

# Hepbourne Hall reworked with flair and style

By Vincent Blain  
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Metro planners interested in studying the theory of housing intensification at work might want to take a look at Hepbourne Hall, a perfect example of how housing intensification can be done with flair and style.

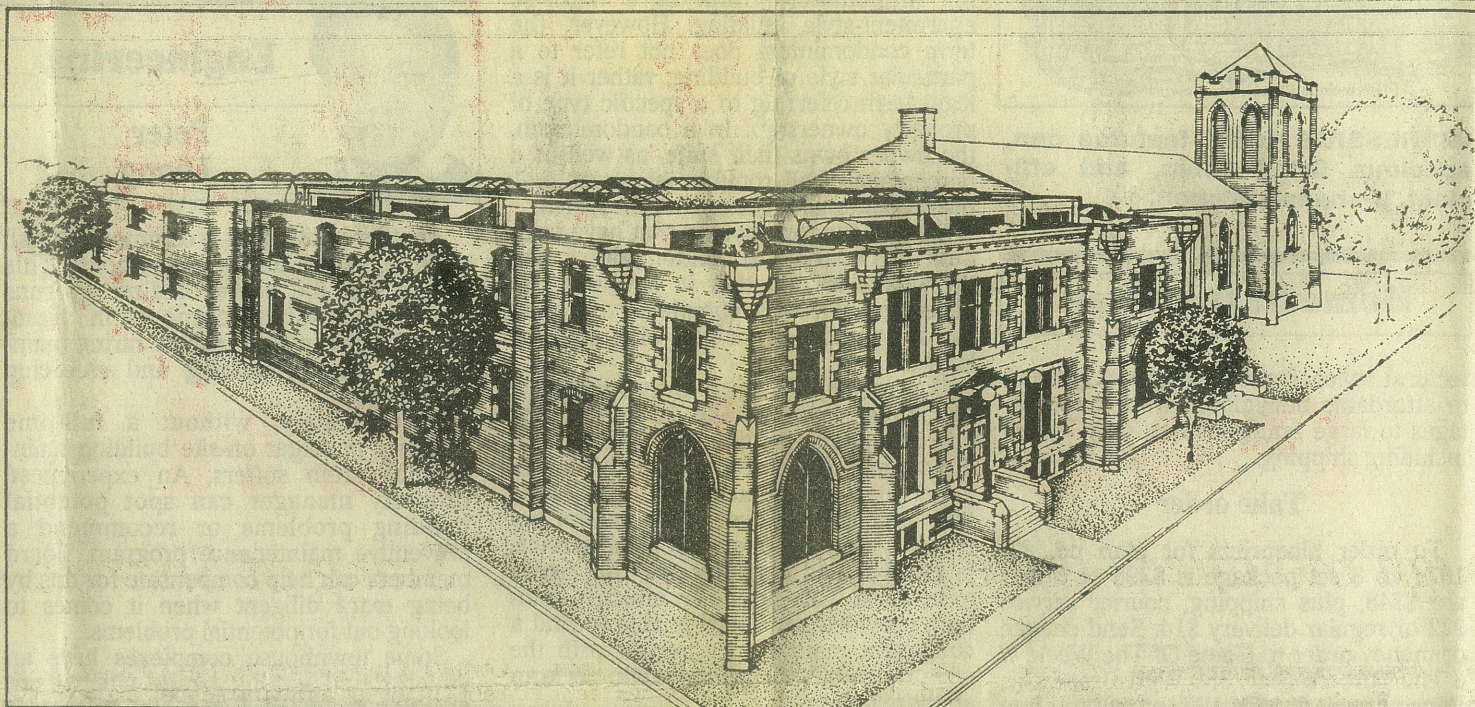
Hepbourne Hall is a small condominium project that is offering 24 spectacular loft-style residential condominiums in a former Church annex.

The intent of the housing intensification concept is to halt urban sprawl by utilizing existing inner city space to provide much needed housing. That's exactly what Mitchell and Associates, a design and development firm, is doing by converting the St. Paul's Dovercourt Presbyterian Church Annex into unique residential condominiums.

At the same time, the project will preserve a part of Toronto's architectural history as the building will most likely be designated as a historical site when the whole project, which includes restoration of the church, is completed.

The style of the old brick and sandstone building is gothic collegiate replete with all the rich architectural character of a bygone era. Features such as gracefully arched stone windows, leaded glass, stone quoining, diagonal buttresses, bartizan turrets and heavy double leaf doors combine to make this building somewhat castle like.

All of these exterior details will be preserved and restored while the interior will undergo a transformation from the traditional to the ultra modern. The open-plan multiple level layouts will have ceilings up to 12 ft. high, two-storey atriums, extensive skylighting and roof windows, wood burning fireplaces and opulent bathrooms with decked whirlpool tubs.



**ALL EXTERIOR details of this former church annex will be preserved and restored while the interior will undergo a transformation from the traditional to the ultra modern. The open-plan multiple level layouts will have ceilings up to 12 ft. high, two-storey atriums, extensive skylighting and roof windows.**

Each of the suites will be custom designed and can come in one- two- and three-bedroom with a den, floorplans. Some of the larger suites will have two and three floors within the residence while the smaller suites will have only one level. The large upper levels also feature walkouts to large private roof decks.

Sizes for the interiors will range from 700 to to 1,750 sq. ft. with lots of room for customized design details to fit the needs of individual residents. Interior features common to all of the suites include Casablanca ceiling fans, kitchens with

European style cabinetry and quarry style floors, telephone intercom/security systems and en-suite laundry rooms. Other interior features include hardwood floors, commercial style track-lighting and central air conditioning for those hot summer nights.

Prices for the suites range from \$129,900 to \$329,900 and condominium maintenance fees average from \$120 to \$140 per month. The relatively low maintenance fees are the result of a decision to concentrate costs on design features and fine finishing details rather

than recreational facilities.

Some of the design features are shown in the floorplans for a 1,600-sq.-ft. two-bedroom and den suite which is priced at \$329,900. Coming into this suite you will enter a waterfall of light that comes from a skylight two storeys above. More light from the second-floor atrium spills over a catwalk to the foyer below.

Within the foyer, a side hung set of stairs lead up to the catwalk backed by a glass wall view into the atrium/deck. The atrium/deck, located in the centre of the suite, is an oasis of light surrounded entirely by glass.

On either side of the atrium, sliding glass doors from the den or the master bedroom provide access to this second-storey garden. Another set of sliders leads out onto the catwalk overlooking the foyer.

Features of the 17-ft. master bedroom, found at one end of the catwalk, include a wood-burning fireplace, a walk-in closet and an en-suite bathroom that comes complete with a twin sink vanity, a separate shower stall and a decked whirlpool tub.

At the other end of the catwalk is the den and the main bathroom. Off the den is the guest bedroom, which has a walk-in closet and sliding glass doors to the atrium.

Downstairs, the 18-ft. dining room and the 17-ft. living room are open to one another and the warmth of the living room fireplace. Beside the dining room is the kitchen, which has wraparound cupboard and counter space and entrances to the dining room and the foyer. A front coat closet is found in the foyer and a powder room is just beyond the foyer, between the living and dining rooms.

Located within an established residential neighborhood, within walking distance of shopping, the subway and schools, the Hepbourne Hall condos are a perfect example of how housing intensification can work to enrich the everchanging face of the city.

To view the old building, drive along Bloor St. W. and go south one block on Dovercourt Rd. to Hepbourne St. For an appointment to discuss layout plans call the developers, Mitchell and Associates, at 539-0289.

