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Street Smarts: Absolutely fabulous in Mississauga

A host of new towers are changing the horizon of Canada's sixth-largest city: Drop by yourself to see what the hype is about



Hassan Siddiqui, pictured at Celebration Square, is smitten with Mississauga. He owns two units in the Marilyn tower, seen in the distance. Aaron Lynett/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. The sixth part of a lengthy series examining the GTA's new condo 'hoods.

Hassan Siddiqui likes to live on top of the world. Given this proclivity, it's no surprise his latest address is the 39th floor of a 50-storey cylindrical condominium tower in Mississauga called Absolute.

"I was born and raised in the Emirates, in Dubai," explains the 37-year-old cardiac sonographer, who arrived in Canada in his early twenties. "I know about towers, I love towers; I've seen all kinds of towers. So when this project came [on the market in 2006] I was one of the very first people who applied. There was no such thing at that time — except probably a tower in Stockholm and another one in London, England — that swings 360 degrees on its torso. This was one of the first projects in Canada so I wanted to be a part of it."

Absolute was designed by Yansong Ma, founder of a small Beijing-based architectural design firm. His winning design was chosen from 92 proposals submitted to Fernbrook Homes and Cityzen Development Group's international design competition. It was first choice among a nine-member international expert judging panel. It was the favourite of 6,000 people who cast ballots at an exhibit in Mississauga's Square One Shopping Centre. And it was Mr. Siddiqui's favourite, too, prompting him to purchase not one but two two-bedroom units in the intriguing building. He even convinced nine friends and family members to buy units in the Absolute group of towers, too.

"I showed them the project and said, 'You're living in Mississauga. You're going to die in Mississauga. Don't you want to have something that is totally different from everything?'" he recalls. "Towers are the way of the future. Down the line in the future you'll see vertical cities. If you get to live in something like this, it's landmark."

Today, Absolute encompasses two Ma-designed buildings — the 50-storey cylinder-like tower and a curvy 56-storey structure dubbed by many as the "Marilyn Monroe Tower" — as well as three other condo buildings and a 30,000-square-foot recreation centre. They are among a slew of towers that continue to transform Mississauga city centre's horizon. Those who have moved in and those purchasing units as their future abode include singles and young couples who, like Mr. Siddiqui, grew up in Mississauga and can't imagine leaving. They're also magnets for many new immigrants, with extended families buying up several units in a building to keep close to each other.

"It represents the multicultural fabric of Mississauga," says Cityzen president Sam Crignano.

As Canada's sixth-largest city, and one of the fastest growing, the area directly surrounding Square One Shopping Centre has experienced tremendous growth in the

past decade and things don't appear to be slowing down. Condominiums of all shapes and sizes dot the skyline, with more than 32,000 people calling the downtown core home and more than 20,000 people working in the surrounding office buildings. It truly feels like a city in itself, with City Hall (reigning mayor is 91-year-old Hazel McCallion), the Living Arts Centre, the library, the YMCA, the new Sheridan College campus, two movie theatres, the mall, a Go Station and more all packed into a few streets.

To top it off, last year saw the debut of Celebration Square, an outdoor venue attracting 30,000 people for community festivals, concerts and winter skating. City Hall's 12th-floor cafeteria will soon move to the main floor where diners can flow on to the square, yet another way to encourage residents to socialize downtown. There's even the city's first roundabout at the regally named intersection of Duke of York and Prince of Wales boulevards, with public art to be unveiled in the middle of the circle later this year.

"We're on fire in terms of the action and activity in our downtown," gushes Ed Sajecki, commissioner of planning and building at the City of Mississauga. "It's a city really whose time has come."

Mr. Sajecki has lived in the neighbouring Port Credit area for more than 25 years and is amazed at how Mississauga's downtown core has expanded. In 1973, it consisted of little more than Square One and vacant farmland, he says, but over the past 10 years, the city centre has grown into what he calls "a good-sized Ontario town." When the current crop of condo projects are complete (there's one that's 11 blocks long), the downtown population is expected to top 70,000.

Given the intensification, planners are working on a Downtown21 Master Plan that will create a "walkable" city complete with a "high street" of shops and restaurants. A light rail transit system will connect the downtown to Port Credit in the south and Brampton in the north and will link to a number of GO lines and a Bus Rapid Transit line along Eglinton Avenue and Highway 403. From Mr. Sajecki's vantage point, it's one of the most exciting downtown redevelopment projects in North America.

"We're going to be a model for North America on how you transform what was, let's face it, a sprawling suburb of Toronto into a big urban centre focused on rapid transit and higher densities in the right location," says Mr. Sajecki, who likes to lunch at Alioli Italian restaurant and Alice Fazooli's just steps from his office.

Square One, which gets 24 million visits each year, is also evolving to cater to residents. Crate and Barrel and The Apple Store set up shop a couple of years ago while Whole Foods moved in last summer. Recent additions include Zara and upscale Michael Kors, and more are scheduled to arrive after a major renovation set to start

this summer. The renovation will also result in new personal touches such as door greeters as well as security people who will help shoppers find their cars, all in response to the new demographic.

