

When you can't build up, build sideways

Toronto architecture firm finds novel way to erect a populous condo development in Dhaka and stay out of nearby airport's airspace



JOHN BENTLEY MAYS

THE PERFECT HOUSE

jmayes@globeandmail.com

When Toronto's JCI Architects Inc. was invited by a private Bangladeshi developer to design a middle-income condominium community in a northern suburb of Dhaka, the young firm was faced with a problem that is all too familiar to planners and other citizens who want to see greater density in the Greater Toronto Area.

It's this: How do you bring residential concentration to a site (such as this one near Dhaka) that lies directly underneath the approach path of an important international airport? (We've got Pearson; Dhaka has Hazrat Shah-jalal, Bangladesh's largest and busiest air hub.)

Are the areas around these facilities condemned to be forever carpeted by sprawl?

Of course, an ordinary skyscraper – the most obvious solution – is out of the question in such places. But there's another way to tackle the issue.

Instead of pushing the tall buildings upright, you can tip the towers onto their sides, as JCI has decided to do in Bangladesh. This move lets skyscrapers do what they do best – provide dwellings that are safe and private, but compactly stacked in the landscape – while making them reach into the air no more than a few storeys.

The horizontal configuration of multiple living spaces is not new. Le Corbusier pioneered the form of the prone tall building when he did his hugely influential Unité d'Habitation residential block in Marseilles (1947-1952). And the designers of dwellings in Toronto's celebrated St. Lawrence Market neighbourhood put it to excellent use some 40 years ago. But JCI's Shobuj Pata complex (Bengali for "Green Leaf"), if built out according to the plans, could add an interesting page or two to the postwar history of this controversial housing type.

JCI's intriguing proposal has been devised by Jaegap Chung (principal in charge), project architect Derek McCallum and their colleague Sudipto Sengupta. The scheme's first phase features seven long, narrow, slightly curved structures, each 10 storeys tall and set down parallel to all the others. These buildings are meant to be differentiated by subtle variations of plantings on some facades and by the various kinds of trees placed in the park they stand in.

In terms of form, however, each block is very much like the ones



Instead of pushing the tall buildings upright, JCI Architects tipped the towers onto their sides. JCI ARCHITECTS



beside it. The standard module contains four generously proportioned apartments per floor, each between 1,800 square feet and 2,000 square feet in area. Every suite is far longer than it is wide, a gesture intended to maximize the light coming in through the tall glass walls on the long sides. There are elevators for each 10-story stack of four-apartment clusters. Each of the seven long blocks comprises three of these modular stacks.

Put more simply: The total development is big – Mr. Chung estimates the population of the first phase alone could top 2,700 souls – but the architectural mass has been broken down into fine-grained, manageable bits with intimate entrances. Wholly absent, mercifully, are the long, impersonal double-loaded hallways we often find in condo slabs.

These suites are meant to be lived in by large families with servants, and, as far as I can tell, JCI's

planning has been notably sensitive to the cultural needs and desires of white-collar Bangladeshis.

Though the divvying up of space in each apartment generally follows modernist open-plan precedents, for instance, the kitchen, in a nod to local tradition, is wholly enclosed. The climate is hot, people expect central air conditioning, so the architects have included it. (After an ecologically-minded fashion, that is:

Mechanical cooling equipment is available for the warmest seasons, but it is supplemented by a simple system that pumps air deep into the earth, where the heat is taken out of it, then pumps it back to the surface and into the units.)

The designers have also made a point of encouraging more natural temperature management by leaving open a light and air shaft, about 15 feet wide and running the length of each block. This interval between the two wings of each building enables cross ventilation during the months when the mercury is not off the charts.

The setting of the blocks is park-like, though these are hardly "towers in the park." (The lawns and gardens are actually parts of the green roof of the vast one-level parking garage, situated below grade.) A long allée, cutting right through the buildings at grade and lined with shops, daycare centres, an elementary school, a fitness studio and other community facilities, bisects the site of Shobuj Pata's first phase, helping make it a livable, walkable place.

Even if this very large undertaking is not completed in Bangladesh – it may not be moving forward – JCI Architects has produced a thoughtful and imaginative package of plans that are applicable anywhere height is not desirable or not possible, and where density of human fabric is called for.

ON SITE » BY SYDNIA YU

YONGE AND EGLINTON 155 REDPATH

Contemporary design for city's new 'centre'

DEVELOPERS

Freed Development Corp. and CD Capital

BUILDER

Broccolini

SIZE

396 to more than 850 square feet

PRICE

Mid-\$200,000s to \$495,900

CONTACT

To register, phone 416-996-4837 or visit redpathcondos.com

Peter Freed, the pioneer developer behind a string of popular King West condominiums, is now planting the flag in downtown Toronto with a plan to develop a series of contemporary high-rises in the Yonge-Eglinton corridor.

The first of four projects – 155 Redpath, at Roehampton Avenue just east of Yonge Street – will be released by Freed Development Corp. and CD Capital next month.

"What makes this different is the fact it's not in the middle of a busy road, but set right in the middle of an existing residential neighbourhood," says Todd Cowan, who is a managing partner of CD Capital. "This building is in one of the most prime areas going forward."

The 36-storey residence will be a short walk from shops, cinemas, cafés, restaurants and rec-



The building's articulated shape will give the illusion of stacked boxes.

reation facilities, as well as a subway station and the light rail transit line running along Eglinton Avenue and scheduled for completion by 2020.

"We feel Yonge and Eglinton is going to become the centre of the city," Mr. Cowan says.

"It will be one of the only locations in the city where you can ... be downtown in 15 minutes or the airport in 40 minutes."

Peter Clewes of architects Alliance and designer Johnson Chou will also anchor this 470-unit tower in the community with strong visual designs.

"A lot of the buildings have been there for a long time, dating back to the seventies," Mr. Cowan explains. "And a lot of the new buildings built in the last 10 to 15 years are typical residential buildings, nothing very contemporary."

This building's articulated shape will give the illusion of stacked boxes shifted inward and outward and allow for a great number of wide and shallow suites.

"All principal bedrooms will be along the exterior glass and the units will have a lot of natural light because ... the floor plate of the building is more rectangular and less square in comparison to similar type buildings," Mr. Cowan states.

"A lot of the units will have large balconies or wraparound balconies, or in many cases they'll have balconies on two

sides, so that's a really unique feature of this design. And some areas on top of the podium level will have very large outdoor terraces as well."

Sunlight will also flood common areas, including a grand lobby, library, party and fitness rooms with walkouts to private gardens, including one with a reflecting pool and fire pit.

On the ninth floor, there will be an outdoor infinity pool, hot tub, cabanas, lounging, barbecuing and dining areas.

"Our plan is to bring something more contemporary and lifestyle oriented," says Mr. Cowan.

"We have a much larger site than a typical condo site, so it give us the luxury of grading a very large open area for the residents of this building and ... a more exclusive area on the roof of the podium level."

Each suite, ranging from studios to two-bedroom plans, will feature nine-foot ceilings with exposed concrete above the principal rooms, pre-finished engineered wood floors and porcelain tile finishes, in addition to European-style kitchen appliances, custom cabinetry and bathroom vanities.

Parking will cost \$47,500, while lockers requests are put on a wait list. Monthly fees will be 49 cents per square foot, plus individually metered utilities.

Occupancy is slated for fall 2017.