

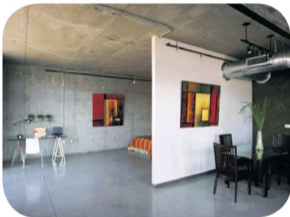
# Hard and soft lofts: What's the difference?

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**T**o some, the word loft may be reminiscent of agrarian coach houses, rough-hewn timbers, bales of hay and horses, but in today's downtown real estate market, lofts are a hot commodity.

What actually constitutes a loft? According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a loft is "a room or space directly under the roof of a house or other building, used for accommodation or storage."

So is a loft just a condo with a high ceiling? Metropolitan loft living conjures up images of uber-cool, open-concept studio spaces with lots of beams and exposed brick. It can be quite different from your regular condo suite.



Hard lofts are conversions of industrial spaces, while soft lofts are condos that mimic some of the features buyers desire in original loft units, such as high ceilings and large windows. FOTOLIA

To understand Toronto's lofty marketplace, one must make the distinction between hard and soft lofts.

According to specialist Heikki Walden, hard lofts are conversions of older, inner-city industrial spaces: warehouses, factories and churches turned into unique

residential living spaces.

"Toronto used to be an industrial city," Walden says. "Back in the '70s and '80s when all that industry left, we were left with all these shells of the buildings and so developers started to convert them into artist's space and residential space.



That was the first wave."

A growing demand developed for these unique and authentic living spaces.

"This proved to be quite popular. There was not enough of these type of buildings so they started building what they called soft lofts; architecturally

designed lofts which mimic a lot of those same features," Walden says.

These are new buildings built with open-concept designs and interesting features such as big windows and high ceilings.

"They are specifically designed for people that want

that loft experience but maybe in a better neighbourhood," says Walden. "They're lumped in together with the condos. They're considered a condo."

Walden runs the high-performance sales team of loft specialists at the Camber Walden Group, part of Sutton Group Associates. He says these types of properties are tough to find as they are in high demand and only represent a small sector of the market: "When you look at the overall market, they're only about 5% of the total number of listings."

Many residential lofts are zoned for live-work, permitting the operation of low-traffic, light office-oriented enterprises.

"All the creative industries — so the ad agencies, photographers and design studios — you can run it out of the loft," says Walden.