

Paul Wilson: Lakefront condo for \$3 million – or room next door for \$60

The police say, 'If you want to sleep quiet, go to Tony'"

By Paul Wilson, [CBC News](#)

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Contributor

This summer, after 20 years of delays, they announced a \$200-million condo-and-hotel complex for the Burlington waterfront. They say it's really going to change things down there.

And yet, there's a place right next door where time stands still. That would be the 10-room Ascot Motel, which looks just as it did several generations ago.

Mady Development, the condo builders, released a mock-up last month of their project. You can see the residential towers, one 22 floors, the other seven. And the retail space. And the eight-storey hotel, which they promise will be four-star.



This \$200-million condo-complex is coming to downtown Burlington. At right, in the trees, the old Ascot Motel lives on. (Mady Development)

But if you look off to the right of their rendering, nestled in amongst the trees, you see a long low building. That's the Ascot.

The pressures to develop this stretch of downtown waterfront are immense. Glittery towers have gone in across the road, and the nicer units there are seven figures.

At the Mady project – on land that was occupied by the 1960s Riviera Motel and a similar-vintage ice-cream drive-in – prices will start at \$500,000 and reach \$3 million. So how much longer can there be for little old motel next door?

It's Tony on the desk

Out front, there's the Ascot's neon-and-metal sign, straight out of the Fifties.

A nice home dominates the property. The office is in the back of the house. The bell rings as we walk through the door and owner Tony Vrkljan comes to the desk.

Tony isn't sure when the Ascot opened. He pulls out a postcard. On one side, a fuzzy image of the Ascot. On the other, it says: "Your host and hostess, Harold and Mabel Hooper." Tony thinks they were the first owners.

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From the Ascot property, the view includes the new Burlington pier. (Paul Wilson/ CBC)

He knows he's been here longest, more than 20 years. "Too long," he said.

Tony is not a showy guy. He politely declines to pose for a photo or to give his age. He's from Croatia, trained there to be a traffic engineer.

No website here

Instead he and wife Maria and two kids ended up right here. They bought the Ascot – one house, 10 motel rooms, one long-stay apartment unit and 155 feet of prime Lake Ontario waterfront.

Business, he says, is OK. The Ascot has no website, not even an e-mail address to make reservations. If you want a room, you call up or show up.

Tony says his customers range from construction workers to European tourists. The Ascot does appear on TripAdvisor, the big travel site where users get to say what they think of a place.



A bed, a desk, a little picture on the wall – all yours for \$60 at the Ascot. (Paul Wilson/ CBC)

There's the TripAdvisor Hotel list for Burlington. The Plains Road motels – Bell, Esquire, Royal, Crestwood – are all there, at the bottom of the list.

For some reason, the Ascot is on the "BBs and Inns" list. It's near the bottom, but the eight reviews are mostly kind: Excellent, 3; Very good, 2; Average, 2; Poor, 1; Terrible, 0.

Light on luxury

"Clean, certainly not luxurious," says one. "Owner seems to be fussy about the clientele, so it's not a party palace," says another.

No, not luxurious. For \$60, you get a double bed, a green-tiled bathroom, an old desk and a TV. AC, yes. Telephone, no.



The new Burlington pier provides a good view of the Ascot Motel. (Paul Wilson/ CBC)

As for the fussy part, Tony says that's true. "We have the best record. The police say, 'If you want to sleep quiet, go to Tony.'"

The front-lawn swimming pool has been gone some years. Otherwise, the place looks the same. When it's time to reroof, Tony always goes with shingles in original red.

Tony's hair is gray and he admits getting tired. He and Maria only close for a couple of weeks a year at Christmas and take a trip. He would like to travel more.

So if some developer came knocking? Tony doesn't hesitate for a moment: "My door is open."

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