



>> HOMES & CONDOS

Getting creative with party rooms

Developers now building flexible, event rooms to function 'as livable spaces'

ALEX NEWMAN
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

As days get shorter and nights get longer, the lead-up to Chanukah, Christmas and a score of major sporting events start to fill calendars. You may be thinking your downtown condo just doesn't have the space for you to host a party.

Not so, say developers, chefs, designers — and residents. Because unit sizes are shrinking in relation to higher land costs, developers have come up with creative ways to help highrise homeowners entertain outside of their suites.

Bryon Patton, a noted Toronto interior designer and decorator of condo amenity spaces, has seen increasing effort and budget being spent on creating flexible "event spaces."

One big change he's noticed is that party rooms are no longer relegated to unused floors, such as parking levels, where there was otherwise unusable space.

Condo residents increasingly want more connection to the outdoors and to natural light.

David Hirsh, CEO of Brandy Lane Homes, which has just launched new development thestationcondos.ca in the north part of the GTA, says the biggest change in party rooms is "they're actually used now."

"It's an integral part of the lifestyle that condos offer and we as developers have had to become more creative and sympathetic to the uses that homeowners want... We're now building party rooms as livable spaces, there to be enjoyed."

Hirsh also thinks it was "daunting" to book those large party rooms. "We're all living a little smaller and can't accommodate dinner parties for 12 in a 600-square-foot suite, but you don't want to hold an intimate dinner in a cavernous party room either."

That's led to some flexible designs, such as a system to separate multiple party rooms for intimate dinners and opening them all for a large event, Patton says.

People expect better flow in the amenity spaces and they want doors opening to terraces and a view of green space, he adds.

At this time of year, a space with large windows overlooking the city lights, or the quiet of a ravine or golf course, makes the party room feel expansive, bright and more house-like.

At Station Condos, Hirsh has overseen the design of small outdoor dining rooms called "urbanas" that can also be joined to create a larger area. With direct access to outdoor terraces and BBQs, they can be enclosed in winter and are equipped with TVs, sofas, mini-bars and microwaves. The dining area in the main party room has a double-sided fireplace and offers views over the terrace.

Sixth Condominium in Markham, part of the Angus Glen community, offers a different kind of flexibility. "We created a gathering space," says Patrick O'Hanlon, president of Kylemore Communities.

"We established an area that people could gather without having a function to attend."

"It overlooks the ravine and golf course and there's a kitchen, bar and dining room. If you've booked the party room, you can close that off without inhibiting other people from



BRYAN CAPORICCI

Builder Tariq Adi, left, and chef Matt Kershaw prep for a party at Adi's Link Condos & Towns presentation centre.



BRYAN CAPORICCI

Adi says having a condo shouldn't stop you from enjoying things you might think only work in a house.



Small outdoor dining rooms, called "Urbanas," can be joined to create a larger area and be enclosed in winter.

> CONDO PARTY ROOM PRIMER

► Last-minute availability has become scarce so think ahead. The process is easy: call management to book the time and have backup dates in mind. There's a security deposit in case of damage and you are expected to clean up afterward. At Tariq Adi's projects, a monthly schedule is posted.

► Once you have numbers and the date, check out the equipment so you can arrange extra chairs, ta-

bles or dishes if needed.

► If you hire a chef, you'll need to let them know what the room has. Chef Matt Kershaw, who has just opened his third restaurant, frequently caters condo parties and has seen every kind of space imaginable.

► Kershaw has found the most common — and most successful — party is a meal of non-stop hors d'oeuvres. He recently catered one in a condo with just a kitchenette; his menu

included suckling pig risotto with truffle and shaved foie gras, herb-crusted rack of lamb in a Madeira rosemary au jus, deboned and stuffed chicken wings, ahi tuna with ponzu sauce and tenderloin steak tartare.

► Kershaw does bemoan party rooms without enough glassware or dishes. "These days, it's possible to get good Reidel-type glasses for cheap. When the place is stocked properly, it eliminates the hassle of renting stuff."

gathering in the other areas."

That trend can be seen in Burlington where Tariq Adi, president of Adi Developments, has just launched the Links. There, a resort-like amenity space stands separate from its two highrise buildings.

