

From church to cosy sanctuary

- ◆ Conversions can make for a unique and classical home for condo buyers
- ◆ Think period lighting fixtures, restored stained glass, vaulted ceilings and limestone and brick masonry



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Church lofts and condo conversions are a growing trend in Toronto real estate. These venerable residential structures seem to be cropping up across the city.

The Church Lofts at Dovercourt south of Bloor, are a fine example of a classic, neo-gothic conversion of a century-old church into 28 loft units.

The Abbey Lofts, a 24-unit project in High Park, by developer Abbey Inc., who undertook a careful and lengthy process in order to preserve the heritage features of this historic 1910 Pentecostal church.

The Glebe Lofts at 66

Pape Ave. is a former 1912 Presbyterian church.

This Riverdale conversion by Bob Mitchell features an open-concept design and reveals the original church structural trusses.

Bellefair Kew Beach Residences

One of the more noteworthy conversions underway is the Bellefair Kew Beach Residences in Toronto's Beaches district.

The new development by Reserve Properties is the site of the former Bellefair United Church.

It will feature 23 condo units with six townhomes and a retail façade along Queen Street that is certain to enhance the eclectic style of this distinctive neighbourhood.

Father and son team

Shelley and Shane Fenton have enlisted the resources of heritage architect Christopher Borgal, and lead architect Roland Rom Colthoff of RAW Design, to transform the 20th century, late gothic-styled building into a contemporary design that conforms to the Beaches' unique urban character.

Why are so many churches up for sale in Toronto? "Some of the population in the congrega-

tions are dwindling, and as a result of that, many of these organizations are looking to be more efficient," explains Reserve president Shelley Fenton.

"With these organizations, there's a strong heart in them all and it's people-related, but they're also fiscally responsible."

History lost

In some cases, the church buildings don't survive, as with Willoughby Baptist on Indian Road, which was demolished to make way for four townhomes.

In the case of the Bellefair church, it was not listed or designated under the Ontario Heritage Act and the Fentons recognized the importance of this building to the community.

'Religious and emotional connections'

Says Shane Fenton, vice-president of Reserve, "It was always our intention to try and do what we could to maintain a significant portion of the façade and incorporate that into the overall development so the community still felt that they would still be able to have that tie and attachment to the place where people were married and baptized, and had those religious and emotional connections to that building."

"Other developers that looked at this site, they were looking at possibly just levelling it and creating a new building."

SHELLEY FENTON, ON THE IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING THE CHURCH BUILDING IN THE COMMUNITY



► Time honoured mingles with modern urbanity at the Bellefair Kew Beach Residences in Toronto's Beaches district.



► Pulsing rhythms juxtapose against peaceful interludes. These unique homes are situated at Bellefair Avenue and Queen Street East, directly across from Kew Gardens.

Holy spaces

Why are so many churches up for sale in Toronto?

- Religious leaders are dealing with the financial burden of their older buildings, coupled with a declining membership and lack of financial support from an increasingly secular community.
- Many congregations are combining parishes and selling off church properties in order to survive.