

TALKING DESIGN TIPS WITH AWARD-WINNING ARCHITECT



MARILYN WILSON
Condo Scene

Houry Avedissian, owner of Ha2 Architecture Design, recently won a plethora of awards at the Housing Design Awards put on by the Greater Ottawa Home Builders' Association. Impressive and bright, she is organization and talent at its best. I spoke with her about trends, architecture and design and found common ground between her design sense and her condo sense.

Q What are the most important architectural trends developers you work with are incorporating?

A The focus is more on compact, built-in areas that multitask. Examples are retractable beds that can be folded into wall units, clearing the way for daytime office desks. There are also compact storage wall units and retractable dining tables that can transform from small bar seating all the way to tables of eight. Reducing wasted spaces and maximizing square footage is the trend in recent years. It's not how much square footage your unit has, it's how efficiently it's being used.

Q That's so true. With that in mind, what is the key architectural element in any condo building?

A A high-ceiling vestibule entry with an engaging presence, interesting wall design features, a welcoming lobby waiting area, a separate and secure mail room. I enjoy clever details, original balconies, interesting transition spaces and privacy elements.

Common areas are really important. Exercise rooms, pools, conference rooms and reception areas. Many luxury condo buildings can be identified by how richly they define those spaces.

Q How about the most important architectural detail in a condo unit?

A Standard things such as laundry, clever storage and open spaces are key. The flow from kitchen to living area is another. Room distribution and space are always concerns in condominium units. The lighter, the airier — the better.

Q What materials would you recommend for flooring?

A My personal preference, depending on unit size, would be the use of porcelain tile, which allows you to consider radiant floor heating and a sleek finish. There is so much variety in tile these days that even if you are a big fan of wood, there are many tiles that look like wood or even concrete.

Tile is easier to keep clean
and you can use this material

throughout the unit, instead of breaking the space from tile in the kitchen to wood for the rest of the layout. Natural materials, like marble, are even more spectacular, although more costly.

Q Speaking of marble, I am often asked what is better — granite, marble or composite. What do you think?

A I personally prefer quartz for countertops and marble for walls and bathrooms — or even fireplace units.

Q What is your best advice when considering which condo to buy?

A Orientation. Observe the building layout and verify which elevation your unit is on. If you love sun filtering inside in the afternoon and buy a north-facing unit, you'll be hugely disappointed. Other things include the flow and the storage spaces offered, both in your unit and your locker areas. A lot of these details can be overlooked by a shiny price-point offer. For instance, is one parking spot offered or is that an extra cost?

Q How do you deal with giving the client what he or she wants even though it may not be the best idea for resale?

A It's a matter of how much time they plan to live in the unit. If they are planning on renting it, I would take a certain approach. If they plan on living there less than five years, I probably wouldn't go extremely elaborate, but if they are planning on staying there an indefinite amount of time, I would personalize it all in keeping with the current trends and developments.

Q What would be your “must haves” if you were purchasing a condo?

A Large, expansive windows facing east/west and open-concept space. If space were limited, I would want cleverly laid out storage walls and areas. The biggest balcony available and, if possible, the best view. I would also avoid the first few floors just to be away from the noise of traffic, depending on location, which may not be an issue.

Q At what stage would a buyer hire an architect and is it more expensive than a designer?

A Before purchasing, consider inviting the architect or designer over to make sure your lighting needs will be met based on orientation. Otherwise, it really

depends on the developer's timeline and how far away from the delivery date you made your purchase. Are they two years away or two months away?

In most situations, unless you are buying multiple units and making a larger unit, once the structure is up and windows are installed, it could be a good time to get started. Condo units are more or less small areas, and the design stage won't be long unless highly detailed and specialized items are being built. When the millwork phase is at the point of final site measurements, that's when things start moving quickly.

Q How would hiring an architect differ from hiring a design-



It's not how much square footage your unit has — it's how efficiently it's being used, says Houry Avedissian of Ha2 Architecture Design. *BRIGITTE BOUVIER/OTTAWA CITIZEN*

er for a condo interior's design? Why should buyers consider one over the other?

AI believe it's a matter of personal connection, availability, expertise in the area and relationship to the builders. Some architects hire interior designers for smaller jobs such as these.

However, if there are structural changes being made, an architect should be consulted.

Marilyn Wilson has been selling real estate for more than 25 years and owns Marilyn Wilson Dream Properties Inc. Christie's International Real Estate. Reach her through dreamproperties.com.

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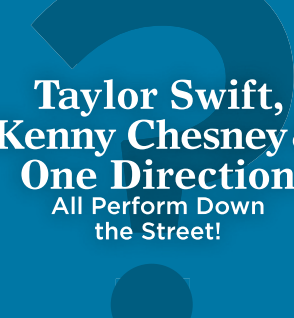
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