

EAST SIDE STORY



EVER EVOLVING: Cafe Florentin and Majesteas opened this summer at Queen and Carlaw.

Aaron Lynett, National Post

Lindsay Forsey, National Post · Saturday, Oct. 23, 2010

The view from Paul Moran's pad is unreal. Maybe it's an illusion of the early autumn twilight, but there appears to be an endless forest stretching eastward from his abode, though he lives just three kilometres from downtown Toronto.

What is this deciduous mirage that lies beneath his seventh-floor balcony? Why, it's Leslieville.

Tall, full trees lining the streets north of Queen Street, east of Carlaw Avenue, create a colourful canopy that cloaks the homes below. And, for now, nothing obstructs the view from the east side of the Garment Factory Lofts, where Mr. Moran lives, and neighbouring developments, such as the Wrigley Building and the newly occupied Printing Factory Lofts and Boston Towns.

"It's the perfect location -- close to the DVP, on the streetcar line and surrounded by The Danforth, The Beach and The Distillery. I knew the area would grow," says Mr. Moran, who, after renting in the area since 2003, purchased his 670-square-foot condo for \$234,000 pre-construction in June 2006, and moved in January 2008. A smaller unit in his building with a less-coveted view sold recently for \$300,000.

The 34-year-old digital marketing manager describes Leslieville as a hybrid of Queen Street West's Ossington area and The Beach in Toronto's east end. "There's not much

of a nightlife scene here, so Leslieville doesn't get flocks of partiers like Ossington does, but there are tons of amazing restaurants and boutiques nearby," Mr. Moran says.

He actually "gets giddy" walking to Ceili Cottage. Since opening in June 2009, the unassuming Irish pub located at Queen and Leslie streets has become his favourite place in the city to grab a pint. It's also become a destination for Torontonians, who pack the small space to slurp oysters shucked by owner and champion shucker, Patrick McMurray (he's a local, too).

"I like to run and ride my bike; this area is great for outdoor activities," Mr. Moran says. "The Leslie Street Spit, Withrow Park and the Lower Don Trail are all close by, and you can go kayaking and wind surfing down at the lake.

"Leslieville is definitely growing and changing," Mr. Moran says. "Some people say this is where hipsters go to retire, but I think it's more accurate to say that it's where they come to have babies."

Mr. Moran's observation isn't a hard one to make; Leslieville isn't just family-friendly, it's family-fashionable. Baby on the Hip, located near Queen and Carlaw, and newly opened Little Peeps, in neighbouring Riverside near Queen and Broadview, are both eco-friendly baby boutiques selling everything from trendy teething toys to speedy strollers.

At "cafe 'n' play" hot spot, Lil' Bean n' Green, parents sip coffee and attend infant nutrition workshops while toddlers stack blocks in the play area. (There's wholesome food on the menu for kids and adults.) During summer evenings, families step out for ice cream at one of several scooperies, such as Leonidas, The Film Buff and Ed's Real Scoop. (The area has been dubbed "Ice Cream Alley.")

Families are thriving in Leslieville and so are independent businesses, including more than a dozen vintage furniture and decor retailers, such as Zig Zag, Guff and Ethel. And Queen East restaurants and cafes, such as Te Aro, Edward Levesque's Kitchen, Ruby Watchco, Tomi-Kro, Lady Marmalade, Gio Rana's and Joy Bistro draw patrons from across the city. For tea lovers, there is a growing number of specialty tea shops, including Majesteas and Steeped & Infused.

Nathalie-Roze & Co., an indie boutique and DIY studio near Queen and Pape Avenue, features items by more than 80 Canadian designers (including a line of cool onesies made from vintage T-shirts) and hosts community events like clothing swaps and poetry performances. The store also offers lessons in silkscreen printing, soap making and sewing.

Owner and head craftista, Nathalie-Roze Fischer, grew up in the area. "Like most emerging neighbourhoods, things in Leslieville have evolved with the local artists," Ms. Fischer says. "Now it's changing into a more family-oriented place. It's not as gritty as it used to be."

Ms. Fischer is proud of her neighbourhood, where locals are supportive of small businesses. "People are evangelical about Leslieville. There's a real sense of community here," she says, noting that the local Presbyterian church, WoodGreen Community Centre and Jimmie Simpson Recreation Centre are busy hubs of activity.

New families are finding places to roost in the east, and so are many young professional couples and singles. There are a number of new developments in Riverside and Leslieville, the boundaries of which run roughly from the DVP to Carlaw and Carlaw to Greenwood Avenue, respectively; both spanning from Gerrard Street in the north, south to Eastern Avenue.

Jeanhy Shim, vice-president of sales and marketing for east-end developers Streetcar Developments, knows the area well. "There's always something new opening. As more people move to the neighbourhood, more amenities and services are needed. It's quite exciting to see the change," Ms. Shim says.

Streetcar has several developments in the area, including Riverside Lofts, completed in 2007, as well as Sync, an eight-storey, 98-unit project located at Queen and Carroll streets, where construction will begin in December.

Each Sync condo comes with an iPod docking station wired to speakers throughout the unit, plus one year of free services, such as high-speed wireless Internet, high-definition TV and digital home phone. Occupancy is set for July 2012 and Sync is more than 80% sold.

Catherine van der Oye, a real estate agent who lives and works in Leslieville, has placed about 30 clients in the area in the past five years. "A lot of first-time buyers find a home here," says Ms. van der Oye. "It's more affordable than the west end and there are great pre-built opportunities."

In January, Ms. van der Oye worked with a couple to purchase their home near Dundas and Greenwood. They paid \$448,500 for a 1,300-sq.-ft., two-storey, semi-detached home, which was listed at \$389,900. (The average sale price in the area to September 2010 was \$460,000.)

The couple moved from their west end Liberty Village townhouse. "Leslieville has a more relaxed atmosphere. Getting to work downtown is faster. There's just a friendlier neighbourhood feeling," the homeowner says.

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