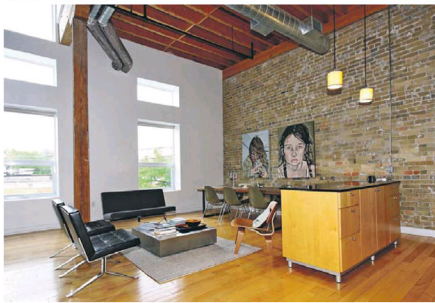


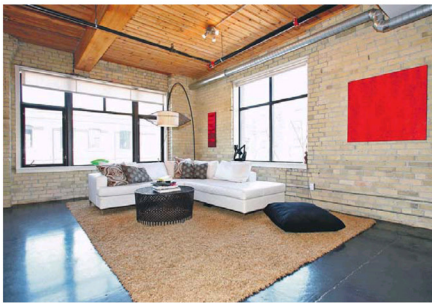


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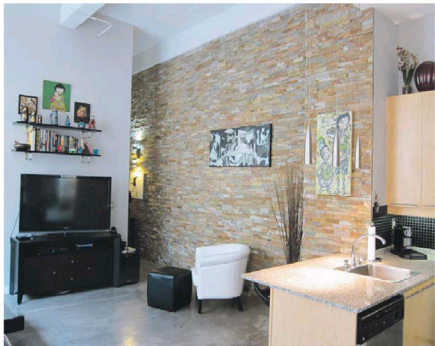


This rare, multi-level, authentic Toronto luxury loft on Brock St., has exposed brick, large south-facing windows, sand-blasted wood, industrial-grade metal staircase, a large skylight and private terrace. (Courtesy Sutton Group)



True industrial-style downtown loft living in this beautifully sunlit and spacious open-concept double corner unit on Wellington St., features exposed brick walls, wooden beam ceilings, exposed ductwork and polished concrete flooring. (Courtesy Sutton Group)

Lofts are a hot commodity



An excellent example of a two-bedroom soft loft for sale on Dalhousie St. A fabulous corner unit facing south west, the fully-upgraded space has soaring, 14-foot ceilings and windows in every room. (Courtesy Ashley Fray, Re/Max Condos Plus Corp. Brokerage)

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Special to QMI Agency

To 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 über-cool, open-concept studio spaces with lots of beams and exposed brick. It can be quite different from your regular condo suite. To understand Toronto's loft 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. 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." 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 Sut-

ton 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 five per cent 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.

The Toronto builder, Streetcar Developments, has been active with soft lofts in Corktown and other emerging neighbourhoods in Toronto. Their Lofthouses project is an exclusive collection of unique live-work, open-concept units by interior design firm Seven Haas. Located near the intersection of King and Queen streets in the Corktown district, Lofthouses is an artistic blend of vintage and modern, ranging from 850 to 1,500 square feet and starting at \$399,000.