

Lofty living in historic Cabbagetown college

Renovation of old building has created 10 apartments

BY PAT BRETHOUR

AT THE TURN of the century, the handsome brick building at the corner of Sumach and Gerrard Streets was home base for a small group of pioneers — women who hadn't allowed the University of Toronto's refusal to admit them to its medical school to discourage them from their quest to become doctors. Built in 1890 in the Romanesque Revival style, the building functioned as the Ontario Medical College for Women from that year until 1905, when the university finally decided to admit women to its classes. For two more years, it functioned as a dispensary which would become, in another location, Women's College Hospital. In 1907, the building was sold, and for much of the rest of the century was converted to industrial use, for which its sturdy construction suited it well.

Cabbagetown residents will have noticed some changes to the old building this summer. Engineer Bob Mitchell and his wife Beverly, who bought the building in May, have been hard at work on a renovation project that will transform a ramshackle machine shop into 10 new condominium apartments in one of the city's most desirable downtown neighborhoods.

Mr. Mitchell's pictures of the building, taken before he began work, are ample evidence of the labor involved. The exterior — which has been historically designated because of its architectural style and the building's original use — had been modified over the years to make room for the loading doors and other conveniences demanded by industry. The interior, too, was filled with the evidence of a half century of industrial use.

Because of the historical board's designation, work on the exterior was essentially a painstaking restoration job, involving stone quarried in the United States to match old lintels, and brick scavenged from local demolition sites. Inside, the building has been completely gutted, insulated and rebuilt. The result is a series of apartments that offer all the spacious amenities of loft living, without the uncertain legal status that so often accompanies such residences in downtown Toronto.

Mr. Mitchell says he and his wife had little difficulty in convincing the city of the wisdom of converting the property from industrial to residential use. Their track record — this is the third such project they've taken on — and the fact that the old college is located in the midst of a residential area made the debate a short one.

