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NATIONAL POST
SATURDAY,
SEPTEMBER 26,
2020

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PHOTO COURTESY OF MENKES DEVELOPMENTS

Projects like 77 Clarendon in Forest Hill are built in a traditional French style meant to look like it's going to last.

Timeless design

WHY TORONTO DEVELOPERS ARE EMBRACING
A FRENCH ESTHETIC MADE POPULAR BETWEEN THE WARS

JEAN GRANT

Castles and châteaux are the last thing you'd think about when someone mentions the Toronto condo scene. Here, luxury usually means sleek glass towers and stark, minimalist lobbies. But there are signs that a much older style is starting to influence the prevailing esthetic, especially among buyers who are craving a sense of permanence.

At 77 Clarendon, a boutique 15-suite condo in Forest Hill by Menkes Developments that's set to start construction within the year, the goal was to build something timeless.

The Menkes family themselves live up the road, and enlisted their longtime family designer, David Powell of Powell and Bonnell, to help them imagine a high-end structure to replace the existing apartment buildings on the property.

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“IN THIS STYLE THE WINDOWS AND OPENINGS TEND TO BE OVERSIZED. OTHER HISTORIC STYLES OF ARCHITECTURE, LIKE SHINGLE BRICK HOUSES, TEND TO HAVE SMALLER OPENINGS, BUT PEOPLE DON’T WANT SPACES WITH LOTS OF LITTLE ROOMS. — RICHARD SOMMER, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

A STYLE THAT LOOKS BOTH OLD AND NEW

ESTHETIC
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Powell was inspired by a specific type of building that was constructed in Paris between the two world wars — built mostly in the 1920s and 1930s but in a style that marked a distinct departure from the Art Deco aesthetic established in France just prior to the First World War. He describes them as “classically styled with restrained decorations — a blend of the traditional styles of the time and more of a streamlined look that was starting to emerge.” Powell knew this style would mesh well with the neighbourhood, which itself is filled with stately century homes.

Richard Sommer, dean of the University of Toronto’s architecture faculty for over a decade, says much of the revival we’re seeing has roots in the French Regency style of the early 19th century — which itself, he says, was an eclectic style, drawing on inspiration from romantic architecture, as well as Greek and Roman elements. He says the modern interpretation of the look is being boiled down and used in these buildings’ exteriors, made mostly of sandstone or a concrete composite designed to look like it.

It’s the fortress effect. At 77 Clarendon, the exterior will be limestone, switching to pale brick for the top two floors. The look was accented with restrained classical detailing surrounding bronze-framed windows. The result is imposing but refined; it looks more like a historic institution than a 2020 condominium. “We wanted something that wasn’t going to date itself,” says Powell.

“The buildings I’m so enamoured with have a loftiness to them, a sense of space and height,” he explains. The lobby at 77 Clarendon is double height for this reason, though salon-like nooks are tucked into it for intimate conversations. Spaciousness extends to the suites, starting at 3,500 square feet for \$6.5 million. Though the building is clearly up-market, Powell maintains nothing about it is showy. The ultimate goal was to make buyers downsizing from sturdy mansions in the area feel at home.

One reason the style is becoming popular again, according to Sommer, is that it can look both new and old, and lends itself to a range of interiors approaches. “It’s a style that can mix an imposing, roughly neoclassical exterior with sleek interiors. It alludes to something old, but



PHOTO COURTESY OF TRIDEL AND ROWNTREE ENTERPRISES

Project architect Berardo Graziani wanted Chateau, at Auberge on the Park at Leslie and Eglinton, to channel the romantic inspiration played up in its name.

is still accepting of contemporary styles,” he says. It also has to do with buyers’ appetite for large open spaces. “In this style the windows and openings tend to be oversized. Other historic styles of architecture, like shingle brick houses, tend to have smaller openings, but people don’t want spaces with lots of little rooms,” he says.

Over at Auberge on the Park, at Leslie and Eglinton, the latest addition to a trio of towers, called Chateau, flips that notion for a sleek exterior and stately interior. The project’s architect, Berardo Graziani, of Graziani and Corazza Architects Inc., wanted Chateau to channel the romantic inspiration played up in its name. Though it’s a relatively contemporary-looking 39-storey tower — being developed by Tridel and Rowntree Enterprises and to be completed

in 2024 — the lower levels are clad in stone, with limestone planters lining most of the expansive terraces on the upper levels. Graziani says the materials were chosen so they would develop character over time. Limestone is one of the most durable natural materials, and doesn’t easily show its age. “It’s like the old homes in Forest Hill with stone exteriors that look even better after 50 years than the day they were installed,” he says. Inside, the design was inspired by classical French architecture with Art Deco accents. The towering coffered ceilings in the lobby feel traditional, while large marble pillars evoke the grandeur of a historic European hotel.

The Randall Residences in Oakville is another recent build inspired by French architecture, in this case from the Beaux Arts era of

the late 1800s. The Rosehaven Homes project, which was designed by Richard Wengle, is now complete and fully occupied. Sommer calls Wengle the king of the Regency revival because he’s responsible for the architectural choices behind many residential Tudor Revivals, Beaux-Arts Forest Hill mansions and condo developments including 77 Clarendon and 89 Avenue Road. At the Randall, the exterior features a series of stone archways that continue into extra-wide marble hallways inside. With fenestrated windows and formal columned Juliet balconies, visual references to the Grand Palais and the Musée d’Orsay are hard to miss.

