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Street Smarts: Condos in the city centre



Paul Spence and his dog, Ivy, moved back to Yonge and Eglinton after an uninspiring turn in the suburbs.

Aaron Lynett / National Post

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 14th part of a lengthy series examining the GTA's new condo 'hoods.

Paul Spence first ventured into the Yonge and Eglinton area of midtown Toronto when he was in his 30s. At the time, it was the place to be for hip professionals looking for great bars and trendy eateries without having to trek downtown.

Given its popularity, the neighbourhood had quickly become known as “Young and Eligible,” with folks like Mr. Spence invigorated by the energy.

As his life changed, Mr. Spence moved around. First he bought a house on The Danforth and lived there for a while until settling into a rented apartment at Yonge and Bloor. Twelve years later, he headed up to Unionville where he bought a house and tried to ease into suburban life. But for a midtown boy used to the city, it was a shock to the system, or as he puts it, “It was that ‘Aha!’ moment: What have I done?”

“I wasn’t happy out there,” recalls Mr. Spence, 50, who owns a direct marketing mail company in Scarborough, where he grew up. “Probably the thing that made me unhappiest was that to get anything — a cup of coffee, a newspaper, anything — you pretty much had to get in your car and drive somewhere. I had always lived downtown and I was used to being able to walk out and get whatever I want whenever I want,” he says. “Having moved from where everything was at your fingertips, I could never adjust to sitting in traffic constantly.” 989 units. There are six projects actively selling that will add another 1,620 units to the area.

Seven years into his suburban experience, Mr. Spence went to visit a friend at Yonge and Eglinton. He had Ivy, his rescued Greyhound dog, with him and she needed a walk. When they passed a sales office touting two sky-high towers about to break ground, Mr. Spence stopped in his tracks. He went in, signed on, drove home and immediately put his house up for sale.

Today, he and Ivy are happy in a one-bedroom-plus-den, 825-square-foot condo looking down on the Yonge-Eglinton intersection. He’s on the condo board and attends many of the building’s social events, including pub nights, game nights and outings to a nearby comedy club. He enjoys walking Ivy along the quiet tree-lined residential streets and exploring the farmer’s market, and he’s a regular at Grazie for Italian food, Spacco’s for pizza and pool and the giant patio at St. Louis Bar and Grill. His friends live in nearby condos, and they get together often at local hangouts.

Though he drives to work, he keeps his car in the underground parking on weekends because everything he needs — including “about 20 Starbucks,” he laughs — is a short stroll away.

“The area is really transforming,” Mr. Spence says. “The new condo developments are driving that change. It’s becoming more upscale. People are renovating their storefronts to look more modern.”

Indeed, the area is certainly getting its share of high-rise attention. According to research firm Urbanation, which follows the GTA condominium market, seven projects have been built in the Yonge-Eglinton area since 2007, totalling 1,989 units. There are six projects actively selling that will add another 1,620 units to the area. Prices average about \$630 per square foot. Word has it that Peter Freed (the man behind many of King West's cool condo developments) has bought the site where the upscale Art Shoppe furniture store now sits, so there's likely more construction to come.

"Yonge and Eglinton has become such an exciting, thriving metropolis," says Barbara Lawlor, president of Baker Real Estate. "There is so much lifestyle, restaurants, clubs. There's so much excitement on the streets. If you go there at lunch hour, the place is just packed. There is just so much choice and activity. Plus there's a lot of residential going on."

Later this year, Ms. Lawlor will be selling E Condos, set for the intersection's northeast corner. Currently in preregistration, E Condos' 1,100 units will be situated in two towers — 44 and 64 storeys in height — and will feature two cantilevered swimming pools that will jut out from the building. The project is being built by Bazis Inc., Metropia and RioCan. During construction, the neighbourhood will lose a TD Bank, Burger King and the ever-popular What a Bagel restaurant. RioCan owns the Yonge-Eglinton Centre office/retail complex across the street and is planning a \$100-million redevelopment that will include turning the current open-air square into an enclosed retail and galleria space.

But why all the action right now? Ben Myers, executive vice-president of Urbanation, says it's just a matter of timing. As he explains, the area went through an influx of new construction a few years back when Minto built its towers. Then there was a bit of a lull, but only because the current developers were going through approvals. Now most have launched and purchasers are responding in droves.

"It's a good spot for people who are North Torontonians," he says. "They may not be downtown people but they are children of Forest Hill and Rosedale and all those high-end areas that people are gravitating to." The area is also great because "you're closer to home, the subway line, and you have all the amenities that you can get right downtown."

The demographic works well for Bruce Tanton. The 43-year-old has lived in the area for 20 years, the past three in a condo. When he first moved to the 'hood, he didn't know anybody so he took a job as a bartender at the lively Duke of

Kent pub and ended up making lifelong friends. He recently sold his real estate assets to become a chocolatier, and last year he quietly opened what he calls a “chocolate tapas lounge” called Coco Rogue next door to the Art Shoppe. Though he admits it’s convenient to work steps from home, it helps that Yonge–Eglinton has double the percentage of 25– to 35–year–olds than any other area of the city because that’s Coco Rogue’s intended clientele. He’s in the midst of revising Coco Rogue’s menu of chocolatey entrées and treats and will finally have a grand opening this summer once the patio licence is approved. Mr. Tanton expects 250 people to attend, mostly his neighbours and his former pub customers.

“Yonge and Eglinton is perpetually youthful,” Mr. Tanton says. “You can walk into The Keg, the Duke of Kent, the Rose and Crown, the Unicorn on any given night and you don’t have to go with a friend. There’s always people there that you know. It’s like Cheers.”

