

## ARCHITECTURE

# Tower promises much-needed seniors' housing

Condo geared to retirees is a thoughtful addition to Etobicoke's former motel strip



**JOHN BENTLEY MAYS**  
THE PERFECT HOUSE

Sooner or later, just about everyone ponders the last day of work, and the beginning of what each of us hopes will be a long, pleasant retirement. It's reassuring, in the midst of a condominium surge pitched mainly to young working people, to discover some Toronto architects and developers who are doing apartments especially suited to the needs of retired folks.

The project that prompted me to think about these matters is called *Hearthstone by the Bay*. Now being marketed by Davies Smith Developments for a site on the south Etobicoke lakefront, this condominium tower promises to be better looking than most of its neighbours in the architectural disaster zone of the old motel strip. Its tan detailing will contrast nicely with the dishwasher-dull cladding of the condo stacks round about, and its ground-floor level will provide some much-needed shops to this shop-challenged part of suburban Toronto.

But what makes *Hearthstone* notable is less its exterior demeanour, which is largely unexceptional, than the consideration the project shows for its target market of affluent seniors. Designed by Roland Rom Colthoff and Susan Ruptash, principals in the Toronto firm Quadrangle Architects, the 18-sto-

rey tower is the sum of many small moves intended to make late-life dwelling a matter of convenience and safety.

The building features apartments with doors a little wider than usual, and non-slip flooring throughout. Light switches are lower than they are in most other condominiums, and wall plugs for electricity and phones are higher. Provision has been made in each bathroom for the installation, when the time comes, of grab bars. Lever handles are used on every door, to make opening and closing easier for people with hands less flexible than they once were.

Now being offered for between \$200,000 and \$500,000, the units range in size from a one-bedroom at 611 square feet to a two-bedroom-plus-den at 1,273 square feet. Bedrooms are small, but all suites come with at least one sun-room. All but one model have walkout balconies, and some are furnished with ample terraces.

The goal of the design, the architects explained, is to make independent, comfortable living possible for the homeowners for as long as possible.

In addition to the numerous small refinements to each well-arranged suite, *Hearthstone* also will offer a kind of clubhouse, with a beauty salon, massage parlour, lounge and tuck shop, and a consulting room for doctor's visits. There is a dining room, and a pub. One level of the podium is to be devoted to offices, presumably of the kind that seniors need more than most other people: dental, medical, chiropractic.

And, I hope, psychiatric. The incidence of depression and substance abuse, unfortunately, increase with age. Even the well-off



homeowners at *Hearthstone* will surely need the services of trained counsellors and psychotherapists, along with doctors for the aches and ailments that come with growing older.

But along with professional aids to emotional and mental well-being, seniors also need something of the vibrancy and pulse of urban life to keep them — I almost wrote *us*, because I am soon to be one of them — engaged with the excitement of living.

Whatever its architectural excellences, *Hearthstone* is almost certainly the right building in the wrong place. It shares with its neighbours a forlorn wedge of land between the Gardiner Expressway and south Etobicoke's lakeshore that was poorly planned in the waning days of old Metropolitan Toronto.

The area was surrendered to real estate developers all too eager to throw up condominium towers by the water, but careless about the quality of life on the ground for the thousands of people lured by the prospect of sensational views of the downtown skyline and Lake Ontario, and a nearby park.

The result is a non-place with all the heavy-handed deadliness of suburbia at its worse: plenty of bedrooms, almost no retail, a mass of unco-ordinated details and an-

An artist's rendering of *Hearthstone by the Bay* by Davies Smith Developments.

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gles, and ill-considered scales.

*Hearthstone* will stand on a good corner location, at Marine Parade Drive and Lake Shore Boulevard West, and the architects have designed a building that should hold this corner well. It's unfortunate that such a solid, thoughtful piece of architecture has to rub shoulders with so much that's ordinary or downright bad.

But we can hope that the planners now in charge of city building will encourage other architects to think more about the possibilities of geriatric architecture, and press developers to make more of such housing available, at all spots on the sliding scale of affordability.