

Site

The Urban Capital Magazine

VOLUME 5 | DECEMBER 2015



The Highs and
Lows of Mid-Rise
Cubitat is Thinking
Inside the Box
Here Come the
Robo-Cars

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Internal staircase by Saucier + Perrotte in River City Phase 1's "lightbox" amenity space

Letter



Welcome to the fifth edition of *Urban Capital Magazine*, newly rebranded as *Site Magazine*. Like in previous years, we've spent the past two months scrambling to put together our corporate annual in time to get it printed and out in the mail before Christmas (and also in time for our annual, and increasingly outrageous, Naughty or Nice Party).

This year we brought in Tony Smith, formerly Creative Director at Hudson's Bay, to do a complete magazine redesign (and rebrand.) We also reached out to new contributors to add more breadth, style and expertise to our content. Magazines are increasingly becoming vehicles of corporate expression, and as with many things we are looking to be ahead of the curve on this.

Of course, we're still a condominium development company, not a publishing house, so what we really accomplished in 2015 was completing **River City Phase 2** in Toronto and **Hideaway** in Ottawa; progressing construction of **Glasshouse** (Winnipeg), **Southport** (Halifax) and **Tableau** (Toronto), all of which will be completed in 2016; and starting construction of **Smart House** and **RC3**, the iconic third phase of River City.

A little teaser on what is up for Urban Capital in 2016: we're working on sites in two new Canadian cities, and also a couple of new markets in the U.S. And of course we will be working on next year's edition of *Site*.

Happy reading and see you then.

DAVID WEX

MARK REEVE

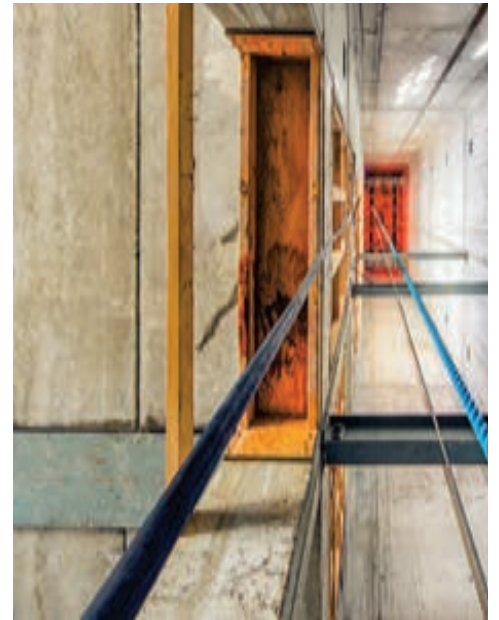
Site Magazine

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On the cover

*Glasshouse's
elevator shaft as
photographed by
Gerry Kopelow.*

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PEOPLE'S CHOICE AWARD 2014
BILD AWARD 2013 AND 2015

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A look back at 2015

TAYA COOK, Urban Capital's official chronicler—and Head of Development—looks at the highlights, lowlights and our general goings-on in 2015

DECEMBER 11, 2014

Naughty or Nice #4 gets down at UCHQ

❶ Go on with yo' bad self! For 2014's UC party we took it back, way back, to the '70s. Complete with a lit up dance floor, a hundred disco balls, a stack of vinyl that would make your dad jealous and more than 250 of our closest friends, the costume-optional (but somewhat mandatory) party was a huge hit.

January 22–25, 2015

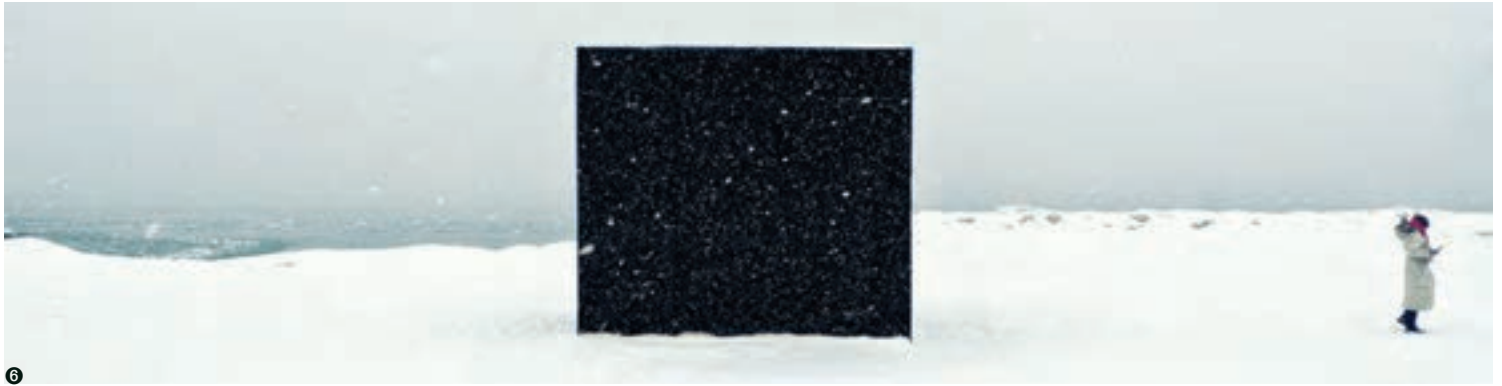
Cubitat takes over The Interior Design Show

❷ It started as an idea, developed into a concept, and within three months Cubitat — a 10' x 10' x 10' fully integrated “plug and play” cube that houses every aspect of your home — was a reality. Complete with a kitchen, bathroom, queen-size bed and closet, Cubitat's every square inch was thought out. Commissioned as the feature exhibit at the 2015 IDS show, Cubitat wowed the crowd and stretched our minds around what is possible in modular home design. Design fairs in Montreal, Brazil, Asia and even the Smithsonian contacted us to get ahold of Cubitat, but the sheer logistics of it didn't come together. Sadly, after four days in the limelight, Cubitat Prototype #1 was destroyed.

JANUARY 22, 2015

UC ♥s design and warms up in Winnipeg

❸+❹ When you choose to develop a condominium in the coldest city (above 500,000 people) in the world, you quickly start asking yourself, “What the \$#@! were we thinking?” How do you solve this problem? Get involved in a really cool winter design project that brings warmth to the city's inhabitants. RAW:almond is just that: a pop-up restaurant on the frozen Red River that for a few dreamy nights every January allows locals (and Torontonians alike) to shelter from the cold weather while experiencing the country's best food and drinks. By sponsoring the event, Urban Capital and its friends get to hang out with Winnipeg's coolest (and coldest) and experience food from Canada's top chefs in a location unlike any other.



FEBRUARY 7, 2015

The Ottawa team toasts sale #4k

6 After numerous projects in five cities (so far), we have racked up our fair share of sales. So when our 4,000th unit was sold, we thought we may as well celebrate! The next day our Ottawa sales team popped open the champagne and shared a cake with our 4,000th happy new buyer. Here's to the next 4,000....

FEBRUARY 16–MARCH 20, 2015

UC ♥s design (#2) and freezes its butt off

6 The theme for the design events that UC supported in 2015 could definitely be winter. And while Toronto holds no candle to Winnipeg in this category, the city's Winter Stations Competition, launched in frigid -30°C weather in mid-February, took home the prize. A series of five installations on the lifeguard stations along Toronto's eastern beaches, the international design competition, for which UC was a corporate sponsor, attracted over 200 submissions from 36 countries, and became a go-to place for Torontonians looking for some mid-winter respite.

APRIL 2, 2015

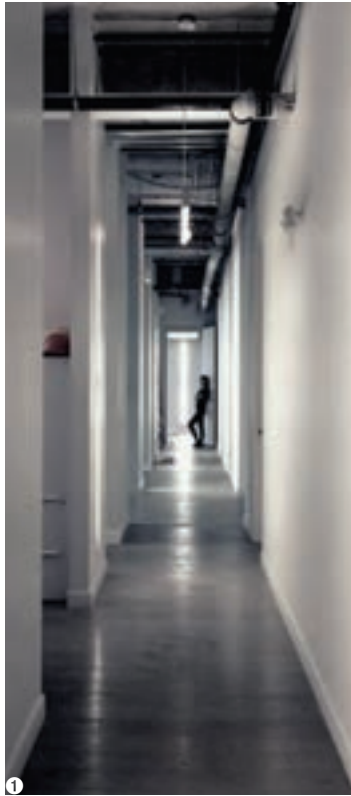
UC+Taggart: celebrating over 1,200 condos

7 Sometimes you have to stop and appreciate just how far you've come. After fourteen years of development in the nation's capital, and nearing completion of the third and final phase of Central, we decided it was a good time to get together and toast our accomplishments. With our development partners at Taggart and our architects, designers and construction managers all seated around the table, many glasses were raised to over a decade of success. And while looking back is great, looking forward proved even better.

APRIL 24, 2015

River City 3 wins BILD's Best High Rise Design Award

9 In a city flush with new building, Urban Capital's brand of architecture is widely celebrated. Continuing River City's winning ways — River City Phase 1 has so far won a BILD Award, Pug Award, AZ Award of Merit and a Toronto Urban Design Award — River City 3 won the Best High Rise Design Award at BILD's 2015 Awards Night.



MAY 2015

Head office expands east

❶ It was almost four years ago that we moved from our small digs on King Street East to the ground floor of one of our developments, Boutique. That in itself was a big move, until fairly quickly staff numbers grew and temporary offices were being set up in the storage area and hallways. With an ever increasing portfolio, it was time to expand once again, so the wall to the neighbouring office space was taken down and we expanded 100 feet east. Always looking to multi-task, the new office now serves as both a hub of productivity and a means to achieve your 10,000 daily steps.

MAY 13, 2015

UC hosts Winnipeg, Halifax and Chicago

❷ When you develop in other cities, you need your local design and construction teams to really “get inside the head” of Urban Capital. So on May 13th we hosted the architects and construction managers of our Halifax (Southport), Winnipeg (Glasshouse) and future Chicago projects to an intense day of site tours of Urban Capital’s Toronto projects. Seen here, some of the group of fifteen touring the roof of Urban Capital’s Tableau project, where everyone seemed to be taking in the Toronto skyline more than anything else.

MAY 22, 2015

The Ravine launches with a carnival

❸ Our newest project, nestled in the greenery of Toronto’s Don Valley ravine at York Mills and the Don Valley Parkway, is a major master planned community spread over a lush 13-acre site. With plans to bring more than 1,600 condominiums to the site, along with amenities and two new parks, we wanted to invite the neighbourhood down to celebrate. The family-friendly event was a big hit and started what we hope will be a lasting relationship.

Pictured: Elaine Cecconi, Cecconi Simone; Councillor Denzil Minnan-Wong, City of Toronto; and Mark Reeve, Urban Capital.

JUNE 19, 2015

UC ♥s design (#3) and snags yet another award

❹+❺ As a lead sponsor of the AZ Awards we look forward to the awards ceremony every June. It’s an opportunity for the design community from Toronto and around the world to recognize and reward the best in the fields of architecture and interior and industrial design. This year River City Phase 1 received an Award of Merit in the Multi-Unit Design Category. So not only did we have a great time, as usual, we also got to bring home some hardware too.

Pictured: Paul Filek, Burdiflek; and David Wex, Urban Capital.



