

The Sovereign - 36 condos in an 11-storey tower by Chard Development Ltd.

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Sun

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Project name: The Sovereign

Location: Old Town neighbourhood, where Gordon meets Broughton Street.

Project size/ scope: 36 homes in an 11-storey building.

Prices: \$359,000 -- \$2.8 million (incl. net HST)

Developers: Chard Development Ltd.

Architect: Musson Cattell Mackey Partnership

Interiors: BBA Design Consultants

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Occupancy: Fall 2012

What does little ol' Victoria have in common with much bigger, more densely populated cities like New York, Chicago, Pittsburgh, and even Vancouver?

Not much right now, perhaps, but by the fall of 2012, Victoria will have a residential building with a car elevator, just like you'd find in cities where space is at a premium and real estate is priced accordingly.

Space -- or the lack of it -- is what's behind Victoria's entry into the car-elevator world, as well.

The Sovereign, which will have 36 homes, is being built on a former parking lot that's just 92 feet by 104 feet.

"One hundred and 20 feet is kind of a magic dimension for parking and we don't have that," says architect Bill Reid, of Musson Cattell Mackey Partnership. "So right off the bat, we're too small and therefore inefficient."

But Reid says the project's developer -Chard Development -was able to "take a negative and turn it into a positive."

Instead of building a ramp that would have taken up so much of the available space they "might get six cars on a floor," Chard opted to install two car elevators. "So this was really a way of getting our parking into a tight floor area."

Even though car elevators are not cheap -"they get up into the six figures, 100 grand, quite easily," says Reid -they're cheaper than blasting and drilling in a city like Victoria, which sits on lots of rock.

"It's an expensive place to build an underground parking garage, so anything we can do to minimize the extent of the garage is a payback."

Without the need for a ramp, parking spaces for the building can be contained on four floors; two below ground level, one above, and the ground floor itself.

But aside from the practicalities for the developer, a car elevator is a "cool" factor for buyers, admits Reid. "It's kind of exclusive. That's not why we're doing it, but it's kind of neat, it has a certain appeal."

Roy and Gladys Abrams think so. The Victoria couple were among the first to purchase a condo in The Sovereign when pre-sales opened in mid-May.

Gladys Abrams says the car elevator "is a bragging right for us," noting it's innovative and also very "green", since less space is wasted on parking.

She also likes the fact that a car elevator makes the building more secure. No one can access the garage without going into the elevator and the only way to open the elevator is with a special fob that only the owners will have.

Once you're in the car elevator, you press another button on the fob to take you to your parking floor, then you back out, park, and take a passenger elevator to your condo.

The Sovereign is being built in the old part of Victoria, close to the Inner Harbour, with restaurants, theatres, art galleries and shops within walking distance. Owners will have some pretty highbrow neighbours -The Fairmont Empress Hotel and the Union Club are just a couple blocks away.

As its name suggests, The Sovereign should fit right into "old" Victoria. Developer Dave Chard says it's the only new luxury building he's aware of that's moving forward in the city.

"It's evident that a project such as this, with its unique location and quality features, was needed in the downtown Victoria market," he says, remarking on the amount of interest received in the 11-storey building since pre-sales began.

The Sovereign will be the developer's fourth project in downtown Victoria in five years and its first luxury building. Floor sizes range from 656 to 1,621 square feet.

Each of the 36 suites comes with high-end finishes, such as wide-plank flooring, wool carpeting in the bedrooms, full-height pantries and granite countertops.

"We have tried hard to differentiate our building amenities with a 12th-floor rooftop terrace for the use of all building residents and a guest suite for friends and family, the car elevators, traditional materials on the building exterior and by creating a blend of rich but contemporary interiors," says Chard. "Our goal with The Sovereign is to set the bar at a new level of quality for Victoria."

And if you're wondering if the car elevators will be as upscale as the rest of the building, architect Bill Reid says: "We won't have mirrors and wood panels, but we might have some stainless steel to give it a good look."



The living areas in the Sovereign residences will have ample glazing, as these computerized renderings demonstrate.



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