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Homes

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Your weekend guide to new home developments

Warehouse condos create lofty spaces

By DIANNE MALEY

WE'RE ALL ARTISTS AT HEART. In our secret selves we stand in vast, skylit studios with wooden floors and soaring ceilings, painting, sculpting, staining glass.

Or perhaps it's music. In a huge room with vaulted ceilings we sit, alone, at the piano.

Bob Mitchell, engineer turned developer, knows this. Since selling homes is, selling dreams, Mr. Mitchell has decided to cash in on our fantasies.

From an old felt factory at 41 Shanly St. near Bloor and Dovercourt, Mr. Mitchell has created 10 truly offbeat spaces: loft condominiums. The warehouse flavor — open spaces, brick, ceiling timbers and steel — has been retained and enhanced. But each unit has a fireplace, a big, fenced-in roof garden with a wall of windows, and a modern kitchen and bath.

Public response was encouraging. Within a week of placing an ad in the paper, all the units had been sold. Buyers with vision, undeterred by the eyesore of a building before them, chose their units from floor plans and a cardboard model.

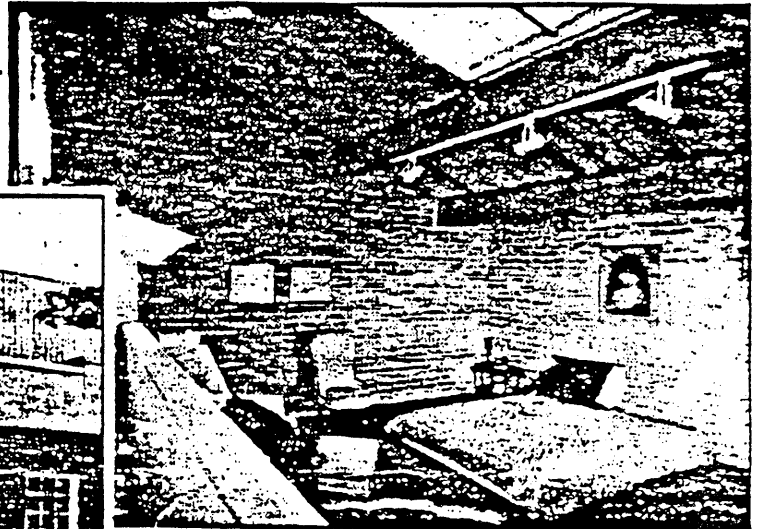
The neighbors were pleased too — an essential part of the conversion process. "Neighbors had been complaining to their alderman for years about this building," Mr. Mitchell says.

The building, which had been a livery stable at the turn of the century, was ripe for conversion. It is in a residential neighborhood, so its use did not conform to city bylaws.

Only a select few industrial buildings are convertible.

"The city is very concerned about keeping its industrial base intact," Mr. Mitchell says. "We looked at some buildings downtown a couple of years ago, but we just couldn't persuade (the city) that converting to residential was the right thing to do. What would have been a nice project just died on the board."

John Carbone, president of Building Resource Group, is familiar with the prob-



Left, unfinished warehouse facade belies interior work. Inside, light floods lofts and rooms below from roof windows in sloping ceilings, skylights and walls of glass.

lem. "Developers have their eyes on the garment district (Spadina Avenue), but the city won't let them do it," he says. Mr. Carbone was one of them.

Also, as chairman of the HUDAC renovation committee, he helped create the Ontario Government's "convert to rent" program. The program offers interest-free loans of \$7,000 a unit to people who convert industrial, commercial or institutional space to rental housing.

While the idea was good, limits to conversion appear excessive. Expensive and time-consuming "zoning nightmares" make it unattractive, Mr. Carbone says.

The city has a list of buildings it would like to see converted; Dan Burns of the city's Planning and Development Department says Spadina Avenue is definitely not on it.

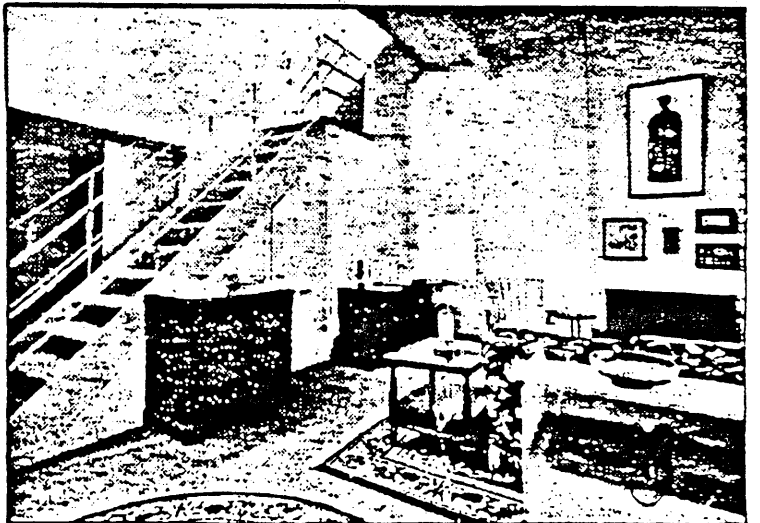
"There are 6,000 jobs in the garment district in the garment industry alone," Mr. Burns says. Then there are the printing companies and hundreds of other small firms.

