

# HOME WATCH

A SERIES ON TRENDS AND STYLES IN HOUSING

## THE CITY OF NEIGHBOURHOODS

Embrace the City of Toronto, the City that works! And more recently, a place of international admiration for being a City of Neighbourhoods—a diverse collection of small communities, each with its own unique imprint, identity and flavour, spread across the city's inner core and outer fringes.

Home buyers are increasingly interested in the neighbourhood within which they will make their final purchase decision. Concerned about how established local character suits their lifestyle—purchasers seek a community spirit which enhances their sense of belonging and instills a shared sense of values and interest with their neighbours.

**Canada's Warm Welcome to the World!** Toronto's diversity of neighbourhoods has Canada's unique view of immigration policy to thank. It is a fairly accepted notion that, while the United States has traditionally invited its immigrants to a "melting pot" culture, Canada has encouraged newcomers to preserve their rich cultural past and values—not only in terms of respect for the past but also in the hope that they will share it with their new neighbours, within a multicultural Canadian community.

With this warm welcome, over some 200 years, countless peoples from across the globe have come to settle in this country, many in larger urban areas where the opportunities to find work and a higher standard of living have flourished.

The Town of York, the City of Toronto's original settlement, came to be one of the country's primary reception centres for new immigrants, a town bursting with vibrant economic activity, in constant need of new sources of labour. Given respect for their distinct cultures and values, a number of ethnic enclaves organically developed—neighbourhoods where a clear imprint of ethnic and cultural identity strengthened over time, reinforcing itself with each new wave of immigrants.

**The Development of Unique Neighbourhoods!** The location of these ethnic enclaves was influenced by the city's rich industrial economy which took advantage of Toronto's natural harbour. As a result, factories and work yards agglomerated next to the waterfront while working class immigrants tended to congregate within walking distance, primarily in the old centre of town adjacent to the waterfront.

The new ethnic enclaves such as the Ward, Kensington Market, and Cabbagetown, became reception areas for waves of immigrants from different parts of the globe—Jews, Eastern Europeans, Italians, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Irish and the list goes on.

The Ward, bordered by present day Queen Street, Yonge Street, College Street and University Avenue, became a nucleus for East European Jews at the end of the turn of the century. By the end of World War II, an outdoor market had begun to develop just west of the Ward strongly influenced by Ward residents, becoming the focal point for the majority of the city's Jewish population. To the west of Kensington evolved another enclave, Little Italy, created by a large wave of Italians following World War II.

In Toronto's east end, Irish immigrants fleeing the potato famine settled along the west bank of the Don Valley, then known as Don Vale. The new settlers, for the most part working class unskilled labourers, were known for planting hardy cabbages in the front lawns of their modest homes, hence the inspiration for the neighbourhood's appropriate title, Cabbagetown.

In the 1870s-80s, new waves of British immigrants arrived to Cabbagetown, some more affluent than their predecessors, who built stately residences next to the existing worker's cottages creating an unsegregated area uncommon for Toronto at that time.

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At the same time, the Town's industrial and political elite flocked towards more quiet and spacious locations to the north and west, capitalizing on the many pristine ravines which offered a perfect setting for upper class suburban life. As a result, an alternative set of neighbourhoods developed, with streets that followed the lay of the land shaded by rich green canopies overhead, cut off from the hustle and bustle of downtown life. Places like Rosedale and Moore Park to the north, or High park and Swansea Village in the west.

One of these suburbs at the edge of the Town of York, the Village of Yorkville, began as a middle and working class residential neighbourhood which, a century later, had become the centre of Toronto's Bohemian beatnik culture.

**Neighbourhood Identity Still Strong!** These neighbourhoods continue to live on. Toronto has managed to preserve its inner city neighbourhoods from the negative influences of crime and automobile dependency which so characterizes cities in the United States. Often bearing names that reveal the rich cultural identity of their past roots and the people and places that made them what they are today, some appear relatively unchanged while others have modified their identity along with changing times.

That is why today, Yorkville has transformed itself into a stylish neighbourhood, undoubtedly the home of Toronto's most chic district—trendy cafes, unique shops and boutiques, expensive restaurants and art galleries. By day, a place for browsing or sipping an aperitif. At night a glamorous magnet for the vibrant gentry of Toronto.

Kensington Market continues to thrive although its original founders have been largely replaced by new immigrants, as well as by residents who have come to appreciate the charm and strong sense of community inherent in the Market.

Local street signs continue to pay homage to Little Italy, home to CHIN Radio, Toronto's multicultural radio station. It was not too long ago, however, that most of the Italians departed their downtown dwellings for larger suburban homes at Toronto's northern fringe—places like Maple and Woodbridge. Little Italy's old cafes, once meetings places for men and hot espressos, have been transformed into trendy cafes and pool halls for young professionals and students seeking a European flavour.

As for Cabbagetown, it is now recognized as "Toronto's emblem of renewed downtown living." Given its vast array of architectural treasures and curious laneways, its proximity to downtown, and its picturesque natural landscapes, the area has served as a magnet for new buyers who have, by their own accord, turned to renovating their homes.

**Neighbourhoods Still Welcome Newcomers!** Toronto's neighbourhoods were born from historical forces and fostered by Canada's warm welcome for immigrants to share their culture, values and community in a new land. Moulded over time, they now offer lifestyles that have the power to appeal to any home buyer, and in a Canadian tradition, these neighbourhoods continue to hold out a warm hand to any newcomer who wishes to make that community their own.

As specialists in the urban housing market, we at Urbaneer have expert knowledge about Toronto's neighbourhoods. In learning about the kind of community you want—its flavour, identity and character—we will be able to open the gates to the neighbourhood that best fits your dreams.

Call Steven Fudge and his highly informed sales team at (416) 322-8000 and let us help make your dream of home a reality.

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