

Custom home in a country setting

Views and bedroom coffee bar in \$3M Hockley Valley estate, H5



Designed for deliberation

Forest retreat built for stargazing and cigars in Brazil, H4

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> HOW WE LIVE



RICK MADONIK TORONTO STAR

“We want it to be the envy of the GTA and a model for other new cities to replicate and emulate,” Mississauga Mayor Bonnie Crombie says of the Exchange District and the city’s creation of a downtown core.

Model for a downtown in Mississauga

TRACY HANES
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

An early hub of trade, commerce and connections, downtown Mississauga’s historic legacy is inspiring its Exchange District — one of the city’s newest neighbourhoods.

The Exchange District is a key piece of the city’s ambitious vision, outlined in its updated Downtown21 Masterplan that was first introduced in 2009.

The area is where, in the 1700s, the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation bought and sold goods with European traders.

Today, the area that now surrounds Square One Shopping Centre is being transformed.

“The Exchange District will be the gateway to downtown — a

MISSISSAUGA continued on H4

The Exchange District will be a ‘modern Distillery District’ with homes, a hotel and people-centric spaces

Dreaming of a green Christmas this year?

Add the planet to your gift list by reusing decorations, using LED lights and going natural

CAROLA VYHNAK
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Deck the halls with boughs of holly, reuse last year’s baubles and choose real over faux fir — all great ways to start a waste-free, planet-friendly Christmas at home.

And when the season’s over, you’ll have a tree-treat for goats — chemical-free and minus the tinsel, please.

As you plan your festive decor this year, consider these cheery facts:

- One acre of Christmas trees produces enough daily oxygen for 18 people.
- Trees rid the air of pollutants and absorb carbon dioxide, reducing the global-warming greenhouse effect.
- If every family reused two-thirds of a metre of ribbon, the combined 45,000 kilometres could tie a bow around the planet.

The most eco-friendly gift you can give Mother Earth is mindfulness, said Toronto environmentalist Candice Batista.

ENVIRONMENT continued on H6



DREAMSTIME

Mix in greenery and natural elements, like pine cones, for on-trend decor.



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> THE WOW FACTOR

Built for thinking and reading

A glass house in Brazil invites reflection and cigars under the stars

GEORGIE BINKS
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

It began with a quest for somewhere quiet to sit and read.

The result, thanks to Brazilian architects Atelier Branco Arquitetura, is a tree house made of glass in the tropical forests of São Paulo, about 450 kilometres southwest of Rio de Janeiro.

A place of “reverie and contemplation,” away from busy city life, was the owner’s goal. With too many books and enough time to read them, he wanted a place to unwind — not a home nor a holiday house, but something in between.

Thus, was born Casa Biblioteca, an international award-winner. It’s a residence the architects say went through three incarnations before they achieved what they and their client wanted: a getaway spot with 2,200 square feet spread over four levels.

Beneath top-floor bedrooms is the mid-level, pièce de résistance: the library and reading space, as well as an office. The kitchen, dining and living room are downstairs. Up on the fourth level is a huge terrace — a perfect spot to survey treetops or stars.

Save for those around the bathroom, Casa Biblioteca has no walls. Constructed of on-site concrete, it was cast in one day after two months of construction on the wooden forms. Inside, wood floors are garapeira — a yellow wood found in South America — and the glass exterior walls are framed in steel.

Casa Biblioteca, completed in 2015, cost \$166,000 and took 2-½ years to design and build.

Pep Pons, architect and a co-founder of Atelier Branco Arquitetura, answers some questions about Casa Biblioteca:

What inspired the design of Casa Biblioteca?

The inspiration for the home was the terrain. It was a steep terrain, so the only way we could work was doing these (four) levels.

The owner of the house is a



RICARDO BASSETTI

The office and reading areas open to the dining, living and kitchen areas below — and to the surrounding forest beyond the glass walls of Casa Biblioteca.