In addition to cold and hot plunge pools, steam rooms and a gym, the space has several party rooms that open onto terraces and a large demo kitchen which allows residents to hire a chef, or to "chef it up" in front of their friends. Food can then be carried into the 20-seat dining room and afterwards everyone can retire into the lounge in front of the fireplace.

With such flexible space, it's possible to host family dinners for Chanukah, Christmas, Thanksgiving and New Year's for anywhere from 10 to 60 people. And with increasingly sophisticated kitchens — many now with restaurant-grade appliances —

it's possible to cook everything right there.

Adi admits the party room is ideal for the poker nights he occasionally hosts for friends — sometimes as many as 35. "It's just guys in a room having a good time, playing cards. Having a smaller condo, though, shouldn't stop you from enjoying the kind of things you might normally only think works in a lowrise house."

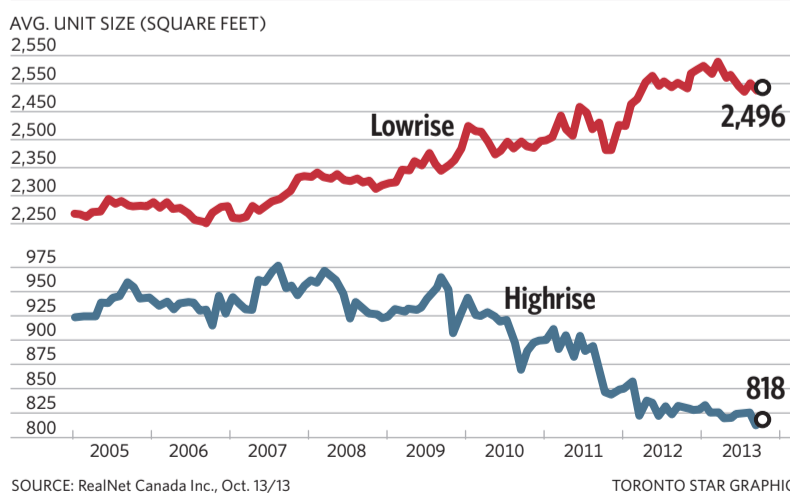
At London on the Esplanade, the party room is connected to a 20-seat theatre room and to BBQs on the terrace. Cityzen president Sam Crignano says a party watched the World Cup there a few years ago. It would be just as easy to host an Academy Awards night, he adds.

Then there are the milestone events, like the rehearsal dinner Crignano hosted last summer for his daughter's wedding. Engagement parties are another popular event, he adds.

And let's not forget the kids. Architect Sybil Wa, who has lived in a condo with her husband and three children since 2000, says the party room has been an invaluable resource for kids' events. When her first child was a few months old, she and neighbouring parents organized a Halloween party. In spring, they hold annual Easter egg hunts. It's also the location for a weekly playdate drop in, with kids bringing books and toys to share. Wa is looking ahead to holding elementary and high school graduation parties.

Crignano has a cautionary word about making one room all things to all people. "I know some developers are creating multipurpose rooms, but I think you dilute the room's potential when you do that. By limiting it to a few uses, you end up with a much better looking room, one that's furnished and equipped appropriately for its use."

The changing average size of new GTA homes



The population of the GTA is expected to grow by approximately 2.5 million people by 2036. Plenty of new housing will be required.

moderate this rapidly growing population.

Intensification has led to a fundamental shift in the kind of housing developers are building across the region, with highrise condo construction becoming the more prevalent form.

This shift has been reshaping the way GTA residents live.

Over the past decade, the average

household contained 2.85 people per home in the GTA. When most of the new housing being created was ground-oriented, typically single family homes, residents in these larger homes learned to live a certain way with plenty of space to meet their various needs.

These days, however, as multi-family development becomes more common across an intensifying

GTA, condominiums — many of them considerably smaller than detached homes — are becoming the go-to form of housing.

The way we live is evolving as a result.

Single-family homes have plenty of space for bedrooms, kitchens, bathrooms, living rooms, dining rooms and laundry facilities. Today's lowrise home has an average of 876 square feet per person to accommodate those basic functions.

