

HOME OF THE WEEK

A Toronto home with the office next door

SHANE DINGMAN > REAL ESTATE REPORTER

PUBLISHED YESTERDAY

FOR SUBSCRIBERS



HARVEY KALLES REAL ESTATE LTD.

408 Ontario St., Toronto

Asking price: \$2,288,800

Taxes: \$16,104.72 (2024)

Lot size: 49 by 28 feet

Agent: Jen Tripp, Harvey Kalles Real Estate Ltd.

The backstory

For many people the concept of “work-life balance” is somewhere between a philosophy of constant adjustments or an ironic joke about an unreachable goal.

Working from home was seen as an ideal solution for some white-collar workers who could attend meetings and file reports from the relative comfort of their living rooms or kitchen tables. But over the summer, Statistics Canada reported that the magnetic pull of the cubicle had reduced the percentage of Canadians working from home from a pandemic-era high of 24 per cent to just over 18 per cent, signaling a slow but steady movement back toward the 2019 “normal” when just 7 per cent of workers could stay in their pyjamas all day.

But there are other options: What if “the office” is next door?

That’s what compelled Michael Thiessen to buy the unusual duplex at 408 Ontario St. in Toronto’s Cabbagetown neighbourhood 15 years ago: one part of the building is a three-bedroom home, the other part is a commercially zoned office unit. It perfectly suited the hustle lifestyle he was living as an audio and video editor and producer making music videos and television.



The duplex has two addresses, 408 and 410, but 410 is clearly the big sister of the pair with about two-thirds of the interior space dedicated to it.

HARVEY KALLES REAL ESTATE LTD.

“When I was younger, I did all the music videos for rappers in Toronto – Chocclair, that whole group of guys,” said Mr. Thiessen. He started as a sound engineer in Vancouver making jingles and his own electronic dance music and then moved to Toronto 25 years ago.

“Everyone I met was working on more than one thing; something that was a means to an end and also doing some art. It was incredibly inspiring.” About 15 years ago his various businesses outgrew the lofts he was using near Toronto Metropolitan University and he bought the Cabbagetown duplex to expand into the next phase of his career.

“I thought everybody ideally likes to live next to where they work, so we’re going to get artists in and do video production an in-house thing where they make their albums and videos,” a sort of live-in, all-purpose studio. The commercial space became a full-time office for his various ventures over the next dozen years.

But just as the pandemic shifted work-home patterns, it upended the needs and expectations of some of his clients, too. For example: his once-thriving business of making and distributing videos for continuing education for legal professionals disappeared when everyone was taking seminars on Zoom. Clients also increasingly had no interest in coming to a meeting in person at his downtown Toronto production office.

“I don’t want to drive to your studio!” It was cool before, now it’s not. Nobody wants to drive in Toronto,” he said, and for the cost of commercial taxes alone, there’s no reason to have an office in downtown if you’re not catering to walk-in customers. “The centre of Toronto is unbelievably expensive, and it doesn’t matter to clients anymore.”

The house today

The duplex has two addresses, 408 and 410, but 410 is clearly the big sister of the pair with about two-thirds of the interior space dedicated to it.

The entrance is a little less grand than 408’s brick archway and double doors, but 410’s marble-tiled foyer also has access to the garage. Up the black and white painted stairs you enter a very tall living room with elaborate plasterwork, a massive Art Deco-style fireplace in the corner with tall narrow windows facing the street side of the house.

A short hallway with closet and powder room leads to stairs that travel a short distance up to a half-floor that houses the kitchen and dining room (more stairs in the hallway continue to the second third-level bedroom spaces). The kitchen feels like it's hosted a foodie video shoot or two with its mix of stainless steel and a butcher-block countertops. An island separates the kitchen from the hallway and dining room, which looks through a glass railing to the living room just below.

Around the corner (past the doors to the rooftop patio) is an office space (with a massive carved wood Victorian-era fireplace in the corner) that could be converted into a bedroom.

The third level landing has a washer-dryer combo in a closet at the top of the stairs, behind which are the entrances to the two bedrooms. The primary suite is only a little larger than the secondary and both have ensuite bathrooms: the secondary just has a tub, the primary just has a standalone shower.

The secondary bedroom also has slightly longer closet space and a huge built-in bunk bed.

The office space next door was originally built for an interior design studio and the chunky steel railing on the stairs that split between upper and lower levels from the foyer reinforces that commercial feel.

This was the area Mr. Thiessen hoped would serve as a landing pad for musicians, who could live and work on their albums in the same space. Directly off the stairs in the basement is an office space with glass walls and door facing the entrance. In the next room is a glassed-in sound studio (featuring soundproofing foam lining the joists) next to a more open space that's become a gym. A three-piece washroom behind the storage space rounds out this level.

On the second level there's a meeting room/lunchroom at the top of the stairs next to a kitchenette that also leads to a powder room. The current production office is one of the largest rooms in the complex, and has served as studio and editing bay. You could easily imagine a small cubicle farm or partitions springing up to turn this into law or other professional offices.

The best part is the commute home is just back down the stairs and a half-dozen steps to the left.

Hustle to the country



The house perfectly suited the lifestyle Michael Thiessen was living as an audio and video editor and producer making music videos and television.

HARVEY KALLES REAL ESTATE LTD.

Mr. Thiessen does wonder what will happen to the energy and vitality that attracted him to downtown Toronto as even successful entrepreneurs like himself feel priced out.

“When I first got here every person I met was doing three things and they were happy about it. Now people are so bitter to do three things, because they are barely making it,” he said.

With improving rural internet he could live anywhere and continue to produce video and audio content, and he might even have time for his own music again.

“I haven’t made an album in 15 years,” in part because any time working on his projects is less time working on paying gigs. He’s looking forward to a slower pace where maybe he could do something that’s not chasing a dollar. “It’s nice when you do your art to not worry about making money at it: I want to cook and I want to garden, but I don’t care about making money on those things,” he said.

Sign up for the Streetwise Newsletter. Follow the money with news and analysis on banks, capital markets, mergers, acquisitions, and Bay Street moves (subscribers only)

[+ SIGN UP](#) | [EXPLORE NEWSLETTERS](#)

[Report an editorial error](#)

[Report a technical issue](#)

[Editorial code of conduct](#)

Related stories



Clanton Park home embraces a New Formalism 



Two offers for renovated semi near Trinity Bellwoods Park



A curvy addition to East York, Toronto house turns heads