

Buildings brashly modern yet at home in the heart of Toronto's Anglican heritage

# Condo towers make nice with the neighbours

## The Perfect House

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MAYS

Two condominium stories with interesting Anglican angles continue to unfold on downtown Toronto's once-dilapidated east side. Both projects are signs of changing times for the city, and also for a Christian denomination that has played a key role in Toronto's life for most of the past 200 years.

Since it rose in the mid-Victorian noon of the British Empire, the Anglican Cathedral Church of St. James, at the corner of Church Street and King Street East, has been Toronto's finest architectural expression of all things English, monarchist, conservative and sensibly Protestant.

For decades after the town's founding in 1793, the political elite and the congregation of St. James were largely identical. When these people decided to build a suitable spiritual home for themselves, they understandably chose an architectural style — the English Gothic — that advertised their loyalty both to the mother country and the Englishman's God.

In view of the cathedral's prominent place in our urban memory, it was hardly surprising when, a few years back, a general outcry greeted news that the church intended to sell off part of its property to a condo developer. The 93-metre

tower and spire, until quite recently, had always stood higher than every other rooftop and steeple in Toronto, and the idea of a tall condo building right next door struck some observers as unseemly.

Negotiations ensued, with the upshot that a 45-storey tower will go up a few metres farther away from the church than originally planned. By February, 2006, the Spire, on the corner of Church and Adelaide, should be ready for its first homeowners.

Designed by Toronto architect Peter Clewes for Context Development Inc., the slender glass-and-steel plinth promises to be a serene, dignified companion to the great steeple of St. James in the heart of east-side downtown.

The gleaming new building has been conceived in the athletic, progressive spirit of mid-century architectural Modernism, but (like Mr. Clewes's other recent Toronto projects) with an intelligence and delicacy often missing in classic, flat-topped Modernist skyscrapers.

Some larger penthouses (1,113 to 2,532 square feet) will be available. Most suites will range between 455 square feet for a junior one-bedroom (\$149,900) to 957 square feet for the most spacious two-bedroom (\$346,900).

The layout of each apartment will be wide, logical and clear, with no interior wall more than about 19 feet from floor-to-ceiling windows and brilliant views of the city. Everything is nearby — the financial district, theatres and concert halls, St. James's cathedral for high Anglican worship and magnificent music, the King Edward Hotel for high tea, and St. Lawrence Market



The Spire, a 45-storey tower to be erected beside St. James' Cathedral, was designed by Toronto architect Peter Clewes. The model kitchen and bathroom echo the building's Modernist style.



for other earthly needs. (An all-purpose grocery store in the neighbourhood would be a plus, though homeowners at the Spire will get that, too, if grocery giant Loblaws takes over and converts Maple Leaf Gardens.)

The other architectural story from the front lines of Anglicanism comes from 600 Jarvis St., which the national leadership of the Anglican Church of Canada, the Anglican Book Centre and other church agencies will vacate this month.

For more than 50 years, the church has been operating out of a notably dull building at that ad-

dress. This structure is now slated for demolition, to make way for the next phase of Philmor Group's Bloor Walk condo project. Meanwhile, the Anglicans and their bookshop will be moving around the corner, to a mostly residential condo tower at 80 Hayden St.

For some reason, I had not caught the story about the Anglican Church's sale of the building and its impending move-out. I was therefore somewhat startled when driving up Jarvis Street the other day to find huge advertisements for condos plastered across the mousy, forlorn façade of 600 Jarvis.

Not that I care what happens to

the building. (Nobody will care.) But I would be very concerned to discover that the Anglican Book Centre (ABC) was going under. It's not, and an outstanding local tradition will live on at 80 Hayden.

No Toronto bookstore is more delightful than the ABC, nor more richly stocked in books from many Christian traditions. These works come in all degrees of intellectual weightiness, from charming devotional gift books to ponderous theological treatises and reference works on the ancient languages of the Bible. There are hymn books, children's books, prayer books, and, along with the books, an array

of what an Anglican friend calls "holy hardware" — icons and crosses, sacred vessels and vestments — all of it a long way, in terms of design and craftsmanship, above the stuff that's usually for sale in religious shops.

Developers can put up all the gleaming new condo towers they want, changing the look of our downtown core forever. So long as St. James and the ABC are still in business, Toronto's best architectural and cultural heritage from its Anglican and British roots will be alive in the city's centre.

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