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Condo amenities get centre court focus

Basketball courts, catering kitchens, terrace fire pits on offer at new buildings



Vince Talotta / Toronto Star

Jake Cohen, director of project implementation for Daniels Corp., stands courtside at Cinema Tower condo in Toronto. The basketball court at the downtown building, and another in Mississauga at Limelight Condominiums, are steadily booked and a half-court plus squash courts are planned for Daniels' One Park Place condo, in Regent Park.

By: [Tracy Hanes](#) Freelance Real Estate writer, Published on Mon Dec 15 2014

Lounges and dining rooms reminiscent of high-end resorts . . . exercise facilities on par with deluxe fitness clubs. Those amenities have become de rigueur at new condominiums in the GTA while some of the very latest and trendy offerings include everything from rock-climbing walls to skating rinks to computer-gaming, arcade-style rooms.

Location is still top priority for condo buyers, followed by suite design. And now amenity packages are influencing purchase decisions — especially for buyers of small units — according to developers of several major Toronto projects.

Jason Fane of 45 Charles Ltd., developer of Chaz Yorkville, describes the amenities at the building where he lives in New York: “There’s a nice garden with small water feature but mostly no one uses it and a storage room in the basement made into an exercise room.”

Those kind of sparse offerings wouldn’t fly with the sophisticated Toronto buyer, he says, especially since Chaz Yorkville is in one of the city’s most prestigious neighbourhoods. That’s why he’s including more than 30 amenities in the building.

“Amenities used to be an afterthought but are not like that anymore,” says Linda Mitchell Young, vice-president, sales and marketing at Vandyk Communities. The company’s The Craftsman Condominium Residences in Clarkson Village, in Mississauga, is a 324-unit midrise project and Mitchell Young says the target, empty-nester local buyer is not keen on extensive amenities but they do want those included to be of high-calibre.

“Amenities are getting more elaborate but not more expensive,” says Pauline Lierman, director of market research for Urbanation, a condo data firm. She says buyers are price-sensitive to condo fees and developers seek to offer features that aren’t exorbitant to clean or maintain — once-popular indoor pools, for example, have fallen out of favour because of their price and required regular effort.

Developers are also getting creative with the design of spaces that can serve multiple purposes and are zoned with indoor and outdoor areas flowing into one another, Lierman says.

Although amenities rise and fall from favour depending on the building’s buyers, a few trends are showing their muscle.

Fitness and wellness: These amenities are must-haves on current buyers’ lists. Gone are the days of a few treadmills and a set of weights in a basement room. Today, fitness areas are light-filled spaces with inviting views, outfitted with state-of-the-art equipment and separate studios for yoga, Pilates and cardio. Some buildings have personal trainers on site, or residents can bring their own.

The Daniels Corp.’s Daniels Erin Mills is the first condo building in Canada to offer Wellbeats — fitness classes with a virtual personal trainer, delivered via large-screen TV. The basketball courts at Daniels’ Limelight in Mississauga and Cinema Tower in Toronto’s Entertainment District are popular and heavily booked, says Dominic Tompa, president of CityLife Realty, a Daniels subsidiary. A half-court gymnasium is planned for One Park Place, in Regent Park, along with squash courts.

At its HighPark Condominiums, where many buyers are active adults who enjoy getting outdoors, Daniels offers biking as an amenity.

“There is a bike share program with 20 bikes that people can use to get out and explore High Park,” says Tompa. “There will also be a bike engagement program where residents can learn about biking from local experts, there will be planned excursions and there will be a bike cleaning and maintenance area.”

At Lash Development Corp.’s ME Living condo in Scarborough, where there will be 900-plus units in four buildings, plans call for an outdoor reflecting pool to be transformed into a skating rink in winter.

“We’re always trying to come up with innovative products and be at the forefront, trying to appeal to public and offer something they’ve never experienced,” says Larry Blankenstein, president of Lash Group of Companies.

Amexon’s 55-storey the Residences of 488 University will house its amenities in the high-end SkyClub, that will cover 30,000 square feet over two floors and face south to take in water and skyline views. Fitness and wellness offerings include an indoor saltwater pool with a retractable wall, steam room, saunas, Pilates, spinning, yoga and meditation studios and squash court.

“We wanted to do something Toronto had never seen before,” says Jason Shiff, executive sales manager for The Residences. “We wanted to create a live-work-play environment, so buyers don’t have to leave the development. It’s like your own private country club.”

Socializing spaces: Second on buyers’ amenity wish list are entertaining and socializing spaces.

Party rooms of the past tended to be dull, low-ceilinged spaces with uninspired finishes. But the current incarnations boast sophisticated, hotel-like style with seating areas, bars, dining areas and catering kitchens.