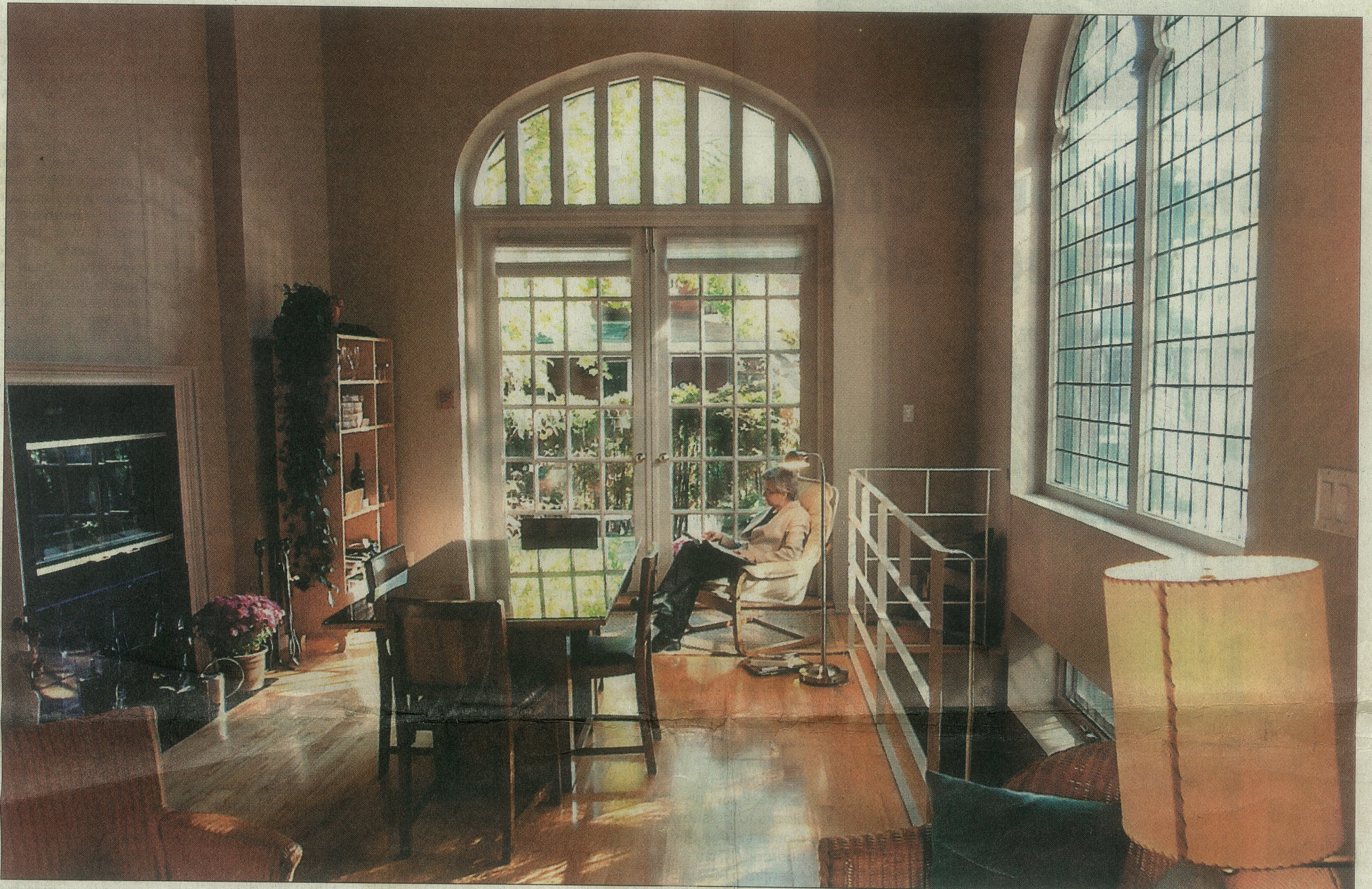
□ Prices quoted were accurate at the time the article was written. Readers should be aware, however, that prices are subject to change without notice.



# CONDO LIVING

Saturday, October 26, 2002 Section P

thestar.com



**SOUL SPACE:** Rona Moreau relaxes in her condo at Hepbourne Hall, converted from church meeting rooms and a manse. The church still operates next door. RICK EGLINTON/TORONTO STAR

## Sanctuaries in the city

Lofts and condos in old churches offer rare features, community and a certain cachet

BY JENNIFER MORRISON  
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

High ceilings, oversized windows, exposed brick walls and vaulted arches — these are just few of the striking visual features echoing through a handful of former churches that have been converted into unique residential lofts and condominiums.

"Churches have this mystique about them. They can't be duplicated and they can't be built again," explains Edwin Brdlik, loft specialist and broker-owner of Toronto LOFTS Realty Corp. "I think that makes them all the more desirable. For a city of our size it's surprising there aren't

**More on lofts, Pages P6, P8, P10**

too many of them."

In Toronto, there are three completed church conversions — 11 Woodlawn Ave., a six-unit renovation, and 12 McPherson Ave., both on the fringes of tony Rosedale, and 34 Claremont St. in the Queen St. W. neighbourhood, where the church was converted into two enormous lofts of more than 5,000 square feet each. The adjacent church hall was transformed into 13 units.

At a similar conversion, Hepbourne Hall at Bloor St. and Dovercourt Rd., developer Bob Mitchell turned church meeting rooms and a manse into 20 one-of-a-kind units. The adjacent structure still operates as a place of worship with an active congregation.

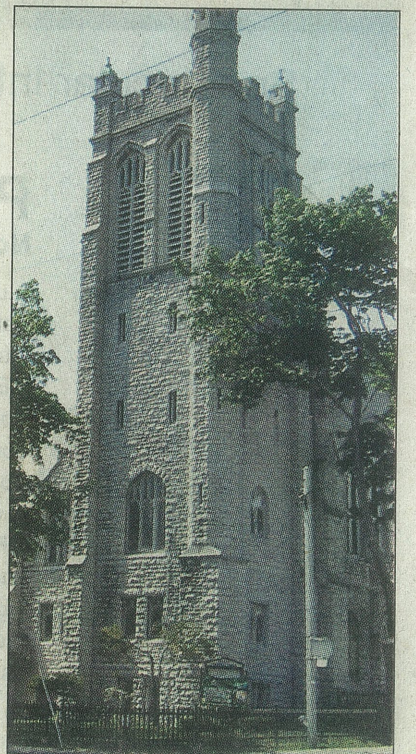
An additional two projects — The Glebe at 662 Pape Ave. in Riverdale, also by

➔ Please see Plenty, P12



LUCAS OLENIUK/TORONTO STAR

**PROUD OWNER:** Realtor Monte Compton was among the first to buy a loft at The Glebe, a conversion of Riverdale Presbyterian Church. At right, Howard Park Pentecostal Church, which may also be turned into condos.



LISA RAINFORD PHOTO



# LOFTS: RISING ABOVE THE ORDINARY

By Iain Wilson

Everybody's seen them in the movies.

Tom Hanks lived in one while spending time as an adult in the movie *Big*.

Billy Crystal walked, sock-footed, along the hardwood floors of his while searching for lost love in *When Harry Met Sally*.

Loft living is familiar to moviegoers, who instantly recognize the exposed brick walls, open spaces, hardwood floors and soaring ceilings as the quintessential New York experience.

But loft dwellers need not travel to New York City to find their perfect hideaway. Lofts (the legal kind), are becoming well-established in Toronto, as some inner-city dwellers turn their backs on the post-war suburbs of their youths.

Older, established neighborhoods are, in turn, being rejuvenated by what city planners like to refer to as the intensification of pre-existing residential areas.

"There's a really strong demand for this kind of living," says developer Robert Mitchell, of Mitchell and Associates. "I think it's always been popular. It's a niche market. As the developer of about one-half of Toronto's 300 or 400 legal units, Mitchell has been a catalyst for the burgeoning loft market in the city.

Work is being completed on Mitchell's Hepbourne Hall development on Hepbourne Street in the heart of the city.

