

SATURDAY, APRIL 26, 2014 SECTION H

EA ON2

Breathing life back into Yonge St.

RYAN STARR
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Aura is changing the way we view our city.

The 78-storey megatower, nearing completion on the northwest corner of Yonge and Gerrard Sts., has fast become one of Toronto most recognizable landmarks.

"You notice it from the 401 and Dufferin, or coming down the DVP," notes Barry Graziani, the architect whose firm Graziani & Corraza designed Aura, Canada's tallest residential building.

"It reorients you — there's the financial district and then there's Aura farther north. It's expanding our sense of the city and the downtown core."

Visible from across the GTA, the building also proudly signals that the once-gloomy stretch of Yonge between Gerrard and College Sts. has suddenly become a big deal. Indeed, Aura, developed by Canderel Residential, has helped spur a transformation of the area, a historic part of the city that had fallen into disrepair over the years.

Before the arrival of Canderel in the early 2000s — and its construction of the two-tower Residences of College Park development on Bay St., followed several years later by Aura — the block bound by Yonge, College, Gerrard and Bay Sts. mostly consisted of a bland office complex backing onto forlorn Barbara Ann Scott skating rink park, itself stranded between two surface parking lots.

"It was pretty dreary," recalls Riz Dhanji, vice-president of sales and marketing for Canderel. "There wasn't much retail and there wasn't much happening. I remember in 2001 walking down Yonge thinking, 'Why am I selling this project? Even I wouldn't want to walk down here.'"

Over the past decade, Canderel's residential developments have brought thousands of new residents to the area. The projects have also added an array of new shops, services and eateries to cater to the sizeable new market. (Canderel owns the adjacent office complex at 777 Bay and has revamped the retail offerings there, including adding a Sobeys supermarket to relieve pressure on the existing Metro.)

Canada's tallest condo among projects revitalizing Toronto's main, historic street



BERNARD WEIL/TORONTO STAR

"It reorients you," says Barry Graziani, architect of Canada's largest condo Aura, left. Graziani and Julie Robinson, senior project manager for Canderel Residential, have helped the builder revive a stretch of stagnant Yonge St. with mixed-use projects Aura, YC Condos and Residences of College Park.

"You notice it from the 401 and Dufferin . . . It's expanding our sense of the city."

BARRY GRAZIANI
ARCHITECT

"(Aura) has been a great catalyst project," says Mark Garner, executive director of the Downtown Yonge BIA. "It's created momentum for change in that area, that block specifically. And you're starting to see the ripple effect going down Yonge."

Canderel's developments are improving the public realm in and around College Park, as well. Aura's base has been set back from the street, creating a wider sidewalk on Yonge. The builder is also sprucing up

Barbara Ann Scott Park, contributing \$3 million to give the valuable green space between its buildings a much-needed makeover.

"To have a three-acre park in the middle of an urban condition in a big city is rare," notes Graziani. "We have this jewel in the rough that everybody has been walking by and ignoring."

The development also will involve restoring a forgotten midblock thorough-

fare, Hayter St., which once connected Yonge to Laplante St., west of Bay.

"Back in the '70s when they did the redevelopment of the entire block, they closed off Hayter," Graziani explains.

"But there was still this stub of it, opening onto Yonge, which we saw as an opportunity to announce the park on Yonge and create a new main entrance into the park."

AURA continued on H14

Projects keep area ‘Yonge’ and alive

AURA from H1

The developments have opened other opportunities, particularly for new retail in the area. Aura's hefty podium houses a Bed Bath & Beyond and Marshalls stores, as well as the newest and largest location of Madonna's Hard Candy Fitness chain.

Three restaurants recently opened along Gerrard St.: Reds Midtown Tavern, Scaddabush and Duke's Refresher + Bar. "We're seeing people from the Ontario courts and Service-Ontario and Ryerson faculty members coming over," notes Amanda Lee, local marketing co-ordinator for SIR Corp., which operates all three establishments. "So we're already getting some loyal customers in the neighbourhood."

