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Mark Cullen
Bald eagles in Burlington
at Royal Botanical Gardens, **H6**

NEW

HOMES & CONDOS

SATURDAY, JANUARY 10, 2015 SECTION H

ON ON2

Moving into the step-up market



MARTA IWANEK/TORONTO STAR
Neil Spiegel, a principal at Circa, stands in front of an image of 1733 Bathurst St. The building will have “the convenience of condo living, with the intimacy of a neighbourhood home,” he says.

Project targets buyers who are ready to expand but are shut out of the market for a house

NEIL SHARMA
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

A new condo conversion in midtown Toronto is, you might say, a step up.

More precisely, 1733 Bathurst by Circa is aimed at step-up home buyers who are looking to expand their living space while keeping it both affordable and within the city.

“The obstacles for us were that the houses we looked at weren’t renovated and we didn’t have the kind of cash required to get them to where we wanted them to be,” says Samantha Barone, 30, a mortgage broker.

“I’ve been in the industry for 10 years doing mortgages and I’ve seen it with my own eyes in the Toronto market, how it seems no budget is ever enough.

“My fiancé wanted something with good finishes —

he didn’t want to move in and then fix it. We found some homes in that category, but then we’d always be in bidding wars and always lose for one reason or another.”

Barone and her fiancé bought a 1,200-square-foot, two-bedroom-plus-den suite with two bathrooms at 1733 Bathurst by Circa. Their new home, which they move into this spring, also has a 240-square-foot terrace.

With just eight units ranging from 979 square feet to 1,200 square feet and priced between \$649,000 and \$749,000 in the apartment building-turned-condominium, Circa has designed the suites to live like homes. Two will have their own

street entrances, while the others will share outside access doors.

Kitchens will have Caesarstone counters, Scavolini designer cabinets and a Bertazzoni gas-plus-electric stove and canopy hood. Floors will be radiant heated hardwood — marble in bathrooms — and the suites will also have water recirculation and custom touches such as Nest smart thermostats. Ceilings will reach up to nine-foot-six and balconies will feature gas hookups for barbecues.

“The appeal in this project is that the finishes are great,” says Barone.

“There’s next to no upgrades you can get because the finishes are so good, like polished concrete floors, marble washrooms and quartz countertops. And we could own it. No bidding war. We bought it right away.”

EXPANSION continued on H6



“It’s like being in a house, but you’re not, and not paying the prices of homes in that area.”
SAMANTHA BARONE
BUYER AT 1733 BATHURST BY CIRCA

In the spirit of change, some reno-lutions to think about



Bryan Baumlér

As you test personal vows you made this new year, try a few for your home

Forget New Year’s resolutions. Reno-lutions are what you really need.

“Sure, everyone’s making resolutions right now,” says Bryan Baumlér. “While you’re busy sitting down making a list of goals, it wouldn’t be a bad idea to actually write some about your home.

“Start making a list of things that need to be repaired and areas where you could increase the efficiency and value of your home. Do a home reno resolution list.”

You heard the host of HGTV’s *Leave it to Bryan* and co-star of *Canada’s Handyman Challenge*. It’s time for a change . . . new year, new basement!

In a conversation with **Alex Nino Gheciu**, Bryan Baumlér answers Star readers’ questions about old tubs, upside-down windows and Frankensteined showers.

Our daughter’s 1920s home in Toronto has in the basement a set of two cement laundry tubs

that must be the originals. We would like to upgrade but the tubs are very heavy to deal with. Also, the connection to the drain looks to be incompatible with present-day connections. Could you suggest who might be willing to help with these old tubs? Thank you very much.

William D.

To remove a cement tub, get a sledgehammer and take it apart, piece by piece — if you can’t get four strapping fellas to help you, that is

Well, William, those cement tubs were actually pretty standard in early 1900 homes; you saw them even up until the ’50s and ’60s. They’re actually poured around a web of steel wire, which provides the strength to hold them up. So they are extremely heavy.

The best way to remove them from a home — if you don’t have four strapping young men to carry it out for you — is to

grab some safety glasses and a sledgehammer and take that thing apart, piece by piece.