Mitchell and Associates, a design and development firm, has converted the St. Paul's Dovercourt Presbyterian Church Annex into residential space while retaining the architectural integrity of the original building.

The company preserved most of the exterior building, with its arched windows, corbelled parapets, solid masonry construction and stone-quoined and leaded-glass windows.

Inside, Hepbourne Hall's 24 units are characterized by soaring ceilings, woodburning fireplaces, skylights and ultra-sleek design.

Each suite is custom-designed, with a choice of one, two or three bedrooms with a den. Some of the suites have two and three storeys and have walkouts to outdoor roof decks.

Suite sizes range from 63 to 158 square metres and range in price from \$135,000 to \$400,000.

Privacy is assured because the units contain almost no common elements. Unlike a traditional condominium corporation, no maintenance fees are paid and residents do not share common services such as a pool or gymnasium.

Buyers of lofts, however, are assured of private ownership and parking is provided.

Mitchell said loft living tends to attract individuals in creative fields. Owners in his buildings include media personalities, artists and at least one executive of an animation company.

Lofts provide a space that reflects their lifestyle, Mitchell said: "They tend to gravitate to a space like this."

Photographers, designers and artists also gravitate to illegal loft apartments in the city, according to zoning officials.

There is a growing market of illegal units — usually located in former industrial buildings and warehouses that have since been converted to artists' or photographers' studios for business purposes. However, these units often also serve as living space.

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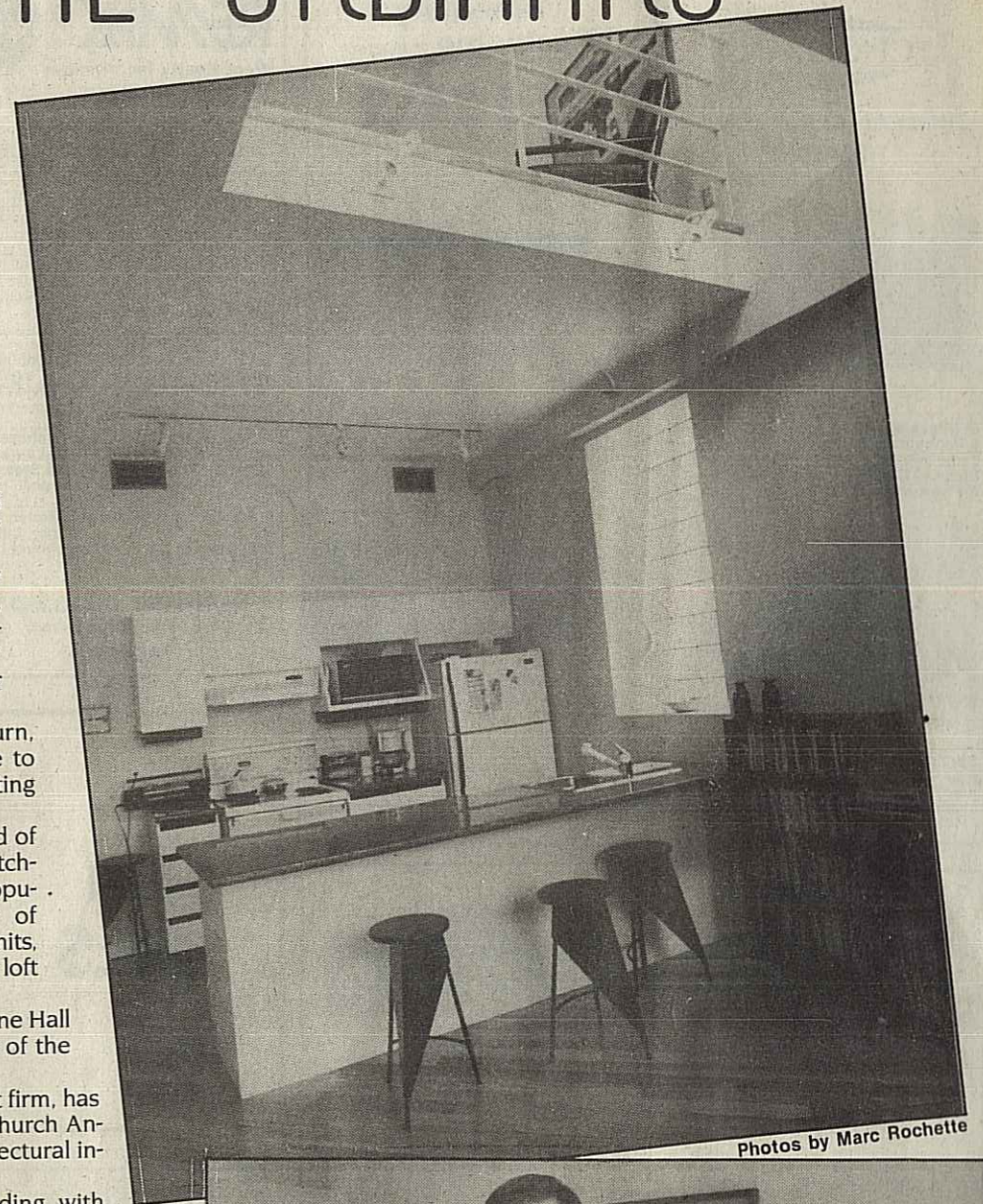
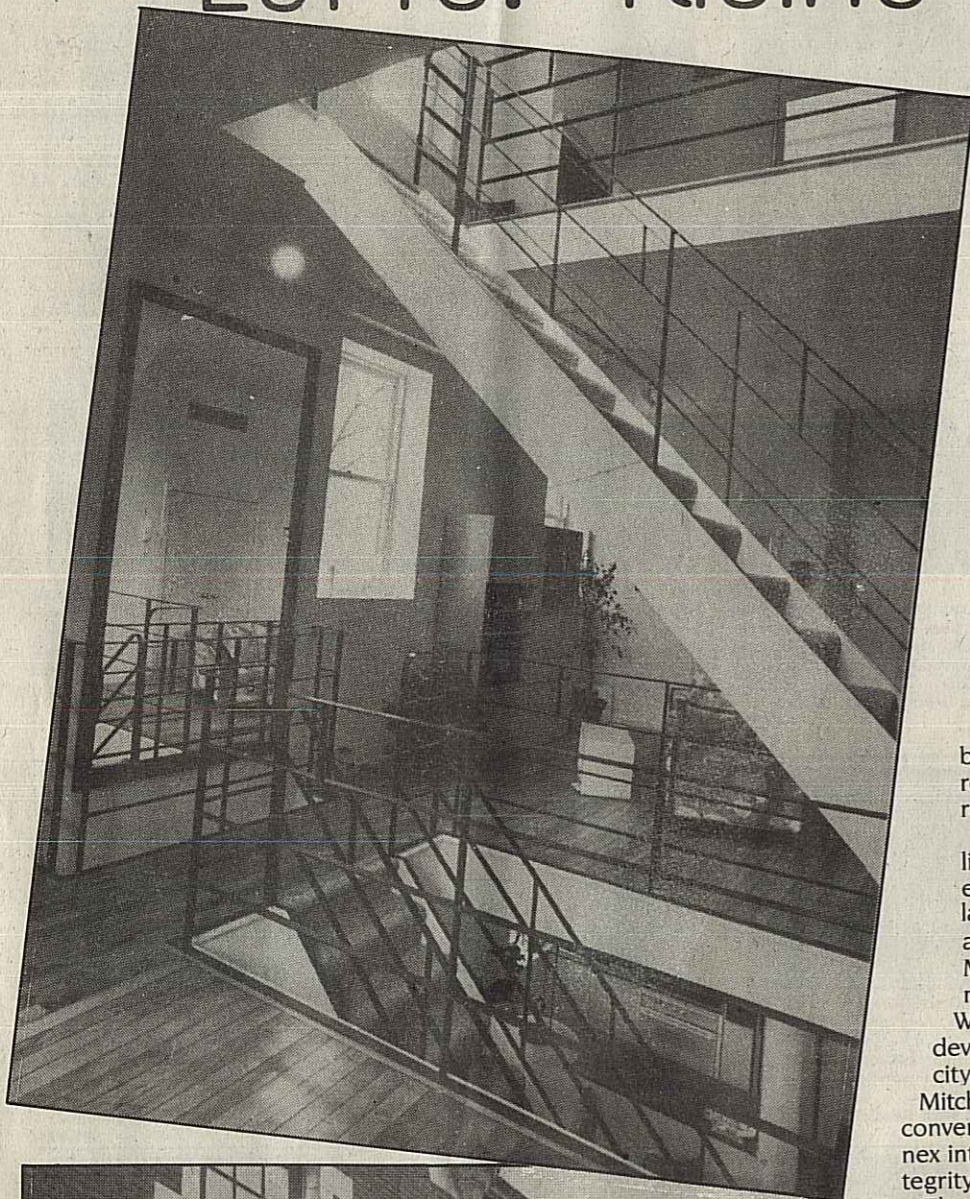
Along with his most recent Hepbourne Hall renovation, he has also converted an old felt factory into loft condominiums and has completed a project at the Ontario Medical College for Women in Cabbagetown.

