

URBAN LIVING

Condo boom pushing out city's creatives

Artists are being squeezed out of the very spaces where culture is created and new businesses are grown



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None is better at making something out of nothing than arts groups in pricey Vancouver. We have heard the grim news recently about our theatre, dance, film and visual arts groups getting the heave-ho from their residences and studios in downtown, Gastown and the Downtown Eastside. Our cultural class is scrambling for space and making-do – as our creators always do – but a downtown without the studios and residences of artists is a dismal prospect, Calgary without the old world charm.

The reason for this is that Vancouver's great condo transformation continues unabated, and no corner of our downtown peninsula (or anywhere nearby) is safe from the prevailing urban ideology of *hausen uber alles*.

What a strange new city we are making: chock full of

boomers preparing retirement nests; hub to global investors transforming their dollars/euros/pesos/yuan/rupiah into condo walls. But as a direct result, we are also shrinking core-area offices and studios, the very spaces where culture is created and where new businesses are grown.

Vancouverites may regret for a long time the way former planning head Larry Beasley's "Living First" downtown housing policy guidelines were allowed to morph into a "condos only" downtown development reality. To bring the irony of this situation into focus, just ask the art galleries and artists who were cleared off their Homer Street locale so that Amacon Developments could build a condo complex launched into pre-sales last week, bearing the name "The Beasley."

The choice of this condo's name seems to me yet more evidence of "Vancouver: the postmodern edition." Find me another city, anywhere, where a developer happily names an apartment tower after the city planner who approved its construction.

Larry Beasley, to his credit, had Amacon endow a scholarship in his name for UBC plan-

ning students, in lieu of residual naming payments for the 200-unit, 33-storey condo.

The Contemporary Art Gallery, the Vancouver International Film Centre and other arts groups have benefited from our condo boom, with developers of adjacent properties being granted extra floors for building in exchange for providing arts facilities, which are managed by the City of Vancouver's Politburo-sounding Office of Cultural Affairs.

This particular private-public partnership is fruitful, but these arrangements do not create low-cost housing or work spaces for individual artists – studios with good light for painters, soundproof rehearsal space for musicians and actors, shops for designers and crafts people.

A new condo project at Main and Prior streets is preserving a historic building, but the proposed development is forcing the exit of the artists and designers who now call it home. Faint hope comes from the current review of Vancouver's cultural space needs, from individual studios right up to the advisability, or inaccessibility, of a quarter-billion-dollar new home for the Van-

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couver Art Gallery. This study is being wrapped up by Toronto consultants Artspace for the Office of Cultural Affairs under Sue Harvey.

As Ms. Harvey observed at last fall's national Creative Cities conference, few doubt that every month Vancouver sees a growing shortage of affordable studios and housing for its artists. It is a shame that such affordability is not achieved the way some U.S. cities do, by requiring developers to set aside a fixed proportion of any new project's housing units as permanently earmarked for affordable rentals. Affordable and integrated rentals – not funds poured into general revenues; not the high-profile museums and theatres that politicians love to open; not

little ghettos of social housing concentrated in one neighbourhood, but spaces for artists (and seniors and students) integrated into every residential floor.

I have been to apartment towers like this in Manhattan. As I rode up the elevator with the developer, neither he nor I had any idea whether the people riding with us were paying the market rate of \$5,000 a month, or the permanently deeded, -affordable rate of \$1,000 a month.

Under Vancouver's former planning directors Ray Spaxman and Mr. Beasley, the city pursued a policy of setting aside 20 per cent of the land in large development sites for social housing. But because senior governments have largely moved out of the affordable housing business, many of the resulting sites remain empty and forlorn.

One thing is certain: Vancouver's theatre and visual artists have made virtues out of their studio-less necessities. Our city is renowned continent-wide for its site-specific theatre and dance productions, the fine arts pushed into the street because of an all-conquering housing boom.

Vancouver's recent PuSh

Theatre Festival featured several standout creative uses of downtown public spaces because, according to artistic director Norman Armour, "we are really short on performance spaces." A four-person theatre troupe from Sydney, Australia, brought us one of them, *Small Metal Objects*, in which actors wearing radio mikes milled around speaking their lines amid the comings and goings of Vancouver Central Library patrons. With audiences sitting on temporary risers, half the fun was gazing into the faces of the hundreds of people in Library Square's atrium, trying to figure out who were the actors and who were just acting out the dramas of daily life. None of us will ever look at Moshe Safdie's grand atrium the same way.

