

# Tall building romance, plus park

Architect Bruce Kuwabara and landscape designer Robert Ng make a welcome addition to the Yonge Street corridor



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Toronto has never had the parkland it deserves. That we have any sizable green spaces at all is largely because of the Victorian philanthropy of John Howard, who willed us his country estate, now High Park, and to the numerous streams and little rivers that prevent the occupation of their marshy, forested ravines.

Waterfront Toronto, the public agency charged with the revitalization of Hogtown's desolate Lake Ontario shoreline, is laying out impressive parks on the properties it oversees, but private-sector real estate interests seem as intent as ever on building out every square foot of land that's available.

Which is one thing that makes the upcoming infill of the spacious vacant lot on Wellesley Street just west of Yonge Street different, and interesting.

In a notable exception to what usually happens, Lanterra Developments, the owner, will create a 1.6-acre public park on the site. To be crafted by Robert Ng of NAK Design Group, this park will satisfy, at least part way, the desire of politicians, city planning staff and local residents that the empty lot not be crammed with architecture. The neighbours will get the landscaped open space they want in this tight inner-city jumble of apartment blocks and the tattoo parlours and pizza joints of Yonge Street.

Lanterra has landed permission to put up a 60-storey commercial-residential tower on the northeast corner of the site. The developer will get the \$300-million, profit-making building needed to suit the backers and make its fashioning of the park work financially.

On the inside, this structure will offer standard-issue condo living to the usual downtown home-hunters – singles, working couples without kids, empty-nesters, investors. Prices for the tower's 742 units start at around \$200,000 for a tiny 300-square-foot studio. At 878 square feet, the largest suite available features two bedrooms and a den – perhaps enough territory for a very small family, though not really. It looks like we'll have to keep waiting for a developer to issue a serious invitation to normal-income, normal-sized families to live deep downtown.

But if the neighbours get a new park out of this arrangement, and Lanterra gets its high-rise, what will be the payoff for people who care about beauty? It could be conspicuous, if the tower lives up to its model and renderings.

Designed for Lanterra by Bruce Kuwabara, founding partner of KPMB Architects, in close co-operation with Page+Steele/IBI



**Lanterra Developments' project at Wellesley near Yonge takes its cues from the mellow, rolling farmland of Southern Ontario.**

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Group Architects, this attractive building takes its artistic cues, Mr. Kuwabara says, from landscape.

Not the stony, dramatic terrain of Ontario's cottage country, it appears, but rather the mellow, rolling farmland in the province's southern districts, and the hilly contours of the proposed park. Belts of whitened glass balcony fronts run smoothly around each level of the structure, quietly looping out at the curved corners, then tucking in, and nowhere making a sharp turn. The billowing white exterior, almost invisibly accented by shades of grey, will be subtly expressive instead of routinely right-angled.

The undulation is most pronounced at the ground level, where the terraced base flares out over the outside tables of what Mr. Kuwabara hopes will be a noodle house, a French bistro or some other casually chic, mid-market venue. His belief that a fine-dining establishment would be out of place in this zone of the city is surely right. What's wanted, instead, is a hub, a popular eatery that lends social orientation to the neighbourhood of high-rise dwellers and strollers on rough-edged Yonge Street.

This description doesn't make this building sound very much like the KPMB structures Torontonians are used to.

For most of its 26 years, the distinguished office has seemed most comfortable doing straight-ahead, anti-historicist modernism. Neither its recent overhauls of the Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art and the Royal Conservatory of Music nor its ground-up residential performances at the mammoth CityPlace housing complex dropped a hint that KPMB might have a place in its artistic toolkit for the tall-building romanticism embodied in the Wellesley Street project.

But this enlargement is surely welcome. Like other local designers of large condominium buildings in the Toronto market – David Pontarini and Rosario Varacalli come to mind – Mr. Kuwabara has clearly been thinking about what comes next in the art of building tall, now that every modernist box has been constructed and every application of the T-square has been explored.

Newer, taller condo stacks may loom over the Wellesley Street tower. But until that happens – which it could, since 60 storeys is no longer extraordinarily high in Toronto – Mr. Kuwabara's softly fluid tower in the park will provide an architectural as well as communal focus for its currently unfocused spot in the Yonge Street corridor.

## ON SITE » BY SYDNIA YU

### THE CODE FOREST HILL

## Hariri Pontarini puts its stamp on a prized Forest Hill lot

#### BUILDERS/DEVELOPERS:

BLVD Developments and Lifetime Developments

#### SIZE:

430 to more than 2,500 square feet

#### PRICE:

Mid-\$200,000s to more than \$1.5-million

#### CONTACT:

To register, phone (416) 792-7174 or visit [thecodecondos.com](http://thecodecondos.com)

For years, a derelict seniors home on St. Clair Avenue sat across the street in stark contrast to a vibrant 21-acre park with 10 tennis courts, a jogging path, ravine trail, off-leash dog run and playground.

So developer – and former Forest Hill native – Brian Brown of BLVD Developments and Lifetime Developments made it a personal mission to replace the eyesore with an upscale residence worthy of its location on Sir Winston Churchill Park.

“The park is one of the largest city central parks we have in Toronto, so to be able to position a building across from a



**The nine-storey development across the street from Sir Winston Churchill Park will consist of 108 condo suites and 10 townhouses.**

park is a rare opportunity, and what it affords you is not just the amenities that come with the park, but the views,” says Mr. Brown, who launched the infill project this spring.

“The views looking south from this property will always be protected and unobstructed, and even looking north, there are low-rise homes of Forest Hill, so again we have very protected views.”

Locals closely guard the community as well, so they were in-

cluded in Hariri Pontarini Architects' design of this nine-storey condominium at the corner of St. Clair and Parkwood avenues, near Spadina Road.

“There are not a lot of redevelopment opportunities in the neighbourhood itself,” Mr. Brown says.

“[The developers] were talking about how the postal code represents some of the most exclusive – and a lot of cases notable – residences in the city, so to name the building The Code felt

very appropriate.”

The area is also well-known for its boutiques and restaurants in Forest Hill Village and elite schools, such as Forest Hill C.I., Bishop Strachan School, Upper Canada College and St. Michael's College School.

“When you build in a mature neighbourhood like Forest Hill, the neighbourhood itself is the amenity,” Mr. Brown said.

“Being able to walk out your door and walk along the private residential, tree-lined streets of Forest Hill is something you can't get downtown, and the schools located around this property are some of the top private schools and even public schools in the city.”

Should residents need to commute further, it will be easy. “It's got the LRT right at its doorstep and the subway is two minutes away at the Loblaws, which is amazing with 66,000 square feet. It's one of their largest and flagship locations.”

When the mid-rise is completed by June, 2016, residents of just 108 units and 10 townhouses will share use of a pet washing station, gym, lounge and terrace.

“There's a relaxed and friendly feeling to the building,” Mr. Brown said. “You get familiar with whose in the building because there are fewer people to see.”

Buyers can select from studios to three-bedroom-plus-den suites with balconies or terraces and townhouses with private patios and interior building access.

“We cater to a very broad group – both people downsizing from larger homes of Forest Hill or people who have wanted to live in Forest Hill but couldn't afford it before,” Mr. Brown said. “We terraced the building to the north, so each floor has a number of suites that have expanded outdoor terrace space larger than we typically provide with a balcony.”

Units will be given nine-foot ceilings, full height windows and engineered floors, as well as custom cabinetry by Tomas Pearce Interior Design Consulting Inc., composite stone counters and Energy Star laundry machines.

Parking will be \$50,000 and monthly fees 53 cents per square foot, plus separately metered hydro.