

APARTMENT RETAIL

What do you do when you can't quite afford sky-high rents in an urban retail district, but you've got merchandise you need to get in front of shoppers? You get creative.

That's what Nike Onile did, choosing to open a boutique inside a downtown Toronto condo. Considered Canada's first shopping apartment, The Apt by 800 Sq. Ft. is merchandised to look just like someone's home — but everything, from the paintings on the wall to the kitchen glassware, the towels and soaps in the bathroom and the clothes hanging in the closet, is for sale. The merchandise is sourced from Onile's design company, 800 Sq. Ft.

Showing items in context has proven to be a purchasing motivator, capitalizing on what Onile calls "execution blindness."

"In a regular shop, things are often kind of placed in multiples, and you can't really get any sense of how it would look in a home," Onile told the *Financial Post*. "That's why staging [the practice of adding décor and home furnishings to houses that are for sale] happened. People walk into an empty home and think, 'Oh, I don't know if this would work.' Then you put furniture in it, and people say 'Oh yes, I could totally live here.' ... It's coming into a space where you can buy everything that you love."

The Apt operates by appointment only and hosts a handful of shopping parties monthly, inviting shoppers to browse and buy. Since shopping takes place by appointment, Onile does not need to operate the business within a zoned retail space.

It's not the first time that a retail shop has been set up in an apartment; there are similar venues in Vancouver, Berlin and New York. Still, it's a creative approach to selling to a highly visual customer base that increasingly expects retailers to cut through the clutter and show them the newest items in context.