I am no fan of Safdie's architecture, but his urban design is always thoughtful. Here the social logic of his bridge-like entrance walkway made sense to me for the first time. By limiting the space, by pushing people together inside the city's largest single room, the architect makes Vancouverites interact. It's a little like the Aussie play itself, literal theatre of the street.

ON SITE » VICTORIA



Condos geared to nature lovers

BY THOMASINA BARNES

There are many reasons to purchase one of the 84 condominium units at 365 Waterfront, says Rod Wilborn, senior vice-president of sales and marketing for Concert Properties. At the top of his list are the waterfront location and, well, the waterfront location.

Situated within the award-winning Selkirk Community in Victoria's Upper Harbour, 365 Waterfront is surrounded by water and park land, guaranteeing a permanent waterfront location and view for most of the suites.

As well, "365 Waterfront is outside the hustle of the downtown core but still within walking distance of the Inner Harbour," notes Mr. Wilborn. "It is the best of both worlds."

With the Galloping Goose network of biking and walking trails adjacent to the project site, as well as storage space for bicycles and kayaks, it will

365 WATERFRONT

DEVELOPER: Concert Properties

PRICE: From \$425,000 to \$1,795,000

SIZE: 863 sq. ft. to 1,901 sq. ft.

SALES CENTRE: 754 Humboldt St., Victoria

CONTACT: Phone 250-382-3382 or visit www.365waterfront.com

be as easy for residents to escape to nature as to commute to work. "365 Waterfront's location, bordering the Galloping Goose trail, adjacent to the Upper Harbour waters and near the Gorge Rowing Centre, encourages an active lifestyle," says Mr. Wilborn. "The homes appeal to active buyers who love the outdoors but want to maintain a sense of connectivity to downtown Victoria."

The building's six-storey, terraced architecture lends itself to outdoor entertaining and allows for views from most of the units. A welcoming lobby offers a fireside lounge that opens onto a landscaped patio.

The marine-inspired interiors, by BBA Design Consultants Inc., have engineered oak flooring, window-walls of glass, custom centre island-styled kitchens, porcelain tiled electric fireplaces and custom cabinetry.

Mr. Wilborn says Concert Properties was excited to be part of the Selkirk development, and aims to create a community of neighbours with its project. "365 Waterfront is a single-phased development located within a pristine master-planned community that is nearing completion, so residents will not be living in the midst of an on-going construction environment, but rather a completed, modern, urban community."

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ON SITE » NORTH VANCOUVER

First nation rolls out luxury homes

SIGNATURE ESTATES AT RAVEN WOODS

DEVELOPER: Takaya Developments

PRICE: Starting at \$848,000

SIZE: 2,287 sq. ft. to 3,300 sq. ft.

SALES CENTRE: 501-560 Raven Woods Drive, North Vancouver

CONTACT: 604-929-1915 or www.ravenwoods.com

BY THOMASINA BARNES

The Signature Estates at Raven Woods are the latest release from the 800-home residential community being built on the historical lands of the Tsleil-Waututh First Nation along the Burrard Inlet in North Vancouver. "We wanted to build a quality project on our land in North Vancouver to add to the homes that have already been so well-received in this development," says Leonard George, director of economic development for the Tsleil-Waututh First Nation.

The Raven Woods community has evolved over the past 15 years under the direction of Takaya Developments, in partnership with the Tsleil-Waututh Nation, the Kuok Group and NSI Strategic Investments Ltd. The developers aim to bring quality construction and



design into what Mr. George calls "one of Vancouver's best communities."

"The North Shore is known for its mountains, parks, recreational facilities and sweeping views of the downtown Vancouver skyline," he says. "The natural splendour of the Raven Woods community, located just off Mount Seymour Parkway, is in close proximity to lush forests and the curving shoreline that hugs the Burrard Inlet. The residences are only steps away from hiking trails, schools, restaurants and shopping. Plus, the convenience of downtown is only 20 minutes away."

The 48 luxury town homes were built by Howard Bingham Hill Architects, Durante Kreuk Landscape Architects and False Creek Design Group.

The West Coast-style houses have gas fireplaces, stainless steel appliances, hardwood flooring, soaker tubs, wine refrigeration and private outdoor patios.

All previous releases at Raven Woods sold out before completion, and the success has "resulted in economic prosperity for the Tsleil-Waututh Nation," says Mr. George.

"We now have a daycare and gymnasium that serve our nation as well as the broader community, and we've created different opportunities to get our young people involved in business as a means of training and learning responsibility," he says.

