



Graywood

Downtown suites spell hip, urban, personal

October 22, 2010

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Even if you haven't heard of Graywood Developments, you've likely heard the catchy radio ads for two of their condo projects.

There's the tuneful twist on Marvin Gaye's classic "Mercy Mercy Me" for the Mercer ("Mercer Mercer Me") in Toronto's Entertainment District and the jubilant "Hands Up" promoting the Ocean Club on Etobicoke's waterfront.

But Graywood itself has flown quietly under the radar despite being a fixture on the city's condo scene for more than two decades. It doesn't even have a website.

But between June 1 and the end of the year, the company will have released almost 1,400 condo units in the city market, including 159 residential units at the Residences at the Ritz-Carlton, 493 suites at Five Condos at 5 St. Joseph, 415 at the Mercer and 461 at the Ocean Club.

The luxurious five-star Ritz, developed in partnership with Cadillac Fairview at 181 Wellington St. W., has established a new standard for Graywood.

"The hotel is set to open beginning of next year and the proof is in the delivery of that building," says Stephen Price, chief operating officer for Graywood. "We have learned a lot from that and are able to transfer it to all our projects."

Although each of Graywood's current projects has a distinct personality, there are themes common to all of them, says Price.

"First of all is the location. Then the design detail, not just in the esthetic of the building but in its functionality. And the value proposition we're offering customers," says Price, who points out that Graywood seeks out "triple A" locations for its projects.

“Good sites are fewer and harder to find, but we've always been able to find enough for us,” he says. “We are not a production developer-builder. We build as we find sites that fit our criteria, and we will wait until we can find those that suit us.

“Then we seek out an architect that will capture the vision we have and find an interior designer who will complement the architecture, then a landscape architect. Those are our three primary partners.”

Five, a modern 45-storey glass tower with undulating balconies, is slated to rise along tree-lined St. Joseph St.

Just steps from Yonge and Bloor Sts., this joint venture with MOD Developments will incorporate a four-storey Gothic Revival warehouse into its façade and a series of small heritage storefronts along Yonge St.

The model suite, designed by Anna Simone of Cecconi Simone, is a sophisticated bohemian style, mixing dark chocolate wood, modern white leather, metal and glass. More than two-thirds of the Five suites have been sold.

“What you'll see in all our buildings is that our kitchens are all highly designed,” says Price as he stands in the pristine white Euro-style model kitchen in Five. “We design not just for the esthetic, but for the pragmatic, so they are functional and the kitchens are integrated with the living area.

“We particularly focus on the kitchen because that's where people like to spend a lot of time. Our second priority is the bathroom.”

Five will likely draw people with a hip urban personal sense of style (they may work at the University of Toronto or nearby hospitals).

The Mercer, near King and St. John Sts. in the Entertainment District, which will be launched later this year in partnership with Beaverhall Homes, is expected to draw a different crowd.

“The Mercer is for the downtown person,” says Price. “We know that area very well because of the Ritz. We were pioneers to build a five-star project in an area that hadn't yet proven itself as a residential location. But it seems the whole city is evolving around there, with the Toronto International Film Festival (Bell Lightbox/Festival Tower) and all the amenities that are here.”

At the Ritz, Price says people get large suites and “incredible hotel services.”

“Mercer is catering to a different buyer. We are expecting to get an interesting group of downtown professionals. It's across the street from the entrance to the PATH system at Metro Hall. It's going to

appeal to the younger, hipper audience,” he predicts. “Maybe not quite as hip as Five. Mercer is like New York’s Soho, Five is the Lower East Side.”

The 33-storey tower, designed by BBB Architects, will have a brick treatment that ties into the street’s history yet will be modern in design.

“We are targeting people who appreciate a contemporary, hip building,” explains Price. “We are identifying the ‘me’ in Mercer, not in a selfish way but in an individual way. These are people who are successful, know who they are and what they want. They appreciate architecture, they appreciate quality design and, most of all, they appreciate the location.”

The Design Agency (whose principals are in HGTV’s *The Designer Guys*) came up with the suites, lobby and amenity spaces. The lobby will feature a spectacular granite concierge desk and metal screenings to give an urban feel. There will be a living wall to add warmth and depth, as well as a sculptural sofa imported from Italy.

“The most significant amenity of this project is its rooftop terrace with a dining area, outdoor screen and misters,” says Price. “It will have a very contemporary look and feel with green elements. We try to ensure as much as we can there is a strong green presence in our projects.”

The Ocean Club on the Humber Bayshores (also a collaboration with Beaverhall), also to be launched later this fall, will have a much different flavour. It is perhaps no coincidence that the “Hands Up” music used in its commercials and on its website is also Club Med’s theme song.

“Once you turn off Lake Shore Blvd. and on to Park Lawn Ave. to where we front on the lake on Marine Parade, you enter a whole different world,” says Price. “There’s a butterfly sanctuary, green space, the lake, the Martin Goodman Trail and unobstructed views of the city skyline. It’s transformative down there. It has a getaway feeling.”

He says people don’t need to be sold on the location: “It’s a matter of us having the right product.”

The two 37-storey and eight-storey towers, designed by Page + Steel/IBI Group, will be sold and operate together but will have independent amenities. The point tower has a sloped, mast-like roof and is inspired by the oceanfront condos of Miami and Vancouver.

“Most suites have wonderful views of city or to the west and we’ve articulated a number of balconies so the views are available to most residents,” says Price. “We’d argue that this is the best location on Lake Shore, given our proximity to lake, and being able to put a point tower so close to lake, the views will be outstanding.”

Interior designer Tomas Pearce has created a three-storey resort-style lobby with commissioned sculptures, glass walls and detailed light fixtures.

Amenities will reflect the club atmosphere. There will be a saltwater pool and cascading hot tub. On the eighth floor will be “essentially a large outdoor lounge” with barbecues where residents can watch the sailboats and cyclists.

There will also be a restaurant in the base of the tower, where people can have a drink and enjoy the lake views or have a meal. It will round out the resort-type environment, says Price.

With the growing roster of unique projects, isn't it time for Graywood to establish an online presence to bolster its public profile?

“We don't have a website because there hasn't been a need, as our business is not sourced that way,” says Price.

“But we're thinking about it. We want to be a little more progressive in how we communicate.”