

CELEBRITY HOMES

MIKE D DIDN'T
HAVE TO FIGHT FOR
HIS RIGHT TO PARTY
IN A BROOKLYN
TOWNHOUSE



Sometimes change means you get to barbecue. Mike Diamond, better known as Mike D of the Beastie Boys, recently opened his doors to the *New York Times*, showing off the \$500,000 renovation he and his wife Tamra Davis undertook on their recently purchased Brooklyn townhouse. The rapper had never lived outside Manhattan before taking over the 3,200-square-foot home, but wanted more space for his family, including two young sons. The result is sunny and spacious with white walls, high ceilings, floor-to-ceiling windows, rustic wideplank floors and an eclectic mix of new and old. In the kitchen, a glamorous Tord Boontje chandelier shaped like a budding tree branch hangs over a live-edge harvest table; elsewhere, toile wallpaper and a clawfoot tub highlight the home's history. *National Post*

SOMETHING TO SEE

Yorkville's MuseumHouse offers spectacular views in luxurious surroundings

BY SARAH KELSEY

What would you pay to live in a condominium that afforded the best views of Toronto — one that rivalled the famed vantage point of Yorkville's Park Hyatt? How about \$12.8-million?

That's the purchase price of the just-released penthouse suite at MuseumHouse, a 19-storey tower on the northwest quadrant of Bloor Street and Avenue Road. Brimming with floor-to-ceiling glass windows and offering a nearly 360-degree view of the city, the site is, quite literally, breathtaking. And because the view from the 6,000-square-foot space looks toward historical areas of the city — such as the University of Toronto and heritage homes in Yorkville — it's unlikely to change in the future.

"With these windows and at this height, you appreciate everything, even the weather," says Sol Wassermuhl, the director of Page+Steele/IBI Group Architects, the company that designed the tower. "The rain is more exciting, you can hear the wind; you can experience the seasons."

Standing on one of the penthouse's four terraces and taking the view in for myself, it's hard to argue with what Mr. Wassermuhl is saying. From this vantage point, you can indeed hear the wind rustling the trees along Philosopher's Walk; unbelievably, you can even see people dressed in red jumpsuits hanging off the ledge of the CN Tower experiencing its EdgeWalk. It's a spectacular view for the penthouse's buyer — as well as anyone else who buys into the building.

There are 27 half- and full-floor units in MuseumHouse; five are still on the market (including the two-storey penthouse). After almost seven years of preparation, most are finally move-in ready. Part of the reason for the long construction timeline involves getting the look and feel of the building "right."

"MuseumHouse is at the confluence of Bloor, Yorkville and the museum district, and then there are these 'forever' views, so this was a site that couldn't be replaced," Mr. Wassermuhl says. "We came to the conclusion that what this building had to be was something exclusive with high-end finishes. Exclusivity had to be everything."

The other involves customization. Residents were encouraged by Mr. Wassermuhl and Sheldon Esbin, a partner in the project, to decorate and redesign their suites to make them feel "unique." Many of these alterations took time to implement.

"Every unit has been decorated personally," Mr. Esbin says. "Each resident has made their space and this building better [because of this]. Spaces speak to the personality of the residents — no two are alike."

Even the penthouse sits empty, waiting for someone to put their personal stamp on it. "When you're paying a large sum like \$13-million for a unit, you want it the way you want it. We built the penthouse space — as with the others — so it was a blank canvas for someone," Mr. Wassermuhl says. "It's great as an entertaining space." One interior designer even suggested the suite be used as an art gallery (A "great idea," Mr. Wassermuhl says).

It's the lure of this "one-of-a-kindness" that prompted Mr. Esbin and his wife to ultimately sell their Forest Hill home and to purchase a 4,300-sq.-ft. full-floor suite in the tower. They're set to move in in a few weeks.

"I've lived in a home all of my life and I couldn't imagine moving into a condo with 200 generic residences," Mr. Esbin says. "[My wife] likes privacy and she doesn't like to share an elevator with a half dozen people. So when this particular lot became available, we thought it was perfect. [Our fellow] buyers are like-minded people who have a high income and can and want to maintain the units."

Even Mr. Wassermuhl and his wife bought a condo in the building because of its character. "Every project I do, the developer suggests half-jokingly 'Why don't you buy a unit in the building?' and I've never been tempted, until MuseumHouse."

It's easy to be tempted when you hear of what the project offers purchasers (aside from the view). Each suite has direct elevator access and limestone-covered terraces. While the penthouse's patio is fully encased in glass, others feature stone walls with stainless steel irrigated flower boxes

(to people walking along Bloor Street this will appear as a living wall in the summer). There's a concierge and valet service on duty 24/7 and a two-inch-thick hardwood underlay to eliminate creaky floors. Pricing starts at \$1.575-million for a 1,600-sq.-ft. unit.

With only a few weeks to go before everyone has moved into the complex and with a few spaces still available, are Mr. Esbin and Mr. Wassermuhl worried about whether each will sell? Absolutely not, Mr. Esbin says.

"This was a labour of love. It wasn't a project to make money. ... We've [visited the site] every day watching progress, evaluating the view and dealing with issues that arose — we wanted this building to be the best." MuseumHouse, he adds, isn't a building for the bulk of Toronto's condominium buyers. The project was marketed to a certain and very select part of the population.

"The city's market is great for some, but there has got to be some spaces for those of us who are empty nesters, who are in their '60s and



PETER J. THOMPSON / NATIONAL POST

"Exclusivity had to be everything," says Sol Wassermuhl, director of the firm that designed MuseumHouse.

who want to live the rest of their years in as much luxury as you can afford. These are legacy homes — things we'll have forever."

And for Mr. Wassermuhl, the

ability to sell the units has everything to do with those fantastic views.

"I think if someone were here, they would experience the city in a different way. They'd be a part of it. They'd

be a part of the action. They'd be able to watch the city grow and change. MuseumHouse is spectacular ... and really unique that way."

National Post



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