

LUXURY REAL ESTATE

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Upscale amenities raise the bar

Sound stages, water spas, gourmet dining among the perks at luxury condos

It's becoming an "only in Toronto" kind of thing. Amenities typically reserved for five-star hotels are being incorporated into luxury condo developments in the GTA, raising the bar to increasingly high standards.

We're talking 24-hour concierge and valet-parking service. Sound stages. Golf simulators. Water spas. In-house dining from five-star restaurants.

"Toronto is the leading condo market in North America and the consumer is so sophisticated and has seen just about every trick in the book," says Mimi Ng, vice-president of marketing for Menkes Developments.

"Developers are always looking at the most interesting things they can provide that make people's lives more convenient and address lifestyle considerations."

As a result, three distinct categories have emerged as the trends to watch for luxury amenities.

SERVICE

There's nothing that satisfies the discerning buyer more than outstanding service. And there's nobody that can provide it better than a bona-fide concierge.

According to Mark Cohen, founding partner at The Condo Store, the concierge is no longer just a security guard.

"This is the person who is increasingly involved in lifestyle and luxury choices for people," he says, "whether it's arranging theatre tickets, making dinner reservations, watering plants or receiving packages."

The Four Seasons Private Residences, for example, features 24-hour concierge service, a 24-hour doorman and 24-hour valet parking as part of its personalized white-glove service. Residents also have access to a five-star chef for private, in-home dining and a five-star spa on site.

While not every building can offer the kind of services available in joint hotel and condominium residence ventures, such as the Four Seasons and the Shangri-La, Ms. Ng says there is an increasing emphasis on the service personnel-to-resident ratio.

"We're seeing more of that level of service in some of the condo projects in the market in the past several years, including executive concierge service."

PERSONAL RETREATS

Once upon a time, common areas were situated on the main floor. Today, they're taking over coveted real estate in luxury buildings to take advantage of better views and to create private oases.

"Common areas are showing up in more prominent areas in the building, including higher floors and spaces that could have been condos," Mr. Cohen says. "Luxury buyers expect to have a place to sit for retreat and salvation."

Stunning spaces with sweeping views may set the scene, but when it comes to luxury, the devil really is in the details. That means creating common areas



Condo developers are raising the bar with the amenities offered at Toronto projects. The Four Seasons Private Residences offers buyers access to Four Seasons Hotel services such as spa treatments (top). You'll find a state-of-the-art fitness centre (above) and saltwater pool (below) at The Residences of 488 University Avenue. PHOTOS: CHRISTIAN HORAN



that cater to the unique needs of discriminating residents.

Midtown's Imperial Plaza by Camroost boasts an Imperial Club, which features a pool complex, a 10,000-square-foot fitness facility, two squash courts, a golf simulator, screening rooms, a media lounge and sound studios for musicians.

The 87 Peter development dedicates the entire 5th floor to common space catered to an individual experience. Instead of a pool, it offers a water spa with individual treatment tubs, water massage beds, water walls and a co-ed steam room. They also offer treatment rooms for massage and other therapies as well as a dedicated manicure/pedicure room.

"I do think developers are putting more time and energy into making amenity spaces a real personal retreat space for purchasers," Ms. Ng says, noting that urban living requires space to get away from it all. "We're committed to creating space outside the condo for that to happen."

LIFESTYLE

Luxury developers are keeping abreast of lifestyle trends to ensure they bring the best the city has to offer to the doorsteps of its busy clientele.

This has taken shape in part-

nerships with local businesses, like the one the Four Seasons has with 889 Yoga. The fitness company has tucked a location inside the building for residents and guests alike. Other luxury properties are ensuring there's space in common areas for personal trainers, massage therapists and other professionals to work on-site with residents.

Other luxury amenities that complement the lifestyles of its residents include wine storage and tasting rooms, dog-grooming stations and party rooms with well-appointed kitchens.

"There's a little bit more of a focus on gourmet and luxury in catering kitchens, Mr. Cohen says. "We're seeing more when it comes to food and beverages, including juice bars and higher-end appliances for common areas."

Luxury boutique buildings are especially following lifestyle trends closely to ensure limited common space is useful to its residents, many of whom are downsizing.

"Many people are trying to get the best of both worlds: a carefree, maintenance-free lifestyle with access to amenities while still having personal space, all within a place that is not too overwhelming and intimidating," said Ms. Ng.

AMENITY TRENDS IN LUXURY MARKET

Shopping for the right luxe amenities for your lifestyle? We've rounded up what you can expect at some of the most sophisticated addresses on offer in the GTA.

- Water spa
- Massage room
- Billiards lounge
- Pilates/yoga studio
- Media lounge
- Squash courts with viewing gallery
- Entertainment suite
- Gourmet catering kitchen
- Access to 5-star restaurants and spas
- 24-hour concierge, valet, doorman
- Private treatment rooms
- State-of-the-art cardio and circuit training equipment
- Manicure/pedicure room
- Executive concierge service
- Landscaped outdoor terraces and rooftop patios
- Wine storage/tasting room
- Event-planning services
- Bar
- Outdoor dining spaces
- A la carte housekeeping services
- Business centre and meeting space
- Games room