

I vote they rename the competition the golden retriever awards

Have you ever looked at a building and thought, ‘Is that ever ugly?’ Most of us have, and it’s nice to know there’s a forum for voicing our displeasure (or pleasure) about the architecture that informs our city. The cheekily named Pug Awards (pug owners take umbrage!), in its fifth year, is on again. The Pug Awards, we’re told, were established to raise public awareness of architecture and to elevate design

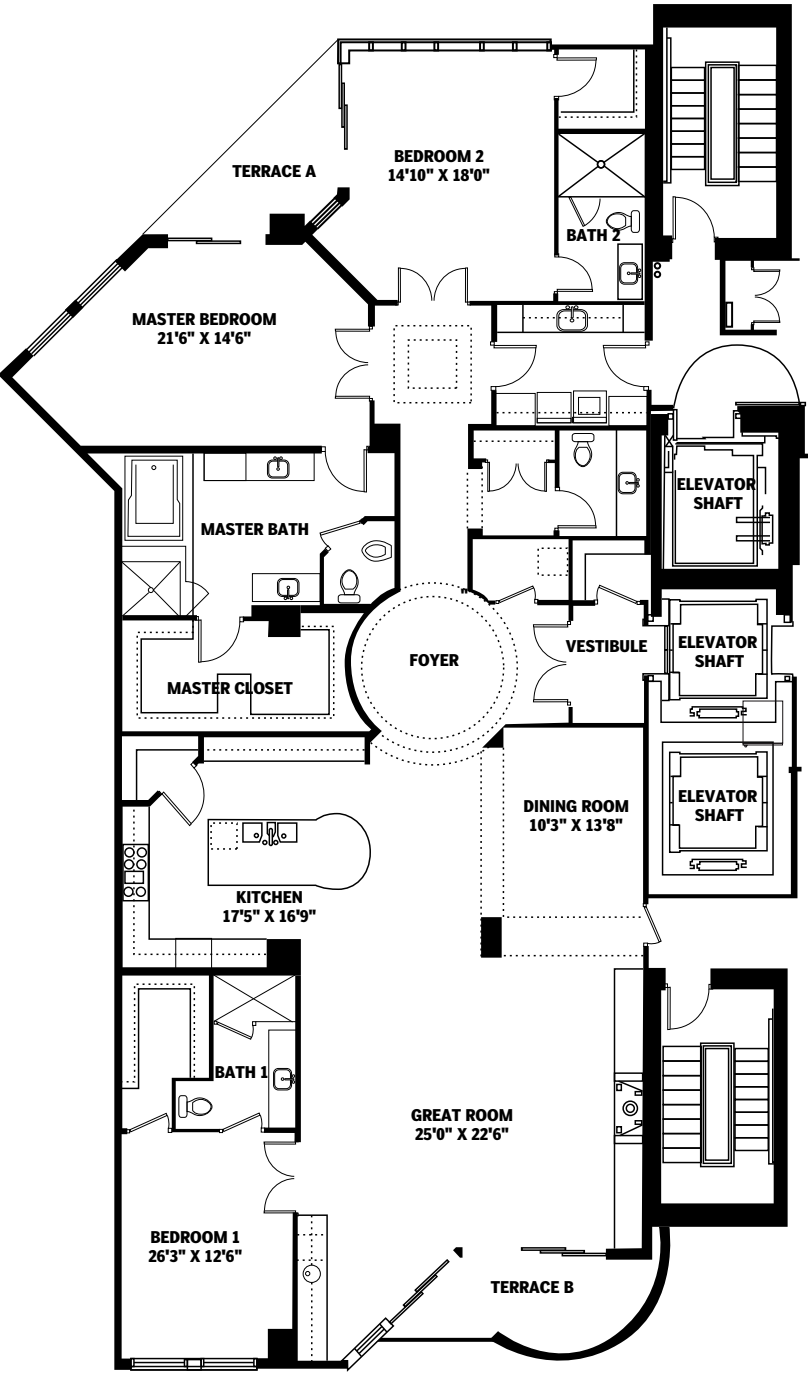
standards for development projects in Toronto. By voting for recently completed residential, commercial and institutional developments, you will join a movement that not only inspires civic beauty but also shuns mediocre design. To vote, go to pugawards.com, then click “vote now.” Photos

depicting various buildings will pop up, then it’s scrutiny time. It’s tons of fun and an important way to get your thoughts made known. Results will be announced June 3. *National Post*



CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

Three design experts analyze a layout for a 3,356-square-foot condo



DEE DEE TAYLOR HANNAH
Architect/interior designer



Size matters and never believe anyone if they tell you differently. The size of rooms and their adjacencies are paramount while the division of public and private space must be clearly defined. It is confusing at best for a random bedroom to be accessible from the great room. There should be a private domain for the family that doesn't emphasize the master bedroom axis with the laundry room. Not to mention the fact that the master closet is only accessed via the bathroom and back through the master bedroom again. This plan is spacious with a central entrance point from the elevator.

The square foyer to the circular foyer can be a great plan device for circulation. The great room needs to be fabulous so give it a chance and make it the full width of the plan. Duelling fireplaces on opposites walls can add drama and set the stage for multiple seating areas. There can be two sofas for each fireplace and a centre table with a ceiling bronze light fixture above in the middle of the room. The art has numerous walls to hang on and floor material can have an endless feel being travertine slab. The terrace needs a central focus with an outdoor sculpture in the curve drawing us to infinity. ■ Dee Dee Taylor Hannah operates Taylor Hannah Architect and is a partner in Montclair Construction.

ANTHONY PROVENZANO
Architect/interior designer/furniture designer



This looks like a Richmond Hill monster home stuffed into a condo floor plate. It's so big that it has three entrances and two interior piazzas. My own view about good design is that it's a balanced interplay of light, space and material. If those three elements can touch your soul, then you have great design. This plan is attempting to reinterpret traditional design or classicism but it doesn't do a good job of it. There is no interplay of spaces — it's a series of rooms stitched together with corridors and doors. While I'm philosophically opposed to this type of plan that refers to the design of classical buildings — you need to at least do it well, if you're going to do it.

First off, this design is centred on that spine of circulation, with the circular foyer in the middle — it needs a rectangular counterbalance to the rectangular room outside the bedrooms, it could act as the threshold to the great room. Second, that spine needs to move over so it can be centred in the space and work with the structural columns of the building. The placement of the great room and bedrooms is ideal and maximizes natural light for the rooms that need it; that shouldn't change. Given the size of the unit, the spine could easily be more central and symmetrical. And if you were absolutely hellbent on making a classically inspired plan — at least it would be better than this. ■ Anthony Provenzano is an architect, interior designer and furniture designer.

HARRY CHRISTAKIS
Architect



The layout is restricted by the lack of windows between the two end walls creating a disproportionate amount of service space in the middle of the suite since the bedrooms and great room must stake claim to the windows. This also limits the daylight that enters the suite. For a large condo, I would expect my kitchen, dining and great room to have access to daylight as well. Including a bedroom next to the great room is forced. Having the ele-

vator entrance in the middle of the plan allows us to flip the layout by locating the kitchen, dining and great room where the master and second bedroom are, providing better light exposure. The kitchen could then also exploit the convenience of a direct service entrance rather than tracking bags across the unit. The three bedrooms should then all slide in between the two solid walls along the windows occupied by the great room and bedroom No. 1. ■ Harry Christakis is principal of HCA Architecture, specializing in hospitality and residential architecture.

BACK TO ITS SAINTLY STATE

The crumbling Gingerbread House gets a sensitive restoration
By Jack Kohane

With a silent “amen,” Stephen Pearson puts the finishing touches on one of the city’s premier restoration projects. Dubbed “the Gingerbread House,” the home, a stunning example of Victorian Italianate architecture on Augusta Avenue, was showing its age when Mr. Pearson first examined it in August, 2007. He found peeling paint on most of the gingerbread adornments, and the capitals of the ornate Corinthian columns gracing the porch were eroding badly. “[The Gingerbread House] needed a major facelift,” says Mr. Pearson, the owner of Fine Restoration and Painting, heritage property specialists. “There was rot in the original wood window sashes and casements, mouldings and door frames. Rodents had gnawed deep into the soffits, fascia and trim, and this damage had to be repaired,” he says. “The charming, but deteriorated, dentil moulding and scribe brackets were also stripped and recoated.” In many spots he found five or six layers of paint, applied decades ago. Akin to an archeologist scouting a site, Mr. Pearson wondered what lay beneath the worn woodwork. Designated an Ontario heritage site, the plaque at the front door refers to the home as Leadley House, built in 1876 by Edwin Leadley, a wealthy textile merchant. In the 1870s this was the western edge of the city and ripe with the smell of mud, livestock and industry. Here, sheep were raised and sheared, their wool destined to be spun into clothing by Leadley’s busy mills, auguring the advent of the Garment District.