Defining exactly what constitutes a loft apartment becomes harder when developers and real estate professionals are not involved.

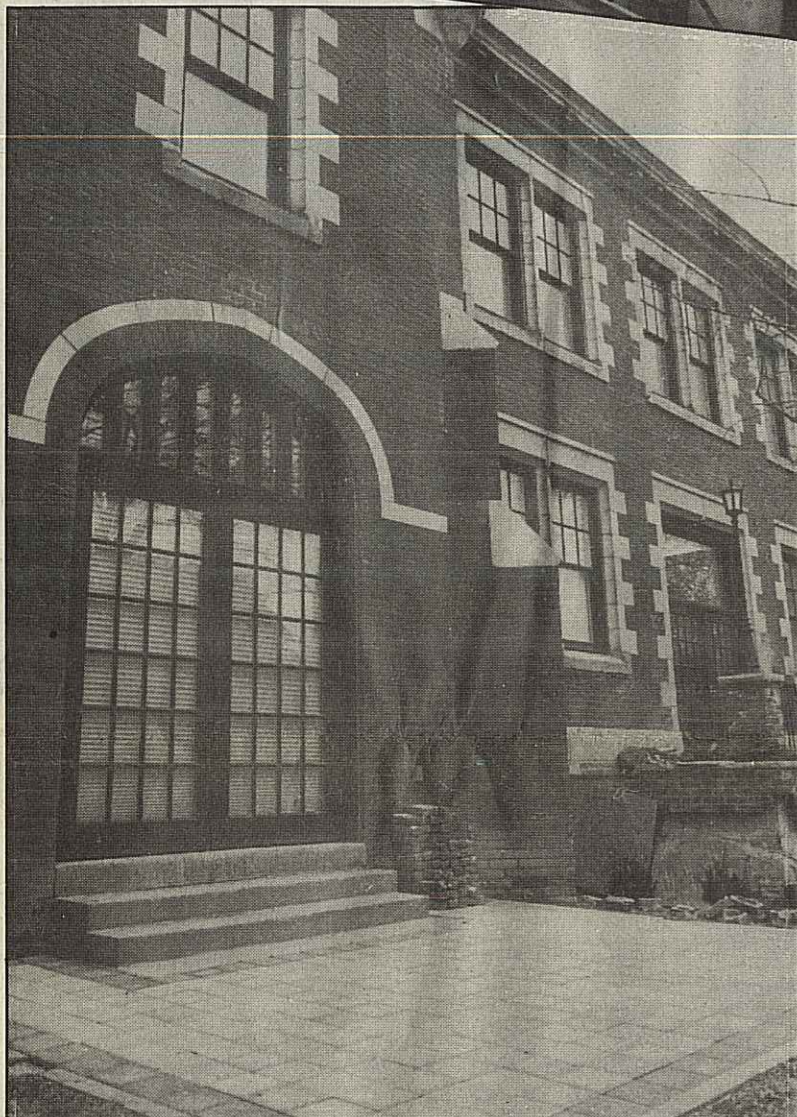
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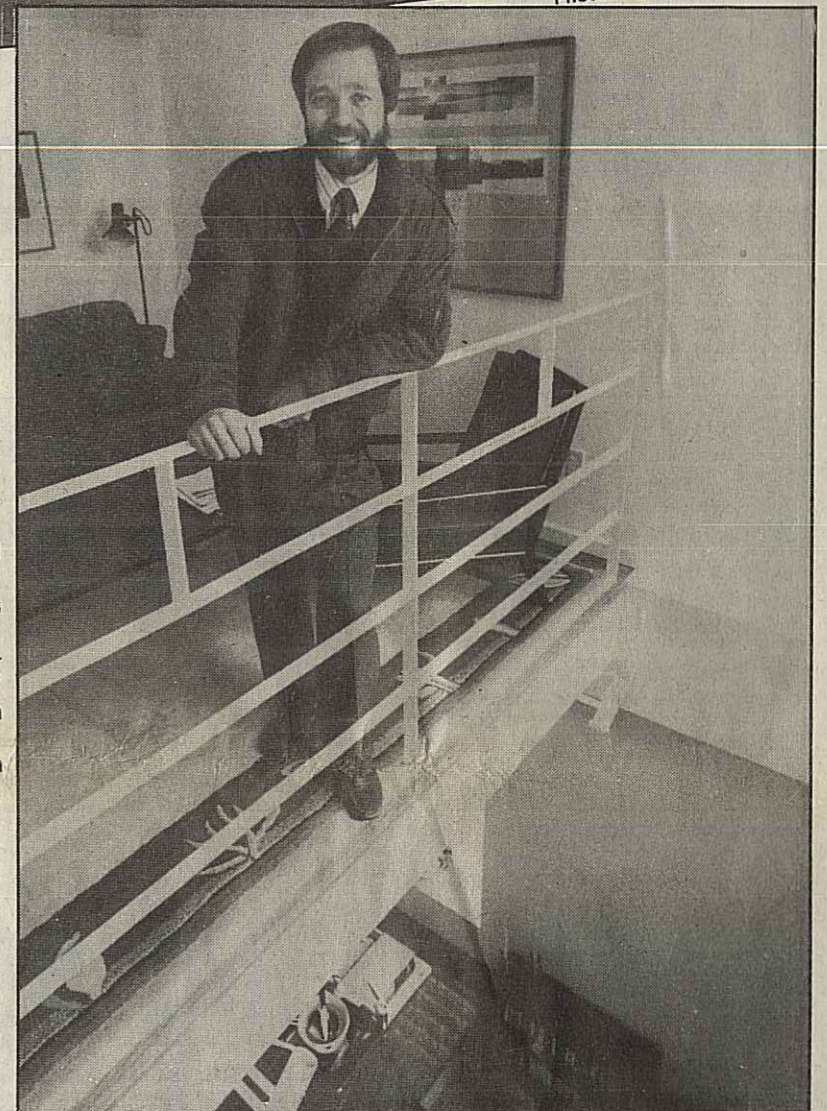
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Photos by Marc Rochette



Hepbourne Hall is being turned into 24 loft units.



Bob Mitchell's company specializes in creating lofts.



# Devotion to detail seen in conversion



Christopher Hume  
Critic's Eye

Once a church meeting hall and manse in Toronto's west end, Hepbourne Hall has found a brilliant new life as a condo complex.

This early 20th-century Gothic fantasy has outlived its Presbyterian origins and become a wonderful example of how buildings can be recycled and re-used by succeeding generations according to their needs.