SEPTEMBER 2015

River City Phase 3 gets underway

⑥ On September 16th, two weeks after the Pan Am Games wrapped up, UC closed its purchase of the River City Phase 3 lands and immediately started boring the 80-foot piles needed to support the River City 3 building on the rock below. Then we did what any self-respecting developer would do: groundbreaking party!

SEPTEMBER 10, 2015

Glasshouse elevator shaft tops off

⑨ From high above the ground on one of those beautiful Winnipeg days between mosquitos and frost, the last floor of Glasshouse's concrete shaft was poured, giving rise to a spectacular 360 degree-view of the prairie city. With the building well on its way to being completed and 200 units occupied this spring, it will be a busy few months ahead.

SEPTEMBER 16, 2015

River City 1 wins big at the Toronto Urban Design Awards

⑧ In another win for River City, the development's first phase picks up a Toronto Urban Design Award, the biennial City of Toronto award that recognizes the best in urban design in the city. According to the jury, River City "makes a radical break from the Toronto condo-tower formula, [responding] thoughtfully to its site [and] becoming a landmark on the edge of downtown."

Pictured: Andre Perrotte, Saucier + Perotte; Paul Stevens, ZAS Architects; Jennifer Keesmatt, Chief Planner, City of Toronto; David Wex, Urban Capital; and David Leinster, The Planning Partnership.

OCTOBER 21, 2015

UC welcomes its president circa 2050

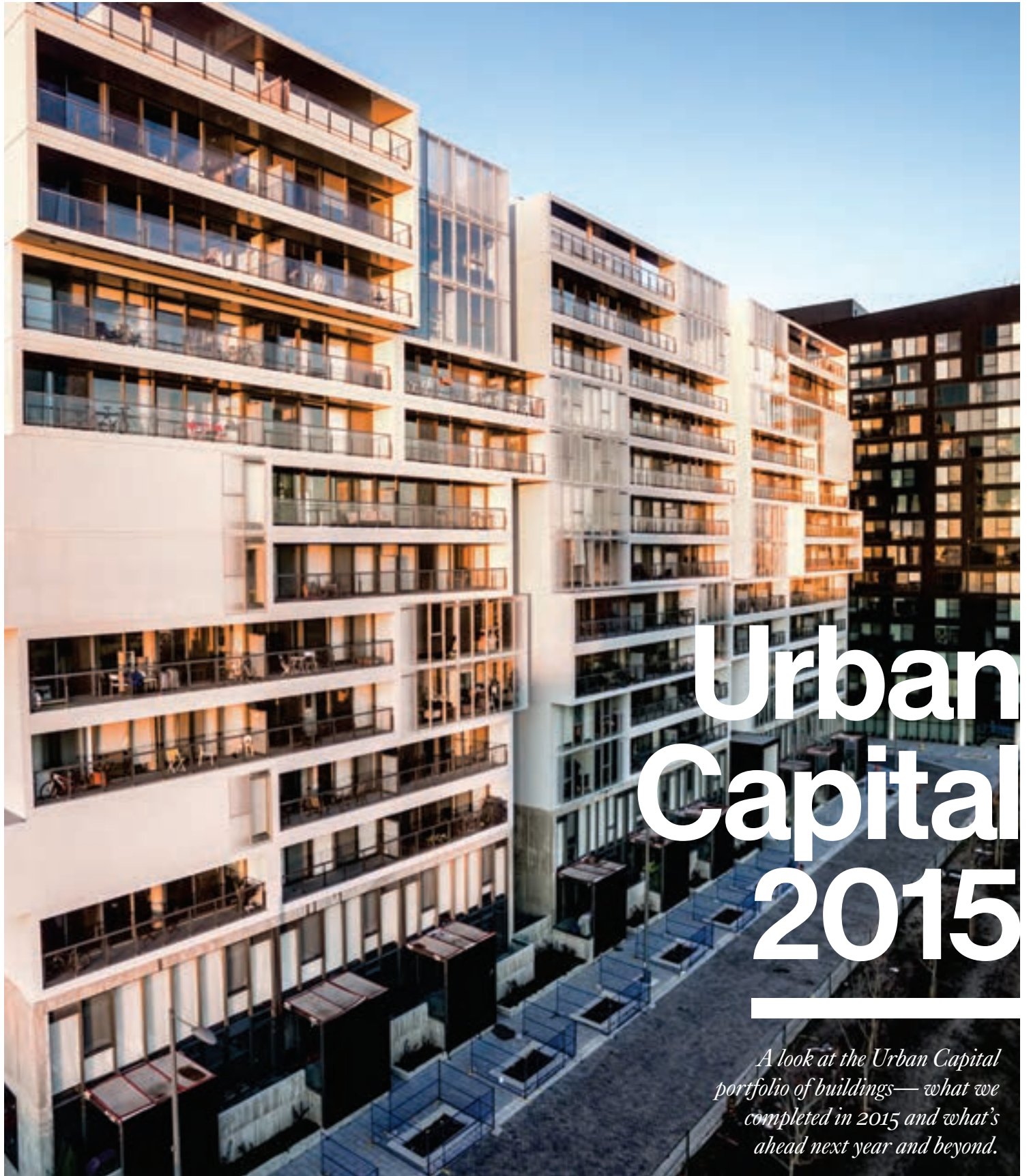
⑦ At 8 pounds 5 ounces, Jameson Love Lennon Cook arrived, happy and healthy, on October 21, 2015. We all look forward to Jameson taking over in 2050.



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MADE IN ITALY



Urban Capital 2015

A look at the Urban Capital portfolio of buildings— what we completed in 2015 and what's ahead next year and beyond.



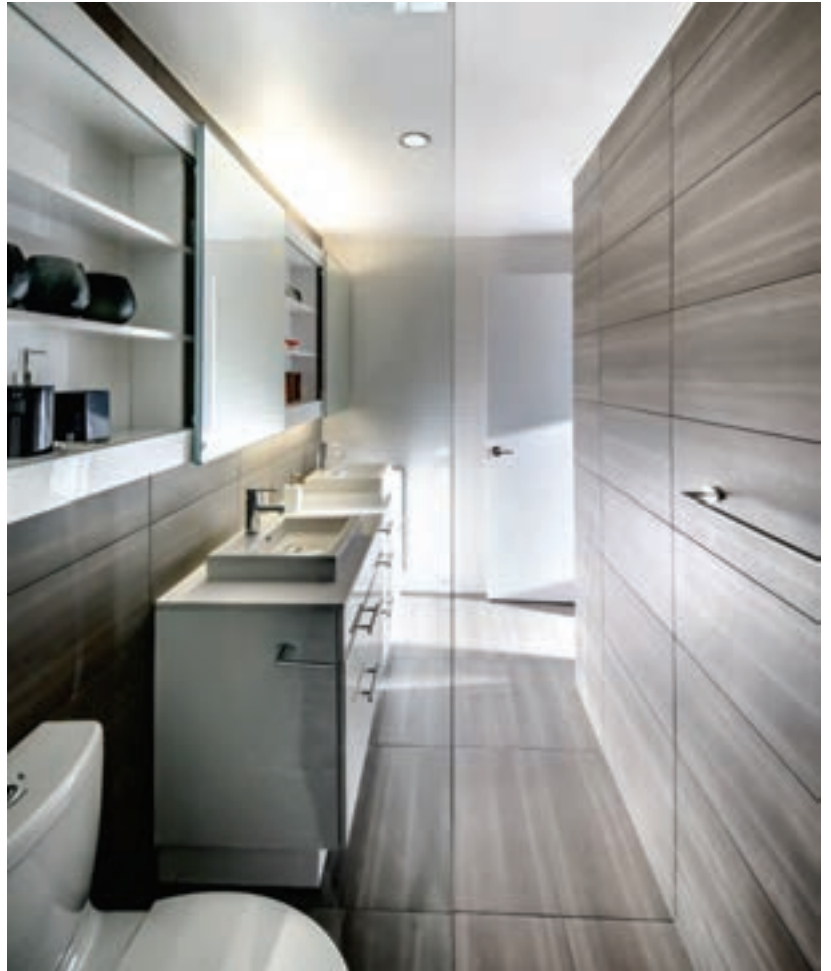
TORONTO | COMPLETED 2015

River City 2

LOCATION West Don Lands, Toronto **PROJECT DESCRIPTION** Phase 2 of Urban Capital's four-phase 1,100 unit LEED Gold "River City" development. **SIZE/PROGRAM** Three 13-storey "mini-towers" containing 249 units. **ARCHITECTURE** Saucier + Perrotte Architectes with ZAS Architects. **INTERIOR DESIGN** Saucier + Perrotte Architectes.

The jewel of the four-phase "River City" development, Phase 2 is a collection of three glossy white "mini-towers" which serve as a counterpoint to the matte black exterior of Phases 1 and 3. Each mini-tower is connected to the other by glass bridges. Jutting in and out and rotating on their axes, the building's 249 loft-style condominium units have been "designed for living," with unit sizes larger than typically found in the current Toronto marketplace.

Designed by renowned Montreal-based Saucier + Perrotte Architectes, winner of eight Governor General Medals for Architecture, River City is a LEED Gold development of over 1,100 units located in the newly regenerated West Don Lands neighbourhood. Urban Capital won the right to develop River City in 2008 after an extensive public tender process in which 18 national and international developers participated. Urban Capital's proposal won based on overall design, neighbourhood vision, and environmental commitment.







TORONTO | COMPLETED 2013

River City 1

LOCATION West Donlands, Toronto. **PROJECT DESCRIPTION** First phase of Urban Capital's 1,100 unit, Saucier + Perrotte-designed LEED Gold "River City" development. **SIZE/PROGRAM** 16-storey and 7-storey buildings, connected by a four-storey bridge, containing a total of 349 units, plus approximately 4,500 square feet of retail space. **ARCHITECTURE** Saucier + Perrotte Architectes with ZAS Architects. **INTERIOR DESIGN** Saucier + Perrotte Architectes.



