

# Dinky digs cramping your style? Pick up tips from this designer

**Small spaces don't have to feel squishy.** Just ask Kim-berley Seldon, right, the master of small spaces. On April 29, from 7 to 9 p.m., Camrost-Felcorp will host Ms. Seldon and her popular small spaces design seminar at the iLoft at Mystic Pointe Sales Centre. A designer, jour-nalist, keynote speaker and broadcast personality, Sel-don will speak about design trends for condominium

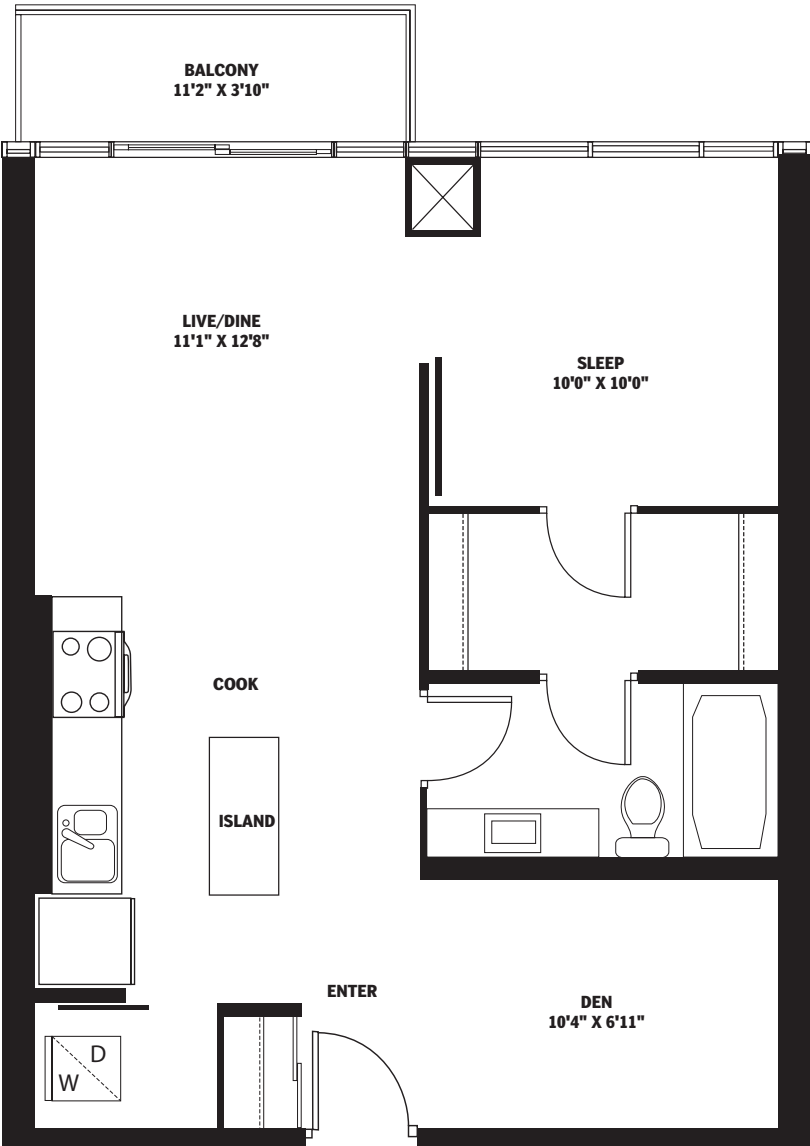
**SELDON'S LARGESS**  
owners, including tips to help them live large in smaller suites or downsize from larger homes. Ms. Seldon ap-pears regularly on *CityLine*, is the host of the television series *Designed for Living* and is the decorating editor of *Style at Home* magazine. Attendees will be treated to

light refreshments and door prizes. The iLoft Sales Centre is located at 185 Legion Rd. N., fourth floor in Etobicoke. Space is limited, so call 416-251-8888 to reserve your spot.  
*National Post*



## CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

Three design experts analyze a layout for a 644-square-foot suite



**DEE DEE TAYLOR HANNAH**  
*Architect/interior designer*

As simple as it gets, this plan can give us all hope. It is crisp, linear and easy to follow. Even the den is not an impossible size for this small unit. The end wall can easily accommo-date floating lacquered library shelves with black-mirrored walls between that are lit from underneath the shelves, giving a glow to the wall. The closet is a millwork piece that is oil-rubbed, oak-stained ebony with a purple hue. The adjacent washing/drying room has a bright blue appliance that is housed behind a frosted glass door.

