



# CONDOS

## NO INSURANCE?

Gerry Hyman delivers  
some encouraging news  
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## CONDO CRITIC

Building is at hub of  
Queen West and John  
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# John St. hub of thriving community

**J**ohn St. could well be one of Toronto's best-kept secrets — except that it's no longer a secret. Indeed, north of Queen St., it's now becoming the main drag of a thriving downtown neighbourhood.

Of course, there's still a big commercial element; one need look no farther than the fabulous pink Umbra outlet, a design store that puts its money where its mouth is in a most un-Toronto-like manner.

Though the architectural standards on John aren't wildly elevated, the elements fit together. That's the important thing.

Though most buildings were probably built as offices, they have found new life in recent years.

There was a moment back in the '90s, for example, when the street became home to some of the city's most important art galleries. Given its proximity to the Art Gallery of Ontario, perhaps that's not surprising.

Though the new AGO is still under construction — it doesn't reopen until mid-November — it's a landmark even from behind. Overlooking Grange Park, the gallery



CHRISTOPHER HUME

presents a new image for those whose vantage point is John, not a main street. But that's exactly what makes it so interesting, even compelling.

Streets such as John give residents and visitors alike an alternative view of the city and familiar sights such as the AGO. In the normal course of events, the gallery is its main Dundas St. facade. The beauty of John lies in its closeness to these sorts of destinations — the Ontario College of Art and Design and Queen Street West as well as the AGO — while being slightly off the beaten track.

For Toronto, a city in the midst of a rebirth, John is one of hundreds of streets that will provide the space for intensification to happen. In time, they will be seen as the saviours of the city.



## CONDO CRITIC

**169 JOHN ST.:** It certainly isn't pretty, but something about the very concrete rawness of this 10-storey condo makes it hard to resist.

If nothing else, this building marks a kind of coming-of-age of the Toronto condo market. In past years, a structure so aggressively unpolished, so rough around the edges, would have been anathema to developers. Now it seems, we have grown up and moved beyond such superficial considerations.

In fact, there's an honesty to this structure that's easier to relate to than the glitzy kitsch associated with so many condos.

This building is exactly what it appears to be; don't go expecting a phony French chateau or an ersatz En-

glish country house.

Made of concrete and glass, it accepts its role as a background building, one used to help define a street as well as provide housing. With its transparent balconies, square concrete arch and no-nonsense attitude, 169 John is arguably the most refreshing condo to have appeared in Toronto in some time. Worth noting, too, that because it's made of wood, the front door actually becomes a kind of highlight. More important than the material restraint, however, is the fact that the big architectural moves — scale, massing and siting — are done so well.

**GRADE: A**  
**WHAT DO YOU THINK?** Email [condocritic@thestar.ca](mailto:condocritic@thestar.ca).

With its wood front door, transparent balconies and square concrete arch, 169 John is refreshingly honest.