

New York. Paris. London. Toronto?

Canada's most populous city is undergoing an architectural and cultural renaissance. With a revitalized museum courtesy of Daniel Libeskind, an art gallery set to be transformed by Frank Gehry and grand old Victorians dotted in between, there is a belief that Toronto is finally coming into its own. There is also a palpable sense of excitement as Torontonians feel the tectonic plates beneath their feet shifting as their city is poised to join the ranks of its fellow, worldly metropolises. From Donald Trump to Kazakhstani development firm Bazis International, all eyes are on Toronto and, as a result, foreign cranes have been sprouting in equally rapid measures alongside the high rises. Could it be that the city the UN calls the world's most multicultural is finally getting a landscape to match its cosmopolitan people?

But what any Torontonian will tell discerning, international real estate investor is that this boom is not confined to Toronto proper. Since the city amalgamated with five surrounding municipalities ten years ago, Toronto has become the fifth largest city in North America, after Mexico City, New York City, Chicago and Los Angeles. The result? Neighbouring suburbs—or the Greater Toronto Area (GTA)—are now closer than ever to the city and have been the greatest benefactors of this renaissance, with growth at first matching and now *exceeding* that of Toronto's. Nowhere is this more evident than at the north end of the city's edge, in the Town of Markham.

Just a 20-minute drive from the downtown core, Markham has seen a remarkable 41 per cent growth in the last decade. With IBM, Sun Microsystems and Motorola calling Markham home for their Canadian headquarters, the town has been dubbed the "Silicon Valley of the North" and highly educated and skilled professionals are also making Markham home. Residents are lured not only by proximity to employment, but by the town's lower taxes and pleasing mix of urbanity and natural environment.

Fifteen years ago when Markham was on the cusp of its incredible growth, town council was determined to avoid the fate so many other suburbs before it had fallen victim to—satellites of Toronto that encouraged sprawl, congestion and excessive car use, and devoid of the natural public spaces. The town knew it had to plan carefully to accommodate and manage rapid growth, and this couldn't be done without the cooperation of developers.

The Remington Group Inc., a GTA developer with 60 years of experience in residential, industrial and commercial real estate, stepped up to the plate. After years of constructing subdivision after subdivision, the venerable developer was ready to do things differently. Remington sat down with the

Town of Markham and agreed on the principles of sustainable development for its most ambitious project to date, Downtown Markham—a 243-acre, \$3-billion mixed-use development. And Remington was ready to commit in a major way: Downtown Markham would take ten years of planning in cooperation with municipal and provincial governments, in addition to environmental consultants and advocates. The project had a 20-year horizon from start to finish, a vision nothing short of transforming and redefining the North American suburban experience.

The Remington Group looked to Europe for inspiration when planning Downtown Markham. The developer found that European neighbourhoods were vibrant, each with a distinct personality and rich combination of retail, residential and commercial life. Convinced this model could be exported to Canada, The Remington Group drew plans for what would be the country's largest mixed-use development, and eventually, North America's largest, Leadership-in-Energy-and-Environmental-Design (LEED)-registered development.

The goal from the outset was for all residents to live, work and play, all within walking distance. Careful attention was paid to scale. No soaring skyscrapers or six-lane thoroughfares. Instead, Downtown Markham will feature low rises and welcoming, human-proportioned structures. Car-free living becomes a reality, thanks to wide, tree-lined, pedestrian-friendly boulevards that lure residents out of their cars and on-foot along cosmopolitan gallerias with small boutiques. Downtown Markham's commercial and residential areas will be interspersed with airy, green, public spaces. Large piazzas, similar to those found in Europe, would act as natural gathering places for residents to enjoy the scenery and people watching after enjoying a leisurely day of shopping, or to briefly unwind over the workday lunch hour. Both bustle and serenity can be had.

Concurrent to Remington's plans to create 72 acres of parks and green spaces were strategies to protect existing ecologies in the Downtown Markham area. One of the province's most sensitive and spectacular ecosystems—the Rouge River Valley—meanders through the heart of the development and the developer was bound and determined to build thoughtfully around it, not over it. Rather than simply building parks in the project, Remington worked with multiple levels of government, environmental advocates and the public to guide the project towards building homes and businesses

into the natural landscape. The developer even reconnected an old tributary to the Rouge River that had been filled in by a farmer's field years earlier, creating a more natural environment for flora and fauna to thrive while eliminating the need for a man-made flood plain. The result was a win-win situation for both man and Mother Nature. Stunning, varied, and unobstructed views of the Rouge River can be found in Downtown Markham's condominiums and town homes, particularly from units in the new luxury Verdale on the Valley condominium, while the Rouge River's habitat is preserved, guaranteeing both the view and the environment's safety forever.

Remington has embraced this new era of outdoor living spaces designed to engage residents physically, intellectually and emotionally. This philosophy is entirely new not only to the suburbs, but to cities too, which in decades past have become static, concrete centres where green spaces are considered adornments. As part of its LEED commitment, Remington designed Downtown Markham residences to maximize the amount of natural light residences are exposed to. Use of glass doors, screens and strategically-placed windows has made this possible. This not only reduces electricity consumption, but also transforms the space and enhances the interplay between interior and exterior environments. The way the new, savvier generation of urbanites see it, this isn't merely a matter of improved quality of life. Proximity to green spaces enjoy a corresponding rise in property values, as residents find appeal in the privacy and serenity windows to nature offer, a feature difficult to find in the city.

