

Radio City hits the airwaves

For Radio City, a condo now rising above the former main CBC Toronto studios on Jarvis Street, Mike Niven Interior Design created a model suite to captivate Context Development's target market of hip, upwardly mobile (but not necessarily well-heeled) singles and couples.

My father was a television producer during the Golden Age of CBC drama, in the late fifties and sixties. I remember accompanying him to the old Studio 7 on Jarvis Street in Toronto, a part of town that, I recognized even then, was considerably seedier than our family's cushy north Rosedale berth. To me, the seediness only enhanced the racy, grown-up glamour of the place. The brightly lit sets ended abruptly at black-painted walls and dusty concrete flooring. There were gigantic, white-hot lights and coils of wiring. Heavily made-up actresses standing offside in the dark, dragging sullenly on cigarettes, suddenly blossomed into ladies as they stepped in front of the cameras.

Over the years, the grimness of the neighbourhood finally overtook the bright lights of Studio 7. The offices, where my father worked, then the studio itself, closed down. CBC moved on to Philip Johnson's flashier Deconstructivist digs downtown. The old buildings on Jarvis Street stood empty for several years, at the mercy of vagrants and vandals.

But that was then; this is now. A downtown address is becoming a highly marketable commodity these days, and this part of Jarvis Street has been undergoing a remarkable renaissance. The nearby Massey mansion, known to a generation of Torontonians as the home of Julie's Mansion restaurant (later the Keg Mansion steakhouse), is becoming the centrepiece of a large and fashionable new development. Similar revitalizations are going on all up and down the street. On the old CBC property, one of the city's hottest developers, Context Management, recently commissioned architects Peter

Clewes and Prish Jain of Architects Alliance to build two handsome new condominium towers. Context christened them with a name that evokes the CBC connection and an equally trendy allusion to New York: Radio City.

Context head Howard Cohen is a former city planner and president of Harbourfront and the Design Exchange. For the second phase of the development, he brought in interior designer and model-suite specialist Mike Niven to create the sales office and suite and to develop the floor plans. Niven's work on Radio City earned the project a Bronze medal at the recent Association of Registered Interior Designers of Ontario (ARIDO) awards.

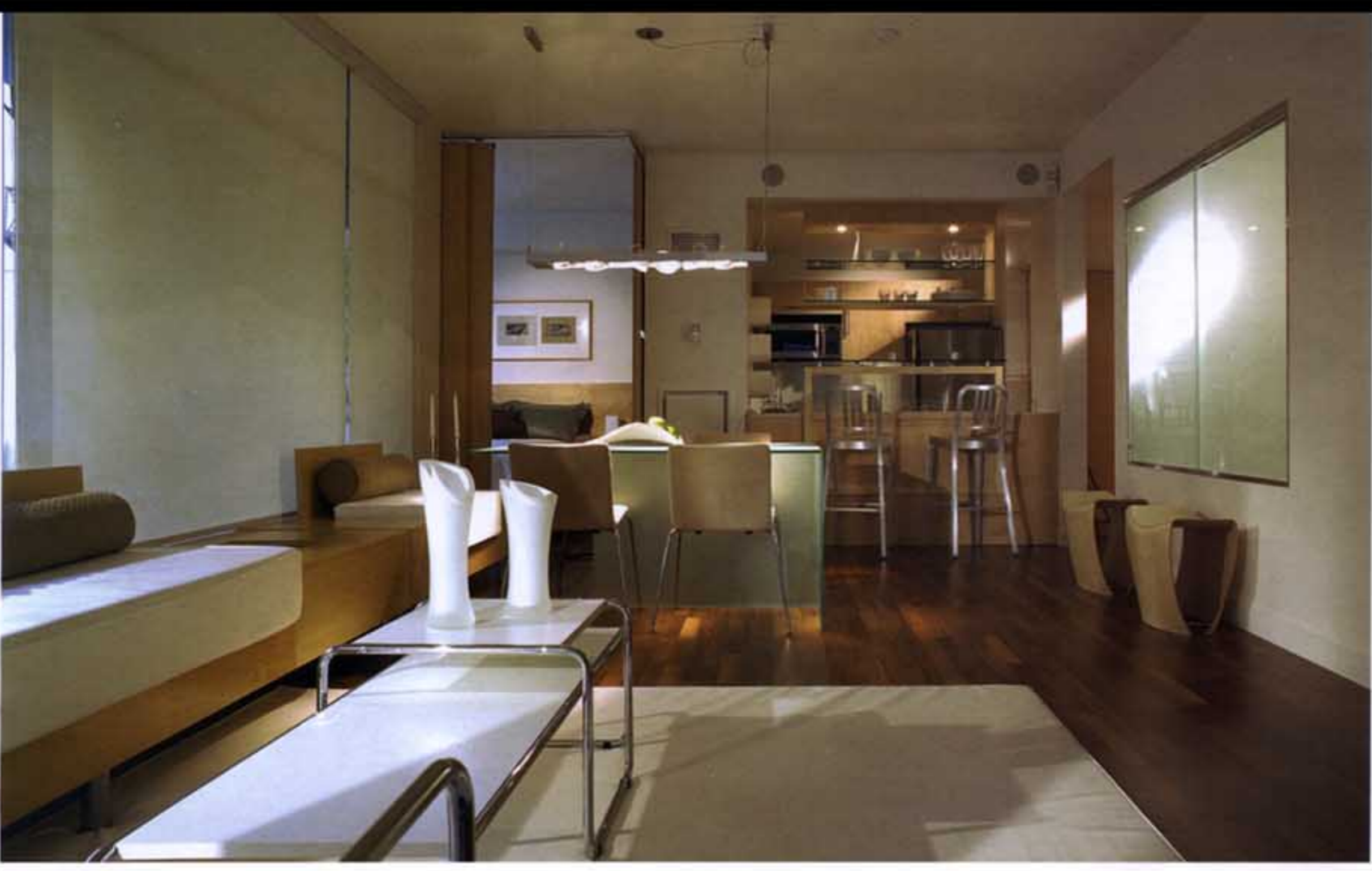
Context has been responsible for several chic Toronto condo projects, including the District Lofts at Spadina and Richmond Streets, Ideal Lofts, and Modern Zone (MoZo). Niven last collaborated with Context on a chi-chi condo called Home in High Park. "Context is extraordinarily sensitive to design in their developments; they're very progressive in that sense," Niven says. "And they spend a lot of energy making the

design and the marketing fit together seamlessly."