Elaborate detailing inside Mr. Leadley’s three-storey, 5,000-square-foot home, most of it still intact, attests to Victorian affluence: scrolled medallions fashioned in elegant floral motifs top 12-ft. ceilings edged with crown mouldings; maple flooring cut from local timber; window shutters and marble fireplaces in every room. Mr. Leadley designed a dichromatic red brick domicile that boasted few architectural equals in the growing metropolis. Its picturesque gabled roofline is punctuated by a widow’s walk ringed by decorative cast-iron railings, adding to the building’s curb appeal. Then, in 1906, the Leadley family left the property. Subsequently, the house has had a succession of owners. Donated first to the Salvation Army, it was used as a home for women (1906-1915), a hostel for men (1915-1930) and a seniors’ home (1930-1937). In 1937, the Felician sisters bought the property, and have operated it ever since as St. Felix House. It functions as a convent, day care and kindergarten, with a simple chapel (converted from the former grand ballroom). Future plans will see the house transformed again, with the support of the Felician sisters, into a hospice for homeless women. To ready it for its new role, the nuns (there are four residing here) gained funding from the order’s Mississauga-based mother school, the Holy Name of Mary Convent. Interior renovations were given to a general contractor; Mr. Pearson, who restored Toronto’s Little Trinity Anglican Church, was charged with the exterior restoration.



BRETT GUNDLOCK / NATIONAL POST

For the refurbishment to the nunnery, Stephen Pearson, above, restored 53 double-hung windows and replaced six wooden storm sashes.

Before starting a project, Mr. Pearson says doing homework is a must. “Heritage and historic property projects require research, and lots of it, to ensure only appropriate materials are used, so these glorious structures are crafted to last.” Mr. Pearson and his crew — restoration experts in wood, plaster and steel, as well as carpentry — started with the convent’s west tower. Over the next 10 weeks, their work included the front entrance, mouldings, and most of the windows and doors.

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Huge holes that squirrels pockmarked into soffits, fascia and trim were repaired. Dentil mouldings and scribe brackets were stripped and recoated. “Particularly challenging were the canopies over the front windows,” Mr. Pearson says. Two of the three canopies required replacement of their four-inch trims, and finding the exact match took more than a week of dogged searching. Mr. Pearson eventually determined that the best option was to replace the tattered trim with a new six-inch version. The new piece was cut to the precise shape and installed, then fillers were used to build up the profile to replicate the original. Another concern for Mr. Pearson was the sorry state of the cast-iron column rosette mouldings and cap-

itals crowning the bulky pillars flanking the porch. “Over the years, the old paint cracks were covered with caulk — as a result, much of the detail was lost,” says Mr. Pearson. His solution: Each cast-iron moulding (the capitals were made up of 24 individual pieces) was taken apart and sandblasted clean. Portions of the rosettes were missing and new castings in epoxy were poured for replacements. Next, the porch’s fretwork was stripped of paint, most of its surfaces found to be heavily layered. Due to the delicacy of the fretwork’s underlying wood, Mr. Pearson used an infrared heater to remove the paint. “This tool works best when there are many layers of paint,” he says. “Though not as effective on one or two layers, it does work well with most areas.” Infrared heat is also environmentally friendly, Mr. Pearson says. “It involves no chemicals, it neutralizes mildew and fungus, it’s easy to clean up and creates no dust in its operation — that’s important as most old houses have original coatings of lead paint.” Mr. Pearson and his crew returned in 2008 to complete the project. “We replaced the flashing, caps, gutters and down pipes — all in galvanized tin,” he says. “And 53 of the double-hung windows were restored and six wooden storm sashes were replaced.” Using Benjamin Moore heritage colours in all of his restorations, Mr. Pearson says he’s proud of what’s been accomplished at the Gingerbread House. Accolades from the Felician sisters are his biggest reward, he says. And the kudos keep coming, as this project has been nominated for a 2009 Heritage Toronto award. *National Post*