RICARDO BASSETTI

Built-ins, made of the South American garapeira wood, hold books and showcase knick-knacks.

philosopher and professor and he has an amazing and huge collection of newspapers. He had no more room for them in his offices. He needed a new place to live and to read — that’s why it is called Casa Biblioteca. So it is a library in the sense of storing the books and a place to read the books.

The roof is also part of the living space. How does the owner use it?

He said, “I want a place to read but I also want a place where I can look at the stars and smoke a cigar,” which is something he does everyday.

How does he have privacy with all those windows?

The natural surroundings are



GLEESON PAULINO

The design of Casa Biblioteca mirrors the steep terrain of the land. Dense forest provides total privacy.

enough. Originally, we put some curtains around the house and when the house was completed, he said they weren’t needed. The vegetation is so dense and the closest house to him is 200 metres away. The land originally was an old coffee plantation, but he has owned the land for 40 years and planted trees there which include the jabuticaba, pau Brasil and ipê amarelo.

Can you describe some of the challenges in building the house?

It was a concrete structure — so it takes a long time to prepare everything, and then you pour the concrete in one day. Actually, we had very few problems

during the construction. The only big problem was the time schedule. It was scheduled for eight months and it took two years. It was basically because we were preparing everything very carefully and we were a bit naive at the beginning of the construction.

We didn’t have that many problems because the client was super-patient and this helped us a lot because whenever we had a problem, we could solve it before actually having it. We had the time to think.

Did the heat and humidity affect the construction?

The trees around keep the temperature quite average — about 18 C. It never goes below 10 C.

> PROPERTY LAW

It can cost you to back out of a deal



Bob
Aaron
ADVICE

This past year’s GTA real estate market may become known as the year of aborted transactions.

Speaking to hundreds of real estate lawyers, both in person and online at a Law Society of Ontario seminar last month, Toronto lawyer Harry Herskowitz told of the “rapid and significant” decline in the GTA housing market as numerous buyers tried to back out of their purchase agreements.

Some were unable to sell their own homes for enough money to close the purchases they had agreed to at the peak of the market. Others were unable to obtain enough financing because the appraised values of their purchased homes were significantly lower than what they had agreed to pay.

Herskowitz attributes these developments to the fallout from the 15 per cent non-resident speculation tax on homes in southern Ontario, as well as the stress test introduced in 2018.

“The shifting market conditions,” Herskowitz noted, “served as a stark reminder, for both purchasers and (legal) practitioners alike, of the potential liability of defaulting purchasers in a declining real estate market.”

In a paper accompanying his talk, Herskowitz dealt with 15 court cases this year in which buyers failed to close on their purchases.

In the case of *Azzarello v. Shawqi*, the buyers signed an agreement to buy a home in Mississauga for \$1.555 million with a deposit of \$75,000. After several extensions, the buyers offered to close for about \$1.4 million, but the sellers rejected the offer. They ultimately resold the property for \$1.28 million.

The sellers were awarded damages against the backed-out buyers of \$308,688 — the difference between the contract price and the resale price, plus other expenses. The court ruled that the sellers were not obligated to accept a reduced price from the defaulting buyers. In the case of *Greco v. Padovani*, the buyers agreed to pay \$3.2 million for a luxury home in Richmond Hill, with a deposit of \$200,000. When they were unable to close on time, they paid a further \$200,000 deposit for what eventually became eight extensions of the closing date.

Ultimately, the buyers could not close and the property was relisted for \$2.499 million in a declining market. By the time the parties came to court last June, it had not been resold.

The court ordered the \$400,000 in deposit monies to be released to the sellers, while preserving the sellers’ right to sue for damages when the house was eventually sold.

In *Degner v. Cabral*, buyers beat out 15 competing bids to purchase a home for \$551,000. After they failed to close, the property was resold for \$450,000, and the sellers were awarded damages of \$100,092.

In his Law Society paper, Herskowitz concludes that these show how defaulting buyers risk losing their deposits, as well as being ordered to pay additional damages.

Clearly, consequences can be devastating with a signed purchase agreement in a falling real estate market. As always, the lesson is buyer beware.

