

## Tiptop Transformation

*Doubling the number of floors, without detracting from the character and presence of the original historic building, was the goal of an adaptive use condo project in Toronto.*

WHILE HISTORIC BUILDINGS frequently are topped with recessed one- or two-story penthouses, it is rare to top such a structure with as many floors as existed in the original edifice. It is rarer still to use a modern idiom respectful of, but differential to, the mass and form of the original historic structure. Yet, that is precisely what developer Context Development, Inc., retained architectsAlliance, both based in Toronto, Ontario, to do to transform

Stephen Gross, he founded Context Development to create design-driven condominiums. In more than a half-dozen projects since then, they have developed hundreds of urban condos, including the Spire, MoZo, Radio City, and Twenty Niagara.

Tip Top Tailors, an art deco structure designed by Bishop and Miller Architects in 1929, was designated a landmark heritage building in 1973. The concrete structure includes massive six-story vertical

corner towers decorated with bas relief and capped with pyramidal copper roofs. These corners bracket a strong horizontal framework of relatively narrow spandrels and columns that hold broad expanses of industrial window walls in seven bays. Terra-cotta panels in crimson, blue, and gold form an ornamental band in a ziggurat pattern above the fifth-floor windows, at the tops of the corner towers, and in panels beneath the double row of tower windows. The front entrance on the north side is framed with a two-

mass on that scale could dwarf the original structure and would be disrespectful of its design and long history. Furthermore, the original building could hold only four stories if it used the same concrete structural system. As a result, architects Peter Clewes, Rob Cadeau, and Blair Robinson chose to add a light glass box of six stories to clearly distinguish the new addition from the historic building. Moreover, they recessed the glass box one full bay to effect a clear separation between the two, which also permitted them to build a roof terrace at the lowest level of the addition and thereby increase the marketability and value of the units on the sixth floor onto which they open. To tie the two pieces of the building together, they framed the glass box horizontally with continuous narrow spandrels tying into vertical columns that echo the original ones. But rather than create a wedding cake form, projecting glazed bays push out 11 feet (3.35 m) from the main mass of the new structure between the sixth and 11th floors, to lend depth and contemporary form to the structure and provide enhanced views over the waterfront of Lake Ontario. The structural steel frame is clad in slightly reflective, clear glass with a dark-gray frame color to make the top mass look as light and unobtrusive as possible.

But creating the glass mass of proportions different from the original structure meant that a means must be found to marry the two different structural systems. So, the architects and engineers created a transfer floor of steel beams. The transfer floor acts as a bridge on the top floor of the old building, horizontally transferring the loads from the new structure's columns to the columns of the existing edifice. The steel transfer beams range up



BEN RAINWATER/FRAME INC.

**The Tip Top Tailors textile factory is a concrete structure that has massive six-story vertical corner towers decorated with bas relief and capped with pyramidal copper roofs. These corners bracket a strong horizontal framework of relatively narrow spandrels and columns that hold broad expanses of industrial window walls in seven bays. To tie the two pieces of the building together, on the north elevation the glass box is framed horizontally with continuous narrow spandrels tying into vertical columns that echo the original ones.**

the historic Tip Top Tailors textile factory building into the 256-unit Tiptop Lofts.

Context Development founder Howard Cohen, an architect who formerly was a senior planner for the city of Toronto, had distinct views about how to transform the industrial waterfront on Lake Ontario and other elements of the city fabric into urbane living environments that could attract Torontonians. So in 1997, with partner

story concrete arch reached by two flights of wide steps. Fortunately for the developers, the south side of the building has two relatively narrow wings that form a U-shaped courtyard and permit both direct and oblique views to Lake Ontario for most of the units.

To make the economics of adaptive use work, developable space would need to be doubled. However, to surmount such a massive and strong historic presence with a

