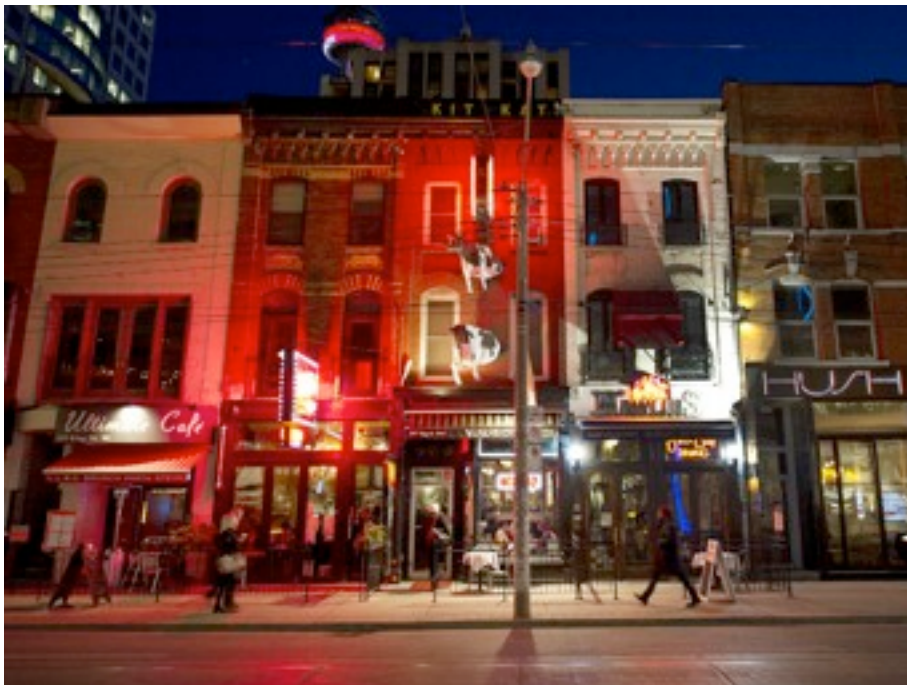


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Brad Pitt, is that you?

Toronto's Entertainment District is full of surprises, which is part of the fun of living here



The King West strip, which is known for its restaurants and nearby clubs, is changing into a more livable area.
Peter J. Thompson/National Post

By Suzanne Wintrob
Special to National Post

Toronto has a love affair with the condo, with 28,466 new-build units purchased in 2011. Thousands more are planned. Suite size, price, amenities and architecture are important, but more and more, a building's neighbourhood is being considered the ultimate draw. This is the first part of a lengthy series examining the GTA's new condo 'hoods.

It's 11 p.m. on a Saturday night and the lineups are starting to build outside the bevy of roped-off nightclubs along Peter, Richmond and Adelaide streets in downtown Toronto. With the theatre crowd safely back home or tucked into the area's bars and restaurants for a nightcap, the girls are

bubbling with excitement as they huddle together in teeny tiny skirts, bare shoulders and mile-high stilettos despite the February chill. Brawny bouncers keep order, ensuring only those on the guest list or those with the gift of gab make it inside.

Around the corner on Wellington Avenue, the buzz is just as excitable yet the people are older and more sophisticated. It's early days for Toronto's new Ritz-Carlton Hotel but the two lobby bars are brimming with spiffy young professionals talking over \$16 cocktails and \$200-plus bottles of Champagne. Smiling doormen sporting long overcoats and bowler hats eagerly open car doors and usher visitors inside.

The two crowds couldn't be more diverse, yet they're perfectly content to share space in the city's lively Entertainment District. The bustling neighbourhood is the city's epicentre for all things cultural, from theatre and movies to ballet, opera and other music. Combine that with stylish eateries, hip bars and two new luxury iconic hotels — all bordering on the busy financial district — and it's no surprise that the 'hood is becoming a coveted full-time residential address.