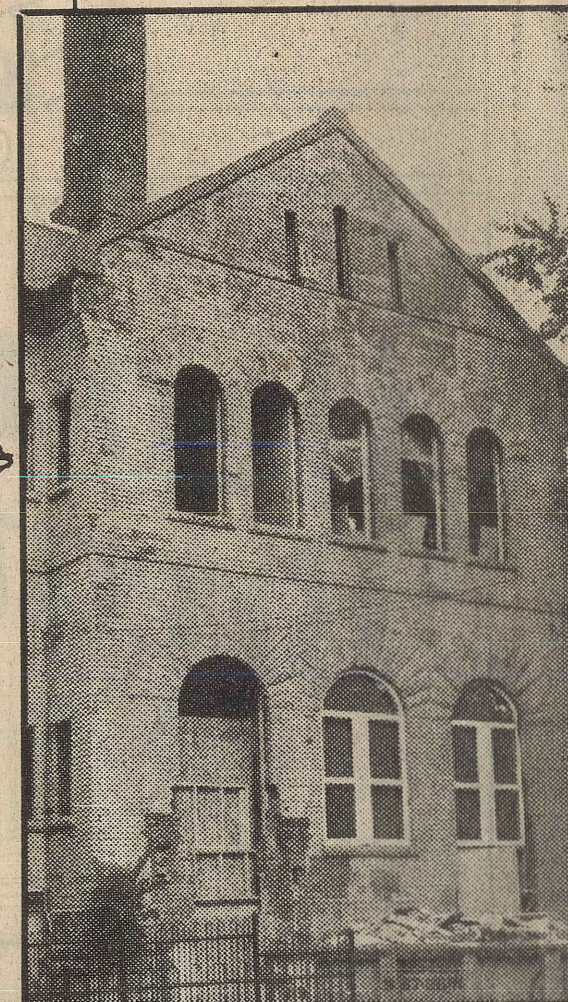
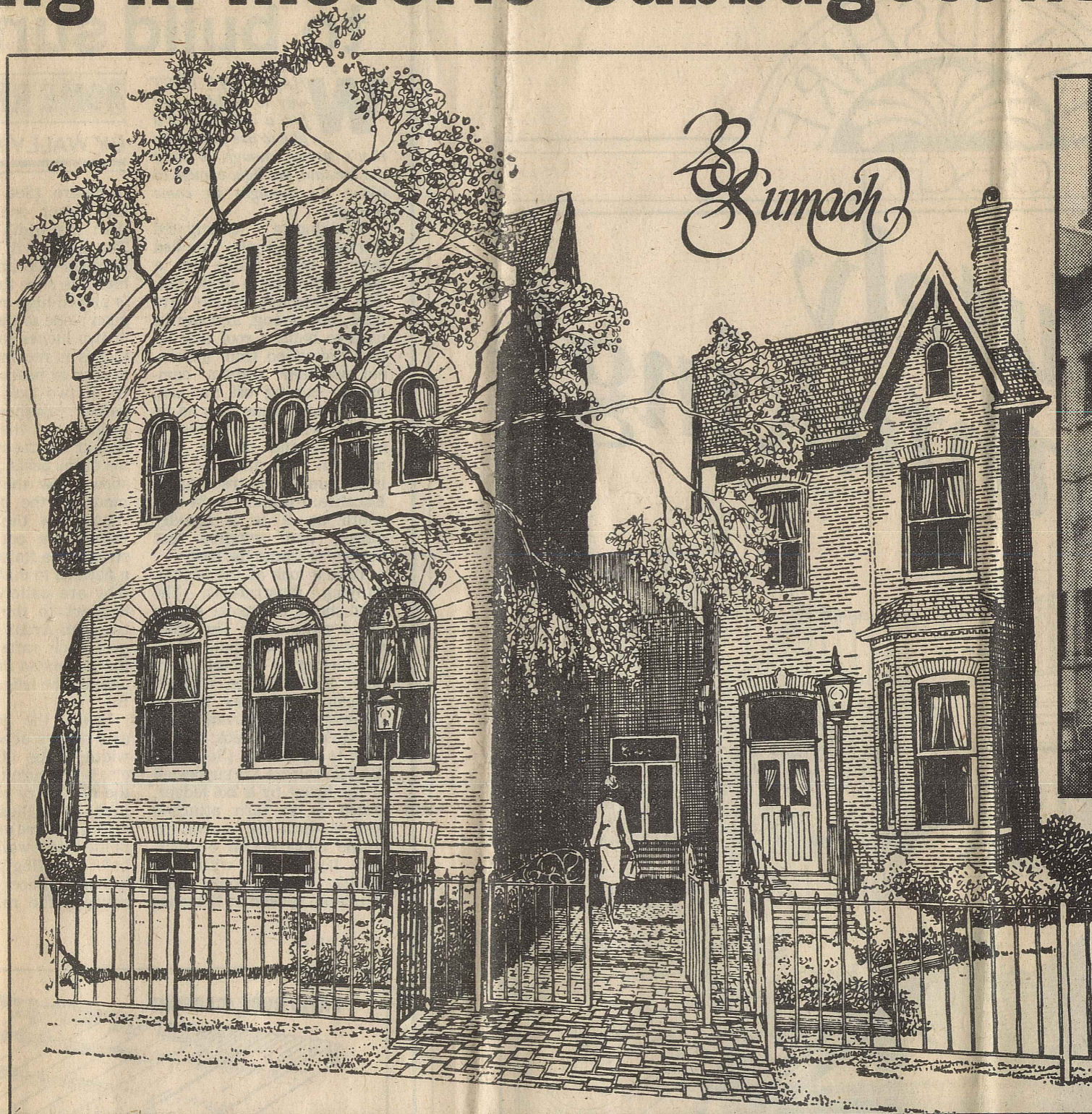
The condominiums at 289 Sumach St. are located close to the downtown core in an established residential community. Riverdale Park, with miles of trails leading to Wilcot Creek Park and Edwards Gardens, is within walking distance.

St. Martin's elementary school, with a day-care centre, is just down the street, and St. Joseph's private high school and Jarvis Collegiate are a short bus ride away. Shopping, transit and major highways are nearby.

The open two and three-story residences feature a loft layout with 12 to 14-foot ceilings. Each home is equipped with extensive skylighting and roof windows. Other features include sandblasted brick, exposed structural steel, roof terraces, fireplaces, ceiling fans and track lighting.

The minimal common elements of the project promise low maintenance costs in future.

Cobblestone walkways and an iron gateway and fence help maintain the historical heritage. Parking is in an indoor garage.



High ceilings and skylights are some of the features of the loft-style apartments at 289 Sumach St. Prices at the building start at \$89,900.

The fifth unit is an excellent example of the loft style. From the main entry, steps lead down into the foyer area with a large closet. The foyer is open to a living/dining room with high ceilings and fan-top windows. To the right of the foyer is the European-style kitchen.

