

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Architecture

Ahoy! Arc's in port at Bayview and Sheppard

Project adds some design flare to the suburban condo norm



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If you happen to be near the intersection of Bayview and Sheppard avenues in suburban Toronto and think you see a Caribbean cruise ship tied up at the subway station there, you haven't had one too many Cuba Libres. It's just Arc you're seeing: a large condominium building from Daniels Corp. that looks somewhat like a hefty ship, though without getting kitschy or literal about the allusion.

Arc is not, of course, the first landlubber building to be inspired by marine design. During the Art Deco decades in North America – roughly the 1920s and 1930s – avant-garde architects often decorated residences with portholes, streamlined prows and balcony railings in white-painted tubular steel. The gentle power of ocean-going liners on architectural imaginations slipped after the outbreak of world war in 1939. For millions of soldiers bound for the battlefields and for myriad refugees fleeing destruction, crossing the ocean was a miserable business, endured in stinking, crowded quarters below deck. It's little wonder that new North American houses stopped looking like boats after the Second World War.

Things are different now. A younger generation has discovered the Mediterranean and Caribbean holiday cruise ship, with its endless supply of pleasures and entertainments. Designed by Clifford Korman, principal in the Toronto firm of Kirkor Architects and Planners, the boat-shaped Arc building is not as luxuriously appointed as the commercial pleasure craft going out of Miami, but its amenities and features are worth noting.

The 60-foot pool, for example, is part of a recreational and fitness complex that comes with its own personal trainer and organizer of activities. Among the diversions delivered by Arc are movie and poker nights, ski trips, golf tours, cardio workouts and Pilates classes. On the south end

of the eighth floor, the building opens into a curving, glassy expanse of party rooms, a bar and such. Beyond the glass are a broad terrace and wide views of the downtown core (and, less fortunately, some undistinguished tall residential buildings in the neighbourhood).

These spacious amenity areas on the southbound prow of the structure provide what most residents don't have in abundance: space. Arc's 450 suites tend to be on the small side, and, compared with prices fetched by similarly sized condominiums downtown, relatively inexpensive. A 650-square-foot apartment here runs about \$295,000, while that outlay would get you only the smallest studio in a tonier condo tower downtown. Such figures suggest that Arc's target group of prospective homeowners are young but high-earning and hard-working, mostly single and in the real-estate market for the first time. These are active people who surely put the eighth-floor amenity zones to good use as extended living and dining rooms, and who enjoy the busy recreation centre. On my visit last week, I got the sense that the residents probably go out mainly for work, spending the rest of their time with each other in the gym, pool, or entertainment rooms.

The site of Arc, after all, is deep suburbia, far from the clubs, up-market shopping and jobs of downtown. But its typical suburban isolation – Arc resembles an island as much as it does a ship – is sharply mitigated by its immediate proximity to the subway. The location is ideal for someone who does not want to live in the city centre – there are certainly reasons other than financial ones for not wanting to do so – but who desires the fastest, most convenient connection to all the city has to offer. The basic necessities of life are also very close by, in the form of a large mall adjacent to the building. I find it attractive that some of the good things about living in suburbia have been joined so neatly to the possibility of living one's daily life (at least while young and independent) without a car.

That said, I do have some problems with the way the building hits the ground. There is no direct access to the subway from the bottom floor; the developer should have held out for permission to create it. The lobby is huge, dull and vacuous; it badly needs the enlivening touch of art. Retail, so far, is limited to a bank branch. More services should be brought on stream at grade to raise the pitch of activity on the barren suburban streets round about.

Apart from these caveats, I find Arc a welcome addition to Toronto's mix of new condo buildings: sleek and economical behind its cladding of glass and silvery-blue aluminum, and well done in a part of the city where a bit of flair is rarely part of the condo package.

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