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Mark Cullen
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NEW

HOMES & CONDOS

SATURDAY, MAY 30, 2015 SECTION H

WE ON2

Stepping into the learning curve

Grid Condos slated for a lively downtown neighbourhood that’s tall on education but short on housing

RYAN STARR
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Ryerson University’s rapid growth in the heart of Toronto has seen the humble polytechnic institute blossom into a full-fledged urban university. A complement of 40,000 students and 2,700 faculty and staff has meant expanding the facility’s footprint out around its original small core.

Yet, in spite of Ryerson’s emergence as a major academic player — luring top students and teaching talent from across the country and around the world — there has not been a corresponding increase in housing options within the school’s surrounding neighbourhoods.

“Because Ryerson isn’t a residential developer, and because land is scarce and dollars are scarce in downtown Toronto for their operations, they haven’t focused on matching the growth in the student population with housing they provide,” explains Shamez Virani, vice-president with CentreCourt Developments. “So it’s really left a big void in the market.”

CentreCourt is seeking to fill that void with Grid Condos, a 47-storey project at the southeast corner of Jarvis and Dundas Sts., kitty-corner from where Ryerson is planning to construct a new sciences building, according to Virani.

Units at Grid — ranging from 415 square feet to 640 square feet, with one-, one-bedroom-plus-den and two-bedroom options — are efficiently designed in order to accommodate multiple student tenants. The base of the building will house the Grid Learning Centre, with dedicated flex space for study and collaboration, plus a fitness centre and terraces.

The project promises to prove attractive to parents wanting to buy units for their student-children to live in, and to investors who understand the value of owning education-related real estate assets, which Virani notes are virtually “recession proof.”



NICK KOZAK FOR THE TORONTO STAR

Shamez Virani, right, vice-president at CentreCourt Developments with Mansoor Kazerouni, executive vice-president of Page + Steele/IBI Group Architects. The Student Learning Centre at Ryerson University inspired the study hub they’ll build at Grid Condos.

“You couldn’t find a seat. That was a huge ‘Aha!’ moment for us.”

SHAMEZ VIRANI
ABOUT RYERSON LEARNING CENTRE

Grid isn’t just catering to the Ryerson community. The surrounding area, which the developer has dubbed the “Learning District,” is also home to St. Michael’s Hospital, a teaching and research hospital; Everest College, Canadian Music Centre, George Brown College and National Ballet School — all institutions filled with people, staff and students alike who need places to live close to where they work and play.

CentreCourt began serving this population with a development it launched last year at Shuter and Dalhousie Sts. — Core Condos. The project’s 221 units sold out in a matter of days, demonstrating to the builder that the area was ripe for student-focused development.


“We were awakened to what’s happening,” Virani says, noting six months later his firm acquired the site for Grid at Jarvis and Dundas Sts.


They’re not the only group to recognize the academic-institution-driven potential of this particular intersection. At the northeast corner, Gupta Group launched Dundas Square Gardens, Toronto’s top-selling condo project last year. On the southwest side, construction is nearing the top of Great Gulf Homes’ 42-storey Pace Condos.

GRID continued on **H20**

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Grid Condos to be a ‘bold, urban gesture’

GRIDS from H1

“The residential community is starting to catch up to what’s happening in the area,” Virani says.

The focal point of Grid Condos will be its study hubs, an amenity inspired by Ryerson’s Student Learning Centre, which opened last year on the former site of Sam the Record Man, at Yonge and Gould Sts.

“It’s a 21st-century library — not the books and stacks of old,” says Virani, who toured the centre with the Grid development team prior to launching.

“It’s a beautiful space with modular furniture, great for individual work or group work, and you can adapt it and modify as you see fit. They designed it with the idea that students will come in with their iPads or laptops and just find somewhere to work.”

The inspiration came when Virani and his associates visited. “You couldn’t find a seat,” notes Virani.

“That was a huge ‘Aha!’ moment for us,” he says. “It showed us there is a huge need for spaces and places for students to work, study and collaborate.”

Which is precisely what the Grid Learning Centre will offer.

The first level will be an open-concept, highly flexible, WiFi-equipped space with plug-and-play stations and modular furniture, enabling students to work either collaboratively (there’ll be a breakout room with a Smart Board interactive whiteboard) or independently.

The first level will include a café and terrace space, as well.

“If you’re a student living in the building, you can come down and be fully connected in a vibrant environment with other students,” Virani says.

“And you won’t have to fight for a seat.”

The second amenity floor at Grid, with a fitness centre and entertaining space with terrace, will focus on two things he jokes are “critical” to student life: “looking good and having fun.”

Grid Condos also will have two guest suites and retail space at the



The open-concept Grid Learning Centre will be WiFi-equipped with plug-and-play stations for students to work.

ground-floor level.

Suites will have 8-foot-6 ceilings and laminate flooring. Kitchens will come with composite stone or granite countertops and stainless steel appliances.

Bathrooms will have porcelain floor tile, a bathtub and glass-framed shower enclosure (depending on the floor plan).

For architect Mansoor Kazerouni, Grid strikes a personal chord.

“I have a daughter at McGill University,” notes the executive vice-president with Page + Steele/IBI Group. “So it’s interesting to design a project while I’m living that experience. It makes me super appreciative of what it means to be providing something like this for students.”

Kazerouni points out that both the development’s name and its design were inspired by the street grid on which it will be built.

“Jarvis and Dundas are an integral part of Toronto’s defining grid. It

goes back to the old Town of York grid,” he explains.

The idea of the grid is expressed on all sides of the building, as a way of “connecting it with the city,” he says. The north and south sides will have balconies that provide a “strong horizontal rhythm” while yielding views of the surrounding Garden District and Lake Ontario, respectively.

The east and west sides of the building — particularly the west side facing Jarvis — will be articulated with a grid interspersed with sections of recessed windows, creating a “zigzagging graphic pattern at a large urban scale that will be visible from great distances,” Kazerouni notes.

The condo tower will have a white grid, while the podium will feature a darker pattern, helping to visually ground the structure, its architect points out.

“It will be a bold urban gesture,” he says with pride. “And it will definitely be recognizable.”



> GRID CONDOS

Location: Dundas and Jarvis Sts. (southeast corner)

Developer: CentreCourt Developments Inc

Architect: Page + Steele/IBI Group Architects; interior design: esQuape Design

Size: 47 storeys

Units: 528; from 415 square feet to 640 square feet

Price: From the mid-\$200s

Info: gridcondos.com



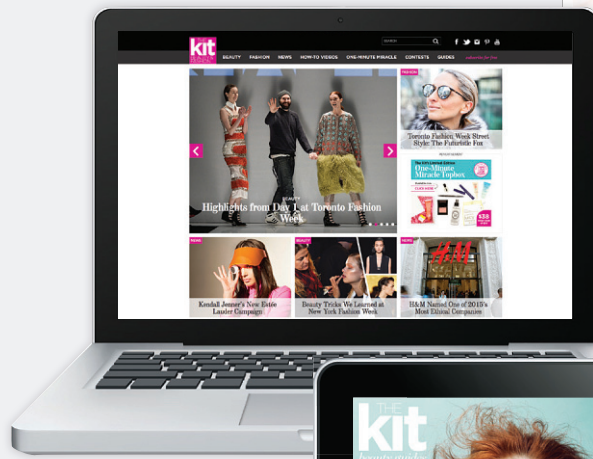
An artist’s rendering of the lobby at Grid Condos. A study hub will be the focal point of the condos, catering to Ryerson University students.

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