

# NATIONAL POST

**Follow the cobblestoned street to the city's best new-but-old condos**



**Five St. Joseph St., in the Yonge and Wellesley area, is among the largest façade retention projects in the city.**

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They say everything old is new again, and that's certainly the case when it comes to condominium development in downtown Toronto.

With vacant lots few and far between, particularly in the downtown core, developers have been sizing up heritage properties and designing alluring projects around them that combine nostalgia with

modern living. From 19th-century factories and churches to warehouses and mansions, it seems that nothing is off limits to enthusiastic developers — as long as they respect Toronto’s past and retain the integrity of the historic site.

“There seems to be no end to the number of applications for condominium projects in the downtown area,” says Mary MacDonald, acting manager, Heritage Preservation Services at the City of Toronto’s planning department. “It’s a very popular choice, largely because in the downtown core there are so many heritage buildings.”

One particular residential project that’s turning heads is Five Condos. Located at 5 St. Joseph St. in the Yonge and Wellesley area, Five is being billed as one of the largest façade retention projects in the city.

When the project is complete in late 2014, Five will comprise a 45-storey modern glass tower atop a four-storey podium that was once the 1905 Gothic Revival warehouse belonging to Rawlinson Cartage, one of the city’s largest moving and storage companies. The podium will house heritage lofts, a rooftop garden with 13,000 square feet of outdoor amenities and 10,000 sq. ft. of indoor amenities. The brick façade on adjacent St. Nicholas Street will be rebuilt but still retain the spirit of its Victorian-Edwardian architecture, with the cobblestoned St. Nicholas Street adding to the quaintness. ERA Architects is restoring the warehouse façade that will become the condo’s entry.

Another five heritage buildings fronting on Yonge Street — once the home of Rawlinson’s offices and now the site of the Five presentation centre — are also being restored. Back in the day, there were narrow, flat-roofed, three-storey storefronts in a warehouse style at the south end of the row. The three northernmost buildings were once sloped-roofed with two storeys, with the centre building getting an Art Deco overhaul in the late 1920s to include a flat roof and two extra storeys. Once transformed, the five buildings will become Five’s Yonge Street Collection of 14 one- and two-storey residences situated on the second and third floors, with a collection of upscale retail on the ground floor.

Mod Developments and Graywood Developments, together with ERA Architects and Hariri Pontarini Architects, are doing their darndest to keep as much of the original as possible, using special techniques to remove years of paint, and cleaning or replacing the brick as necessary. In the true spirit of preservation, a steel frame support system is currently suspending the entire façade over the excavation pit until construction is complete. The goal, say the developers, is to preserve the Rawlinson site in keeping with the original footprint.

“If this project was somewhere in the east end or the west end [of Toronto], I don’t think it would have attracted so much attention,” says MOD president and CEO Gary Switzer. “We ended up winning BILD’s Building of the Year this year. I think a lot of what appealed to people is that it was right on Yonge Street and it was like a preview of what the city could look like with this kind of attention to history. And the modern architecture that [the architects] are doing is so excellent.”

Ms. MacDonald is a big fan of Five. She lumps Toronto's growing crop of commercial and residential developers into two groups: those "who routinely propose façadism," and those who are dedicated to incorporating heritage features into the actual construction. Given her job, she much prefers church or factory conversion or projects like Five that go beyond the façade to seriously blend the old with the new. Though keeping a building's façade can make for attractive eye candy, she says, it shouldn't end there.

"In my perspective, because I'm all about conservation, the buildings should be retaining their integrity," she explains. "You should be able to understand them, not just as cladding on something new.

Some of the condos downtown will keep the façades, and mostly it's a new building with just an old face," Ms. MacDonald says. "That doesn't actually represent a high standard of heritage conservation, though some people might find it interesting from a design perspective."

Ms. MacDonald is particularly pleased about Five's debut, especially given the current dilapidated state of that particular strip of Yonge Street. Five is "a really interesting project," she says, and one that's extremely important to the city.

"Yonge Street is one of our main historic main streets but there's a lot of clutter and signs and shops at the pedestrian level of Yonge Street that have really overtaken the perception of these buildings as really beautiful late 19th century buildings. ... [Five's developers] are keeping all the exterior elements of the heritage property, adding their own tower, and they're going the extra mile to make sure that the commercial character of Yonge Street as a main street — with a certain 19th-century character that we've kind of lost sight of these days — is restored. We're hoping that will trigger a conservation movement and a restoration movement up the street."

Having retail at grade is also something the city is big on, though Ms. MacDonald says it's sometimes a challenge for heritage buildings because today's modern stores demand more space and bigger windows to lure shoppers. With Five, she says, Torontonians not only get the pleasure of the historical warehouse reworked but also "commercial storefronts and a full restoration of those exteriors."

