

# Visions of Kensington: Identity, Community and Beyond

An exploration of Kensington Market's community culture through the eyes of its' residents

Stephanie Wighton

## About the residents

Joel is musician in his early thirties. Having moved to Toronto from Vancouver five years ago, he works several jobs to supplement his music career. He lives in a rental century home with three roommates.

Leslie is a retired former educator and government employee in her mid-50s. For the past 10 years, she has lived in her condo in Kensington Market. Her family has roots in the market; her grandmother owned a home on one of Kensington's many side streets at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Michael is in his mid-50s and has lived in the market for over twenty-five years. Though work takes him out of the market for long periods of time, he is an active member of the community and an organizer of many community events.

## Becoming a Resident



*Leslie's living room. Her art collection includes some pieces purchased within Kensington Market. (Source: Stephanie Wighton)*

On her previous residence: "It was a beautiful apartment but I was deeply unhappy. There's nothing.... except condos. You don't know anybody, there's no stores, no cafes. You have to walk a long way to get to Davisville and Yonge where there are some businesses like cafes and restaurants and he knew I was really unhappy and (my friend) told me about this place had come up for sale so I came to see it and it was empty. But by then the building was about 15 years old. So I liked that. It wasn't a brand new condo building and I liked everything about it and so I moved here." – Leslie

For Michael, living in the market was intended to be temporary but soon found reasons to stay longer:

"I didn't intend to stay here for long when I first moved here, and I ended up staying, because I realized there was nowhere else that would work for me....the most immediate thing is that it's very very convenient, everything you need is pretty close by. I mean, I do drive, but... I can pretty much walk to the post office, the dry cleaners, the hospital, the office equipment [store]... you know. Everything, it's really convenient."

## Daily Life in the Market

Recognition of the market's diversity is a common understanding for residents. In many cases, even daily interactions highlight to residents like Leslie the necessity of

"It's a kind of acknowledgement. You know when I go to the cafes or I go to the local businesses or I meet my friends for a walk or my 90 something neighbour across the street who lives in his own home I think there is a kind of unspoken respect for difference and a value for people." – Leslie



*Joel's century home rental. (Source: Stephanie Wighton)*

## Connections between Business and Residential

For Joel, Sonic Café straddles the line between accessibility to outsiders and familiarity for regulars:

"I don't I don't think that people that go there feel unwelcome because there's regulars there. I don't think you would know that they are regulars when you walk in because you don't know the place.....but it definitely is the local bar or café in the day people will come bring their laptops and do their work and there's an upstairs where you can kind of – it's usually you know pretty empty upstairs – read a book, whatever – do your homework."

While Leslie is drawn to the neighbourhood's local businesses, her concerns lie with the emerging business models of the market: "I don't think people have to live here to run a good business but I ....I think some of the newer businesses and committees- like even residence associations don't have a sense of the Market. It seems like they are trying to force values that they've learned in other neighbourhoods onto the Market."



*Above: Average Joe's, one of Leslie's favourite coffee shops in the market. (Source: Breakfast in Toronto)*

## "Outsiders Looking In": The Influence of Outside Visitors

Kensington Market residents understand the market's draw to outsiders: "There's definitely a cross section of people that come there from all sort of demographics and walks of life. You know there's a younger crowd and then there's a comedy night on Tuesdays. There's guys like from the Market there, older guys like lawyers who just kind of like the charm of the place and um there is I can't think of everyone who comes in but it's definitely like there is really no set age or income bracket about this it's like an open door whatever kind of vibe." –Joel



*Sonic Café (Source: Melissa Yu/BlogTO)*

The drawbacks of the market appeal:

"I don't want to turn this neighbourhood into the entertainment district. I think there are tourists in the Market. I think there are too many pedestrians on Sundays. I'm not afraid of the outside world but I think there are tourists in the Market who like the bar scene and come here to drink, vomit on people's lawns and then take off." – Leslie

## Visions of the Market: What should Kensington Market be?

"I think the city needs to value neighbourhoods like Kensington.....I don't think they have a vision, and I don't think they celebrate what it is and the fact we all have different knowledge and skills." –Leslie

On festivals: "There has to be some kind of compromise made to accommodate both, both sides, to have, to have the festival and generate business, and for people to enjoy.... Their homes on a Sunday. No disruption of their lives."

- Michael



- Pedestrian Sundays can create complications for residents. (Source: Global News)

## Relationships with Neighbours

Michael lives in a row house on one of Kensington's residential streets. Though clashes have occurred between residents like himself and nearby businesses, he enjoys the location and his neighbours, which include families from different cultural background, including Vietnamese, Portuguese, Jewish, Eastern European and Chinese. In some cases, neighbours who grew up in the market and left, ended up returning and starting families of their own.



