

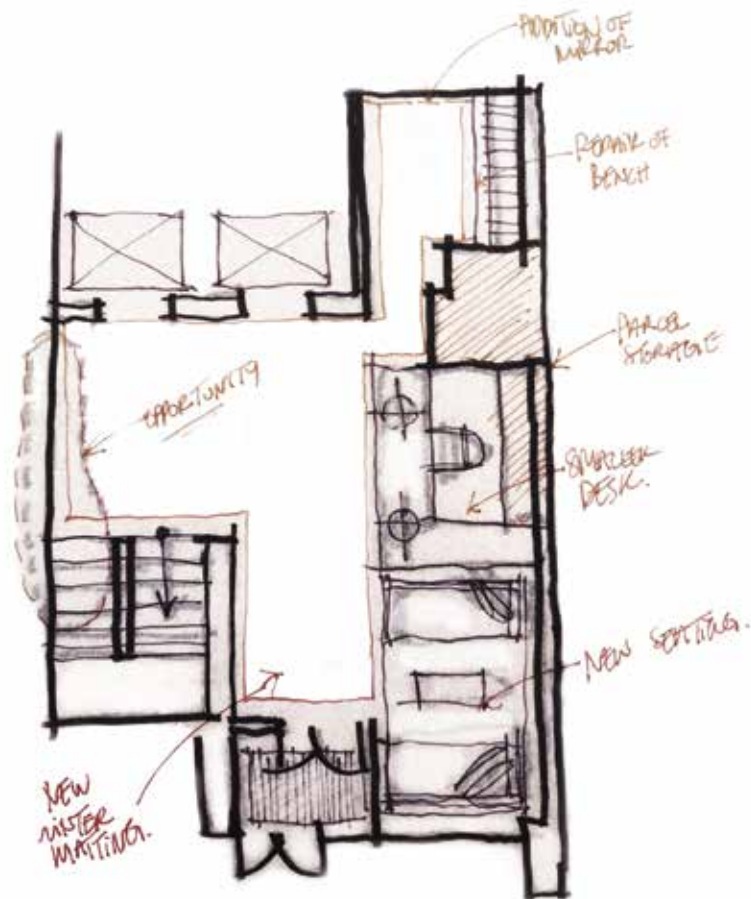


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# The Evolution of Amenity Spaces

How We View Condo Amenity Spaces Has Changed Dramatically Over the Years as Suite Sizes Shrink



Above: Plan of downtown condominium lobby noting opportunities for improvement



Condominiums are small, vertical cities that house a large amount of us in Toronto. In many ways, they provide a platform for a portion of existence and define how we live a good portion of our life.

When it comes to condominiums and the amenity spaces, how we view the spaces has changed dramatically over the years as our suite sizes are getting smaller and smaller.

Amenity spaces had once been perceived as an added bonus to the residential unit and as an element to ameliorate your life... very similar to icing on a cake. Now, amenity spaces are often seen as an extension of the private residences and provide elements that we simply do not have room for inside of our suite. So, instead of the icing on the cake analogy we have moved to a more modern analogy of a tray of cupcakes consisting of different flavours that we all cut into smaller pieces and share. This being said, the composition of interior spaces, both suites as well as amenity spaces is quite different with older and new buildings. Older buildings often times have larger suites and large parcels of amenity spaces that have often times been designed to host a very specific use. New condos have smaller suites and a myriad of amenity spaces that have

the ability to host different kinds of events.

When it comes to updating amenity spaces in older buildings, which aspects of them should we change and which items should be kept in the same configuration? Worn out finishes always need to be replaced – sometimes like for like to bring forth the former glory of the building. In other cases the finishes and interior fit-out scheme are changed completely, either to change the interior aesthetic or to suit the needs of a new function. Updating finishes as part of a maintenance routine is necessary as there is a mandate to keep the building in an acceptable state. Changing the use of spaces should be a decision that's made based on the current and anticipated usage. As time goes on, we always have the to fine tune the interior fit-out, to best suit the



Existing party room in 10 year old North York condominium (top left) with makeshift coat closet (below left ). When renovating party rooms, creating allowances for storage is always taken into account. Existing billiards and games room (above) which is due for a renovation. Interesting to note that this room, which is adjacent to the fitness area was once utilized for fitness activities. Below: New childrens play area, an amenity that is relatively new to the Toronto market





When designing this condominium party room, we had to ensure that the space and layout offered flexibility for various functions

needs of today and the anticipated needs of tomorrow.

