

# This City



Mutton chops: real estate broker Lamb in his office, beside a maquette for the 550 Wellington West condos

## PROFILE

# Mr. Big

The city's self-described "Condo King," Brad Lamb has a staff of 32, developments around the world and now his own TV show. *But seriously, what's up with those ads?*

BY MARK PUPO

**EVERYTHING ABOUT BRAD LAMB IS OVERSIZED.** He's six foot five. His cue ball dome has the swelling fleshiness of a guy who doesn't know restraint. His steel wristwatch, a Cartier Roadster, looks like it could stop bullets. He drives a platinum-coloured Bentley Continental GT—the same turbocharged coupe preferred by Paris Hilton and Vince Carter. Lamb describes himself as Toronto's Condo King, and it certainly takes an outsize ego to plaster the city with billboards depicting one's own head on a fluffy lamb—the effect of which is memorable, if perverse. (The ad confirms that no matter how classy the operation, the world of real estate is as crass as show business at heart.) Lamb's 32-person agency made \$525 million in sales last year and has a lock on sales of such new developments as the glitzy 550 Wellington West condos and the Tip Top Lofts. Beginning this month, he's also the star of an HGTV "docusoup," *Big City Broker*, in which he's trailed as he orchestrates sales, chides his staff about their performance and occasionally provides sage advice on how to read the market.

Lamb has always been headstrong. He was born in Vancouver in 1961 to modest, Depression-era parents. Jim, a commercial pilot for Air Canada, and Lynne, an RN, moved Brad and his brothers, Brett and Blair, to Expo-crazed Montreal in 1967, where they lived in the predominantly Anglo suburb of Beaconsfield. Brad was a math and science whiz and took engineering at Queen's, figuring he'd be a pilot, too. During summer break he earned his licence, then lost interest—it wasn't as cool as he'd hoped. "I was fly-

ing two-seater Cessnas, and they go so slow you almost feel like you're stalled in the air." He completed his degree and worked as a mechanical engineer for an Ontario motor manufacturer, all the while flipping small properties on the side with his brothers (now a doctor and a sales executive). Then he discovered his real estate agent was making more in commissions from him than Lamb was making in his day job.

In 1988, he began working as an agent for real estate developer Harry Stinson. His first sale—a condo in the building beside Ridpath's furniture store on Yonge north of Davenport—netted him a commission of \$6,750, and he went on to make \$250,000 that year. ("That shut them up," he says of his skeptical family.)

Every king has his detractors. Lamb is a rallying figure to opponents of the downtown condo boom. Indie musician Owen Pallett (a.k.a. Final Fantasy) even wrote a derisive song called "This Lamb Sells Condos." As luck would have it, Pallett's boyfriend lived in a unit below Lamb, and the real estate agent's overheard shouting inspired the song's lyrics about an impotent, bald developer who rules downtown with a "barrel fist." Lamb dismissed the brief media storm as so much fluff.

In 1995, he hung out his own shingle. Since cornering the condo market in Toronto, he's made forays into condo development in Montreal, Ottawa and Philadelphia. Lamb is also co-developing luxury resorts in St. Kitts, the Turks and Caicos, the Bahamas and, he hopes, on the hundreds of acres he's sitting on in the Dominican Republic. He has everything planned. "This is the grand

scheme of things: I'm going into retail, commercial and hotel development, more single-family homes and resorts. I want this Lamb thing that I'm doing to be well-rounded and to look at opportunities everywhere. I'm not going to be intimidated by new cities or new countries."

**Lamb made \$250,000 in his first year as an agent. "That shut them up," he says**

His personal philosophy is no less ambitious. He lives well, but invests the bulk of his profits. "I now have probably close to 90 properties," he says matter-of-factly. They include a clutch of southern Ontario farms that he hopes to develop in 20 years.

But he doesn't put that much thought into where he lives, which is perhaps the inevitable result of seeing hundreds of properties change hands. Once, a client backed out of the purchase of a King West penthouse with private elevator, skyline view and a painstakingly built 40-foot terrace pool. "It pissed me off," Lamb says. "I thought, fuck you—I'll buy it myself." Last month, he moved into a double-size penthouse unit (he bought two and joined them to make one) in the Tip Top Lofts, but the choice of building was once again a whim. "I thought, 'Why not?' I let other people agonize over where they're going to live."