

# 10 MINS. WITH KELLY CRAY

by SUSAN LEGGE

Condos are now being curated to include a variety of amenities, and in many ways are similar to hotels. Additional services off lobby areas such as tuck shops, spas and service rooms are also becoming popular, as are ‘beauty bars’, co-working areas and children’s play rooms — Kelly Cray, one of the principals of the Toronto-based design firm, U31. Visit [u31.co](http://u31.co)

**Susan Legge:** Your studio has worked on a number of marquee projects across the GTA. Can you name drop a few of them for us?

**Kelly Cray:** With the upcoming crosstown LRT to become Line 5 on Toronto’s TTC rapid transit maps, many developers are meeting the potential demand by establishing residences in the Yonge and Eglinton neighbourhood. We are designing interiors for Line 5 condos by Reserve Properties and Westdale Properties. These two towers, 36 and 33 storeys respectively, will be located in the area. They have been a real hit with the public with the 504 units selling out within two weeks of the sales launch.

We are also currently working with Aoyuang International on



**Kelly Cray**

their first GTA project called M2M. It won the award for People’s Choice at this year’s BILD Awards. It’s an exciting project as it will transform the Yonge and Cummer neighbourhood with five new

residential towers and incorporates family-oriented features such as a daycare and play areas. The development will also integrate a new park to further enhance the (community) lives of residents.

We are also proud to be part of the Maverick project, led by Empire Communities. It’s a 49-storey condominium to be located in Toronto’s King Street West’s ‘restaurant row’. Last spring, we designed the two-storey presentation centre, which won a Silver Award at this year’s National’s and was highly popular with the public as it showcased a co-working amenity space on the second level. The second level also became a very desirable event space available for groups to reserve.

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The lobby at Line 5 at Yonge and Eglinton in Toronto



### Maverick's co-working space

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**SL:** In terms of amenities, some builders and developers are going to the mat and implementing features that are very hotel-like to add value to purchasers. What are some examples?

**KC:** That's absolutely correct. With so many vertical communities being built simultaneously, it's becoming a very competitive market and developers are thinking of ways of setting themselves apart. One way of doing this is to offer specific lifestyle-engineered amenities. Lobbies are no longer a thoroughfare experience. Expanded lounge areas are being incorporated to allow for flexibility, encouraging residents to relax and check emails before meeting with friends; while co-working niches provide an opportunity to work outside of your suite, or host a meeting. These types of functions are very appealing to the young entrepreneur who doesn't necessarily have surplus funds to rent office space.

Often these lobbies tend to be grand, and double storey, similar to a hotel. Rich materials such as marble, stone and porcelain provide a luxury feel, while water features and one-of-a-kind lighting and art installations encourage residents to enjoy the ambiance.

In some condominiums, we've seen 'tuck' shops that cater to

the demographic's lifestyle. It provides that next level of service and convenience. Other sought-after amenities include spas and outdoor pools.

**SL:** The expectations and needs of a condo concierge have changed dramatically in recent years. They must now manage vast quantities of deliveries, including food deliveries, day and night. What changes have you seen or implemented in terms of the design of a concierge station?

**KC:** As Millennials and other segments of the population,

enjoy the convenience of on-line shopping and food-delivery apps, developers have created larger parcel rooms, to accommodate the increasing volume of deliveries. In most cases, there is an area with warm and cooling options for food deliveries. These locker systems are accessed by the delivery companies, alleviating pressure on the concierge. Some latest technologies that have helped the concierge include: keyless suite entries, automatic parking garage recognition doors that recognize the resident's car as they approach the ramp.

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The M2M social party room

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**SL:** Any other trends in terms of amenities that we'll see in the future that you've seen elsewhere, perhaps globally?

**KC:** As more families are opting for condominium living, due to the steep prices of single-family homes in Toronto, developers are increasing the number of larger suites, as well as providing kids clubs, arcade and games rooms. Outdoor amenities are in vogue now as well, especially with younger residents, even though our climate only allows for outdoor enjoyment for half the year. Again, the convenience of going to the roof-top patio is attractive for people who enjoy entertaining within their own building.

Professional fitness and yoga studios continue to attract buyers, as these amenities present the opportunity to save money that would otherwise go toward a gym membership. Spa environments such as steam rooms and massage rooms are equally popular and will continue to expand as people are more health conscious, and expect these offerings in their residence.

**SL:** In terms of design, what key elements do you consider when designing amenities spaces?

**KC:** Flexibility is a key consideration when designing social spaces. Expandable doors or sliding walls in a space allows for both larger and more intimate events to take place. We consider best locations for certain functions. For instance, a light-filled space is perfect for a gym.

Entertainment areas such as theatres and music rooms should be designed away from suites to minimize sound disturbances.



The Line 5 outdoor screening area



M2M yoga space



Maverick event space

**SL:** Which amenities do you think every condominium community should have, and why?

**KC:**

- Social lounge with adjacent dining room and outdoor space encourages interaction and entertaining.
- Fitness and wellness, as people like the idea of having this in their building.
- Co-working tech room as no need to rent office space.
- A pet spa for convenience and to keep building cleaner for all residents.
- Bike maintenance — biking is not only more popular from a recreational stand-point, but it's also the preferred mode of commuting by many urbanites.