As far as the plumbing connection goes, there’s a good chance you’ve got a one-inch galvanized steel or lead pipe as the drain. So you’ll have to disassemble that drain. My guess is, with the age of home, that it goes into a cast-iron stack, which you’ll definitely want a plumber to come look at. The old cast-iron stacks are actually sealed and put together with a lead filling. A lot of times, the plumber will have a snap cutter — which is a chain and carbide wheel assembly — that will cut that cast iron, allowing you to insert a new piece of ABS pipe and put a proper drain in place with a p-trap for the new sink.

Dear Bryan: I absolutely love your shows. My question: in one bathroom in my house, the previous owners seem to have installed the window upside down (the inside pane can be pushed up, rather than down). I

think it looks strange. Is it something I can do myself (with help from my son, of course).

Teresa P., Guelph, Ont.

Thanks for watching, Teresa! From what you’ve mentioned, it sounds like you have a double-hung window. The inside pane can be pushed up to open the window which, as far as I know, is pretty standard for most double-hung windows. The reason the inside pane is on the bottom is for the outside pane to overlap with the top; so, when water runs down the window, it doesn’t get inside your home. Things always overlap top to bottom on those types of windows. If it’s a newer double-hung window it will have little buttons on either side of the top of the inside, which you can push, allowing you to flip the upper window inside to reach and clean. So, unless it’s a non-standard window, it sounds like it was installed properly. Rest easy.

BAEUMLER continued on H2



>> HOMES & CONDOS

> OPEN HOUSE

See what’s available — and for how much — with a selection of GTA Open Houses compiled by Allison Harness.



Regal Heights

Location: 73 Regal Rd., Davenport Rd. and Dufferin St.
Type: 2-1/2 -storey detached; 4 + 1 bedrooms; 5 bathrooms
Asking price: \$2,975,000
Open house: Saturday and Sunday, 2-4 p.m.
Listing agents: Christian Vermast, Paul Maranger, and Fran Bennett, Sotheby’s International Realty Canada, Brokerage, 416-960-9995; trilogyagents.com



West Rouge

Location: 38 Winter Gardens Trail, Lawrence Ave. E. and Port Union Rd.
Type: two-storey detached; 3 bedrooms; 3 bathrooms
Asking price: \$499,900
Open house: Saturday, 2-4 p.m.
Listing agent: Sophia Tan, Prudential Achievers Realty, Brokerage, 416-417-4488; sophiatan.com



Richmond Hill

Location: 75 Weldrick Rd. E., Unit 824 Weldrick Rd. E. and Bayview Ave.
Type: two-storey stacked condo townhouse; 2 bedrooms; 2 bathrooms
Asking price: \$299,999
Open house: Saturday and Sunday, 2-4 p.m.
Listing agents: Daniel Bloch and Justin Neuville, Harvey Kalles Real Estate, Brokerage, 416-441-2888; teambloch.com



Port Perry

Location: 261 Stephenson Point Rd., Island Rd. and Stephenson Point Rd.
Type: detached bungalow on the waterfront; 2 bedrooms; 2 bathrooms
Asking price: \$549,900
Open house: Saturday and Sunday, 2-4 p.m.
Listing agent: Dianne Hooker, Coldwell Banker R.M.R. Real Estate, Brokerage, 905-985-7351; dhooker.ca



Whitby/Brooklin

Location: 645 Townline Rd. W., Townline Rd. W. and Ashburn Rd.
Type: two-storey detached; 5 + 1 bedrooms; 4 bathrooms
Asking price: \$1,089,000
Open house: Sunday, 2-4 p.m.
Listing agent: Bill Little, Coldwell Banker R.M.R. Real Estate, Brokerage, 905-430-6655; cbrmr.com



Mimico

Location: 2240 Lake Shore Blvd. W., Unit 3404, Lake Shore Blvd. W. and Legion Rd.
Type: condo unit in a highrise; 2 + 1 bedrooms; 2 bathrooms
Asking price: \$539,000
Open house: Saturday, 2-4 p.m.
Listing agent: Michael Kelly, Sutton Group Realty Systems Inc., Brokerage, 905-896-3333; Michaelkellyhomes.com.
Compiled from publicly available information. Please contact listing agent to confirm before attending any open house. Send upcoming open house listings to soldhome@rogers.