Located at 110 Hepbourne St., west of Dovercourt Rd. and south of Bloor St., this 2½-storey structure dates from a time when the city

and its denominations took architecture seriously.

With its stone turrets and window frames, this building is an excellent example.

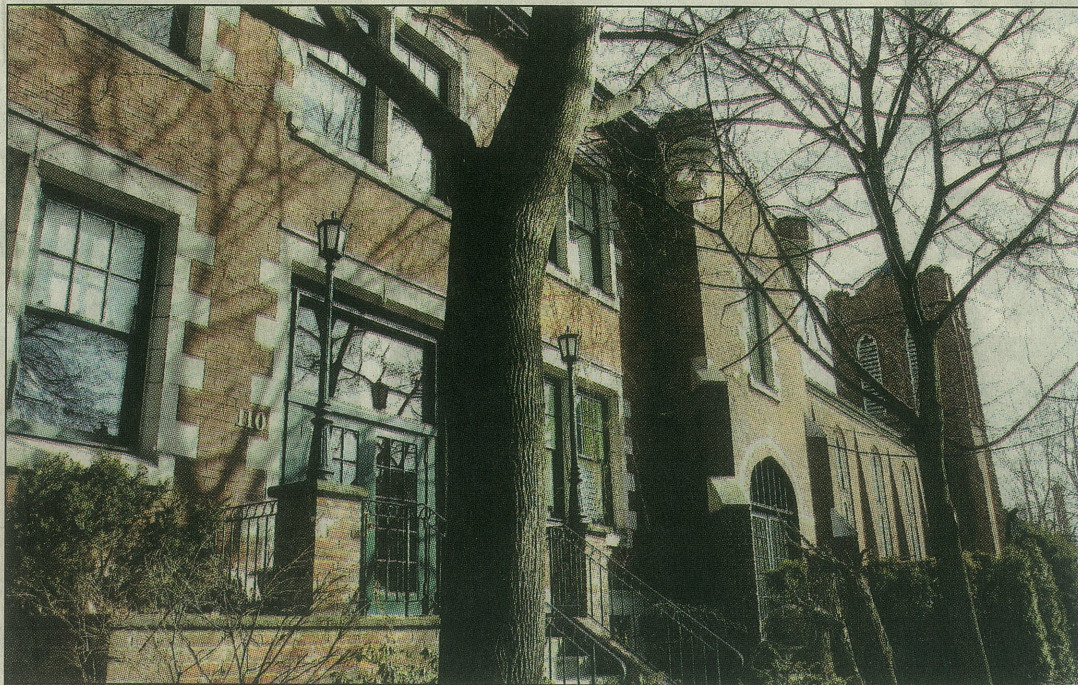
Now fully restored, these marvellous features stand out more than ever. Indeed, they are irresistible.

Interestingly, with a couple of artworks installed in front of the building and signs of domesticity showing above, the religious feeling has been replaced by something entirely secular.

Too bad the new brickwork on top doesn't match the red masonry below but, otherwise, everything about this conversion is admirable.

## GRADE: A

**Christopher Hume** is The Star's urban issues reporter. In this weekly feature, he rates the appearance of condos around town. He can be reached at [chume@thestar.ca](mailto:chume@thestar.ca)



CHARLA JONES/TORONTO STAR

Critic's Eye columnist Christopher Hume gives an A rating to Hepbourne Hall, the "admirable" conversion of a church meeting hall and manse just west of Dovercourt Rd. and south of Bloor St.



# Plenty of converts to life in a church

Continued from P1

Mitchell, and St. George on Sheldrake, a 34-unit conversion of a 1923 church at 65 Sheldrake Blvd. in North Toronto — are under construction.

Another development still in the preliminary stages would see the early 1920s Howard Park Pentecostal Church at 384 Sunnyside Ave. in Roncesvalles Village converted into 23 to 27 condominiums.

The storied backgrounds of these buildings, so much a part of their communities, adds to the allure of these condos, as seen in the St. George on Sheldrake project. Some buyers were christened there as babies, or married beneath the vaulted ceiling that will become their home next year.

"Some attended church here and so did their parents," says Greg Swanton, partner in Brentford Development Ltd. "They heard about World War II breaking out in Sunday school here, or found out about Pearl Harbor in church."

Swanton says the unique architecture and the church's history has drawn buyers, most of whom already live in this upscale Lawrence Park neighbourhood. Just two units are left in the project, where condos start at \$800,000.

Because there are so few of these conversions around, it didn't take long for The Glebe's 32 multi-level units in the former Riverdale Presbyterian Church south of Danforth Ave. to be snapped up. Mitchell said all units were sold within a month of going up for sale in the spring of 2000 without any advertising. In fact, almost half were sold before the building was officially on the market.

This was no fluke. Mitchell and his firm Mitchell & Associates are known for a number of successful conversions, including Toronto's first legal loft — a 10-unit project in an obsolete felt factory at 41 Shanly St. in the Bloor-Dovercourt area in the early 1980s.

Because of Mitchell's impressive resumé, several of The Glebe's units went to former clients or their friends. Designers, real estate agents and developers familiar with his work were also among the first to jump on board.

Prices ranged from \$179,900 for a ground-floor, 906-square-foot unit to \$419,900 for a second-floor loft boasting 2,101 square feet.

As standard features, each of the units will have at least two storeys of living space, 17-foot ceilings, gas- or wood-burning fireplaces, elevator access to all floors and underground parking. Each unit also has its own private roof terrace, garden or balcony.

"It's important for me to give each of the units outdoor space, so it gives them all a sense of having a home," Mitchell says.

The idea of being able to walk out of his loft and on to the street was an important selling feature for Monte Compton, who purchased a main-floor,

1,325-square-foot unit.

A realtor with Remax Unique, Compton specializes in condominium and loft sales. He's seen hundreds of units across the city and chose The Glebe.

"It's stunning. I think the building is stunning. It's a far more exciting space than most of the developments I see," he says. "For me this is the perfect loft, the perfect location and the perfect design. It's just the best."

Compton plans to use his unit, which covers four levels, including a 240-square-foot basement, as a work and living space. He'll share the unit with his dog, Roscoe.

Aside from the convenience of having underground parking, Compton likes having his own little backyard with a private exit.

"Every single unit has outdoor space, which is amazing, and you don't see it very often," he says. "The ground floor is perfect for my office and it has a direct exit out onto Harcourt St., so I can go in and out without having to go through a lobby."

Construction is well under way and Compton is looking forward to the day when he'll be able to move in — possibly in the spring.

Although Mitchell has not been able to retain many of the original fixtures in the 1908 structure, such as the stained-glass windows, he's doing his best to keep the integrity of the church inside and outside where possible.

"That's what people want. They want to have the vaulted ceilings and some parts of the church inside. That's what makes it a church," adds Brdlik, who also purchased one of The Glebe's units.

Like Compton, he bought on the ground floor, choosing a 1,700-square-foot corner unit that he intends to use as an office and living space for himself and his wife.

"I've never lived in a church before, so there's this whole romantic notion of being in one. Also, because there are very few of them in the city, it makes for a good investment," he says.

A great selling feature for Brdlik was The Glebe's location in the midst of a residential neighbourhood in prime Riverdale.