“We really like how vibrant it is,” gushes Eric Lutz, 38, who lives with his boyfriend, Sebastian St-Laurent, in a one-bedroom condo at Festival Tower above the TIFF Bell Lightbox, home of the Toronto International Film Festival. “So many of our interests are served in this neighbourhood. We like to go out to dinner. We absolutely love movies so the fact that there are multiple movie theatres is really nice. We're not big clubgoers — we're too old for that — but there's high-end shopping, we're close to Chinatown. Pretty much everything we want to do is downtown. We'll go to baseball games, concerts at the ACC, the AGO is up the street. And we'll walk there. We don't need to get in a car to go anywhere.”

In fact, Mr. Lutz is so struck on their new digs that he's putting his car up for sale. He walks to work at an advertising agency steps from home and many of his friends live downtown, too. Much like their neighbours, Messrs. Lutz and St-Laurent believe in supporting local establishments. They drink at Bar Wellington, eat at Le Sélect Bistro and O&B Canteen, and indulge their sweet tooth at Cool Hand Luc and SOMA Chocolatier. They buy their running shoes at Get Out Side on Queen Street West and their groceries at Fresh & Wild Food Market on Spadina Avenue. They also spend a great deal of time watching flicks at TIFF Bell Lightbox (their condo purchase came with a three-year Lightbox membership).

It's that kind of loyalty that puts a smile on Janice Solomon's face. She and her husband spent 16 years living in Yorkville before moving to the Entertainment District six years ago. Ms. Solomon immediately got involved in her new 'hood by volunteering with the Toronto Entertainment District Association and later became executive director of the Entertainment District Business Improvement Area. She still can't believe all the changes that have taken place since she moved in (“It's quite remarkable to see that you can go from approved plan to construction and wow, all of a sudden, you've got these occupied buildings,” she says) but it's proof that the area is ripe for a makeover.

As she explains, a decade ago the City of Toronto designated John Street as a “cultural corridor,” describing it as a “must-see destination and the place to celebrate the convergence of art, design and the new media that is rapidly transforming Canada’s cultural landscape.” The BIA’s 2009 Master Plan echoed the sentiments, calling for the reshaping of John Street into an arts and cultural promenade with narrower tree-lined roads, wider sidewalks, seating, sidewalk cafés, public art and non-barrier curbs to accommodate street closures for annual events and festivals.

City councillor and resident Adam Vaughan is a big proponent. Next week, he says, an Environmental Assessment Study (EA) for John Street will go before the City’s Public Works and Infrastructure Committee. The BIA has sponsored and invested more than \$600,000 in the planning leading up to and including the EA, he adds, and more than \$10-million in funding from private developers has been committed to the City of Toronto for John Street’s transformation.

“With the population growth projections of 137% for this area in the coming years, sidewalk capacity and public space will be even more important than it is now,” he says. “Our streets have to function both as thoroughfares and destinations, places for vehicles and people. Good streets accommodate multiple uses safely and beautifully.”

In the meantime, one of the newer things to hit the ’hood is the influx of developers who are quickly buying up nightclubs and parking lots to make way for residential condominium buildings. Ms. Solomon places the residential population at about 10,000 but expects the figure to double over the next few years.

“The number of people walking with strollers and dogs is remarkable,” she says, adding that one former nightclub is now a daycare centre. “Historically, you didn’t see that.”

Parul Bansal, 25, moved last summer from her parents’ house in Markham to a two-bedroom, 1,250-square-foot condo at Festival Tower and basks in the energy of her new neighbourhood. She originally fell in love with the area as a 19-year-old university student when she partied on the nightclub strip every weekend. But now — like the area itself, which once boasted 80 nightclubs but now is down to 30 — she has matured, trading in her teeny tiny dress for a classy ensemble and heading with her girlfriends for martinis at Hey Lucy or the new luxury hotels. With so many restaurants nearby, some weeks she dines out so many times that she doesn’t even shop for groceries. She’s also grateful for her condo’s social events, such as food and wine tastings and movie nights, where she can meet the neighbours.

