

A rendering of Aura, currently Canada's tallest residential tower.



The height of residential towers

BY ERIN RUDDY

Tall commercial towers are nothing new, but the last few years have seen an exceptional crop of super-slim residential buildings sprouting up in cities all over the world. From Manhattan to Mumbai, tall towers are as fashionable as they are effectual given advancements in engineering and the sophistication of modern building materials.

Another reason for the sudden surge skywards is the lack of urban land parcels — and the price tags that go along with them. Given most city skylines are so tightly developed, it's no surprise that the only direction left to build is up.

According to Richard Witt, principal at Quadrangle Architects and Canadian chair of the Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat (CTBUH), an international body in the field of tall buildings and sustainable urban design, more than 100 residential skyscrapers are currently under construction across the globe, the tallest being World One, in Mumbai, India, which is set to rise a staggering 442 metres.

Also under construction is the Diamond Tower in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, at 432 metres, and 432 Park Avenue in New York City at 425 metres.

"Of the world's top 10 tallest residential buildings, eight are located in United Arab Emirates," says Witt, pointing out that one is in Australia and the other is in China. "The Princess Tower in Dubai is 413 metres tall, making it the tallest residential tower currently in the world."

Canada's soon-to-be-tallest residential tower is no slouch either. Coming in at an impressive 272 metres, Aura, a condominium located at Yonge and Gerrard in Toronto, will be the city's fourth tallest building and fifth tallest structure, soaring above everything but The CN Tower, First Canadian Place, Trump Tower and ScotiaTower. Construction began in January of 2010 and the last occupants are scheduled to begin moving in this December.

Sky-high dwellings

Condominiums are climbing to impressive heights, but apartment towers of unusual form are also on the rise. According to Witt, The Cayan in Dubai, which sits at a respectable 306 metres, is far from the tallest building in the world, but it has a striking helical shape turning 90 degrees over the course of its height.

New York is currently awaiting the realization of several new ultra-slim residential towers, including 125 Greenwich St., which will soar 413 metres at a pencil-like width making it the second tallest building in Manhattan's downtown core.

"In Canada, we have nothing over 250 metres in the residential department yet except for Aura," Witt says, "but it won't be long before this changes. One Yonge Tower and 50 Bloor West are both under construction and slated to be 293 metres and 277 metres respectively."

Notable designs

Impressive height is one thing; striking architecture is another. While historically residential buildings have been on the dull side of design compared to their office building counterparts, Witt suggests that this may no longer be the case. In addition to The Cayan in Dubai (mentioned above), Eight Spruce in New York City, designed by Frank Gehry, is something Witt cites as quite remarkable.

"Toronto developer Cityzen has also made some great forms with Absolute World (commonly referred to as the Marilyn Monroe Towers) in Mississauga, and their nearly completed L-Tower in

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Aura stands out in this aerial shot of Toronto

downtown Toronto,” Witt says. Designed by architect Daniel Libeskind, the 58-storey L-shaped residence is already making its mark on the skyline and will be ready for move in next summer.

Beauty may be in the eye of the beholder, but height is measurable — meaning the tallest buildings of today won’t be the tallest buildings of tomorrow. Love it or hate it, just look at Canada’s national icon, The CN Tower. Though the once dubbed “tallest free-standing structure in the world” didn’t hold any permanent world records, it will forever hold a place in Toronto’s ever-changing skyline. □

Erin Ruddy is the editor of Canadian Apartment Magazine.

Skyscrapers at-a-glance

- World’s tallest building: Burj Khalifa, Dubai, 828 metres
- World’s tallest residential tower: The Princess Tower, Dubai, 414 metres
- Canada’s tallest building: First Canadian Place, Toronto, 298 metres
- Canada’s tallest residential tower: Aura, Toronto, 272 metres
- Canada’s proposed tallest building (office/residential): Oxford Place, Toronto, 326 metres
- Cities with the most buildings over 300 metres: Dubai (18) Chicago (6) Hong Kong (6)
- Since January 2013, Toronto is the site of 31 buildings over 150 metres, with a total of 1,938 high-rise buildings city wide

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