

THE ARCHITOURIST

## Luxury condos to sprout from a restored 1930s auto showroom in Toronto



**DAVE LEBLANC** >

INCLUDES CORRECTION

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Renderings of One Marlborough, a new 13-storey luxury condo of 58 residences that will rise from the 1930-era Pierce Arrow showroom. AUDAX ARCHITECTURE

The Pierce-Arrow automobile was built in Buffalo, N.Y. from 1901 to 1938. Early in the company's history, it made the decision to build large, luxury automobiles with substance: their first, the Great Arrow, proved its mettle by winning the first Glidden Tour in 1905, an endurance test of 1,770 kilometres put on by the American Automobile Association.

Twenty-three years later, the car was still highly regarded; The Globe wrote that it had "an enviable place in the public mind" and is "as good as motor car brains can devise."

First showing the cars in 1920 to Torontonians at 120 King St. E. and then at 684 Yonge St., in 1929 H.E. Givan purchased a vacant lot at 1140 Yonge St. and, on Jan. 13, 1930, opened his glamorous, gleaming, classically proportioned showrooms to the public (by architect William F. Sparling of Sparling, Martin, and Forbes), trumpeting them in a large Globe advertisement as, "the most beautiful in Toronto." The newspaper one-upped the claim in a small piece with an illustration, calling it "one of the finest ... in Ontario." The unnamed author went on to describe the interior as "unique in the treatment of the windows which constitute the whole of the frontage" to provide a "well-lighted, handsome interior" with "finely carved oak."

**THE NEW PIERCE-ARROW BUILDING**



Another milestone in the life of H. E. Givan Limited is passed today with the opening of their beautiful new building just south of the North Toronto Station, on Yonge Street. Nine years ago H. E. Givan started with a small store on King Street. After a short time there, he moved to 884 Yonge Street. At this address he has been making splendid headway in marketing the Pierce-Arrow car. At the Yonge Street premises it has long been forced upon him and his associates that their efforts were being hopelessly restricted by lack of space, and the project of the new building began to take shape. Today sees the crowning of many years' effort in the opening of one of the finest showrooms in Ontario. The building was designed by Messrs. Sparling & Forbes, architects, who have certainly erected a building which not only is a credit to the H. E. Givan company and the Pierce-Arrow car, but also adds distinction to that part of Toronto. The interior is unique in the treatment of the windows which constitute the whole of the frontage. These are in the form of arches separated by pillars which support the roof, giving a well-lighted, handsome interior. A gallery runs the full length of the building, with a wide oak staircase leading up from the main floor which, halfway up, divides into two stairways, running at right angles up to the gallery. In the gallery, the front of which is of finely carved oak, the general offices are located, from where an excellent view of the whole showroom floor is provided. In the rear is a large showroom for used cars, spare parts, etc. Arrangements have been made so that two new floors can be added to the rear portion of the building for use as wash-room, storage, etc.

An advertisement of the Pierce-Arrow building in The Globe.

The exteriors, too, had carvings. Godlike male figures holding tiny Pierce-Arrow cars, winged tires, and an assortment of chimeras (in Greek mythology, a beast with the body or head of a lion), and imps, all by renowned female sculptor Merle Foster, a 1919 Ontario College of Art graduate. The imps, writes Terry Murray in her book *Faces on Places*, may have been modelled on poor neighbourhood children who lived near the artist's Walton Street studio in the part of downtown Toronto once known as "The Ward."

"Children flocked to her door to see the red-haired grown-up who seemed to make mud pies for a living and occasionally paid kids to pose for her," she wrote in 2006.

"We want the chimera wings back in all their glory," said ERA's David Winterton with a smile. "The Staples siding hurt them." Mr. Winterton is referring to the building's most recent use as an office supply store that sported oodles of red corrugated siding that unceremoniously rammed into Ms. Foster's work.

