

Concert Properties Ltd.

By Susan M. Boyce

It's been called many things. The golden years, turning over the reins, a new beginning and yes, a few names that are a little less kind, less gentle. But whatever your definition of retirement is, get set to have any preconceived ideas turned upside down and inside out, because Tapestry senior living communities are definitely not your grandpa's retirement home.

Built by Vancouver-based Concert Properties Ltd., Canada's two Tapestry communities — The O'Keefe — Arbutus Walk in Vancouver and Village Gate West in Toronto — are shining examples of the philosophy that by integrating all generations within a single neighbourhood, everyone benefits.

"Concert is known as a development company that builds whole communities, not just structures," says Ken Bogress, Vice President of Development. "We believe seniors are an intrinsic part of any vibrant community. There should be no stigma attached to being older. You shouldn't have to live differently than anyone else does, and the home you choose to live in should definitely not feel institutional."

Both Village Gate West and The O'Keefe — Arbutus Walk are single components of Concert master-planned communities created specifically to include market strata housing, independent living, retail/services, plus outdoor green spaces and parks. Suites are visually indistinguishable from conventional, luxury condominiums — full kitchen, full bath, bright living rooms wrapped with windows and cozy bedrooms. "These are homes anyone can feel proud to bring guests into," Ken says.

When you look closer, however, there's also a plethora of extras to make life easier — lever handles on all doors, step-in showers, in-suite storage areas spacious enough to accommodate a walker or power scooter. The phone has larger, easy-to-read numbers and an emergency response button. Even in the common hallways there are subtle details — illumination situated so there are no overlapping areas of light that could be mistaken as a step and cause tripping, use of slightly bolder colours that create a heritage-style elegance while being easier to distinguish, ramps so cleverly integrated you're hardly aware of their existence until you need one.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CONCERT PROPERTIES LTD.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CONCERT PROPERTIES LTD.

“But what truly differentiates us in the seniors housing market is the fact we offer all our services — services like meals, laundry or housekeeping — on an à la carte basis,” Ken says. “You aren’t buying a package filled with services you don’t want. You’re buying only the things you need, so as your needs change, you can add more ... or less. It’s about enhancing active living, not pigeonholing people.”

FIVE-STAR FABULOUS — EVERY DAY

So seriously does Tapestry take its commitment to perfecting the art of active living, that when I initially arrive at The O’Keefe in Vancouver’s Arbutus Walk neighbourhood, I’m convinced I’ve taken a wrong turn. From the sheer visual pizzazz and refinement, I’m convinced I’ve stepped into a resort hotel.

The lobby is five star — gracious, classy, yet filled with a refreshing vitality. To my left, a baby grand piano is tuned and ready for the pianist who’s flipping through sheet music for this afternoon’s cocktail and hors d’oeuvres concert. Ahead of me, the 24-hour concierge/reception boasts a crisp, contemporary design, sweeping counter and colourful floral arrangement. Around the corner, I catch a glimpse of the dining room — formal linens, fine china, elegant flatware.

“Mags!” A lady with immaculately coifed hair and a saucy smile of delight leaps up from her seat beside the fireplace to hug a woman approaching the front desk. “Mags, it’s so good to see you. When

are you coming back to us?” The two embrace like old friends.

“That’s typical of the way our residents think of the people who work here — they’re friends, not just staff,” says Wendy Walker, Tapestry’s sales representative, who’s arrived to give me a tour. Turns out, Mags, one of Tapestry’s dinner servers, is temporarily on leave to recoup from an injury, but still pops in almost every day simply to visit. By the time four more people have given Mags a hug, I can’t help myself ... I give her one, too. Tapestry simply fosters that kind of instant camaraderie.

RESORT LIVING YOUR WAY

Ken’s already told me Tapestry chefs are typically recruited from the upper echelons of the hospitality industry, but my first glimpse of this week’s menus finds me attempting to come up with an excuse to stay till dinner — pecan chicken, slow-braised curried lamb stew, Pollo con Chianti, and even Duck à l’Orange. “Service is restaurant style,” Ken adds. “You make a reservation, you eat when you want and you sit with whoever you choose to sit with.”

Still, it’s Tapestry’s many resort-style amenities (a full 20% of the total square footage is devoted to making life easier, more active and more fun for residents) I can’t wait to see — amenities that go way beyond the traditional library lounge, Internet café and games room, although natural, beautifully appointed examples of each are here as well.



A cheer precedes us from the media room. Two ladies, controls firmly grasped in hand and intense concentration on their faces, are engaged in a spirited round of Wii Cattle Racing on the mega-sized TV screen. I confess, I've never heard of the popular video game, yet here are people in their 80s adroitly maneuvering digital bulls along a track. Whoever suggested seniors have difficulty with our computerized world seriously needs to check this crowd out.

Ryan Rosar, who's visiting from Leisure Care, the company that handles daily operations at all Tapestry residences, points across the room to another unique Tapestry feature, the Posit Science Brain Fitness centre. An eight- to 10-week program, Posit Science is a challenging mental workout that's fun. "One lady used to check the menu choices every morning, but by the time she got back to tell her, she could only remember one of the five choices. Now, she usually remembers three or four," Ryan says.

On the top floor, Wendy shows me the state-of-the-art gym with windows on three sides and views across English Bay. A gentleman in colourful Bermuda shorts is just completing his new stretch routine under the watchful eye of Tapestry's full-time kinesiologist. "It's like every resident has a personal trainer here," Wendy says.

Next stop is the outdoor patio with so much room you could dance, followed by the hair salon and spa with massage tables and treatment rooms. "Every Tapestry community also has its own, chauffeured town car available for hire," she adds. "When

someone needs to go to the theatre or for an appointment, it's so much nicer to have a driver you know than take a taxi."

LOOKING AHEAD

"Concert has always maintained a mandate of steady growth, and the Tapestry brand is no exception," Ken stresses. "Our goal for the next five years is to open four new facilities, primarily within metro Vancouver and Toronto. Not only are these types of independent living communities needed, but it will give us a much greater economy of scale."

The first of these new Tapestry communities is already well under construction at the heart of the University of British Columbia's prestigious Wesbrook Village neighbourhood. With an anticipated opening date of late fall 2010, Tapestry at Wesbrook Village will be comprised of two six-storey concrete buildings linked by an above-ground walkway and street-level pedestrian greenway.

Sure to be a well-used addition, classrooms suitable for meetings or special lectures will be available for both resident and the community at large. "It's part of the way we integrate Tapestry with the entire Wesbrook community," Ken says. "By inviting the public as well as our resident to use our facilities, it's like interweaving the fabric of life, of past and present — which is really what a tapestry is all about."

Tapestry communities can be visited online at www.DiscoverTapestry.com. ■