

Art & Culture - Toronto

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# Artists get needed pick-me-up

Studios available at old distillery under long-term lease

## Urban Issues

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They haven't made booze at the old Gooderham & Worts distillery since 1990, but there's still plenty fermenting at the perfectly preserved 19th-century industrial complex.

These days, culture is replacing alcohol as the main business of this unique 5.3-hectare site.

Last year, the corporate heirs to Gooderham & Worts, a British pension fund, sold the land to Toronto developer Cityscape. Now Cityscape has made an enlightened deal with Artscape, a non-profit civic agency dedicated to creating studio space for artists. Under terms of the arrangement, Artscape has a 20-year lease on 72,000 square feet within the complex. That space will in turn be rented out to individual artists and arts groups.

This means two of the 43 buildings on the site will soon be renovated and reoccupied. According to the deal, however, the ground floor of both buildings must be kept for public uses, such as art galleries, boutiques and restaurants.

As Cityscape president David Jackman sees it, once complete the distillery neighbourhood will be a destination for tourists and Torontonians alike. The entire industrial village will be cleaned up and reconnected with the city.

Jackman envisions a precinct programmed with regular festivals and filled with kiosks where artists sell their work.

As he pointed out, "Artists are pioneers." They have reclaimed any number of Toronto neighbourhoods — Yorkville, Queen St. W. and Liberty Village — that middle-class types wouldn't consider.

Their problem has always been that they become victims of their own success. Once an area has been cleaned up and revealed, rising property val-

ues push out the artists.

At Gooderham & Worts, however, Artscape and its tenants have a long-term commitment.

"The two main conditions for us," explains Artscape director Tim Jones, "are affordability and long-term leases. Here we have both."

That's why 150 people and organizations have signed up so far, even though there will be only 50 spaces available. There is so much pent-up demand for this sort of room in the city right now that the success of Gooderham & Worts seems a sure thing. The first residents are expected in November.

Still, Artscape will need a lot of help to realize its plans. In this case, the guardian angels came in the form of Eb Zeidler and his daughter Margie. The former is a leading Canadian architect, the latter is the driving force behind 401 Richmond, the fixed-up warehouse that's now home to hundreds of cultural workers.

Zeidler Senior will design the renovations for free and Zeidler Jr. will lend Artscape \$600,000 to them. What makes this so vital is the fact that Artscape — a tenant, not an owner — doesn't qualify for a conventional mortgage from a regular financial institution.

Already, Margie Zeidler is talking about what she calls a "cultural investment fund." It would pay interest much the same as a savings bond or a GIC, except that the money would go to help arts groups. Her confidence comes out of her experience at 401 Richmond, which has succeeded beyond anyone's wildest expectations.

"We have a waiting list of 200," she says. "It's so big, we bought a second building down the road from 401 at 215 Spadina."

For Artscape, the deal with Cityscape represents a major breakthrough. As Jones points out, "at least we have a private-sector partner who understands just how much artists can bring to a neighbourhood."

There's no doubt the long-neglected area around Front and Parliament Sts. needs an injection of life. Not only will that happen at Gooderham & Worts, but also just up the road at Front and Eastern Ave., where a magnificent century-old Consumers Gas rendering plant will soon become headquarters of the Toronto police force's 51 Division.

Culture and cops, both boldly going where others fear to tread.

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