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ON ONE

VICTORIAN GEM



BRANDON BARRÉ PHOTO
Yanic Simard is principal designer at Toronto Interior Design Group.

Living large in a small house

Toronto designer Yanic Simard gave himself a tough assignment

DONNA LAPORTE
STAFF REPORTER

Designer Yanic Simard is proof that you can live large in a small space. The principal designer of the Toronto Interior Design Group recently decided to rent a house and renovate when he couldn't find a suitable one to buy. The 640-square-foot Victorian house, in the Jane and Annette Sts. area of Toronto, captivated him with its high ceilings, oversized baseboards and potential for an outdoor deck.

"I just fell in love with it, with the neighbourhood, with the surroundings, with the layout, with the potential that this place had," says the 34-year-old Simard.

Just 14 feet at its widest point, the house's long and narrow dimensions posed some interesting design challenges.

"As an interior designer, we are fortunate enough to have the vision to see past all the imperfections and we have the tricks to make it right," he says.

Simard and his team spent three months on the project — about half the time it would normally take working for a client.

Having a team of talented designers, as well as being able to custom design furniture, is a huge advantage, he admits, but in the end the design principles they used can be broadly applied by any homeowner. Consider what Simard has done in

SIMARD continued on H5

PATRON OF THE ARTS



AARON HARRIS FOR THE TORONTO STAR
Developer-artist Gary Silverberg brings a sense of fun to the ART Condos presentation centre in the Queen West neighbourhood.

Portrait of the artist as a real estate tycoon

Renaissance man Gary Silverberg has a knack for expertly blending his two specialties

RYAN STARR
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Gary Silverberg is an artist. He also happens to be a developer.

He admits, though, he wasn't thrilled when marketing consultants came up with the name for his new project, ART Condos.

"I wasn't that warm to it at first," Silverberg says one muggy afternoon at the sales centre for ART, an 11-storey, 152-unit midrise to be built at Dovercourt Rd. and Sudbury St., just south of Queen St. W. As an artist, Silverberg had reser-

ervations about the name; it seemed a bit contrived, he felt.

But the businessman in him recognized the importance, marketing-wise, of capturing the essence of the neighbourhood the condo building would soon be part of.

"It was about getting people to relate to Queen West as being a unique hub of creativity," he says.

It worked. As of late summer, ART was nearly 70 per cent sold, and construction is slated to begin mid-October.

MEET THE HYBRID that is Gary Silverberg: a developer-artist who is a unique figure on Toronto's real estate scene.

He's spent much of his life creating art — even launching his own movement — garnering international

recognition and critical acclaim for his work.

Silverberg has also been in the real estate business for 30-plus years. Currently he's president of Triangle West Developments, and ART Condos is the first project he's taken the lead on.

His true love is art but Silverberg is also a savvy businessman who knows how to sell property.

He doesn't have trouble reconciling his two worlds, mind you. Indeed, Silverberg's long-standing belief, the credo that's shaped his work in both spheres, is that business is art and art is business.

"I understand business and art," he says. "And hopefully I have enough experience manoeuvring

SILVERBERG continued on H4

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A patron of the arts

SILVERBERG from H1

through the system to make everyone happy and deliver for everybody."

Silverberg's knack for blending his areas of specialty is on display at ART Condos.

To ensure both artistic authenticity and healthy sales for the project, Silverberg knew it was essential to embrace and promote Queen West's funky aesthetic.

He began by assembling a project team that knew the area well. Ole-son Worland Architects had worked on the Trinity Bellwoods community centre, and interior designers 3rd Uncle had refurbished the Drake Hotel.

"They understand the evolution of

the neighbourhood," Silverberg says. "They know where it is now and where it's going. They know the sensitivities and mentality of the people."

Once built, the lobby of ART will feature an art gallery displaying the work of local artists. And ART's ground floor will have live-work units with 15-foot ceilings, aimed specifically at creative types.