2013 BILD Award, Best Building Design



2014 Award Winner, Best Residential Building

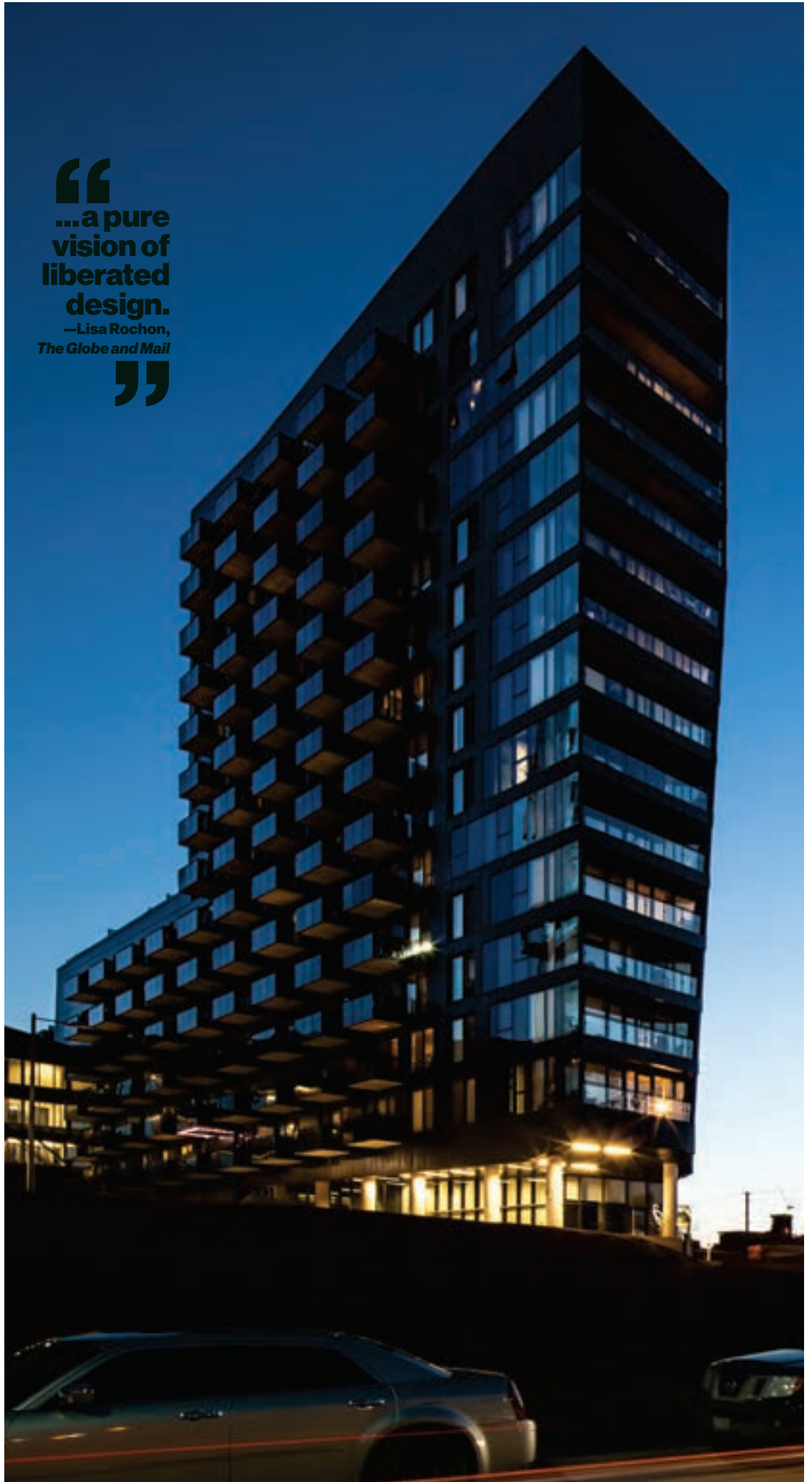


2015 Toronto Urban Design Award of Excellence, Private Buildings in Context, Tall Category





Consisting of two angular, matte black buildings connected by a four storey bridge, the first phase of River City kicked off Urban Capital's four-phase River City development, which Urban Capital won the right to develop in 2008. Designed by Montreal-based Saucier + Perrotte Architectes, the development has won a multitude of design awards, including a 2015 Toronto Urban Design Award in which the jury referred to the buildings as "a radical break from the Toronto condo-tower formula."



“
...a pure
vision of
liberated
design.
—Lisa Rochon,
The Globe and Mail
”



Hideaway is the third and final phase of Urban Capital's "Central" development in Ottawa. When the first phase was launched in 2008, the location was characterized by surface parking lots and empty buildings, a huge void between the city's central business district to the north and trendy Glebe neighbourhood to the south. By the time the final phase was completed in 2015, over 750 new residents and a significant amount of new retail was added, creating one of the most sought-after districts in the city.

PHOTOS: KEITH GABRIEL, CORE ARCHITECTS



[OTTAWA | COMPLETED 2015](#)

Hideaway

LOCATION Centretown, Ottawa. **PROJECT DESCRIPTION** The final phase of Urban Capital's three-phase 540-unit LEED Gold "Central" development. **SIZE/PROGRAM** 9-storey building containing 162 units and extensive indoor and outdoor amenities. **ARCHITECTURE & INTERIOR DESIGN** CORE Architects. **DEVELOPMENT PARTNER** Taggart Group, Ottawa.





OTTAWA | COMPLETED 2014

Central 2

LOCATION Centretown, Ottawa. **PROJECT DESCRIPTION** Phase 2 of Urban Capital's three-phase 540-unit LEED Gold "Central" development in downtown Ottawa. **SIZE/PROGRAM** 9-storey building containing 141 units and a 4,500 square-foot LCBO. **ARCHITECTURE & INTERIOR DESIGN** Core Architects. **DEVELOPMENT PARTNER** Taggart Group, Ottawa.



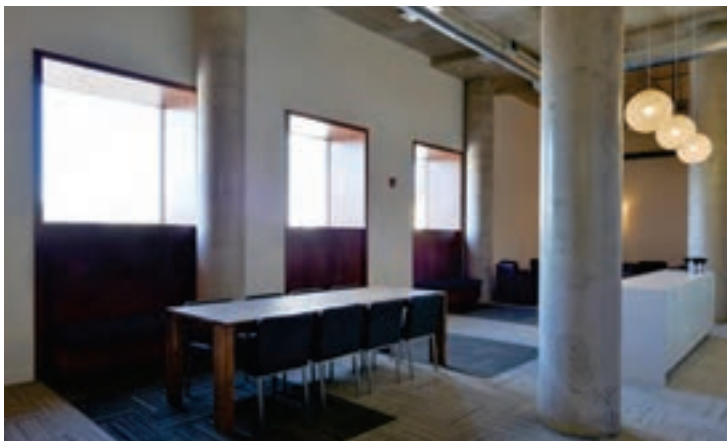


OTTAWA | COMPLETED 2012

Central 1

LOCATION Centretown, Ottawa **PROJECT DESCRIPTION** The first phase of Urban Capital's three-phase 540-unit LEED Gold "Central" development.

SIZE/PROGRAM 10-storey building containing 239 units and 20,000 square feet of ground-floor retail space. **ARCHITECTURE & INTERIOR DESIGN** CORE Architects. **DEVELOPMENT PARTNER** Taggart Group, Ottawa.





TORONTO | COMPLETED 2014

Nicholas

LOCATION Yonge-Bloor, Toronto. **PROJECT DESCRIPTION** Residential glass tower located on cobblestoned Nicholas Street, just south of Toronto's premier shopping district, and incorporating the heritage Planing Mill Building at its base. **SIZE/PROGRAM** 35 storey tower containing 308 units. **ARCHITECTURE** Core Architects. **INTERIOR DESIGN** Cecconi Simone. **DEVELOPMENT PARTNER** Alit Developments, Tel Aviv.

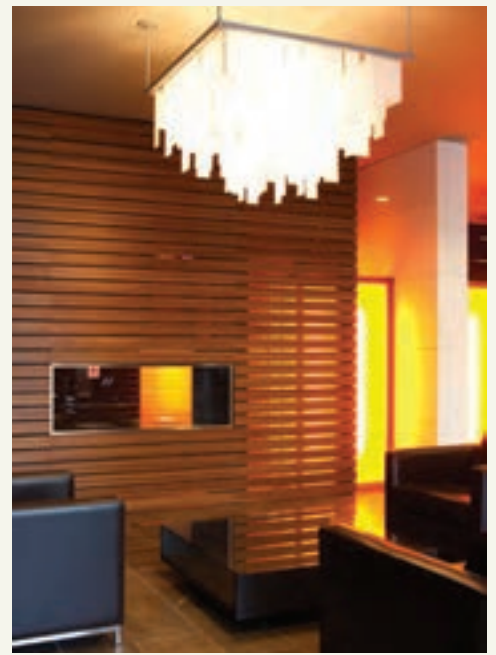


TORONTO | COMPLETED 2012

Trinity Bellwoods

LOCATION Little Italy, Toronto. **PROJECT DESCRIPTION** Contemporary designed freehold townhouse development. **SIZE/PROGRAM** 45 townhomes ranging in size from 1,900 to 2,650 square feet. **ARCHITECTURE** Richard Wengle Architects. **INTERIOR DESIGN** Cecconi Simone. **DEVELOPMENT PARTNER** Shram Homes, Toronto.





TORONTO | COMPLETED 2011

Boutique

LOCATION Entertainment District, Toronto.
PROJECT DESCRIPTION Two-phase urban condominium development at the nexus of the Entertainment and Financial Districts offering a combination of condominium and boutique hotel-style amenities. **SIZE/PROGRAM** 35-storey tower and 16-storey mid-rise building containing a total of 637 units. **ARCHITECTURE** Core Architects. **INTERIOR DESIGN** Cecconi Simone. **DEVELOPMENT PARTNER** Malibu Investments, Toronto and Alit Developments, Tel Aviv.



OTTAWA | COMPLETED 2011

Mondrian

LOCATION Downtown Ottawa. **PROJECT DESCRIPTION** Glass tower with red glass panels interspersed among the linear window system, as an homage to the Dutch painter Piet Mondrian. **SIZE/PROGRAM** 23-storey building containing 249 units, sitting atop a five-storey public parking podium enclosed in a glass screen. **ARCHITECTURE & INTERIOR DESIGN** Core Architects. **DEVELOPMENT PARTNER** Taggart Group, Ottawa.

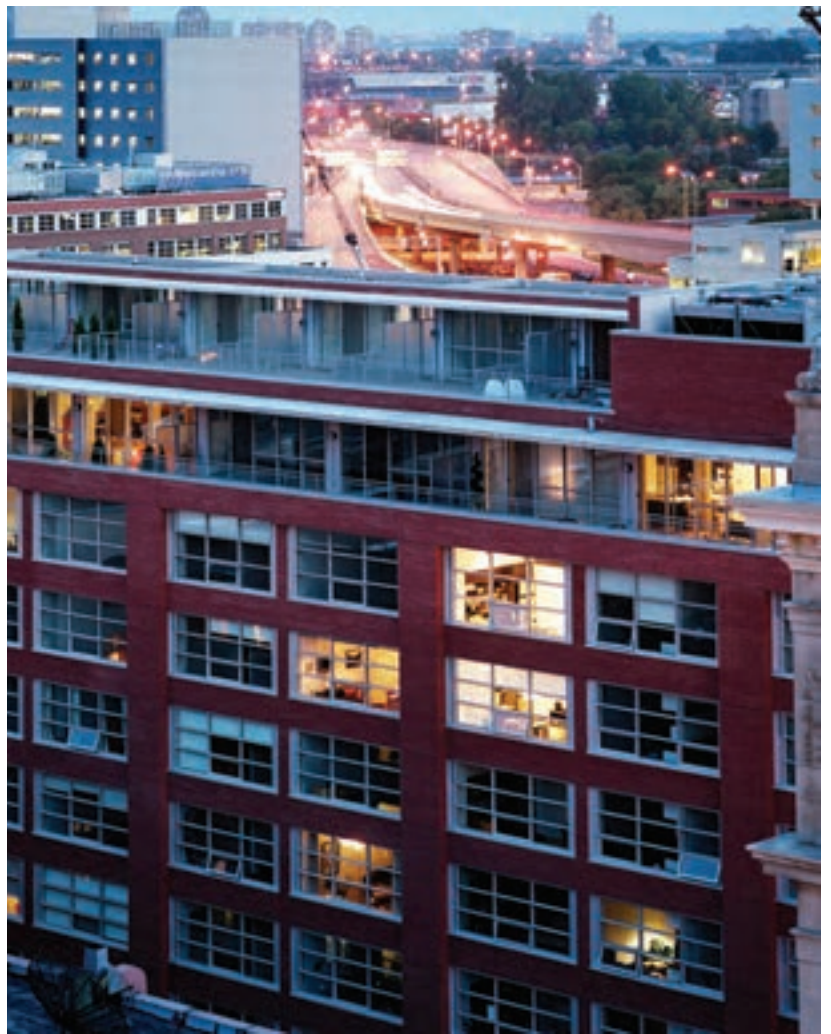




MONTREAL | COMPLETED 2008

McGill Ovest

LOCATION West of Old Montreal. **PROJECT DESCRIPTION** Two-phase glass and brick building; Urban Capital's first development outside of Ontario. **SIZE/PROGRAM** 9-storey mid-rise building containing 244 units. **ARCHITECTURE & INTERIOR DESIGN** Core Architects. **DEVELOPMENT PARTNER** Metropolitan Parking, Montreal.