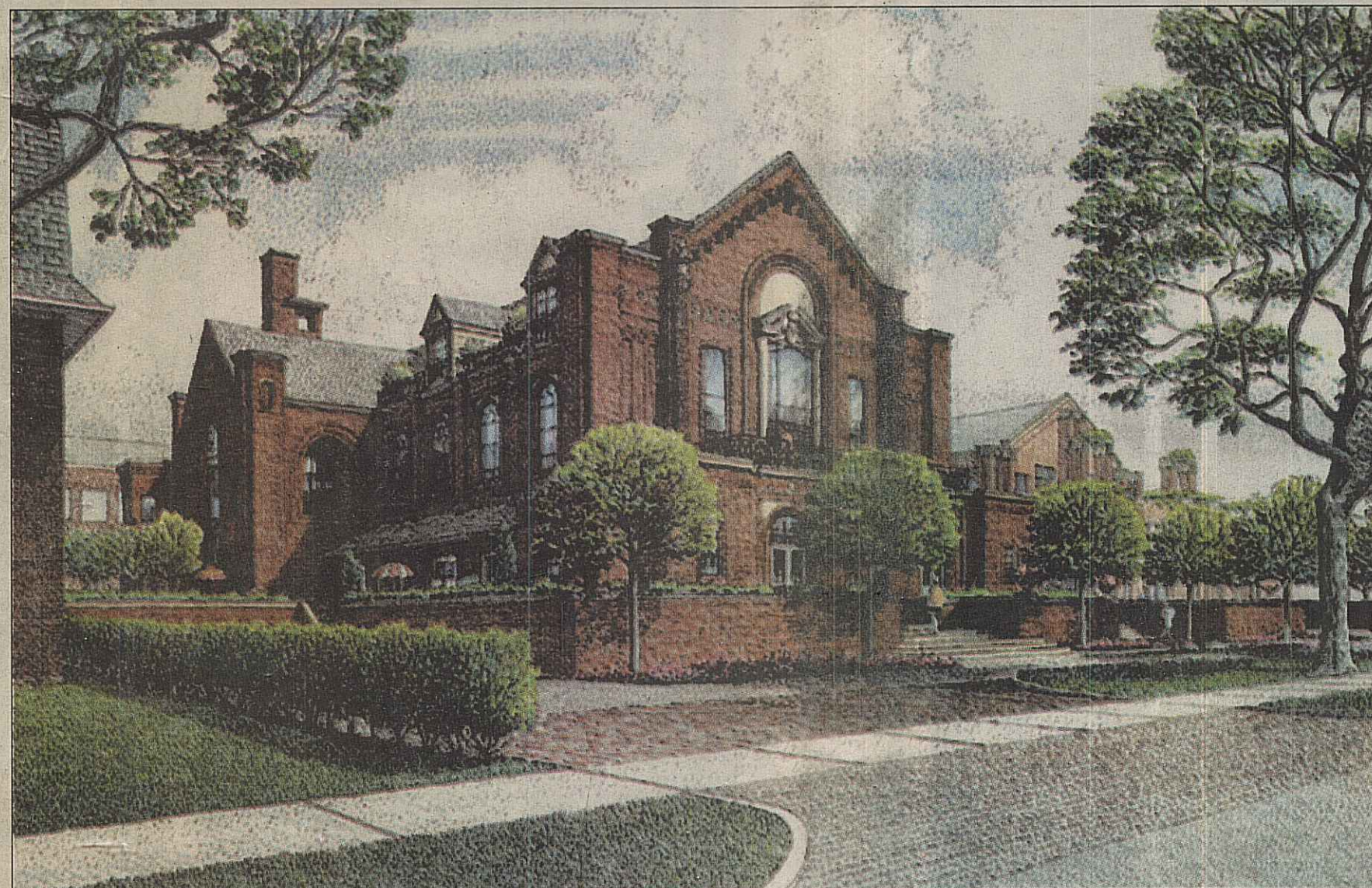
While most lofts are located in secondary, more industrial-type neighbourhoods, Brdlik says churches defy this pattern.

"Typically churches are within communities. You find them in much more of a built-up, residential setting, which is a bit of an appeal."

The Riverdale church first caught Mitchell's eye in the mid-1990s. He tried to purchase it then, but the congregation wasn't too keen on selling it to be developed.

Although a church is deconsecrated once the congregation leaves, meaning it is no longer considered a holy place, trying to win a church community's approval can still be difficult.

Five years after Mitchell's first attempt to pur-



**LIVING HISTORY:** St. George on Sheldrake, a 34-unit conversion of a 1923 church, has attracted several former parishioners as buyers.

chase the building, and with several successful loft conversions behind him, the congregation was more open to the idea and Mitchell was able to acquire the church.

"It's always difficult dealing with churches. They're usually very democratic and you're dealing with a congregation that has been there for years," he explains.

Riverdale Presbyterian was erected in 1908 and expanded in 1920 to accommodate a growing congregation. Its conversion to lofts doesn't mean its congregation is scattered. As the membership dwindled over the years, members eventually opted to use the original structure, located on the north part of the property. This will continue to be used as a church, connected to the development via a firewall once construction is complete.

"One of the church elders was baptized in this church in 1922. He knows all the history, so for him to see the building maintained is a real plus," Mitchell says.

It's also a real plus for Mitchell, who has a backyard in town planning.

"It deserves every effort you can to maintain it. It's part of the streetscape and the community," he says. "Conversions are more difficult for builders to

do than starting from scratch, but they're worth it."

They can also be more costly. Because of the abandoned state of the buildings and the developers' desire to retain as much of the original structure as possible, church conversions often end up costing considerably more than new projects.

"The cost of doing conversions is very high and doing them well is even higher," explains Toronto developer Harry Stinson. "Structurally they (churches) are very challenging... they're generally poorly built, poorly maintained and awkward structures that lend themselves very poorly into dividing up into units that are marketable at moderate prices."

Swanton agrees. He said St. George's was built in just nine months in 1923 and plans weren't drawn with today's accuracy.

"The standards of their time were terrific (then), but today are harder to work with," says Swanton, adding it's challenging to build creatively within a defined space like a church.

Adding to his challenges was the difficulty in finding the highly skilled tradespeople needed to do a church conversion. "It's more of a work of art than a building job," he says.

Stinson wrestled last year to transform the 103-

year-old St. Jude's Anglican Church on Roncesvalles Ave. near Dundas St. into lofts. He abandoned the project in favour of building from scratch after deciding it would not be viable.

