



HOME OF THE WEEK

Soft sell for a hard loft

A Corktown condo celebrates its industrial past with massive pillars, exposed pipes and industrial hallways

PAGE 4

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

FRIDAY, JANUARY 17, 2014

SECTION G

Globe Real Estate

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ARCHITECTURE



In with the old

How to cure a Summerhill semi's chronic glumness while keeping its heritage cred PAGE 2

THE NEXT MOVE

Spring market – in January?

Anticipating stiff competition, anxious buyers are not waiting for the ice to melt



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In the opening days of 2014, John Quarrie and Lindsey Robins decided to spend a bit of time looking for their first house.

They looked at one house on a Friday evening and 24 hours later were the victors in a bidding war on a different property.

"The funny thing is they expected to spend a couple of months to find a place and ended up buying one in the first two days out," says Shawn Lackie of Coldwell Banker RMR Real Estate, who helped them to make the deal Saturday.

It seems they are not the only buyers who are not waiting for the ice to melt.

Real estate ended 2013 with a burst of activity that surprised many economists. The Teranet-National Bank house price index hit a milestone in December with Toronto prices edging up 0.4 per cent. And despite concerns expressed by TD Bank chief Ed Clark who opined that bankers "should be worried about" the runup in house prices, buyers in Toronto seem more anxious than ever to grab what they can, when they can.

Ireland, Page 2

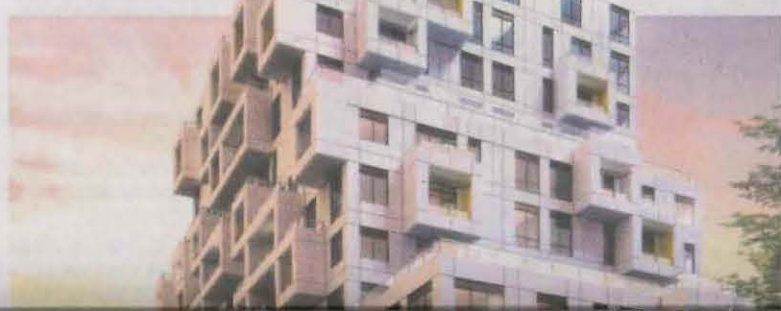
The architects worked within the existing envelope, but interior treatments like the white oak millwork lend a sense of luxury and refinement. JAMES BRITTAIN

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Overhauled, not overwhelmed

A century-old home gets a properly respectful update



JOHN BENTLEY MAYS
THE PERFECT HOUSE
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Where renovation of one of Toronto's Victorian and Edwardian dwellings is concerned, it's just not good enough to hire a few workers and turn them loose to gut the place, splash the interior with white paint, then call it a day. The result may be more "modern" than what was there before, but it almost always lacks character, a sense of home, and a properly respectful attitude toward the neighbourhood and the streetscape. If they must be overhauled, the old houses our urban ancestors have given us deserve the kind of treatment a thoughtful, experienced architect can bring.

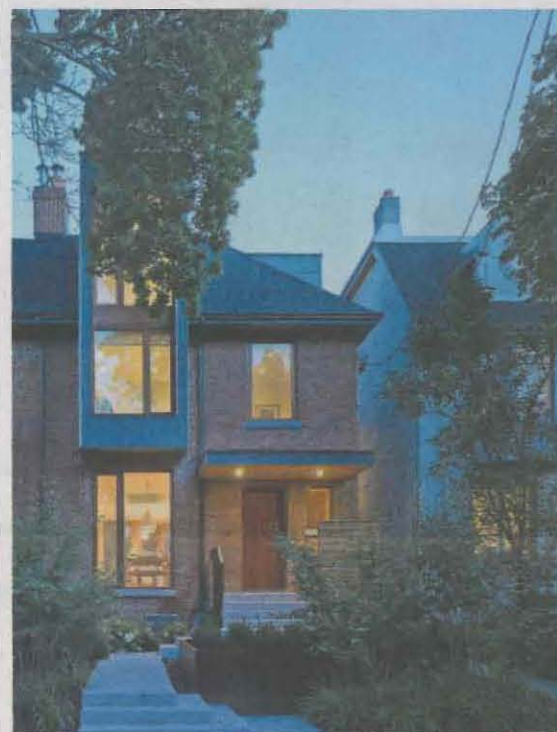
A modest Edwardian semi-detached house in downtown Toronto's Summerhill district has finally gotten its just deserts after several unsuccessful attempts over the years to cure its chronic glumness and lack of charm. The architects who have at last made the structure into a comfortable, bright home come from the Toronto practice called superkül and include the firm's founding partner Andre D'Elia along with Anya Moryoussef and Deborah Wang.

