

601 Herald - 27 condos in an 4-storey building by Airey Development

Suzanne Morphet

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601 Herald

Location: Victoria

Project size: 27 homes, 4-storey building

Residence size: 446 sq. ft-- 1,018 sq. ft.

Prices: from \$249,900

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Developer: Airey Development

Architect: Matrix Architecture and Planning

Interiors: Evoke

Occupancy: summer/fall 2011

If Trevor Linden's name carries any cachet from his years as 'Captain Canuck' you would hardly know it given his low profile in a new multifamily residential development in Victoria.

"We've talked about it and I don't think it does," says Howard Airey, president of the Airey Group, whom Linden has partnered with to develop the four-storey 27-unit building in the city's historic Chinatown.

"With all due respect to Trevor, when we did our building in Vancouver, 'West,' I think it was interesting for people, but at the end of the day they have to like what we're doing, it has to make sense."

Airey and Linden were both in Victoria recently to dig a few shovelfuls of dirt to officially launch the construction phase of their project at 601 Herald St. This is the second project together, but Linden has also built some single-family homes in Vancouver with his brother, Jamie, including two contemporary-style homes in the Point Grey neighbourhood.

Still, Linden doesn't call himself a developer. "You know, I've always enjoyed the real estate side, the personal side, from the time I was in my early 20s, looking at unique real estate products and that sort of thing. I enjoy the creative side of it so when people ask me what I do, I don't say 'I'm a developer,' but I suppose in a way I am."

Asked what he does call himself these days, he pauses to consider, then suggests, "I'm an unemployed hockey player?"

But according to Airey, Linden is not a passive investor in this project. He's in the Vancouver office every day comanaging all aspects of the development.

"Real estate development is one or two big moves and a million small moves," says Airey. "Trevor's very good on the big moves and on the small stuff He's not popular by accident, this guy is a real natural leader and can motivate people and obviously he's a team player. He's a huge asset."

Both partners really like Victoria, says Airey, explaining why they chose to build across the Strait for the first time, and they scouted out a lot of locations before purchasing the vacant lot next to the Chinese

Benevolent Society. But they purchased just before the recession, forcing them to sit tight them for months. Even now, says Airey, it takes careful planning to make sure the project is viable.

They've been working closely with Durwest Construction, a Victoria-based builder that has numerous high profile projects under its belt, including the Victoria International Airport expansion, the Bear Mountain Clubhouse and the Sidney Pier Hotel and condos.

"The margins are very tight on development right now," explains Airey. "Construction costs are the biggest variable and they've been really great managing that."

But the first step was determining what kind of condominiums are in demand in Victoria. To answer that, the partners met with local realtors.

"We organized two or three events where we had realtors come and tell us what they actually thought was missing in the market," says Airey. "What came out of that was [that] having a mix of unit types, offering a range for everybody, would be the smartest thing that we could do." So that's what the partners designed, with units ranging from 400 square feet to over 1,000 square feet and prices starting at \$249,900. The top floor, two-storey units with 18-foot ceilings climb to \$489,900. Though 400 square feet sounds small, Linden says Victoria has lots of condos that are even smaller, some no bigger than hotel rooms.

"We never did any of that, because we could never see ourselves living in something like that, so we really built a product where people live and work and that will be home for them."

The building's brick exterior is traditional and designed to fit into the historic neighbourhood, the second oldest Chinatown in North America. But the interiors will be modern, says Linden, reflecting his and Airey's personal preferences.

The architect who is looking after that part of the project is David Nicolay of Evoke International Design, who also worked with Linden on the single family homes he built with his brother.

"These interiors are very clean, a little bit contemporary and that appeals to my eye" says Linden. "A lot of things - the products we chose, colour palettes -are all things we would see ourselves liking, for sure."

Some buyers will have terraces bordering an interior courtyard, something the partners have dubbed the Zen garden. "It's a very contemporary garden so homes on the inside will look onto that urban garden," says Airey.

"You know, in New York City, there's a lot of these, people don't even know they're there, but there are these great urban gardens behind the compounds and apartments that you look down onto."

Another modern feature is a bicycle storage and maintenance room, right off the street rather than in the basement, where they're typically located. This could have been retail space for sale, but Airey says it's their nod to the environment, providing owners with a facility that will encourage them to bike rather than use cars.

"Sales are great at this stage of development," report Mark Lawless and Rebecca Ross, realtors for 601 Herald. "We are now 30 per cent sold."

The project is attracting a wide range of people, from young first-time buyers to retired empty nesters and everything in-between.

"It's definitely a neighbourhood I could see myself living in," says Linden. But while he has no plans to move in, his parents have bought a unit.

They live in Medicine Hat, Alta., so for them, Linden says "it's a place to escape the nasty weather, and my dad really likes the area, the neighbourhood."

Suzanne Morphet is a freelance writer in Victoria and co-author of the Vancouver Island Book of Everything.



Former NHL star Trevor Linden speaks before turning the sod on his newest development project at 601 Herald St. in Victoria. The four-storey 27-unit building in the city's historic Chinatown is Linden's second project with Howard Airey, president of the Airey Group. Photograph by: Darren Stone, Postmedia News, Vancouver Sun