“We have a younger customer who is moving into the condos and they’re looking for all the new retailers and brands,” says Elena Price, Square One’s director of marketing. “We’re bringing in the retailers to align with that.”

Many of those frequenting the downtown core are also avid runners, with the annual Mississauga Marathon a topic of lunchtime chatter. The event got its start after area resident Elliott Kerr ran the Toronto Marathon and wondered why his hometown didn’t have a race of its own. Ever determined, he mapped out a course and presented it to Mayor McCallion, who gave it her blessing. The first race, held in 2004, attracted 5,000 runners. Now in its ninth year, this year’s event will draw more than 10,000 runners on May 5 and 6 to seven different events – from a 2K fun run to a full 42-km downhill marathon. It all begins in the downtown core, of course, with the various events winding through residential streets, parks and along the waterfront.

Though he’s not running in the marathon this year, Mr. Siddiqui will be watching the action from his sky-high condo. It’s yet another event that makes living in Mississauga so delightful.

“All of the city centre is awesome,” he says. “There’s shopping at Square One. There are awesome restaurants like Canyon Creek. There are theatres. Everything is in the centre. The City Hall itself did a facelift. You can sit down for open-air concerts. In the summer you see people practising yoga. There are movies and ethnic singers. It’s amazing. When I came here there were only three buildings in the centre and now it’s like 20 buildings and even more to come. I’ve lived in 20 countries. Living is living [but] there’s no place like Mississauga.”

Street Smarts: Due West digs in Mississauga

Sam Crignano is busy building condominium towers all over the Greater Toronto Area. One of his favourites is Absolute with its intriguing 50- and 54-storey curvy towers. Though they would have looked awesome on Toronto’s downtown waterfront, it wasn’t an option due to restrictive design bylaws.

So out he ventured to Mississauga, a city Mr. Crignano calls “ahead of the curve” because height, density and design aren’t an issue “as long as you’re providing one parking space per unit.” The move inspired an international design competition, with city planners among the judges. Given the design potential in this growing city, he’s not surprised that Mississauga is drawing international attention thanks, in part, to Absolute’s unique look.

“They have brought international attention and absolutely shaped the landscape [of the city centre],” Mr. Crignano says. “The uniqueness of their design has helped achieved that and, to some degree, placed Mississauga at a different level in terms of its position on the world stage.”

Here’s a sampling of what’s on the go in the Mississauga City Centre:

Absolute

56-storey tower with 427 units, 50-storey tower with 437 units, 20 podium units
Builder Cityzen/Fernbrook Location Burnhamthorpe and Hurontario Suite Availability 95% sold. 840 to 1,785 sq. ft. and priced from \$384,400 to more than \$1.4-million
Hot Tickets World-renowned architecture designed by Yansong Ma of Beijing who won an international design competition Status Complete Occupancy Now Contact 416-896-6057; absolutecondos.com

Crystal at Pinnacle Uptown

28-storey tower with 251 units and 24-storey tower with 212 units Builder Pinnacle International Location Hurontario and Eglinton Suite Availability 572 to 926 sq. ft. starting from the \$200,000s Hot Tickets More than 28,000 sq. ft. devoted to luxury amenity spaces, grand roundabout entrance connecting the two towers Status Registration Occupancy 2015 Contact 905-568-9000; pinnacleuptown.com

Limelight

Two glass clad towers rising 22 and 32 storeys atop a six-storey podium Builder The Daniels Corporation Location Living Arts and Prince of Wales Suite Availability 90% sold. 436 to 961 sq. ft. and priced from the low \$200,000s Hot Tickets The fifth landmark residence within Daniels’ award-winning city centre community; rooftop terrace with multiple gardening plots; ground-level bicycle parking spaces; illuminating roof line Status Under construction Occupancy Summer 2012 Contact 905-306-6996; limelightcondos.com

Mirage

22 storeys, 352 units Builder Conservatory Group Location Rathburn and Confederation Pkwy Suite Availability 50% sold. 585 to 950 sq. ft. and priced from \$251,900 to just under \$400,000 Hot Tickets Two-storey separate amenity building with fitness centre, indoor pool, theatre and bowling alley Status Actively selling Occupancy August 2014 Contact 905-232-2400; conservatorygroup.com

Parkside Village

30 acres, 11 blocks, three parks, 15 high-rise towers, 12 mid-rise, 10 low-rise, 6,000 residential units, more than 15,000 residents once complete Builder Amacon Location Burnhamthorpe and Confederation Pkwy Suite Availability Currently selling

The Residences, The Grand Residences and The Park Residences from 533 to 1,192 sq. ft. and priced from \$249,900. Only 10 units remaining in each tower. Hot Tickets Urban village features shops, restaurants and parks; 50,000 sq. ft. amenity space including pooch patio, barbecue lounge, show kitchen, wine cellar and kids play area
Status The Residences, The Grand Residences and The Park Residences under construction
Occupancy The Residences - fall 2012, The Grand Residences - spring 2013, The Park Residences - winter 2013
Contact 905-273-9333; lifeatparkside.com
Up Next Next phase called PSV (Posh, Style, Vibe) coming this spring,
life@parkside.com

—Suzanne Wintrob