OTTAWA | COMPLETED 2008

East Market

LOCATION Byward Market, Ottawa. **PROJECT DESCRIPTION** Urban Capital's first foray outside of Toronto, introducing the company's signature architecture, interior design and affordable loft-style units to the Ottawa market and becoming a catalyst for the city's subsequent condo boom. **SIZE/PROGRAM** 420 units over three phases. **ARCHITECTURE & INTERIOR DESIGN** Core Architects. **DEVELOPMENT PARTNER** Taggart Group, Ottawa.



TORONTO | COMPLETED 2002

Charlotte Lofts

LOCATION King-Spadina, Toronto. **PROJECT DESCRIPTION** Urban Capital's second development in the King-Spadina area. **SIZE / PROGRAM** 13-storey building containing 66 units. **ARCHITECTURE & INTERIOR DESIGN** Core Architects. **DEVELOPMENT PARTNER** Chard Developments, Vancouver.



TORONTO | COMPLETED 1999

Camden Lofts

LOCATION King-Spadina, Toronto. **PROJECT DESCRIPTION** This is the building that started it all. Launched when residential development was not actually permitted in the area – the project required special city council approval – this seminal development created a precedent for the subsequent residential projects that ultimately redefined this part of the city. **SIZE / PROGRAM** 9-storey building containing 48 units. **ARCHITECTURE** Core Architects and Oleson Worland Architects. **INTERIOR DESIGN** Cecconi Simone. **DEVELOPMENT PARTNER** Dundee Realty, Toronto

TORONTO | COMPLETED 2006

St Andrew On The Green

LOCATION Etobicoke, Toronto. **PROJECT DESCRIPTION** Finely-proportioned terraced building overlooking the Islington Golf Club. **SIZE / PROGRAM** 9-storey building containing 108 units. **ARCHITECTURE** Turner Fleischer Architects. **INTERIOR DESIGN** Bryan Patton. **DEVELOPMENT PARTNER** Malibu Investments, Toronto and Alit Developments, Tel Aviv.





TORONTO | COMPLETION 2016

Tableau

LOCATION Entertainment District, Toronto. **PROJECT DESCRIPTION** 36-storey mixed-use development. **SIZE/PROGRAM** 410 residential suites, 25,000 square feet of office space, publicly accessible plaza with 90' sculpture by Shane Dark, and retail space at grade. **ARCHITECTURE & INTERIOR DESIGN** Wallman Architects, Cecconi-Simone Interior Design, Claude Cormier Landscape Architects, Shayne Dark, Artist. **DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS** Malibu Investments, Toronto and Alit Developments, Tel Aviv.

📍 visit tableaucondos.com

A “condo-collaboration of art, fashion, design and good taste,” Tableau is Urban Capital’s latest offering in Toronto’s Entertainment District, following on the heels of Camden Lofts, Charlotte Lofts and Boutique.

Developed jointly with Malibu Investments and Alit Developments, Tableau is centred around a huge structural table which divides the mixed-use development into three zones: residential suites “above the table,” condo amenities “on the table,” and commercial space, retail space and a huge Claude Cormier-designed public plaza featuring a 90-foot installation by Canadian artist Shayne Dark “below the table.”



TORONTO | COMPLETION 2017

Smart House

LOCATION Queen Street & University Avenue, Toronto. **PROJECT DESCRIPTION** 24-storey mixed-use building. **SIZE/PROGRAM** 256 “micro-condos” on Floors 5–25; retail space on Floors 1 and 2; and 16,000 square feet of Class A office on Floors 3 and 4. **ARCHITECTURE & INTERIOR DESIGN** Architects Alliance, Il x IV Design, Aya Kitchens. **DEVELOPMENT PARTNER** Malibu Investments, Toronto.

© visit.smarthousetoronto.com

Toronto’s (and maybe Canada’s) first development designed exclusively as “micro-condos,” Smart House makes living at an expensive location such as Queen and University affordable by delivering units that are small in size (as small as 276 square feet) but highly functional through smart design. Developed in partnership with Malibu Investments, Smart House looks critically at all the elements inside a condominium — from kitchens and bathrooms to storage — to make sure they are “right sized” and efficiently designed for smaller space.

Launched in October 2013, Smart House received an unprecedented amount of press for pushing the envelope in terms of unit size and condo functionality. The market response to this new concept was exceptional, with over half of the units selling out immediately.



Smart House’s highly innovative, all-in-one kitchen, closed and open (below). See Canadian Business’ take, page 38.





TORONTO | COMPLETION 2018

River City 3



LOCATION West Donlands, Toronto. **PROJECT DESCRIPTION** Loft-style condominiums. **SIZE/PROGRAM** 333 units. **ARCHITECTURE** Saucier + Perrotte Architectes with ZAS Architects, Claude Cormier & Associés Landscape Architects. **INTERIOR DESIGN** Saucier + Perrotte Architectes

visit rivercitytoronto.com

After bringing a new architectural language to Toronto with River City Phases 1 and 2, Saucier + Perrotte takes daring design to new heights with RC3. Merging the matte black design of Phase 1 with the cantilevered white boxes of Phase 2, RC3's 29 storeys of randomly stacked cubes liberates Toronto condominium design from its usual constraints. Boldly engaging the city around it, RC3 dramatically confirms River City as being "unlike anything else."

Interior spaces continue S+P's strong aesthetic from Phases 1 and 2, augmented by a variation of the "smart" kitchen from Urban Capital's Smart House. RC3 also creates a whole new level of condominium amenity, with such new and thoughtful amenities as an office/productivity centre, quiet reading room, kids' playroom, hobby/crafts room, and "product library", where you can rent those things you need from time to time but don't have the room to store yourself. This, in addition to a 2,000 square foot fitness facility, guest suite, S+P-designed double storey party room, and Claude Cormier-designed outdoor terrace and pool.



HALIFAX | COMPLETION 2016

Southport

LOCATION South End, Halifax. **PROJECT DESCRIPTION** New loft-style condominiums. **SIZE/PROGRAM** 142 units. **ARCHITECTURE & INTERIOR DESIGN** RAW Design and MNA Architects. **DEVELOPMENT PARTNER** Killam Properties, Halifax.

visit southporthalifax.com

Urban Capital's first development out east, Southport is a nod to Halifax's rich shipping history. Located where the city's historic South End meets the Port of Halifax, this innovative building is clad in corrugated metal panels reminiscent of shipping containers, for a maritime industrial look that's fresh, urban, and out-of-the-ordinary. The development introduces Urban Capital's loft-style condominium residences to the Halifax market, and adds some project-specific features such as roof-top amenity space centred on a repurposed shipping container.

Southport launched in late 2013 and almost completely sold out on the first weekend. Completion is scheduled for summer 2016.



WINNIPEG | COMPLETION 2016

Glasshouse

LOCATION Downtown Winnipeg. **PROJECT DESCRIPTION** Urban condominiums. **SIZE/PROGRAM** 200 units. **ARCHITECTURE & INTERIOR DESIGN** Stantec.

visit glasshousewinnipeg.com

Glasshouse is Urban Capital's first foray into the Prairies. The 200 unit residential tower will be the residential component of Winnipeg's Centrepoint project, a multi-use development that includes an Alt Hotel, 100,000 square feet of Class A office space, and two restaurants. Glasshouse brings Urban Capital's urban living concepts to Winnipeg, introducing a style and urban sensibility not previously available in this market. The development will help kickstart the residential rejuvenation of downtown Winnipeg, much as previous Urban Capital developments in Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal did for their own cities' downtown districts.



TORONTO | PRE-CONSTRUCTION

Ravine

LOCATION York Mills and DVP, Toronto. **PROJECT DESCRIPTION** Multi-phase condominium tower development. **SIZE/PROGRAM** Approximately 1,600 units. **DEVELOPMENT PARTNER** Alit Developments, Tel Aviv.

visit theravine.ca

Urban Capital is coming uptown to give one of Toronto's most historic and picturesque neighbourhoods a renaissance. Ravine, a new master-planned community in York Mills at the Don Valley Parkway, will comprise a total of seven buildings with over 1,600 units on 13 acres, with two new parks and two acres of dedicated conservation lands, overlooking the Don Valley and the spectacular Brookbanks Park.

Developed in partnership with Alit Developments, Ravine takes its inspiration from the ravine system that dominates the area: Cascading terraces that mimic the rolling topography, natural materials such as wood and stone that blur the distinction between outdoor and indoor space, and expansive glass to maximize the panoramic views.

Phase one, 1215 York Mills at the Ravine, is now open and set for construction to commence in late 2016.

Condo Development 101

How to keep clients happy—in 10 easy steps

By DAVID WEX

Photography by KATHERINE HOLLAND

There are many people to keep happy in condominium development — your lenders (who want their money back), your investors (who want the return you promised), the city (who want the building exactly as they approved) and your designers (who want the building exactly as they designed). Sometimes we forget the most important people — the purchasers. Herein, 10 steps to keep them happy and ensure that, among other things, you're not raked over the coals one day on social media.



01 Have a friendly, informed sales staff.

Your sales agents are your first interaction with most people. Make sure they know the facts about your project, are approachable, and actually show up for work. These are not things to take for granted, especially in remote locations.

02 Protect purchaser agents.

In some markets, like Toronto, real estate agents are your real purchasers. Without them selling your development to their clients, you'll never reach your pre-sales level. Of course keeping them happy principally involves paying them healthy commissions. But it also helps to deliver a good product.

03 Keep everyone updated.

It's very easy to make a sale and then go quiet until you need something from the purchaser (like a mortgage approval, or his or her finishing selection). But for most people purchasing pre-construction is a step in the dark, so keeping them up-to-date with the project's progress is a cost-free way to reduce their anxiety and keep them happy.

04 Make choosing finishes a great experience.

The finishes and upgrades session is often the first time people get to interact with you in person, after the initial sale. Make it a good experience. Give people a chance to see their options, with prices, beforehand. And make sure there's a good selection, but not so extensive that people can't decide what to choose.

05 Manage bad news about delayed move-in dates.

Perhaps the most frustrating thing about pre-construction purchasing is delayed move-in dates. It's hard, years out, to know exactly when a building will be ready. Always start with the most optimistic date, then update everyone as much as possible (see 03) if you slip from it.





