

Family life beyond a house

Toronto architect Gianpiero Pugliese is raising his children in a condo. He says it's more traditional than you might think.

By Jackie Burns Star Touch | Sat., July 8, 2017

Creating a dream home for his young family is one of Gianpiero Pugliese's grand designs.



The Toronto architect, principal founder of architecture and design firm Audax, most recently designed 128 Hazelton Avenue — a new boutique condominium, by builder Mizrahi Developments — in the upscale Yorkville neighbourhood.

Pugliese, 41, also boasts a Master in Architecture from Harvard University.

So when it came time for the father of two to execute his vision of the perfect living space for his own family — wife Mariya Naumov, 34, son Maximilian, 3, and daughter Evelyn, 1 — he didn't follow the traditional, single-family-home blueprint. There were no plans for a four-bedroom house with an extra large backyard and a two-car garage.

Instead, his canvas was the third-floor of a 1980s midrise office building in the heart of Toronto's Little Italy neighbourhood. After purchasing the entire



floor, Pugliese decided to remake the 3,000 square feet of commercial space and completely transform it into a residential sanctuary.

“It presented us with a unique opportunity to create a one-of-a-kind space,” he says, adding their decision has prompted some interesting discussions about the best environment in which to raise a family.



“A lot of people still today are like: ‘How do you raise kids in a condo?’ ‘How can you raise a family in an apartment?’ ” Pugliese says. “They are accustomed to the idea that the next step is to have a house, and a yard and a garage. We wanted to look at another solution.”



When Pugliese first undertook the four-month project three years ago, he and Naumov were living in a one-bedroom condo in the same, bustling College St.-area community. They were eager to continue their vibrant downtown lifestyle with their growing family and didn’t hesitate to turn their backs on societal pressures to build a house in the suburbs.

Pugliese said he wanted to emulate the lifestyle many families happily live in Europe and other parts of the world.

“It’s sort of inspired by these New York or Paris apartments which, incidentally, are the way in which people live in those cities; there is no expectation that you would live in a house,” he says.

“You live in an apartment, and you live your life there, and you raise your family there — and that’s the way it is in those cities. You’re sort of trying to bring back both the aesthetic and also the lifestyle that’s associated with that.”

A New York ambience in keeping with that city’s Upper East Side ambience is evident when the elevator doors open directly into the couple’s home.

Pugliese envisioned a cross between traditional and contemporary when he designed the three-bedroom condo which, despite looking magazine-shoot

ready, still doubles as a comfortable living space where his toddlers run around at ease.

There are traditional foundations in terms of the finishes; herringbone oak floor, marble entryway, three-panel doors with decorative hinges and glass knobs. Yet there is a much more contemporary aesthetic with the furnishings and decor.



Pugliese doesn't hesitate when asked for his favourite feature in the condo. It's the "winter garden" which he designed as an alternative to a windy balcony that would not have been useable for many months of the year. Instead, it is one of the most-used rooms in the home: two walls of oversized windows, that can be completely opened, surround the 225-square-foot space, making it feel like an enclosed terrace.

There's a flat-screen TV on the wall bordering the winter garden and the living room, a two-way fireplace, some comfortable outdoor lounge furniture and porcelain floors.

"You're basically outside," he says. "It's really cool. It's such a nice space."

In fact, since the idea worked so well, Pugliese incorporated similar winter gardens into several of the units at 128 Hazelton.

The winter garden, living/dining area, office, kitchen, butler's kitchen and powder room make up the front half the condo. Doors separate what would traditionally be the upstairs area of a family home, with three bedrooms — two with ensuites — an impressive laundry room as well as a luxurious walk-in closet off the master bedroom.

“It’s very functional. It’s like a house — that’s the key. When you close your eyes, you don’t know you’re in a condo. There’s all the amenities that a house would have,” says Pugliese.



Naumov, who has a degree in art history and went back to university to study design, says she feels like she would have been isolated in the suburbs with her small children, having to drive her car everywhere. She loves getting out the stroller and walking to the grocery store, the butcher shop and local parks.

“There’s a real sense of community here,” she says. “When we go to the park, there are so many kids. Everybody knows each other — I feel kind of like I’m back in the 1950s. It’s a great support system.”

The couple take turns running across the street to their local gym, take their son to Little Kickers soccer in a nearby park, and relish their family lunches at the renowned Bar Raval in their neighbourhood. Pugliese says he values the extra time with his children that he’d have had to sacrifice if he was busy commuting to a house outside the city.