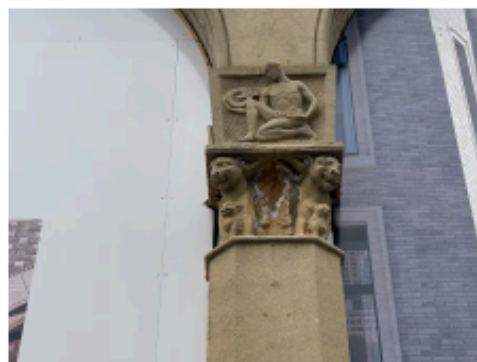
"But it's all restorable," he continues. "We're kind of excited about the digital aspect; we've been working with Carleton University [graduates] ... They scanned sculptures at Parliament Hill and then recreated them in their studio using CNC [computer numerical control machining tools] and other 3-D printing [methods] so there's this technology that exists now that didn't exist before that's going to help us figure this out."



Renderings of One Marlborough, a new 13-storey luxury condo of 58 residences that will rise from the 1930-era Pierce-Arrow showroom.

That means ERA will also be able to recreate the lost cornice and multiple gargoyles that were “shorn off by the CBC” (if someone has one in their backyard, however, let this author know – it will save ERA a lot of trouble!). The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation owned the building, it should be noted, from 1952 until selling it in 1995 (after Pierce Arrow went out of business in 1938, Mr. Givan sold Studebakers until 1942, upon which he leased the building to RCA Victor). The CBC was also the first owner to paint over the lovely two-toned, checkerboard brick that surrounded the arches.

In a light drizzle, Mr. Winterton points to the spots where gargoyles will once again perch, as co-developers Pouyan Safapour of Devron Developments and Ian McLeod of Dorsay Development Corp., and architect/interior designer Gianpiero Pugliese of Audax, nod rain-speckled heads in approval. After decades of neglect, this old automobile showroom is being lovingly restored and will form the base of a new 13-storey luxury condo of 58 residences, to be called One Marlborough. The building will be an homage in cast stone and brick, with plenty of archways that pick up on Mr. Sparling’s Byzantine/Renaissance Revival building.

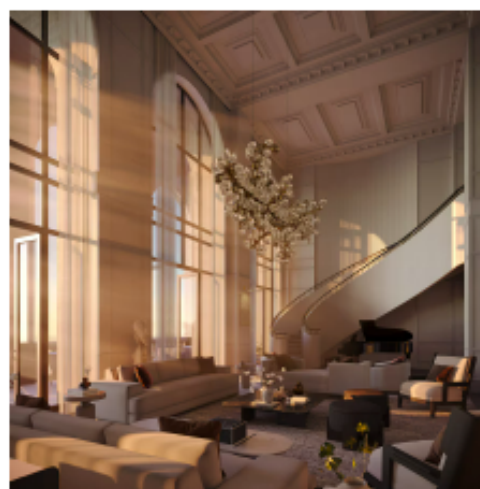


Details of the Pierce-Arrow showroom.  
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“We know that Torontonians are visually sophisticated, and that the two architectures are enhancing and complementing each other,” says Mr. Winterton, who once worked in the New York offices of Robert A.M. Stern, one of the fathers of the New Classical movement.

“So, in particular, you’ll see this recurring theme of that corner bead that comes from the heritage building, and that gets repeated in many instances in our trim profiles and in our detailing of the [exterior] of the building,” says Mr. Pugliese. “The geometry of the bays, the grid of the bays, set up our entire penthouse.”

Oh, what a penthouse it will be: “We replicated the same scale,” says Mr. Safapour. “Double-height arches and the ceiling is about 24 feet high ... so the Pierce-Arrow showroom scale [but] up at the top of the building.”



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AUDAX ARCHITECTURE

And for those who remain skeptical of architects who endeavour to recreate the architecture of the past, Mr. Pugliese reassures them that he's gone all-in, and a book he's written (out in October) will prove it. "It's called *Human Architecture* ... and a lot of it is this conversation about how young people, we're all trained in the Modern period, but we've lost something ... looking at the historical principles of design and trying to apply them to contemporary projects."



From left to right, Mr. MacLeod, Mr. Safapour, Mr. Winterton and Mr. Pugliese.

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That means there are, currently, heated discussions about the type of brick that will be used, the colouration of the new cast stone, and debates on texture, detailing and just about everything other niggling thing, since, with a starting point as powerful as the former Pierce-Arrow showroom, the focus on what sits on top comes down to a very fine grain.

"If you get one of those three or four things wrong, it could look quite unfortunate," admits Mr. Safapour. "It'll take a lot of love to make sure it comes out right."