

New Condo Concept: Beyond Flooring and Counter Tops at ART Condos

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A few weeks ago CJ of foodnetwork.ca, and I, attended a most elegant opening luncheon for the sales centre of a **new condo concept**. The relatively low -- 11 stories -- building is slotted to rise in Toronto's trendiest downtown neighbourhood of Queen West, kitty-corner to the internationally acclaimed 'creative clubhouse' known as the Drake Hotel.

The area, which has been undergoing gentrification for nearly 20 years now (really picking up speed since the street's first major loft conversion known as the Candy Factory Lofts, in 1999), has had a love/hate relationship with condo developments. Not a shocker, seeing as the mainstay of the community is **creative urbanites** not always down with developers exploiting their culture to sell condos -- a recent development's billboard was seen as particularly egregious

for featuring a woman in a sheer top and a face of Goth-like makeup, wearing a sash bearing name "Bohemian Embassy" :(

The name of the development CJ and I previewed chose a moniker much less gauche, but still indicative of how it intends to gel with the apprehensive denizens of Queen West: **Art Condos**. And on that they intend to deliver.



The approx. 500 sq ft unit with standard finishes, which include the solid-surface island, ash flooring, two-toned kitchen and solid-surface counter top. The livingroom built-in with sliding door which hides the TV is a standard upgrade, but looks well worth it to me.

In a **refreshing approach**, the team behind Art Condos did their best to try and understand what the area and its residents really want in the way of housing. Integrity, however, doesn't always translate into viability, as Gary Silverberg of Triangle West Developments Inc., the core team, told me during our chat, "Nobody thought this was a very viable idea. We took a chance, because everyone on this team wanted to do something different."

Several things set this development apart from its predecessors;



Model unit

(right of frame) and wall of finishes (left) at Art Condos sales centre.

- Believe it or not, 11 stories is actually quite modest and considerate when compared to the 20, 30 and 60 stories going up elsewhere in the city.

- In an unprecedented attempt to serve the creative community, Art Condos offers **9 live-work spaces** on street level, in which owners can live and operate various commercial businesses, simultaneously.
- The lobby will function as a true art gallery -- curator and all -- showcasing local talent.
- The units were designed by fave'd Toronto-based firm, **Third Uncle** (also authors of the Drake Hotel), who worked built-ins, sliding walls, dining islands and great-looking finished into the design options.
- Common areas will include a gym, business centre, private screening room, residents' lounge with fireplace and full entertaining facilities (kitchen, bar), outdoor terrace with hot tub, bar, lounge seating, fire pit, bbq, and built-in banquettes, and the lobby gallery.
- Underground parking is also available.

While the model unit CJ and I walked through was only around 500 sq ft, the **economical design** of smart built-ins and sliding walls made the space feel surprisingly spacious. In fact, I got pretty excited about what I saw, and knowing my parents were looking to invest in a downtown condo, came really close to making them buy one. Alas, the buy-in price is approximately \$450 per square foot, which while fair when all is considered, turned out to be a bit of a stretch for strictly investment purposes.

Sigh... Would have been nice to have one of these units in the family.