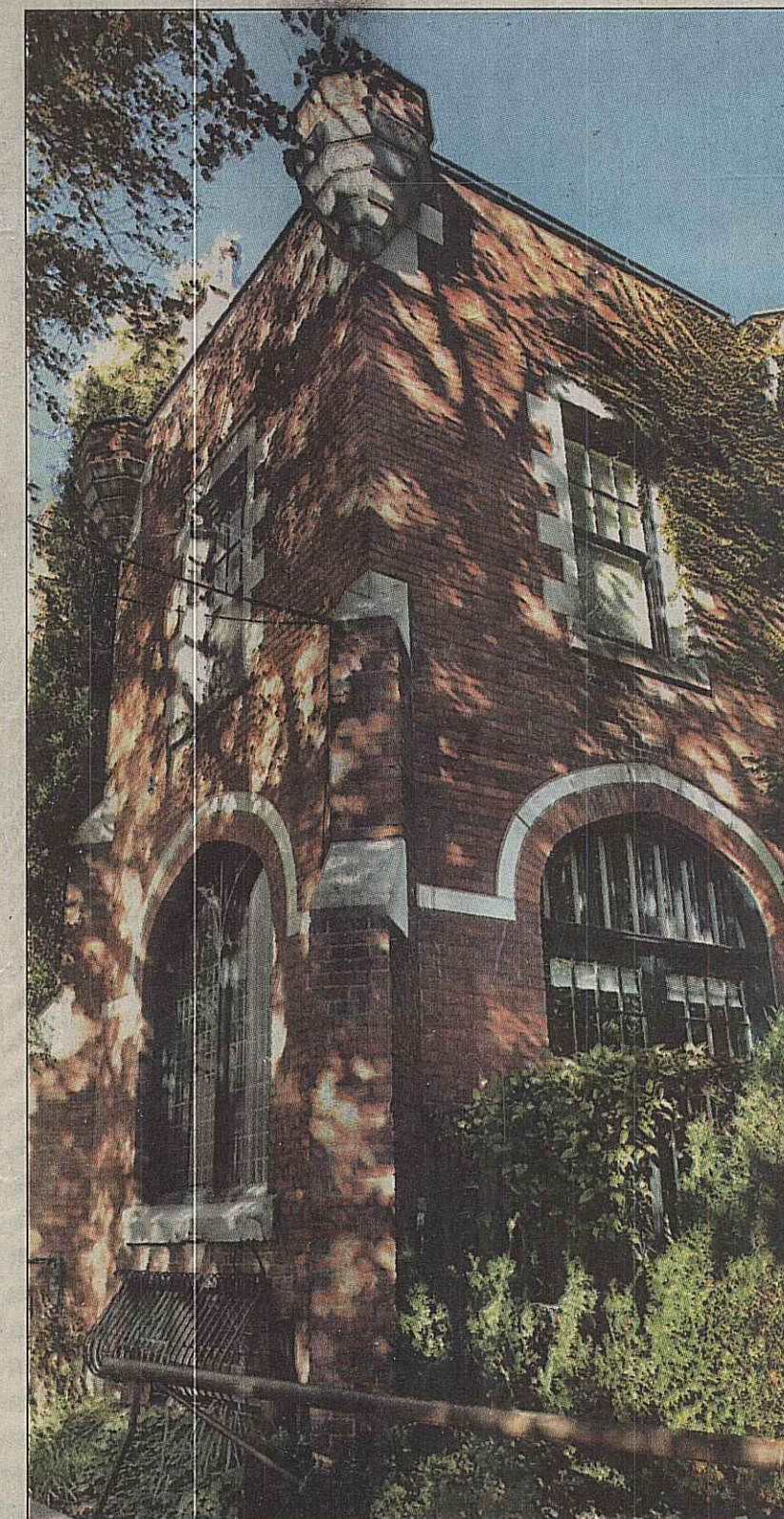
In its place is a proposed six-storey, 82-unit split-level, loft-style condominium project in identical, parallel facing buildings with an atrium separating them.

"Some of the elements of the church, especially the church hall, are pretty spectacular, but that never would have been visible when you start cutting it up into units," he says. "We are keeping some of the design ideas. We will be incorporating some of the window shapes, but the actual materials are new."

Not all churches are good candidates for conversion projects. While large churches with lots of open space may look spectacular, they often don't leave many options in terms of what you can do with each unit.

"You end up basically cutting out rectangles with higher ceilings and possibly a bigger window... What you really have is a new box in an older shell," Brdlik says.

A more viable church is a small to medium size, providing a workable scale in which the developer can incorporate more of the existing features into the suites.



RICK EGLINTON/TORONTO STAR

**HALLOWED HOMES:** At Hepbourne Hall, developer Bob Mitchell turned the former church meeting rooms and a manse into 20 condo units. The main building still operates as a church.

# Tiny in number, huge in demand

Although lofts make up a small percentage of all condo sales in Toronto, they do represent a growing segment of the real estate market, says loft specialist Edwin Brdlik of Toronto Lofts Realty Corp.

According to data from the Toronto Real Estate Board, Brdlik says loft sales are up 41 per cent this year, compared to the same period last year. The average price has also risen, by 14 per cent, with the average price for a loft now at \$281,000.

Lofts make up 2.8 per cent of all condos sold in Toronto, compared to 2.2 per cent last year.

"These numbers may seem small, but there are still 100 loft projects out there and the number is growing," Brdlik says.

Last year, the lowest-priced loft in the city sold for \$92,500 on Noble St. So far this year, Brdlik says the lowest price has been \$125,000.

These figures do not differentiate between hard lofts (conversion projects) and soft lofts (new projects), but Brdlik says that since there are only so many buildings suitable for conversion and because they can't be duplicated, hard lofts usually cost more to build and buy. But he says they are better investments.

Brad Lamb, president and broker with Brad J. Lamb Realty is not immune to the cachet of church conversions. He was the first to buy a suite in The Glebe, a church conversion in Riverdale.

"I bought not to move in but because I thought it was a cool building and the price when I bought was very good," says Lamb, who paid \$149,000 for his 900-square-foot suite which was expanded to 1,300 square feet for a final price of about \$190,000. Lamb estimates it's worth double that today and the units aren't even ready for occupancy.

Another church conversion Lamb points to as being quite unique is St. George on Sheldrake, a 34-unit conversion of a 1924 church in Lawrence Park. Only two of the units, which started at \$800,000 and went to \$1.25 million, have yet to sell. Given their original price, the properties haven't gone up a great deal since sales opened 18 months ago.

Developer Bob Mitchell recalls the early 1980s, when he was trying to sell units at 41 Shanly St. — Toronto's first legal loft conversion, where he transformed an obsolete felt factory into 10 units.

"If you go back to Shanly St., we were selling them for \$50,000 (1981-82). Now they're going for \$250,000 plus," Mitchell says, using this as an example to illustrate how prices have increased.

"Over the long term and the short term, lofts have been extremely good investments."

Realtor Sean Routbard, of Re/Max Condos Plus, reports a softening in the condo resale market, "except for good product such as hard lofts, which seem to be holding their own."

Most sellers are looking for a premium on their units, compared to previous sales, but they're not getting it, he explains. "The buyers are sitting and waiting."

But "a real loft building can command that little extra without being laughed at."

— Jennifer Morrison



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# REAL ESTATE NEWS



Friday, May 8, 1992

Published by the Toronto Real Estate Board



You don't have to move to New York City to enjoy loft living. For more about how you can rise above the ordinary, see page A3. Photo by Marc Rochette



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Older, established neighborhoods are, in turn, being rejuvenated by what city planners like to refer to as the intensification of pre-existing residential areas.