Amenity spaces (and common spaces in general) in condominiums have 2 primary functions;

- to provide a common area for residents to gather and to help foster a sense of community
- to provide space that supports the lifestyle choices of the various residents

From over 200 walk throughs in existing condominiums in the GTA I have seen amenities appointed in a myriad of ways – theaters, pools, fitness areas, libraries, billiard rooms, guest rooms, party rooms, pet areas, velvet panel clad party rooms, poker rooms, children’s play areas... the list goes on. Every building and condominium community is exceptionally different than the next and it’s important to realize that what works well at Yonge and Bloor most probably won’t work well on the periphery of Etobicoke.

The reality is, the assortment of amenity spaces that exist in most new buildings are often the result of a sales and marketing ex-

ercise. The appointment of amenities (both in aesthetics and programming) may lead to a successful marketing venture for a condominium but does not always guarantee that the spaces will function as intended. Well poised and elegant renderings of amenity spaces always look great and have the opportunity to further support a marketing campaign, but the reality is that purchasing lingerie is usually a much more exciting and captivating than purchasing the more utilitarian version - sweatpants. New buildings are often marketed with a “lingerie” mentality with operational concerns being secondary – retrofit projects are often require a “sweatpant” sensibility with a desire to take on a “lingerie” aesthetic.

The real estate market has changed significantly over the past 100 years and the ideal condominium development looks very different today than it did 50 years ago. Building shell, ceiling height, proportions, appointment of amenities, suite sizes... everything is vastly different. There is one common misconception – it is often assumed that only the new condos with the soaring 20’ lobby ceilings can be al-

luring and have a swanky amenity spaces. The older stock of condominiums in Toronto have a certain amount of intrigue and unique features that are hard to find in new buildings. When renovating the public spaces in your condominium, it is important to fully realize, and make the most of, the unique elements.

The stock of older condominiums in Toronto have spaces that are vastly different from condos today – large amenity spaces on the basement levels consisting of party rooms, swimming pools, utilitarian change rooms. I have an entire library of site photos of underground party rooms and pools – lit with fluorescent lights and that have the same finish out as 1983. When walking through a project in the past year, through the change rooms to the pool I noticed a stand-up tanning booth – still in mint condition. Obviously tanning booths are something that is not introduced into a new development project. That being said, most individuals reading this would assume that the direction would be given to remove the tanning booth with the imminent renovation. Surprisingly, ac-

ording to the board, the tanning booth was an item to be maintained as-is during the renovation as it was well used and liked by the residents. Interesting.

Walking further through the change rooms I get to the underground pool area – a vast, 2-storey space with decorative tiles on the walls and with a ceiling dotted with numerous fluorescent lights. When the building was developed in 1983 there was obviously a greater desire to create spaces for underground pool parties as there was less need for underground lockers and parking spaces. In 2019, the closest we get to parties on the p2 level is fumbling with our fob to get out of the garage and into the airlock. Joking aside, as time progresses, it is important to understand the unique characteristics that bring value to the property and accentuate them through the renovation or evolution process.

Through my years of experience in condominium refurbishment, I have always encountered an excessive amount of amenity spaces. When meeting with a condo board, there is always the question – ‘what

are we going to do with the all of the amenity spaces’ and there is never a request to find more space. Guest rooms area always booked, gyms are typically too small. Theaters, the majority of time, continue to be vacant, party rooms tend to be lonely places to be Monday afternoon at 2pm. Not surprisingly, children’s play areas are empty Saturday night at 10pm while the party in the adjacent party room with a capacity of 40 people is already at 41 when you really wanted to invite 60.

As our individual units get smaller and smaller, our individual units only include the necessary elements. Having a unit with a spare guestroom is something that the majority of us can’t afford. Some of us are lucky enough to live in condos that have guest suites. Guest suites (especially those in downtown buildings) are always booked and are a great amenity. Coworking spaces, spaces for strollers, parcel storage are items that we seem to be adding to most condominiums. Childrens rooms, craft rooms, and tool rooms are spaces we are seeing in most new buildings and are quite popular.

If anyone could design the perfect building, what would it look like? A certain size of lobby, certain proportions of amenity spaces? Would it have a spa? What about a dog run area? What about a dedicated spot for food delivery in the front lobby? The reality is, there is no perfect building and even the ‘perfect development’ will only be seen in this light for only a fraction of a second. At this exact moment in time fitness spaces and parcel spaces are the 2 areas that have undergone significant change in the past 10 years. I would assume that in another 10 years the requirements and uses for both of these will be significantly different again. Perhaps our parcel requirements will double? With our aging population will the guest suites in our condos be transformed to nursing stations? Will we open-up our ground floors to further engage the communities to include daycare facilities, convenience stores, and dry cleaning?

The better question is – how do I set my condo up for continued, positive change? My suggestion is to leave room for flexibility and to create spaces (with character) that are set up for positive change. **CV**



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