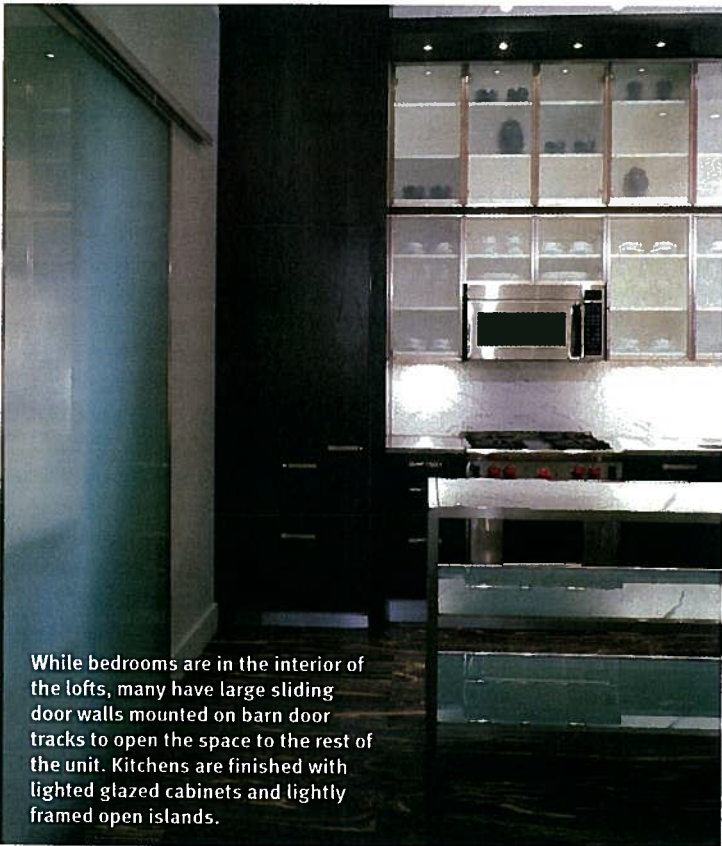
**Lofts in the historic former textile factory building all have 13.5-foot-tall (4.1-m-tall) ceilings. Broad expanses of industrial window walls in seven bays flood the lofts with light and views of Lake Ontario.**

to four feet high (1.2 m) and run the 220-foot (60-m) width and the 195-foot (59.5-m) depth of the building. That also permitted the floor layouts of the glass box to vary from those in the historic structure. Bay sizes in the existing building are based on a 24-foot-by-24-foot (7.3-m-by-7.3-m) module and in the new structure are typically 24 feet (7.3 m) wide, but vary in depth, as well as at corner conditions.

As a result, the glass box contains several different types of units. The sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth floors contain a variety of two-story mezzanine lofts that range in size from 620 to 1,262 square feet (57.6 to 117.4 sq m). While those smaller lofts are only 11 feet 3 inches wide, the mezzanine bedroom overlooks a two-story living room with an 18-foot-tall (5.5-m-tall) glass wall leading out to an 11-foot-by-12-foot (3.35-m-by-3.66-m) roof terrace. The larger mezzanine loft in the corner of the glass box has a 20-foot-long (6.1-m-long) glass wall opening onto its roof terrace through sliding glass doors and a nearly 30-foot (9.1-m) glass wall perpendicular to it in the kitchen and dining areas adjoining the living room.

Two-story penthouses on the tenth and 11th floors range from 2,129 to 2,557 square feet (198 to 237 sq m). They are unusual in several respects. The bedrooms are on the lower level and the living and dining areas are on the upper level to maximize views. The three-bedroom, three-bathroom end units, which are entered in the center of the unit, run completely through the wing and have glass walls on three sides.

The historic building has large, round concrete columns with massive conical capitals. In the 16,000-square-foot (1,488-sq-m) sales center, those column capitals were dramatically lit from below and the



While bedrooms are in the interior of the lofts, many have large sliding door walls mounted on barn door tracks to open the space to the rest of the unit. Kitchens are finished with lighted glazed cabinets and lightly framed open islands.

rest of the space was divided only with frameless glass walls. Marketing elements were displayed like art objects. An internally lit massing model was set on a clear acrylic slab. Floor plans were mounted on frosted acrylic boxes. Finish selections and samples were displayed on open trays under accent lights. Abstract photographs

and bold graphics were highlighted against white walls. Yet, the space was not enclosed but rather filled with natural light from the large window walls of the original textile factory.

The interiors of the individual 256 units vary among approximately 80 different floor plans ranging in price from \$237,900 to more than CDN\$1

million. The 160 lofts in the historic building all have 13.5-foot-tall (4.1-m-tall) ceilings and range in size from 599 to 1,018 square feet (55.7 to 94.7 sq m). While bedrooms are in the interior of the lofts, in some suites large sliding door-walls mounted on barn door tracks open the space to the rest of the unit. The original bay spacing typically was used to demise walls between the units. However, the concrete columns and the conical concrete column capitals are left exposed, and in some units full freestanding columns make dramatic features.

One level of below-grade parking was created in the warehouse basement, and a four-level subterranean parking structure was built under a semicircular entrance drive on the north side; between them, these two facilities provide 254 parking spaces. The main challenge inherent in constructing the underground parking garage was the high water table near Lake Ontario. An underground caisson wall was erected, and groundwater was then drained from the soil enclosed by the caisson. Although it was not undertaken in this application, in other similar underground parking garages in waterfront situations, high groundwater has been used as a geothermal water heat pump source.

Above the recreational facilities and lobby on the first floor, a roof terrace has been built at the second level, forming a focal point for the aforementioned U-shaped courtyard. The construction cost for Tiptop Lofts was CDN\$55 million, of a total hard and soft development cost of CDN\$80 million. **U**

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