Nurturing romance, roses and bald eagles

Botanical gardens foster surprising results and will play key role in future



Mark Cullen

We started our trip last week in Australia with a tour of the Royal Botanic Gardens of Melbourne and Sydney.
This week, I’m going to take you to a place closer to home with a visit to a new botanical garden located in one of the most unlikely places: Omaha, Neb.
The Lauritzen Gardens — Omaha’s Botanical Center took me entirely by surprise. I was in the American Midwest early last spring and, with a free day on my hands, googled “botanical gardens” hoping to find some wide-open, green spaces near the urban centre. The Lauritzen Gardens popped up and off I went to the southeast corner of the city and a chunk of land nestled next to the wide, open Missouri River.
The garden is in a gorgeous, 87-acre natural setting. As I approached the grand, glassed-in entrance, a tour train snaked quietly past me. It was one of those rubber-wheeled jobs, with commentary piped through a speaker system, and perfect for people who want to enjoy a leisurely ride round the property.
I chose to walk, as the property is quite manageable by foot and I wanted to take my time to explore. The gardens feature a huge rose garden; a formal “ruins” complete with perennials and a formal, structured parterre; a children’s garden (with programs for youngsters); perennial borders and the most impressive gently curving walk flanked by large flowering crabapple trees in full and glorious bloom. I was fortunate to be there on the very day that the crab flowers were at their peak.
I took my time over a fine lunch in the restaurant and wandered up to the top of a hill to inspect some original steam-powered train engines from days gone by. This tribute to the old west was a bonus — the gardens themselves were worth the visit on their own. Were they worth a special visit to Omaha? For me? Definitely.
The Lauritzen is only 20 years old. By usual standards it is a very young garden, indeed. It was the great 18th-century British landscape architect Capability Brown who said that a garden should be designed to peak in 200 years. This garden has lots of time to meet Mr. Brown’s standards and I believe that it will. You and I, unfortunately, won’t be around to witness it.

Royal Botanical Gardens, Burlington: Closer to home, we have a



MARK CULLEN

The Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington takes up a massive 2,000 acres. This year, it boasts a newly renovated Rock Garden.

> QUESTION OF THE WEEK

I received a pot of flowering paperwhites. Where should I keep them in my home?

The blooms will last longer if they are not directly in line with the warm, drying air from heat vents. Put them in a cool spot, such as a cold room, overnight to prolong the blossoming period by several days or a week. Once the blooms have finished, keep them watered sufficiently to maintain healthy foliage and nurture the bulbs until you can plant them in the ground when the soil thaws. They will bring your garden to life next spring.



It’s impressive to see families, seniors and tourists who are touched by experiences visiting botanical gardens

world-class example of a botanical garden in Burlington, on the Hamilton border. The Royal Botanical Gardens (RBG) is located on a massive piece of real estate that contributes significantly to the economy and the ecology of the cities. Residents there are very familiar with the formal gardens, Leslie Laking Iris garden, the children’s garden,

and the most extensive rose collection in the province.
This year, the RBG boasts a newly renovated Rock Garden, with a history that is tied in with romance, wedding proposals, ceremonies and the classic hand-in-hand quality time that couples of all ages enjoy. That it now has a tender focus is a bit of a miracle since the Rock Garden rose from the remnants of a gravel pit. It was left quite a mess and then, 80 years ago, the pit became the focal point of the garden by way of an aggressive design that takes full advantage of the landscape’s changes in elevation. Masses

Midtown location, local amenities motivate buyers

EXPANSION from H1

Located on the western edge of the Forest Hill neighbourhood, just south of Eglinton, the community is family-friendly with schools and parks, as well as restaurants and shops within walking distance. The subway is nearby and the Eglinton Crosstown LRT construction is underway.
“Perhaps more to the step-up buyer than to any other segment of the condo market, location matters,” says Circa principal Neil Spiegel. “This buyer is looking to be part of an established neighbourhood and to enjoy what classic communities like Forest Hill have to offer.
“A midtown location with an urban feel, buyers are motivated equally by the local amenities — which include nearby parks, shops and cafés, and local schools, as by its proximity to the downtown core, convenient commute and easy access to public transit.
The condo, Spiegel adds, will offer “the convenience of condo living, with the intimacy of a neighbourhood home.”
Barone agrees, happy that her commute to work downtown won’t be a long one. She’s also pleased to have found a place that feels like a house (two of the suites will have their own street entrances, while the others will share outside access doors).
“Being on one level makes it functional with kids in the future. It’s like being in a house. but you’re not, and not paying the prices of homes in that area. It’s like having a little piece of the pie in a very good area and being able to enjoy the amenities



Hardwood floors, high ceilings and designer cabinets are among the features at 1733 Bathurst.

