

# Won't you be my neighbour?

*Before the big dig, these chummy developers partner with their communities. PH6*



NATHAN DENETTE / NATIONAL POST

"Get out early" into the community, before applications are filed, says Craig Hunter, a planning consultant at Armstrong Hunter & Associates (at the penthouse at the Residences of College Park). On Mr. Hunter's advice, that's exactly what Canderel Stoneridge did before launching Aura.

## RIGHT ANGLES

### GRAND FINALE

Before an ambitious overhaul, this Rosedale bungalow, with its puny rooms, was an eyesore.

*PH10*

## STYLE SCOUT

### Steep the rewards

Tsk, tsk, not another lonely afternoon? Maybe it's time you replaced that tired teapot.

*PH16*



# POSTHOMES

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## MODEL

### CIRCA

Tridel's refined penthouse is big enough for a grand piano. *PH4*



## IDEAS

### STYLE FOR LIVING

Long live fusty recipe cards: Lynda Reeves. *PH4*

## SOLD

### MIAMI VICE

Baseball's Mike Piazza scoops an eight-bedroom Florida mansion for US\$10-mill. *PH23*



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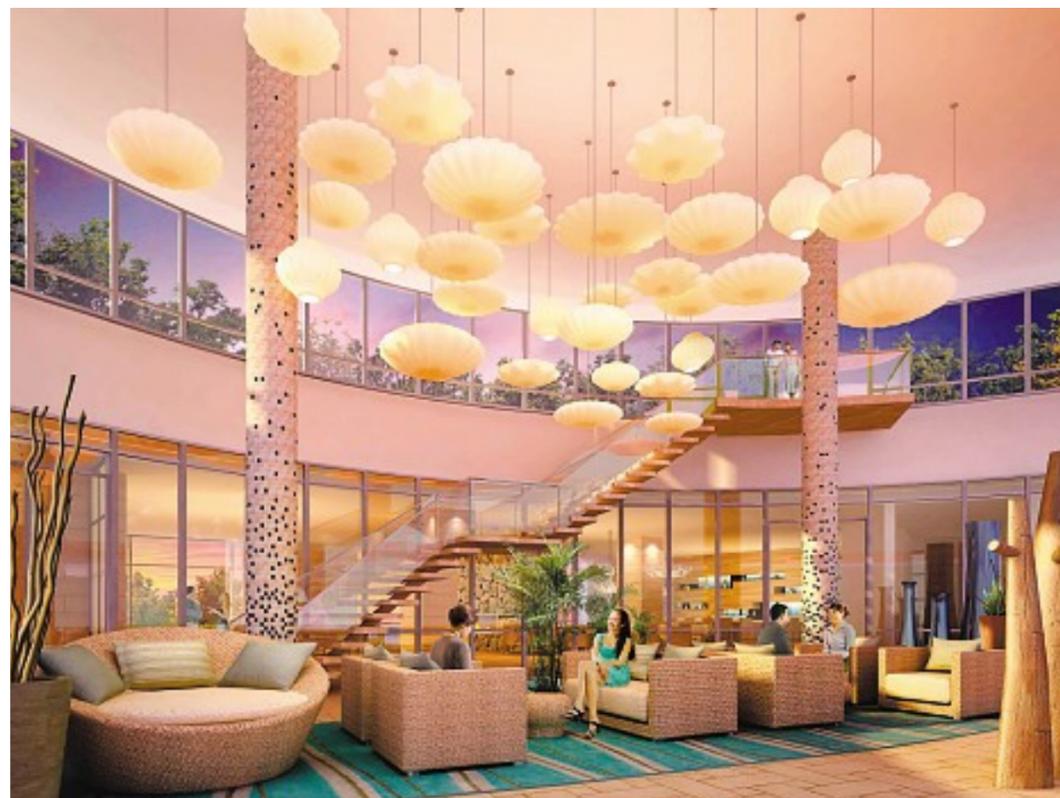


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“ We’ve always taken the approach that it’s better to open up the dialogue early, versus waiting — you’re not going to come up with your plans, your concepts, and then shove them down people’s throats — *Paul Golini Jr.*, executive vice-president, Empire Communities



Before development began, these projects got the go-ahead from their respective neighbourhoods. Above, clockwise: Empire Communities’ Beyond the Sea; Victory by BLVD. Below, James Cooper Mansion, a proposed 32-storey building by Tridel that involved lengthy discussions with the Upper Jarvis Neighbourhood Association, and Canderel Stoneridge’s Aura.

# Come to the block party

For some developers, community harmony is part of the corporate philosophy

BY LISA VAN DE VEN

It started with a question. Toronto developer Tridel was looking at a property in the city’s Upper Jarvis neighbourhood, at Sherbourne just south of Bloor Street. The site included a historical home and was close to the developer’s Herve project at Wellesley and Sherbourne.

