

# Affordable Forest Hill. No, really

There are no cheap homes in Toronto's tonier neighbourhoods. But one builder may be bringing them within closer reach



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In the scenario I'm proposing – hardly an unlikely one – you are an unattached, well-employed young apartment-dweller, currently installed in a downtown Toronto tower, who has met and fallen for another of your kind. You would like to live with your beloved somewhere this side of suburbia, or perhaps even marry (if young metropolitanites do that any more).

But where will you join forces? Neither of your flats is big enough for two people, never mind a family.

Anyway, you've turned out to have somewhat posher tastes than your recent high-rise, inner-city lifestyle might suggest. Now that settling down is on the horizon, you find yourself dreaming of a house in Rosedale or the Annex or Deer Park, or in some other old-fashioned Hogtown neighbourhood with good schools, parks, shops.

Dream on: Even after you and your new partner pooled your considerable resources, a house in any traditional bastion of the well-heeled would almost certainly be still unaffordable.

If this (or something like it) is your predicament – or if you're at the opposite end of life and looking to downsize in an upscale zone – you may be interested in a Forest Hill project I recently heard about.

No, it's not a cheap house. There is no such thing in this part of town.

Rather, it's a little block of eight new, ample, airy condominium apartments situated at 1733 Bathurst St., south of Eglinton Avenue. It offers a few veterans of the tower experience (or empty-nesters) the chance to put down roots in this desirable district for well under a million dollars.

And I do mean well under. The largest suite, with an area of 1,189 square feet, has been sold for about \$750,000. A unit 980 square feet in size is for sale at \$650,000. (Plans show a 700-square-foot, one-bedroom flat, which is on the market for just under \$400,000).

Buyers will get dwellings with tight layouts and little leeway for clutter – conditions, of course, that young home-owners will likely have become accustomed to during their high-rise years. The area of bedrooms varies, roughly, from 100 square feet to more than 150 square feet, which are not exactly majestic dimensions, but are comparable to what's found in many semi-detached Victorians.

This is amenable Forest Hill housing; that is, for modern-minded people who don't mind living light on the ground, and who don't need or want expanses for, let's say, their collections of antique furniture or large-scale art.

The divvying-up of the largest space here is typically compact and comfortable. The so-called "Great Room," almost 15 feet



Renderings of the converted condominiums at 1733 Bathurst St. The largest suite, at 1,189 square feet, has been sold for about \$750,000. A unit 980 square feet in size is for sale at \$650,000. Buyers will get dwellings with tight layouts and little leeway for clutter. CIRCA

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wide and 30 feet long, has provision for the Italian-designed kitchen, a dining table for six or so and a living-room ensemble. The plan shows two bathrooms, one of them en suite, and two bedrooms plus a den. (The area designated as a "den" measures nine feet by 11½ feet, meaning it could be deployed as a third bedroom.)

Located on the ground floor, this apartment features a walk-out terrace, and, like some of the other units, it has windows on three sides.

In common with all the others, it is heated by a hydraulic system embedded in the concrete floor-slab. (The visible flooring is made of engineered wide-plank oak.) The interior climate of each apartment is

controlled by a Nest Learning Thermostat, a high-tech gadget that can be programmed from a cellphone or computer.

The California-based Nest company is also supplying 1733 Bathurst's smoke and carbon monoxide detectors – machines, according to a fact-sheet, that "speak up to tell you what the problem is, and where it is."

This talkative monitoring technology is, of course, quite new.

The appointments in each unit – from the Scavolini kitchen cabinetry and the solid-wood doors to the high-performance windows and the "intensive" soundproofing – are also new, up to date and apparently on par, in terms of value, with similar touches in many a well-done residential renovation.

In fact, the little complex might best be understood as a thoroughgoing renovation.

To create it, developers Neil Spiegel and Evan Johnsen – their firm is called Circa – found this very modest, 1930s-era rental property on the edge of Forest Hill, scooped out its insides, added a fourth level on top and are currently completing the building's overhaul. Occupation is scheduled to start this spring.

Mr. Spiegel told me that Circa intends to keep on redoing old multiunit residential structures in deluxe neighbourhoods.

It will be interesting to see if this imaginative initiative catches on with post-tower clients longing for family-friendly spots in staid places that have been, until now, beyond their grasp.



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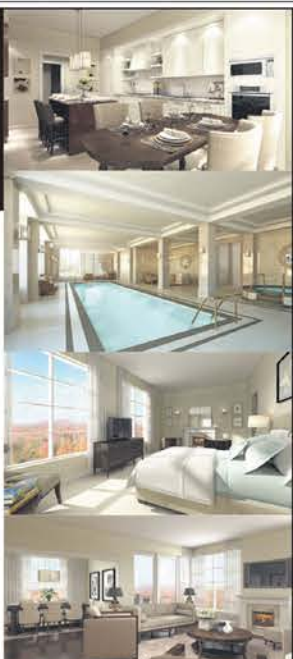
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