

Highrises are reaching the heights of high-tech; Cable networks, fibre-optics add convenience Owners pay only for the services they want; [ONT Edition]

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The groundwork is being laid for sophisticated technology in new Toronto condos that will keep residents ahead of the high-tech game for years to come.

A combination of advanced cable networks and fibre-optics will provide residents with innovative audio-visual opportunities, more convenience within their suites, and optimum security.

And condo owners pay only for the services they want, which can range from high-speed Internet to a touch screen, which controls almost every electronic function in the suite.

"We're in the Jetsons' age," proclaims Barry Fenton, CEO of Lanterra Developments, developer of the Toy Factory Lofts.

"We have to be ahead of ourselves all the time," Fenton adds. "What we've heard from our clientele is they want to be ahead of everybody else in terms of Internet access. The wiring adds to our cost, but we're providing it as a free service to clients."

David Hirsh, a principal at Brandy Lane Homes, which is building Loggia condominiums on the Queensway, says Bell Canada is bringing a fibre optic backbone to Loggia.

"These homes will be future-ready," Hirsh says. "They will have very fast connections to the internet and digital TV. With the use of a router, you can network a suite so computers can talk to one another. And there will be one point within the suite to access satellite TV, telephone, Internet and digital TV."

Paulo Stellato, a partner at Cityzen, which is developing London on the Esplanade, says that these suites will all be pre-wired for the latest Rogers technology, and they'll have customizable features.

"We've taken the next step in terms of amenities to make life easier," he says. "You can control blinds and temperature while you're away, and personalize music, audio and visual components. There is a premium to customize but you can select what benefits you."

At Monarch's new Waterview development, suites are also pre-wired and can be upgraded to a client's needs. An extra jack, for example, is just \$200. Automated blinds go for \$16,000 and a complex, one-touch panel is over \$100,000.

"This is the way the future is going," Linda Mitchell, vice-president, sales and marketing, high-rise, says. "Our Waterview model suite is wired so you can see the opportunities. With our touch screen, you can automate lights... turn off the lights in the

entire suite with one button, dim the lights in the living room or call in from your office to control the lighting."

Mitchell explains that audio-visual components can also be customized, with different systems in different rooms.

"You can custom-design rooms with surround sound. You can also have a home theatre where the lights and blinds automatically go down when the screen is on."

Once the wiring is in place, it seems as if there is no limit to what can be done in both the suites and common areas.

London on the Esplanade is installing Cybersuite - a high-end security system with an LCD (liquid crystal display) screen, allowing the concierge to send a message to all the suites simultaneously or individually. This would help notify residents about fire drills or get messages to people about mail or visitors. Residents will also be able to communicate with neighbours using an LCD screen.

"We'd like to think we're at the leading edge of cybersuite technology," Stellato says. "Our integrativeness sets us apart."

The popularity of wireless technology means new condo owners will be able to use their laptops anywhere in their buildings, anytime.

"Everybody has a laptop in this part of town," Fenton says. "At the Toy Factory, you can be in the hot tub using your lap top. People don't want to be tied to their computer at their desks."

For people who are new to the techno-world, the Waterview is offering cyber lounges with computers and Internet access. And golfers can get in the game in the middle of winter, using a golf simulator. Mitchell explains that when you hit the ball, it reads how far you drove it. Waterview will also have a theatre with surround sound for 15 people to gather and watch a movie.

Even if you're not into computers or technology, just having the wires in place can be a benefit when it comes to reselling your suite years from now.

"Having the capability for this technology is the most important thing when it comes to resale," Mitchell says. "In older buildings the groundwork is not there and these advanced functions are not possible."