

Culture and location at HighPark Condominiums

Gardening, bicycles, DIY dog spa among programs that tap into community's values



Directly across Bloor St. from High Park, the 14-storey condo will include 18,000 sq. ft. of indoor and outdoor amenity space.

By: Ian Harvey *Special to the Star*, Published on Thu Oct 10 2013

To some, High Park in west Toronto is simply an urban oasis of greenery. To others, it's a village tightly bound by common values. To those who live there, however, it's a way of life.

So when a condominium developer began amassing property on the north side of Bloor St. across from the iconic park six years ago, there were more than a few eyebrows raised and grumbles over lattes along Bloor St. W.

Although Daniels Corporation had already won accolades for its work at 70 High Park Ave. where the historic lobby was preserved, and for its revolutionary approach to building in Regent Park, the residents of High Park were not going to idly stand by and let their neighbourhood become the next location for a soaring glass and steel tower.

It took some doing and hundreds of hours of meetings and listening. But the result is a shift in condominium design, one that speaks not just to the old adage of location but more directly to the concept of condo dwellers' culture.

As such, Daniels' 14-storey HighPark Condominiums is as much about the internal programming for soon-to be residents as it is about design aesthetics and its role in the future landscape of the community.

"It was complicated and I think took about six years," says Niall Haggart, Daniels executive vice-president. More so, he nods, they didn't get it right the first time.

"We came to the community at the restaurant in the park with our presentation," he said. "When people

looked at it — and from the feedback — it was clear we didn't get it right.”

So Daniels went back to the drawing board and re-jigged the design with Diamond and Schmitt Architects. They drilled deeper in to the community's values to come up with unique programming for buyers. They also targeted a Toronto Green Standard Tier 1 rating with low VOC paint, smart meters, extensive green roofs, energy efficient lighting and low-consumption plumbing fixtures.

Some of the features are part of a trend among inner-city condos, such as indoor-outdoor yoga-Pilates facilities. Yet other amenities at HighPark Condos are entirely unique, such as a terrace garden “allotment” complete with organic gardening consultants to get it all started.

From a doggie spa room to wipe down Rover after a romp in the off-leash park across the street, to a second-floor weight room, climbing wall, private theatre screening room and cardio studio, there's a shift away from anonymity in private units and towards shared space and experiences. There's a billiards room off the party room, catering kitchen, landscaped barbecue area outdoors, and both indoor and outdoor fireside lounges.

Daniels is also initially arranging a gardening consultant for those who want to grow vegetables and herbs on the terrace and a recreational co-ordinator to assist with the party room or arrange a personal trainer.

In all, there are 18,000 sq. ft. of indoor and outdoor amenities for buyers of the 377 suites that start at \$300,000 for a 320-sq.-ft. studio and rise to over \$1 million for a 1,645-sq.-ft. three bedroom suite. There are also a dozen 1,322 sq. ft. ground-level, two-storey townhomes for \$815,900. Finishes are quartz and/or marble countertops, marble floors and stainless steel appliances. Many units also have views of the city, park and lake in the building bordered by Keele and High Park subway stations. Occupancy is slated for July, 2015.

In a city of neighbourhoods, High Park an icon which stands out among names like the Beach, Yorkville, Rosedale and Forest Hill. And it's the park that drives everything, that 400-acre, inner city green space with playing fields, walking and cycling paths, forests, off-leash dog runs, playgrounds, gardens and a zoo.

Toronto's first surveyor, John Howard, carved the land out for himself in 1836 and then bequeathed it to the West Toronto Junction, along with his home, Colborne Lodge, in 1873. West Toronto was annexed by the City of Toronto in 1909.

“We could never just have put a tower of glass and steel up at that location,” Haggart says. When the team reworked the design, he says, they were “sculpting, changing angles, adding details, changing the colour of the bricks and stones.”

The creation of a public space in the piazza out front, he says, is part of what is hoped will be both a meeting space and a place for poetry readings, and other arts and culture events, in collaboration with local cafes.

From addressing migratory bird issues — window glass treatments, lighting, new building operations practices — to planting 36 new oaks to compensate for the removal of three trees that bordered the site, Daniels wants to make it work.

“We wired parking for electric vehicles and then looked at the Bixi bike program but it was too far away from their core area,” says Haggart. “In the end, we created our own bike share. They just swipe their fob

and then the owner and their guest can take out a bike.” Daniels will also arrange a consultant to provide bike excursion programming and bike clinics for topics like maintenance and tune-ups for those who have their own wheels.

Similarly, there’s an 800-sq.-ft. allotment garden on the terrace where Jane Hayes, a.k.a. Garden Jane, and her collaborator Daniel Hoffmann, of The Cutting Veg Organic Farm, will work to organize a gardening committee which will then map out plans for the allotment. Hayes is a specialist in condo gardening and is also part of the children’s gardening program at High Park.

“With Daniels it’s a new project so we’ve got space from the start,” Hayes says.

The terrace garden will be container-based and on the fifth floor facing south to get the sun and be somewhat sheltered.

“We’ll still have to look at the microclimate, though,” she adds.

Once participants are signed up, the discussion around issues like composting, organic gardening and other planning essentials can begin. The idea is for the Cutting Veg and Garden Jane to gradually hand the project over to residents.

While some participants may hanker for orange trees, she said, basic foods and herbs with some other plants to control pests organically are the most likely targets.

“It’s really going to depend on the level of interest and participation,” she said, adding she’s hoping between five and 10 per cent of the residents sign up.

HIGHPARK CONDOMINIUMS

1830 Bloor St. W.

- 14 storeys
- 377 units and 12 townhomes
- Suites from the \$300,000s;

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