

New in Homes & Condos



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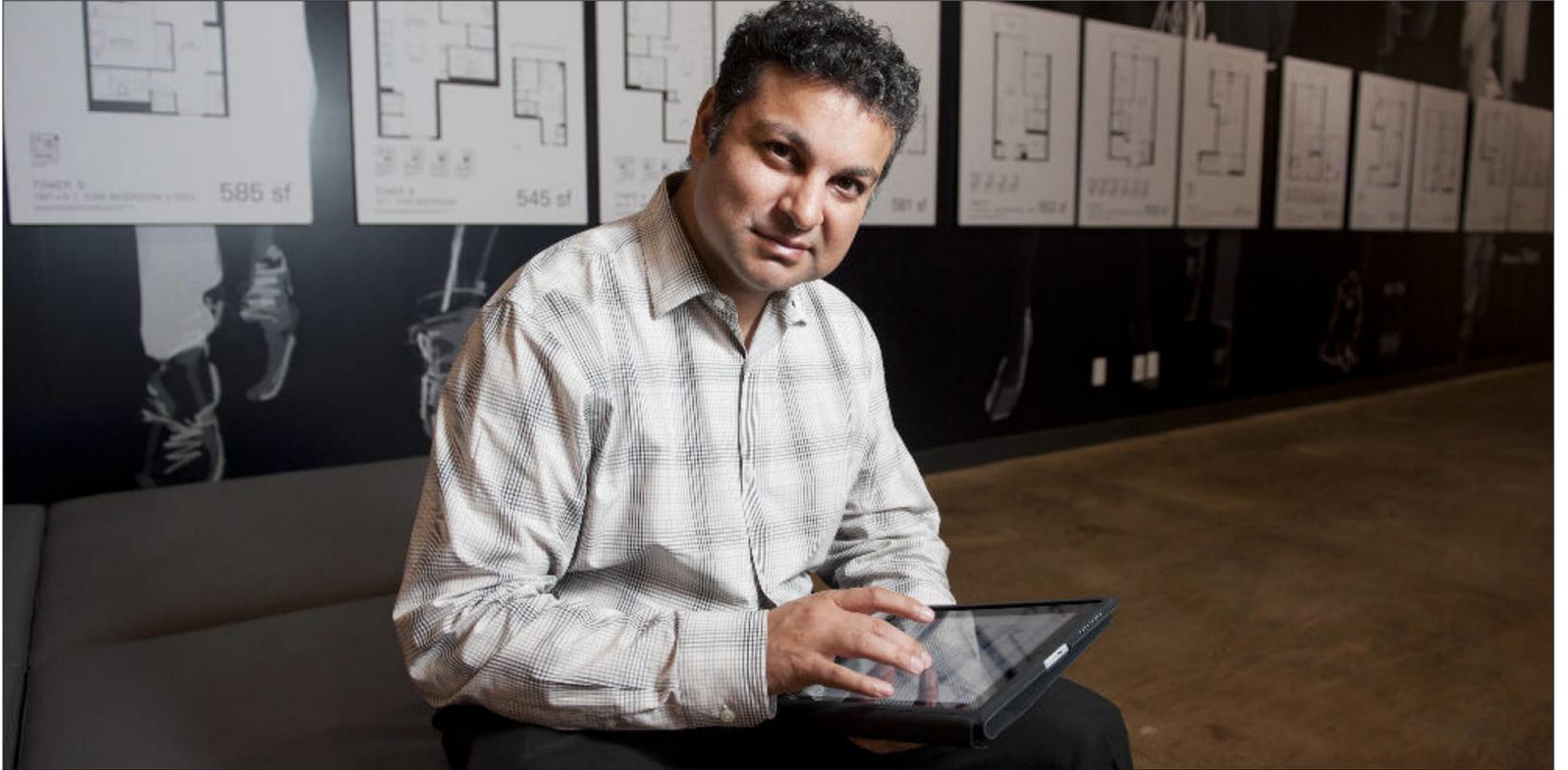
MODEL OF DESIGN
Alessandro Munge has made the Bisha sales centre a destination, **H29**

Top 10 Home Buying Tips

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ON ON2

FALL PREVIEW



SARAH DEAFOR THE TORONTO STAR

Riz Dhanji, vice president of sales and marketing for Canderel Stoneridge, says an iPad app in development will allow DNA3 condos to be completely controlled by remote control.