"We're interested in proposals for lower Bathurst south of Queen," he offers. "We would also entertain proposals for King Street east of Parliament." Both areas are considered primarily residential.

Such proposals, if they come, likely would be for condominiums. Despite the interest-free loans, very little rental conversion is taking place.

"The only conversion to rental in Toronto was done by Cityhome," the city's non-profit housing arm, Mr. Burns says. "This is just another aspect of the general reluctance of people to get into rental housing these days."

"Rental is still a less attractive option for developers because the rental returns don't justify the expense," Mr. Mitchell



PHOTOS: JOHN McNEILL

says. Also, there is "a lot of aggravation with tenants. It's more fun building than fixing leaky faucets."

Toni Farley, co-ordinator of the convert to rent program, admits that "response has been a little slow." A total of \$18.2-million has been allocated for the loans, which are available in Toronto, Ottawa and Sudbury.

"I am very optimistic that it will pick up," she says. Anyone interested can call Mrs. Farley at 585-6391.

Oddly enough, the thrust to convert has not been directed to lofts and studios illegally used as residences. "Current loft

space has an economic function," Mr. Burns says. "We have not been asked to look at it."

For those who feel constrained by conventional spaces, warehouse conversion offers an interesting alternative. Units at 41 Shanly range in size from 800 to 2,000 square feet and were priced from \$59,900 to \$114,900. Other such projects are in the works.

"It's very satisfying to take something that's a piece of junk and turn it into something that to me is a piece of art," Mr. Mitchell says.

INSIDE

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ARCHITECTURE

Innovative lofts have aged well in 20 years

41 Shanly St. is strangely unfinished but deserves respect

If nothing else, 41 Shanly St. is an example of how even the most modest industrial building can find new meaning and live happily ever after as a place for people to live.

Built as the Dominion Felt Works, it was a nondescript structure just west of Dovercourt Rd. in the heart of a stable neighbourhood. In the early 1980s, it was converted into a loft residence, which it remains today.

Critic's Eye

CHRISTOPHER HUME



Though stucco isn't as trendy as it was 20 years ago, at 41 Shanly it seems to have withstood the vicissitudes of time and weather change in reasonable style.

That's not to say it's especially attractive, but on the other hand, it fits into the neighbourhood so well it's almost invisible.

Still, even after two decades, the complex is strangely unfinished, above all on the east side, where the neighbours park their cars and a gravel path leads to a row of front doors.

On the west side, where garage doors dominate, the complex looks more like a storage facility than a human habitation.

But given how innovative the scheme was — and is — it deserves our respect.

Grade B

Christopher Hume is The Star's urban issues reporter. In this weekly feature, he rates the appearance of condos around town. He can be reached at chume@thestar.ca



RICHARD LAUTENS/TORONTO STAR

STORAGE FRONT: The garage doors are unattractive, but this condo fits the neighbourhood.

Warehouse converted into New York-style condominiums

By Anne Fitterer

About five years ago, a warehouse at 41 Shanley St., was converted into eight unique condominium homes, reminiscent of the New York-style, studio/loft residences. One unit is now on the market.

The architecturally designed condominium homes in the former warehouse, two blocks north of Bloor Street West at Dovercourt Road, were created under engineer-turned-developer Bob Mitchell.

Unit 7, listed for sale for \$159,000, includes some outstanding highlights. The unusual two-storey condo residence has a large studio with skylights; large roof-top lounging deck with pergola, planters and privacy fence; free-standing fireplace; and a dining area on a mezzanine.

A long hall entry provides access to a large, main-floor studio. Designed in open concept, it incorporates a dramatic living room/family room; entertainment areas; a small cosy den/TV room tucked in behind a free-standing fireplace; and through swinging french doors, a music room or office/library.