Street Smarts: 10 projects, in the works

Suzanne Wintrob, Special to National Post

Barbara Lawlor thinks Yonge–Eglinton is more trendy and sophisticated than Queen West and King West. The real estate agent recently ventured there from her downtown office and was amazed at the number of people buzzing around, whether at lunchtime or in the evening. While there, she took in a Brazilian floor show at Copacabana steakhouse. It was a day to remember.

“There is just so much choice and activity,” she says. “And there’s a lot of residential. Professionals are also attracted to the area because of the subway. There’s just so much happening. It really is thriving.”

According to the Toronto Transit Commission, more than 81,000 people enter Eglinton subway station every weekday, the majority heading on to the train. The number is sure to climb once the selection of new condominium projects put out the welcome mat for residents. Here’s a sampling of what’s on the go in the Yonge/Eglinton area as well as other nearby subway stops:

Allure Condominiums

10 storeys, 197 units **Builder** Greenpark Homes **Location** Yonge and Davisville **Suite Availability** From 560 to 906 sq. ft., priced from \$318,900 to \$503,900,

more than 75% sold **Hot Tickets** Private street entrance, spa and fitness studio, party room with bar facilities, caterer's kitchen and outdoor terrace, billiards and card room, media room, rooftop sky deck with fireplace, barbecue and lounge seating **Status** Under construction **Occupancy** January 2014 **Contact** 416-487-7600, allurecondos.ca

The Berwick

17 storeys, 205 units plus 20 townhomes **Builders** Andrin Cherrytree Homes and the Brown Group **Location** Berwick and Duplex **Suite Availability** Condos: 651 to 928 sq. ft., priced from \$374,990 to \$507,390; Townhomes: Three-bedroom, 1,830 sq. ft., priced at \$944,900, 95% condos sold, one-third townhomes sold **Status** Under construction **Occupancy** Fall 2013 **Contact** 416-922-9425, theberwick.com

E Condos

44-storey and 64-storey buildings comprising 1,100 units **Builders** Bazis, Metropia, RioCan **Location** Yonge and Eglinton **Suite Availability** From 400 to 1,200 sq. ft. starting from the \$250,000s **Hot Tickets** Two cantilevered pools projecting dramatically out from the buildings — one halfway up, the other at penthouse level; E-Sky Lounges provide stylish and convenient gathering places to chill out and admire the views **Status** Registration **Occupancy** 2017 **Contact** econdos.ca

The Madison

West Tower: 36 storeys, 290 units; East Tower: 33 storeys, 260 units; Podium: Seven — storeys, 154 units **Builder** Madison Homes **Location** Eglinton and Dunfield **Suite Availability** 510 to 1,045 sq. ft. priced from high \$300,000s to low \$600,000s, top floors of two towers just released **Hot Tickets** Two storeys of retail with Loblaws the onsite grocer; 22,000 sq. ft. of amenities on fourth floor plus 5,600 sq. ft. on eighth floor **Status** Actively selling **Occupancy** July 2015 **Contact** 416-482-8090, madisoncondos.ca

Minto30Roe

34 storeys, 397 units **Builder** Minto **Location** Yonge and Roehampton **Suite Availability** 522 to 920 sq. ft. priced from \$306,900 to \$569,900 **Hot Tickets** Fitness centre with Kinesis Wall touted as one-of-a-kind in a Canadian condo; “breakout room” with WiFi go relax after working out **Status** Actively selling **Occupancy** Spring 2015 **Contact** 416.915.3812, minto30roe.com

Neon Condominiums

20 storeys, 218 suites **Builder** Pemberton Group and Felcorp **Location** Duplex and Orchard View **Suite Availability** From 775 to 1,250 sq. ft., priced from mid-\$400,000s **Hot Tickets** Landscaped rooftop terrace, four parking spaces

leased through an auto-sharing program **Status** Actively selling **Occupancy** Spring 2013 **Contact** 416-987-7878 or neoncondos.com

Other midtown opportunities:

South Hill on Madison

Seven storeys, 159 units **Builder** Burnac Holdings Limited **Location** Davenport and Madison **Suite Availability** 384 to 1,278 sq. ft., priced from \$249,900 to more than \$1-million **Hot Tickets** Art deco and modern design combined; pet spa, media screening lounge **Status** Pre-registration **Occupancy** April 2015 **Contact** 416-966-3737, southhillonmadison.com

3018 Yonge in Lawrence Park

12 storeys, 179 suites **Builder** Lanterra Developments **Location** Yonge and Lawrence **Suite Availability** Two-bedroom to two-bedroom-plus-den designs from 978 to 1,084 sq. ft., priced from \$706,900, 97% sold **Hot Tickets** Across from parklands, ravines, pathways, groomed trails and tree-lined avenues; each suite has balcony or oversized terrace **Status** Actively selling **Occupancy** January 2015 **Contact** 416-787-8882, 3018yonge.com

530 St. Clair Ave West Condos

19 storeys, 155 units **Builders** The Goldman Group and Lash Group of Companies **Location** St. Clair West and Bathurst **Suite Availability** 576 to 984 sq. ft., priced from the \$330,000s to the \$500,000s, more than 95% sold **Hot Tickets** Two-storey, all-season private "530 Club" for fitness and entertainment **Status** Under construction **Occupancy** Fall 2012 **Contact** 416-868-0500, 530condos.com

Rise

25 storeys, 300 units **Builder** Reserve Properties **Location** St. Clair and Bathurst **Suite Availability** 437 to 865 sq. ft., priced from the mid-\$200,000s to more than \$600,000, 85% sold **Hot Tickets** Hotel chic luxurious ambiance, infinity pool that spans across the building, outdoor terrace with fire pits and private cabanas **Status** Actively selling **Occupancy** 2015 **Contact** risecondos.com, 416-546-7399