It also creates mood. Ryan Love, a heritage architect at ERA, says the melding together of modern, infill, existing façades and elevations will create an intriguing streetscape. Low-rise row houses will share the block with mid-rise and high-rise residences. Residential, industrial and retail will live in harmony. There will be noisy streets beside quiet streets, and weathered historic brick sharing the spotlight with sleek modern glass. Says Mr. Love: "With the design, we wanted to work with that."

## **Past Meets Present**



### *Shangri-La Toronto*

When it was announced that the Shangri-La luxury hotel chain was bringing its brand to the corner of Adelaide Street West and University Avenue, Torontonians and international investors sprang into action. Today, the 370 residences in the 66-storey glass tower are 80% sold, with occupancy scheduled for next summer. The site sits on the historic Bishop's Block, dating back to the mid-1830s when John Bishop built five Georgian row houses on the site and developed it as a high-end residential district. Only two remained intact when Vancouver-based developer Westbank Corp. came knocking.

In an effort to preserve history, Westbank hired a company to conduct an archaeological excavation underneath the building and recovered thousands of artifacts including pipes, toys, writing slates and ceramics that offer clues into early Toronto life. Further, Westbank dismantled the building's façade brick by brick and will replace it on the new building once construction is complete. To date, explains project manager Renata Li, Westbank has reconstructed the south and west walls at Adelaide and Simcoe Streets to mimic the building's appearance circa 1885.

All existing window and door openings have also been respected. The reconstruction used original building materials where possible, including salvaged brick, stone, windows and wood trim.

Additional materials match the originals as closely as possible.

When the building was dismantled, she adds, façades were fully documented by photographs and measured drawings. Elements were numbered and split into grid patterns for salvaging of brick and stone. The materials were palletted according to the numbering, and contents recorded and taken to a restoration company's secure facility where they repaired and restored whatever they could. When all is said and done, the heritage space will be dedicated to retail, though no tenant has yet been announced.

“Bishop’s Block is an important part of the history of Toronto in terms of documenting not only the typology of the row house, but also the architectural character of the area at that time,” Ms. Li says. “Our company values architecture and design very highly. With the Bishop’s Block being an architectural landmark for the city, we would hope that the Shangri-la Toronto would also inspire such a designation.”



### *Fashion House*

For the past decade, Peter Freed has been infusing downtown Toronto with a host of urban playground properties. Now the president of Freed Developments has taken over a spot near King Street West and Portland Street for Fashion House. The 11- and 12-storey glass and steel staircase towers, with 334 condo suites set for occupancy in 2013, will wrap around the historic Silver Place Company built in 1882.

According to the city, the industrial building — resplendent with its red brick cladding and brick and stone trim — is one of the earliest surviving factory complexes in the King/Spadina neighbourhood.

Its construction preceded the development of the area as the City’s manufacturing centre after the great fire of 1904. In 2005, it was included on the City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties.

Mr. Freed never intended to destroy the building nor just keep parts of it. Rather, it will be retained in its entirety to include 11,000 sq. ft. of retail space on the first floor and live/work condo suites on the second and third floors. The building will be refurbished and polished and its clock tower will be restored.

Mr. Freed is confident the combo of past and present will boost its saleability.

“It gives the overall project a much stronger character to have something that’s special and old and something that’s special and new,” he says. “There are so many buildings that are just a new building.

It’s nice to have something different and complementary and something to be celebrated. People are buying into neighbourhoods. If they can find a unit that appeals to them and there happens to be an exciting heritage that’s been restored, it adds to the offering and the sense of community.”



### *Rain Condominiums*

In Oakville, the folks at Empire Communities have cleared an 11-acre apple orchard at the rejuvenated Kerr Village to make room for two 19- and 21-storey glass condo buildings connected by a five-storey podium. In their midst will sit two stone-façade historic homes called the Smith Houses, built in the early 1900s by the Scottish family of the same name.

As Empire executive vice-president Paul Golini explains, the homes have not been listed by Ontario as heritage buildings, yet they are important to Oakville’s history. That said, Empire relocated them to prepare the land for construction and will move them back before excavation. The homes will be retrofitted and brought up to code — “that’s a challenge in itself,” says Mr. Golini — and will be incorporated as “monumental entrances” to the site. Some of the heritage aspects will be integrated into the interior design and landscaping, too.

When the 532-unit project is ready for occupancy (Phase One, the 21-storey building, is set for Spring 2014), Empire will offer the homes to the community. Mr. Golini says they will be perfect as office space, a recreational centre or an art gallery.

“Many developers had shied away from more modern looking buildings in Oakville,” he says. “We thought we could create a very interesting streetscape and appealing start to [the area’s] revitalization by combining the modernity of our architecture with the heritage look and feel of the shale heritage homes. These homes will create monumental welcoming symbols to our own little site plan. We’re bringing what used to be an unusable building to a point where it can now regain its

place in the community, and actually give back to the community by giving someone an opportunity to work there.”