

News

## So T.O. who's the Pugliest of them all? Condos

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Now we know it all: the good, the bad and the Pugly.

The results of the second annual **Pugly Awards** were released yesterday and, once again, it was the condos that scored the worst.

The prizes, based on a month-long web poll, included 15 major buildings, all of which were completed and occupied in 2005.

Divided into residential and institutional/commercial categories, the results made it clear that private developers still lag behind their public-sector counterparts.

The overall winner was the National Ballet School of Canada, designed by **Toronto** architectural firms Kuwabara Payne McKenna Blumberg and Goldsmith, Borgal and Company Ltd. It received an approval rating of 78.3 per cent.

Located on Jarvis St. north of Carlton St., the project is a worthy winner; not only does it share a rather constricted site with the two-towered Radio City condo complex, it addresses the context beautifully and gives students spectacular spaces in which to learn their craft.

Other high-scorers in the institutional section were the MaRS Building (75 per cent), the Terrence Donnelly Centre for Biomolecular and Molecular Research (73.9 per cent) and the SAS Building on King St. E. (70 per cent).

The highest-ranked residential project was 18 Yorkville, designed by architects Alliance, a **Toronto** firm.

It scored 65.5 per cent. Sitting on the corner of Yorkville and Yonge streets, it consists of a tall tower atop a low-rise podium. Also included is a handsome new public square designed by **Toronto** landscape architect Janet Rosenberg.

The undisputed loser this year was nondescript condo complex Glenlake, at 2495 Dundas St. W., which received an approval rating of 12.4 per cent, which means nearly 90 per cent of respondents considered it the ugliest building of the year.

Founded in 2004 by Gary Berman and Anna Simone, the Puglys are yet another indication that architecture has become one of the city's major preoccupations. Of course, design has never been bigger throughout North America, or Europe for that matter.

Architects have become pop cultural fodder. Several years ago, **Toronto**-born Frank Gehry, officially a starchitect, was featured on an episode of The Simpsons.

In **Toronto**, the trend has been fuelled by two equal but contrasting phenomena. The first is the condo boom that has changed the face of the city.

Though the return to urbanity is to be applauded, some condo designs have left many disappointed.

The second part is the rash of cultural facilities now being expanded or built from scratch.

That includes everything from additions to the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Royal Ontario Museum and the

Ontario College of Art to this year's most popular Pugly project, the National Ballet School.

Mention must also be made of the educational schemes that have greatly enhanced the downtown core, most notably at the University of **Toronto**.

The exquisite Terrence Donnelly Building on College St. is a good example.

Designed by Alliance and Behnisch Architects, it brings a new level of urbanity to a building type (labs) that would once have been seen as little more than a warehouse for scientists.

As interesting as this year's Pugly may be, next year's should be even more so as a number of major institutional buildings, including the ROM, the opera house and the Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art, are expected to open.

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