

# How they topped up Tip Top Tailors

Converting textile factory posed various challenges

Six storeys added to historic 1931 art deco building

How it's built

W.D. LIGHTHALL

Converting the former Tip Top Tailors textile factory into upscale condominiums represents a unique opportunity for Context Development Inc., albeit one that comes with its share of engineering and construction challenges.

It's a unique opportunity because this designated historical building on Toronto's waterfront is often cited as one of the city's better examples of art deco architecture.

Completed in 1931 for clothing manufacturer Tip Top Tailors Ltd., the building features ceilings 15 to 18 feet high and wide-open floor plates easily carved up into condo apartments.

Interior features include round concrete columns that flare into mushroom caps where they meet the ceilings.

The building's exterior features all the geometric harmony characteristic of art deco design.

On the other hand, the engineering challenges involved in turning what was a five-storey factory and warehouse into an 11-storey condo residence can be simply summed up: How to go about constructing a new building on top of an existing building?

Located on Lake Shore Blvd. W. near Bathurst St., Context began converting the Tip Top Tailors building in late 2003.

Construction of the 250-unit project, called Tip Top Lofts, is scheduled to finish late this year.

"The existing building is a massive building. It's a very strong, sturdy structure that enables us to put six storeys on top," says David Hart, project manager of the development for Context.



RICK MADONIK/TORONTO STAR

The old Tip Top Tailors factory on Lake Shore Blvd. W. is being transformed into condominium lofts, with the added twist that an additional six-storey structure is being added on top of the original 1931 art deco building.

To ensure the design of the two sections mesh together, the new storeys feature lots of glass with a concrete skin, as does the original building.

"One complements the other," says Hart, adding the total design effect is one of "a light structure on top of a very solid base."

City policies require that when adding height to a heritage building, the new storeys must be set back from the front exterior wall, in order to preserve the

design integrity of the original façade.

"What that meant was the supporting columns for the new structure didn't line up with the old supporting structure, because of the setback. So we had to introduce a transfer floor," Hart says.

"It's like a bridge on the top floor of the old building. It comprises very deep structural beams which horizontally transfer the loads from the columns in the new structure, to the columns in the existing structure."

Located between the fifth and sixth storeys, these steel transfer beams are up to 1.2 metres high and run the entire 60-metre length of the building.

"It's like a crawl space, in effect an attic, in the middle between the two floors," Hart says.

Compounding the challenge of connecting the new storeys with the old ones, the addition has a steel structural system, while the original building has a concrete support system.

Hart says there's a catch to working with structural steel.

"It's not forgiving. It requires a very high degree of accuracy in the design and the (on-site) execution," he says. "We had to notch the steel transfer beams into the existing concrete columns. It's a little tricky. It has to be very precise."

Steel was chosen as the structural system for the addition because it weighs less than concrete.

"With concrete, we would only be able to add four new storeys," Hart says.

Before Context purchased the site, there existed a plan to convert the Tip Top Tailors building into a telecommunications hotel (a building holding computer servers and other communications hardware).

Alex Spiegel, director of development for Context, says that fate would have been a "huge, missed opportunity" for such a grand building.

"You can basically build a big box for utilitarian functions like that anywhere," Spiegel says.

"But this building, with its waterfront location, high ceilings, large windows and wonderful architecture, all those things make this building an icon in the city.

"It's a natural for condominiums," adds Spiegel.