

RadioCity

by Jerry Eberts

When one considers downtown Toronto, the thought of discovering underground rivers and other such adventures is unlikely to be part of the equation. However, just such a hidden water feature caused some small amount of delay on the successful RadioCity project headed up by Context Development Inc.

The two RadioCity condominium towers and adjacent townhomes are on the site of the former headquarters of the English-language CBC building, a landmark of Canadian history that was home to innumerable news programs and variety shows for several decades. The site also houses the new National Ballet School of Canada building.

Craig Taylor, director of marketing for Context Development, says RadioCity is "a great example of infill in Toronto." When the former site of the CBC became available, Context looked at the property and, in conjunction with the National Ballet School, created a deal in which Context purchased the property and sold part of the property at a nominal cost to the school. This generous deal, in turn, allowed Context to reap such benefits from Toronto city bureaucrats as favourable density transfers.

"The CBC has moved to its new location, which is near the SkyDome," says Taylor. "The Ballet School needed to up its school space. Everyone benefited from this."

RadioCity is located in the neighbourhood known as The Village, centred around Church Street, a colourful part of Toronto populated by many of the city's gay residents, a high-income, property-savvy group.

"The gay community has hugely supported RadioCity and, in actuality, approximately 90 per cent of our purchasers come from this demographic," says Taylor.

With a very high density of rental housing, Taylor says there has been little new freehold property on the market for a long time.

"We didn't just want to put in one big building," he says. "There are 411 units altogether, with 156 suites in the 25-storey North Tower, 238 suites in the 30-floor South Tower and 17

townhomes on Mutual Street."

The tower suites come in a variety of configurations, including studios, one bedroom, one bedroom and den, two bedroom, two bedroom and den and penthouses.

Project architect Ralph Bergman of architectsAlliance worked with design partner Peter Clewes to create a unique property. architectsAlliance worked with KPMB (the ballet school architects) to develop the site plan together.

"After various cross-agreements, we then proceeded to rezoning," says Bergman. "We started construction of the first condo tower in the fall of 2002. The whole project went very well. There was a lot of mutual respect on both sides and the resulting buildings are remarkably comfortable with each other."

"It was not a conscious effect for all the buildings to be consistent, but our styles are coincidental. The materials and colours are quite compatible. The city seems to be pleased as well," says Bergman.

Residents have been quick to snap up the new homes in the two towers and, at publication time, there were only a handful still available.

Bergman describes the buildings as "Very modern, other than the townhome component where we tried to use similar materials to the single-family buildings in the adjacent neighbourhood. And I think we were successful at integrating the tall buildings into the neighbourhood."

Garth Goode, principal with landscape architects Corban and Goode, says between the two condo buildings is a large open space, as well as two private green spaces. A tree canopy and sub-canopy landscaping with seating has made the space a bit of a destination.

"It's a good local amenity," says Goode, "with a good in-between space. The roundabout for drop-offs and the entrance to underground parking is hard paved. And the on-site art installation is really great."

The permanent installation is composed of 36 stainless-steel sculptures by Canadian artist Roland Brener. The pieces capture ambient light and Goode is pleased with the overall effect.



Interior design firm Hudson Kruse was in charge of all the common areas. It kept the look "clean and architectural," says Trevor Kruse, principal with the firm. "It's such a beautifully simple, sophisticated piece of architecture that we went with quite plain intersecting shapes rather than applying decoration."

"We used teak panelling to give a natural, warm feeling and used charcoal coloured slate on the floors. The vinyl covering on the drywall is a warm ivory and the mix is almost like a gallery space."

Lighting in the common areas is



recessed using built-in troughs and hidden fixtures along all the walls, further enhancing the look and feel of the amenity spaces and lobbies.

One hiccup occurred early in the project, according to Robert Ficara, project manager with Eastern Construction Co. Ltd. "In many respects, the project was up and down," says Ficara. "The space was basically leveled before we got there, but there were a lot of unknowns. During the removal process, we had some groundwater issues and it turned out there was actually an underground river where we were planning to build the North Tower. We had to go through a six-month dewatering process because the water cut into the lowest part of the design. The overall delay was only about a month. Once the concrete got going, things moved well."

Ken Fong, structural consultant on the project with Read Jones Christoffersen Ltd., says there were issues with the columns for each tower

not lining up perfectly. The problem was fixed by introducing transfer girders at the ground floor in the South Tower and on the third floor of the North Tower. The main concern was fixing the problem in such a way that it did not interfere with open space in the parking garages.

People have been moving into the two towers and the townhomes since January 2005 and Craig Taylor says the whole project has been a huge success.

"Our goal was to create something extraordinary," says Taylor. "And I think we have done that." ■

HIGHLIGHTS

Location
281 AND 285 MUTUAL STREET
TORONTO, ONTARIO

Owner/Developer
CONTEXT DEVELOPMENT INC.

Architect
ARCHITECTSALLIANCE

General Contractor
EASTERN CONSTRUCTION CO. LTD.

Structural Consultant
READ JONES CHRISTOFFERSEN LTD.

Mechanical/Electrical Consultant
MCW CONSULTANTS LTD.

Interior Design
HUDSON KRUSE

Landscape Architect
CORBAN AND GOODE

Total Building Footprint
26,500 SQUARE FEET

Construction Cost
\$55 MILLION

Development Cost
\$85 MILLION