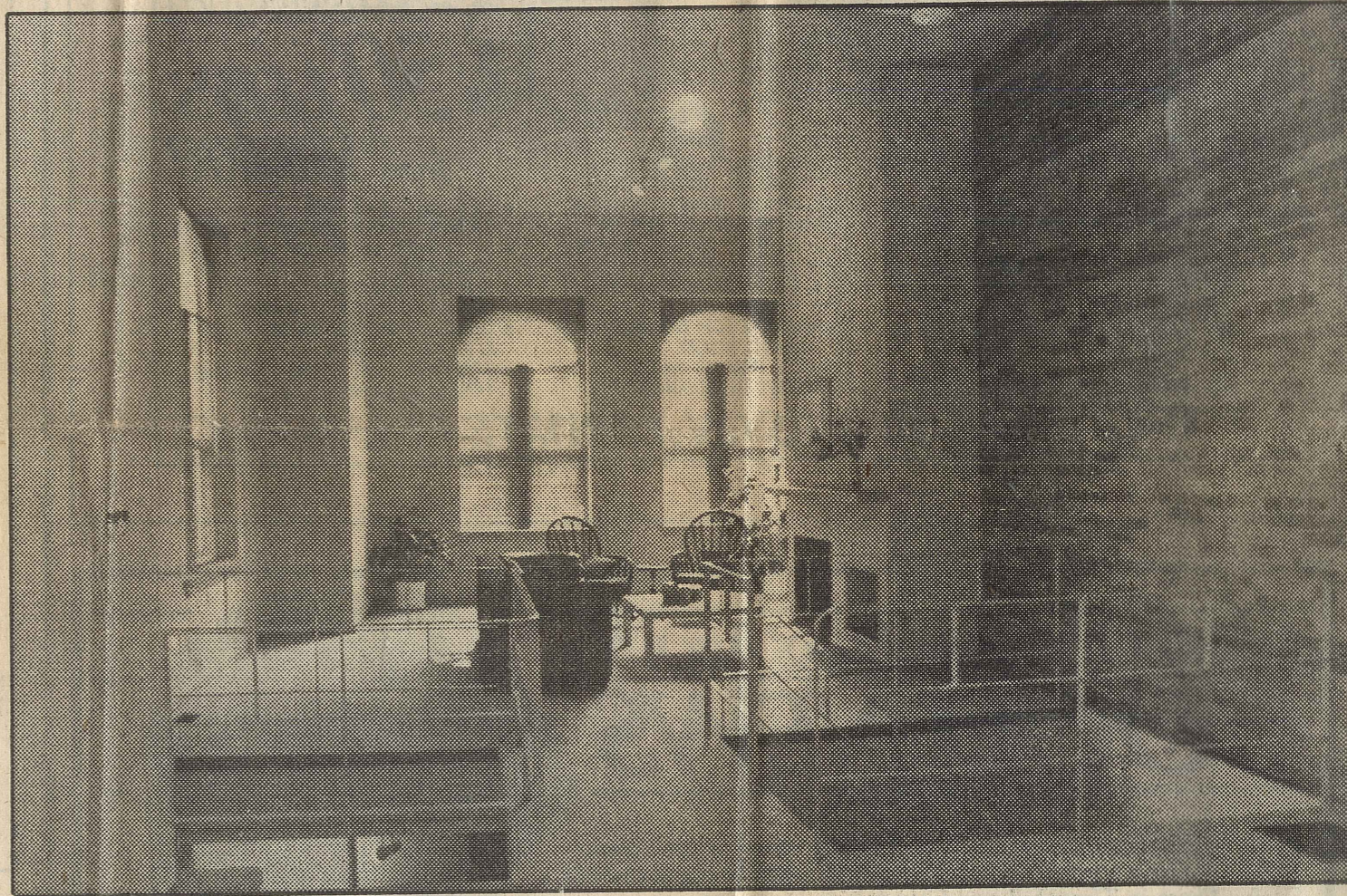
An open stairway, overlooking the living room, leads to the second level of the condominium. On this level are a den and a bedroom with two closets, a skylight and a three-piece bath.

The third level has an open bedroom with a walk-in closet, a three-piece ensuite bath and a stair to the roof terrace.

Buyer response to the project has been good. Of the 10 units available, seven have already been sold. Prices for the remaining suites, which offer 800 to 1,800 square feet of floor space, range from \$89,900 to \$144,990. Financing is available. A down payment of 10 per cent is required.

Also for sale at the site is a 2,500-square-foot house on an adjacent property. This three-story home features three bedrooms, five fireplaces, a skylight shaft from the roof to the first floor and a private garage with entry to the kitchen. Like the condominium building, the house at 287 Sumach has been historically designated for its unique architectural design. Finishing features like those offered in the condominiums next door, plus French doors, stained glass windows, two terraces and original nineteenth century woodwork, combine to create a luxurious home.

The sales office is open Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Call 967-5884 for an appointment.