Inside, interior designer Ferris Rafauli added classic rotunda foyers and used elaborately coffered ceilings combined with hard-

wood, marble and bronze to evoke glamour. The goal was to help residents feel established — not simply as investors taking a transient step on their way to single-family-home ownership.

Sommer would say the goal is a bit more obvious. “The style says, ‘I’ve got money, I’ve got power, and the place where I live announces that.’ It’s unashamedly upscale,” he says. He thinks it’s partially about “keeping up with the Joneses,” in the sense that many developers feel this is simply what buildings of a certain price, appealing to a certain strata of society, look like. He also points out that this French revival isn’t occurring in a vacuum; it’s also popular in places like London, Vancouver and L.A., cities where international money often settles.

Graziani, on the other hand, believes that, in Toronto, condo living is becoming more of a way of life, especially in the high-end market. “I think many buyers are becoming more like Europeans, wanting to upgrade to larger units as needed rather than transition into standalone homes,” he says. So, he notices that developers are putting more thought into what a building will look and feel like 50 years from now, and perhaps leaning on historic architecture is one way to impart a sense of endurance. Now that more buyers are in the condo market for the long haul, there’s value in passing up fleeting trends in favour of builds that can stand the test of time — or that look like they can.

Postmedia News

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EVE Park an eco-paradise nestled in London’s west-end net-zero community

Traveling west down London’s Oxford Street toward Westdel Bourne, it will emerge to the north like a shining vision of progress.

Solar panels sparkle on rooftops. Wild fescue grasses frame walking paths. A neighbourhood of shared green spaces where children play, where roads have been designed to welcome autonomous cars.

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Located in London’s west end among North America’s largest net-zero community, West 5, EVE Park’s 84 units will allow you to align your green ideals and philosophies with the place you call home.

From the air, the development looks like ringed swirls called helixes set amongst grassland and wildflowers. Inside the rings, the units are wedge-shaped with the entrance at the tip that leads to open concept living and wide, panoramic views of green community spaces.

Ashley Hammerbacher, EVE Park’s project lead and part of the s2e Technologies team that specializes in the development of smart communities and sustainable energy solutions, says that there isn’t a stereotypical buyer for the units.

“EVE Park’s appeal cuts across tra-



Kitchen and living room in this Woodfern unit is an example of the attractive living space at EVE Park. SUPPLIED

ditional home-buyer segments - it’s less about age and more about outlook - people who love nature, are into healthy living, people who appreciate good design and people who plan ahead,” says Hammerbacher.

It’s also for everyone wanting to live in an affordable city. In Lon-

don, dollars go further — much further than almost any city in Canada.

StatsCan data shows you’ll need \$6,675 in Toronto to maintain the same standard of life that you can have in London with \$5,000 (assuming you rent in both cities). Take these savings and enjoy the EVE Park benefit of an exclusive lease rate on Tesla’s Model 3 or Y starting at \$497/month.

Or, if you want to test electric vehicle life, a carsharing fleet awaits. If you already plug in your vehicle, every parking spot comes with charging.

Inside the units, every design aspect has been passionately considered. From hi-tech showers that use 70 per cent less water while feeling like a downpour, induction stovetops that heat instantly, and ovens that preheat in seconds, your

energy footprint will be minimized the moment you move in.

Even the parking towers will be environmentally conscious. Rotary carousel-style, the towers take up a footprint of just two parking spots with the vehicles rotated up by a chain mechanism.

There are three-bedroom unit options that will have two kitchens and living spaces on separate floors — perfect for families with college aged kids living at home while studying, or those in multi-generational families looking for independent space for older loved ones.

Set next to a flourishing and evolving commercial district, which includes Yoga and fitness studios, spas, a vet, health care services and schools, EVE Park is walkable.

After downward dogging through your morning you can walk down the street and indulge in a craft

cupcake. The smoothie you make for breakfast is powered by electricity that comes from the sun. On the visioning table is a nearby grocery store and a public square.

And because you’re in London’s west end, Lake Huron’s pristine sandy beaches and camping are less than an hour drive away. Out your front door in Komoka Provincial Park there are beautiful river hikes.

And a few minutes east is London’s thriving Richmond Row entertainment district and downtown core. Craft breweries, farmers markets and arts festivals will call your name.

Perhaps the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted your priorities and changed your lifestyle?

Thinking of the hours lost in commute? Struggling to find dog friendly parks, or schools with vast green spaces? Searching websites for home office inspiration?

The team behind EVE Park knows this. As visionaries, they’ve anticipated a future where people work effortlessly from home, or a park bench. Where cars are plugged in at night and streets are built to welcome autonomous vehicles. Where public health is a priority and children can roam free.

In London, things are minutes away, not hours.

“In EVE Park, every unit has a separate and safe, ground floor entrance,” says Hammerbacher. “As well, high-tech air quality sensors and HVAC systems are unique to each unit, which means you won’t be sharing air with your neighbours and units are easily adaptable for a home office.”

For many, the desire to live net-zero is there. Now, it’s never been easier and more affordable to be on the right side of environmental history.

If you have this desire, the sales centre is now open at 461 South Street in London. Visit evepark.ca for more information and to book an appointment.



From above, EVE Park resembles ringed swirls called helixes set amongst grassland and wildflowers. SUPPLIED

THIS STORY WAS PROVIDED BY EVE PARK.