



Greener acres

By Catherine Osborne
Photography by Mark Gomes

Balconies are a big sell with condo developers. They can be as important to clinching a deal as throwing in a year's worth of free parking. Everyone – even condo dwellers – needs a quick getaway to the outside world, or at least a place to store their kayak. But most sky-high decks look blank and barren because, well, what can you do when the perennials get knocked over every time the wind kicks up? Enter Box Design & Build, a three-guy team that's turning unloved balconies into miniature paradises inspired by the rugged beauty of Georgian Bay.

For years, Mark Gomes and John Broere have worked as contractors while maintaining their other careers as visual artists (Gomes is represented by Leo Kamen Gallery). A client's invitation to build a terrace garden led, through word of mouth, to a full-time business of designing gardens for limited spaces.

Balcony gardens may be small, but they're complicated to create. Weight, for instance, is an issue, so Box constructs hollow rocks cast from concrete and planters out of high-density foam.

"First we build a model in our studio," says Paul Gorrie, a trained architect who joined Box three years ago. "That way, the client can see exactly what they're

Above A narrow balcony at Richmond and Spadina has been overhauled with integrated planters and rock formations made of hollow concrete.

Left Hardy plants like junipers and evergreens are used to block the wind.

getting." It also gives everyone a chance to work out any problems, such as finding ways to block an ugly view by strategically planting tall evergreens or wide shrubs.

Upkeep is another concern, since most condo dwellers like their homes to be maintenance-free. For that, Box installs an irrigation timing system. If you leave for a month, the garden thrives without you. All that's left to do is trim back the branches in the spring, and nature takes care of the rest.

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