

THE VERDICT ON OLD TOWN

Eddie Greenspan tours the market district by Hailey Eisen

EDDIE GREENSPAN HAD already been at work for an hour when I arrived at his majestic King Street East office at 8 a.m. When I rang the buzzer at the century-old Bank of Commerce building, now housing the Greenspan White law firm, the country's most famous criminal lawyer was eager to take a break for breakfast.

"When I moved in here 11 years ago, I was tired of the towering buildings on Bay Street and wanted a place of my own," says Greenspan. As we cross the street, admiring St. Lawrence Hall — the city's first public meeting place, *circa* 1850 — Greenspan explains, "This is one of the most impressive facades in the city."

In this neighbourhood, referred to as Old Town, it's easy to imagine yourself in Europe. But, when Greenspan bought the building over a decade ago, Old Town was on the edge of downtown and not the vibrant, thriving community it is today. "The area really blossomed over the past eight years," he says, looking up the street with a sense of pride. As we stand on the corner, a group of George Brown College students pile off the streetcar and make their way to class while the coffee shops across the street begin to fill up with customers.

The short walk to the St. Lawrence Market on Jarvis Street between Front Street and the Esplanade, is a familiar one for Greenspan. A big supporter of the market, he comes here almost every day for breakfast. "I love the sights and smells of the market as it comes to life in the morning," he says. "For me, it's the best way to start the day." Once inside, we walk up the centre aisle of the market. Vendors greet Greenspan by name, and he happily returns the greetings. "You could go a whole day on Bay Street without anyone saying hello to you," he says. "Here, the people are so friendly."

The Market comes to life

The St. Lawrence Market, which has been named one of the 25 best markets in the world, by *Food & Wine* magazine, houses over 50 specialty vendors. Since 1901, the South Market has been known for its fruits, vegetables, meat and cheeses. Today, from Tuesday to Saturday, the market comes to life like clockwork. "No one here misses a day," says Greenspan. As we wander through the top floor of the market, vendors are already hard at work, unpacking loads of fresh fish and piling them onto cases of ice, slicing meats and

preparing foods for early morning customers. "It's like watching the city wake up," says Greenspan, who usually reads all three daily newspapers while sitting in front of his favourite breakfast stall. Of all the places to eat in the neighbourhood, this is where he feels most at home. Anyone who visits the market on a weekday morning is likely to spot Greenspan by the **Carousel Bakery**, known for its world famous peameal back bacon sandwich. A Toronto tradition, this breakfast-on-a-bun has been written about in the media more often than the

dating habits of Belinda Stronach. After enjoying a decadent breakfast, we continue on our tour of the market. Greenspan eagerly points out some of the market's best vendors: for deli meats and olives, **Scheffler's Delicatessen**; for cheese, **Alex Farm Products**; for hot dogs, **Manos Meats**; and for seafood, **Buster's Sea Cove**. "If I were condemned to eat in one place for the rest of my life," says Greenspan, "this would be it." Because of his demanding work schedule, Greenspan spends weekends in the St. Lawrence Market neighbourhood as well. Every Saturday he visits the

farmer's market in the North Market building. "In order to get a full sense of the market, you really have to visit it on Saturday," he says. If the market was ever at risk of being shut down, Greenspan says he would spend a long time fighting to keep it alive. "This place deserves to be here forever."

The best of Old Town

Though there is enough food in the market to satisfy any palate, the surrounding neighbourhood also boasts a huge selection of restaurants. Inside St. Lawrence Hall is Greenspan's favorite restaurant — **Biagio (155 King St. E.)**. This upscale eatery serves classic Italian fare in a beautiful dining room. "The owner is a very fine man and has become a genuine friend," says Greenspan. "We had a party here the night before my daughter's wedding." For the very best high-end seafood in the area, Greenspan recommends **Starfish (100 Adelaide St. E.)**. And, for seriously good Japanese food, Greenspan likes to eat at **Nami Japanese Seafood Restaurant (55 Adelaide St. E.)**.

While he does enjoy fine dining, Greenspan says some of his favourite restaurants aren't very fancy at all. When he's not at the market for breakfast, you can find him at **Zouly's Deli (244 King St. E.)** the best greasy spoon around. "Here some of the most important people in the city, including police officers and hydro workers, gather to solve all the world's problems before work," he says with a smile.

Old Town landmarks

The history of Old Town dates back to 1793 when Toronto was the town of York. The surviving buildings create an historic ambience unique to this part of the city. **Le Royal Meridien King Edward Hotel (37 King St. E.)** is a stunning building that has been serving guests for 100 years. Past guests include Rudyard Kipling, Mark Twain and the Beatles. Another landmark, the **St. James' Cathedral (65 Church St.)**, is the fourth church to be erected on the site since 1797. Greenspan loves to wander through the beautiful park and English gardens that stretch across an entire city block from his office to the church. One of the most famous buildings in Toronto is the **Flatiron Building (49 Wellington St. E.)**. Built in 1891 and recognized by its narrow shape, it's one of the best photo ops in the city.

Old Town entertainment

At the end of the day, Old Town comes to life with fabulous entertainment and live music. With a number of Toronto's finest theatres within walking distance,

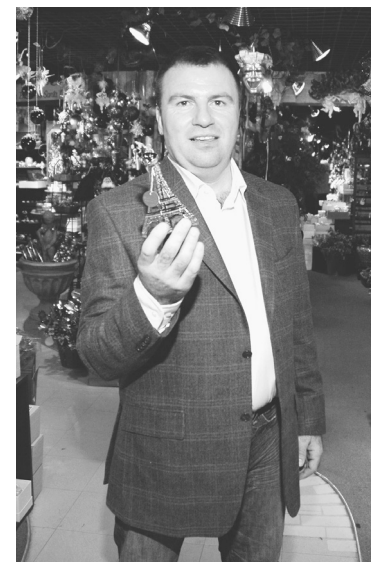
the neighbourhood is as vibrant at night as it is during the day. For quality, live entertainment, there is the **Hummingbird Centre for the Performing Arts (1 Front St. E.)** and the **St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts (27 Front St. E.)**. For the after dinner crowd, there is **C'est What (67 Front St. E.)** with 35 craft brewed beers on tap and live music performed by local talent. For a taste of North Africa, there's the **Foundation Room (19 Church St.)** featuring delicious cocktails and a trendy ambience.

Old Town holiday shopping

'Tis the season for shopping, and Old Town has many unique stores for all your holiday needs. For a beautiful selection of Christmas gifts from around the world, **Flatiron's Christmas market (51 Front St. E.)** is not to be missed. For that hard-to-shop-for-person on your list, why not visit **Timbuktu (39 Front St. E.)**, which boasts a selection of handcrafted furniture, clothing, linens and giftware from India, Morocco, Guatemala, Africa and more. Travelers will love **Europe Bound (47 Front St. E.)**, Toronto's unique outdoor adventure store. One of Toronto's most celebrated bookstores, **Nicholas Hoare (45 Front St. E.)**, also makes its home in Old Town. Here you'll find a huge selection of books and a knowledgeable staff, who will help you choose gifts for everyone on your list. The King Street East area (often referred to as the Design District) is becoming well-known for its vast selection of home decor and arty furniture shops. Large windows boast eclectic displays of high-end furniture for the ultra-modern homeowner. "This place really means a lot to me," says Greenspan of the St. Lawrence Market and surrounding area. "There is enough of a thriving community here that you need not go beyond the area to have a pretty rich life."



Breakfast at the market is a ritual for Eddie Greenspan



Find holiday gifts at Flatiron's market