Occupancy for Signature Estates is slated for December 2009.

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DONE DEAL » FALSE CREEK NORTH

628 KINGHORNE MEWS, UNIT 503

ASKING PRICE: \$1,458,000

SELLING PRICE: \$1,375,000

PREVIOUS SELLING PRICE: \$1,284,000 (Sept. 2007)

TAXES: \$5,379 (2007)

DAYS ON MARKET: 29

LISTING AGENT: Keith Roy, Macdonald Realty

BY THOMASINA BARNES

The Silver Sea by Concord [Pacific] is one of the finest buildings in Vancouver. It is a luxury boutique building with the highest standard of finishings, a great location and incredible security," says agent Keith Roy.

Because of its reputation and waterfront location, the previous owners of this 1,302-square-foot suite were able to sell it just months after buying it. "Even the parking garage lobby is tiled and has art on the walls," notes Mr. Roy. "No expense was spared in this building. The quality is truly



worthy of the waterfront location."

With its nearly 10 metres of glass overlooking the False Creek Yacht Club toward Granville Island, the new owners of this two-bedroom suite fell in love with it immediately, says Mr. Roy. "[For them], living in Vancouver means living at the water."

The waterfront location will give the new owners direct access to the marina and sea wall, along with the area's numerous shops, restaurants, recreation and entertainment.

The suite has direct elevator access, two waterfront balconies, marble and walnut flooring, and a gourmet kitchen. The master bathroom has a custom-made marble vanity,



soaker tub and steam shower.

The updated finishings include roller shades, custom built-ins and Sub-Zero and Miele appliances.

"This is by far the best floor plan in the building," says Mr. Roy. "Plus, you can't get any closer to the water than this." » Special to The Globe and Mail

DONE DEAL » WEST VANCOUVER

5472 KEITH RD.

ASKING PRICE: \$1,569,000

SELLING PRICE: \$1,450,000

TAXES: \$4,663 (2007)

DAYS ON MARKET: 151

LISTING AGENT: Holly Wood, ReMax Masters

BY THOMASINA BARNES

Purchasing another person's second home can feel a bit like buying a car from that little old lady who only drove it on Sundays. "This was the previous owner's 'other' home, so it is really half the age, half lived in and very well kept," agent Holly Wood says of this 4,003-square-foot home in West Vancouver's Caulfield neighbourhood. The new owners, who were moving back to Vancouver from Edmonton, "fell in love with this home as soon as



they walked in," she says.

The four-bedroom house boasts high ceilings, three private decks and ocean and mountain views. It sits on a lot measuring 13,078 square feet, with a greenbelt behind and the ocean in front.

The master bedroom has a walk-in closet and spa-style ensuite where even the jetted tub enjoys a view.

The main floor offers a den, family room and eat-in kitchen, as well as formal living and

dining rooms. The finished basement houses a games room and wine cellar.

"I knew this was the one for them," Ms. Wood says of the new owners. "We looked at several homes, but this was the one. In real estate it doesn't matter if it's one day on the market or six months on the market, every home has its own special buyer waiting for it, sort of like its destiny." » Special to The Globe and Mail

DONE DEAL » WEST DUNBAR

4005 WEST 29TH AVE.

ASKING PRICE: \$1,598,000

SELLING PRICE: \$1,700,000

TAXES: \$5,110 (2007)

DAYS ON MARKET: 11

LISTING AGENT: Walter Wells, Sutton West Coast Realty

BY THOMASINA BARNES

Although this three-bedroom bungalow would offer ample room for any family, it sold for more than \$100,000 over the asking price because of its property value alone, says agent Walter Wells. "While prices seemed to have peaked just before Christmas, recent prices have begun to rise even further this year, as this record-breaking price shows," he says.



Built in the 1950s, the house has a finished basement with seven-foot ceilings, a large recreation room and two extra bedrooms that could easily be converted into a separate suite, Mr. Wells says. The house also has a solar-heated hot water tank, built-in vacuum system, and in-ground sprinkler system, but what attracted buyers was the 53-by-130 foot lot in a West Dunbar location.

"The general location on the west side of Vancouver contin-

ues to be greatly in demand for buyers who can afford the million-dollar prices," the agent says, noting, "Dunbar is 10 minutes from downtown, 10 minutes from the airport, but also just 10 minutes from Vancouver's beaches and is situated on the edge of Pacific Spirit Park."

While Mr. Wells describes the home as "well-kept," it is sure to see a complete renovation, if not demolition.

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