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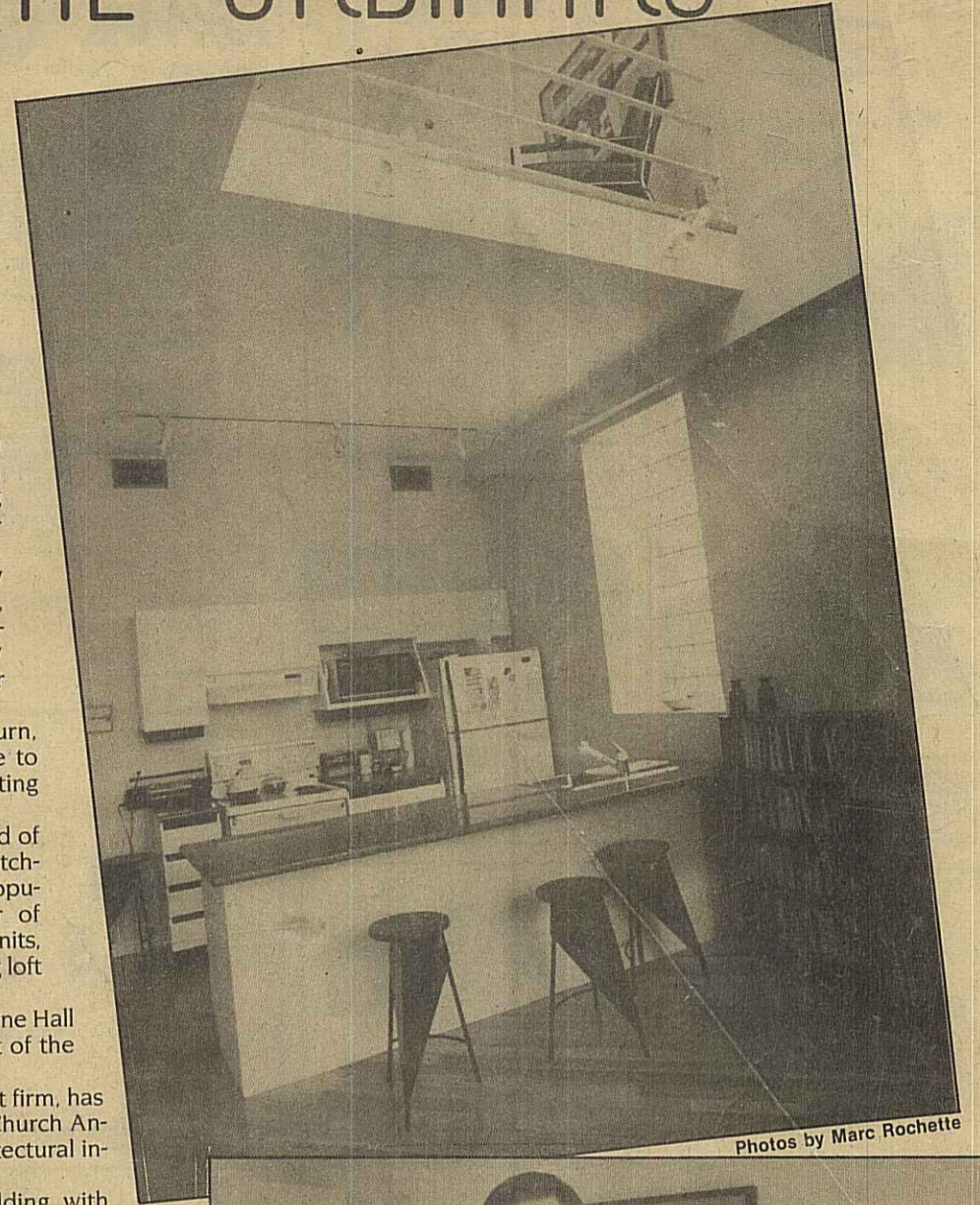
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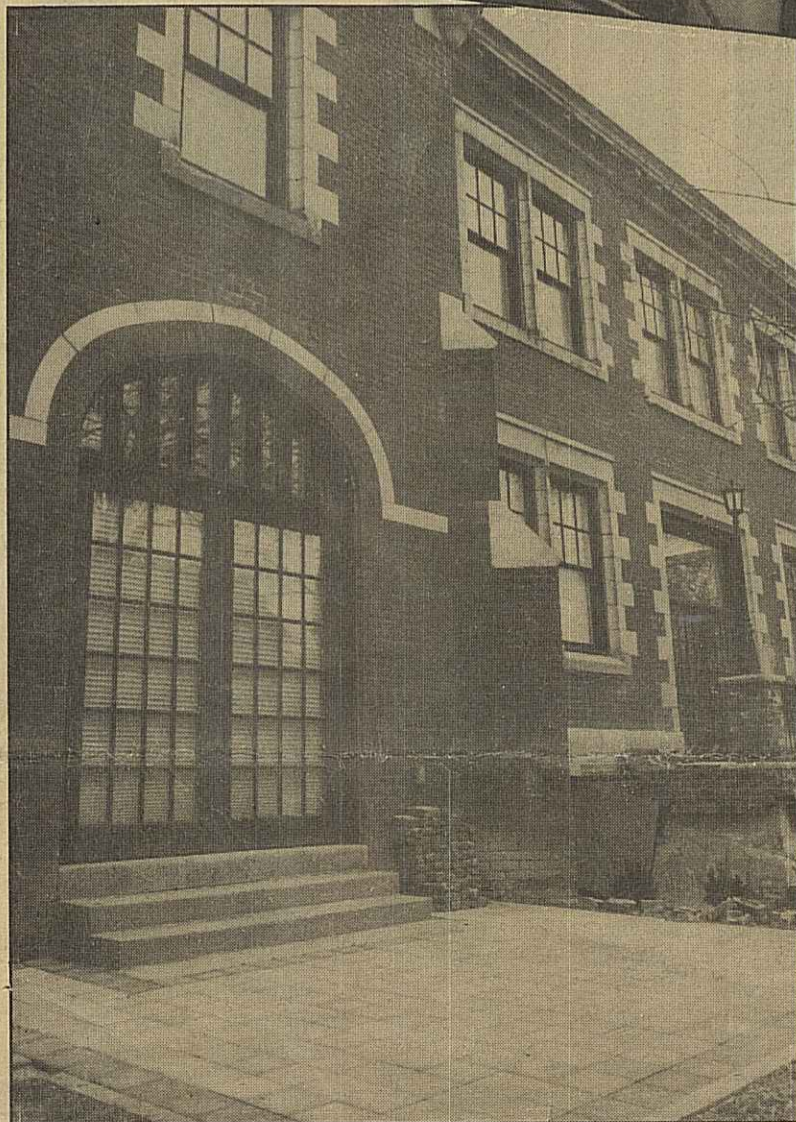
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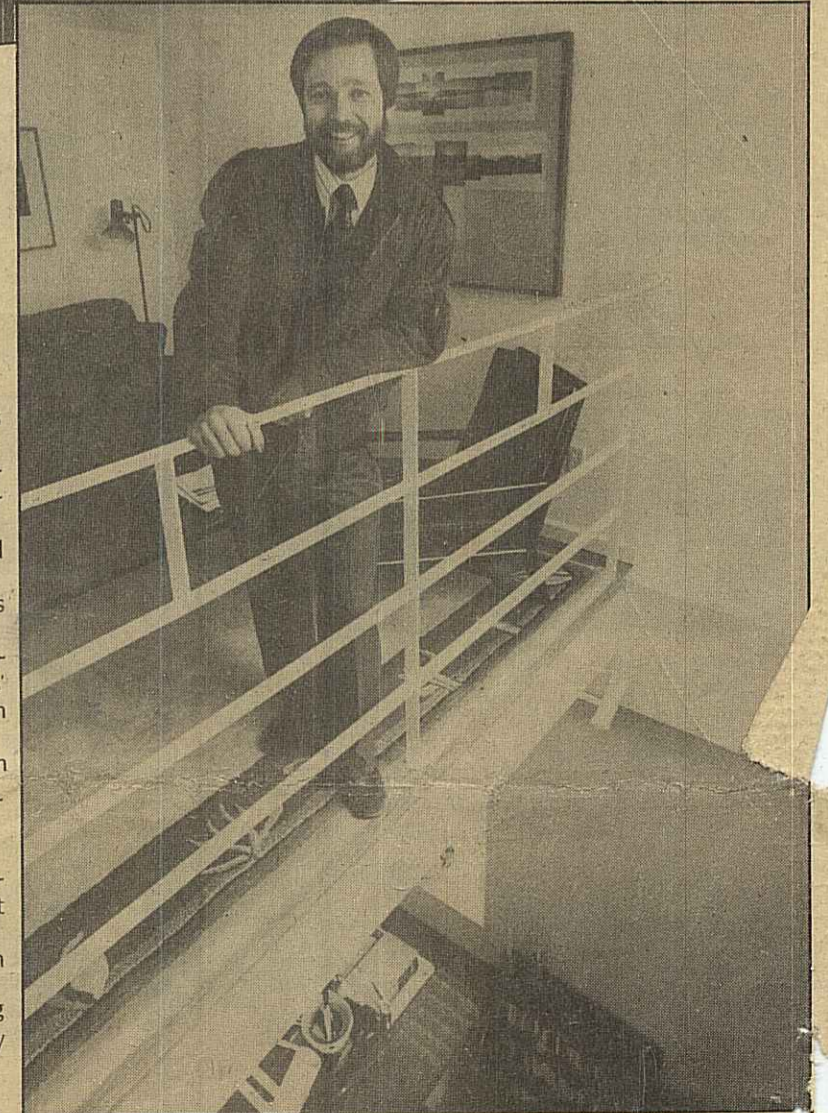
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