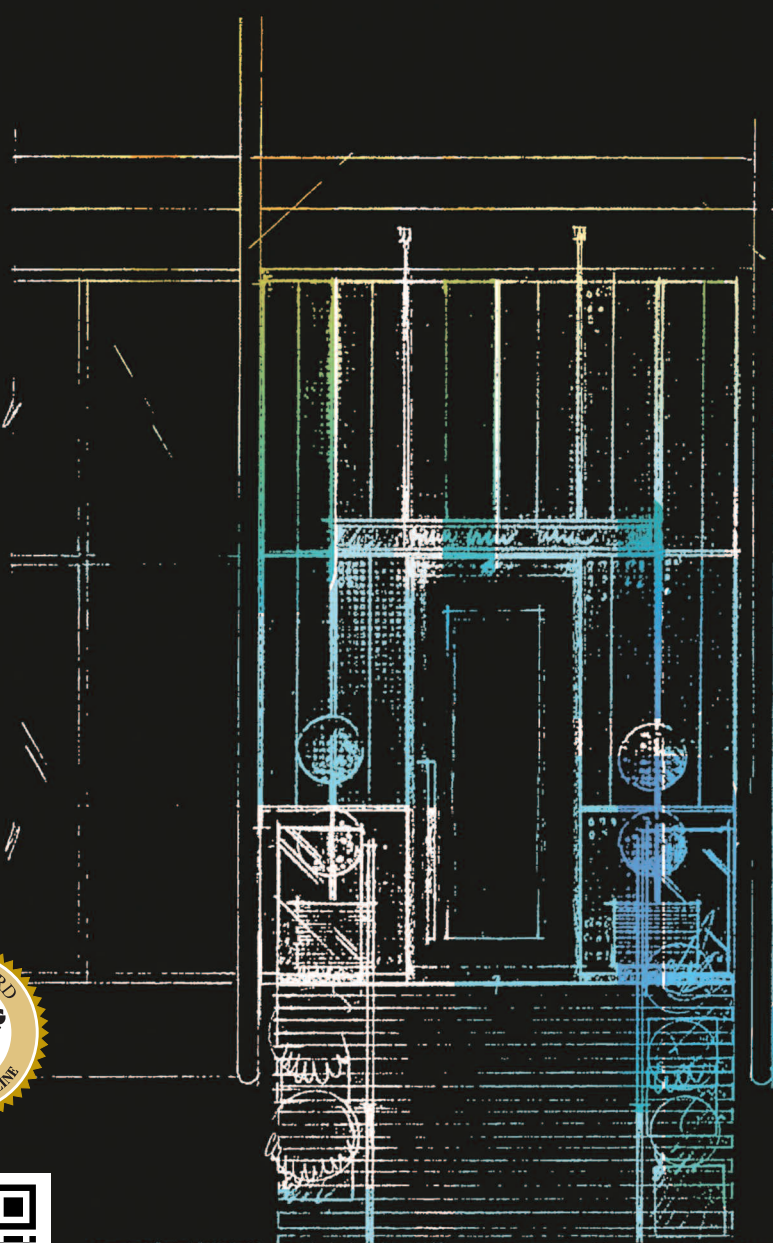


## IT STARTS WITH A VISION...

THE PENTHOUSES AT PIER 27 ARRIVE THIS SPRING



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## interview

condolife



## Breathing New Life

IDC's Julia Salerno talks to  
Anita Wiklem about her project,  
The Penrose

**It's no secret** that Toronto's condo market is fast evolving. New high- and low-rise condos are popping up on what may seem like every street corner. But where does that leave the condo developments designed in the eighties and nineties?

If condominiums from decades past want to stay competitive in today's condo marketplace, a refurbishment may be the only solution. Interior designer and ARIDO member Anita Wiklem of Wiklem Design Inc. specializes in just that: breathing new life into tired condominiums once at the leading edge of design.

### What areas of interior design do you specialize in?

Wiklem Design specializes in designing condominium common areas including, lobbies, corridors, elevators, party rooms, exercise rooms, guest suites, and more. We also specialize in residential homes and condo suite designs.

### What attracted you to this project?

We thought of this building as a hidden gem based on its location and that it was full of design potential! The Penrose rises more than thirty stories high and is located at the south west corner of Bay and College in Toronto. This building was built in the late nineties and most people would walk or drive by and hardly notice it. The potential to revitalise this building and bring it back to life was very enticing. I was eager to take on the challenge.



