

## Top 10 residential towers in T.O.

The Top 10 residential-tower countdown: Buildings we feel contribute more than property taxes to our town.

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National Post

*Saturday, March 11, 2006*

Toronto's construction boom has created dozens of new condominium towers. It's probably not a bad time to ask whether all these buildings give anything back to the city -- besides floor space and the economic benefits of real estate commissions and mortgage interest. These buildings help shape the urban fabric around us, so they should be on your radar whether you're a prospective buyer or not. How a building connects with its environment -- on the ground and in the air -- is critical. Even projects that are not leading-edge contribute to the city's design quotient; for example, the Prince Arthur on Avenue Road makes a grand urban gesture with its dramatic entrance arch, its oversized sofa-cum-public-art piece and its tony shops on what could have been an abandoned stretch of the street. Our countdown:

### 10. Palace Pier/Palace Pier Court, Lake Shore Boulevard West

For many years, the first tower (Palace Pier was built in 1979) and then the second (Palace Pier Court in 1993) were orphans on Lake Shore Boulevard, sentinels for Toronto and disconnected from their neighbourhood by the Gardiner Expressway. Today, these still-imposing 46-storey towers are reminiscent of those along Chicago's waterfront. They've aged well, with the new adjacent development giving them context. The new buildings also demonstrate that the towers-in-park approach is a better concept for this location than the surrounding jumble of mediocre high- and low-rise designs that pretend to be a street-based community.

### 9. One King West, King Street West and Yonge Street

Rising 51 stories from the historic 1912 Dominion Bank Building, it's a sliver of a tower and now the titleholder of the tallest residential building in Canada. Its historic building base is repurposed and the project is a step in the right direction for the intensification of downtown. While you can quibble with some of developer Harry Stinson's clumsy details and finishes, from the perspective of the waterfront, it's an elegant, almost ephemeral tower, one we wish were even higher.

### 8. District Lofts, 388 Richmond St. W.

District Lofts is probably the most audacious and adventurous of Toronto's newer residential buildings with its parallel towers connected by vertiginous flying walkways and shed-roofed penthouses. On an unprepossessing stretch of Richmond Street, it rises over a narrow mid-block site with its two-storey parking podium allowing many suites to have a view over the building to the south. At the base, it succeeds at bringing a dim bit of sidewalk alive with retail activity. Compare its modern elegance and deft touch with the faux-Deco hulk across the street at 438.

### 7. 190 St. George St.

On a leafy but architecturally challenged street populated mainly by banal buildings from the 1960s, this modernist condominium, completed in 1972, looks like a dashing visitor from Miami. Even on a drab winter day, its crisp whiteness brightens the area and, while it does sit back from the street, the cantilevered entrance canopy and lovely landscaping distinguish it as a good, if reserved, neighbour. Wraparound balconies with see-through metal railings and floor-to-ceiling windows make this a timeless gem. The architect, Joseph A. Medwecki, liked the building so much he painted his self-portrait with it in the background.

## 6. The Lonsdale, 619 and 625 Avenue Rd.

The sedate twin towers called the Lonsdale that overlook Upper Canada College's verdant acreage seem as though they've always been there. Compared with the behemoths further south on Avenue Road, their delicate integration into the neighbourhood is why they feel so appropriate. They're simultaneously the right scale for a main arterial road, yet positioned to be respectful of their single-family-home surroundings. The townhouse segment of the project certainly aids the tower-to-low-rise transition. And, speaking of transition, its luxe rental suites are now mostly luxe condo units.

## 5. Jefferson, 11 St. Joseph St.

This was a real surprise. Completed in 2004, one face of this almost-hidden luxury rental building is sensitively inserted into a restored 100-year-old Victorian brick facade on a quiet mid-town street. The other facade fronts a back lane off Wellesley Street. With its six-storey townhouse apartments, an 18-storey main building, its elegant greenish glass curtain wall and white vertical blinds for each unit (to prevent any window-treatment misdemeanors), this building is a rose among residential thorns.

## 4. Mozo, 218 King St. E.

Context Development and its architects of choice, architectsAlliance, do it right again with the well-designed (if unfortunately named) Mozo. Perhaps the most laudable urban design feature is the six-storey corner element. It celebrates the intersection of two streets, acknowledges the building's Victorian neighbours and provides generous double-height retail spaces that are a gift to the city and to the merchants within. Now if Toronto Hydro would only get rid of all of those nasty poles and wires that pollute our city.

## 3. 10 and 20 Avoca Ave.

A classic 1971 modernist design statement with large windows and enormous wraparound balconies, these two towers by Seligman & Dick Architects were among Toronto's first co-ops. They're poised in a prime position overlooking David Balfour Park, but don't impose themselves on their location. Stroll around the neighbourhood. If you thought they were boring buildings, consider all the nearby and newer examples of how to destroy a bucolic location with designs that scream "look at me!". (The runner-up for careful consideration of a naturally beautiful site are the twin buildings of Tower Hill at St. Clair and Spadina Road. Let's hope the new condo going up on the site doesn't ruin that.)

## 2. Radio City, 281 and 285 Mutual St.

We know, this sounds like a Context promo. Maybe it's head honcho Howard Cohen's stint as chief city planner back in the 1980s or his desire to expiate the sin of those ghastly buildings on Queens Quay (he's done it in spades), but these guys know how to add to the city's urban design and still make a profit. Perhaps the most significant and well-thought-out recent urban space, this ensemble combines two sleek towers, a row of townhouses that blend but don't mimic the historic neighbourhood all wrapped around the new National Ballet School. A courtyard links the hubbub of Jarvis Street to the quiet of the residential street behind. Urban planning doesn't get much better than this.

## AND THE WINNER IS ...

## 1. 18 Yorkville Ave.

The city's most sophisticated condominium project is another architectsAlliance creation. It's not just a massive tower colliding with the pavement, but a sensitive combination of an exuberant 36-storey tower fronting Yonge Street, one that sings with style, and a seven-storey low-rise gem along Scollard Avenue. Continuing the high level of finesse is an intriguing Janet Rosenberg-designed park that relates the two buildings to the neighbourhood and the nearby historic library. This is urban renewal at its most sublime.

## NOT JUST TALL:

Towers aren't the only solution to living in the city, even at higher densities. The

horizontal building, or block approach, has produced many successful urban spaces. The Colonnade on Bloor Street, residences set on a two-storey commercial podium, is a good example of non-tower development, as is the similarly organized but curtain-walled 110 Bloor St. W. across the street. The Manulife is a tower that was a worthy addition to the city until they filled in the courtyard with a big box of Indigo. KPMB's lovely 500 Queens Quay W. is one of the only worthy buildings on the waterfront. The Benvenuto on Avenue Road is a sprawling, but successful, buffer between a major road and an established verdant neighbourhood.

#### GREAT EXPECTATIONS:

Many condo projects around town are still just images on sales brochures or in the early stages of construction. Hence, the jury is still out on whether they will succeed or fail, in the urban design sense.

For example, while the tops of many of the CityPlace towers are nice, the bottoms aren't producing much of a neighbourhood yet. -Will architect Robert Stern's One St. Thomas be a classic skyscraper or a Palladian pastiche? -Will the Armani tower have its namesake's understated elegance, or The Murano Towers on Bay the legendary shimmer of Italian glass? -Will Spire be too high and The Hazelton too squat?

Stay tuned.

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