

“...as for the subtle something, that quality of air that emanates from old trees, that so wonderfully charges and renews a weary spirit.”

– Robert Louis Stevenson

Chelsea

by Kim Wooder

A gorgeous old walnut tree is the centrepiece at Chelsea, Concert’s newest residential development in Victoria on Vancouver Island, B.C. Planted at the turn of the century, the tree was deemed a must-keep by city officials, along with an iron-gated stone wall.

The combination of tree and wall created a challenge for everyone involved. Campbell Construction project manager George Zeeman says the tree’s proximity to both the wall and the new building had some people shaking their heads at the complexity of the task. “We had to navigate around the

root structure of this enormous tree and, at the same time, come up with a methodology to build a retaining wall that would take the earth pressure off the heritage wall (caused by previous attempts to shore it up with backfill), while also anchoring the wall to bring it up to seismic code.”

Durante Kreuk Ltd. landscape architect Ken McKillop gives credit to the construction company for doing whatever it took to keep the tree healthy. McKillop agrees that both the stone wall and the tree were important to the site, adding that the challenge presented was more than offset by

their value. “It is such a good feature in the landscape,” he explains. “It begins to shape what happens with the rest of the outdoor space, giving it a sense of enclosure and tying everything together.” Substantial space was required around the tree, providing a generous outdoor area. A more formal garden was built with ample seating and water features.

McKillop says everything fits – the walnut tree, the wall, the shape of the building; everything flows together. “When I walk up to Chelsea, I feel like I’m coming to a much more established project than one where you have to

start from scratch,” notes McKillop.

Architect Colin Shrubbs feels the same way. “It’s a beautiful site. There was a lot to work with and everything fits. My parents live in the Fairfield area and they would walk by and say that the project looked great. They like it and so do all their friends.” Shrubbs says the onus was on the team to get things just right, given the giant tree, stone wall and older neighbourhood. As it was for the general contractor and landscape architect, the walnut tree gave the architect reason to pause. “It is so enormous,” says Shrubbs. “We had to look and see where the corner



PHOTOS COURTESY: CONCERT PROPERTIES LTD.



of the building was because it brushed the branches." Adjustments were made and the result is a beautiful lowrise concrete building with generous suites that feature kitchens with top-end appliances, quartz countertops and porcelain tile, plenty of room for entertaining and floor-to-ceiling windows.

Interior designer Tara Wells provided her expertise to make the décor complement the building's exterior, giving suites a contemporary yet elegant quality. Wells describes the result as classic good taste that will stand the test of time. "Concert wanted to construct a building from an architectural point of view that complemented the existing neighbourhood. The result is a wonderful residence," says Wells.

Concert's director of development Lisa Lock agrees. "I love the location. It's very close to the core of downtown Victoria, yet when you walk through the neighbourhood with its beautiful

old homes and tree-lined streets, it feels like you are further away from the city than you actually are. Such an ideal location is a rare find. The L shape of the building also allowed us to maximize the outdoor living spaces with oversize patios and decks. The result feels more 'house' than 'condo', which is great for residents who are downsizing and don't want to sacrifice outdoor living. I also love the fact that Chelsea has a historic neighbourhood context and yet provides the ease of condo living. And of course the heritage wall – the way it is slightly bowed adds a character and grit that you wouldn't find if it was brand new."

The bowed wall isn't the only admired imperfection that helps make Chelsea a home. Two large entry lanterns were part of the wall at the front entrance, and Concert went to great lengths to find the right parts to refurbish the lights. But to the discerning eye there's an anomaly. "One of the lanterns looks like it's missing a piece," explains Lock. "We learned that it has always been that way – from its original installation, so we didn't change it or try to make it perfect. It was those little things that allowed people working on the project to be more creative, knowing they were working on something out of the ordinary."

The description of Chelsea as out of the ordinary strikes structural consultant Michael O'Keefe as apt. O'Keefe says the wall was in bad shape. "The tricky aspect was trying to determine how much of this wall could be left in its old condition above the upgraded portion and still meet code requirements so it doesn't fall over in an earthquake." The tree was an added complication. O'Keefe recalls, "We needed to come up with a foundation design for the wall that spanned over the root area to leave it untouched with room for the roots to keep growing."

Lock says the end result is exactly as the developer envisioned. "When you walk through the neighbourhood, it feels like Chelsea has been there forever." ■

LOCATION

999 Burdett Avenue
Victoria, B.C.

OWNER

Concert Properties Ltd.

ARCHITECT

DYS Architecture
Richard Henry Architects

GENERAL CONTRACTOR

Campbell Construction Ltd.

STRUCTURAL CONSULTANT

Glottman Simpson Consulting
Engineers

MECHANICAL CONSULTANT

Sterling Cooper & Associates

ELECTRICAL CONSULTANT

Nemetz (S/A) & Associates Ltd.

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

Durante Kreuk Ltd.

INTERIOR DESIGN

Portico Design Group Ltd.

TOTAL AREA

98,280 square feet

TOTAL CONSTRUCTION COST

\$30 million

CONGRATULATIONS FROM



PROUD TO BE PART OF THE CHELSEA PROJECT

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