

Stella 96 condos in an 13-stories by Shenoor Jadavji, 350 Kingsway Development

VANCOUVER I Auto group's owners pursue a retail-below, residential-above innovation at Stella

Michael Sasges

Sun

Saturday, October, 01, 2005



STELLA

Project location: 12th and Kingsway, Vancouver

Presentation centre address:

350 Kingsway

Telephone: 604-677-1099

Web: www.liveatstella.com

Project size: 96 apartments, gardenhomes and two-tiered penthouses

Residence size: One bedroom, one bedroom + den and two bedrooms

Prices: one bedroom, \$252,000 to \$489,000; penthouses, \$559,000 to \$799,000

Developer: Shenoor Jadavji, 350 Kingsway Development Ltd.

Architect: Acton Ostry

Interior design: Cristina Oberti

Tentative occupancy: Fall, 2007

Warranty: St. Paul Guarantee

Holy torque wrench, Vancouver, a residential tower over a vehicle retailer! The Stella highrise at 12th and Kingsway will not only punch skyward with robust architecture equal to a landmark location, but it will do so from the developer's Honda dealership. You can see the vehicle retailer's 12th Avenue display windows in the lower right hand of this artist's sketch, the Biltmore Hotel behind and across Kingway.

Stella is the latest step up in the living-over-the-shop version of multiple-residence housing.

If I were asked to restrict the local list of residence over retail to just one building erected in our times, it would be the apartment building on West Fourth between Yew and Vine streets, its corners at the street anchored by a Capers and a Coast Mountain Sport. The Plimley Motors dealership was located on the site for many, many years before its replacement, in the early '90s, by the mixed-used "Plimley" building that is there now.

(If asked to name two, I would add the Uno new-home project across the street from Stella.)

Vehicle showrooms under residences are neither common nor uncommon. But a vehicle retailer under homes, and further a business in which vehicles will be sold and serviced is unique, reports Stella's project manager, Donald Redden.

"It's a use that hasn't been done before," he said in an interview. "I think, maybe, 10 years ago developers would have been reluctant to do it, even five years ago."

He doubts - he's determined - their proximity will impose on either retailer or resident. "When we started taking a look at how an auto retailer works versus a residential building, [we found] they do work quite well together. They have different peak times. The dealership is busy during the day when most people are away at work. In the evenings it's dead quiet and on the weekends it's very quiet. . . ."

"What we're concerned with and what we've addressed is any noise that may emanate from the dealership, or any odours. That's been front and centre. So, for example, the slab separating the two is thick plus we've got one of our consultants working on all the equipment that's there. I don't think that will be an issue; it can't be an issue."

A vehicle dealership as fellow occupant of a building means that, after the police stations' parking garages, Stella's parking garage could be the most secure in the city. "The only crossover between the auto retailer and the residents will be in the underground parkade," the project's architects said in an e-mailed Q&A. "The needs of high-end auto retailers include an enhanced degree of security in parking areas. Residents of Stella will benefit from this."

Mark Ostry and Russell Acton didn't quibble with my suggestion that the dealership is as important a component of the Stella story as is its location, at a landmark Vancouver intersection, and the structure they've designed there.

"The type of retail is secondary to the principle of distinguishing the uses from each other by expressing their unique relationships to the street and neighbourhood."

The podium or base is the key component of whatever success or failure they and the building will know in the fullness of time, their intention a podium "that responds directly to the context, the surrounding streets and the city's Wellness Walkway" that will eventually connect the hospitals and retirement homes in the neighbourhood with the new Mount Pleasant Community Centre at Kingsway and Eighth. Stella will spring the walkway north and across 12th Avenue.

Expressions of the new-home project's eventual relationship with the new retail, with the streets that border it and with the neighbourhood include:

- [1] Wider than typical sidewalks for pedestrians, achieved by setting the retail back from the property line.
- [2] The showroom windows on Kingsway and 12th mark the intersection -- they will, indeed, intersect -- "but also animate the streetscape by providing views into the retail space."
- [3] "The street wall along 12th Avenue and along Kingsway, both commercial streets, is defined by the retail use."
- [4] The tower, in contrast, "relates directly to the residential Sophia Street," achieved by orienting it perpendicular to the commercial streets and, therefore, to the north and south.
- [5] "A large yet intimate public open space . . ."
- [6] Minimization of retail and residential "crossover" to the parking garage.

There are three visible elements to the Stella new-home project and two invisible.

"The low-rise podium base is the commercial use of the project. The mid-rise horizontal band of two-storey townhouses and the residential tower are situated above the podium," architects Ostry and Acton write.

The two invisible elements are "air-space parcels," one owned by the strata owners and the other by the Destination Auto Group and the Jadavji family involved in the auto retailer.

"Unlike most developments where the developer comes in, does the development, sells it and, then, vacates the neighbourhood, this developer has owned this site for many years and will continue to own land there for many years," project manager Redden said.

The developer's staying-on pledge was critical to city hall acceptance of the tower's height.

"In the zoning there's no upper-height limit. So height is granted by the city; the developer has to earn height," Redden said.

". . . we're almost 130 feet in height, and will be the tallest building in the area for years to come. The question is, how did we earn that?"

"One of the things the family did is buy a triangle of land [along 12th Avenue and Sophia] and the lane [between that parcel and their starting-point property] and dedicated that to the city as public open space, as a park, that they [the family] will maintain forever."

Landscape architect Don Vaughan has the park assignment and it will be "landscaped to the higher level of quality associated with the city's Wellness Walkway," architects Ostry and Acton write.

The architects consider the city-hall design-review process "one of the best in the country" and report "the highest urban design and architectural standards" guided the city-hall review of the Stella design.

"The City challenged us to set a new standard for design and livability in new mixed-use residential projects in the neighbourhood. The City of Vancouver's respected Urban Design Panel was resounding in their support of the project."

Outdoor amenities, of which the new park will be one component, are a critical part of the offer to buy at Stella, Redden said, because market research suggested that "outdoor spaces" would give Stella marketplace edge, over not only nearby new-home projects, but new and resale Yaletown product.

Commented the architects: "Residents will pass through a procession of outdoor spaces from the public-entry park through the semi-private green roof deck to the private balconies and roof decks associated with every unit.

"The private decks and balconies are twice as large as typical balconies and extend the sense of interior space out and into the view.

"Balconies are staggered on the north and south facades. This staggering allows for greater amounts of natural light to enter the suites. The staggering also results in a dynamic architectural composition."



The Stella two-bedroom is an invitation to buyers to make all kinds of life-transforming things happen at the newhome project, for better or for worse. (Remember, in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, things really start to go wrong for Stella and Stanley after her weird sister, Blanche, begins to share their apartment.) The Stella two-bedroom apartments offer two bedrooms (obviously), but each bedroom has its own bathroom and balcony. Imagine what the diminution of privacy considerations addressed by this living arrangement could generate . . . two childless couples, any sexual persuasion, but sympathetic after years of socializing and travel together . . . a couple wanting to downsize, but with an adult child still in the natal home . . . an empty-nester couple with widow responsibilities, but a worldly widow, a merry widow . . . The Stella project manager, Donald Redden, calls these two-bedroom apartments 'mingles.' 'It's a more democratic design in terms of who gets the best bedroom,' he comments. 'They both have their own balcony; they both have their own private bathroom.' In the floor plan reproduced here the living space equals 925 square feet.