

Next May, paradise opens for business in Toronto's downtown core with the completion of Living Shangri-La Toronto, a 66-storey residence, five-star hotel and retail tower that promises to raise the bar in luxury living. The project was born after developers at Westbank Projects Corporation and the Peterson Group experienced firsthand the legendary hospitality of the Asia-based hotel franchise and met with Shangri-La executives to discuss importing the brand to Toronto. Soon after, plans were drawn for a landmark 700-foot-tall building that would redefine the Toronto skyline and introduce an unprecedented standard of living. "The project design brings light and life to the building," says Jill Killeen, communications consultant for Living Shangri-La Toronto. "Shangri-La is an iconic brand, and its hotels are known around the world for merging elegance with comfort. Westbank and Peterson are combining that Asian refinement with North American style in the Toronto marketplace."

Construction began in April 2008, with designers taking inspiration from the tower's sister development in Vancouver. Completed in 2009, Living Shangri-La Vancouver - and now its Toronto counterpart - encompasses a philosophy fittingly referred to as "Vancouverism": highrise towers that accommodate large populations while preserving view corridors of the city's esthetic. "Very few hotels today are built as stand-alones," Killeen notes. "Modern developments incorporate retail and hotel amenities alongside living space, such as high-end spas, restaurants and bars. They are more than just temporary or permanent residences: they create a lifestyle."

Indeed, mixed-use hotels, apartments and condos are a growing trend among global hotspots like New York and Hong Kong, and Shangri-La is developing similar properties in London, Vienna and Paris. With its densely populated epicentre, Toronto's foray into the multi-use market was only a matter of time. And there was no better company to oversee development of its landmark edifice than Westbank, who, in partnership with the Peterson Group, was the first to bring Shangri-La to North America with the Vancouver building. Founded in 1992, the company has since made a name for itself as a leading residential developer in Canada, with a focus on mixed-used projects.

The owners appointed architectural design to James K.M. Cheng Architects, who worked with associate architect Hariri Pontarini Architects and heritage architect E.R.A. Architects Inc. to draw up plans for 592 hotel rooms, residences and private estates, including two 6,700-square-foot penthouses, an 18-seat theatre and a 2,500-square-foot fitness centre. James K.M. Cheng Architects was also responsible for designing Living Shangri-La Vancouver, whose green-and-glass esthetic

served as inspiration for the Toronto building.

Though still in the construction stages, the building already achieves a sleek finish thanks to streamlined double-glazing along the exterior and glass pavilions facing the street. This refined elegance is balanced by stone cladding at the base of the tower, which complements the ground plane's stone finishing. The designers at Phillips Farevaag Smalenberg merged what landscape architect Mike Derksen refers

## Living Shangri-La Toronto

by Sonu Purhar



RENDERING COURTESY WESTBANK PROJECTS CORPORATION



to as “the rugged beauty of the Canadian Shield with the calm serenity of an Asian-inspired garden. In this way, we captured microcosms of nature within a man-made forum.” The team interwove greenery throughout the building, including the terraced dining area and public amenity spaces; several levels feature character pine trees, wind-swept grasses and rocky outcroppings set within the framework of rich stone paving. Foliage extends to the penthouse villas, where manicured trees stand behind an extended curtainwall visible from street level. As its polished greenery demonstrates, the property is a showpiece as much as a residence; in fact, Westbank has teamed up with the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) to commission an international artist to create a piece of installation art for display on site. In keeping with the building’s air of cool mystique, the work is currently being kept under wraps – though Killeen promises that once it’s unveiled, “it will be dramatic and impressive. We want to contribute to the neighbourhood’s vibrant art culture, and this piece will definitely achieve that.”

Living Shangri-La Toronto’s interior is just as flawlessly and carefully designed as its shell. Suites feature electric fireplaces, wood and stone flooring and over-height ceilings. Self-closing cabinets, designer fixtures and spa



showers add the touches of understated elegance and comfort that Shangri-La is known for. These same courtesies appear at the structural level, thanks to design schemes by Jones Kwong Kishi Consulting Engineers and Adjeleian Allen Rubeli Ltd. Bruce Neil, principal, Adjeleian Allen Rubeli Ltd., says that concrete core walls, up to 48 inches thick at the lower levels, were carefully tuned with concrete strength to meet the challenge of wind-induced building motion. “Our goal was to avoid the more costly damping system that’s typically placed at the top of tall buildings,” he explains. “That in turn freed up high-value spaces, particularly at the penthouse level.”

Despite its location in urban Toronto, the Shangri-La’s ode to utopia also acknowledges the city’s roots. Scott Weir, associate, E.R.A. Architects Inc., says developers were careful





to preserve the site's historical elements, particularly the Bishop's Block, a derelict heritage building that was on the verge of collapse. "A leaky roof had advanced decay to the point that the facades couldn't be retained in place,"

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**LOCATION**

University Avenue and Richmond Street  
Toronto, Ontario

**OWNER/DEVELOPER/  
GENERAL CONTRACTOR**

Westbank Projects Corporation

**ARCHITECT**

James K.M. Cheng Architects

**ASSOCIATE ARCHITECT**

Hariri Pontarini Architects

**HERITAGE ARCHITECT**

E.R.A. Architects Inc.

**STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS**

Jones Kwong Kishi Consulting Engineers  
Adjeleian Allen Rubeli Ltd.

**MECHANICAL ENGINEER**

Sterling, Cooper & Associates

**ELECTRICAL ENGINEER**

Nemetz (S/A) & Associates Ltd.

**CURTAIN WALL CONSULTANT**

BVDA Facade Engineering Ltd.

**SITE SERVICING CONSULTANT**

Johnson, Sustronk, Weinstein & Associates

**LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT**

Phillips Farevaag Smallerberg

**TOTAL AREA**

882,00 square feet

**TOTAL COST**

Undisclosed

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explains Weir. "In many areas, the mortar could no longer hold the bricks together." After consulting with the City of Toronto, Weir and his team documented the south and west walls of the Block before heritage masons dismantled and stored them off site. The walls are currently being restored and re-erected to their original location. Weir says it was crucial to preserve such an important part of Toronto's history. "Those bricks were handmade in the 1830s," he says – a feature that lends a rich historic element to the modern tower.

Perhaps the most compelling attraction of Living Shangri-La is its location. The tower is within walking distance of Toronto's

theatre and financial districts, which is particularly appealing to globetrotting sophisticates. "Living Shangri-La provides international travellers with all the amenities they could ever want or need," says Killeen. "They can order room service from an upscale eatery, enjoy a spa treatment or have a drink with friends or colleagues – all within the same building."

The project seems to have been blessed with the golden touch associated with its name. According to Westbank, there have been no delays or budgetary concerns as yet. "It's been a very smooth development throughout," says Killeen. But then, you wouldn't expect anything less from paradise. ■

