

Moving On Up

Residential elevators reach new heights in consumer demand BY JUDY PENZ SHELUK



We've all heard about aging demographics, but did you know that in 2001, the Census of Canada reported there are 1.8 million baby boomers and 1.475 million seniors living in Ontario alone? And while 83 per cent want to stay in their residence as long as possible, many are concerned about limited mobility within their current home.

The reality is these concerns are not without foundation. Today, over one half of all new homes are multi-level, and builders are looking for ways to respond to multi-generational families, an ever-burgeoning population (the Greater Toronto area is expected to grow by 48 per cent in the next 25 years) and legislation such as Ontario's Greenbelt Act and Places to Grow.

"We are entering a new age of intensification, with more and more units being built into in-fill areas," says Dan Gabriele, president of Marz Homes. "But, while the trend is to build up, rather than out, the reality is most people don't like stairs. Elevators take care of the stair issue and have the added benefit of providing what I like to call a 'chi-chi' effect."

Building up to maximize land use was of paramount performance when URBANCORP, in conjunction with the Landmark Building Group, planned Townhomes at Hog's Hollow at Yonge and York Mills, an area of prime Toronto real estate. The five-block community features 81 traditional back-to-back luxury townhomes, which range from three to four storeys plus basement.

The elevator is hidden behind regular doors that match with the decor throughout the home.



With a variety of cab finishes and colours, elevators can be customized for a more personal look.

Making it Work

When a physically-challenged homebuyer approached Schuit Homes about the possibility of installing an elevator in one of their 51 luxury two-storey condominiums at Madison Park, Schuit project manager, Marco Martorano, and Bob Nowack of Cambridge Elevating, found a way to fulfill the client's request. "Fortunately, our condo units are well-suited to elevator installations," said Martorano. "By relocating the main floor laundry room to the lower level, and replacing an upstairs storage closet, we were able to install a four-stop elevator. This allowed access from the garage, main floor, and upper and lower levels. More importantly, we were able to provide this access without ramping."

One block of four-storey townhomes featured residential elevators. Fifteen of the larger units (3,500-5,100 square feet) came with an elevator as a standard feature. The remaining units offered an elevator as upgrade. Nine buyers purchased the option.

It's this type of response that has both production and custom builders looking at elevators as a new marketing opportunity. So, it's not surprising that requests for residential elevators are on the rise with elevator companies noting a new trend: residential installations are starting to exceed traditional commercial applications.

"Historically, there were two types of clients who requested residential elevators — the affluent buyer and the buyer of necessity," says Wayne Cassidy, president, Cassidy & Co., an architectural design firm with over 30 years in the industry. "This is starting to change, in much the

same way as our perception of the 'traditional' family has changed. Gone are the days of 2.2 kids and a dog. Many homeowners today have blended families, with three or more generations living under one roof, often on separate floors."

As a result, every custom home designed by Cassidy & Co. starts with a barrier-free recommendation.

"This is more than providing for wheelchair accessibility with wide hallways," says Cassidy. "Even if clients choose not to have an elevator, we recommend the structural support of a rough-in 100 per cent of the time. The rough-in provides an extra closet or pantry space, and eases the process of installing an elevator in the future. At present, about 25 per cent of our clients are selecting that option."

According to Kevin Field, senior designer and project manager at the Adapt-able Design Group, it's an option well worth choosing. As specialists in access design and construction management, they are often called in to retrofit elevators into existing homes, and the cost can be overwhelming.

"Depending on the elevator style and options, installation of an elevator into a roughed-in space, or into new home construction will usually cost from \$20,000 to \$30,000. The most basic installation for a two-storey home will start at \$60,000 to \$70,000," says Field.

Elevators are also being considered more frequently in home additions. Jane Cameron, an architectural technologist and the owner of LIFE HOME Design, is frequently consulted by homeowners wanting to accommodate aging parents or extended families. Depending on the size and type of the addition, and the family's projected needs, including an elevator often makes sense.

Cameron cites the example of a 1,750-square-foot ranch bungalow in Adjala-Tosorontio Township, an area known for its scenic, rolling hills.

"In this case, my client wanted to build an addition for her parents. While they were still in good physical shape, the couple wanted bungalow living, a double garage, and a spacious workshop — all independently attached to their daughter's house."

Unfortunately, the narrow property allowed for only one option; a long, skinny structure with the garage/workshop attached to the front. "The difficulty was the original home had been built far



With so many hardwoods and veneers to choose from, elevators can have the elegance and sophistication of fine furniture.

back from the road and the best views faced to the front. Putting a garage there entirely eliminated the view," says Cameron. "In addition, the land sloped downward, which meant a lot of fill."