Still, the real excitement is on the street, particularly when Hollywood shows up.

“It’s an unreal experience walking home and seeing Brad Pitt across the street about to go into Roy Thomson Hall for his screening of *Moneyball*, or George Clooney, who I was fingertips away from,” Ms. Bansal says. “I’m just walking home and it’s like, ‘Hey, what’s going on?’ I get to see all that stuff.”

At the same time, all the action can sometimes make her weary: “As amazing as it was, by Day 10 or 11 of TIFF I was like, ‘OK, I’m glad you guys are wrapping up and going home.’ It’s not so much the noise as it is the crazy getting to your condo.”

Mr. Lutz concurs but, like Ms. Bansal, realizes it’s part and parcel of calling the Entertainment District home.

“If you’re going to live in an entertainment area, you kind of expect it’s going to be a little busier on the weekends, it’s going to be more vibrant,” he says. “But that’s part of the draw as well. You’re not living in the suburbs. You’re living in the heart of the city.”

GTA Neighbourhoods: T.O. Entertainment District redux

By Suzanne Wintrob

Special to National Post

If you’re tired of heading back to the ’burbs after taking in a play or a meal, developers are hoping you’ll make the Entertainment District your next permanent address.

“That particular neighbourhood is undergoing a bit of a shift,” says Niall Haggart, executive vice-president of The Daniels Corp., which is behind Festival Tower and the new Cinema Tower under construction next door. “When we first started in that neighbourhood, it might have been a target audience that was a little more youthful and hip. We sold to an audience that had a connection to the film festival and we tapped into that. Now we’re finding there’s a whole host of people in the buy-down market. Their kids are gone, they want to get rid of their larger home, they really love the condominium lifestyle and they want to be in this area because of what it has to offer, the hustle and bustle of the city. It’s a very different vibe than, say, Yorkville, which still has a certain characteristic to it.”

According to Urbanation, the fourth quarter of 2011 saw 13 projects with 5,377 units under construction in the Entertainment District, 10 projects (3,529 units) under construction and marketing, and another 18 applications (7,011 units) proposed. The numbers of projects is slightly up compared to the end of 2010 though the 2011 projects boast substantially more units. Under-construction projects grew by 34% (1,350 units) annually while applications grew by 21% and 1,209 units year-over-year.

Besides the influx of full-time residents, the residential construction will also add a new lineup of stores, restaurants and services that will add tremendous value to the ’hood.

“When all of the development is completed — though I don’t think it will ever be fully completed because it’s an ongoing thing — the good thing is our streets will be aligned with a lot of great at-grade retail opportunity, which for us is huge about that sort of pedestrian experience, that experience on the street,” says Janice Solomon, executive director of the Entertainment District BIA. “What do the local businesses and residents and visitors to the area feel when they come into this area? We’d really like to see a lot of vibrancy, a lot of retail, a lot of activity on the street. The vision for the John Street Cultural Corridor is the best of all of it.”

A quick walk through the neighbourhood reveals there are plenty of places to put down your hat. Turn the page for a sampling of what’s available.

Bisha Hotel and Residences

A 41-storey boutique hotel and condominium with 337 condo suites and 100 hotel rooms **Location** 56 Blue Jays Way, south of King Street West **Builder** Lifetime Developments and INK Entertainment **Suite Availability** 90% sold. From \$302,900 for 389 sq. ft. to \$754,900 for 944 sq. ft. **Hot tickets** Two bars, two restaurants, a 24-hour café, 7,000-sq.-ft. rooftop patio and infinity pool, fitness centre, high-end salon. **Status** Construction starting early spring **Occupancy** Spring 2014 **Contact** 416-637-2211; bisha.com