Now, the plan flows in a circle with-out a dead-end in sight — it's forever

moving. The bathroom has a fabulous-size vanity and is accessed from main space and bedroom via the closet. In every direction, you can view the entire width and length. The walk-in closet is a dream with floor-to-ceiling built-ins that house all your special requests. A felt-lined drawer for precious items and a perfectly proportioned angle shoe storage complete with expert lighting. The live/dine slips into the cook area and the island is on wheels for maximum flexibility. A movable feast — this could take you out to the balcony for an evening bar set up at sunset. Keep it clear: Absolut on ice.

■ Dee Dee Taylor Hannah operates Taylor Hannah Architects and is a partner in Montclair Construction.

**ANTHONY PROVENZANO**  
*Architect/interior designer/furniture designer*

At 644 square feet, this is a small unit but its thought-to-square-foot ratio is very high! (I made that last part up, only to say: This is a very well-thought-out layout.)

In this amount of square footage, there isn't much more you can do to efficiently lay out bedroom, den, washroom, kitchen and living/din-ing areas. Everything is modest and it maximizes natural light from a full wall of glass. This even has a proportionally large balcony. The galley kitchen and movable island are the right call in order to make the main space feel as generous as possible. And that will be appreciated when this space converts to party mode.

It's a bit like Ikea's target demo-

graphic manifest in a condo because the things to do to this unit to make it better would be selected from its catalogue. This unit will need to rely on furniture and fittings that have multiple purposes, which are small, compact and have integrated storage; otherwise it risks appearing cluttered.

I would also remove the closet built in the bedroom; instead I would buy the Ikea full-height armoire system because it's more efficient than what's shown and will literally make the bedroom two feet longer. I did this at my home.

With a storage locker in the base-ment and creative furniture solu-tions, you'd have a livable, modest, thoughtful suite.

■ Anthony Provenzano is an archi-tect, interior designer and furniture designer.

**HARRY CHRISTAKIS**  
*Architect*

As an architect, one of the most difficult things to do is re-design an item that is simple in form and pure in functional design.

Since it's important to make the most of natural light, a unit about the size of two small hotel rooms, should have access to light in most spaces.

I would relocate the den in front of the window and push the bedroom, closet and bathroom back. The den would now get light and open up a world of uses: a home office, a TV room, a library, a baby's room or by adding a chair, ottoman, small table and a floor lamp, it will make a wonderful reading room.

A five-foot-wide glass screen could

partially separate the bedroom and den while a sliding door could separate the den from the living room.

I would remove the wall and door that divides the bedroom and closets. The two closets would stay in their current arrangement but would be turned into a regular closet with sliding doors and organizers. By giving up the walk-in closet, a much-needed sense of space is gained without losing functionality.

I would also extend the kitchen island and make it my dining table, either with the same material as the island, but a little lower or with a regular table, leav-ing the remaining living space for sitting and entertainment.

■ Harry Christakis is principal of HCA Architecture, specializing in hospital-ity and residential architecture and interior design.



THE HOLMES GROUP

Solar thermal technology can save you up to 50% on a water-heating bill.

# Here comes the sun

Solar panels are maintenance free and a smart choice



**MIKE HOLMES**  
*Make It Right*

There is more energy reach-ing Earth from the sun every day than we can ever use. It's free, safe and endlessly renewable. Why wouldn't you want to take advan-tage of it?

Getting the power for your home from the sun isn't rocket science. With the fluctuating costs of oil and gas to heat your home, not to mention the emissions and environmental damage created when using typical heating methods, solar power allows home-owners to lock in to unlimited and uninterrupted power. Once installed, solar panels are virtually maintenance free and there are even some govern-ment tax incentive and rebate pro-grams for adopting solar technology.

There are two basic ways to har-vest power from the sun: solar photo-voltaic panels (PV) that convert light from the sun into electricity, and solar thermal collectors that use energy from the sun to heat water or an-other fluid for heating your home or

preheat your home's hot water tank. I've used both types in building projects and highly recommend both.

Solar thermal is very cost-effective. Preheating hot water for showers, dish washing and laundry using solar power can save up to 50% on a water heating bill. And, using solar thermal in connection with radiant floor heating will save even more.

PV panels have a rating in watts based on the maximum power they can produce under ideal sun and temperature conditions. Use the rated output to help determine how many panels are required to meet your electrical needs. You'll need to figure out your weekly and seasonal energy usage (check your utility bill for your monthly usage). To com-pensate for wire loss, roof shading, poor weather conditions and battery loss, experts say you should double the wattage calculated to guarantee your supply.