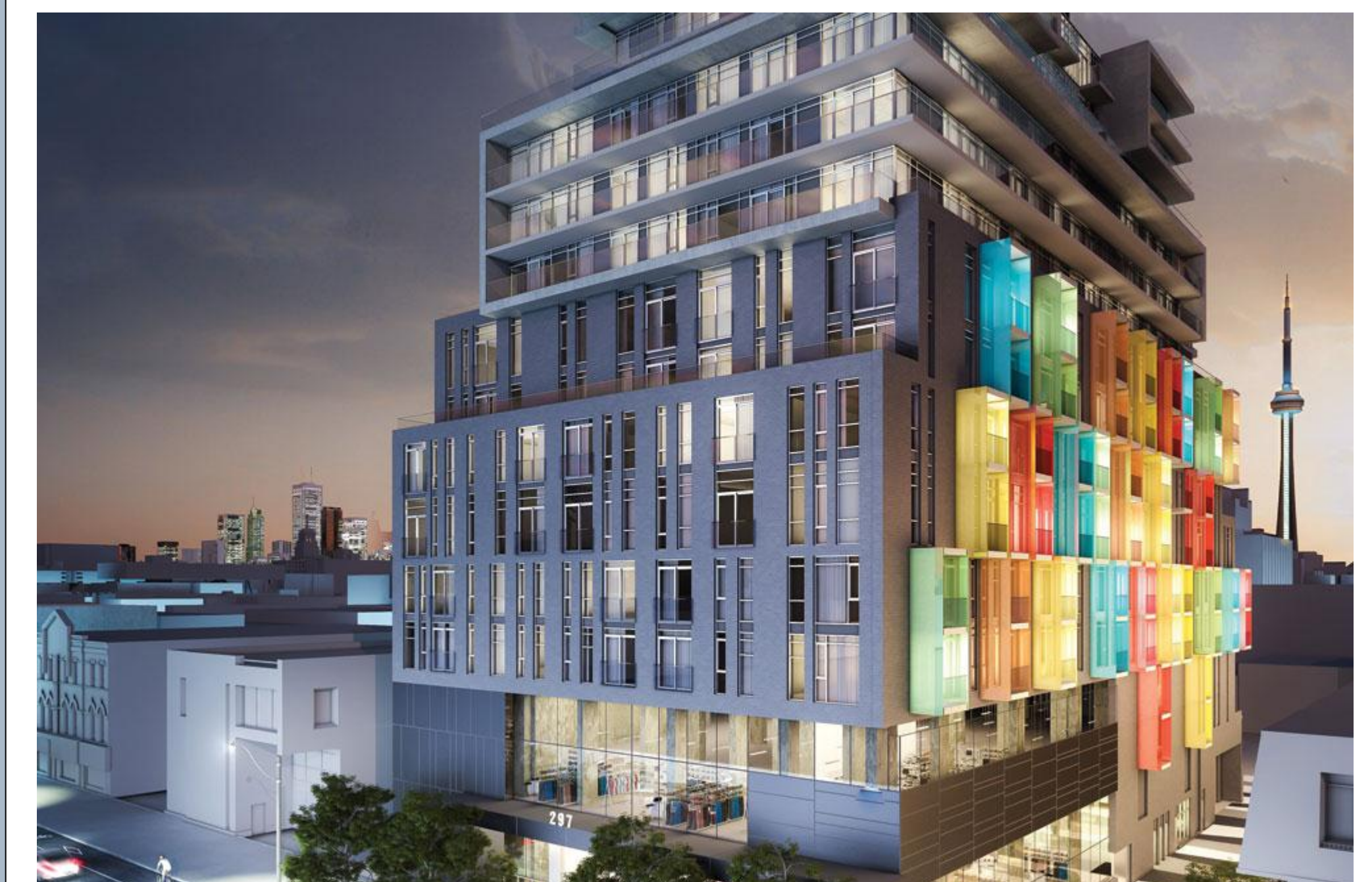
*The row houses common in Kensington Market. (Source: Douglas Taylor/Historic Toronto)*

## What the future holds: Concerns and Questions

"I don't want people, businesses that sell very over priced stuff. Overpriced food and overpriced clothing, you know?" –Leslie

For Michael, the Alexandria Park Revitalization is not a large concern for him, since Alexandria residents are no stranger to the market.

But there is doubt over the College Condominiums being built at the intersection of College and Augusta. Though builders are working within zoning regulations, Michael and others have expressed concern over the effects the new development will have on Market activities



*The College from Tribute Communities (Source: Tribute Communities)*