The Bond

A 41-storey translucent glass and steel tower with 369 suites **Builder** Lifetime Developments **Location** Adelaide and John streets **Suite Availability** 75% sold. From 327 to 1,170 sq. ft. and \$261,900 to \$929,900 for 1170 sq. ft. with 572 sq. ft. terrace **Hot tickets** Seventh-floor urban retreat with residents’ lounge, billiards room, golf simulation and video games room, and his-and-hers private saunas. Eighth-floor fitness retreat with sun lounge and juice bar **Status** Pre-construction **Occupancy** Fall 2015 **Contact** 416-546-7525; thebond.ca

Charlie Condos

A 36-storey, 278-unit contemporary tower with expansive windows grounded by classic heritage brick at street level to fit in with its historic surroundings **Builder** Great Gulf Homes **Location** King and Charlotte streets **Suite Availability** 97% sold. From 749 to 1,775 sq. ft. and \$470,000 to more than \$1-million. **Hot Tickets** “The Zone” has fitness rooms, a yoga studio and co-ed steam room **Status** Under construction **Occupancy** Fall 2012 **Contact** 416-927-9772; charliecondos.com

Cinema Tower

A 43-storey, 444-suite tower next to the TIFF Bell Lightbox **Builder** The Daniels **Location** Adelaide and Widmer streets **Suite Availability** 75% sold. From 420 to 1,500 sq. ft. and priced from the mid-\$300,000s **Hot tickets** Some “combo suites” can expand to three-bedroom-plus-study layouts to accommodate larger families **Status** Under construction **Occupancy** Fall 2013 **Contact** 416-203-2020; cinematower.com

Fabrik Condos

16 Floors, 169 suites **Builder** Menkes Developments **Location** Richmond Street and Spadina

Avenue **Suite Availability** 424 to 1,388 sq. ft. starting from the mid-\$200,000s **Hot tickets** Green roof system with storm water management to reduce the urban heat island effect, on-site car sharing program **Status** Registration phase **Occupancy** July 2015 **Contact** 416-591-7700; menkes.com

King Charlotte

32 storeys, 232 units **Builder** Lamb Development and Niche Development **Location** Charlotte Street **Suite Availability** 70% sold. From 642 to 962 sq. ft. and \$395,000 to \$579,900 **Hot tickets** Architecture is based on a series of different-sized boxes stacked one on top of the other in intriguing ways **Status** Starting construction in May 2012 **Occupancy** January 2014 **Contact** 416-422-0333; kingcharlotte.com

Living Shangri-La Toronto

A 66-storey glass tower housing a 202-room hotel, 287 one- and two- bedroom residences and 107 private estates. **Builder** Westbank Corp. & Peterson Group **Location** University Avenue and Adelaide Street **Suite Availability** 80% sold. Residences from 1,537 to 1,822 sq. ft. and \$1.7- to \$2.4-million; Private Estates from 836 to 3,306 sq. ft. and \$993,500 to \$5.6-million; a \$7.5-million Signature suite at 4,431 sq. ft.; and Penthouse suites from 3,300 to 3,500 sq. ft. for \$9.3-million. **Hot tickets** Private estate on floors 50 to 66 have two-car private garages, automated blinds and TV embedded in the master ensuite's mirror **Status** Under construction **Occupancy** 2012 **Contact** 616-599-0333 or 1-866-599-0333; livingshangri-latoronto.com

The Mercer

A 35-storey, 412-unit tower of layered brick, stone and glass **Builder** Graywood Developments and Beaverhall Homes **Location** John and King streets **Suite Availability** 75% sold. From 363 to 1,133 sq. ft. and low \$300,000s to more than \$1-million **Hot tickets** 10,000-sq.-ft rooftop terrace, Scandinavian-inspired sauna and spa area **Status** Open for sales **Occupancy** 2014 **Contact** 416-597-6940; th Mercer.ca

Peter Street Condominiums

Dramatic 40-storey Peter Clewes-designed glass building with 429 suites **Builder** CentreCourt Developments **Location** Peter and Adelaide streets **Suite Availability** 95% sold. From 303 to 772 sq. ft. for mid \$200,000s to \$500,000s **Hot tickets** 24/7 concierge, Totum LifeSciences gym, eco features **Status** Under construction **Occupancy** December 2014 **Contact** 416-987-8765; peterstreet.ca

