



CLOUD 9

THE LAYOUT PAYOUT

Advice on deciphering tricky floorplans: Rule No.1, make space for the sofa

By Lisa Van De Ven

In sales offices across the city, condo buyers are sifting through floorplans trying to imagine themselves living there long before the brick-and-mortar buildings actually exist. By now, Torontonians are used to making purchases based on suite layouts alone, but many of them still don't know exactly what to look for — at least if you ask Ramsin Khachi.

“I think people owe it to themselves to understand a little more,” says the principal with Khachi Design Group. And he should know. As one of the judges for the Ontario Home Builders' Association's annual Awards of Distinction, it's been his job for the past five years to help choose the “most

outstanding” suite layout among the current high- and mid-rise crop. To do so, he analyzes the submitted plans, trying to see which make the most out of the space allotted, but still stand out at the same time. “You've got to balance the funkiness aspect of it with the practicality,” Mr. Khachi says.

Last year, the winner was W2C, a 1,045-square-foot two-bedroom-plus-den unit at The Madison at Yonge and Eglinton by Madison Homes. The corner suite has a split-bedroom layout with a den off the front entry, windows in both bedrooms and a balcony that hugs one corner. “We pay very close attention all the way through to make the space feel as big as possible,” says Nelly

THE MADISON



CARLAW



Zadanski, Madison's vice-president. "I think there are ways that you can do that and ways that you can destroy it, too."

Getting the suite layouts right can mean happy residents and better word of mouth once the building is completed. But "good design takes work," Mr. Khachi says. The folks behind Madison spent a year tweaking the floorplans to make sure they were "100% satisfied" before they got to market, Ms. Zadanski says. Developers consult architects, interior designers and even the sales team, who can tell them what buyers are looking for at any given moment. They consider livability and efficiency, and they look at trends. After all, what makes a good layout today is differ-

ent from what it was 10 years ago.

"We try to learn continuously from what the market is telling us," says Mimi Ng, vice-president of marketing for Menkes, the developer of Fabrik Condos at Richmond and Spadina. "But there are certain things that are always a given, that we understand people generally look for. People want as much storage as possible. They really want functional spaces, and typically they want outdoor space, such as a balcony or a terrace, or if that's not possible even a French balcony."

But those are things buyers know to look for. Ms. Zadanski explains there are smaller key features purchasers might not even notice, until they're already living in their suite.

For instance, she notes the developer always makes sure there's an appropriate wall for the TV in the living room, across from which there's space for a sofa. Mr. Khachi, during his judging duties, looks out for bulkheads that jut against windows — making it difficult to hang curtains or blinds — and laundry areas that back on to a bedroom wall (a nuisance at night when you put a load in before bed). Walk-in closets should be at least 5x8-feet to work effectively, he adds, and "silly nooks and crannies" are a no-no.

In fact, in an age where suites are getting smaller, any waste of space, and that includes hallways, is frowned upon. "Every square foot of space should be useable," says designer Jeff



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Schnitter of Seven Haus Design, who helped lay out the units at Streetcar Developments’ The Carlaw. “If we can save 10 square feet of space by eliminating the hallways, that makes the bedroom 10 square feet larger, which, when you’re talking about a bedroom that is condo-sized, makes a huge difference.”

As suite sizes shrink, there’s another danger too. Furniture needs to fit, says interior designer Elaine Cecconi of Cecconi Simone, which helped assemble the suite layouts for INDX, the Bay and Adelaide site by Lifetime Developments and CentreCourt Developments. Many developers include suggested furniture positioning in their layouts, but Ms. Cecconi goes a step further, always making

sure the master bedrooms fit a queen-sized bed and that spaces are generous enough to take into consideration how people actually use furniture. “What we find is that sometimes you look at a floorplan and it looks great, but then you realize there’s no place to put your sofa or your bed doesn’t fit into the bedroom,” she says.

It all comes down to livability, explains Larry Blankenstein, president of Lash Group of Companies, the developer of Cloud9 Condominiums in Etobicoke. And as lifestyles change, suite layouts will as well. Today, buyers are looking for more natural light than ever, and want kitchens that are open to the living room, as open-concept living continues

to be embraced. Dens are also becoming more popular, Mr. Blankenstein says, which are ideal as more people are working from home.

Developers learn from trends and from the successful suite layouts they’ve had in the past, but for Mr. Blankenstein, the litmus test for any layout comes down to one thing: Could he live there himself? “We always feel that what’s good for us would be good for our purchasers too,” he says. Mr. Khachi agrees. Each year, as he judges a new collection of suites for the OHBA, he imagines himself settling down in each space.

“I honestly look at it as if I’m the average person, and [ask myself] how would I like living there,” he says. **PH**