Urban Capital's Toronto sales and customer service teams include, clockwise from top left: Ben Rusonik; River City Sales Manager; Carol Duong, Smart House Sales Representative; ManLing Lao, Smart House Sales Manager; Irvin Lee, River City Sales Representative; Priti Patel, River City Customer Service Representative; and Greg More, River City Finishing Supervisor.

[You can read more Condo 101 instalments in previous issues of Urban Capital Magazine at \[urbancapital.ca/about/ucmagazine\]\(http://urbancapital.ca/about/ucmagazine\)](http://urbancapital.ca/about/ucmagazine)

- No.01: How To Launch a Project*
- No.02: How To Build Large Buildings on Small Sites*
- No.03: How To Design a Condo Building*
- No.04: How To Approach a New Market*

08 Admit when you screw up.

You will screw up; it's inevitable. Admit it, face it and do what you can to make it better. Fast.

09 Respond to customer service inquiries – even if you have nothing to say.

"Thanks for your inquiry. I'm looking into it and don't have an answer yet, but hope to be back to you by X. If you haven't heard from me by Y, please contact me again." This is what we tell our CS reps to answer, promptly, when they receive a customer service inquiry and don't have a readily available response. It's easy to do, and it takes away 90% of people's frustration.

10 Keep your purchasers close.

Your best ambassadors for future sales are your current purchasers. Make them happy and they will talk you up to others. Piss them off and they will bad mouth you forever. So work towards the former, and when they do help you make a sale, send them a little something as a thank you. It goes a long way.

06 Deliver what you promised.

Inevitably, as you build your building, things come up that crush your budget. The easiest way to get back on track is to skim on finishes, which are the last thing to be priced and often the only discretionary expense left. But you need to avoid this, as finishes are what people really buy, and skimping on them ends up killing you in the end.

07 Don't ask people to move into a construction zone.

As part of the rush to get people moved in (see 05), you tend to finish the units first, and let the lobby, corridors and common areas slip. People hate this, especially because they're paying full condo fees. Aim to have the lobby and amenities finished in time for move-ins. The corridors can wait; they get trashed during move-in anyway.



It's generally accepted that mid-rise development creates friendlier cities. BRANDON DONNELLY investigates why developers don't build more of it.

The highs and lows of mid-rise



Over the past decade and a half, Toronto has really come into its own. The high-rise condominium has dramatically transformed the city's urban landscape and is continuing to inject new life and vibrancy into its downtown core, as well as the region as a whole.

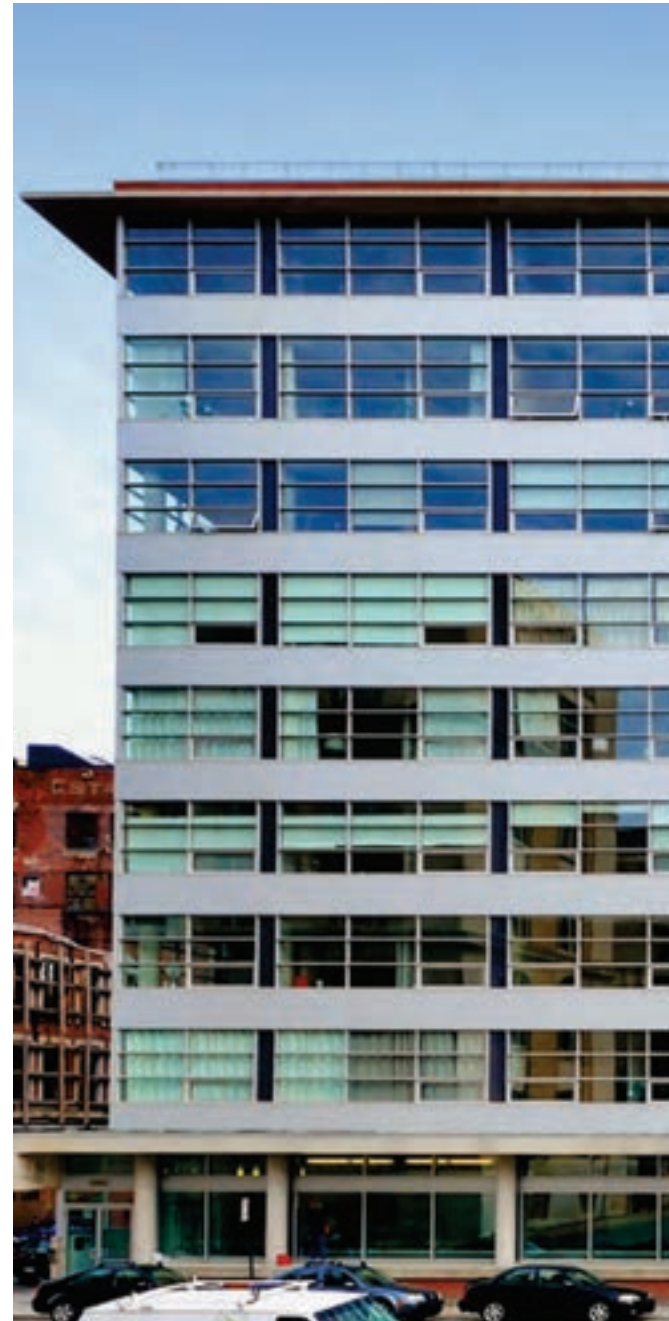
But Toronto's condo story is not exclusively a high-rise one. Alongside the supertalls popping up in the city centre, there's also a significant transformation happening in the form of mid-rise buildings. It's happening in the "shoulders" of downtown Toronto, in the city's older and more established neighbourhoods, and also in many other cities across Canada and the U.S.

The urban landscape of North American cities has long been dominated by high-rise buildings in the downtown and low-rise single family homes all around it. But today we are seeing a shift. Policymakers, architects, planners, and developers have fallen in

love with the "in-between" scale. That's why in 2010, Toronto City Council enacted its Mid-Rise Performance Standards with the intent of guiding and promoting European-style "avenue" development all across the city.

To a certain degree this is a shift that has been in the works for much longer. Urban Capital, for instance, has a long history of developing mid-rise buildings, dating all the way back to Camden Lofts (1996–1999) in Toronto's Fashion District. And for partner David Wex, mid-rise is actually his favourite scale of projects. "It's very urban, it frames and supports street-life, and it doesn't overwhelm the streetscape in the same way that tall buildings can," says Wex. "We've been doing mid-rise since Camden Lofts in the late '90s, which kick-started the King-Spadina renaissance. We've developed mid-rise in Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and now Halifax. All have been great contextual buildings that have added to their urban landscapes and community feel."

Urban Capital's "Central" development is an exemplar of the mid-rise scale, bringing much needed density to its downtown Ottawa location without overwhelming the existing urban fabric.



Left, Camden Lofts in Toronto's Fashion District; right, McGill Ouest in Old Montreal.

But despite the rise of mid-rise, many people across North America are still scratching their heads and asking: Why aren't we building more of them? What could be done to encourage more mid-rise development in my city? And why is Europe so damn good at this scale? The reality is that there are many challenges lurking in this type of development.

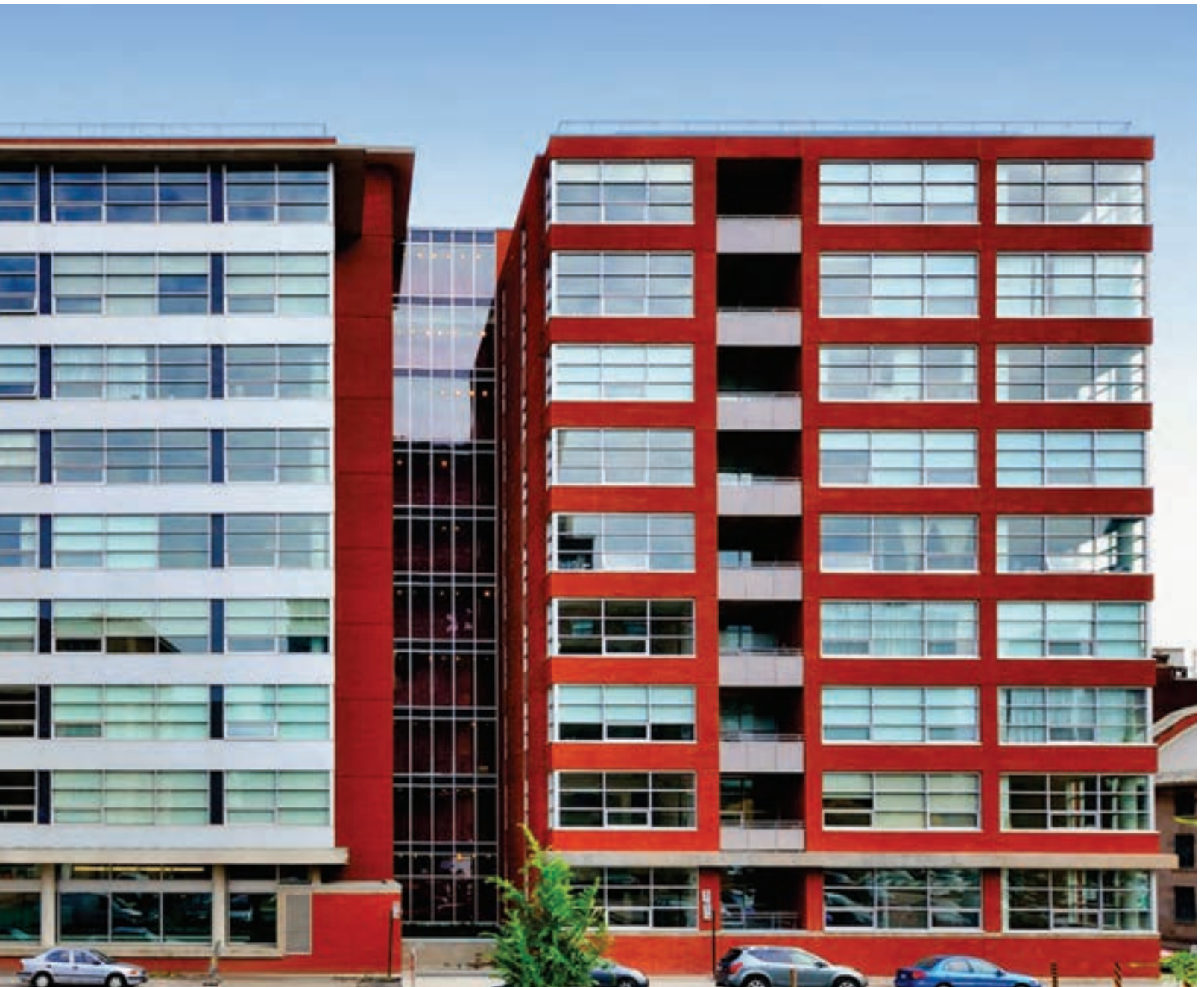
SMALL IS NOT ALWAYS BEAUTIFUL. The first challenge is, not surprisingly, financial. There are many fixed costs that developers incur regardless of the scale of project they build. Whether they're building a 50-suite mid-rise or a 350-suite high-rise, they still have to put up construction hoarding, they still have to build amenities and a lobby, and they still need to pay someone to do the day-to-day project management. The list goes on.

So there are "diseconomies of scale" associated with building at a more modest scale. Niall Finnegan, co-founder of Toronto-based development consulting firm Finnegan-Marshall, believes these diseconomies alone could result in a \$5 to \$10 per square foot premium over larger size high-rise

buildings — a significant amount in Toronto's competitive condo market. From this perspective, bigger is better.

