

Renaissance takes hold in capital

Buyers are looking to once-dull city for urban lifestyle at affordable price

JESSICA BARRETT SPECIAL TO THE SUN



The 84-suite Escher on Broughton, a development in the heart of Victoria's downtown core, is slated for completion in 2017.

The cost of modern condos in the heart of hip urban districts may have left some buyers shut out of markets in Vancouver, but across the Georgia Strait in Victoria, Escher on Broughton offers the sought-after urban experience at an affordable price.



Escher features Chard Development's signature rooftop terrace and a wide range of design options.

Slated for Victoria's downtown core, the 84-suite development is poised to put residents right in the heart of a city on the ascent, says developer David Chard. With five other downtown developments under his belt, Chard says Victoria is in the midst of a revitalization that may surprise those who know the city by its former reputation as a tourist trap for the newly wed and nearly dead.

"We feel we've been part of this ... I'll call it a renaissance, happening in Victoria," he said. With Victoria's tech sector drawing young talent from across the country and a renewed interest from the retirement market, people are flocking to the city and planning to stay.

"We're seeing more younger people coming in, working in the offices downtown and creating a vibrancy, which is fantastic to see," said Chard. And with that has come the necessary influx of hip businesses to offer urban cachet, such as Victory Barbers & Brand or Vancouver offshoot Meat & Bread. "The second aspect is we're back to seeing an increase of people from across Canada really refocusing on Victoria, because there was a hiatus here for the last five years."

Add to that Escher's prime positioning across the street from the YMCA (which offers a full fitness centre) on a quieter street somewhat removed from the hustle of the business core, and you've got a location that has appealed to a wide base of buyers, said Jeff Griffiths, vice-president of marketing for Chard. He said buyers range from their late 20s to late 60s and hail from as far afield as Ontario, the Prairies and other parts of B.C. "You've got a diverse group, and that certainly has always been our market," he said.

Building on its experience with the downtown Victoria market, the developer has also refined the project's design to appeal to modern lifestyles, with plenty of in-house amenities and cutting-edge customization options. The 10-storey building's bold and modern design by Vancouver's Musson Cattell Mackey boasts Chard's signature rooftop terrace along with an outdoor kitchen and lounge. On the ground floor, homeowners have access to secure bike storage, charging stations for electric cars and scooters and dog-washing amenities for those with pets. A meeting room with Wi-Fi is also available for resident use.

Breaking from the trend of offering one or two colour options, Escher also offers an array of suite customization op-

tions not found in many condo developments. "Everybody's used to having the two or three colour palettes and a few upgrade options," said Griffiths. "We, being a smaller developer, have worked with lots of purchasers over the years to customize suites for them. So what we thought is we'd take that a step further and actually make that a set program."

Escher's website allows prospective buyers to view an array of options for their suite, starting with a choice of three colour palettes that each offer several choices for walls, counters, floors and finishings. "We allow our purchasers to move things around within those," Griffiths added. "Which makes for thousands and thousands of different options."

For Betty Lohr, 65, Escher's location in walkable downtown was a major factor in purchasing a one-bedroom condo at Escher, as was Chard's reputation as a leader in Victoria's urban renewal. A self-described "realestate junkie," Lohr said she felt comfortable buying after looking at Chard's reputation in the area. "He's interested in revitalizing the downtown, and downtown is where I want to live," she said.

Inside her 600-square-foot unit, Lohr said she's looking forward to design details like a breakfast bar that looks out onto a window, rather than inward to the kitchen.

But the biggest selling feature is the buzz of the up-and-coming urban atmosphere Lohr has been enjoying since relocating to Victoria last year from Vernon — a community she considered too small for her active lifestyle.

Escher
 Project size: 84 condos
 Address: 838 Broughton St., Victoria
 Residence size: 474 — 1,350 sq. ft.
 Price range: \$229,000 - \$979,000
 Sales centre address: 102-608 Broughton St.
 Hours: noon to 5 p.m., Wed. to Sun.
 Telephone: 250-590-9940
 Developer: Chard Development Ltd.
 Architect: Musson Cattell Mackey Partnership
 Interior design: Proscenium Architecture + Interiors
 Website: eschervictoria.com
 Warranty: Travelers 2-5-10
 Occupancy: Early 2017