I like to see solar electric used with a battery backup system, so that excess power is stored and then available at night. That makes sense to me.

Without backup, you have to use power from the grid at night, and that cuts your energy savings. A backup system will also provide power in the event of a power failure. And, in some areas, when the backup system has reached its storage capacity, the excess energy is sent back to the grid, which further reduces your energy bill.

A 100-watt PV panel can produce about 400 watt-hours of power per day. An average home might use about 25,000 watt-hours per day or more. That means you'd need 62 PV panels to provide enough electricity. That's a lot and the payback takes time. And

that's one of the reasons you don't see more rooftops with solar panels.

On a recent project, we needed 20 panels to power the home, because current technology produces a rela-tively small amount of electricity per panel. That's improving all the time, and soon a single panel could provide up to a kilowatt of power — that's when you'll see solar power being adopted more and more.

There's a lot of debate about the payback period on such green build-ing technologies as solar PV or ther-mal systems. It can cost thousands of dollars for a relatively small retrofit and a lot more for a large custom-de-signed and installed system. People question whether they'll get their money back when they sell or how long it will take to account for the initial cost and see real dollar sav-ings. But I believe you need to look beyond the dollars when thinking of the return on your investment. Solar technology is an investment in your quality of life, in your community and in the environment.

This is not a do-it-yourself project. Have a certified solar energy installer check your system size and work with you to determine your exact needs before making this large investment.

Installing solar panels or solar thermal preheating is a great choice to make. It's the right choice. It's reli-able, free and what you pay to har-ness it will be paid off over time. And any power from other sources that you are able to offset by changing to solar helps the environment.

■ Watch Mike Holmes take on the biggest challenge of his career in *Holmes in New Orleans* on HGTV Thursdays at 8 p.m. Visit hgtv.ca/neworleans for more information.

*Canwest News Service*

# BUYING IN GOOD 'HOODS: ALWAYS HOT

**HOT**  
*Continued from PH1*

fixed and 3.3% variable, and are a boon to people buying or refinancing. He says that many new buyers he pre-approved in the fall waited and are now jumping in to the market at substantially lower rates.

But not all properties are bought by first-time buyers. The homes on Euclid and in Roncey that sold so quickly attracted people who were trading up from smaller places. These types of buyers like neighbourhoods such as the Beach, Riverdale, Cab-bagetown, South Annex and Ron-cesvalles for lifestyle reasons and because the homes are attractive and mostly updated. Properties in these areas have not dramatically dropped in price because there are relatively few with strong appeal on the market.

According to our agents, people are shopping for well-maintained, up-dated homes with parking that show well and are priced fairly. The trouble is the people living in those homes are not motivated to list, as they are con-cerned their property will linger on the market and become stigmatized. As a result, there are not enough quality homes available for under \$700,000. But the good ones sell fast. Really fast.

So what is a buyer to do? Mr. Bettencourt counsels patience: "There

are so few good Victorian houses that there is more demand than supply so it's a matter of being patient until the right house comes along."

What is available is a plethora of unattractive houses in less-desirable areas, and beautiful carriage trade homes in the best neighbourhoods. Rosedale and Forest Hill have bar-gains for buyers who have a million, or millions, to spend. Those homes still sell, but not quickly in most cases.

The "dogs" aren't selling quickly, either. Mr. Amantea says, "It is pos-sible to get amazing deals on less-than-perfect homes in good areas that have been on the market for a long time because the vendors are motiv-ated." And properties abound for a little more than \$200,000 if you want to live in 416-far-east or 416-far-west.

Do the real estate agents have words of wisdom for buyers and sell-ers and those considering jumping into the market this spring? Mr. Mac-donald says, "Nobody is throwing money around like they used to. Buy-ers and sellers will have to be patient and realistic about timelines."

Mr. Amantea says, "Mortgage rates are probably as low as they will go. This is an excellent time to buy." Mr. Bettencourt is encouraging: "There are more buyers and more demand than there are properties [for sale] in the Annex and downtown core. You will have many interested buyers."

The current, more-balanced mar-ket is nothing new. Buying and sell-ing used to be a "thoughtful" process with due consideration given to each and every detail. Purchasers see this as a great advantage, agents see it as more work and vendors are nerv-ous. Condos and solid homes in good neighbourhoods are hot. Everything else is not, yet, but spring is here and anything can happen with time and patience.

*National Post*



BRENDA McMILLAN

Buy now, says real estate agent Jonathan Amantea.