

NEW-HOME PROJECT PROFILE

Townline completes Victoria transformation

Hudson's Bay store, abandoned after 80 years, now an address for 152 residences while incorporating ideas on recycling, sustainability

BY SUZANNE MORPHET

Four years and \$80 million later, the transformation from old Victoria department store to new condominium project is complete.

The Hudson's Bay Store is now The Hudson. And what was once a four-storey, state-of-the-art shopper's paradise is now a six-storey, 152-unit, modern residential building with enough retail space on its first floor to recall those vibrant retail years.

The road from retail to residential was about as rough as the weathered exterior on the Georgian-styled building when the Bay abandoned it after 82 years. Old buildings always have surprises — and this one was no exception — but the Vancouver developer who bought the property in 2006, Townline Group of Companies, wasn't counting on enduring

a recession halfway through the reconstruction.

Vice-president Bob Pearce says the economic meltdown a couple years ago brought the restoration almost to a halt for about eight months as the company had to subdivide the block-size property into three smaller chunks to satisfy lenders. Pearce admits "when the wheels fell off [the economy] in 2008" he questioned whether the company had made the right decision to even take on the massive heritage project.

Townline has converted some Vancouver heritage buildings into condos, including the Crane Building on Beatty Street and 1180 Homer in Yaletown, but the company is better known for new construction and infill.

But any second thoughts have obviously passed, as Pearce was all smiles a few weeks ago when he got to show off The Hudson in its restored

glory for the cameras. "We are thrilled to be involved with perhaps the most historically significant heritage re-adaptation in B.C.," he said. "This will not only breathe new life into the building itself, but into the surrounding Uptown Victoria community."

Steven Barber, Victoria's heritage planner, couldn't agree more. "The Hudson's Bay Company was the company that founded Victoria, and now here we are with their department store being rejuvenated in such a magnificent fashion."

Barber said his goals for the property were twofold: put the old building to new use and retain important heritage elements such as the terra cotta exterior and the original wood windows. "They've done all that, they've done a fabulous job," he enthused as he walked about the property.

"It's really one of the most significant landmarks in the

city, and I think the attention to detail that they paid ... they had to completely reconstruct the whole thing and at the same time had to incorporate seismic upgrading details ... so [an] incredibly complex technical exercise," Barber said.

Part of that process included replacing any cracked or missing terra cotta tiles. Broken ones were sent to one of the few terra cotta manufacturers still in existence — in New York — for new moulds to be made by hand, as they were back at the turn of the last century.

The Hudson's Bay Store is unique in Victoria for the extent of its terra cotta facade — about 25,000 tiles cover three sides of the building from top to bottom on the original four floors. Other local historic buildings, such as the Union Club and the Royal Theatre, have some terra cotta but are mostly brick, which was a cheaper



building material at the time. "This is part of the prestige of the Hudson's Bay being the premier department store in Canada," explained Ken Johnson, Townline's heritage consultant. Johnson researched the store's history and found numerous references to it in *The Beaver*, a magazine the company started as a newsletter for its employees. In

the magazine's October 1921 edition, for instance, associate editor A.S. Woollard described the store this way: "Architecturally, the new store is an edifice of splendid design and execution, having been planned and erected along the lines of the most up-to-date department stores on the continent. It embodies the latest ideas in store construction as developed in the greatest mercantile centres of the world." Today, the Hudson embodies the latest thinking about recycling and sustainability, with about half the old building incorporated into the new one, according to Johnson. Each home is also heated and cooled by geothermal heat pumps, which work by taking heat from the ground in the winter months and putting unwanted heat into the ground in the summer months.

CONTINUES ON D18



After an expenditure of \$80 million, The Hudson, from Townline Group of Companies, is ready for occupancy. The main photo shows the finished exterior; the top photo, the new common entrance. The photos above display the project's show home. The building used to house a Hudson's Bay department store.

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HERITAGE DEVELOPMENT

The Hudson set to open its doors


 DARREN STONE, TIMES COLONIST
 The Hudson is almost ready for its new residents to move in.

\$80 million, 4 years later, downtown has new landmark

ANDREW A. DUFFY
Times Colonist

Bob Pearce had been waiting for a day like this for four years, and yesterday he beamed as he got to show off the end product of his company's massive \$80-million reinvention and reclamation of the historic Hudson's Bay Company building.

The vice-president of development for the Townline Group, which bought the historic building in 2006, was clearly relishing the chance to show off the development.

"I get to see this every day, so there really is a sense of accomplishment and it's quite rewarding to be able to show it off finally," he said. "It's especially rewarding when you think what a livable space it is, and what a great place it will be to live."

The Hudson, a 152-unit residential project built within the 89 year-old walls of the Hudson's Bay building on Douglas Street is near completion as workers put finishing touches on the units homeowners will take possession of over the next few weeks.

It's taken four years, \$80 million and plenty of patience to get to this point.

It was just two years ago that he led the *Times Colonist* through the rubble-strewn skeleton of the building that looked more like a war zone than a potential home.

He said the road has been long one with a few surprises along the way, but he is trying to keep it all in perspective.

"Yes it's been a long time, but it's not so much when you consider the restoration and the size of the building, most restorations are much more manageable, but this is a big building with big challenges," he said.

Most of those challenges were beyond the view of the average passerby — often it looked as though there was little happening at the site leading to plenty of speculation over the last four years that the Hudson would never get built.

But behind the shuttered windows and terra cotta facade, and often well below the ground, there was an army at work.

