

Life / Homes

Christopher Hume: Sync Lofts at Queen and Broadview one of Toronto's better behaved additions

The recently completed Sync Lofts at Queen and Broadview bring in tune with neighbourhood



CHRISTOPHER HUME / TORONTO STAR

This eight-storey condo fits into the Queen and Broadview-area streetscape in both its architectural style and size.

By: Christopher Hume Urban Issues, Published on Fri May 17 2013

Never underestimate the power of midrise to change a city.

Its effects are easily seen — and appreciated — along Queen St., both east and west of Broadview Ave. Written off for decades, this part of Toronto is now being brought into the 21st century thanks to a number of condo projects that make up in urbanity what they lack in height.

Indeed, the area provides proof positive that six- to 10-storey buildings can contribute enormously to urban intensification without overwhelming the landscape. It is a lesson largely lost on local developers, most of whom seem to believe height makes right. In some areas, yes.

But in others, like Queen and Broadview, less so.

Yet with four-lane roads, the 501 streetcar line and a growing infrastructure of parks and other amenities, midrise makes sense.

There's no better example than the best-known neighbourhood landmark — the magnificent 1893 redbrick heap known as the New Broadview Hotel, home of Jilly's strip club. It is an impressive example of 19th-century midrise. With four storeys and a tower, the minor Romanesque masterpiece manages to dominate the corner without looming over it.

Sync Lofts, 630 Queen St. E.

Happily handsome yet unobtrusive, this eight-storey condo fits into the streetscape effortlessly. The four-floor podium is finished in yellow brick, a nod to historical architectural fashion, and built out to the sidewalk.

The top storeys, made of glass and steel, are set back to lessen the impact of height. To minimize what could otherwise be a bulky presence, the building is broken up into several elements — including a small, pavilion-like structure on the corner of Queen and Carroll St.

In this way, Sync falls into the very human scale and rhythm of the old city, something that has flummoxed contemporary planners and architects for decades.

The building itself has no grand pretensions. It does its job of filling in a missing part of the urban fabric but isn't loud and unnecessarily attention-seeking.

It also recognizes the historical flavour of the neighbourhood while remaining true to its modern (and modernist) roots. Without balconies extending in rows from the exterior, Sync is the very model of restraint.

This is one well-behaved building.

Grade: A

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