The tasks handed the designers by their clients – a professional couple with a daughter who will probably live with them for a while after she finishes graduate school – included outfitting their 2,100-square-foot semi efficiently but warmly. The owners also wanted the exterior modernized, but kept in harmony with the other bay-windowed and dormered old family homes up and down the block. There were some constraints on meeting these objectives. For one thing, the house was attached to another on one side, and, on the other, it fit very tightly on its lot, so no lateral expansion was possible. (A few feet were added to the rear.)

So the architects worked, for the most part, within the Edwardian envelope, although if they felt any sense of constriction, they haven't let it show. Especially in the interior treatments – the austere lovely white oak mill work used throughout, the tall oak-framed glass walls that open the rear of the house to the deck and garden – there has been no sacrifice of luxury or of refinement. The aesthetic is spare and neat, but in no way stingy. Although inside space is precious, and not a square inch of it has been



Inside, the Summerhill house had a few walls knocked down, while on the outside the architect opted for 'lots of dormers, reinterpreted.' JAMES BRITTAIN



wasted, this rather small house has been made to feel more spacious than it is by wide exterior openings and the elimination of every unnecessary wall.

One problem shared by many older Toronto houses is the darkness that seems to gather at the centre of each level. Here, superkül has addressed this issue by carving out, in the mid-

dle of the structure, a rectangular chute that scatters natural light from an opening in the roof downward, through the attic, past translucent panels on the second floor, and finally into the open-plan main level. Even on the overcast afternoon, a wash of light was brightening the dining area and kitchen at the bottom of this well.

Another common problem with traditional dwellings has to do with privacy. In century-old Hogtown houses that have not been renovated, there is usually too much of it – too many doors to open and shut, too many walls. In this project, wall-sized partitions pivot or slide away and disappear when strict separation between spaces isn't

wanted or needed, and the more usual doors that remain are tall and wide.

Because the divisions of interior area have been left versatile and variable, the attic, for example, can become a private living and working apartment while the owners' daughter lives there, pulling her career as a screenwriter together; and it can easily be converted into a guest suite or retreat after Hollywood has called her away.

As for the exterior, the architects have left the pitched roof profile as it was, but punctuated the brown-brick skin of the house with what Mr. D'Elia calls "lots of dormers, reinterpreted." There are three of them, each one a tall oblong that looks a bit like a dormer – but a modernist one, if there has ever been such a thing. These elements give the façades crisp definition, and they are indeed polite nods to the traditional streetscape.

Less traditional, but more striking, is the interesting transition from street to front door. One leaves the public realm and approaches private space by way of a small, welcoming sequence of concrete steps and platforms that extends from the sidewalk across the garden. Here, as elsewhere on this site, superkül does something special with simple means, and does it well.

FROM PAGE 1

Ireland: 'This is now like Sunday shopping. People are out 12 months of the year'

» "They went nuts," says Mr. Lackie of his client's enthusiasm for a three-bedroom bungalow in the Oshawa area.

Mr. Quarrie says the house had just come on the market so the couple decided to make an offer right away. That didn't deter the competition.

He believes that he and Ms. Robins prevailed because they offered slightly over the asking price and attached a hefty deposit. They made the offer irrevocable only until midnight the same day. The offer was conditional on approval

home is we could start a family there."

Although they had only recently started looking, they sensed that other first-time buyers were eager to get into the market. "Things were going up for a day and then they were gone," he says.

Once they realized they had actually purchased a house, the couple felt the usual what-have-we-done jitters, Mr. Quarrie says. "I don't think we fully grasped the situation because we went so fast. It's a little bit nerve-wracking



The real estate market is changing in part because first-time buyers are

buildings is allowing buyers to take their time and press for better deals.

Christopher Bibby of Sutton Group Associates Realty Inc. says an astonishing number of rental units – 87 at last count – are available in the Cinema Tower at on Widmer Street in the Entertainment District.

"I have never once seen 87 units for rent in one building at the same time," he says.

He takes the high number as a signal that the vast supply coming onstream in the condo mar-