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Don Mills denizens:

The area's new condos & shops satisfy residents & newcomers



"The people who moved into Don Mills in its early days in the late '50s and early '60s are very loyal to the area," long-time Don Mills resident Dorothy Pestell says. Aaron Lynett / National Post

By Suzanne Wintrob
Special to National Post

Dorothy Pestell considers herself a "Don Millser" at heart. She moved into Toronto's first master-planned community in 1963, shortly after getting married, and spent almost two decades nestled with her husband and three sons in a two-bedroom basement flat in the neighbourhood's popular enclave, Brydencourt Apartments. The

32 buildings contained 11 apartments each and sat on seven acres, proving a safe and airy space for the kids to play.

In 1982, the Pestells reluctantly moved out of the area when a developer decided to build condominiums on the Brydencourt property. But as soon as construction was complete, Ms. Pestell snapped up a condo — and later a townhouse — steps from her old place. She's now anticipating early 2013 when she will move into a one-bedroom, 700-square-foot condo at LivLofts, one of the development's residential buildings being developed by Cadillac Fairview and FRAM Building Group.

"The people who moved into Don Mills in its early days in the late '50s and early '60s are very loyal to the area," Ms. Pestell says. "Everybody loves it and nobody wants to move away. It's a unique area that's very, very friendly. I'm still in touch with a lot of parents that my kids went to school with their children, so it's very comfortable. And from a geographic standpoint, it's absolutely perfect. You're a minute away from the Don Valley Parkway, a couple of minutes to the 401 and 10 minutes to downtown. It's a perfect location for getting out of the city any time of the year without having to go through the city."

It also helps that the Shops at Don Mills is at Ms. Pestell's doorstep. The real estate agent has watched its transformation from an open-air mall built in the 1950s to an enclosed plaza in the late 1970s, and she is a proud member of the Don Mills Residents Association that became the community voice when Cadillac Fairview set its sights on returning the centre to its open-air glory. Though some thought it crazy to build an outdoor mall in a province known for its chilly winters, Cadillac Fairview confidently ploughed ahead.

By the time the Shops at Don Mills opened on a blustery day in April 2009, the neighbourhood buzzed with excitement. Finally, they had a modern shopping centre yet one with an urban village look and feel, complete with cobblestone roads and a town square for seasonal festivals, jazz concerts and an outdoor skating rink. The concept attracted a host of exclusive retailers and eateries including Toronto's first Anthropologie store, chef Mark McEwan's first gourmet grocery store, and B.C.-based Joey Restaurant's foray into Ontario. Even Ko's Gift Shop took a spot, much to the delight of long-time residents who frequented the family-run store during its days at the old Don Mills Centre. While a few original retailers have moved on, new entrants include European-inspired patisserie Ice 'n Cake and chef McEwan's Fabbrica restaurant, with rumours of a Bier Markt and Fisker luxury plug-in hybrid car showroom coming soon.

With the commercial side firmly entrenched, Cadillac Fairview and FRAM have now turned their attention to bringing in the masses with three residential projects on the

go (priced from \$530 to \$560 per square foot) plus four more planned for the 40-acre development.

“I wouldn’t call it a suburban location anymore,” says Niall Collins, Cadillac Fairview’s senior vice-president of development. “I’d call it an urban location with good proximity for people working. And it’s a destination for the retailers as well.”

Judging by sales, business is booming. Just three units are still available at Reflections, a 12-storey, 108-unit triangular-shaped building with large units ideal for empty nesters downsizing from Don Mills houses. About 45 one- and two-bedrooms are still up for grabs at the 14-storey, 172-unit LivLofts, a converted office building that hopes to attract younger buyers and sassy empty nesters.

The most recent to come to market is Flaire, with 297 units in two 11-storey buildings attached by a four-storey podium. The towers are horizontally swathed in undulating ribbons, glass and concrete balconies to combine the area’s retro past with its hip present. There’s a port-cochère and courtyard, Miami-inspired outdoor lounge with cabanas, a fitness centre, and a party room with chef’s kitchen and two-way fireplace.

According to Ralph Giannone, principal of Giannone Petricone Associates Architects, Flaire’s “curvilinear architecture” draws from the area’s curvy streets as well as its rich history, while the towers’ dark grey brick base ties into the brick façade of the nearby shops. Mr. Giannone says the curves allow for wraparound balconies as well as intriguing pie-shaped living spaces. In short, he calls it “a new fresh architectural language” that continues Don Mills’ tradition of creating modern abodes for its faithful residents.

“We didn’t want to create something that [clashed] with what was existing,” he says. “We wanted to respect the history, which can be interpreted as a bit of nostalgia as to what Don Mills was — an exciting place to live — and at the same time create something that is refreshing and fresh and new and contemporary.”

With a community centre, park and hockey rink in the works, there’s certainly something to be excited about.

“The community that we’re building in creates a big reason for doing some of the things that we’re doing,” says Frank Giannone, FRAM president and Ralph’s brother. “Once you come home from work, if you’re not working nearby, everything is there — whether you just want to lounge around in the building or get outside in the square. It gives you that feeling that once I’m home, I’ve got everything at my fingertips, everything within walking distance. It feels a bit like a resort.”