The challenge was resolved by building the main living area over the spacious garage/workshop and installing a two-

stop elevator, essentially providing bungalow living. Stacked construction recouped most of the elevator's additional cost, which came in at about \$20,000.

Breathtaking views of Lake Ontario, large grading transitions and an aging parent were the primary reasons that Pharaoh Design Associates incorporated an elevator into Carriage House, a multi-level home in St. Catharines and the 2005 winner of OHBA's Most Outstanding Custom

Home under 2,200 square feet.

"The house was built for the owner's mother," says Brent Pym, president of Pym and Cooper. "The multi-level design allowed us to maximize the views and achieve the look and feel of a much larger home. Incorporating an elevator into the design allowed us to simplify her life."

Taking economic advantage of waterfront views has long been a challenge for

production builders. "Panoramic lake views were the key selling feature for Marz's Bal Harbour, a 24-unit upscale waterfront community in Stoney Creek," says Gabriele. "Builders traditionally offer units on either side of the lane facing each other, but this equates to a huge disparity in values, because everyone wants a view of the lake."

By building the units as terrace townes, everyone was afforded with the same view. To overcome the detraction of stairs leading to the 12 upper units, Marz offered more square footage by building over the garage and a three-stop elevator with access at the ground-level basement, and the entrance and main floor as a standard feature.

"Installing the elevators cost about \$25,000 per unit, but it was well worth it," says Gabriele. "The end result was 12 luxury loft units which were not only priced substantially higher than if we had built in the traditional manner, they were also priced significantly higher than the bungalows below."

In fact, the Bal Harbour project was so successful that Marz followed it with Tiffany Ridge, a community in Ancaster that included 10 terrace townes, ranging in size from 1,400 to 1,510 square feet. Each of the five upper units features a three-stop elevator.

"The decision to include terrace townes in Tiffany Ridge was twofold," says Gabriele. "The property is surrounded by a conservation area and it was an awkward shape. The terrace townie configuration allowed us to offer all homeowners vistas of the natural feature. Once again, the elevators were a standard feature, rather than an option."

Other builders, such as the FRAM Building Group, have elected to offer elevators as an option. "Our first elevator experience was in 1999 at Port Credit Village, an upscale mixed redevelopment located on the edge of Lake Ontario in Mississauga," says Peter Del Fatti, senior project manager. "Most of the purchasers were affluent empty nesters over 50 years of age."

Of the 167 luxury townhomes, 27 units were structured to accommodate an elevator. Each of the elevator units was over 3,200 square feet with a finished lower level and three floors above grade. Eleven of the 27 units selected the elevator upgrade at a cost of \$45,000; one unit selected a rough-in.

Homeowners' FAQs

- 1. Will the elevator be noticeable?** The inside of the elevator can be finished to complement virtually any home decor style imaginable, and the contractor will supply landing doors to match the other doors in the house.
- 2. What if the power goes out?** Residential elevators have a battery backup system that will enable the user to lower the elevator and get out in the event of a power failure. This battery backup system also provides emergency lighting in the cab in the event of a power failure.
- 3. Is it noisy?** No, the noise generated when the elevator is running is comparable to the sound of a standard furnace or freezer.
- 4. Can the elevator open mid-floor?** No, elevators come equipped with many standard safety features. For example, each landing door is equipped with a door interlock. This prevents the operation of the elevator with the door open, and also prevents any other door from opening when the car is not at a designated floor.
- 5. Is it safe for children to operate?** Yes, residential elevators are safe for operators of all ages, although adult supervision for small children is advisable.
- 6. Does the opening need to be on the same side for every floor?** No, only one of the hoist way walls is used by the drive mechanism, leaving open the possibility of three walls for entrances. It is also possible to have a double entrance at a landing.
- 7. How much will my elevator cost in maintenance?** Maintenance is typically performed annually, subject to site conditions and/or frequency of use. Costs vary by company, but range from \$150 to \$550+, depending on frequency of visits, elevator model and the number of stops.



