

CityPlace Panorama

by Luigi Benetton

What do a grocery chain distribution centre, a long-lost pier and Lake Ontario have in common? They each occupied or influenced the land where Toronto's CityPlace Panorama condominium is now located.

Both history and the present day prove interesting in the story of Panorama. In the here and now, motorists easily see the tower and its base mere metres to the south of Toronto's major east-west downtown highway, the Gardiner Expressway. Panorama has joined other large buildings that line this raised highway, venturing closer to the Gardiner than perhaps any other building to this point.

"The driveway to the building is just under the Gardiner," says Tim Gorley, executive vice-president of Page + Steele/IBI Group Architects, the architect of record.

This particular spot proved irresistible. "By virtue of its location, we can design a tower which is elliptical in shape to take advantage of the unobstructed views all round," says Neil Hylton, project manager for Panorama's developer, Concord Adex Development Corporation.

"Through sensitive design of the built form and clever layout of the amenity spaces, this building yields a high proportion of suites with panoramic views," Hylton adds. "The continuous balconies wrapping all the way around the tower accentuate the elliptical shape."

Brian Curtner, founding principal of design architect Quadrangle Architects Limited, explains how Panorama achieves so many great views: its egg shape, with the narrow part of the egg pointing away from Lake Ontario, will afford residents vistas not commonly enjoyed in "straight-line" buildings. "It's a very narrow site tucked between Lakeshore Boulevard and the Gardiner," Curtner notes. "It's creative in how it uses the land there."

Panorama's curves required special effort from builders. "If you build a square box, you can start in one corner and work out," says Joseph Day, construction manager for EllisDon Residential Inc. "We have to build everything curved. To build a concrete slab, for instance, you have to lay out every point on that curve to make the windows and everything else fit within the curve of that building. There's more effort required in the building layout to get the various pieces to come together. You need to coordinate more with every trade."

Agha Hasan, principal of structural consultant Halcrow Yolles, spells out the structure of the building as "a trapezoidal footprint, from which springs the pseudo-elliptical plate of the tower." The trapezoid, a low-rise podium, rises seven storeys, where it cedes the sky to the tower.

"The building is topped with a structural steel roof covering the mechanical and electrical equipment," says Hasan.

The lake-facing windows sheltering the upper floors break with the design of floors below, jutting out from the tower's ellipse to better show their distinctive dark glazing. "We maximized the value of the high-level units facing the lake by designing unique 'Elite' suites with direct private elevator access from an exclusive secured parking area of the garage," Hylton explains.

All residents will experience design departures. Mike Niven, principal of Mike Niven Interior Design, took cues from current European designs.

"We came up with three or four units that held different appliances," Niven says. "Those pieces put together form the basis of a suite. Everything else worked around those pieces."

Niven revelled in the design leaps Concord Adex approved. "Nobody has done blue kitchens before," he says.

Few developers have ever worked with as many design or construction constraints. Aside from the Gardiner, which proved one of the elements that complicated digging and crane placement, the team responded to other challenges on the site. Among the first of these was the water table. "The grade is 1.5 metres above the water table – Lake Ontario," Day explains. (Gorley notes that the building sits in what was once Lake Ontario.) "As soon as you put a shovel in the ground, you're into water." Once contractors completed a caisson wall to protect the dig, Day's crew could pump water out, and keep it out, as they dug.

Niven chose to use all this nearby water as design inspiration. "The lobby is meant to feel below water level," he says. "There are soft curves, shapes, bubble lighting, and a metal canopy that evokes an arch of seaweed."

"We made it very architectural," Niven adds. "We took that level of finish and colour throughout the building, so there's a flow. We weren't very square anywhere. Everything was more freeform, more like the shape of the building. This makes it more tactile; less severe."

The site itself easily accommodated Panorama's scale. "The foundation is supported on rock," Hasan says. "Consequently, except for core foundations, column and other wall foundations comprise isolated footings."

Unfortunately, the importance of the site's neighbours added considerations to both Panorama's design and construction. The site itself neighbours, in addition to the Gardiner Expressway, a historic warehouse. "We made sure we didn't affect that building, or the Gardiner," says Day.

To mitigate the noise from one of the city's busiest thoroughfares, "the glazing and exterior walls were designed to certain STC ratings as determined by the acoustics consultant to maintain acceptable interior sound levels," Gorley explains. "The podium roof-level garden has a high sound wall on the north edge to reduce ambient noise in the outdoor amenity areas."



The only CityPlace development that does not sit on the railway lands now occupied by a series of condominium towers, Panorama identifies with both those towers and the warehouse. "The podium with the dark brick expression responds to the historical warehouse building to the west," Hylton explains, "while the modern tower responds to the other CityPlace towers."

History also lay in wait during the dig, when a pier from nearby Fort York emerged. Day recalls his own amazement when he saw what had been buried for a century: "The timbers were barely rotted at all."

"We had to call an archaeologist in when we started drilling into the site," says Day, adding that crews unearthed anchors, a common find in this part of Toronto. ■

LOCATION

450 Lakeshore Boulevard West
Toronto, Ontario

OWNER/DEVELOPER

Concord Adex Development Corporation

ARCHITECT

Page + Steele Architects/IBI Group Architects

DESIGN ARCHITECT

Quadrangle Architects Limited

CONSTRUCTION MANAGER

EllisDon Residential Inc.

STRUCTURAL CONSULTANT

Halcrow Yolles Partnership Inc.

MECHANICAL/ ELECTRICAL CONSULTANT

MCW Consultants Ltd.

INTERIOR DESIGN

Mike Niven Interior Design Inc.

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

Ferris+Associates Inc.

TOTAL AREA

495,000 square feet

TOTAL CONSTRUCTION COST

\$65 million

