



Spire is to be built across the street from historic St. James Cathedral after 2½ years of negotiation over the location. Top right, glass walls and glass-fronted balconies capitalize on the view of cityscapes surrounding the edifice. Right, the model kitchen features granite countertops and stainless-steel appliances.

The skinny on Spire

Toronto-based Context Development has made its name putting together some unusual condominium projects, and its latest, Spire, is no exception.

"It took 2½ years to make this location happen," says developer Howard Cohen, a partner in the company. Since sales opened this fall for the 45-storey project at Church and Adelaide Sts., 35 per cent of the suites have been sold.

Context had originally planned a condo on top of an 18th-century graveyard adjacent to historic St. James Cathedral in Toronto's downtown. The proposal sparked a public and parish outcry, and, as a compromise, the company negotiated the rights to build on a former parking lot across the street. The site was also owned by the church's Anglican York Rectors.

A former city planner, Cohen has taken on difficult sites that other developers have stepped away from. For example, the company has started work on Home, a condominium to be built on a slope at the edge of High Park in Toronto's west end. That project had met with strong neighbourhood opposition. Context recently started work on Radio City, a high-rise condo and townhouse project, which will share a former CBC studio site on Jarvis St. with the National Ballet School of Canada. The company will also convert the Tip Top Tailors building on the waterfront into lofts, and has plans as well for new construction behind the art deco landmark.

Cohen has always opted for a

Modern art is the inspiration for 45-storey building at Church and Adelaide
Every unit will have a floor-to-ceiling glass wall, *by Donna Jean MacKinnon*

modern aesthetic, although the condo buildings his company has already completed borrow much from an early 20th-century warehouse style. These mid-rise buildings, such as 20 Niagara St. and Ideal Lofts on College St. at Bathurst St., fit into their neighbourhoods of old factory and office structures.

For Spire, Cohen is taking a building to new heights (Radio City's towers are 25 and 30 storeys) and going all glass for the exterior.

"The building is a glass sheath in front of another glass sheath, inspired by Mies van der Rohe," Cohen says. "It's like a beacon, a very modern, simple glass tower."

Architect Peter Clewes of Architects Alliance, who has designed most of Context's other projects, had the idea of a glass-on-glass building. Each of the 320 units will have a floor-to-ceiling glass wall and outside of it, a glass-fronted balcony, designed not to obscure the cityscapes surrounding the edifice.

The exterior of the building has few decorative touches. Blue glass topping the building hides the mechanicals and, on the east façade of the building, there are red geometric inserts in the glass, reminiscent of artist Piet Mondrian.

"As you drive west, along Adelaide, you'll see a Mondrian painting," Cohen says.

Residents will enter the condo through a parkette off Lombard St. Context could have made a shorter building that used up the whole parcel of land, but instead it opted to build higher so there was room left for the park, according to Cohen.

"We worked with a city planner on this. Part of the city's urban design is to create a system of linking public squares, going north and ending at Dundas Square," Cohen says.

The sales centre at 60 Adelaide St. E., a reflection of what the Spire lobby will look like, was designed by Diego Burdi and Paul Filek of Burdifilek. The two will also work on the building's public spaces.

The 3,000-square-foot centre is done in a neutral palette and features an elongated stone fireplace, destined to anchor the actual lobby of Spire. Finishes are displayed in small acrylic cases in Burdifilek's sparse, airy sales centre. Chic metal stools are provided where potential buyers can perch as they contemplate the six different gray, beige and brown packages on offer.

The palette was chosen by interior designer Trevor Kruse of Hudson Kruse. Three of the coordinated tile, floor and counter samples displayed are the standard package, while the other three are samplings of upgrades. Cohen explains that buyers

want a neutral palette.

"Muted earth tones are in. Just look at Caban and Club Monaco," he says. "Besides you can add a red chair."

Context will also customize finishes, Cohen adds. Kruse designed Spire's kitchens and bathrooms and they can be seen in vignette form in the sales centre. Mathew Cohen, Spire's director of marketing, who worked with Kruse on the vignettes, describes their kitchen design as "a bold step forward" for a project in this price range (units cost \$144,900 to \$433,900).

Standard finishes include honed granite countertops and sandblasted glass in the upper cabinets. The kitchen also has stainless-steel appliances, including a slide-in stove that's flush with the countertops. In the bathroom, Kruse added a recessed medicine cabinet with mirror behind an unobtrusive vanity.

"The idea was to have clean, sophisticated lines and fixtures that were functional but didn't impose on the space," Mathew Cohen says.

Each floor of Spire will have eight or so one-level suites, with nine-foot ceilings and a balcony. They range from a junior one-bedroom with 455 square feet to a two-bedroom unit with 957 square feet. There will also be four floors of penthouses, with two bedrooms and a den, from

1,559 to about 3,000 square feet and priced from \$605,900 to more than \$1 million.

Because the tower is skinny, there are many corner suites, Cohen says. Layouts have been given neighbourhood names, like The St. James, The Flatiron and The Esplanade. When occupied in 2005, the building will house more than 400 residents.

Toronto residents are becoming more urbane, Cohen says. People now deem it acceptable to raise children in a downtown condo, just like New Yorkers and Parisians do. He also says some 50 per cent of Spire's buyers already live downtown and don't have cars, preferring to walk, bicycle or use transit.

He says he firmly believes Toronto needs more of these inner-city people to support neighbourhood businesses and the arts, what Cohen calls the urbanizing of society.

"The city will have growing pains to deal with as downtown flowers. But we need more density," he says.

"If a building is well-designed, it'll be lasting," Cohen adds. "Tastes change, but a building like this is timeless."

The Spire sales centre at 60 Adelaide St. E. is open Monday to Thursday 1 p.m. to 7 p.m., and weekends noon to 5 p.m. For information, call 416-703-3383 or visit www.context.ca.