Cambridge Elevating Inc.

www.CambridgeElevating.com
Contact: Bob Nowack 519-653-4222
Cambridge Elevating has been manufacturing elevators for over 15 years. Models include: Elmira: Compact cab sizes starting from 36 inches x 48 inches (hoist way required: 54 inches x 52 inches); six-inch minimum pit depth required, four adults/750-pound capacity; 2.0 Hp power/pump unit; up to six stops. Heritage and Cambrian: Larger custom cab sizes available; automatic sliding entrance doors; eight-inch minimum pit depth required, six adults/1,500-pound capacity; 3.5 Hp power/pump unit; up to six stops. Supplied and installed prices range from under \$20,000 to \$40,000+ depending on size, features, number of stops and finishes. All construction costs to accommodate the elevator are in addition to the installed prices previously listed.



Concord Elevator (London) Ltd.

www.concordelevator.com
Contact: Kevin Wells 905-450-7010
Savaria Concord has been manufacturing elevators for over 30 years. Models include: Infinity and Infinity SRE: Cab sizes starting from 35 inches x 48 inches (hoist way required: 50 inches x 56 inches); eight-inch minimum pit depth required, four adults/1,000-pound capacity; 3.0 Hp power/pump unit; up to six stops. Prolift Voyager: Cab sizes starting from 35 inches x 60 inches (hoist way required: 52 inches x 68 inches); 12-inch minimum pit depth required, six adults/1,400-pound capacity; 5.0 Hp power/pump unit; up to six stops. Supplied and installed prices range from less than \$20,000, up to \$30,000, depending on size, features, number of stops and finishes. All construction costs to accommodate the elevator are in addition to the installed prices previously listed.



Advanced Elevator Systems

Federal Elevator Ltd.

www.federalelevator.com
Contact: Richard Piatti 905-458-4015
Federal Elevator has been manufacturing elevators since 1988. Models include: Panorama and Renaissance: Cab sizes starting from 30 inches x 30 inches (hoist way required: cab width plus 14 inches x cab depth plus 4 inches); eight-inch minimum pit depth required; four adults/750-pound up to six adults/1,400-lb. capacity; 2.0 or 3.0 Hp power/pump unit; up to eight stops.



CANADA CUSTOM ELEVATOR INC.

Canada Custom Elevator Inc.

www.canadacustomelevator.com
Contacts: Daniel Nyanteh or Igor Markovic 1-888-283-1112
Canada Custom Elevator has been a supplier/installer of residential elevators since 2004; representing over seven different manufacturers, the management team has over 65 years of combined elevator industry and construction experience. In addition to a wide selection of traditional residential hydraulic drive elevators, the company offers these non-traditional models: Designer Series: Utilizing a winding drum drive with a machine room-less design, this unit is ideal for retrofitting into existing homes or new construction where space is at a premium. This elevator can fit into a space as little as 36 inches x 36 inches. Symphony Series: Hydraulic drive elevator that features a commercial-style horizontal sliding car door (versus accordion-style car gates traditionally used in residential elevators) that works in conjunction with a residential swing door in the hallway.

FRAM will be launching another waterfront development in Collingwood. The Shipyards will be geared to the same demographic as Port Credit Village and offers views of Georgian Bay and Blue Mountain. Thirty-six of the two- and three-storey units, ranging from 2,268 to 3,950 square feet will have the option of an elevator. To date, four buyers have selected the upgrade, which has been priced at \$50,000.

Communities billed as Adult Lifestyle are also a good fit for residential elevators, as Daniels Corporation discovered at Swan Lake Village in Markham. The adult lifestyle community features four pools, tennis courts and a 16,000 square foot recreational centre.

“The community is geared to empty nesters, and buyers range from 55 to 75 years of age,” says Diane Hall, sales consultant. “The original housing included (loft) bungalows and a four-storey condominium apartment. In 2003, Daniels decided to build 67 two-storey town-home units.”

Of the six model types, two plans — Driftwood and Fairbank — include a rough-in elevator as a standard feature. Installation is an optional upgrade, billed close to the builder’s cost. Both models contain a large removable storage closet on the main floor and second floor, with a pit in the basement.

“Swan Lake illustrates just how seamless the addition of a rough-in elevator can be for a builder,” says Kevin Wells of Concord Elevator. “It’s all about offering lifestyle, and today, that’s what homeowners are buying.”

TRENDS

Location, location, location

Installed in the correct location, an elevator should work for its living, ideally giving access to all levels while blending into the overall design and decor of the home.

The best location is inside the house envelope, adjacent to an attached garage, allowing access to all the levels including exterior grade at the garage slab. This can sometimes eliminate potentially problematic and costly exterior ramps and other lifting devices.

If there is an overhanging second floor, another option is to build the hoist way inside the garage. However, the resulting excavation and foundation wall construction will add considerable cost to the project.