By comparison, those living in highrise units have on average only 287 square feet per person in which to house those same functions. This means more efficiency in the use of space will be required — or perhaps some activities will simply have to occur outside the home, elsewhere in the community.

If smaller and smaller-sized highrise homes are the future for the region, GTA residents will have to further adapt as intensification policies create an increasingly compact urban environment.

George Carras is the president of RealNet Canada Inc. His column appears in New in Homes & Condos the last Saturday of every month. For more information, visit realnet.ca or follow on Twitter at [@realnet_canada](https://twitter.com/realnet_canada).

> ASK JOE



Joe Richer

What's so different? Technology, for starters

November is Financial Literacy Month, a nationally-recognized month with the goal of protecting and educating consumers about financial services. This year's theme is Financial Literacy Across Generations. This is the final column touching on the real estate decisions buyers and sellers face through their lives. Join the discussion on Twitter at #FLM2013.

After 30 years in our home, we're ready to downsize. What real estate changes through those years should we be aware of?

Technology has had the largest impact on the buying and selling process. There is more information available to consumers about real estate trends, transactions and advice than ever before. That's where a real estate agent, with their education and experience, can help distill the information and navigate you through the process.

Most buyers today shop for homes using the online Multiple Listing Service at REALTOR.ca. Thirty years ago, MLS was a smaller, paper-based database. Most listings were distributed to brokerages and sales representatives would then pass them along to their buyers by a fax or phone call. Now a much more accessible and up-to-date online MLS system helps real estate professionals and buyers keep track of the majority of homes on the market. Cellphones and mobile technology makes your real estate professional more accessible and the process more efficient. It can also speed up the decision-making process. Consumers may make hasty decisions when they feel rushed, so be sure to take the time to read forms carefully before signing.

Another significant change has been the formation of the Real Estate Council of Ontario. RECO was created in 1997 because the real estate profession and the provincial government agreed there was a need for transparent regulation to enhance professionalism and consumer protection. Today, individuals or businesses that trade in real estate in the province must generally be registered with RECO. Before you begin working with a salesperson or broker, use the "Registrant Search" tool at the top of our website (reco.on.ca) to make sure they are indeed registered and in good standing. Once you're ready to select a real estate professional, you'll notice you have more choice than 30 years ago. Ontario has more than 60,000 brokers and salespersons and it's a good idea to meet with a few before settling on one. You don't have to use the same agent to sell your current property and help you buy your next one, though there may be benefits to doing so.

When you do start working with your chosen representative, they will probably ask you to sign a Buyers Representation Agreement. It's a negotiable contract between you and their brokerage for an agreed-upon length of time. It sets out the rights and obligations of you and the brokerage, which was a concept not so fully developed three decades ago.

If the brokerage you choose is also the seller's brokerage, that's called a "multiple representation." The brokerage is obligated to represent your best interests and must disclose its dual involvement to you, and obtain your agreement.

Finally, when it comes time to make an offer on a property, buyers today are covered by two important insurance policies: consumer deposit insurance and errors and omissions coverage. The first protects your deposit payment (held in trust). The second is a policy that real estate professionals must hold to cover a situation where errors or omissions are made during the real estate transaction.

Overall, these changes make it a safer time to be a homebuyer and seller. Welcome back and happy house hunting.

Joseph Richer is Registrar of the Real Estate Council of Ontario (RECO). He oversees and enforces all rules governing real estate professionals in Ontario. Email questions to askjoe@reco.on.ca. Find more tips at reco.on.ca, follow on Twitter @RECOhelps or on YouTube at youtube.com/RECOhelps.



George Carras

The walls really are closing in

In an effort to give homebuyers affordable options within a rising-cost environment, GTA condominium developers have been building smaller units. The average size of a new highrise home at the end of October, 2013 was 818 square feet.

The Ontario government's 2006 Places to Grow legislation called for the GTA to grow up — not out — as part of a push to promote intensification and ensure sustainable ongoing development in the region.

The population of the GTA is expected to grow by approximately 2.5 million people by 2036 — that's like a population the size of Vancouver's moving to the GTA over the next 20 years. Safe to say that plenty of new housing will be required to accom-