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Anthony Casalanguida, general manager of Yorkdale Mall.

VINCE TALOTTA/TORONTO STAR

By **Jennifer Wells**
Feature Writer



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Anthony Casalanguida — California tan, Hugo Boss suit, David's lace-ups the colour of luscious caramel — is doing the circle thing, which, he clarifies, is really a racetrack move.

The names of luxe, less-than-luxe and mid-market retailers — from Tiffany's to Sirens — blur past as Casalanguida smoothly circumnavigates the clusters of stores at Yorkdale mall which are, as he notes, plotted in ovoid formation.

His feet barely touch the ground.

If there's one thing you don't want in retail, the mall general manager informs as he hydroplanes past Swarovski, it's the prospect of having shoppers hit a dead end. Dead ends in retail are very bad.

Seduction, on the other hand, seduction is good.

How about this: \$1,208? Is that seductive? That's the average sales per square foot that Yorkdale retailers are reeling in, twice the national average. More than twice, actually, and thus exceptionally seductive to retailers interested in testing Toronto's shopping waters. "Last month was the first month we got over \$1,200," Casalanguida says. "We've garnered close to 12 per cent growth year over year."

What's the trick?

Casalanguida is a man of detail. Retail is, at least in part, a numbers game.

A total of 113,000 visitors visited Yorkdale on Boxing Day. At one point that day 15,000 shoppers were on site.

Did you know: one in four Yorkdale shoppers uses the washroom during his/her visit?

Sales last year? Approximately \$780 million.

Back to that bit about seduction: I have brought along my lust list.

In announcing a 145,000-square-foot expansion of the country's first covered mall — "As new as tomorrow!" trilled the long-departed Simpson's department store when it opened its doors here 47 years ago — Yorkdale will be opening 40 new store spaces (to the roughly 240 already in place), a number of which are promised to be "first-to-market" brands.

Some of Yorkdale's "firsts" have been fun: the first "dual-auditorium theatre," by example, when the mall opened in 1964.

Other firsts not so much: "The first professional offices grouping of non-retail."

Nevertheless, Yorkdale was the radical "it" place in the mid '60s. "It's instant downtown even though it's uptown!" went the billing, with palm trees and fountains and, yes, air conditioning in summer and heating in winter. Simpson's managing director Allan Burton fancied his customers as "the young, opulent couple" along with the "eager-beaver executive type."

In these times it's the retail firsts that garner the most buzz in these times.

"Williams-Sonoma was first," says Casalanguida of the gourmet food cookware emporium's Yorkdale arrival. "The first True Religion (cool jeans.) The first Pottery Barn Kids. The first Crate & Barrel."

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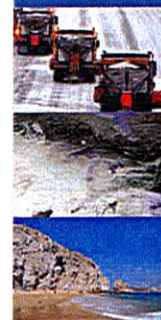
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And there are mall firsts. The first *enclosed* Tiffany. The first *enclosed* Burberry. (Tiffany and Burberry had already opened free-standing stores on Bloor.)

In 1964, you could have a roast cooked in the “electronic oven” at the mall’s Dominion store in just 11 minutes. That might have been a first.

Apple. Apple was a huge first. I say: “I’ve heard they’re doing \$45 to \$50 million a year (in sales).”

“You wouldn’t be incorrect in thinking those things,” responds Casalanguida. “If you get the Apple that means all the other U.S. retailers are saying to you ‘Okay, you’re a player in the market.’” Apple’s sales per square foot? Moving in on \$10,000.

“When we get inquiries from European and U.S. retailers it’s Bloor Street and Yorkdale,” says John Crombie, national retail director at commercial real estate broker Cushman & Wakefield Ltd. “Yorkdale just has that reputation internationally.”

Crombie is hearing names. Retailers that might be coming. AllSaints out of London, by example, purveyor of hip fashions and housewares. Intermix, the U.S. women’s wear chain that touts a designer list from Acne to Zac Posen, is being whispered. And, of course, the eagerly awaited Topshop.

Casalanguida doesn’t mind playing the lust list game, so he adds White House Black Market, the American boutique chain that offers mid-priced women’s wear, though he adds later that it appears to be too early for this retailer to make such a move.

Sigh. It’s almost February. We could use some cheering up.

“Is Intermix coming?”

“I don’t know actually.”

“J. Crew?”

“Definitely on our list,” he says, meaning the list of retailers he likes very much, not the list of retailers that have actually signed on.

“Ted Baker?” (Men’s and women’s fashion out of London.)

“Yes, absolutely on our list.”

“Uniqlo?” (Exceptionally cool wear out of Japan.)

“Yes, but they’re not ready.”

“AllSaints?”

“Yes, definitely on our list.”

Brooks Brothers? “They’ve expressed an interest but maybe there’s a men’s store that wants to do something bigger and more beautiful.”

Aha!

What is Larry Rosen up to? Surely he’s in the mood to expand Yorkdale’s Harry Rosen location given the mall’s expanding fortunes?

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"I cannot confirm or deny," says Casalanguida.

"Regretfully, I am not in a position to disclose anything at this time," says Larry Rosen via email, offering the most promising news of the day.

Other existing retailers may choose to relocate into bigger Yorkdale space as part of the expansion. Apple? Apple is a logical thought, Casalanguida avers, giving nothing away.

The mall manager urges patience. "We could fill up 145,000 square feet immediately," he insists. But the retail mix has to be note perfect, the mall has to remain flexible to accommodate the next great retail wonder and negotiations can be terribly trying given the "accommodating" posture of strapped American landlords showering tenant inducements at the feet of retailers.

Well, you can't please everyone. Casalanguida's 13-year-old son is less than impressed. "He says, 'Dad, your mall sucks.'"

"Why?"

"Because we don't have an Abercrombie & Fitch."

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