BUILDER PROFILE

Lofty ideas

Through inspiration and hard work, developer Bob Mitchell turns old buildings new again

BY JANE VAN DER VOORT

What may look like the musty interior of an old church or a tired inner-city garment factory shines with living potential for Toronto developer Bob Mitchell.

"One of the key things I try and do is look at the light and volume of space," says Mitchell, owner of Mitchell & Associates, who has converted more than a dozen old

buildings in Toronto into unique loft condominiums over the last 20 years. "Older buildings allow you to do that and smaller buildings have the advantage of more perimeter per volume. You have to go only, say, 50 feet to a window or outside space instead of hundreds of feet."

His current projects include The Glebe, a 32-condominium loft conversion using an extension of the 1912 Riverdale Presbyterian

Church on Pape Avenue just south of The Danforth. In 1990, Mitchell created Hepbourne Hall, a 21-loft renovation of the annex building at Dovercourt-St. Paul's Presbyterian Church, where the Maple Leafs' Conn Smythe once taught Sunday school. The 1898 Ontario Medical College for Women, now a heritage Romanesque Revival building, was a machine shop when Mitchell saw it in 1983. Into it he built 10 suites and restored the facade according to photos in a century-old calendar that workmen found behind the baseboards.

"Essentially, I design for myself. I'm at the peak of the Baby Boom demographic curve and there's a

lot of people out there who are interested in the same things that I am," Mitchell says.

The developer also has new construction in his lineup with Mayfair Walk, nine townhomes at Logan Avenue and The Danforth, as well as 12 lofts at The Greenhouse on Queen Street East in The Beach, directly across from Kew Park.

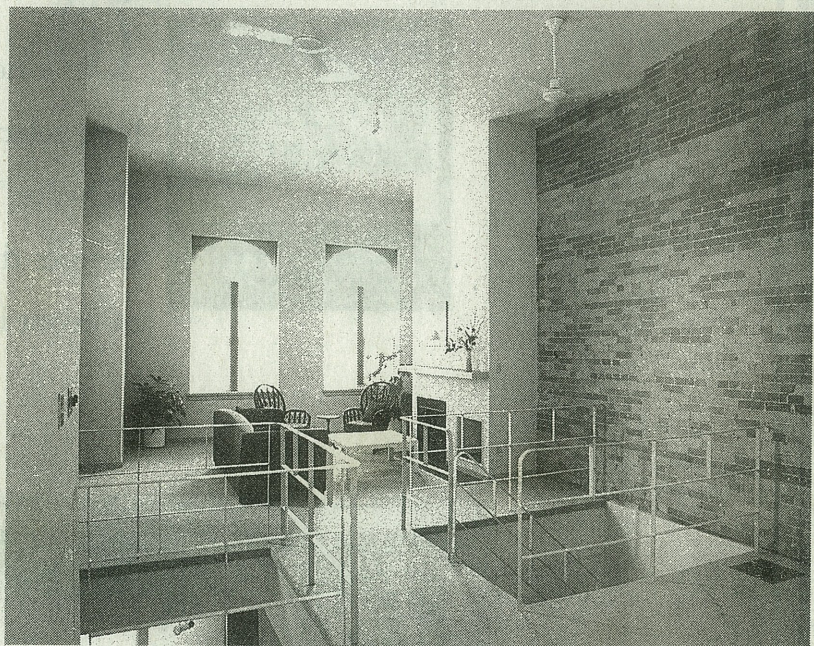
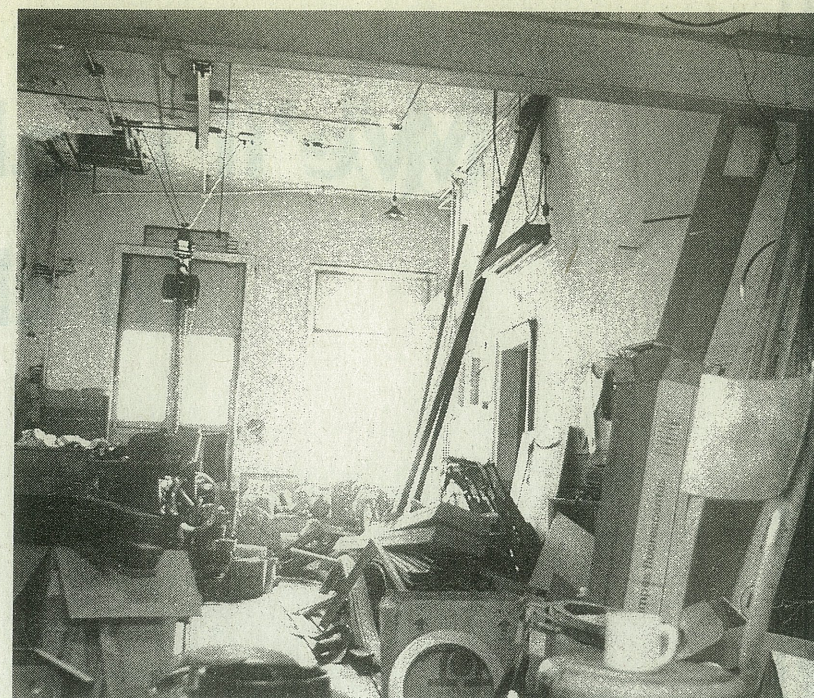
Still, he's working with small numbers that allow each suite to be tailored to its buyer.