“The new stuff is very well done,” says Urbanation’s Lierman. “There is a richness that you didn’t see before and the aesthetics are pretty interesting.”

With suites getting smaller, people are paying attention to how they can entertain and continue to have the social calendar they had before.

You are not going to fit 15 people into your suite,” says Blankenstein. “The party room is an extension of your suite for private parties or potluck dinners. Ours are utilized by residents and the condo board.”

“The party room is something that’s been really thought out,” says Mitchell Young. “The Craftsman’s party room has couches and chairs, a fireplace, TV screen, bars where you can put down drinks and a separate 10-seat dining area that can be open to the other spaces or closed off, so it’s more intimate and formal for a sit-down dinner.”

Lierman says party rooms and terraces are also being placed mid-building or on top floors to offer every resident the opportunity to enjoy prime views. Example include High Park, where the party room faces south, overlooking over the park canopy.

At Chaz Yorkville, the two-floor Chaz Club occupies the 36th and 37th floors and cantilevers out beyond the façade. It includes a lower-level cocktail lounge opening to an outdoor terrace, overlooked by the second-floor 20-seat dining room and caterer's kitchen.

Theatre rooms are also in big demand, says Tompa, where family and friends can gather to watch movies or sports events on the big screen.

The great outdoors: Indoor entertaining spaces are being integrated with outdoor, so there is a seamless flow between the two.

“Outdoor space is important. We are seeing a lot of terraces, green space, barbecues and firepits,” says Lierman, who says indoor and outdoor amenities are often designed to connect. “The indoor-outdoor fireplaces are nice, there are a lot of cabanas and meditation areas and while not as common, some other have play paths for kids.”

“One of the things people potentially miss when the move into a condo is outdoor space, so we have a rooftop lounge facing Birchwood Park,” says Mitchell Young. “It’s a park-like setting with a firepit and in evenings, people can gather around it or have an al fresco dinner.”

Emerging amenities

- Dog washing stations: Pet lovers’ needs have struck a chord with builders, and dog washing stations and pet spas are now on offer. The new twist is a separate entry so owners don’t have to parade wet or muddy dogs through lobbies or corridors.
- Urban gardening: Daniels pioneered condo urban agriculture and CityLife Realty’s Tompa says residents really enjoy growing their own vegetables. They’ll continue that trend at HighPark with second-floor community garden plots. The Craftsman is among the condos offering gardening and potting area, where residents can pot plants for their balconies.
- Computer gaming: Fane says he insisted on a computer gaming arena at Chaz, which may seem curious considering that many buyers will be older. But even if mature residents don’t play, it’s something to help entertain the grandchildren. ME Living will also incorporate a gaming room for families to play together.



Photo: 2 of 6

Chaz Club lounge, at Chaz Yorkville, spans the 36th and 37th floors of the 47-storey condominium.



Photo: 3 of 6

Condo pools have evolved into spas. At Residences of 488 University, it includes a salt-water pool with retractable wall, steam room and sauna.



Photo: 4 of 6

A lounge opens to outdoor dining at The Station condo, in North York.



Photo: 5 of 6

/ TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO

Veggie gardening at GTA condos is being pioneered by Daniels at One Park Place in Regent Park.

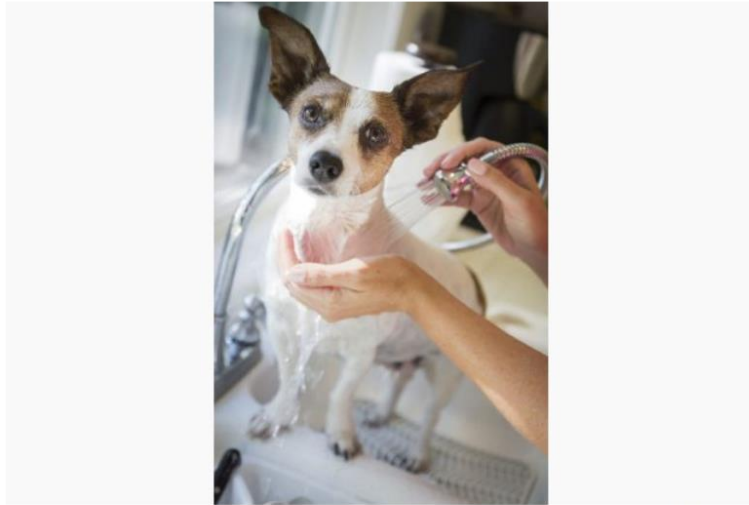


Photo: 6 of 6

DREAMSTIME PHOTO /

Dog-wash stations, with separate entrances to prevent muddy paws in the lobby, are on offer.