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EA ON2

Breathing life back into Yonge St.

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Aura is changing the way we view our city.

The 78-storey megatower, nearing completion on the northwest corner of Yonge and Gerrard Sts., has fast become one of Toronto most recognizable landmarks.

"You notice it from the 401 and Dufferin, or coming down the DVP," notes Barry Graziani, the architect whose firm Graziani & Corraza designed Aura, Canada's tallest residential building.

"It reorients you — there's the financial district and then there's Aura farther north. It's expanding our sense of the city and the downtown core."

Visible from across the GTA, the building also proudly signals that the once-gloomy stretch of Yonge between Gerrard and College Sts. has suddenly become a big deal. Indeed, Aura, developed by Canderel Residential, has helped spur a transformation of the area, a historic part of the city that had fallen into disrepair over the years.

Before the arrival of Canderel in the early 2000s — and its construction of the two-tower Residences of College Park development on Bay St., followed several years later by Aura — the block bound by Yonge, College, Gerrard and Bay Sts. mostly consisted of a bland office complex backing onto forlorn Barbara Ann Scott skating rink park, itself stranded between two surface parking lots.

"It was pretty dreary," recalls Riz Dhanji, vice-president of sales and marketing for Canderel. "There wasn't much retail and there wasn't much happening. I remember in 2001 walking down Yonge thinking, 'Why am I selling this project? Even I wouldn't want to walk down here.'"

Over the past decade, Canderel's residential developments have brought thousands of new residents to the area. The projects have also added an array of new shops, services and eateries to cater to the sizeable new market. (Canderel owns the adjacent office complex at 777 Bay and has revamped the retail offerings there, including adding a Sobeys supermarket to relieve pressure on the existing Metro.)

Canada's tallest condo among projects revitalizing Toronto's main, historic street



BERNARD WEIL/TORONTO STAR

"It reorients you," says Barry Graziani, architect of Canada's largest condo Aura, left. Graziani and Julie Robinson, senior project manager for Canderel Residential, have helped the builder revive a stretch of stagnant Yonge St. with mixed-use projects Aura, YC Condos and Residences of College Park.

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BARRY GRAZIANI
ARCHITECT

"(Aura) has been a great catalyst project," says Mark Garner, executive director of the Downtown Yonge BIA. "It's created momentum for change in that area, that block specifically. And you're starting to see the ripple effect going down Yonge."

Canderel's developments are improving the public realm in and around College Park, as well. Aura's base has been set back from the street, creating a wider sidewalk on Yonge. The builder is also sprucing up

Barbara Ann Scott Park, contributing \$3 million to give the valuable green space between its buildings a much-needed makeover.

"To have a three-acre park in the middle of an urban condition in a big city is rare," notes Graziani. "We have this jewel in the rough that everybody has been walking by and ignoring."

The development also will involve restoring a forgotten midblock thorough-

fare, Hayter St., which once connected Yonge to Laplante St., west of Bay.

"Back in the '70s when they did the redevelopment of the entire block, they closed off Hayter," Graziani explains.

"But there was still this stub of it, opening onto Yonge, which we saw as an opportunity to announce the park on Yonge and create a new main entrance into the park."

AURA continued on H14

Rendering is artist's concept. *Prices correct at press time and are subject to change without notice. E. & O.E. **Limited Membership