Some of the original duct

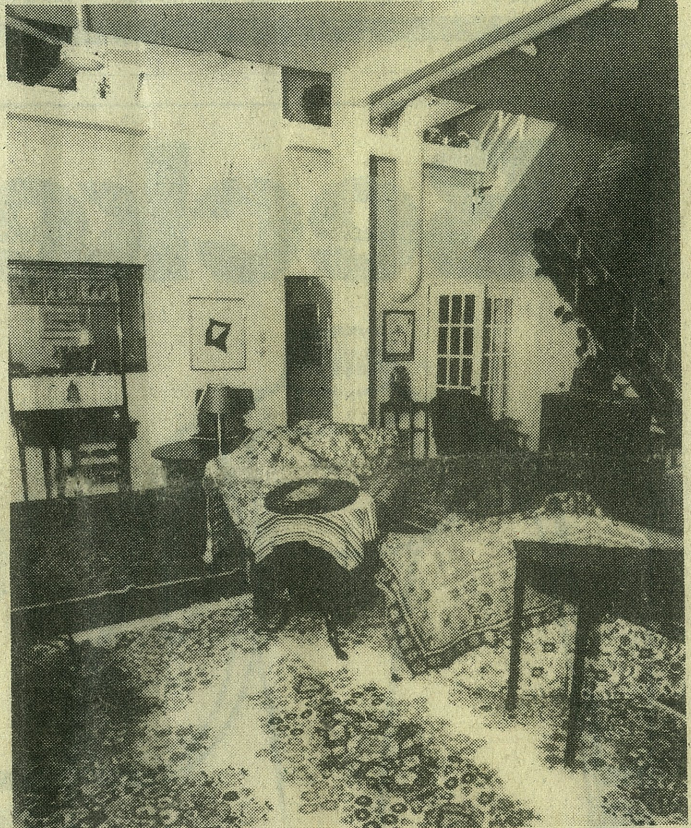
work and piping of the warehouse has been retained and supplies the home with forced air gas heating as well as creating a high tech and interesting atmosphere.

Part of the open studio rises about 4.5 metres (15 feet) in height and in another part escalates upwards to more than 7.5 metres (25 feet), where an east window and skylight are located. Elsewhere, the main floor includes one of two bedrooms, with full ensuite bathroom, which is also accessible from the hallway.

A flight of stairs ascends to a most unique dining area on mezzanine level, 3.3 by 4.8 metres (11 by 16 feet) in size; with an enormous overhead skylight that allows for an abundance of natural lighting. Nearby is an efficiency and ultra-modern Canac kitchen with oak-trimmed cabinets.

The master bedroom on this level has a full ensuite bathroom, walk-in clothes closets, plus a charming interior window, with a garden box area, brightened by the natural lightwell overhead and overlooking the dramatic proportions of the large studio.

From the dining mez-



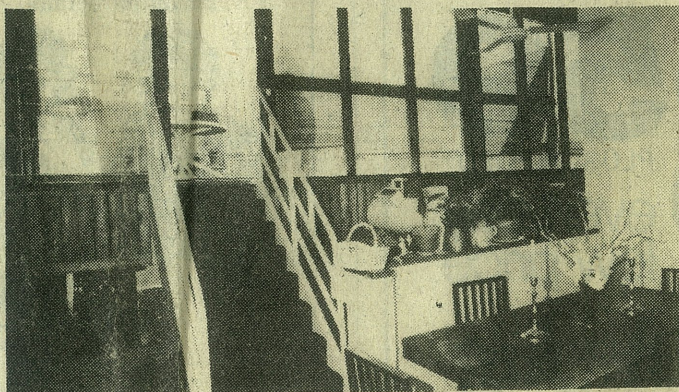
This unusual two-storey condominium was designed using an open concept and includes a free-standing fireplace.

zanine, up a set of stairs and through sliding glass doors is a luxurious wood-crafted, roof-top garden and lounging deck, completely enclosed by a tall privacy fence. The size is 6.3 by six metres (21 by 20 feet) and offers sections for planters as well as a pergola.

Special features of the home include a secured entrance; quality carpeting and track lighting throughout; central air conditioning, an attached brick garage for one car, with loft storage; a washer and dryer in the laundry closet; sound and heat insulation; ceiling fans, and ample clothes closets.

A monthly maintenance fee of about \$140 is required to maintain the common elements of the condominium building, as well as pay for cable television, water, sewage and general building maintenance and upkeep. A healthy condo emergency contingency fund, has also accumulated, said listing agent Peggy Bennett-Richardson, who added that the Ossington subway station is only about a five-minute walk away.

For more information about Unit 7 at 41 Shanley St., contact any real estate agent and quote Toronto MLS number D86931. ●



Sliding doors lead to a large (6.3 by six metre) roof-top garden and lounging deck, enclosed by a privacy fence.