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## On Toronto's 'New Blue Edge'

As one of the first developments along Toronto's "new blue edge," Monde Condominiums is setting the stage for a wave of sustainable building along the city's waterfront

By Matt Alderton

The world's great waterfront cities—Barcelona, Sydney, San Francisco—are dominated by parks, trails, beaches, and boardwalks. They teem with activity. Attractions. Ambiance. But because waterways historically have been important shipping arteries, many of them were once overrun with industry, which in certain cases turned the waterfront from an asset into an afterthought.

This is certainly the case in Toronto. For much of the 19th and 20th centuries the city was a thriving port, brimming with warehouses, factories, and wharfs. In the 1970s, however, deindustrialization left the shores of Lake Ontario littered with brownfields, economically and environmentally spent.



Four decades later, government stakeholders are reclaiming and revitalizing this once-forgotten district. Led by **Waterfront Toronto**, established in 2001 by the federal, provincial, and city governments of Canada, Ontario, and Toronto, the effort is a 25-year, \$34 billion megaproject that will transform 2,000 acres of blighted waterfront into sustainable mixed-use communities.

**Monde Condominiums** in Toronto's East Bayfront neighborhood is among the first private-sector developments precipitated by the initiative, which Waterfront Toronto calls the "new blue edge." Still in the early stages of development with a groundbreaking date expected in late 2014 or early 2015, it will be a LEED Gold-certified condominium building with 40 stories and 516 suites when completed in 2018.

"It's pioneering to be the first [private-sector] building in the area," says **Alan Vihant**, senior vice president of high-rise development at **Great Gulf**, the building's Toronto-based developer. "We're helping to set the tone for the entire waterfront."

A fixture of the East Bayfront neighborhood is **Sherbourne Common**, a 3.63-acre waterfront park that opened in 2010. It is the first park in Canada to feature a neighborhood-wide stormwater-treatment facility as part of its design. According to architect **Moshe Safdie**, who designed Monde in collaboration with local architecture firm **Quadrangle Architects**, Sherbourne Common and Lake Ontario were a major consideration in the building's design, which will engage the park via a café promenade along its park-facing entrance.

"There are two elements within the design: a podium that defines the urban context and continues the urban spaces, giving an edge to the park and animating the street front, and a tower that springs out of it," says Safdie, head of Boston-based **Safdie Architects**. "[Waterfront Toronto] wants to create street life at the pedestrian scale. This building, by embracing the idea of a podium that engages the street and the park in the form of arcades, cafés, restaurants, and shops, contributes to this objective."



It's the first of many ways that Monde advances Waterfront Toronto's vision for sustainable mixed-use communities. "The building itself is connected to the park so that the main mid-block public passage actually runs from the street into the park by all the residents' front door," says **Sheldon Levitt**, a principal at Quadrangle Architects. "It's not just what happens in your individual unit that's important; it's all the opportunities for being outdoors."

In fact, outdoor spaces are a cornerstone of Monde's design, which promotes indoor-outdoor living with a "Gardens in the Sky" design philosophy. In addition to the requisite green roof at the top of the tower, the building will sport a planted-edge green roof on the amenities level at the top of the podium component, where there also will be an infinity pool overlooking downtown Toronto. The highlight, however, is the private balconies and terraces with built-in planters outside each condo suite, most of which will average 60 square feet compared to approximately 27 square feet for a traditional condo balcony. These balconies will connect residents to the natural world while giving the building a unique, textured appearance.

"What a building offers tangibly to those living in it and what it does to the people looking at it has to be somehow fused together," Safdie says. "The emphasis on outdoor spaces achieves this and gives the building its unique appearance. The balconies are quite unusual. They either follow the face of the apartment or they stick out in a perpendicular way. And because the building staggers in a kind of zigzag form, the glass reflects these balconies, so it looks like an extremely complex three-dimensional puzzle."



The integration of indoor and outdoor spaces accomplishes a lot in the way of sustainability, using native plant species, for instance, and minimizing heat island effect. Great Gulf promises many other green elements, including low-flow plumbing fixtures that will reduce water consumption by up to 40 percent, a rainwater collection system that will reuse water for the building's evaporative cooling, and innovative heat-recovery ventilators that will use heat from residents' bathroom exhaust fans to heat their units. It also includes more requisite features such as low-VOC paints, adhesives, and flooring; daylight maximization; an on-demand fresh air system; and a "master kill switch" that residents can use to easily turn off all the lights in their suite when they're leaving it.

According to **Michael Pires**, an associate at **Enermodal Engineering** and the sustainability consultant on the project, the team plans to avoid using Portland cement whenever possible in its concrete, to use rebar that's locally sourced and contains more than 90 percent recycled content, and to use drywall metal studs with the highest possible recycled content. Ultimately, though, what makes Monde Condominiums most sustainable isn't its individual footprint but rather its position within East Bayfront and the larger Toronto waterfront community. Inhabitants and visitors will have access to local shopping and entertainment, public transportation, public green space, and even a state-of-the-art broadband network—Canada's first open-access, ultra-high-speed broadband community network—that will allow them to work from home more often and therefore commute less.

"Most of what is covered under 'sustainability' has to do with the physical world; it's about materials, energy, and consumption," Safdie says. "But there is also a whole social dimension, which has to do with the urban form and the mix of land uses, which encourage or discourage transportation and travel in the city. Urban concepts that get people to live closer to their jobs are a good thing. Those that force you to commute for two hours are less efficient—not just in terms of energy, but also in terms of human lives. These types of large-scale urban questions go well beyond individual buildings and have to do with the whole notion that mixed-use development is better than single-use development, which is something we encourage in every one of our urban projects."

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