Picasso on Richmond

A 35-storey, 373-suite building designed as a vertical landscape of cubist forms **Builder** Monarch **Location** Richmond and John streets **Suite Availability** 75% sold. From 456 to 935 sq. ft. and \$312,990 to more than \$800,000 **Hot Tickets** Gardens on every 10th floor, with vibrant red accents on interior and exterior **Status** Actively selling **Occupancy** December 2016 **Contact** 416-495-3549; monarchgroup.net

The Pinnacle on Adelaide

A 43-storey building with 564 units. **Builder** Pinnacle International **Location** John and Adelaide streets **Suite Availability** Over 75% sold. 594 to 1047 sq. ft. and \$339,900 to \$659,900 **Hot ticket** Located at the forefront of the John Street corridor project **Status** Under construction **Occupancy** Fall 2013 **Contact** 416-596-1600, pinnacleadelaide.ca

Ritz-Carlton Hotel and Residences

A 52-storey hotel with 159 residences **Builder** Graywood Development **Location** Wellington Street **Suite Availability** 90% sold. Newly available: a 6,000-sq.-ft. sub-penthouse for \$9.6-million and a 1,575-sq.-ft. one-bedroom-plus-library on the 32nd floor for \$1.6-million. **Hot tickets** AAA Four Diamond award-winning chef Tom Brodi runs Toca bar and restaurant **Status** Now occupying **Occupancy** Spring 2012 **Contact** 416-591-1000; theresidencetoronto.com

Studio 2

A 41-storey, 422-unit stacked rhombus glass tower **Builder** Aspen Ridge Homes **Location** Duncan and Richmond streets **Suite Availability** 68% sold. From 495 to 1,275 sq. ft. and low \$300,000s to \$954,990 **Hot tickets** Aqua lounge, winter lounge, media room, yoga space **Status** Actively selling **Occupancy** Late 2014 **Contact** 647-352-7736; studiocondos.ca

Tableau Condominium

A 36-storey, 415-unit building **Builder** Urban Capital, Malibu Investment and Alit **Location** Richmond and Peter streets **Suite Availability** 95% sold. From 590 to 1,036 sq. ft. and \$375,900 to \$679,900 **Hot tickets** The building's table structure creates a large, four-storey colonnaded public plaza on Richmond Street **Status** Under construction **Occupancy** Summer 2014 **Contact** 416-591-8887; tableaucondos.com

Theatre Park

A 47-storey, 234-suite glass tower situated across from Roy Thomson Hall **Builder** Lamb Development Corp. and Niche Development **Location** On King Street West's Theatre Row **Suite Availability** 80% sold. From 530 to 2,480 sq. ft. and \$418,900 to \$2.3-million **Hot tickets** Exposed concrete ceilings, 10-ft. ceilings in penthouses **Status** Under construction **Occupancy** July 2013 **Contact** 416-422-0333; theatrepark.ca

300 Front West

A 49-storey, 683-unit building **Builder** Tridel **Location** Front and John streets **Suite Availability** 95% sold. From 540 to 1,927 sq. ft. and \$350,000 to \$1.59-million **Hot tickets** Rooftop infinity pool, suites designed using environmentally preferable materials **Status** Under construction **Occupancy** Summer 2012 **Contact** 416-217-0300; tridel.com

210 Simcoe

A 25-storey New York-inspired building with 294 units **Builder** Sorbara Development Group **Location** 210 Simcoe St. at Queen and University **Suite Availability** 84% sold. Suites range from 481 sq. ft. to 754 sq. ft. (plus terraces) for \$353,900 to \$460,900. **Hot tickets** High-design lobby,

art gallery, his/hers steam room, meeting/event rooms **Status** Construction starts April 2012
Occupancy July, 2015 **Contact** 416-217-0210 or 210simcoe.com