

Builder/Architect

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Concert Properties Ltd.

A landmark development by Concert Properties, Alvar sits within one of downtown Vancouver's oldest, most established neighbourhoods — on the West End's last major waterfront high-rise development site.

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By Susan M. Boyce

You might think that Concert Properties is all about residential construction. After all, during their 16-year history, they have successfully built more than 6,000 condominium and rental homes in municipalities throughout British Columbia, Alberta, and more recently, Ontario.

Although the year 2005 is far from over, Concert has already been awarded the prestigious National Grand SAM Award for the second year in a row, a Gold Georgie for Best Residential Development in British Columbia (StoneCliff in West Vancouver), and the Urban Development Institute's (UDI) Award for Excellence for Seniors Housing (The



Above: Stainless steel cabinetry and an over-scale island set a tone of grandeur in the Alvar penthouse kitchen.

Left: Ansonia is one of seven buildings constructed within the Vancouver master-planned community of Arbutus Walk.



O'Keefe in Vancouver). Tapestry, one of their most recent Vancouver condominium projects, was more than 60 percent sold out prior to the official public opening as home buyers already familiar with the company's reputation for excellence lined up to sign sales contracts during the Priority Preview Event.

So you could be forgiven for thinking Concert Properties equates to residential construction. However, you'd be missing the main point.

"At Concert, we build more than housing developments. We build communities, vibrant communities, where neighbours greet each other and people feel safe taking an evening stroll at any time of the year," says President and CEO David Podmore. "But what many people don't know is that we are also one of the largest,

A rarity within the Vancouver condominium market, Brio is a four-story, concrete-built low-rise.