"We were a little bit disbelieving when Bob said we could do whatever we wanted," says Lin Gitterman, 48. She and husband Michael bought a top-floor, 1,700-square-foot loft for \$259,000 in the knitting mill that Mitchell renovated at 670 Richmond St. West four years ago. "We thought, 'Okay, where will he draw the line?' But he didn't ever draw the line!"

Instead, they were able to change their kitchen space by removing a powder room, moved the fireplace into a corner, ran the stairs up the side of the room instead of across, and removed all internal doors except for sliding "barn doors" in the master bedroom.

The downtown condo just south of funky Queen Street West is a big change for the pair who had previously been homeowners outside the city. "We look around for a house each spring when I get garden lust," says Gitterman, who now walks to work. "This year we've come to the realization that we're not about to move because we love the community in our building and we love our home."

Based on the work they saw Mitchell doing in the next building, the couple bought their condo. "There were just two units left when we came so we had to make a decision pretty quickly," Gitterman says. All of the developer's projects in the last decade have completely and quickly sold-out through word of mouth and his Internet contact list. "It keeps me in touch with the end user - it keeps me sharp," he says.



PHOTOS: BOB MITCHELL

Before and after: The building at 289 Sumach St. was renovated into attractive lofts. High ceilings allow tall windows to let in lots of sunlight.

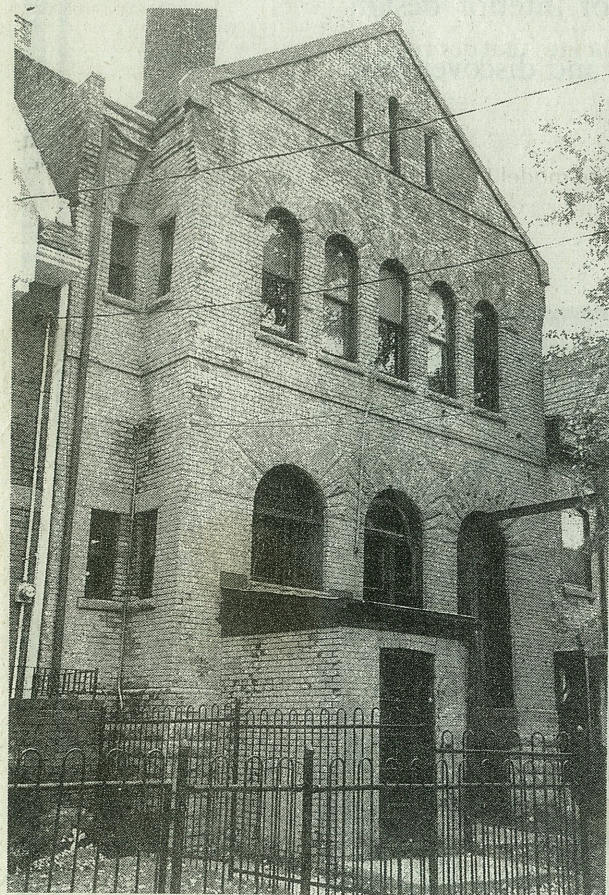
He's also kept on his toes by residents in the areas where he builds.

"What makes a neighbourhood is people. Sometimes it's a real education process you have to do with the existing neighbourhoods," Mitchell says of long-time homeowners disgruntled by the construction process and the increased density within their communities.

As well, he says, redeveloping buildings that are "past their life

cycle" benefits the environment. "All of our units are energy efficient with various 'green features.' And there is inherent energy conservation to re-developing the downtown," Mitchell says, citing the ease of subway travel instead of a daily drive to work.

Bob Mitchell's developments can be seen at www.mitchell-lofts.com or call 416-698-7174.



PHOTOS: BOB MITCHELL

Before and after: Mitchell & Associates has renovated more than a dozen old buildings into homes such as this one at 289 Sumach St.