Bob Aaron is a Toronto real estate lawyer and a contributing columnist for the Star. He can be reached at bob@aaroon.ca or on Twitter: @bobaaaron2

Streets will be pedestrian-friendly

MISSISSAUGA from H1

modern Distillery District, with walkable streets, shops, galleries, places where people want to gather,” Mississauga Mayor Bonnie Crombie said.

The makeover has begun with office buildings and condominiums rising around amenities that include the city’s Living Arts Centre, Playdium, Celebration Square, a Sheridan College campus, the Central Library and YMCA, Square One and two transit hubs.

Pedestrian-friendly streets with shops, eateries and public spaces hosting events are other integral elements.

“All the changes happening are very positive to the downtown,” Crombie said. “Forty-five years ago, that area of Hurontario Street was a farm with horses and cows. Many cities start with a town and build around it. We started with farmland.”

With essentially a blank slate, “we get to personalize and grow the downtown to our own vision,” Crombie added. “We want it to be the envy of the GTA and a model for other new cities to replicate and emulate.”

Developer Camrost Felcorp is creating the Exchange District mixed-use community. On three acres adjacent to Square One and steps from the Hurontario Light Rail Transit line projected to open in 2022, the neighbourhood will include four condo towers, a boutique

hotel and extensive retail space along the future Exchange Street.

The first condo tower, the 60-storey EX1, sold out and Camrost has launched EX2, a 42-storey building with 395 suites.

Fully understanding the vision for the area and setting shared goals took considerable time, said Joseph Feldman, director of development at Camrost Felcorp.

“We are doing our thing, which is urban international development, and aligning it with the downtown strategy,” Feldman said. “We worked long and hard with the city to finesse the details.”

The Exchange District will have a European esthetic with a raised open square, or piazza, that Feldman describes as “the Spanish Steps of Mississauga” — in reference to the iconic stairway in Rome, Italy — for people to rest, shop, dine and meet.

“With the hotel and all of that, it will be very downtown in nature, very urban,” Feldman said. “The next push is to ensure the urban fabric is laid down properly, and we hope we are a catalyst for other development.”

EX2’s design (by IBI Group Architects), in metal and glass, will have offset symmetrical blocks rotated 90 degrees. All of the Exchange District towers are designed as a masculine counterpoint to the nearby and internationally acclaimed Absolute “Marilyn Monroe” Tow-



RICK MADONIK TORONTO STAR

Joseph Feldman, left, and Christopher Castellano of Camrost Felcorp with sales associate Deana Popovic at EX2 sales centre.

> EX2 AT THE EXCHANGE DISTRICT

Location: 151 City Centre Dr.

Developer: Camrost Felcorp

Architects: IBI Group (residential tower); BDP Architects (pedestrian spaces)

Suites: One bedroom, one-plus-den, two-bedroom and two-plus-den, from 420 to 1,500 square feet. Prices starting in the \$400,000s.

Amenities: Gym with circuit training and cardio area, plus a running track with 360-degree

views; co-working space with conference rooms; resident wine storage; social room with catering kitchen, private dining room and access to outdoor dining space; multi-purpose games room and lounge; outdoor sundeck with garden patio and barbecues.

Contact: TheExchangeDistrict.com. Sales centre at 151 City Centre Dr., Suite 900, Mississauga

ers, a pair of curvy highrises designed by Ma Yansong of MAD Architects in Beijing.

The double-height lobby of EX2 is proposed to include direct access to a grocery store, plus over 10,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor amenities topped by the 41st-floor Sky Restaurant.

Feldman sees the Exchange District becoming a focal point for Mississauga. “A tremendous effort is going into this and the city wants to make its downtown world-class.”

Crombie predicted that when Mississauga residents talk about going downtown in the near future, they’ll mean their own city centre. She said there will be 25 new buildings, with 12 million sq. ft. of office space, in the Exchange District within the next 10 years. Residents, workers and visitors will be served by Mississauga, GO transit and the LRT.

“We are trying to put Mississauga on the map with arts and culture and we are doing our best to create a livable city.”