OH, AND PARKING. Since mid-rise buildings are often built outside the core, adjacent to low-rise neighbourhoods and away from primary transit corridors, the requirements for parking can often be more onerous (on a per suite basis) than if one were building a high-rise building downtown. Also, mid-rise buildings tend to attract more "end-users," people who are actually going to live in the building and want a parking space for their car, rather than investors who will rent to tenants without cars. This increased need for parking is problematic for developers because underground parking is often a "loss leader." Some parking is needed in order to sell or rent the space in the building, but it's usually sold or rented at a loss.

Parking is one area where the North American landscape differs significantly from the European one. In many cities — Berlin is one example — there are no minimum parking requirements. Build what you need to build.



This changes the economics and can make it much more feasible to develop and construct at the mid-rise scale.

MID-RISE IS HARD WORK. One of Toronto's Mid-Rise Performance Standards dictates that buildings adjacent to a low-rise neighbourhood must follow a 45-degree angular plane. Other cities may not formalize this, but the intent is likely there. It's a way for the building to transition down to the adjacent low-rise houses and to minimize shadowing on people's backyards. (It also sometimes applies on the side and even main street, to reduce shadowing there as well.) The result is usually some pretty spectacular cascading terraces. But it doesn't come easily."

The mid rise is particularly difficult in that units change on every floor," says architect Roland Rom Colthoff, principal at RAW Design and the architect behind Urban Capital's Southport project. "This means vertical duct runs and stacking of mechanical equipment as occurs in a [high-rise] point tower is not possible. These cumulative offsets add directly to costs

and require close scrutiny by the designer to avoid unfortunate ceiling conditions." Colthoff adds, "A typical mid-rise will also require 30 or more individual unit plans, versus a point tower with only ten to fifteen."

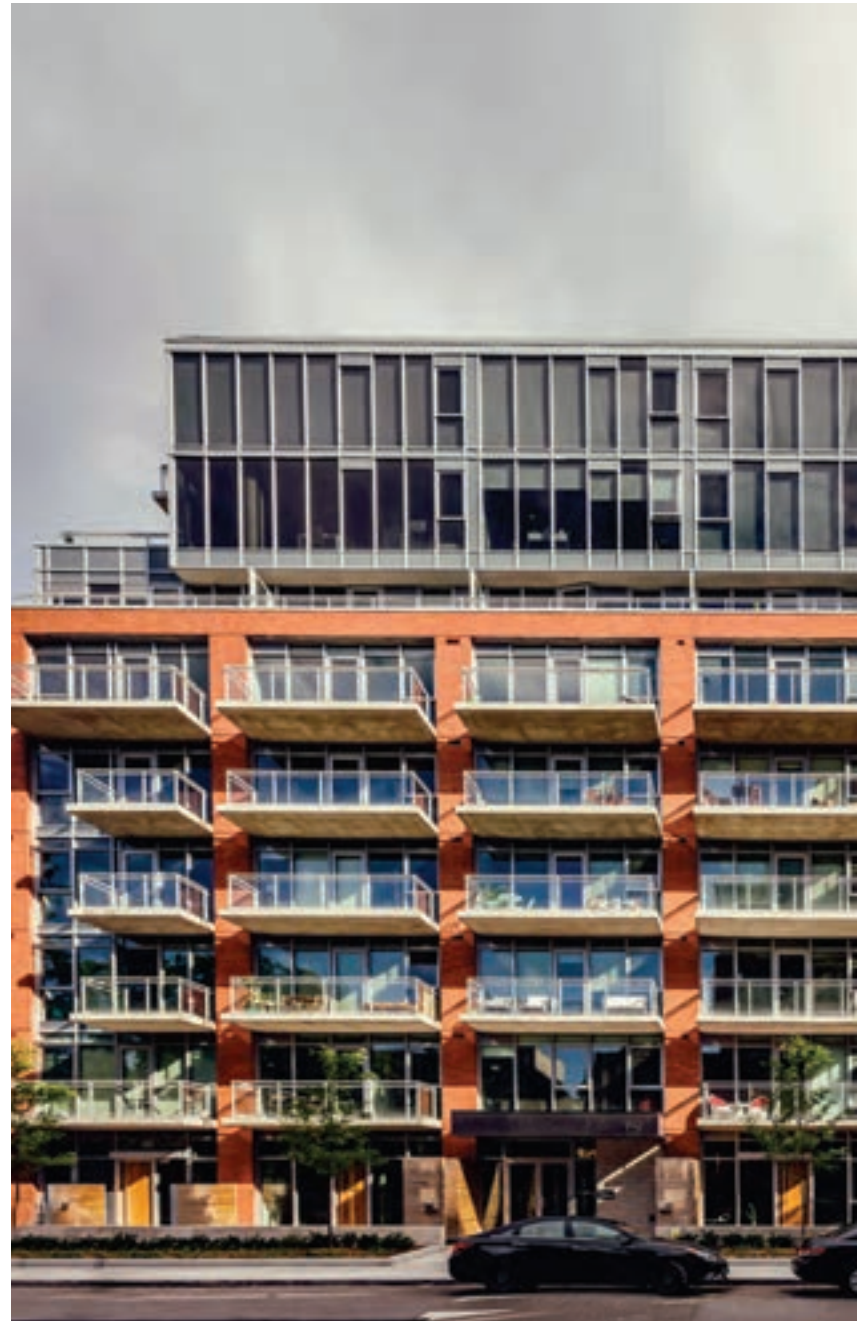
Of course, there's something nice about having a more unique condo suite. And more floor plan types means more options for purchasers. But it unequivocally makes designing and building more complicated. And also selling it — often the increased options can be confusing for purchasers, and require more work by agents (who, let's face it, prefer an easy sell to a hard one.)

In the end, Colthoff says there are real cost implications: "The 45-degree angular plane, while creating some very desirable outdoor spaces, very significantly adds to the design and construction costs." So there are real trade-offs between increased customization and sensible urban form on the one hand, and housing affordability and ease of building on the other.

IT CAN BE DIFFICULT TO FIND MID-RISE SITES TO DEVELOP. Along the main streets and outside of the downtowns of many North



Left to right, River City Phase 1, Toronto; Central Phase 3 (Hideaway), Ottawa; Southport, Halifax.



American cities — which is where mid-rise buildings typically live — the land parcels are often smaller and the pieces of land needed to put together a viable project might be owned by half a dozen or so different people. Getting them all on-side to sell can be a feat in itself, especially given that these sites are often the locations of viable local businesses, providing income to their land owners. And since we're already talking about smaller projects with many other challenges, it may not make sense, or be worth the headaches, to even try to put the sites together.

FINALLY, THERE'S THE ISSUE OF NIMBYISM. Anyone involved in cities and the built environment will know that NIMBY stands for "Not In My Back Yard." And it has come to pejoratively represent anyone or any group who blindly opposes development and change in their local community. The challenge with mid-rise buildings is that they're often literally built right beside people's backyards. So while a new 80-storey tower downtown might not ruffle too many feathers, an 8-storey building

down the street might. And considering that construction will also likely necessitate some level of cooperation from these same neighbours, it can sometimes be quite challenging to get a project like this off the ground.

This last point can be quite frustrating for urban leaders and policymakers because growth has to happen somewhere. And frankly the alternative to growing up is growing out. So while it may seem like a win for some to stop even the most modest of developments, all it means is that that growth will be displaced to some other part of the city. And if that too isn't possible, then eventually that city will face a housing shortage and ultimately an erosion of housing affordability. Right now, the North American poster child for this phenomenon is probably San Francisco.

However, the challenges facing mid-rise are also paradoxically some of its greatest strengths. Its scale and typical positioning in established neighbourhoods allows it to offer a new form of housing — multi-unit — in locations typically characterized by predominately single family homes, providing people with the option of "downsizing" while remaining in their local



community. And it also typically offers more affordable housing options in communities that might otherwise be out of reach of most people.

These benefits will only improve as cities continue to work on “upzoning” districts to allow mid-rise building to proceed without laborious rezonings, and as provinces and developers adopt more cost effective construction codes and techniques. Ontario, for example, recently started allowing wood-framed buildings up to six storeys. Previously the highest one could go was four.

At the same time, mid-rise buildings are also a far more sustainable form of housing than the alternative (sprawl). They keep people living, playing, and working close-by, and they improve the viability of mass transit by increasing population densities. These are all huge benefits, particularly at a time when successful cities around the world are seemingly facing the same issues: housing affordability, inequality, and crippling traffic congestion.

So while there are many challenges associated with building at the scale of the “in-between,” there are also many benefits for those who can get their

head around them. But perhaps the most significant of all, which hasn’t yet been mentioned, is the simple fact that people love them (except maybe the people whose backyards abut them, but they typically get over it).

Some of the most memorable cities in the world — Barcelona, Paris, Stockholm — were built at a mid-rise scale. These cities manage to achieve urban density while at the same time maintaining their human scale. There’s something quite magical about striking that perfect balance. And it’s for reasons like this that architects, developers, planners, and policy-makers around the world continue to look to the mid-rise building as the gold standard in city building.

Brandon Donnelly is an architect-trained, Toronto-based real estate developer. He is passionate about cities, real estate, design, and technology. His daily blog, Architect this City is aimed at city builders and is rated by the Guardian Cities in the UK as one of the best city blogs in the world.



Canadian winters are impossible to ignore, especially if you're building in the Prairies. So in 2015, Urban Capital sponsored two spectacular winter events: the first annual Winterstations along Toronto's Eastern Beaches; and the third annual RAW:almond pop-up restaurant at the confluence of Winnipeg's frozen Red and Assiniboine Rivers.

-30° Celsius: Bring it.



Winterstations 2015

What started as an idea to cover Toronto's Balmy, Key and Ashbridges Bay Beaches lifeguard stations with installations, ended up becoming an international design competition attracting nearly 200 submissions from 36 countries. The brainchild of Roland Colthoff of RAW Design (the architect behind Urban Capital's Southport development in Halifax), Ted Merrick of Ferris & Associates (the landscape architects behind our Central development in Ottawa) and art consultant Justin Rideway, the competition took the city by storm, attracting thousands of spectators and a huge amount of press. This notwithstanding a freak cold spell during its mid-February launch. Or maybe the installation's incredible success was because of the extended record-cold temperatures, which created a pure white arctic-like environment that was the perfect backdrop to the magical forms of the installations themselves.

From top: Hot Box by Michaela McLeod and Nicholas Croft; Sling Swing by London-based WMB Studio; and Driftwood Throne by London-based architect Daniel Madeiros.



Top- and middle-left, The Wing Back by New Hampshire designer Tim Olson; top right, Snowcone from a student team at Ryerson's Department of Architectural Science; below, RAW:almond situated on three feet of frozen river water at The Forks National Historic Site in Winnipeg.



RAW:almond

The third year of RAW:almond's pop-up restaurant design competition brought a UK team led by Tony Broomhead to Winnipeg to create a dreamy white structure to house some of Canada's top chefs for three weeks of haute cuisine on ice. A creative venture of Mandel Hitzer of deer + almond, one of Canada's top restaurants, and Joe Kaltornyk, founder of contemporary architecture and design gallery RAW:Gallery, RAW:almond lightens up Winnipeg's deep winter by bringing chefs from across the country to a temporary tent-line installation anchored in three feet of Red River ice. The night Urban Capital attended we were treated to dinner by the chef of one of our favourite restaurants — Liverpool House — a little Montreal style on the frozen prairie.

