

MuseumHouse

by Luigi Benetton

Perhaps inspired by the way Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa smiles from a small canvas hung in the massive Louvre, Yorkville Corporation chose a narrow plot of land in a tony area of Toronto to erect a masterpiece: the MuseumHouse condominium residence.

MuseumHouse neighbours include the Royal Ontario Museum (across the street), the Gardiner Museum (across another street from the ROM) and the Bata Shoe Museum (two blocks away), hence the name. Four square blocks of the city's finest retail and dining stretch to the east, while the University of Toronto downtown campus sprawls to the south.

Residents will enjoy great views of the neighbourhood. Those views enter suites via floor-to-ceiling glass on the north, south and east sides. Since designated heritage buildings circle the building, north and south views will remain protected indefinitely.

Exterior details on the 19-storey, 26-suite limestone, metal-and-glass tower will include a hotel-style porte-cochère on Bloor Street and stone terraces featuring stainless steel flower boxes and glass rails.

A waterfall and Zen garden add atmosphere to the lobby, all overlooked by a 24-hour-per-day concierge/valet. An as-yet-unknown retail boutique will reside on the first two floors of MuseumHouse.

Direct access elevators will whisk residents directly into their suites. Once there, they can choose where to unwind: by a gas fireplace, in the hot tub on the terrace, or simply standing for a few moments on the heated floors of the master ensuite spas.

Modern conveniences include European-style kitchens complete with Miele and SubZero appliances, plus a central vacuum system and optional audio and video prewiring for Bang & Olufsen entertainment components.

And to keep these devices running seamlessly during a blackout, the team chose an emergency generator that runs on either gas or diesel.

Fine as these residences are, the two-storey penthouse will outdo them all. Its twelve-foot main-floor ceilings will edge the ten- to eleven-foot ones on lower floors. Where half-floor suites have one terrace and full-floor suites get two, the penthouse will boast 1,152 square feet of outdoor space spread over four terraces.

Asking price for 5,618 square feet

on the 18th and 19th floors is \$12.8 million. (Other suites range from \$2.1 million to \$6.8 million.)

To showcase the penthouse's possibilities and inspire potential buyers, three highly regarded interior design firms – Powell & Bonnell, Munge Leung and Patty Xenos Design – unveiled their visions of the space at a fall 2010 media event.

All three designers delivered drawings under the same conditions: buyer unknown, no set budget and very little direction provided (deliberately) by the builder. To varying degrees, all three designers made the penthouse into a residential art gallery while preserving views north and south.

Designers each added inspired touches, including: a sculptural bathtub at the south window, with an infinity pool on the other side of the window; various grand stairway designs; a second-floor hallway that doubles as a small art gallery; window walls that open to the terraces, taking 'open concept' to a whole new level; and a water wall spanning two storeys.

Soon, all people will see of this oeuvre is the structure, but its narrow pedestal also bears mention. Built where a pizza place once stood, the 42-foot property width (at Bloor Street – 50 feet at the rear) and proximity of neighbouring buildings presented both design and construction challenges.

One narrow lane east of the building is all contractors have to cart materials and equipment on site. The lane runs north from bustling Bloor Street, which is also where services enter the site. With the curb lane closed to traffic during construction, a temporary two-storey structure accommodates the transformer, labourers and materials. "We don't have much of a staging area," says Elias Veisman, president of Veisman Consulting Ltd. "We had to create space."

On the site, excavation of the five-level, 60-foot-deep parking garage proceeded without a ramp to bring trucks down to the bottom. "We placed a special backhoe with an extended arm on the north side of the project and a smaller backhoe in the excavation," Veisman recalls, "plus equipment for shoring and caissons." The small backhoe moved soil to the north end of the project, where the big backhoe, sitting on land rented from an adjacent parking lot, pulled the soil out and placed it in waiting trucks. Crews also found



plenty of groundwater and had to waterproof the garage.

Not having room for a vehicle ramp means cars will descend to their spots using a vehicle elevator. "For us, it's the second time in 40 years of being in business that that has come up," says Joe Merber, president of Merber Corporation Consulting Engineers. With subway access, nearby public parking lots and the valet, visitors will not have to worry about parking.

Sol Wassermuhl, president of Page + Steele / IBI Group Architects, views the small footprint less as a challenge than an opportunity. "This small site enabled us to design an intimate building of full- and half-floor suites," he says, noting the limited parking restricted the building's height.

Sheldon Esbin agrees. The founder of Romspen Investment Corp. and a partner in the development, Esbin told the *Toronto Star*: "What's attractive about this building is that it's small and you're not going to meet 20 people in the elevator. Plus, there are no hallways, so you have privacy. You're part of a small, exclusive community."

Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) subway tunnels run along the north end of the property, metres away from the garage wall. The development team asked for and received the TTC's approval of MuseumHouse plans ("We often build adjacent to, and even over, subway tunnels," Wassermuhl notes.) and acoustical engineers added noise and vibration control.

"On the north side, we placed a vibration isolation line consisting of about 100 rubber pads between the parking garages and the ground floor slab," says Brian Howe, president of HGC Engineering, adding that builders connected the south side of the building to its foundation to take wind loads and other ordinary stresses.

"Shear walls combined with rigid frames contribute lateral resistance to

the building," says Mike Shiu, a partner with Jablonsky, Ast & Partners.

Engineers terminated services in notches on the east side of the building to preserve north and south views. Since upper floors also feature eastward views, overhead heating and cooling systems will be installed.

Wassermuhl bought a suite at MuseumHouse. He and his wife plan to leave their Forest Hill home for MuseumHouse next fall.

The Wassermuhls typify the buyers envisioned for MuseumHouse: empty-nesters who like to travel, appreciate art and prefer walking to galleries over driving to them. "It's a change of lifestyle," says Wassermuhl. "We're downsizing but not downgrading. We'd like to travel with peace of mind, just turn a key and leave." ■

LOCATION

206 Bloor Street West
Toronto, Ontario

OWNER/DEVELOPER

Yorkville Corporation

ARCHITECTS

Page + Steele/IBI Group Architects

CONSTRUCTION MANAGER

Veisman Consulting Ltd.

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER

Jablonsky, Ast & Partners

MECHANICAL/ ELECTRICAL ENGINEER

Merber Corp Consulting Engineers

ACOUSTICAL/VIBRATION ENGINEER

HGC Engineering

INTERIOR DESIGN CONSULTANT

Powell & Bonnell

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

Land Art Design

TOTAL AREA

100,000 square feet

TOTAL CONSTRUCTION COST

\$65 million