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GTA condos make a statement with their lobbies

Serving the social role of a front porch, a building's entrance hall makes an important first impression.



A light pillar creates visual focus in the contemporary lobby of new condo, The Bond. From left to right: president of Lifetime Developments, interior designer Melandro Quilatan who created the lobby, and Lily Chan. (COLE BURSTON / FOR THE TORONTO STAR)





Jared Menkes, vice-president of highrise and residential development for Menkes Developments
(FILE PHOTO)

By **ELAINE SMITH** Star Touch
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While floor plans and amenities top the shopping list for condo buyers, each building has another unique calling card: the lobby.

"Lobbies are very important when you live vertically," says Jared Menkes, vice-president of highrise and residential development for Menkes Developments, the builders of Pears on the Avenue, a 20-storey condominium in Toronto's Yorkville neighbourhood.

“You don’t have a front porch anymore, so the lobby becomes that social environment for residents. It’s where they meet and talk,” Menkes says.

“It’s also the first impression people have when they visit the building. People want to impress their friends and family.”

This duality was one of the principles that guided the building’s designer, Alessandro Munge, principal and founder of Studio Munge in Toronto. He created a welcoming and elegant lobby with a stunning focal point: a large, spiral stairway that leads to a gym overlooking the pool, a party room, a theatre, a yoga room and an outdoor terrace.

“I wanted a freshness and a modernity that was timeless and warm, even though modern design is usually cold and sterile,” Munge said. “If I wanted my home to feel like a gallery, I’d go to the AGO (Art Gallery of Ontario), but I want to come home to something different.

“This has a beautiful residential feel, using textures and layers and inviting, gorgeous finishes, and the staircase is a sculptural opportunity to connect two spaces.”

Munge believes lobbies play an important role in the lives of a building’s residents.

“People in condominiums live in 500- to 1,200-square-foot boxes and are confined to them,” he said. “The public spaces are equally important to them, if not more so.

The public space was something Lily Chan and Jacob Plago took into account when they purchased a two-bedroom suite in The Bond, on Adelaide St. W.

“The combination of a nice floor plan, nicely planned amenities and the location were important to us,” said Plago, 29, who works in financial services downtown. At the Bond, he’ll have access to a pool, a golf simulator and a play station room.

“The lobby is nicely laid out. It provides a sense of permanence and makes you feel more at home. It has a modern aesthetic and helps you feel comfortable in your own space.”

Chan, 32, an optometrist, is pleased to have a nice space where “guests can sit and wait for us.”

One of the lobby’s notable features is a light pillar.

Brian Brown, vice-president of Lifetime Developments, the Bond’s developer, said the pillar adds a meaningful vibe.

“It’s a very cool, hip, young neighbourhood,” Brown said. “It’s very important to get the lobby correct and reflect the neighbourhood and who’s living there. It establishes the quality of the building.”

“We want to feel that the lobby is inviting and welcoming, but it’s also a high-traffic area, so the quality of the materials must be able to withstand the weather and traffic that goes through it,” he said. “Generally speaking, we try to create something reflective of trends and styles, but still timeless so that the owners of the building won’t need to revise it.”

At Imperial Plaza, on St. Clair Ave. W., the lobby dates back to the 1950s, when the structure was built as the headquarters for Imperial Oil. The building was recently converted into condos after the company relocated to Calgary.

The public lobby's vaulted ceilings retain the original 1950s light fixtures; a pair of murals depict the history and the future of oil; a massive clock's golden tiles gleam.

Energy and people fill the space since the lobby houses an LCBO outlet and a Longo's grocery store, conveniences most condo dwellers yearn to have in their building.

"It's grand, impressive and distinctive," says Joseph Feldman, development manager for Camrost-Felcorp's Imperial Village project, says about the lobby. "There is marble, granite and the amazing clock. In the 1950s, they overbuilt everything and spared no expense."

The result is an active lobby that sees a working crowd during lunch hour and later "residents in their pyjamas going to pick up dinner."

There's also a private, 2,500-square-foot lobby for residents on a lower level and 22,000-square-feet of amenity space that includes a golf simulator, theatre, games room, squash courts and a fitness club.

Feldman, though, sees the public lobby as the jewel in Imperial Plaza's crown.

"We received an Award of Merit from Heritage Toronto for restoration," he said. "We took a commercial, corporate space and created a sense of community. Retail brings shoppers in and it's always bustling. It's very different than your standard condo."

He concedes, however, that the lobby design depends on the project, something with which his fellow developers agree.

"You need to cater to the neighbourhood and every lobby is unique," Feldman said. "If you had a standard concept, they would lose their sparkle."

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IMPERIAL PLAZA

Address: 111 St. Clair Ave. W.

Developer: Camrost-Felcorp

Public lobby dimensions: 8,500 square feet

Units: 23 storeys, 400 suites

Contact: sales@imperialcondos.ca

PEARS ON THE AVENUE

Address: 170 Avenue Rd.

Developer: Menkes Developments

Lobby dimensions: 2,000 square feet

Units: 20 storeys, 175 units

Completion date: Occupied

Contact: info@menkes.com

THE BOND

Address: 290 Adelaide St. W.

Developer: Lifetime Developments

Lobby dimensions: About 750 square feet

Units: 42 storeys, 393 units

Completion Date: 2017

Contact: info@thebond.ca

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