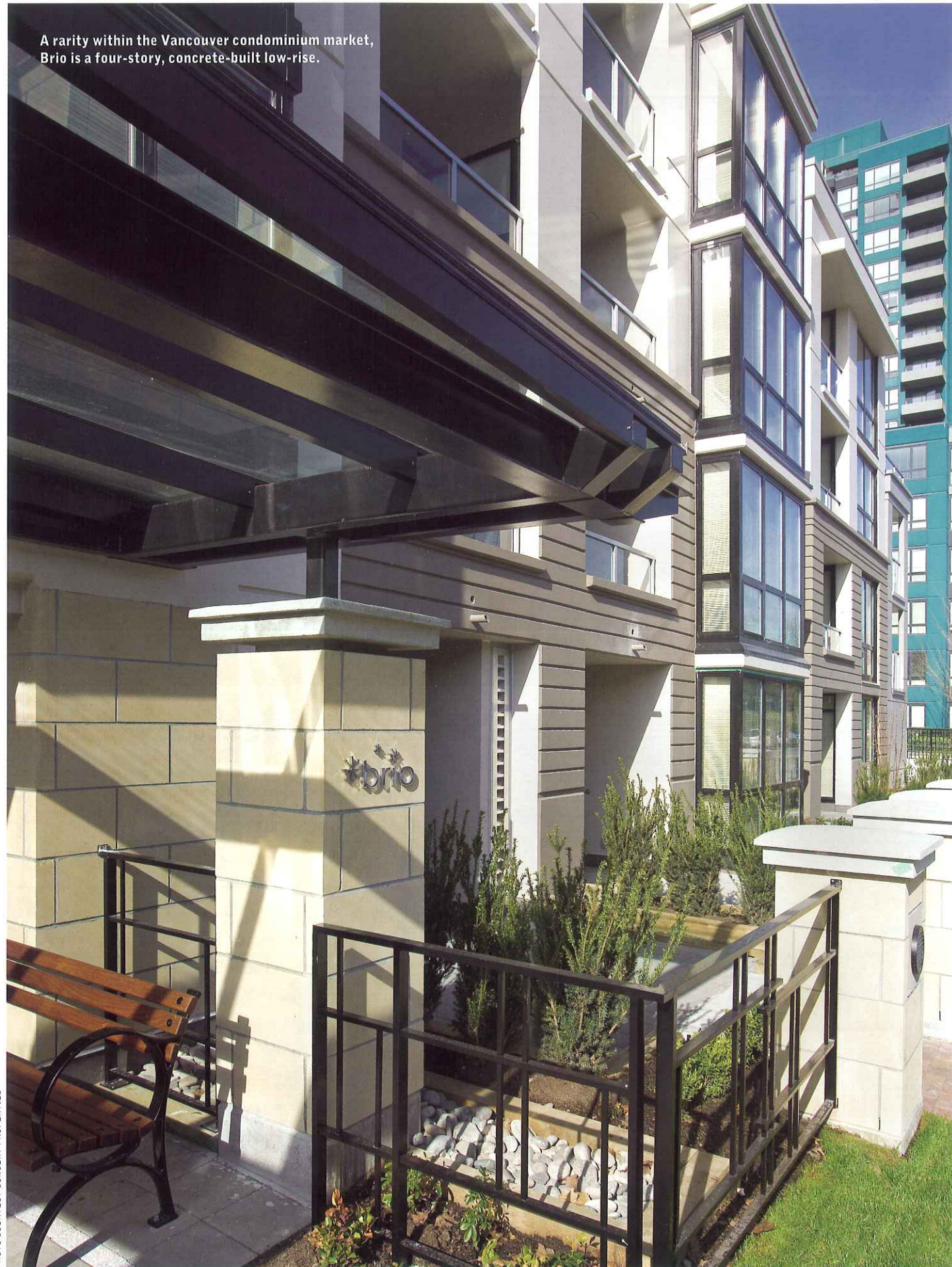


PHOTO COURTESY CONCERT PROPERTIES

most diversified real estate development companies in Canada, building far more than just residential,” he adds, rapidly listing off an extensive list of distribution centres, office/industrial parks, downtown office towers and resort properties — more than 3.5 million square feet in total.

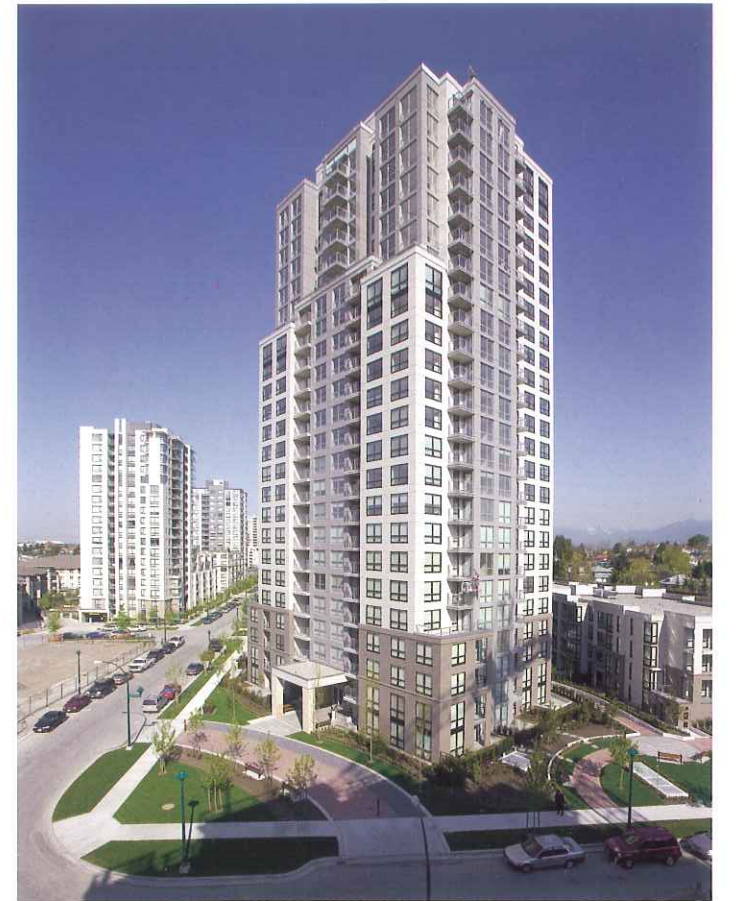
And that’s just a starting point. “Over the coming few years, I see Concert developing a much larger presence in Alberta — both residentially and industrially — as well as Ontario and Quebec,” Podmore says. “We are also actively pursuing new markets in Oregon, Washington and Southern California.”

INNOVATION AND INSPIRATION

Now a company with holding assets in excess of \$800 million and shareholders’ equity of some \$410 million, Concert Properties’ journey began in 1989 with a straightforward, if controversial, mandate: build attractive rental housing that was

Right: Latitude is the most recent addition to Collingwood Village, a 28-acre master-planned community nearing completion in East Vancouver.

Below: The O’Keefe at Arbutus Walk is redefining senior living and was awarded the 2003 Grand SAM Award by the Canadian Home Builders’ Association.



PHOTOS COURTESY CONCERT PROPERTIES



Awarded the 2004 Grand SAM Award by the Canadian Home Builders' Association, StoneCliff includes three 15-storey towers rising from a forested 9.3 acre mountainside setting.

so affordable it would give back the dignity and self-confidence many lower income tenants lose when forced to live under conditions that could at best be described as undesirable and at worst as squalor. The project was named simply 600 Drake, and it still clearly holds a special place in Podmore's heart.

