

## Blending vintage and modern Toronto in Davisville Village

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At a time when only a handful of independent cinemas remain in Toronto, it's surprising to find a neighbourhood that has not one but two classic movie houses that are still screening films.

Within a couple of blocks of each other on Mount Pleasant Rd., the Regent and Mount Pleasant theatres, which opened in the late 1920s, continue to show films on their single screens — catering to a community with discerning tastes.

The theatres opened at a time when houses were being built in Davisville Village, a midtown neighbourhood that spans an area between Yonge St., Eglinton Ave., Bayview Ave. and the northern border of Mount Pleasant Cemetery.

The Mount Pleasant Theatre opened in 1928 as The Hudson and was given its current name 20 years later. The Regent's history is more colourful. It began operating in 1927 as The Belsize Theatre, before closing in 1950 for renovations and reopening later that year bearing a new name, The Crest.

Four years later, it remade itself into a live theatre, showcasing new productions — both classical and original plays. Between 1954 and 1966, some of the most talented actors, writers and directors in Canada worked out of The Crest, including Donald Sutherland, Martha Henry, Robert Goulet and Jackie Burroughs.

In 1966, the theatre resumed showing movies, and in 1988 under new owners, it became The Regent.

The theatres fit in well on Mount Pleasant, known for its countless restaurants, cafés and bakeries (many of the French variety), specialty food shops, stores that cater to children — from books and games to clothes — and home decor and antique shops.

While Davisville Village has a trendy ambience, it's also a neighbourhood that serves as a reminder of a simpler, more innocent time, which could be one reason why the theatres continue to attract movie-goers — that and the fact that they screen high-quality films.

There are several other examples of long-standing businesses in the area. Perhaps the oldest is LeFevre's Chocolatier, which has been operating at the same location on Mount Pleasant since 1927, and makes its own chocolates and truffles.

Down the street, about halfway between the two theatres, is Penrose Fish and Chips, where lineups out the door can still be found after 61 years. It was established by Roly and Marion Johnston, and the family continues to run the business. Along with fish and chips, Penrose serves one of the best lemon meringue pies around, as well as old-fashioned soda pop.

A must-see for children of all ages is the magical Little Dollhouse Company, which opened in 1975, and is Canada's oldest and largest dollhouse and miniature store.

Area residents aren't limited to just one street for shopping and dining. Yonge is a bustling commercial strip, while Bayview has a good assortment of stores, restaurants and food shops, many serving a high-end clientele.

Standing out on the street is the bright pink sign adorning The Elegant Garage Sale. True to its name, this browsers' paradise buys and sells antique and vintage furniture, china, silverware, jewellery, figurines and artwork.

It's hard to imagine, but Davisville Village, now a flourishing residential and commercial area, was once home to wood and paper mills, as well as the Davis Pottery. Established in the 1840s, it became the area's largest employer.

It was operated by John Davis, who arrived in Canada from England in 1840, who was one of the founders of Davisville Public School and was the village's first postmaster. The building housing the post office is still standing on the northeast corner of Yonge and Davisville Ave.

Most of the homes in the neighbourhood were built in the 1920s and '30s. There's a large collection of semi-detached residences, but also detached houses in the English Cottage and Edwardian styles. Davisville Village also has stretches of condominium and apartment buildings, with condos concentrated along Balliol and Merton Sts., Eglinton and Mount Pleasant, and highrise apartments especially prevalent on Davisville east of Yonge.

In keeping with the neighbourhood's urbanity, it's not surprising that tennis is so popular among residents. Situated among a cluster of highrises on Balliol St., Toronto Tennis City is a year-round facility providing outdoor play from spring to fall, and indoor play in winter, when a white dome is erected — an unusual sight on a city

street.

Six outdoor tennis courts are also available at June Rowlands Park, located at Mount Pleasant and Davisville, and home to the Davisville Tennis Club. In addition to the courts, the former Davisville Park has a baseball diamond, a playground, splash pad and lots of green space for recreation.

At the south end of Davisville Village, running from Bayview to Yonge, is Mount Pleasant Cemetery, which opened in 1876 and is a National Historic Site of Canada. It provides a peaceful place to walk, reflect and learn about the many famous Canadians who are buried there.