HILDITCH ARCHITECT PROVES THAT GOOD THINGS COME TO THOSE WHO WAIT

It was in 1988 that Toronto architectural firm Hilditch Architect and Dixon Neighbourhood Homes, a non-profit housing developer, first discussed building affordable housing on a parcel of land at 30 St. Lawrence Street in downtown Toronto. Twelve years later, in February 2000, the two organizations welcomed 40 previously homeless men and women into a new townhouse development on the site.

That the townhouse stands at all is a credit to the perseverance of Hilditch Architect. The firm had to rezone the property, drum up neighbourhood support, and redesign the interior half way through the project.

"We sat down with Dixon Homes and local residents and businesses to see if we could do this like anyone would: go to the bank, borrow the money, and make the project carry itself," says Charles Rosenberg.

Hilditch Architect concluded that dividing the building into 10 townhouses and putting four people in each unit would generate enough income to carry the building. This model presumed that tenants would contribute their basic monthly shelter allowances, that the land would be free, and that some upfront money would be available. In effect, Hilditch Architect had come up with a traditional rooming house concept where several tenants share a kitchen and bathrooms.

The change in the development—from self-contained apartments to shared townhouses—required that Hilditch Architect redesign the interiors. Reconfiguring the space, Mr. Rosenberg put two bedrooms and a bathroom on the lower level and on the ground floor the communal kitchen, living room, and dining room. Upstairs he put two more bedrooms and another bathroom. This arrangement allows for future and alternate living configurations/models.

Hilditch Architect completed the working drawings, tendered the project, secured permits and approvals, and then launched construction in the summer of 1999. The United Way and the City of Toronto, which donated the land, contributed substantially to the project's financial footing. Hilditch Architect helped bring the project in on time and on budget, by keeping construction costs down and working for reduced fees.

Sporting brick facades, pitched roofs, and balconies, the 30 St. Lawrence townhouses today often attract passersby who inquire about purchasing units, mistaking them for condominiums. "We wanted the development to look similar to the rest of the community," says Mr. Rosenberg. "We wanted the housing to look familiar and welcoming."

Hilditch Architect is a finalist in the Concept and Design category of the 2002 Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) Housing Awards Program, **Affordable Housing Innovations**. The Housing Awards recognize individuals, companies and organizations that have made significant contributions to improving housing affordability in Canada.

For more information about the Hilditch Architect's 30 St. Lawrence Affordable Housing Project, please contact:

Name: Charles Rosenberg
Tel.: (416) 977-7877
Fax: (416) 977-8460
E-mail: charles@hilditch-architect.com