New York State of Mind
By Don Proctor

To passing motorists on Toronto’s busiest thruway, Highway 401, a four-building condominium tower complex on the rise may look much like any other in a city where tower cranes pre-dominate. But when the finishing touches are put on the peaked roofs, the towers are expected to stand out, recognizable by their similarities to Manhattan landmarks—the Chrysler Building and The Waldorf-Astoria.

Aptly called New York Towers, the complex will be made of concrete cast-in-place structures clad in exterior insulation and finish systems. One of the biggest-ever EIFS projects in Toronto, it is not one just any contractor could have taken on. The $5 million contract was awarded to Lido Wall Systems, of Concord, a suburban community on the northern fringe of Toronto.

Owner Oscar Chiarotto says the project has put his newly expanded production facility to the test. Lido upgraded its plant about a year-and-a-half ago from 27,000 to almost 60,000 square feet, making it the largest of its kind owned by an EIFS contractor in Greater Toronto.

The complex’s first four buildings—two more will rise later—require close to 400,000 square feet of field-installed and prefabricated EIFS panels. The work has to be done in short order, with completion slated before another season of inhospitable weather cloaks Toronto. Field-applied EIFS require temperatures above 5 Celsius (41 Fahrenheit) for at least 48 hours, so Chiarotto’s company has until about October to complete the job.

Normally, on-site work can be done in colder months provided it is covered with blankets or tarps and warmed with heaters. But wrapping %-story towers in heated blankets defies logic in these chilly and often windy climes. Lido had completed model suites at the project over winter by covering them with transparent tarps for solar gain. Propane heaters were installed both inside the building and out to prevent flash freezing.

The panel system specified for the job is a source drained one, meaning wherever moisture can enter, passage for exit must be included. This prevents extreme loads that could result if moisture builds up behind EIFS panels of the tall towers. “We sat down with the customer, architect and the third-party consultant that does site reviews to try and put the best possible wall system together,” Chiarotto explains.

Roughly 5,000 man-days will be required for the field-applied segment of the contract.

The first three floors, consisting of luxury townhomes, will be ornately clad with classical mouldings and fine Deco-style detailing befitting the Manhattan emblems they aim to represent.

When work peaks this summer, a key challenge will be finding enough qualified EIFS applicators to meet the tight schedule. Chiarotto has come to expect labor shortages as part of business these days, but one bright light is the recent expansion of the Interior Systems Contractors’ Association’s recent training centre, which will pump out more EIFS recruits annually. Still, many of Lido’s best people have learned the trade through hands-on experience at the company’s pre-fab panel plant, which prepares them for in-field work.

The big contract could be one of a number of major EIFS projects in Toronto this year, where the hot pace of construction has continued over the past few years. Still, Chiarotto doesn’t suggest that that will translate into a banner year for his company. That is because there is a growing number of fly-by-night companies in business, many of which underbid reputable contractors (“with ridiculously low bids”) and don’t fulfill contract obligations. What’s more, they change business names to avoid leaving a traceable trail behind for sloppy and incomplete work.

About the Author
Don Procter is a free-lance writer in Ontario, Canada.