Before purchasing the land, though, the company wanted to know if residents in the neighbourhood could get behind the project Tridel had in mind. If the company had buy-in from the neighbours, it would go ahead. If not, the company would pass on the property.

And so the question was posed, which is how Chris Crane, president of the Upper Jarvis Neighbourhood Association, first got involved, meeting with Stephen Upton, Tridel’s vice-president of development planning, to discuss the developer’s preliminary plans for what would become James Cooper Mansion, a 32-storey building currently on the market.

“At that time, it was literally the cocktail-napkin type of discussion, [asking] what would the community think about this? They’d done some preliminary drawings and kicked the tires a little bit,” Mr. Crane remembers. “I got together with Steve and some people at Tridel a couple of times, and they actually shared with me some concept sketches, which I then took back and walked around the neighbourhood — just to say ‘what do you think?’”

For Tridel, it was the beginning of a year-long process of working with the neighbourhood to finesse the design of the project and to create something that the local community could get behind. At the neighbours’ request, the developer agreed to an architectural peer review, even entering into a formal agreement with the ratepayers’ association to ensure that they kept to the building materials they’d promised.

“They had a lot to say, a lot of assistance to us, and we actually engaged a lot of their comments



into the design of the building,” Mr. Upton says.

For Tridel, that community approach wasn’t just a one-time deal, but part of a corporate philosophy that Mr. Upton says the developer brings to all of its sites, a commitment to working with neighbourhoods rather than against them. “In every circumstance, we will work with the community,” he says. “We’re not going to get anywhere without bringing the community on board.”

Tridel isn’t the only company with that mindset: Many Toronto developers have found that working with neighbours — and getting that ultimate community buy-in — not only helps move their projects through the city’s approval process more quickly, but may end in better building design, one influenced by the community that surrounds it.

“We’ve always taken the approach of taking a collaborative approach to the approval and planning process,” says Paul Golini Jr., executive vice-president of Empire Communities. “[It helps] not only in moving the process further along and perhaps



accelerating the approval process, but in terms of how we end up with a better product — a better product for us as a developer and a builder, but also a better product for the neighbourhood and the community.”

Mr. Golini and his team at Empire have had a series of meetings with the neighbours and local ratepayers associations about the multi-phase Beyond the Sea site at Lake Shore Boulevard West and Park Lawn Road in Etobicoke. Specifically, local residents were concerned with traffic issues as new residents come into the community, and the developer made the decision based on that to introduce a new traffic light at Legion Road, accelerating the process to make sure that it’s in place before the site’s occupancy date. They also re-examined the design of the buildings themselves, narrowing the point towers to decrease shadows on surrounding homes, and taking a closer look at residents’ comments on commercial space and parkland.

“I guess we’ve always taken the approach that it’s better to open up the dialogue early, versus waiting

— you’re not going to come up with your plans, your concepts, and then shove them down people’s throats,” Mr. Golini says. “That doesn’t work.”

Craig Hunter agrees. The planning consultant and principal at Armstrong, Hunter and Associates advises all of his clients to “get out early” into the community, even before applications are filed. That is exactly what the team at Canderel Stoneridge chose to do, with Mr. Hunter’s help, when it was starting the process that would end up with the current plans for Aura, the building at Yonge and Gerrard. Armed with shadow studies and preliminary plans, the developer met with nearby condominium residents, as well as local groups such as the McGill-Granby Village Residents’ Association and the Downtown Yonge BIA.

The discussions culminated in a series of working sessions that systematically acknowledged and worked through each of the concerns and issues introduced by the local residents and business owners. During the process, the building

went through three or four major design shifts, says Mr. Hunter, but in the end, the due diligence and resulting compromises helped the developer bring Aura through the approval process.

“You may spend more time upfront ... but it will help in the long term to be able to achieve the product that at least the majority of people can support,” Mr. Hunter says.

That is exactly the attitude of Brian Brown, principal with BLVD Developments. During a four-month neighbourhood review process, the developer made four sets of significant changes at its Victory Condominiums site at King Street West and Spadina Avenue, before settling on the design now on the market. Those changes were made after a series of more than 20 meetings with the local community, including both public meetings and private gatherings with neighbouring condominium residents and local ratepayers associations.

“We basically went as far as we could to try to understand all the issues,” Mr. Brown says. “I don’t think you’ll ever come to being able to find a solution that everyone is 100% satisfied with, but when you can show that you’ve addressed the key issues and the issues that have the greatest impact on the people in the area, it makes a strong statement.”

For Mr. Brown and his team, those issues included safety concerns related to an access way leading to public parking from an interior courtyard, and concerns with the exterior design of the building itself. Dealing with those issues upfront, the developer adds, not only helps when trying to obtain the necessary permits from the city later, but also creates a building that meshes better with its neighbourhood.

That, after all, is the ultimate goal. “Everyone has a different opinion, everyone comes at it from a different angle, and different means and different concerns,” Mr. Brown says, “and I think the strong developments these days are the ones that understand all of those different facets.”

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