

Globe T.O.

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BRIGHT HEIGHTS

Condo towers are popping up everywhere on Toronto's skyline, and the fierce debate around them is ongoing. But there's an artful upside – architecture critic **Lisa Rochon** looks at five stellar condo developments that show us there's beauty in the boom **PAGE 4**



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DESIGN

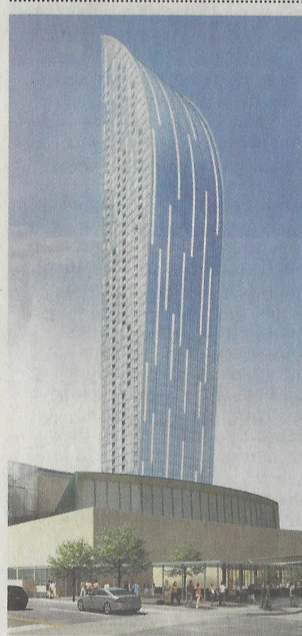
THE CONDOS THAT STAND ABOVE THE REST

Most designs in Toronto have little sparkle, but these five designs show that condo architecture can give back to the city



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Monotonous and relentless, a vertical density of condominium towers is shooting up fast in Toronto. A skyline that could have been crafted with the sculptural daring of Sao Paulo or Chicago has become dominated by green-tinged glass architecture without subtlety or sparkle. Toronto has more than 180 towers currently under construction, more than any other city in North America. Which ones actually inspire? We waded through the sea of banality to fish out five stellar condominium developments, completed this year or approved to break ground. The tall condominium tower has become a cliché – what's critical is housing that is fresh, joyous and varied in scale. All five of these developments demonstrate a belief in the art of architecture and the critical need to give back to the city.



THE L TOWER
Studio Daniel Libeskind, Page & Steele/IBI Group, Cityzen Development Group, Fernbrook Homes, Castlepoint Realty

The brilliance of the 58-storey L Tower, built onto the back of the Sony Centre at Yonge and Front, comes down to a design gesture that's as pure as it is simple: Oppose the straight lines of the city's downtown towers with a single, sublime curve. Delivering the power of that organic female shape required a complex glass facade and intricate sculpting of structural columns on the north side – an engineered solution by Jablonsky, Ast & Partners. In balcony-crazed Toronto, the developers have taken a risk by eliminating balconies on the curved north facade, and discreetly tucking them into the silver-blue facades on the visually magnetic tower. The building is set to be completed this fall.



ART CONDOS
Oleson Worland Architects & Hariri Pontarini Architects Triangle West Developments

South of Queen Street West, at the foot of Dovercourt Road, it's only right to challenge your expectations of the ordinary. Developer and artist Gary Silverberg collaborated with architect David Oleson to deliver a mid-rise building that enlivens the ground plane rather than turn its back on the street. There are colourful tiles to add some pop to the building's facade and artists' studios that look out onto the sidewalks. Art and music flow onto the street, in contrast to the dry cleaners and drug stores that typically sit at the base of condo towers. Designed for the millennial generation, a sound and light installation transforms the building's loading dock every day at dusk. Coming up: ART's expansion of the sidewalk on Sudbury Avenue, with custom-designed lounge furniture.

MASSEY TOWER
Hariri Pontarini Architects MOD Developments

The Massey Tower near Queen and Yonge is one of the most elegant juxtapositions of contemporary lightness and heritage gravitas to be proposed for Toronto. Until Gary Switzer came along with his newly launched development company, nobody wanted to touch the Canadian Bank of Commerce Building (designed by Darling & Pearson in 1905), which has been abandoned since 1987 and considered one of the city's most at-risk heritage buildings. The 60-storey clear glass tower with gently curved balconies is inserted behind the Beaux-Arts relic on a diminutive site. The bank itself will get a \$2-million restoration that will transform its first three storeys and the development will provide the land for an expansion of Massey Hall just behind it. The project is set to break ground this fall.



ALEXANDRA PARK, PHASE ONE, BLOCK 11
Teepel Architects Tridel/TCHC

Towers with inexpensive glass window walls are not only ubiquitous, they're unsustainable. To deliver higher insulation values and provide some sculptural rebranding for the city's beleaguered Alexandra Park housing project, Stephen Teepel's firm has designed a 10-storey condo as an irregular stack of blocks and protrusions. Silver-toned cuboid balconies, smoothly clad in aluminum, project out from the 14-storey building to heighten the architectural rhythm. Expected to start construction next year, Block 11 is planned to earn an impressive LEED Gold rating for its sustainability. Residents will be able to cycle directly inside the building, then park their bikes on a stackable storage system inside the front doors.

