

## Artists see soul on King Street

*Hamilton Spectator*

When Adam Colangelo put his gleaming new apartment up for rent on King Street East at Walnut, he was concerned that the \$1,895 a month price might be too high.

But the 2,000-square-foot space with 14-foot ceilings, enormous windows, and exposed brick walls was rented in six days. A doctor, a chef, and a teacher were the first to call. No one balked at the price.

"It's a step up for the area," Colangelo says about the apartment he finished renovating in the 100-year-old building at 205 King St. E.

While much of the talk about getting people to move into the downtown core is about the megaprojects like the condo conversion of the Royal Connaught, there's a quiet and maybe more sustainable conversion movement going on. Colangelo, and other newcomers, see beauty and opportunity in the old buildings on King Street, with their history and human scale.

Colangelo, a 30-year-old full-time artist, assembled the loans he needed to buy the three-storey building on King Street in 2012. It was listed at \$350,000, far cheaper than properties in Toronto, where he'd moved to be part of an artists' collective. The upper floors of 205 King had been gutted, so Colangelo got to work rebuilding. Rent from a clothing store (Ziegler Pacific) on the ground floor helped to pay the mortgage during the year-long renovation.

While Colangelo shaped a new vision in his building, other artists were seeing potential in the King Street block between Walnut and Catharine.

In April, Peter De Sotto, violinist with the world famous Quartetto Gelato, will take possession of 189 and 191 King Street East.

"We've been hearing that Hamilton is the new exciting place to be, the new Brooklyn. We're excited about the new Go train, and we just jumped on the opportunity," De Sotto says.

De Sotto and his wife, artist Mary Kennedy, will renovate the two top floors into luxury apartments and move in. "We're just following the pilgrimage of artists moving to Hamilton," De Sotto says.

The couple, who have real estate investments around the world, plan to "keep the integrity" of the buildings and improve the retail store fronts, according to De Sotto, "We want to see the whole block improve."

De Sotto and his wife paid \$230,000 each for the two buildings which were listed at \$238,500. They bought the properties from Gord Thompson, the owner of G.W. Thompson Co. Ltd. Jeweller and Pawnbroker Co. Ltd.

"This is a good story for King Street," Thompson says.

Buying a solid building in the core made perfect sense to Colangelo, who's from Mississauga. He fell in love with the city when attending the Brock University Hamilton Campus in 2007. His intention at 205 King Street was to create an apartment and studio space to make his copper mosaic sculptures. But the plot took a twist, he says. "I met a girl." So romance is taking him to Toronto, and a lucky person is moving into the open-space perch where King meets Walnut.

Colangelo worked with architect Bill Curran of Thier + Curran Architects Inc. to buff the space into something special. At 16 feet wide by 90 feet deep, the plan was to open the two floors up to light and movement. Remnants of the building's past were preserved. "Men's Department" remains stencilled on a transom window on the second floor, a leftover from the days when the building housed S Lee Menswear. A dumb waiter is still in place beside the modern Ikea kitchen Colangelo had installed. At Curran's suggestion wooden floor joists for the third storey were cleaned and left exposed as the ceiling for the second-floor living room and kitchen. Colangelo's long-term plan is to move back to King Street with his girlfriend and turn



*It took a year to finish renovations to the 100-year-old building; when it was done, owner Adam Colangelo had this apartment rented in six days.*



*The apartment at 205 King, used to be the home of S Lee Menswear.*



*Real Estate is hot on King Street East according to the International Village BIA. Renovations to the building at the corner of King and Walnut include a luxury two-storey apartment.*

the ground-floor retail space into a gallery for his artwork.

Perhaps by then another piece of this King Street block will be showing a new face. By the end of the month the infamous Sandbar Tavern at 193 King St. should be for sale. The former crack den and site of two murders was seized by the province in 2006. It is now owned by the city and on its way to being declared surplus so it can be sold, according to Glen Norton, Hamilton's Manager of Urban Renewal, Planning & Economic Development.

International Village BIA executive director Susie Braithwaite has seen 17 new businesses open in the last year. "When people purchase and renovate and move in, they've invested in their business and invested their personal lives in the area," she says. "It's great news."

Gord Thompson has seen the roller-coaster fortunes of King Street during his long tenure in the pawnshop business.

"You have to hand off these buildings to the right people," he says, "You don't just dump them."

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