Remington also knew that the lush scenery outside had to be complemented by equally impressive finishes on the inside. With a demanding, highly educated and sophisticated clientele, the developer understood that its future tenants sought Downtown Markham's European lifestyle because they had actually experienced it. Thoughtful design and convenient functionality were priorities from the outset.

Remington's latest Downtown Markham condominium, The Verdale on the Valley, is a luxury, 10-storey building that boasts elegant and sophisticated suites that range from studios, one bedrooms, one plus dens, two-bedrooms and two plus dens. Expansive balconies, patios and terraces are complemented by nine or ten-foot ceilings. No detail is left unattended—suites all feature custom baseboards, door frames, casings and quality-finished hardware.

Each kitchen is fit for a chef, boasting six major appliances, granite countertops and ceramic or mirrored backsplash. Cabinetry is finely crafted with glass accent doors with task-lighting beneath upper cabinets, and wood or ceramic flooring complete the kitchen's elegant functionality. Bathrooms have marble floors and countertops, and frameless glass shower stalls or a contemporary soaker tub with polished chrome fixtures invite residents to relax under custom halogen lighting.

If residents were to venture outside their sanctuary-like suites, they would find The Verdale on the Valley's amenities to suit their discerning tastes. Club Verdale offers residents and guests a fully-equipped exercise facility, indoor pool, Jacuzzi, steam room, massage and treatment room. For entertaining, there's also a lounge/party room and games area with a fireplace, high-tech screening room and demonstration kitchen. Award-winning landscape architects designed a stunning 9,000-square foot courtyard complete with an outdoor media room, barbeque terrace and lounge chairs. Trees and a double-sided water wall act as natural sound barriers to accommodate group events or individual, restful relaxation.

The Verdale on the Valley is a promising investment, and not only for its desirable location, innovative vision and luxurious design. The building represents an investment in sustainable development, an issue that is quickly climbing the list of priorities for tenants, residents and investors today. Consumers realize how sustainable design helps their wallets. The cost savings realized through low-flow faucets, dual flush toilets and high-efficiency showerheads are just the beginning, and Remington has built the green right into the bricks and mortars by following the rigorous standards set by LEED.

LEED certification is awarded only if all the sustainability requirements are met within each of five environmental categories: sustainable sites; water efficiency; energy and atmosphere; materials and resources; and indoor environmental quality. There are LEED points associated with every stage of design and construction. Ultimately projects are certified based on the total point score, following an independent review and audits of selected credits of documentation submitted after construction is complete.

A LEED Silver or Gold design will produce a significant reduction in energy costs, sometimes to a tune of 30 to 50 per cent. Those are significant cost savings that appeal to buyers. While purchasing a LEED residence may cost more at the outset, the money saved in the long run more than makes up for the upfront cost. Smart investors residential and commercial alike are realizing this, and if the uptake of

Downtown Markham space is any indication, they are finding that green building means greener pocketbooks, too.

In Downtown Markham residences, non-toxic paint, carpet and thermally-insulated windows come standard. The development meets its LEED requirements in more creative and technologically innovative ways. Suites have individually controlled energy recovery ventilators to recover heated or cooled air to decrease energy costs and seasonally controlled heating and air conditioning for greater energy efficiency. Buildings even use cisterns to collect rainwater to hydrate the gardens.

These bricks and mortar elements complement Remington's grander vision encouraging transit use as much as possible. With the municipality's much-lauded rapid transit in full swing and high occupancy lanes in the works, Downtown Markham residents reap the benefit from their proximity to effective, mass transit without having to drive to it first. All 243 acres of Downtown Markham will ultimately be accessible by transit. With the occupancy of Motorola and Honeywell already confirmed in Downtown Markham, with more businesses to come, walking to and from work can be a reality for the development's residents.

The result? Homebuyers have rushed to occupy Downtown Markham and the first condominium developments sold out immediately. House prices in Markham continue to soar in value. In mid-2007, the average apartment price in Markham actually exceeded that of Toronto due to the city's glut in supply. House prices—whether detached, semi-detached or townhome—continue to keep competitive pace with Toronto, with the added bonus of bearing lower property taxes.

Today, Downtown Markham is on its seventh condominium—The Verdale on the Valley—its most luxurious building yet. Lured by the unobstructed, lifetime-guaranteed view of the Rouge River Valley, the pleasurable mixed-use lifestyle and the ability to enjoy urbanity in the lush landscape of this suburb, Downtown Markham has redefined what it means to live just outside the city. It is becoming a city of its own, with visions of New York, London and Paris to guide its growth.

The development's newest luxury condominium, The Verdale on the Valley is now accepting registrations at www.downtownmarkham.ca or call 905-948-9900. Prices start from the \$190,000s to over \$440,900. Occupancy is expected in April 2009.