Jeffrey Roick, who co-owns The Carlu event space in the neighbouring art deco College Park building — once home to Eaton's College Street — sees the changes taking place in the area as a huge positive.

He's looking to include more live music events on the venue's calendar and condo dwellers represent an obvious target market. "There's a whole new group of people moving in," he says, "and that's good for everybody on the block."

Just north of Aura, at Yonge and Grenville Sts., Canderel is building on its momentum with YC Condos, a 66-storey glass tower. (Penthouses, ranging from 1,000 to 1,500 square feet, are available starting at \$930,000.)

The slender, building, which will have a pool on its top floor, promises to add architectural interest to an area that hasn't seen much through the years.

"We wanted to restore the fabric of the city, put it back the way it should be, and get good retailers in there."

GARY SWITZER
MOD DEVELOPMENTS

"This building is very New York, with a modern look and feel," says Canderel's Dhanji. "We think it's going to be a great architectural and design addition to the area."

Like its developments at College Park, Canderel's YC Condos will help rejuvenate that stretch of Yonge St., he adds, with new retail at the ground floor and a focus on enhancing the public realm. "This is going to bring lots of people onto the street, which will help change and improve things along Yonge," says Dhanji.

Canderel is in good company in the TLC it's showing Toronto's main drag. Up and down Yonge, new projects are playing a part in its rebirth. Just north of Wellesley St., an entire block of 19th-century buildings on Yonge is being restored as part of a new condo project, Five Condos at 5 St. Joseph.

"We wanted to restore the fabric of the city, put it back the way it should be, and get good retailers in there," says Gary Switzer, whose firm MOD Developments is co-developing the project with Graywood Developments. Farther south on Yonge near Queen St., MOD is developing The Massey Tower, a 60-storey building that will incorporate at its base a restored beaux arts-style bank build-

ing that for years sat deteriorating behind a chain-link fence.

Up at Yonge and Bloor Sts., Great Gulf Homes is building its 75-storey One Bloor mixed-use condo. Down Yonge St., a few blocks south of Aura, construction is under way on the new Ryerson Student Living Centre at Yonge and Gould Sts.

All of these projects are paying homage to Yonge St.'s rich history while also helping rejuvenate the city's spine for another century.

"When you talk about the cultural memory for most Torontonians, Yonge St. has always been the main street," Switzer says. "It's where you went on a Saturday night, it was the main shopping street. And it's because of that that people feel very emotionally tied to it."

For Dhanji, the change in atmosphere on Yonge St. between College and Gerrard since his company began work there has been dramatic.

"I used to be able to walk down Yonge and I could run back and forth along the sidewalk and never hit somebody," he says. "Today you have to actually dodge people — it's such a different feeling from what it was in the past."

"I think it's great that the development we've been doing has really brought this animation back to Yonge that wasn't there when we started back in 2001."



YC Condos will rise at Yonge and Grenville Sts., and will feature an infinity-edge pool on the top, 66th floor.

- > FOREVER YONGE**
- Y/C Condos**
- > Developer: Canderel Residential
 - > Location: 460 Yonge St., Yonge and Grenville Sts.
 - > Size: 66 storeys;
 - > Status: Pre-construction; yccondos.com
- Aura**
- > Developer: Canderel Residential
 - > Location: 388 Yonge St., Yonge and Gerrard Sts.
 - > Size: 78 storeys
 - > Status: Nearing completion; canderel.com/residential/aura-condominiums-college-park
- The Massey Tower**
- > Developer: MOD Developments
 - > Location: 197 Yonge St.
 - > Size: 60 storeys
 - > Status: Pre-construction; themasseytower.com
- Five at 5 St. Joseph**
- > Developers: MOD Developments/Graywood
 - > Location: Yonge and Joseph Sts.
 - > Size: 48-storey tower with five, 1870s brick buildings along Yonge
 - > Status: Pre-construction; fivecondos.com
- One Bloor**
- > Developer: Great Gulf Homes
 - > Location: 1 Bloor St. E.
 - > Size: 75 storeys
 - > Status: Construction; onebloor.com

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