### What were the client's expectations for the building's re-design?

The condo's Board of Directors wanted to create a sense of community. They wanted communal gathering spaces throughout the building where residents could meet, host an event, gather with friends and bring guests. They also wanted their building to get noticed among all of the new high-rise buildings going up around The Penrose and wanted to increase the value of their suites.

### What elements were you responsible for designing?

We re-designed most of the building. The entrance lobby and concierge area had to be relocated and re-defined as its previous placement didn't allow the concierge on duty to see the main entrance. We created a circular waiting area with a phenomenal metal sculpture feature in the centre of the space. The sculpture really helps the space feel like an extension of the exterior and creates an impressive focal point as you arrive. We also opened up the windows to allow daylight in and allow for a glow to filter out at night, which adds to the building's curb appeal.

The lobby lounge received a new feature wall of stone with a fireplace, which helped bring the exterior stone garden into the design. We designed a sorting and recycling station with notice boards in the mail room to make it easier for residents to keep the area tidy at all times.

The corridors have an off-set area at the elevators, meaning the cabs are not balanced on either side of the corridor. This didn't allow for symmetrical design, so we created a line running down the corridor which was off centre and had accents featured at the elevators. The ceiling by the elevators had an existing drywall detail that we had to work around, so we took advantage of it and used the ceiling detail to anchor the design and allow residents to feel as though they have "arrived" at the elevators.

The party room was renamed The Penrose Room and we created an area with hardwood floors for meetings that can double as a dance floor for large parties. We also grouped tables and chairs functioning as conversation areas and work stations. An entertainment area with flexible seating was also created. We designed a mobile dry bar that can be used independently or set up as an



Photography by: Greg Page, Colby Kidd.



extension of the kitchen, depending on the function. The games room got an overall re-design where we incorporated some recycled elements. The exercise room got a fresh look along with the management office.

It is truly exciting when we can address all the areas of a building. The flow and consistency in our design throughout all the amenity areas brings the building to a new level.

### What was your inspiration for the design?

The metal sculptures and stone garden outside were very inspiring to us. We liked the idea of continuing those elements into the lobby and lounge areas. The colouring from the existing natural marble and granite stone floors with the cherry wood panels throughout the lobby and lounge added a rich starting point for a colour pallet.

The two storey lobby area adds grandness to the space. Extending the living spaces for residents has been an asset to the many who call The Penrose home, allowing us to create a timeless design with a contemporary edge. Our ultimate goal, and I think we achieved it, was to create a space that is both current, yet looks as though it has always been part of the building. To me, that's inspiring.



### How does your design appeal to the different demographics that live at The Penrose? How does that get interpreted in the space?

Most of the building's residents are young urban professionals, although there are some retired residents. We added a contemporary flavour to the existing transitional elements of the building and added key items such as the custom printed carpeting. These key features allow for creative freedom when it comes to pattern, scale and colour. The new furnishings and fabrics give the spaces a fresh and welcoming look that appeals to a variety of demographics.

We chose to go transitional with the finishes for the shell of the building and keep the colour and style unified throughout. When it comes to the furnishings there are contemporary as well as modern pieces. We love mixing styles and find that the juxtaposition of the different pieces keeps the space fresh and alive. You can never please everyone, however we initially included the building's residents to help select between two design and colour directions. From there we worked with a design committee as well as the Board of Directors.

### Describe your creative process. What factors do you consider when designing a space?

There are always clear starting points in refurbishment projects. From the start, we narrow down what we have to work with versus what we can change. As with most projects, it boils down to budget. Sometimes we have to be creative within the limitations of a budget and the needs versus the wants of the client.

### What is the user experience in the space? How is that achieved?

The residents now have an extension of their home, with areas they can be proud to bring friends and family, as well as areas to retreat and enjoy reading a paper, work on their laptops, or to simply to meet up with fellow residents for some easy conversation. We have received very positive feedback about giving the residents a 'new' building with the community feel they desired.

### Does this project have longevity?

I think so, yes. The design works with the bones of the building and our transitional approach allows for a timeless design.

### What are some design challenges associated with refurbishing a condo?

What's often the case is that the reserve funds allocated for the project are unrealistic with the associated scope of work that the Board of Directors wish to take on, as well as the cost of products and labour in the marketplace. It can be

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challenging to balance limited budgets with big expectations, but the rewards are always more satisfying!

### How do you describe what you do? What does interior design mean to you and how do you use that principle in your design work?

Design is a balance between aesthetics and function. The two must be in sync with one another. We design and create environments that make our clients feel at home and enjoy creating spaces that have timeless value, trusted solutions and that are distinct environments. [CL](#)