

HOMES & CONDOS

ZAMANI HOMES

Building executive townhomes with a keen eye for detail

TRACY HANES
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Mohsen Zamani has brought a wealth — and world — of experience to his company's foray into executive townhouse building.

Zamani's ideas about building have been forged from his engineering training in Germany, his home building background in Europe and the Middle East, to his lengthy record of custom building in Canada. Since he and his family arrived in Newmarket from Iran in 1986, he's developed a reputation as a builder with a keen eye for detail who has built luxury homes in some of Toronto's most prestigious neighbourhoods.

His son Bob, a university business graduate whose company Canquest Financial specializes in construction financing, joined his father as a partner in Zamani Homes in 2003 and since then, the company has branched out beyond custom building. (It still does custom homes — about 10 a year — ranging in price from \$1.5 to \$8 million.)

"We wanted to bring the executive, high-end idea to townhouses,"

explains the younger Zamani. "We wanted to build multi-residential that was not cookie cutter. We insist on the same quality, style and design as in the custom homes."

The Zamani's knew that location would be foremost for most purchasers, so they chose a site in a prime location on Finch Ave., just west of Yonge St. in North York for their first townhouse project, Lorraine Park. The site is within walking distance to the restaurants, shops and wealth of amenities on Yonge St., close to several excellent schools, the TTC and recreational and entertainment centres, such as the Toronto Centre for the Performing Arts and Mel Lastman Square.

The site is also next door to Edithvale Park, where the city plans to build a new \$15 million community centre with fitness facilities and two preschools.

A handful of freehold townhouses are still available in the 25-unit project, 1,700 to 2,400 square feet in size, starting at \$629,990. Plans range from two to four levels, with

three bedrooms with open-concept layouts.

"The finishes offered are very different than the typical subdivision home," says Bob Zamani, who has an interior designer to work with each purchaser to personalize every townhouse in Lorraine Park. "We offer a list of 150 options and most purchasers take advantage of that. Some purchasers have put in home theatres, some have added cedar closets and one even put a water feature in their home."

Each townhouse features smart wiring throughout and "we've used the same kitchen company as we have for a \$7 million house," says Zamani.

The project is architecturally controlled and the townhouses feature extensive classic detailing around doors and windows, stone, brick and stucco facades, Georgian windows on the main floor, bow windows with copper roof detail and patterned paver walkways. Some have yard and others have generous balconies.

"When I built houses in Iran,



TRACY HANES PHOTO/

Mohsen Zamani, third from left, and Bob Zamani, on his left, with Lloyd Martin, far left, and Nima Farhadian, far right.

there were a lot of details and the homes were built of concrete and reinforced steel," recalls the elder Zamani. "When I came here, I started building with wood, but I used a lot of stone and brick and stucco for decoration. Houses then had a lot of small rooms, but I like open concept and built my first house in Canada that way. It sold in one day."

For more information, go to www.zamanihomes.com

Shuttle diplomacy for housing affordability



STEPHEN DUPUIS

You don't get a lot of air miles for a trip to the nation's capital, but do it often enough and the points start to rack up. Just ask Victor Fiume of Durham Custom Homes, who as president of the Canadian Home Builders' Association is spending lots of time in Ottawa of late.

Earlier this week, Fiume was airborne again, travelling to Ottawa for an appearance before the House of Commons finance committee to present the residential construction industry's recommendations for the pending federal budget.

How does one approach such a presentation when there are so many mixed signals out there and you're following no less than Mark Carney, Governor of the Bank of Canada, who in the same room a week earlier was grilled about consumer debt, notwithstanding the stellar performance of Canada's housing finance system during the global economic crisis?

The answer is you tell it like it is, and that's exactly what Fiume did. "Looking ahead, we are entering a very uncertain period for our industry. We cannot be complacent about our industry's performance going forward, and its ability to contribute to economic recovery," Fiume stated.

With that preface, Fiume put forth the CHBA's succinct list of proposals for the next federal budget, with indexation of the GST new home rebate at the top of the list.

Despite a lower tax rate (5 per cent GST versus 8 per cent HST), the federal tax on a new home is much more than the provincial tax. That's because the federal government's new housing rebate is just 36 per cent of the GST payable to a maximum of \$6,300, while Ontario put housing affordability first with a 75 per cent tax rebate to a maximum of \$24,000.

The real problem with the GST as it applies to new homes is the regressive federal tax structure under which the rebate is based on a 19-year-old threshold price of \$350,000 and clawed back to zero on homes over \$450,000. "Lack of action on this issue continues to undermine housing affordability," declared Fiume.

Fiume also called for a permanent GST home renovation tax rebate of 2.5 per cent, as well as for all businesses, regardless of sales volume, to be obliged to register for a business number, both measures targeting the underground economy.

As a leading green builder, Fiume couldn't resist getting in a plug for the ecoEnergy rebate program, calling on the federal government to build on the momentum of the original program by introducing the next generation of this important initiative. More than 600,000 homeowners received a home energy evaluation initially, with the majority of those households following up with energy efficiency retrofits.

Time will tell what the federal budget will contain, but if the government properly connects the dots between a healthy housing sector and overall economic growth and employment, as Fiume was clearly driving at in his remarks, then all those trips to Ottawa will have been worth it.

As it happens, Fiume will be back in Ottawa later this month for a sit-down with Carney, where they will undoubtedly talk about consumer debt as well as interest rates and other key factors affecting housing markets across Canada.

Note to Victor — be sure to mention you always fly economy!

Stephen Dupuis is president and CEO of the Building Industry and Land Development Association. The views expressed are those of the president. Email: president@bildgta.ca.



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