

How King West evolved into city's most dynamic neighbourhood

What a difference 25 years can make. In the 1980s, there was little evidence that the King St. West area would evolve into the hip, dynamic neighbourhood it has become today.

The area was characterized by abandoned industrial buildings, gritty warehouses and parking lots. It wasn't a place anyone wanted to linger, especially after dark.

Today, it pulses with life thanks to a vibrant cultural and entertainment scene and in September, Hollywood's glitterati gather there for the annual Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF).

King West has undergone a remarkable transformation, more so than any other Toronto neighbourhood in the last two decades. A boom of condo building, from stylish boutique projects to loft conversions to sleek highrises, has helped to inject the formerly barren precinct with new life. Today, it teems with energy and is an exciting mix of shops, residential units, trendy restaurants and artist studios and is a hub for culture and creativity. It's become the heart of city's Entertainment District, home to the Bell Lightbox, where TIFF has its headquarters, and the Royal Alexandra and Princess of Wales Theatres, and it's in close proximity to the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Ontario College of Art and Design, Metro Hall and the Rogers Centre.

Other factors have contributed to its evolution over the years, including the Mirvish family's decision to reopen the Royal Alexandra Theatre and to establish several restaurants in old warehouses east of John St.; the west extension of the underground PATH system; and the addition of large-scale attractions nearby, including the CN Tower and the SkyDome (now the Rogers Centre). CBC also built its Glenn Gould Studio at the corner of King and John Sts. and CityTV created an interactive broadcast facility in an old printing factory.

Another turning point for the neighbourhood was city council's decision in the late 1990s to allow rezoning of the old warehouses for purposes beyond industrial use, such as for office space which became popular with creative agencies.

Innovative condo projects (eg. such as those by Freed Developments and Candereel Stoneridge) have played a large part in the neighbourhood's evolution and some of Toronto's most stylish buildings can be found here, as well as several glamorous boutique hotels. The condos have attracted residents, who tend to be design savvy young professionals, to the previously sparsely populated area. More than 10,000 people now live in the Entertainment District which had a population of just 3,000 a half dozen years ago. And the influx of residents has been a catalyst for further retail and commercial activity to serve their needs, such as yoga studios and health food stores.

Despite the ambitious level of continuing development in the area, the histori-

cal King West buildings are protected creating an interesting mix of heritage and contemporary architecture.

Minto (www.minto.com) is among the developers playing a role in the ongoing renewal of King West. Its Minto775 King West (at Tecumseth St.), designed by Hariri Pontarini Architects, consists of two towers joined by a five-storey brick podium, creating a unique facade that is sensitive to the area's heritage.

Though distinguished by modernist lines and extensive glazing, the development is carefully designed to fit within its surroundings. The project responds to the scale of adjacent buildings and has a landscaped courtyard opening to King St. Commercial space at street level is defined by a palette of brick, Algonquin limestone and copper accents and the five-storey podium is clad in brick.

Inside, Dan Menchions of II by IV Design has created thoroughly modern, functional spaces with features such as stainless steel appliances, granite



kitchen countertops, mosaic-tile backsplashes and marble vanity tops.

The project is under construction with occupancies in 2013. Recent releases include penthouses, which are from \$580,800 to over \$1.2 million. One and two bedroom suites are priced from \$329,800.

Harhay Construction has partnered with Lamb Development Corp. and Niche Development to create two unique projects in the King West neighbourhood.

One is Parc, a recently completed 11-storey building designed by Peter Clewes of architectsAlliance that fronts Stanley Park. The glass and metallic building features staggered balconies that widen and narrow on alternating floors and consists of 94 units with four two-storey townhouses. The units feature high ceilings (10 feet) with exposed concrete, feature walls and high-end modern finishes.

Harhay, Lamb and Niche have launched another standout project at 224 King West, Theatre Park, (www.theatrepark.ca) which is under construction. The slim 47-storey tower will sit next door to the Royal Alexandra Theatre and has a small urban park at the front of the property. The contemporary glass tower, also designed by Clewes, will rise 47 storeys and appears to be criss-crossed with ribbons.

The podium will be at the same height as the surrounding buildings in the warehouse district and the tower will float above the public space created by the urban park, thus be unobtrusive.

The 234 suites start on the ninth floor while lower floors will be devoted to a five-star restaurant, amenity space and administrative facilities. Amenities will be similar to a five-star hotel, with 24-hour concierge, a swimming pool, and gym, etc., bringing yet another facet to the burgeoning neighbourhood. 🏠