"Artists don't control their own destiny. They usually can't afford to. So I'm trying to give them a bit of a bigger space here for less money."

Not just anyone can buy a live-work suite.

"We're restricting it to creative uses," Silverberg says, noting this could include painting, sculpture, music, fashion, dance and theatre.

"We don't want somebody living here and operating a normal business."

The concept of dedicated live-work spaces for artists is new to Toronto, but Silverberg doesn't mind taking a chance on it.

"Gary's a guy who has a passion for innovative ideas," says David Ole-son, ART's architect. "He's willing to experiment or consider alternative ways of doing things."

BORN AND RAISED in Toronto, Silverberg got involved in real estate in the late '70s while studying fine arts and economics at York University.

"It was really about money," he says. "I took my real estate licence exam so I could have a summer job selling real estate."



Gary Silverberg is a unique figure on Toronto's real estate scene.

"Unfortunately, I did very well. I made a lot of money fast, and it kind of hooks you."

Needless to say, Silverberg didn't return to York.

"I wish I had stuck to studying art;

it was much more interesting. But you're in university and you figure: money or happiness?"

He went on to work as a tenant representative on commercial and retail developments, scouting locations and negotiating deals for clients such as the Hard Rock Café, Licks, Shopy's and The Pickle Barrel.

Silverberg was also involved in the field of concept leasing, coming up with themes for retail developments.

"I was a young guy and couldn't compete with Royal LePage, CB Richard Ellis and Colliers," he says. "So we created our own types of real estate and did quite well -- until the recession."

The early '90s downturn deepened the real estate market, freeing up Silverberg to return to his passion.

"Real estate was over," he says. "Some people say they dabble in art. I had been dabbling in real estate."

Now a dedicated artist, Silverberg launched the "Reactionist Movement," whose followers create their art "only during the heat of emotion."

Silverberg's paintings impressed his friends, who encouraged him to get his work on exhibit. He eventually did so at China Blues, a trendy restaurant.

"We put it up and stuff started to sell off the walls to the point where everything sold," he says. "I couldn't figure out what was going on."

Spurred by his successful debut, Silverberg had several more exhibits through the years, all premised on his conviction that business is art and art is business.

Up to that time nobody had really taken the human condition and the culture of business and turned it into an art commentary," he says. "I figured business was the greatest form of art of our time. Business can be incredibly creative and affect culture."

TIMES HAVE CHANGED and these days Silverberg is back working in real estate full-time. But he still believes business and art are inextricably linked.

His latest passion is for digital photography and guerrilla video, which he believes are the defining forms of artistic expression for this generation.

"Gary's always getting seduced by an idea, and he gets really excited about this one," says Gary Michael Dault, an art critic who curated one of Silverberg's shows in the '90s and is a consultant for ART condos.

Silverberg's team launched the Articulate competition, inviting Queen West denizens to submit photos and videos that reflect how they see the neighbourhood.

The idea was to reach out to the community while at the same time creating buzz for ART Condos.

"Gary's decided that ART Condos should be the ground zero for proclaiming his absolute conviction that cellphone photography and video clips are the art of the future, the new graffiti," Dault says.

Top videos will be played in the ART model suite, the building lobby and even projected onto walls in the surrounding laneways at night, like graffiti. Winning photos will be displayed at ART as part of a rotating exhibit.

"We wanted to show the creativity of the community," Silverberg says.

We want everyone in the area to speak for themselves and offer a feel for what Queen West is all about. So anybody who likes innovation or who's bored can come down here, take a walk around and feel the energy.

"We wanted that to set itself." For more information, go to www.artcondos.ca.

QUEEN WEST ART CRAWL: Triangle West Developments is the principal sponsor of the eighth annual Queen West Art Crawl Friday, Sept. 17 to Sunday, Sept. 19. More than 500 artists will exhibit work in locations along Queen West, from Bathurst St. to Bonaventure Ave.

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