Canadian Business' coverage of Smart House shows that this development is more than just a real estate story

A case study in smart

PROFIT

THE WHITEBOARD

A BETTER SHOEBOX

HOW DO YOU BUILD A CONDO IN DOWNTOWN TORONTO THAT'S REASONABLY PRICED? MAKE IT JUST (A WELL-DESIGNED) 289 SQUARE FEET

BY MAI NGUYEN; ILLUSTRATION BY LEEANDRA CIANCI

THE CHALLENGE

DEVELOPERS URBAN CAPITAL AND MALIBU INVESTMENTS' EFFORTS TO BUILD AN AFFORDABLE CONDO AT A PRIME DOWNTOWN LOCATION RESULT IN TORONTO'S SMALLEST BACHELOR UNIT TO DATE.

the research

AFTER TALKING TO URBANITES, DEVELOPERS LEARN FOUR KEY THINGS ABOUT THEIR FUTURE TENANTS.



THE KITCHEN

BUSY CITY DWELLERS TEND TO DINE OUT, SO THE KITCHEN LOOKS MORE LIKE A NET BAR.

a smooth two-burner cooktop is built into the counter.

SPACE SAVED: 18"

a dishwasher drawer takes up half the visual space. (for extra drawers)

SPACE SAVED: 18"



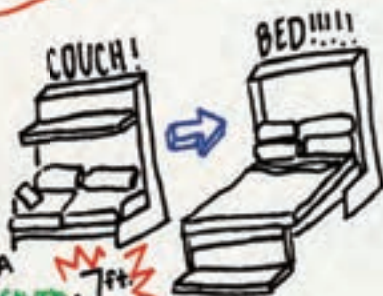
a 1.5-cubic-foot microwave-convection oven is perfect for heating up leftovers.

SPACE SAVED: 5 cu. ft.

the bedroom

THE BED FOLDS INTO THE WALL, PILLOWS AND ALL, AND TURNS INTO A SOFA WITH A BOOKSHELF ON TOP.

SPACE SAVED: 7ft



THE RESULT

THE 289-SQUARE-FOOT UNIT IS PRICED AT AROUND \$250,000.

CONSTRUCTION BEGINS IN NOVEMBER.

Thinking inside the box

It's like that feeling when you open a package that just arrived in the mail. As you lift the object out of the box and set it down on a table, you smile knowing how well it's going to fit into your life. CUBITAT is just like that, except it's your house.

By DAVID WEX & PADDY HARRINGTON



**ARCHITECTURE +
INTERIOR DESIGN +
PRODUCT DESIGN**
Cubitat at the 2015
Interior Design Show,
showing the kitchen
and bedroom/living
room functions.

David Wex, a partner at Urban Capital, was the creator of the Cubitat concept. Paddy Harrington, formerly Executive Creative Director at Bruce Mau Design, is the founder of Frontier, a creative exploration company based in Toronto.



Clockwise from top left, Cubitat's main facade; the 2015 Interior Design Show booth; the washroom is located inside the cube; looking outward from inside the cube, through the shower.

Toronto's Interior Design Show (IDS) is Canada's premier showcase of new products, innovative designs and avant-garde concepts from around the world. For four days every January, IDS packs Toronto with industry superstars, cutting edge emerging names, design-savvy consumers and international press.

For IDS 2015 Urban Capital, together with Italy's Nichetto Studio, was asked to curate the main feature. The result: Cubitat, a plug-and-play, customizable, and transportable cube that contains everything you need in a house.

The idea behind Cubitat is architecture as product. Your living room, bedroom, kitchen, bathroom and closet are packaged into one exquisitely designed object, something custom ordered online, fabricated off-site, shipped to wherever you want it, and installed.

Cubitat is designed to be placed in any empty space — your typical 600 square foot condominium could work easily. Each of Cubitat's four exterior walls has a distinct function: upon

entering your space there are extensive storage cabinets, and then you have a choice of walking down either side, one has your kitchen, the other the entrance to your bathroom. The fourth wall faces your open living area, with a large entertainment wall equipped with a flat screen TV, retractable book shelves and a hidden queen-size bed which slides out from underneath (the step-up bathroom is above this). All electrical and plumbing is brought to one central location, from which it plugs into the building's services.

Cubitat creates a modular prefabricated house-in-a-box that can be inserted into any form of structure, whether new residential, old factory or converted loft. It gives the owner a choice of what they want in their kitchen and bathroom. And it lets the hard, messy stuff of building get done in the controlled conditions of a factory.

Or at least theoretically. While Urban Capital was able to manufacture Cubitat at a site in Toronto and then transport it — on a flatbed

truck, with police escort — to Toronto's convention centre, at the end of the exhibition Cubitat had to be dismantled (and its parts returned to its various suppliers). This version of Cubitat had not yet been designed to come apart and be transported, or stored, in pieces.

Nevertheless, Cubitat garnered attention around the world. Online coverage of it went viral. It was the top viewed article on *Slate* for days after it was posted, and was picked up by newspapers and design blogs in Europe, Asia, North and South America and Australia. There were multiple requests to show it at international design exhibitions.

Where would Urban Capital take Cubitat if it went forward with Version 2? The next design phase would look at designing Cubitat as individual pieces that snap together and are able to be flat packed — à la Ikea — to allow for more nimble transportation as well as on-site assembly and dismantling.

Possibly a task of IDS 2017.



Imagining architecture as product



01 Design

Configure your Cubitat online according to your own personal specifications.

Nike pioneered an online product customization tool that lets customers log onto its website, choose a basic shoe type, and then go through a set of easy steps to personalize it. Mass-produced small-scale products do this but nobody is doing it at scale with architecture — until Cubitat.



02 Make

Your custom Cubitat is assembled according to your order.

If architecture and our building industry evolved at the same rate as the tech and auto industries, we'd live in dramatically different ways. Architecture as product rethinks our relationship to the built world. It imagines architecture as fast, not slow, and configurable, not static.



03 Deliver

Have your Cubitat shipped to the location of your choice.

Cubitat takes the core elements of your house, wraps them up together and delivers them all-in-one pretty much anywhere. Whether it's setting up your starter home or taking your home with you when you move, Cubitat makes just about any place a place to live.



04 Install

Hoist, sit or slide your Cubitat in place and plug it in.

You know how you plug in your Mac and get going right away? Cubitat is the same but for your house. Live in a condo? Hoist Cubitat up to your floor and slide it in. In the country? Build a platform, plug in to services, and away you go.



05 Live

Move right in and live in a whole new way with Cubitat.

Cubitat living makes small things fun. It's like vacuum packing your home. Cubitat is everything you need to live nearly anywhere you want to live.





Jacques Tati as Monsieur Hulot in *Mon Oncle*, 1958.

Jacques Tati eyes Queen Street

MONOCLE, the wry, slightly unnerving work by Berlin-based REALITIES:UNITED, will cast an eye over Toronto's Queen Street West from Smart House.

By MICHAEL PROKOPOW

In 1958 French film director Jacques Tati presented his comedy *Mon Oncle* to the world. An affecting story of the relationship between an eccentric uncle and his beloved nephew, the film was instantly acknowledged to be as much about the tensions in post World War II France between the past and the future as it was about family and character.

In the film the quixotic, bicycle-riding Monsieur Hulot lives in an old, slightly shabby district in Paris, that romanticized type of neighborhood where happy dogs run the streets, baguettes and berets are the trustworthy, ordinary things of everyday life, and the sound of accordion music is never far away. The young boy on the other hand — nine-year-old Gerard Arpel — lives with his striving, materialistic, middle-class parents in the family's modernist and obviously anthropomorphized house.

Streamlined and concrete — a mix somewhere between the generically progressive architecture of the modern movement and the radical experimentation of Corbusier — and dominated by two round windows on the second floor, the house boasts an automated garage, abstract landscaping, an impossibly stylish curving path, and a fish sculpture fountain that is turned on only for visitors. As such, the house is a centrally important character in the film: a caricature of the Arpels' questionable

priorities and capitulation to a new social order, but also an undeniably enticing embodiment of progress and technological possibility.

One of the running jokes in the film is the transformation of the circular windows on the second floor into eyes. The heads of people become pupils that are looking and staring back. Suddenly the house — a machine for living — becomes a type of living machine. The technological marvel that is the Villa Arpel is at once humanized and made charming. Not surprisingly, the sight gag never fails to please and Tati's critique is at once genial and smart.

SMART ART *Monocle*, the work by Berlin-based realities:united to be installed at Smart House, Urban Capital and Malibu's groundbreaking micro-condominium development on Toronto's Queen Street West at University, is a compelling example of the benefits of art in the public realm, and a wry reference to the transformational nature of Smart House itself.

Designed for the prominent space above the residential entrance of the building, the artwork — intelligent and playfully provocative — blurs the lines between architecture and art. It is a work of both visual and intellectual consequence. Seemingly straightforward in appearance, *Monocle* is a kinetic device the simplicity of which belies the references it makes to art and architecture and the ideas that it presents.



“
**With *Monocle*
 the standard
 fact of people
 looking at a
 work of art is
 inverted.**
 ”

To the viewer, the work is a study in elementary forms: a large single circle containing a black disc is inset in the building’s stone façade. Evoking the machine aesthetics of 1930s modernist architecture — rational, minimal and urbane — and paying a type of homage to the spare details of the neighbouring 1920s classical bank building, *Monocle* manages to both bridge and claim the space between the new and the old.

At first glance, the cleverly named work makes coy reference to the precedent of the windows of the Arpel House, while at the same time moving beyond the visual language and optical ruse of Tati’s film. Indeed, *Monocle* both looks like an eye peering out from the building and, because of its mechanical capacity, operates as one. Designed so that the black disc moves continually back and forth at the bottom of the circle, the piece engages with the public on the street.

While the artwork evokes the matter of seeing and sight, it also raises the question about how art is regarded. With *Monocle* the standard fact of people looking at a work of art is inverted. Here the artwork is looking back. For just as it is claimed that the eyes of the *Mona Lisa* follow the movements of an admirer, so *Monocle* gives the impression of watching the comings

and goings of throngs of city dwellers as well as the residents of Smart House. The effect is complicated. In an age of glass architecture and see-through condominiums, where exhibitionism and voyeurism can collide, and at a time when the welcome anonymity of the city meets the anxious culture of surveillance, *Monocle* is a work of art in which the charm of its representation of looking and being seen speaks to some of the more pressing issues of contemporary life.

Finally, *Monocle* connects the transformational nature of Smart House — its conscious redesign and recalibration of interior space to meet the increasingly smaller unit sizes that are being delivered to the market — to the transformation of an earlier era as embodied in Tati’s film. The former is to a new, significantly more urban and compact world; the latter was to what was then a new, more modern world in all its facets.

CATALYTIC CONVERSION The critical creativity that is embodied in *Monocle* is to be expected from the artists of realities:united. Long concerned with what is described as “architecture’s outward communicative capacity”, the Berlin-based studio is committed to thinking outside traditional definitions of place,

aesthetics and creative objects. “Our projects are intended to serve as a catalyst in a given situation, and are therefore strongly determined by identifying, transforming, amplifying, and combining various existing potentials,” says Jan Edler, one of the firm’s two principals. “In that sense our approach centres on taking advantage of available opportunities, rather than specific skills, procedures, or tasks.”