"The objective was to create a fully self-contained suite that would rent for less than \$500, but would be the kind of home where you would feel comfortable inviting someone over for dinner," Podmore explains. To make the numbers work, suites had to be small — between 265 and 285 square feet. Pundits and nay-sayers said it couldn't be done. Concert Properties proved them wrong.

Rather than go it alone, Concert looked to the surrounding community for input and recommendations. They held focus groups, they asked questions, and they built mock-up suites that were trailered around the city so potential tenants could critique layout and design. But mostly they listened, and gradually a strategy evolved.

Murphy beds and French balconies expanded usable space. Floor-to-ceiling windows, virtually unheard of at that time, especially in low income housing, gave an expansive, airy ambience to the compact units. A full kitchen allowed tenants the option of conserving funds without sacrificing the ability to have a hot meal. "We also pioneered the concept of combining the TV room and laundry, so it became a place where people gather to socialize," Podmore says. The project was such a success that today some of the original tenants still call 600 Drake home.

MOVING WITH THE TIMES

Triumphing over the extreme constraints of 600 Drake has given Concert a unique perspective on, as one happy homeowner describes it, "doing space well." Collingwood Village, Concert's wildly popular master-planned community on the eastern edge of Vancouver, has won numerous awards, as well as the hearts of hundreds of satisfied homeowners. Alvar, a landmark 28-storey concrete tower in Vancouver's prestigious West End, garnered accolades from purchasers and industry insiders with its timeless architecture and opulent finishing details.

With Concert's recent entry into the Ontario marketplace, the company is now introducing eastern Canada to this high level of expertise. The first challenge was addressing the shortage of rental housing in Ontario. Concert's answer was to join forces with the Ontario Municipal Employees Retirement System (OMERS) in order to develop Prelude — a \$46 million, 26-storey rental apartment building and a first-ever co-ownership venture for OMERS. Together with OMERS, Concert will invest more than \$300 million to develop more than 2,000 units of assured rental housing for the Toronto area over the next five years.

Already under way are two additional Ontario projects. Jazz, located in downtown Toronto, will create almost 400 upscale rental residences, plus an impressive array of in-house amenities, including a private theatre, fitness club and fireside lounge. Now breaking ground on the first phase, Village Gate West, Concert and OMERS' other current collaboration is the first of a three-phase,

master-planned redevelopment project in Etobicoke — a combination of rental, seniors' independent and assisted living, plus a proposed pair of 20- to 25-storey condominium towers.

GIVING BACK

Philanthropy is as much a cornerstone of Concert Properties' success as construction expertise. Early in its history, Concert chose to donate a portion of its project management fees to a hospice for East Vancouver residents with a terminal illness. Concert built

Right: Concert Properties' latest development on Vancouver's west side, Tapestry offers a selection of larger-than-average homes surrounded by three new city parks.

Below: From its meticulously manicured garden courtyard and impressive porte cochere entrance to the solid concrete construction, the four-storey Tropez is truly the measure of a fine home.





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Only one of Concert's many office, industrial and commercial buildings, 1140 West Pender offers attractive modern-design office space with a retail component on the ground level.

a 25,000-square-foot community amenities building that provides a variety of programs, services and recreational activities to the same neighbourhood. Later, they introduced a groundbreaking initiative to facilitate community/police interaction by donating space for the first Community Crime Prevention Office in Canada.

And it's not only current considerations. Concert tackles the

looming shortage of skilled construction trades people head-on. "Concert is a major sponsor of BCIT's Trades Discovery Program," Podmore says. "The program gives people who are interested in the trades but don't have much knowledge about what they entail 20 weeks of exposure to 17 different trades. Participants visit actual job sites, receive rudimentary training and can then make a more informed decision about what area they might want to specialize in."

Concert also partnered with 25 other companies and individuals to create a series of annual bursaries of \$250 for students entering the trades. "The money is meant to cover their safety equipment — hard hat, work boots and goggles," Podmore says.

On an individual basis, Concert initiated the Concert Golf Tournament nine years ago. Now with a core foundation of \$400,000, the fund provides up to \$40,000 worth of bursaries annually to financially assist students in their final term of training. "We hope the government will reinstitute fund matching," Podmore says. "But whether they do or not, it's essential that we support the next generation of tradespeople."

LOOKING AHEAD

Looking to the future, Podmore is enthusiastic about the many diversification options open to Concert. "We plan to focus on more resort and industrial properties over the next year," he says. "We will also continue to push the limits

of affordability in residential housing."

And somehow it goes without saying that Concert Properties will continue to build innovative, attractive neighbourhoods, where people can rediscover the joys of community.

For more information, contact Lizette Parsons Bell at Concert Properties; telephone: (604) 788-4170, or visit them at www.concertproperties.com. ■