

Staying gritty, not pretty, earns top marks



STEVE RUSSELL/TORONTO STAR

The conversion of 383 Adelaide St. E. rates an A.

Industrial site true to its roots



Christopher Hume
Critic's Eye

Though long overlooked, the east end of downtown Toronto contains a rich supply of industrial architecture ideally suited for various forms of reuse, domestic, commercial and retail. Already a good number of old warehouses and factories have been cleaned up and turned into offices and lofts. The condo boom has transformed whole stretches of King, Sherbourne and Adelaide Streets.

One of the best projects is 383

Adelaide St. E., a largely utilitarian four-storey structure that has stood nearly invisible for decades. Though not exceptional, it was built with just enough detailing and sense of proportion to make it architecturally respectable. Built of red brick and punctuated only by large rectangular windows, the front façade faces north onto Adelaide just east of Sherbourne.

Windows are arranged horizontally, separated by masonry shafts that extend the full height of the building. Though the thin strip of ground that runs between the building and the sidewalk needs attention, one assumes it is only a matter of time.

Best of all, the fifth-storey addition on top actually manages to enhance the original slab. It is a low-slung pavilion under a flat roof that reaches out almost to the edge of the building. The leftover space becomes a series of decks, partially protected by the overhanging roof.

Garage entrances are located on the east wall, out of the way but easily accessible from a short laneway.

The west façade has not been cleaned; the yellow brick remains stained gray with age. It may not be pretty, but it is authentic.

Add a few Juliet balconies to the exterior and even this gritty industrial site seems warm and romantic. Here is the city reclaimed without being prettified.

Grade: A

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