

# Condo living – family style!

By Kara Kurylłowicz



**W**hat's it going to be? A family-sized condo with child-friendly amenities perched high above Toronto; or, a small, shabby \$1-million-plus semi in the urban core; or the traditional suburban detached with the backyard and white picket fence? It's the dwelling debate facing Toronto families looking to make their next move

That was a no-brainer for Jeanhy Shim, president of independent housing research and consulting firm Housing Lab Toronto, who grew up in the suburbs but has been living in downtown condos for close to 20 years – even following the birth of her now six-year-old daughter. Why? Her husband walks to work, they don't need two cars or that much space, and they have no interest in a “million-dollar fixer-upper” or the stress of a bidding war.

“There is a subtle shift in values, behaviours and lifestyles with consumers placing more value on their time than on the big backyard,” says Shim. Indeed, more and more families are now opting for larger downtown condos

and all the conveniences that come with them, than ever before. “When we first moved into the Quay West condos, we were the only ones with a baby – now there are families in 10 per cent of the 350 units here.”

According to Pauline Lierman, director of market research at Urbanation, the largest share of the condo market is still investor-driven, particularly in the downtown area. However, more recently, downtown projects like Garrison Point, The Eglinton, and River City 3 are being marketed to family buyers. As of Q1 2015, there were 405 condo sites in development in the GTA with 122 (roughly 30 per cent) of those projects offering three-bedroom or larger units, of which 59 per cent are in the former City of Toronto. Of those 405 condo projects, 325 (80 per cent) had two-bedroom-plus-den units, of which 40 per cent are in the former City of Toronto.

“Condos make sense for the younger generation



that wants the upscale finishes without the commute, the grass-cutting or the snow-shovelling and is challenged by the profound lack of affordable, single-family inventory downtown,” says Jamie Johnston, owner, broker of record, Re/Max Condos Plus, Toronto. Increasingly, developers are offering larger suites with family-specific amenities such as indoor play rooms and outdoor playgrounds, because they’ve seen their properties’ demographics evolve as single condo dwellers find love and start families.

“In the 30 years that Menkes has been building and managing condo buildings, we’ve seen the demographics evolve with increased interest in family-friendly amenities,” says Mimi Ng, vice-president of sales and marketing, Residential at Menkes Developments Ltd., which is responsible for both The Eglinton with its two-bedroom units measuring 871 sq. ft., and Harbour Plaza Residences with three-bedroom units at 1,126 sq. ft. and penthouses up to 1,907 sq. ft.

The Eglinton’s “old-school” children’s playroom incorporates highly tactile elements to encourage children to play and develop fine motor skills. At the Harbour Plaza Residences, the outdoor terrace spaces will also include a children’s play area.

“When the amenities pull people out of their suites into the common areas, it encourages interaction and helps build a sense of community,” says Ng. “We were inspired by how vertical living in Hong Kong had been adapted for families with children.”

River City 3, where the large two- and three-bedroom units have been the most popular with buyers, is close to good schools, greenspace and parks, and will also have a 600-sq.-ft. children’s playroom, because developer Urban Capital has seen more young parents with kids calling its other buildings “home.”

“Young families in downtown condos is a more recent phenomenon,” says David Wex, partner, Urban Capital. But with the proliferation of condo living the world over, families are becoming a highrise fixture.



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