The summary is clarifying. *Monocle* is a grounded and nuanced work and a particularly accomplished piece of public art. Oftentimes the process of putting art into the public realm suffers from concerns about ideological agendas being played out, or about being too radical or difficult to comprehend. To the credit of its makers and to its patrons, *Monocle* is at once appealing and light and an active invitation to contemplate the forces and implications of modernization, change, and social life at a specific point in time.

Michael Prokopow is an associate dean and professor at OCAD University, and was a member of the jury that selected Monocle as the public art piece for Smart House.

With a history of creative collaboration dating back to the early 1990s, realities:united has amassed an impressive body of work, including massive lighting installations, media interventions and autonomous art objects, and has partnered with leading architects worldwide on projects that range widely in terms of program, scale, character, materiality and function. Michael Prokopow interviews principal Jan Edler:

MP: Your practice is defined as an “art and architectural” one.

Could you speak to its history and intellectual and artistic culture?

JE: Tim [Edler] and I are both trained architects. We started to initiate joint projects as part of the Berlin based trans-disciplinary art group “Kunst und Technik” in the late ‘90s. In 2000 we founded “realities:united” as a studio for art and architecture. The name reflects our approach of trying to broaden the notion of architecture by synchronizing different working fields and by reprogramming reality. We are especially known for our art and media extensions to buildings by other architects and we are fortunate to have been able to collaborate with some of the most interesting figures of contemporary architecture including Minsuk Cho, Peter Cook, Coop HimmelB(l)au, Will Alsop, Bjarke Ingels, Diller Scofidio & Renfro, and Nieto Sobejano.

MP: How does your office work? How do you approach projects?

JE: We are interested in the specific potentials of each project. Through a thorough analysis of the specific conditions and aims of each project and situation we try to reveal and transform those potentials that otherwise remain undiscovered or unused.

Most projects we develop are unique and we make use of a vast variety of artistic media. We pragmatically choose whatever medium appears most suitable to achieve the specific aims of a project. That can be fluorescent light tubes as for our *BIX* installation at Peter Cook’s Kunsthau in Graz, that can be the transformed exhaust of a smokestack as for Bjarke Ingels’ waste-to-energy plant currently under construction in Copenhagen, or that can be an industrial robot as for our installation *Sender* in Bergkamen.



BIG Vortex, Amagerforbrænding Waste-to-Energy Plant, Copenhagen, Denmark



BIX Communicative Display Skin, Kunsthau Graz, Austria.



Sender, Urbane Künste Ruhr, Bergkamen, Germany

Synchronizing art and architecture

MP: In the case of Monocle, can you explain the genesis of the idea? **JE:** We initially started off with investigating a variety of different and technically rather ambitious ideas and approaches all circling around themes of “dynamic” or “changeable” structures. But we couldn’t get them in line with the building’s use. Looking at a condominium structure we wanted to create a piece that would add a jolly tension and human notion to the building. That is when we started discussing and referencing movies by Jacques Tati, a French filmmaker whose œuvre we greatly admire. Quoting an element of ‘Villa Arpel’ in his most popular movie *Mon Oncle* from 1958, *Monocle* is a built homage to Tati and his passionate reflections on modern architecture.

MP: Monocle is a smart, referential piece. Is it fair to say that it also operates on the level of critique? In Tati’s film modernist architecture

is presented questionably as the embodiment of material progress. Monocle could be read in ways that both affirm and question contemporary modes of western life? **JE:** Yes, with a twinkle in the eye! Tati creates satirical contrasts by pulling the leg of modern and traditional times at once, creating extraordinary comedic moments, joyfully expressed in a charming, affectionate and wise manner. Tati remains at a great distance passionately and lovingly observing the fate of modern man.

In his films, ahead of his time, Tati unmask the true nature of technological progress as a matter of devotion, much more than reason. With weightless magic, he inhales spirit into objects and machines, creating a mesmerizing theatre, which strikes us equally with amusement and awe. This ambiguity is an angle we consider worthwhile recollecting, when addressing the striving for a better living.



realities:united’s Jan Edler

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Here come the robo-cars

From urban city centres to sprawling suburbs, autonomous vehicles are about to change everything. Are you ready?

By STEVEN BARR



Lets jump ahead a few years and assume we're over the cynicism and skepticism that comes with the idea of driverless cars. Autonomous vehicles (AVs) are coming and there's no doubt about it. Some automakers say they will be consumer-ready by 2020, others by 2025 or 2030. Either way, driverless cars are about to change everything. They will change our cities and how we move people around them. They will birth new industries and kill others. They will stretch

the boundary between the public and private realms. Autonomous vehicles will be the cognitive leap into a new era of automation.

The depth and speed of the transition to AVs will be determined by whether we fully embrace the idea now and start preparing. And like all city building exercises, it starts with a capital planning strategy that rethinks infrastructure investment. Namely, transportation infrastructure. Driverless cars are about the same number of years away as it takes to build and deploy a new subway



The Google Koala Car doesn't need a steering wheel, pedals, or windshield wipers — hop on in.

or light rail system. The question is, why invest in costly, lengthy mass transit projects that may be rendered obsolete before they're even completed? That is perhaps the crux of the driverless car debate: how do we prepare today so we don't kick ourselves tomorrow.

WHY ARE DRIVERLESS CARS GREAT? Robots are better drivers than us. Today 94% of car accidents are due to human error, with the three leading causes being alcohol, speeding, and distraction. According to the World Health Organization, accidents kill around 1.2 million people a year. A study by the non-profit Eno Centre for Transportation estimates that if 90% of cars on American roads were autonomous, the number of accidents would fall from 5.5 million a year to 1.3 million, and road deaths from 32,400 to 11,300.

As well as being safer, self-driving cars would drastically cut down congestion. They would not brake erratically or unnecessarily, and could drive nearly bumper-to-bumper to increase road use efficiency. A study by the University of Texas estimates that 90% penetration of self-driving cars in America would be equivalent to a doubling of road capacity. This efficiency gain alone would be huge for transportation planning and a reduced need for road expansion.

We could also eliminate all traffic management fixtures that clutter our streets — stop signs, traffic lights, speed bumps — which are not needed for self-driving cars. The result would be a more attractive urban realm and improved streetscaping for pedestrians.

OWNERSHIP IS DEAD The great promise of driverless cars, however, is that no one will need to own one. The potential for this technology to be transformational is with an on-demand car-sharing model. In this future, the concept of car ownership is entirely an unnecessary burden. Cars today have an average utilization rate

of 3%. In a driverless future, autonomous vehicles have constant utilization. We're already seeing a growing trend of young people moving away from car ownership and this will be true across all groups. When you're done with your driverless car, it moves on to the next customer, then the next customer, and so on.

With on-demand cars in near-constant use, there is also much less need for parking. Self-driving cars could drop off their customer and zip off to a centralized parking structure away from prime real estate. We could completely eliminate surface parking on our city streets and use those spaces for additional road capacity, or better yet for bike lanes and widened sidewalks. Condo buildings would have zero parking, and therefore no need to construct below grade. Below grade construction typically represents 20%–25% of the overall construction budget, so now buildings would be significantly less expensive to build, and by extension less expensive to own. Alternatively, maybe below-grade parking does not disappear because it proves to be an efficient place to store self-driving cars for on-demand service in the downtown core. Underground garages designed for self-driving cars would have narrower parking stalls and drive aisles, lower ceilings, and would not need the same ventilation as today — again, translating to less costly below grade construction. And the garage could be rented to a private operator as a revenue source for the condominium corporation.

FROM THE CITY TO THE EXURBS Autonomous vehicles free up space in dense urban environments for more meaningful land use, but we will also see an impact on the suburbs as these vehicles unlock the potential for habitation outside of mass transit centres. University of Utah researcher Dan Fagnant foresees a “simultaneous densification of cities, and expansion of the exurbs.” Fagnant argues that driverless cars would make it easier



for workers to live farther out of the city because if you can sleep on the journey a longer commute becomes feasible. Riders in self-driving cars would be able to do other things, like work. Morgan Stanley estimates that the productivity gains would be worth \$5.6 trillion worldwide. Autonomous vehicles would also democratize mobility and offer independence for the elderly and the disabled, while children could get to and from school without a parent chauffeur.

SO CAN WE JUST ABANDON MASS TRANSIT NOW?

Transportation is one of the most important factors in habitation. Cars, as they say, created the suburbs. Fifty or sixty years later, the shift in focus is to downtowns, with empty nesters, young families, and of course investors all vying for a piece of the action. The problem today is we champion public transit as the solution to our overburdened infrastructure but most often land use density does not support it. Definitely not in the suburbs, but even in the big city centres where transit ridership between rush hours is often too low to justify the capital costs for expansion.

Then there's the politics. In Toronto, with its record-breaking number of cranes in the sky, the in-place planning policies do not always promote an aggressive land use intensification strategy along transit networks and in support of expansion.

Yet in the "driverless cars versus transit" debate a common conclusion seems to emerge: we will still need mass transit where mass transit already exists — meaning, high density urban centres. An autonomous car takes up as much physical space on the road as a human-operated car. *The Atlantic's* CityLab argues that yes we will be able to fit more AVs on the road because they can drive bumper-to-bumper but road capacity is finite and subways, LRTs, and buses simply carry more people. Subways may be underutilized

outside of rush hours, but they move a heck of a lot of people every morning and every evening. Even a road full of driverless cars inches from one another could not match this efficiency.

It seems most likely, then, that the future of driverless cars will be part of a multi-modal transit system: an alternative to transit expansion in low population suburbia, a complimentary mode in busy urban centres, coverage in low-volume scenarios such as late-night service, and as the first mile/last mile connections to conventional bus and rail services that only get people "close" to where they want to go but not exactly there. Moreover, mass transit will always be a more affordable mode of transportation. Driverless taxis would be less expensive than conventional taxis because you wouldn't need to pay a human driver, but the same is true for driverless public transit that would also benefit from the lower operating costs of much higher-capacity buses and trains.

Driverless cars will undoubtedly change our cities. The public sector, for better or worse, will have a central role in determining the trajectory of change and must actively create conditions for this technology to flourish. There is good news: in October the Ontario Government announced an upcoming driverless test car licensing program, joining California, Nevada, and Sweden on the frontier of AV policy research and development. Inevitably people will demand that their elected officials incorporate driverless technology into cities, so it would be essential that they get a jump on it now, beginning with the allocation of infrastructure funding that recognizes the rapid rate of technological change happening in front of our eyes.

And when they do, the future will be fantastic.

Steven Barr is a development manager at Urban Capital.

The Lutz Pod, produced by Coventry-based RDM Group, can seat two people and range at a top speed of 15 km/h for about 60 kilometers, or roughly six hours on a single charge.



JJ Thompson's point of view

What looks like a series of box cars or storage containers sitting ready for loading is in fact a picture of River City Phase 1's balconies, rotated 90 degrees counter-clockwise. Toronto-based photographer JJ Thompson catches the play of River City's slick and rough exteriors in one of the more inventive photographs we've seen of this iconic development.



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