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Streetcar on track to build new Queen West hot spot

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SUPPLIED ILLUSTRATION

Ryan StarrSpecial to the Star

Streetcar Developments owns most of the land just north of Queen St. W. between Dufferin St. and Gladstone Ave., save for a handful of older homes farther up Gladstone near Peel Ave.

So the Toronto builder, which specializes in midrise infill urban development, has come up with an ambitious master plan for the site, aiming to create a new centre of gravity for Queen West.

“We are basically in a position to program this whole city block,” Streetcar president Les Mallins explains during an interview at Streetcar’s Riverdale office.

“It’s kind of exciting and cool. Even if we aren’t the ones to ultimately develop those other properties (north on Gladstone), at least we’re programming the area so that everybody knows what’s coming and there’s a comprehensive plan.”

Streetcar has already done two midrise condo projects along Gladstone: 2 Gladstone, which is built and occupied, and 8 Gladstone, currently under construction.

Now the company has announced plans for the development of the property directly to the west of these sites, 11 Peel Ave., occupied at the moment by a large warehouse and Streetcar’s sales centre.

The first phase of the condo project, The Carnaby, will be a 20-storey tower with 207 residential units. The suites — which range from one bedrooms to two bedroom plus dens and penthouses — are priced from the mid \$200,000s.

The Streetcar sales centre at the southern end of the property on Queen will be incorporated into a new two storey shopping plaza that will include a Metro grocery store on the top level and two other shops at street level.

Loft-like units at The Carnaby will have nine-foot-high exposed concrete ceilings, engineered hardwood floors, quartz or granite countertops and porcelain bathroom tile.

Amenities include a party room, gym and a lounge that will be connected to an outdoor terrace.

At full build-out the development will include 450 condo units and five to six midrise volumes that vary in height, as tall as 16 storeys, but stepping down to four-storeys as the project approaches Peel.

The midrise towers will be part of a single contiguous building, but Mallins is taking great pains to avoid creating a monotonous monolithic block of mundane condos.

“We don’t want to do this continuous monster of a building so that it feels like you’re in one of those cartoons where you’re walking by the same buildings over and over,” he says, referring to old school *Spider-Man*.

“We don’t think that would be taking advantage of the opportunity we have here.

“There isn’t any (architectural) context — we’re on our own island here,” he adds. “We’ve done a nice response to the Gladstone Hotel with (2 Gladstone), but beyond that there is no prevailing architecture, no existing fabric that we need to be tightly woven into.”

Inspired by Carnaby St.

The name of the first condo tower in the development, The Carnaby, is a nod to the famous London street — the inspiration for Streetcar’s approach to the design of the Queen West project.

“Carnaby is a really interesting pedestrian-friendly street that’s lined with buildings of varying character,” Mallins notes. “We wanted to do a modern twist on that.”

While only The Carnaby tower has been designed so far, Mallins is challenging his architecture team to come up with concepts for a series of subsequent buildings that can each “stand on its own merits.”

“It’s an interesting exercise,” says Prishram Jain, a principal with TACT Architecture, the project’s designer. “Can you design a collection of buildings that obviously are designed and built at the same time, but give them the same qualities as a street that’s evolved over a long period of time?”

“It’s been a springboard for a lot of discussion in our office.”

It’s also been a slog, he admits, noting that several architects in his shop are designing different project elements to ensure variation.

“We’ve done maybe 25 different versions of these buildings so far, and we’re still going,” Jain says.

The heart of the new community will be an existing laneway that runs between 2 and 8 Gladstone and the 11 Peel site. This laneway will be transformed into a *woonerf*, a Dutch-style road where pedestrians and vehicles coexist in relative harmony.

Woonerven are curbsless and use different surfacing materials than regular streets, signalling to drivers that they’ve entered a calmer traffic environment. “It blurs the distinction between what’s a sidewalk and what’s a driveable road,” explains Jain, noting that *woonerven* are also being used in the new West Don Lands neighbourhood.

This public laneway will connect Peel to Queen via a corridor that runs through the shopping atrium, allowing for passage at all hours.

On the other Dufferin-facing side of the condo complex, an additional pedestrian laneway will run from Peel to Queen, with a rear entrance to the Metro.

Just to the west of the development, a sliver of city-owned land along Dufferin — a steep grass-covered embankment — presents a challenge for Streetcar. The builder has proposed turning the property into a hardscaped urban park that will be publicly accessible.

At the base of both sides of the residential complex — lining the *woonerf* and facing the laneway — non-residential units will be made available for local creative types to use as studio space.

“The artists who used to occupy the spaces along the main street, now occupy these new laneways and new walkways,” Jain says.

“This allows us to maintain as much of this area’s artistic heritage and roots as possible.”

Carnaby Lofts

Location: Queen St. W. and Dufferin Ave.

Developer: Streetcar Developments

Architect: TACT Architecture

Size: 20 storeys

Units: 207, from 1-bedroom to 2-bedroom plus den.

Amenities: Party room, gym, lounge, outdoor terrace.

Sales centre: 1230 Queen St. W.

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