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ARCHITECTURE

MODERN MEETS MELLOW

Architect David Anand Peterson creates a Roncesvalles home both informal and welcoming

The kitchen and dining room on the upper level of Kenneth Montague's two-storey Roncesvalles residence; a pavilion-and-terrace arrangement shaped to make casual entertaining pleasant.

BEN PAHN/A FRAME

THE MARKET

Retuning to a swiftly changing market

As buyers hope for the sales downdraft to erode prices, sellers dig in to protect their value expectations

CAROLYN IRELAND

There's a stalemate in Toronto's condo market.

Inventory is up, sales are down and prices are holding firm. Buyers, it seems, are not in a rush to close a deal because they think prices may weaken. They're still looking, but they're taking their time.

"There's not that sense of urgency," says Christopher Bibby, an agent with Sutton Group Associates Realty Inc.

Sellers who aren't in financial distress, meanwhile, don't feel any imperative to lower their asking price, says Mr. Bibby, who recently had a couple of lowball offers lobbed at a condo for sale near the Art Gallery of Ontario. His client turned them away.

"I'm not going to accept your offer for \$30,000 or \$40,000 under asking," was the client's response, according to Mr. Bibby.

Meanwhile, units in buildings with little turnover that would have found a buyer in a day or two last year are taking two or three weeks to sell.

"We're just starting to see inventory sitting in these highly desirable buildings."

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LIVING SPACES

Urban condo with a modern yet welcoming vibe? No sweat

David Anand Peterson designs a Roncesvalles flat to make tongues wag. 'There's always something to get people talking'

JOHN BENTLEY MAYS

These days, the most internationally famous condo in Toronto is one located in the city's west-side Roncesvalles neighbourhood.

It's famous because a shot of it recently made the cover of *Dwell*, the widely noticed – and very cool – residential design magazine published in San Francisco, and because the two-storey suite and its owner, Kenneth Montague, got star treatment inside the magazine by Toronto architectural journalist (and *Globe Real Estate* contributor) Alex Bozikovic. "A Vespa-riding dentist and curator, Dr. Kenneth Montague is one of a kind – and his home is equally unique," Mr. Bozikovic writes.

Into his two-storey flat on Ritchie Street, we learned, Dr. Montague had gathered many paintings, photographs, prints and recordings by black artists and about the experience of people living in the African diaspora. "When I have parties," the collector told the writer, "there's always something to get people talking. Just as often as it's the art, it's somebody looking at the album covers in my record collection. The house is a very naked expression of my self, and people relate it to their own lives. Gatherings here can be a very rich experience, a collective discussion around art history, music, food, and fashion. It takes on a sort of salon atmosphere."

The morning I visited the apartment, in the company of project architect David Anand Peterson, the owner was away, and there was no one else about. It was possible, that is, to see the bones of the home Mr. Peterson had crafted for a man with several talents and interests and a delight in hospitality, and with a notable collection of artworks the client loves to share with others.

Dr. Montague did not want a "dry, white-box gallery," the architect told me. But in its general outline, the skeleton of the suite harmonizes with the framework of the modernist mid-rise building it's in, which Mr. Peterson also designed. The wrapper is a tough, plain, well-tailored structure arrayed on three sides of a courtyard. Its



The rooftop sauna at Kenneth Montague's west end Toronto condo camouflages a homely elevator housing. BEN KAPPA/FRAME

formal inspiration comes from European cities, where the architect learned well how to create liveable multiunit dwellings in tight urban places. Like the container, Dr. Montague's roughly 2,000-square-foot apartment is composed of rectangular volumes that are in no way formally unusual or eccentric.

The distribution of roles within the space, however, is perhaps less common. The visitor enters at the lower level, and finds himself at the bottom of a large light-well sliced through the floor of the upper storey. A flight of wooden steps floats upward toward the sunshine, past a wall clad in the same attractive yellow-green colour

that Mr. Peterson has used on the exterior surfaces of his building. Mr. Montague's large bedroom and his library, crammed floor to ceiling with books, records and art, lies off the bottom of the light-well. One comes into the penthouse, in other words, through intimate territory, and goes from there up the steps to the more public area at the top.

The sense of this upper storey is public and welcoming indeed. In form, it is a pavilion-and-terrace arrangement that has been shaped to make casual entertaining pleasant and practical. To one side of the light-well through which the steps ascend is the bright, open-plan zone

containing the Bulthaup kitchen, a dining table, a conversation area and a small washroom. A set of forceful abstract prints by Alexander Calder brightens one wall, but the overall atmosphere – generated in part by the client's taste for modern Scandinavian furnishings – is one of mellow, relaxed informality.

On the other side of the staircase, beyond a wall of glass, the spacious walk-out terrace, with its patches of tall grass and fine views over nearby rooftops toward the downtown towers, lies open to the sky. Before Mr. Peterson took charge, this was one of those homely, high-top places often designated as

"amenities," but that, too frequently, become windswept, bare, orphaned dead-ends in the sky. Turning utility into art, however, Mr. Peterson has transformed this deck by planting it generously, pulling it around the pavilion, and camouflaging a homely elevator housing, which punches up through the roof at that point, with a handsome sauna and an outdoor kitchen.

The result of Mr. Peterson's mostly quiet architectural moves is exactly what his client wanted. "[T]he space is very home-spun, even though it is also very contemporary," the owner said to Mr. Bozikovic. "And that's by design. It's supposed to be a home first."



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