A state of the art . experience

Technology is empowering homebuyers and changing the way real estate is marketed

RYAN STARR
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Several years ago, Chang Su worked as a granite countertop salesman.

Any given day, he'd provide stone samples to customers, who would select a style and order the granite for their homes.

In most cases Su's clients liked the end results. There were a handful, though, who complained after installation that the countertops were not what they'd originally envisioned.

So Su and his business partner, who holds a degree in 3D computer program-

ming, developed software that lets clients see exactly how the countertops will look once in place.

This caught the attention of Zancor Homes president Fabrizio Cortelluci, who enlisted Su's team to take things a step farther and create a program that would enable homebuyers to view an entire house in 3D before it's built.

The result is Your Home 3D, which uses blueprints to build a house in virtual reality that purchasers can tour via a sales centre touchscreen.

"You can see 360 degrees around the property and walk through the home,"

explains Su, vice-president of marketing for vTrend Marketing Technologies.

"And you can pick upgrades — change the flooring or cabinets — and that's transferred into the 3D world."

Zancor has used the technology for two of its lowrise communities: King's Ridge in King City and Brooklin's Forest in Olde Winchester in Brooklin.

And Empire Communities is deploying it to sell Star Tower at their Beyond the Sea project along the lakeshore in Etobicoke.

TECHNOLOGY continued on H15

LIFELONG RENTER

The nomadic life of a pro athlete

Ricky Romero lives in a sparsely furnished rented condo near the Rogers Centre

DAVID HAYES
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

It's the end of September, a few days before Toronto Blue Jays pitcher Ricky Romero made his final start of the season against the Minnesota Twins in Minneapolis. In his bedroom, his suitcase lies open, half-packed, his clothing in piles around

the room. Shrugging, Romero, who is a soft-spoken 25-year-old, says, "Sorry about the mess."

It's not really much of a mess. It looks like a hotel room occupied by any professional athlete who is out-of-town for half of a 162-game Major League Baseball season. Except this isn't a hotel room. It's Romero's

880-square-foot, two-level condo that he rents for \$3,000 a month.

Romero was brought up from the minors by the Blue Jays in 2009 and that first year he shared a condo with fellow pitcher Scott Richmond. This year he wanted his own place and, as it turned out, he needn't have worried about the expense. The Jays bet on this rising star among the young pitching staff.

ROMERO continued on H10



LUCAS OLENIUK/TORONTO STAR

Ricky Romero is a pitcher with the Toronto Blue Jays.

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ON ON2

'Interactive technology is the future'

TECHNOLOGY from H1

"If you're selling someone a home for half a million dollars," Chu says, "it's better for them to see exactly what they're getting before they buy."

Across the GTA, technology is empowering homebuyers like never before and fundamentally changing the way real estate is marketed and sold.

From 3D visualization software, to programs that let buyers choose precisely where in a community they want to live, to interactive touchscreens at sales centres and home automation systems — house-hunting has become a state of the art experience.

"People today are a lot more tech savvy and they're demanding more," says Rob Nicolucci, principal of RN Design Ltd.

Nicolucci's firm created an interactive site plan system that lets homebuyers at the sales centre select on a touchscreen the exact size of lot and model of home they want.

The web-based site map then highlights to indicate whether that particular combination is available (lowrise design rules dictate that two identical plans can't be side by side).

All of this can be done by the customer before even dealing with a salesperson.

"Buyers want to be more independent," Nicolucci says. "They want to be able to look at the choices and not be pressured. Everything seems to be moving toward more of an independent sales model."

At the sales centre for DNA3, a two-tower project at King and Shaw launched last month, it's all about improving the customer experience.

