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THE GLOBE AND MAIL

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2015

SECTION LRE



SMALL AND SUMPTUOUS

How to live lavishly in a downsized space: choose the right project, invest in quality

Like so many other couples when their children head off to university, Sam and Maria Crignano made the move downtown. They exchanged their large Richmond Hill family house for a penthouse at London on the Esplanade, a residential high-rise that Mr. Crignano's development company, Cityzen, had built.

Although the city condo sizes are smaller – at Pier 27, one of Cityzen's luxury projects, has penthouse suites starting at 1,300 square feet – these buyers aren't expected to scrimp on luxury. Amenities, for example, compare to a five-star hotel – valet parking, thermal relaxation pool, counter-current pool, outdoor pool, party room and guest suites. Inside, it's more of the same: 10-foot ceilings, nine-inch baseboards, marble, granite or limestone floors in kitchens and baths, Downsview kitchen cabinets and bathroom vanities.

"You don't want to be stingy on quality because it changes the whole feel of the suite and the overall project," Mr. Crignano says. "Kitchens have to be high-end because people spend so much time in that area, whether they're eating home alone or entertaining friends."

He adds that because this demographic travels a lot – and is accustomed to some pampering – bathrooms and bedrooms have to be comparable to a boutique hotel.

The Crignanos are part of a growing demographic that's selling the family home so they can divide assets and time between a cottage, a Florida condo and a Toronto pied-à-terre.

"High ceilings are a must because they give volume and a necessary feeling of space to a room, especially important when the footprint is smaller," says Mr. Crignano. "The same goes for windows. Unless you have a corner suite, the only opportunity for windows is on one of four walls, so that fourth wall has to be all window."

"It's very possible to live luxuriously in a smaller space," Toronto interior designer Bryon Patton says. It helps when the building sets the tone, such as Menkes' Gibson Square, where Mr. Patton was the principal designer. Luxury buildings offer high ceilings that add a sense of spaciousness; large windows for better light; and quality finishes, such as engineered hardwood, large baseboards, tall door frames, custom cabinetry and spa-like bathroom fixtures.

If you start with a good project, he says, you've started off on the right foot.

INVEST IN THE BEST

Take a careful look at the condo project's amenity package. When there are a lot of amenities, a 1,000-square-



Pier 27's model suite (top) is packed with upscale features such as high ceilings, large windows and tall door frames. Pears on the Avenue townhouses (above) offer gourmet kitchens with stone counter tops.

foot suite seems much larger. Chances are if the lobby and amenity spaces are extravagantly outfitted, you're going to find luxury in the suite. Look at the standard list for inclusions, such as stone or engineered hardwood floors, high-quality kitchen appliances and bathroom fixtures.

It's wise to invest in upgrades from the beginning, especially for things like radiant heat floors or heated towel racks.

Invest in the best furnishings, such as a conversation piece carpet, artwork, Egyptian cotton or linen bedding and down comforter, or upholstery that has inviting textures or well-defined patterns.

ACCESSORIZE

Don't assume that removing everything in sight will help the space feel larger. That just makes for a boring home. Don't get rid of all your books, art or collectibles. While furniture that multitasks is useful, sometimes that exquisite piece with a single purpose provides more personality and beauty.

Go for one large, dramatic piece of artwork rather than several small pieces, unless they're framed alike and hung in neat rows.

Sparkle adds a touch of luxury. Consider mirrors and mirrored furniture, silver and crystal accents.

Invest in custom drapes. They're lined, hang better than off the rack and dress the windows properly. Silk, damask and linen are good choices.

DON'T SCRIMP ON DINING

Everyone needs a place to linger over a good meal. A round table and four chairs don't take up very much room. Beautiful dishes are another necessary indulgence.

SPRING FOR BUILT-INS

Many condo suites have walk-in closets, but Mr. Crignano thinks they eat up valuable space. "My designers and marketing people tell me that people want them, but I think built-ins work much better – they use every square inch, hold more clothing and finish off a room beautifully."

HIRE PEOPLE

Designers know how to come up with floor plans that combine existing and new furnishings in proper scale and proportion. They also know how best to use lighting, especially critical in small spaces.



Condos of more than 2,000 square feet often incorporate wine rooms.

DIETER HESSEL

Liquid assets

Where to put a cherished wine collection when downsizing to a condominium

For serious wine collectors, downsizing from a home to a condo is a serious challenge. It often means swapping a roomy wine cellar for a wine fridge with decidedly less space.

Though some luxury condos offer a communal wine cellar or include modest wine storage in their units, most of the latter don't hold more than 200 bottles. "Anyone who is serious about their wine collection needs a store-size space – and the utilities – to store it," says Chris Morris, vice-president of Toronto Vintners.

As more baby boomers downsize, it's a challenge that's being taken up all over the city in various ways. Here are a few of the most popular.

SPREAD OUT THE COLLECTION AMONG PROPERTIES

Gary LaRose, president of Rosehill Wine Cellars, works frequently with downsizing collectors. "It's not unusual to transfer a 3,000-bottle collection into a condo unit that can take 600 bottles or fewer."

One solution is to redistribute the

collection among properties, such as a cottage up north or a winter home in Florida. "You won't be able to put your hands on your complete collection at one time, but there's a good chance you'll be able to keep it all," he says.

CUSTOMIZE THE CONDO

If you want to keep your collection intact, the best solution is to get ahead of the game by planning. Custom wine storage can be installed just about anywhere, but often requires

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