> 1733 BATHURST BY CIRCA

Location: 1733 Bathurst St., south of Eglinton Ave.
Design: architect — Solares Architecture; interior design — Mazen Studio
Units: 8
Pricing: \$649,000 to \$749,000
Info: circabuilt.com/1733-bathurst; 416-588-3286. Email: info@circa-built.com. Sales centre (by appointment only) at 672 Dupont St., Ste. 101.



around you as opposed to the amenities in the building.”
Evan Johnsen, also a principal at Circa, says purchasers such as Barone and her fiancé are underserved by the city’s current housing market: They’re a matured demographic with lifestyle needs that have developed from single-person dwellings to quieter, uptown neighbourhoods

with adequate school zones and related amenities.
“I’ve heard of the frustrations people have expressed about condos becoming smaller and smaller,” says Johnsen.
“The level of finishing we’re providing in these units is significantly more thoughtful than what I’ve seen in highrise construction. The materi-

of plants were arranged among the rocks to appeal to all of the senses. I encourage you to visit the newly renovated version of the Rock Garden later this year — it is slated to open late this spring. Details at rbg.ca.
The formal gardens are a small part of the overall geography of the RBG.
Located on over 2,000 acres, the diverse and complex piece of real estate can be explored any time of year. Walking and bike paths wind through mature forested areas, streams rush down hillsides and the amazing body of water known as Cootes Paradise breathes with an abundance of wildlife. This past season there was a nesting family of bald eagles at Cootes. Imagine that!
The RBG stands alone in this province — indeed in the country — as an example of what can be done with foresight, imagination and the will to push an aggressive dream through to reality. Such a place is not created quickly; it is handed down from one generation to another, each putting their own stamp on it as it grows, matures and becomes woven into the fabric of the greater community. Such is the RBG today, 80 years after the first shovel of soil was turned.

What have we learned? As I reflect on the impact each one of these amazing gardens has on its community and country, I am impressed by the families and seniors and tourists who are touched by their experiences there. And then I think about our future as people.
I read recently that doctors are becoming concerned about a new generation developing physical maladies caused by constantly looking down while texting and emailing. Chronically sore necks, stooped shoulders . . . possibly early onset osteoporosis? I mention this as an example of how our society is changing.
It is true, we communicate very differently than we did just 10 years ago. We continue to speed things up, by pushing a button or sliding our finger over a glass screen.
Yet, in the next decades, our society will be much more in need of botanical gardens. As sure as butterflies fly, the scent of a rose inspires poetry and the flight of a bald eagle causes us to stop, breathless, we will need botanical gardens and all that they represent.
Next week: why botanical gardens started in the first place and how Toronto may become the home to the world’s newest version of a botanical garden. Stay tuned.
Mark Cullen is an expert gardener, author, broadcaster and garden editor of Reno and Decor magazine. Get his free monthly newsletter at markcullen.com, and watch him on CTV Canada AM every Wednesday at 8:45 a.m. Follow him on Twitter @MarkCullen4 and Facebook.

als we’re using are what you’d expect in a renovated Victorian house.
“And the pricing is more approachable to people with condo budgets, and the space is more suitable for raising a family,” he adds.
Concern for the environment shows at 1733 Bathurst with green features including recycled, filtered water. Circa has also maintained the building’s 1930s-era, red-brick facade so that its esthetic remains that of the neighbourhood.
They drew their inspiration for the condo conversion from Europe, and cities like Paris, Barcelona and New York’s Manhattan borough where homeowners are in the majority those who buy flats.
“We represent a niche where people can have that custom-home experience in condo form,” says Johnsen. “It’s a very different experience than coming home to a 300-unit building where it’s impersonal, like walking through the door of a casino or something.”
Ontario’s building and growth policy, outlined in the Places to Grow plan released by the province in 2005, dictates intensification rather than development on open land. And that, says George Carras, president of RealNet Canada Inc., is partly responsible for the birth of the step-up homebuyer demographic.
“Developers can only build what consumers can afford and what government lets them,” says Carras of the current trend to build condominium towers with hundreds of units. “Intensification has caused extreme conditions in form, size and price. The affordability gap is widening.”