

“Shangri-La offers high-end accoutrements, such as Boffi kitchens with granite countertops and herringbone-pattern wood floors in our private estates. There’s a real focus on the elements of luxury — *Renata Li*, project manager, Westbank

There’s something unnerving about being 29 storeys above the ground with nothing but a waist-high chain-link fence between me and the open air. (It’s probably the 400-or-so-foot drop to the street below.) I’m standing near the western perimeter of the 29th floor of Toronto’s Living Shangri-La (livingshangri-latoronto.com) development, decked out in a shimmering gold hard hat. The absence of windows and walls in the bare concrete space is exhilarating.

For now, this is as high as you can go in the under-construction tower, located at University and Adelaide, that will stand 66 storeys tall when complete. I’m intimidated by my surrounds, but my Shangri-La tour guides are comfortable here. Construction manager Keith Stott cruises through the space explaining the layout in detail, as though the units already exist.

“This is the living room,” he says, leading me across the wide-open floor. He has blueprints tucked under one arm, but knows the floor plan by heart. “The kitchen is over here and this hallway takes you through to the bedroom.”

Renata Li, project manager for Westbank, one of Shangri-La’s developers, is in town from Vancouver. She’s here every few weeks to track building progress and is obviously at ease in her hard hat. (Ms. Li and Mr. Stott both wear white helmets. The metallic headgear I’m sporting is reserved for visitors.)

“Shangri-La offers high-end accoutrements, such as Boffi kitchens with granite countertops and herringbone-pattern wood floors in our private estates. There’s a real focus on the elements of luxury,” Ms. Li says, as Mr. Stott walks us through all nine of the 29th floor’s yet-to-be constructed units, pointing out the highlights of the suites.

Floors 18 to 49, Shangri-La’s “residences,” will each house nine units ranging from 818-square-foot one-bedroom to 1,856-sq.-ft. two-bedroom plus family room suites, while floors 50 to 64 will have six units each, known as “private estates,” that will range from 1,961-sq.-ft. two-bedroom plus family room and library to 4,808-sq.-ft., two-level, three-bedroom spaces. The tower will be topped with two two-level 6,700-sq.-ft. penthouses, for a total of 370 condos. (Available units range from about \$1-million to \$18.8-million.)

Having made a lap around the space, we hop back into the construction elevator. The rickety ride down along the outside of the tower offers an unobstructed north view up University as well as an unusual close up of the exterior wall. “I think people will particularly appreciate the detail on the eastern façade, facing out on to University,” Mr. Stott says. “There’s an articulation to it, unlike a typical building that goes straight up with balconies at every corner. The developer has been very involved with creating the artistic look of the tower.”

The development team is a partnership between Westbank, lead by Ian Gillespie, and Peterson Group, headed up by Benjamin Yeung. Westbank and Peterson is behind several Vancouver developments, including the city’s Shangri-La property, and has enlisted the talent of Vancouver architect James Cheng and Toronto’s Hariri Pontarini Architects to build Shangri-La Toronto.

“Ian really thinks about how a person will feel in relationship with their surroundings. He invests a lot of time and money into design and consideration



Renata Li, project manager for the developer of Shangri-La, is in town from Vancouver often to chart the building’s progress.

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of spaces,” Ms. Li says

So far, the building is clad in glass up to the 22nd storey. Floors 1 to 17 will comprise the 200-room Shangri-La Hotel, with 20,000 sq. ft. of amenity space, including an indoor pool, fitness centre and spa.

When the elevator arrives at the sixth floor, we step off into a scene very different from the one we’ve just scoped out above. Here, corridors and guest rooms are under construction and dozens of trades are busy with hammers and drills. It’s noisy, dusty and almost as exciting as the breezy 29th.

“Shangri-La is not just about bigger rooms and bigger suites, it’s about the level of service and functionality of it all,” Mr. Stott says.

“When you’re a part of Living Shangri-La Toronto, you’re tied into all the amenities the hotel has to offer,” Ms. Li adds. “The service associated with the brand is markedly different from other five-star properties. We’re bringing something new to North America.” Hong Kong-based Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts manages 50 hotels and has more than 40 projects under development globally.

We make our way by foot down through the amenities floors and check out the future ballroom and business centre before we’re back on the ground. There’s still plenty to explore at street level, including the Bishop’s Block, a 19th-century building that has been restored and incorporated into the development as retail space.

Also at ground level will be two restaurants and a bar by superstar chef David Chang,

“People will particularly appreciate the eastern façade

the man behind New York City’s Momofuku culinary empire. The Shangri-La Toronto locations will be Canadian firsts for the brand.

The restaurant will feature a large glass architectural element, nicknamed “the ice cube” by the construction crew. “The structure is made with a steel frame and spider fittings to hold the glass in place,” Mr. Stott says. The giant translucent cube will hang out over the University sidewalk from the second storey of the hotel.

The main entrance, also located on University, will house a public art installation as well as a water feature. “Feng shui is very important to Ben Yeung. We always have water in the entrances of our projects and he’s come here a few times to conduct blessing ceremonies of the building site,” Ms. Li says.

Shangri-La partnered with the Art Gallery of Ontario to find the artist for the public installation, Shanghai-based Zhang Huan. Details of the project haven’t been made public, but Ms. Li reveals the sculpture will rise out of the water and that, while it’s placed outside, elements of the artwork will permeate through to the hotel’s interior spaces.

The hotel opening and first residential occupancies are scheduled for June 2012 and, with all 66 storeys covered in glass, Living Shangri-La is sure to stand out in the Toronto skyline. While construction continues, just look for the fuchsia billboard and glittering hard hats at the top of the open tower.

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A hard-hat tour of this condo is harrowing, but when it’s built, residents will be grounded in luxury *By Lindsay Forsey*

SHANGRI-LA ALOFT