

LUXURY LIVING

Four developers discuss impact of COVID-19 on luxury condo builds

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The pandemic's influence on how luxury high-rise and boutique projects are being built, designed and sold is immense and understandable.

When lockdowns happen, the need for more personal space is intensified, and according to four developers involved in four distinct projects, it's impacting everything from size of units to the type of amenities being offered.

Julie Di Lorenzo, president of Diamante Development Corp., a developer whose latest project is the twin-tower Mirabella Luxury Condominiums at 1926 Lakeshore Blvd. W, says there is no question that COVID-19 has caused everyone in the building business to reconsider design.

"We implemented touchless door sensors in response to COVID, and under LEED and Toronto Green Standards, installed in-suite energy recovery ventilation (ERV) for enhanced indoor air quality and dedicated fresh air quality for each unit," she says, adding, "we anticipated the changes and designed Mirabella with larger proportions. For example, our two bedrooms range from 780 sq. ft. to just under 1,000 sq. ft., where most projects have two bedrooms at 600 sq. ft. and 800 sq. ft. Projects brag about how compact suites are, and we brag about how spacious the rooms and layouts are."

Once built, Mirabella will also contain increased open spaces for outdoor activities and increased amenities for indoor activities.

As for the decision to install ERV systems and touchless door openers, Di Lorenzo adds that even after the design was complete and under construction, they saw how these could improve the client experience.

The insatiable quest for more space is also evident at three luxury boutique projects: 89 Avenue Yorkville by Armour Heights Developments, North Drive Investments' 10 Prince Arthur and Altree Development's Forest Hill Private Residences.

Frank Mazzotta, president of Armour Heights, has modelled 89 Avenue Yorkville after 815 Fifth Ave. in New York City, located directly across from Central Park.

The eventual design will contain what has been described as pre-war New York inspired architecture, and with pricing for the 30-35 units starting at \$4.5 million, opulence will be everywhere.

According to Mazzotta, every unit is fully customizable and aimed at people who want to move from large family homes, but are not prepared to alter their lifestyle.

"The Armour Heights model revolves around a one-on-one discussion with clients and effectively designing their dream home in every detail that is customizable," he says. "And because we've got this small floor plate which is 45 feet in width by almost 300 feet in depth, we can really customize these suites because we don't

have massive sheer walls and columns and everything else. We can span quite a bit."

A two-minute walk west of this location is 10 Prince Arthur, a seven-storey 25-suite project in which the starting price is \$4 million, and the average unit size is expected to be around 2,500 sq. ft.

"At North Drive, we've experienced tremendous pent-up demand from those that are living in large homes in midtown Toronto, raised their families, and are contemplating the next move," says Jordan Morassutti, the firm's co-founder and partner. "And they're not looking to downsize per se. It's more about single-level living and reallocation of space. Rather than being in a five-bedroom home on three levels, they're looking at suites that occupy roughly the same area as their existing homes, but have grand areas to live, work and entertain both indoor and out."

The intent of a project like 10 Prince Arthur, he says, is to provide an opportunity for people to transition to a single-level living environment, while still staying in the neighbourhood they raised their families in.

As for the impact the pandemic has on client requests and their needs, Morassutti says "we've seen a shift away from the open concept plans to plans that more or less mimic the programming that exist in their current homes. We've seen significant demand for dining rooms, separate living family rooms, oftentimes his-and-her offices."

The continued need for more space is one reason why the number of units at the upscale Forest Hill Residences, to be located at 2 Forest Hill Rd., have been reduced from the original plans.

President and CEO of Altree Developments Zev Mandelbaum notes that prior to the pandemic, the nine-storey building was scheduled to contain 94 units ranging in size from 700 sq. ft. to just under 2,000 sq. ft. And with pricing starting at \$1.8 million, it was anticipated that the average size would be in the 1,200-1,500 sq. foot range.

Since then, the number of units has been reduced to the mid-80s, with the average unit being sold closing in on the 3,000 sq. ft. mark that carries a \$6 million+ price tag.

Mandelbaum explains that typical clients are looking at downsizing, but not downpricing.

"What they are looking for is a larger condo, way bigger than you think," says Mandelbaum. "They are looking for a 3,000 sq. ft. unit. They can still entertain, have their kids over, feel comfortable, and at the same time have all these amazing amenities. They're willing to pay for it."

In terms of the amenities that will be offered once the structure is built, these include 24-hour valet service, a 20-seat dining room and lounge, fitness studio, heated indoor swimming pool with adjoining wet and dry saunas, as well as an outdoor space with a lounge and dining area.



COURTESY OF NORTH DRIVE INVESTMENTS

At 10 Prince Arthur, expect a shift towards larger separate spaces for living, dining, and working.



PUREBLINK AND ARMOUR HEIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS

The 89 Avenue Yorkville project features opulent spaces, and the pool is no exception.



COURTESY OF ALTREE DEVELOPMENTS

Forest Hill Private Residences will include many onsite amenities, including a 20-seat dining room and lounge.



COURTESY OF DIAMANTE DEVELOPMENT CORP.

Waterfront Mirabella will provide large outdoor spaces like this open terrace.

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