Interactive touchscreens offer a bird's-eye view of nearby amenities and attractions.

If buyers select King West on the screen, for example, dots pop up on the aerial image to show what's in the vicinity.

"It can tell you where the nearest Starbucks is or how close you are to Liberty Village," explains Riz Dhanji, vice president of sales and marketing for Canderel Stoneridge, the developer of DNA3. "It's better than a boring map with a thousand dots on it that you typically find in sales offices."

"The fact is, you can do a lot more and put more information on touchscreens and that's what people are interested in seeing."

Real estate marketing guru Gerry Ryan is a big fan of touchscreens.

At the sales centre for Uptown Markham — a Times Group project that's slated to launch in January — the chief of G Ryan Design is installing a six-foot by six-foot wall of touchscreens.

"If I want to show an interior of one of the suites, it's almost full scale," he says. "It makes it look absolutely awesome."

In the presentation centre for Blade, a highrise condo being built atop a former skate factory in Brampton, Ryan set up a touchscreen with a projector.

Purchasers can stand on the model suite's balcony, select the floor they've bought a unit on, and watch as the view is projected onto a wall 10 feet away.

To promote Blade, Ryan used Bluetooth proximity marketing. Equipment in the sales centre sent out messages to Bluetooth-enabled devices within a 600-foot range that contained an offer, such as suite upgrades, to draw buyers in.

Ryan's firm is also using quick response codes (QRs) to generate buzz for developments.

The codes are inserted into ads and brochures and when readers point their Blackberrys or iPhones at them, they can access embedded project information, images and full videos.

QRs will be used to promote, among other projects, Exhibit Residences, a Bazis International condo at Bloor St. and Avenue Rd. that's launching in January.

Social media has become a major force in real estate project marketing. Indeed, Facebook and Twitter are commonly used these days to complement more traditional methods of promotion.

"Truthfully," Ryan says, "most builders decided a year ago that we better put Facebook and Twitter logos on our website. And then they did nothing, because they thought it would look after itself; it would go viral. Of course it doesn't work that way."

Ryan is taking a different tack: he



SARAH DEA FOR THE TORONTO STAR

Zancor Homes president Fabrizio Cortellucci enlisted the help of Chang Su to create a program that would enable homebuyers to view an entire house in 3D before it's built.

plans on launching an upcoming downtown highrise project exclusively through Facebook.

"We'll manage it and make it work," he says, "rather than just making a token effort by throwing a logo up on a website or ad."

Technology is enhancing the

home ownership experience, as well. At Trinity Bellwoods Towns and Homes, a high-end project on Manning Ave. launching later this month, units will come equipped with a Crestron Electronics home audio-video system controlled through an iPad.

"The homeowner can use the iPad as a panel to access CDs, MP3s and satellite radio at the touch of a button," says Eran Shram, a partner in Shram Homes, which is developing the project in partnership with Urban Capital Property Group. "It's a great marriage between technology

and content."

Back at DNA3, Riz Dhanji's team is developing an app that will help condo owners connect with their neighbours.

"If you're having a party in the party room, you can use the app to invite other people in the building," Dhanji says. "It's like a mini-Facebook just for DNA3."

If owners want to take the party elsewhere, the DNA3 app will connect with local restaurants and venues, so residents can make reservations using their handheld devices.

And property management will use the app to send out information and alerts about building goings-on.

"It automates the process, rather than having a piece of paper stuck on the wall of the elevator saying the windows are being cleaned today," says Dhanji.

Inside the suites, the app can adjust lighting and climate controls, even from a remote location.

"Say you're at work on a cold winter day and you forgot to turn on your heat," he says. "With this app you can switch on the heat so when you come home it's already warm."

If it all sounds too good to be true, it isn't.

"Interactive technology is the future," Dhanji says.

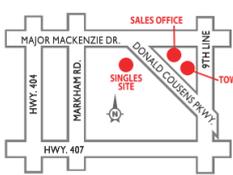


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