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A dining area at 77 Charles St. in Toronto.

Luxury Living: You don't always have to be at the top in all facets of your life

Suzanne Wintrob, National Post

When it comes to luxury living, size matters.

Sure, there are plenty of students and young professionals who are quite content to squeeze themselves and their belongings into a 500-square-foot condominium so they can live in the heart of the action and feel all grown up. Investors get it and are speedily snapping up petite suites in downtown Toronto within days of a new development's launch.

But with age comes wisdom — and, hopefully, money. With thicker bank accounts from hard work or inheritance, today's grownups crave substantial splendour and are turning to a new crop of large one- and two-bedroom units to call home. Think open plan, high ceilings, wraparound terraces and plenty of natural light, all perfectly blended into 1,500 sq. ft. or more of living space. They're not penthouses, but they're just as impressive.

“Although suites aren't typically that large downtown — except in the boutique and niche buildings — they are appearing in many of the new towers being marketed, and they often fetch higher prices per square foot than smaller suites largely as a function of their relatively low supply,” says Mark Cohen, managing partner at The Condo Store Marketing Systems. “I think we're already seeing larger suites in neighbourhood buildings and through many parts of the 905.”

Take Mady's Brookdale on Avenue Road as an example. About one-third of the 93 condos in the seven-storey building, set to rise in North Toronto's tree-lined and family-friendly Bedford Park neighbourhood, are larger than 1,500 sq. ft. Given the \$1.2-million starting price, the generous suites boast the expected high-end appliances and finishings, terraces and balconies, as well as a 24/7 concierge, 2,500-sq.-ft. fitness centre, and a rooftop terrace with dining areas, casual seating, gas barbeques and a fireplace.

Jonathan Mueller, Mady's vice-president of sales and marketing, says the size perfectly suits local empty nesters who are downsizing but still want roominess, and 30-something professionals who hail from the area but don't want to pay its housing prices.

“This is a neighbourhood where it's very expensive to buy into the low-rise market,” he says. “We know people want to live here, both young and old. If you're not already in the neighbourhood, you have to spend \$1-million to buy a lot and then build a house on it. Or you can spend \$1.5-million and get an okay house. There's a demand for people to live here because of its location and all that it has to offer, so we are building condos that are a good alternative to a low-rise house. You can get 1,200, 1,500, 1,700 sq. ft. for less than \$2-million.”

What really makes condos of this size shine are intriguing open-concept layouts and carefully chosen colours and textures. Kelly Cray, principal at interior design firm Union31 that's working on the Brookdale project, says two-bedroom units of this calibre will usually have a good-sized master bedroom, with a second smaller bedroom doubling as a guest room and study. Unlike traditional layouts where bedrooms branch off from long corridors, bedrooms can be situated at opposite ends of the condo rather than back-to-back. Alternatively, they can be moved away from the main window wall to the middle of the unit — what the pros call “inbound.”

“Typically developers will want to maximize light and views in the areas where people spend the most of their time,” Mr. Cray explains. “Still, Ontario’s building code has requirements for the amount of natural light that these inbound rooms must have. One solution ... is to use frosted floor-to-ceiling room partitions, which open up the bedroom to the living space. This way the bedroom can be concealed when guests visit but still benefit from natural light even when the doors are closed.”

Much more is possible if purchasers get in early. Architect Thomas Tampold, owner of Yorkville Design Centre in Hazelton Lanes, has encouraged clients to scrap long hallways and position the circulation of private spaces along the window wall instead. Technically, that means an enfilade of rooms, with the living room opening to the den or study, which then opens to the master bedroom.

“You’re going to be walking through rooms to get to the last bedroom,” he says. “The first room can be a study or den that you walk through to get to the master. If you have another room before you get to the master, you might have a sliding frosted glass screen parallel to the windows to separate the circulation from that room. It’s more intimate walking from one room to another along the window wall. Imagine the freedom of walking naked in front of the terrace along the perimeter of your waterfront condo, or chasing your partner through the condo. These things are important. It’s all about stories, it’s all about life.”

As for eating and entertaining, Mr. Cray says a kitchen that’s an absolute “knockout” in large suites is a must. Open plans call for integrated breakfast bars, built-in wall ovens, and fridges and microwaves concealed behind cupboards and panelling.

“In some cases your dining room is almost an extension of your kitchen because of European influences,” he says. “It’s a little more casual, like you’re dining out.”

From a colour perspective, neutral tones such as grey and white remain popular for large spaces, he adds, as is wide-plank textural wood flooring to achieve fewer lines, thereby visually expanding the space.

But even with all the grandeur, or perhaps because of it, the larger-unit condo category is a longer sell. According to David Feldman, president and CEO of Camrost Felcorp,

which, among other sites, is building the tony 23-storey Imperial Plaza near Avenue Road and St. Clair Avenue West, most sales happen during construction when purchasers — usually end-users, not investors — can “touch and feel” the space. He says sales at the company’s luxury project nearby, The Avenue, sold slowly at first but briskly upon completion (there are still three up for grabs). The Imperial Plaza experience has been similar.

But the slower decision-making doesn’t deter developers like Mr. Feldman, who certainly knows a thing or two about luxury living and realizes that, indeed, size matters.

“The rooms are like a mansion because they are larger rooms, larger space,” he enthuses. “You can move your furniture in from your home. You can retain items that normally if you moved into a smaller accommodation you wouldn’t be able to retain. You can keep all your memories and you can have more storage.”