As with any condo project, Niven, and his associate Cheryl Broadhead, started by imagining what kinds of clients would be most likely to move here and what they'd be most likely attracted to in a new home. The changing face of the neighbourhood figured largely in the plan. "I think it's great for this part of the city. It used to be that the area east of Yonge Street was less desirable by real-estate standards than the



Above: White, wood and glass furnishings give a sleek contemporary look to Radio City's model suite. The open layout has a hip loft feel.



Above: Despite its small size, the suite's living room seems surprisingly expansive. Niven's design is unexpectedly homey, for all its spareness. White and putty-coloured linen cushions soften rectilinear maple benches set up along the side of the longest window. Below: A translucent, sliding interior window conceals the bath. It offers the option of privacy when needed and access to the view, even when one reclines in the tub.

west, but it's a neighbourhood whose time has come. Over the next while, we're going to see a real change in the population and lifestyle of the area: not just high end, but everyday young professionals."

This population of hip, upwardly mobile (but not necessarily well-heeled) singles and couples is condo developers' gold. Fashion and interior design are incredibly important to them. The key elements of the development, and therefore of the sales office and model suite that Niven created, emphasize clean uncluttered forms, plenty of white, concrete and glass, and open, flexible spaces.

While the development will share little more than a nominal reference to the site's distinguished former tenant, the history makes for a great marketing theme. Graphic artist Lawrence Ayliffe worked closely with Niven and Cohen to come up with a signature colour scheme of grey blue, orange and white. In the marketing kits and interior signage, cool graphics mix with classic CBC-era images: 1950s radios, old microphones, radio waves radiating from a tower and so on. Even the sales kits feature a chronology of Studio 7's career highlights.

The journey from the parking lot to the model suite is set with the visual equivalent of incidental music, heightening the emotional response to its various delights. The former studio building has been converted into a sales centre, but is doomed to give way when the condo goes up. For now, the door leads to a vestibule decorated with images of *Hockey Night in Canada* and *Wayne & Shuster*, two highly rated programs produced at the site.

From here, one enters a metaphorical time tunnel: a low, covered hall, with walls lined with flickering blue and orange fibre-optic lights. The tunnel opens up into a 22-foot-high presentation area, where a model of the new development rises majestically in the centre of the room, its dramatic silhouette set off against a backdrop of soft grey-blue. A dozen or so blowups of floor plans line the sidewalls, but the overall effect is



clean and linear, cleansing the palate for the model suite that lies ahead.

"Part of what makes Radio City interesting is the emphasis on openness and views, even in the smallest suites," Niven explains. With only eight suites planned per floor, the layout gives each suite a commanding view of the skyline, often from more than one direction. Window-walls stretch as far as possible across the whole length of the suite. The openness is enhanced by walls and doors that slide, by long vistas that make the view a major component of almost every vantage point and by cherry hardwood flooring used continuously throughout the space.

The model is a corner suite, with a swath of glass that stretches along two walls and opens onto a narrow balcony. Though only 845 square feet, one of the smallest suites available, the living room is a roomy 25 by 14 feet. In fact, it takes up most of the suite, with a tiny galley kitchen on one side, an efficient master bedroom that shares the extended window wall at the end of the living room, and a second bedroom large enough to serve a variety of living rooms.

While the model is a fairly typical two-bedroom condo, the flexibility of the layout was borrowed from loft conversions. It suits the developer's diverse target crowd.

The bathroom, set in the middle of the model suite, has an interesting quirk: a translucent glass partition enclosing the tub can be opened to allow the bather to continue enjoying the skyline as he or she soaks. Close it and the glass partition on the other side, and the whole room converts into a shower.

Niven is particularly proud of the entrance to the second bedroom. It closes by sliding two perpendicular doors together at its corner: an interesting, space-efficient bit of design insouciance.

"Given the way they've handled the design of the suites, the way they've worked out the details, I think you could make a very comfortable home here. The bones are very good. And you can imagine how it would look at night, with the city lights all before you. I could live here myself."

Sources:

Presentation centre:

- Chairs: Modernica (closing office), Nienkamper (bar), desk (Studio B)
- Closing-office furniture: Nexus
- Cocktail table: Quasi Modo
- Concrete flooring: Smoothcrete
- Flooring: Floorworks
- Lighting: EuroLite, Systemalux
- Millwork: Bohemia

Model suite:

- Coffee table: Counter: Quarrella
- Custom furniture: Nexus
- Flooring: Floorworks
- Glass table: Adanac
- Hardware: Richelieu
- Kitchen: Sitraco
- Lighting: EuroLite
- Seating: Design Within Reach (bar stools, plywood chair), Downsview/Commute (dining chairs), Palazzetti (coffee table), Studio B (armchair, plywood stools)
- TV built-ins, glass shelves, sliders: Bohemia
- Window coverings: Glamour Line



Above: In the master bedroom, a padded headboard rises to the ceiling like a modern version of a canopy. Below: A time tunnel in the sales office takes one from the CBC's old domain of radios, microphones and Wayne & Shuster to a 21st-century home in the sky.

