

LUXURY HOME

quarterly



TIMELESS
DESIGNS... *for kids*

SELLING TORONTO
Canada's booming condo market

+ A PEEK INSIDE *Rachel Ashwell's*
'Shabby Chic' master bedroom

LIPPINCOTT LIVING

Each bright, open-concept unit features plenty of living space that can be adjusted to its residents' specific needs, including integrated storage units, accessible service areas, and a stylish union of internal and external environments.



Elaine Cecconi & Anna Simone

*"It's not just real estate; it's creating a unique design specific to each condo owner."
Anna Simone,
Cofounder & Principal*

CECCONI SIMONE

Elaine Cecconi and Anna Simone describe themselves as opposites in personality—Cecconi the shy one, Simone the outspoken one—but that hasn't stopped the two design experts from running a profitable, award-winning, globally heralded interior-design consulting firm.

The women's partnership seems serendipitous: Simone recalls an "odd feeling" she experienced when she first saw the newly hired Cecconi at their former employer's office, a feeling that prompted Simone to turn to a colleague and pronounce that she and Cecconi would end up as business partners.

Their company, Cecconi Simone, based in Toronto, has risen to the top of the chic-urban-condo market by leveraging a multidisciplinary staff of 40–50, a

heralded eye for fashion and design, and business smarts gained from 28 years of experience from China to Dubai to Europe and North America. The firm's team includes architects, administrators, interior designers, industrial designers, and architectural technologists.

Cecconi Simone's principals don't believe in resting on their laurels. "We are always reinventing and reanalyzing our direction," Simone says. "We are not believers of trends. A good designer looks at the client's needs and assesses the process with the understanding of those needs."

Indeed, the firm, which started in retail design, shifted into corporate design, ultimately fashioning millions in square feet in banking,

legal offices, accounting firms, and communications companies. Through that experience, Cecconi Simone realized that personal and private environments were failing to keep up with the technological changes occurring in the corporate world.

The technological updates coincided with the development of urban condo living in downtown Toronto, starting in the mid-1980s. Initially, condo living was considered a rental, transitional lifestyle, Simone points out. "After 5 p.m. on a weekday, you could shoot a cannon down Toronto's downtown core," she recalls.

Yet with the more sophisticated and technologically updated condo, new developments in the Toronto condo market became real, viable options for long-term homes.

In order to best serve its clients with multifaceted design concepts that incorporated updated technology and automation, Cecconi Simone established a

go-to integrated design team. The firm partnered with Toronto architect Brad Netkin to create their own development firm, Blurredge Group, focused on developing low-rise townhouses with the kinds of stylish design, environmental sensibilities, and indoor/outdoor flow of the best high-rise condos. The development firm is now able to hand-pick its entire project team from inception to completion. The integrated design team ensures that technology is used in subtle and practical ways that create high-end living, Simone says.

"When you are working in small spaces, the more knowledge you have and the more creative you become with the space," she explains. "The more I know about plumbing stacks and the runs required for a functional kitchen, the more I know about creating a lifestyle kitchen. And the more another team member knows about electrical slabs, the more able I am to ensure that dimmer lighting is incorporated into the condo development prior to the building being built."

While this partnership was forming, Cecconi Simone started focusing on the demographics of customers attracted to urban living in Toronto: a sophisticated audience that enjoys art, music, culture, shopping, and fine dining, while also appreciating well-appointed outdoor spaces. "We started asking questions of the potential condo owners: What type of car do they drive? Who is their fashion designer of choice? What types of books do they read? Do they drink wine, beer, martinis?" Simone says.

The first example of the Blurredge Group's integrated-team philosophy is Lippincott Living, an eight-unit townhouse development that reinvented Toronto's infill residential living concept, providing luxury and exclusivity in a struggling real-estate market. The Lippincott development showed Toronto homebuyers for the first time that they could have the luxuries of modern living in a convenient urban setting.

"We gave people luxury," Simone says. "We integrated appliances into the kitchen in a stylish way, included beautifully organized closets rather than having rack-and-lightbulb closets, placed lights on every wall on which the



LIPPINCOTT LIVING AND BLURREDGE GROUP

The cofounders of Ceconi Simone have become intimately aware of developers' habits after 28 years of working with condo, office, and retail developers in locations ranging from China to Qatar to major cities throughout North America. Elaine Ceconi and Anna Simone realized that the most successful developers take time to involve all of the important disciplines, from engineers to architects to designers, in a project from the very beginning. Simone partnered with Toronto architect Brad Netkin and a silent partner to create their own development firm, Blurredge Group. The name highlights the blurring of the various disciplines' roles to create a condo development in which every available comfort is fully anticipated and brought to fruition. By involving all disciplines from the outset, the approach ensures that the project is designed holistically from the outside in and the inside out.

Blurredge Group's first venture is Toronto's eight-unit townhouse development Lippincott Living, near Bathurst and College streets, highlighted with private courtyards, green roofs, 10-foot-high ceilings on the main floors, and a modular design constructed with a minimal amount of construction waste. The homes showcase Ceconi Simone's award-winning ability to seemingly enlarge the space by connecting indoor and outdoor elements. An eight-foot-tall window wall opens each dining room onto the outdoor space, for example, and master bedrooms feature walkouts to a sundeck.

"Using green elements throughout the project, from the design approach to finishes to energy consumption, is part of being a responsible professional."
Anna Simone, Cofounder & Principal



owner might hang artwork, and included ambient light, overall lighting, and reading lights throughout. The units were fully loaded."

The design features of the property include thoughtfully designed lighting throughout the 2,000-square-foot units; porcelain-tile flooring that runs through living, kitchen, and dining areas; a window wall that opens up eight feet wide to connect the dining area to the outdoors; and bathrooms designed as spas and with a seamless connection to the bedroom.

"In the past, people's bragging rights revolved around how much square footage their homes had," Simone says. "Today, it's about how unique your environment is. Today, homebuyers are looking for lifestyles that give them more time, and that translates into a market such



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X THE CONDOMINIUM

According to Simone, modern urban living is no longer simply about real estate and location; it's about creating a unique condo design specific to each unit owner. X The Condominium epitomizes the interior-design-consulting firm's philosophy. The 44-story, 437-suite condo tower in Toronto is the winner of the Building, Industry and Land Development's 2010 High-Rise Project of the Year award. The tower's double-height lobby features 24/7 concierge service, as well as a multifunctional space called "The Core," that offers yoga, aerobics, Pilates, cardio, weight and fitness training and steam rooms; a kitchen/dining/bar lounge with a billiards room; an outdoor swimming pool with a hot tub, barbecue, and lounge poolside; and a rooftop garden and sun-deck with exceptional landscaping. The condo tower also features panoramic views of the tony Bloor and Rosedale neighborhoods, as well as Lake Ontario.



CHARLIE CONDOS

Charlie, a 32-story, 314-suite luxury condo tower—which totes the motto "Condos That Love You"—showcases Cecconi Simone's insistence on owner exclusivity. The suites, which feature nine-foot ceilings, offer a choice of granite or solid-surface kitchen countertops, porcelain-tile backsplashes, bathrooms with a soaker tub, a frameless glass shower, and prefinished engineered wood flooring. All of the suites come with Cecconi Simone-designed kitchen cabinetry and Euro-style stainless-steel appliances.

True to Cecconi Simone's philosophy that urban dwellers crave a sense of community, the condo in the King-Spadina area is a short walk from Roy Thomson Hall, the Princess of Wales and Royal Alexandra Theatres, and the Rogers Centre and Harbourfront. The condo tower is also close to clubs, bars, lounges, restaurants, and trendy fashion boutiques.