"Take the seismic upgrades alone, that was a year just going through the structure and doing it in a way that it's basically buried in the building, that takes a while and a lot of work," he said, adding the terra cotta refurbishing and establishing an underground parkade also took time. "Yes it all extended the time period but the gratification is there in the end."

The result is impressive.



DARREN STONE, TIMES COLONIST

The main entrance features touches of the past.

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Go inside the Hudson with a virtual tour of the site and new suites. Also check the photo gallery

HUDSON TIMELINE

1909 - Fact finding mission leads Hudson's Bay Company to separate retail business from fur and land business.

1913 - Construction begins on the store at what is now 1701 Douglas St.

1914 - Construction halts due to depressed economy and labour shortage resulting from First World War.

1921 - The Georgian-styled store opens Sept. 19 after \$1.5 million is spent to build it. There are 50 departments and 250 employees and state of the art heating, cooling and ventilation systems, elevators and escalators.

2002 - Hudson's Bay Company announces in September it will move to the former Eaton Centre in the downtown core

2003 - The 1701 Douglas St. store is shuttered.

2006 - Townline buys the building.

2010 - Conversion to a modern residential building with a historic facade is complete.

modern spaces wrapped in history, with overheight ceilings and the massive original windows to create a bright and seemingly spacious living area.

There are also some touches to tie the sleek inwards of the new building with its past. An original chandelier hangs at the main entrance off Fisgard Street and a display of old heating and boiler gauges and a lighted red-lettered sign reclaimed from the original parking garage that reads Entrance to Store hangs at the south elevator lobby.

The package gets a thumbs up from the city's heritage department.

"I think it's fabulous," said Steve Barber, the city's heritage planner. "I remember walking by this building when it was shuttered and wondering what's going to happen and to see this now, it's fantastic. They did a wonderful job on the exterior on the heritage element restoring the terra cotta and keeping the old wood windows."

The Hudson has sold 95 of its 152 units, and Pearce said they were fortunate they did not lose any sales despite the recession.

"That's always a concern when the market changes like that," he said, noting they sold two-thirds of the suites in 2007 before coming off the market for two

years.

The sales centre reopened in June, and sales manager Tracy Menzies said they have had a number of inquiries, but at this point the Victoria market wants to see the finished product before buying.

The same holds true for the 40,000 square feet of retail space at the ground level which almost surrounds the Hudson.

There are no leases signed as yet, but Pearce said there has been a lot of interest.

He envisions about 15 tenants splitting up the space.

"We want to maintain the right kind of mix of tenants, we want to create vibrancy on the streets," he said.

"There will probably be one or two large ones in there but the objective and preference is a series of small, hopefully local tenants, to add personality to what happens here."

What's happening in the area, according to the City of Victoria is a rejuvenation of the northern end of the downtown core.

Barber said the Hudson — the first part of Townline's four-phase development — is a move in the right direction.

"It's all part and parcel of a strategy to strengthen and rejuvenate downtown," he said. "We really don't have enough people living downtown, but this project has brought a huge number of units to the centre core of the city and it will really help the whole north end of Douglas Street."

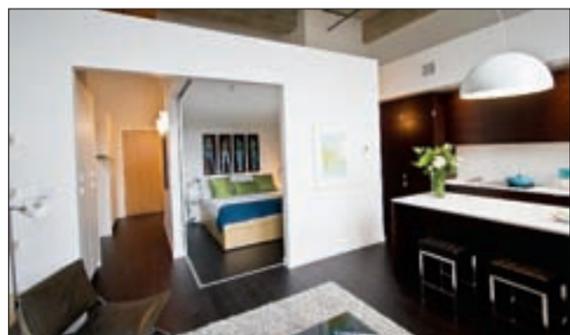
Townline is already at work on the next phase, a 12-storey tower on a portion of the old Bay parkade. The 120-unit tower was to have been a partnership with the province to establish affordable housing downtown. The province recently pulled out of the deal, which would have cost B.C. \$18 million and provided about \$10,000 toward the rental units in the building, but Townline intends to go ahead.

"We have had a number of people we've talked to and continue to do so and expect we will have a new partner to help us kick it off," said Pearce, who said they hope to start pouring the foundation in January.

There are two other towers to come on that lot, a 19-storey tower on Blanshard Avenue and a 24-storey building on Herald Street.

At the same time Townline is also working on new plans for the old Radius building site at the corner of Caledonia and Blanshard.

— aduffy@timescolonist.com


 DARREN STONE, TIMES COLONIST
 The \$80-million development features 152 units.


DARREN STONE, TIMES COLONIST

The developers kept much of the ambience with over-height ceilings and large windows.



DARREN STONE, TIMES COLONIST

The rooftop looks over

Compliments of CallRealEstate.ca

NEW-HOME PROJECT PROFILE | FROM D13

Exterior facade and other historic elements preserved



In addition to maintaining the exterior facade and windows, other historic elements have also been preserved. Units on the second, third and fourth floors have exposed ceilings that reveal the old mortar, for instance. And in the inner courtyard, where escalators once transported shoppers from one floor to another, the original columns have been left as they were.

Cathy Grant, vice-president of sales and marketing for Townline, says this building is attracting a wide cross-section of buyers, people from their 20s to their 60s, from Vancouver Island, the mainland and as far away as the United Kingdom. "I think the common denominator is a love of heritage, a love of something that's a little bit out of the ordinary."

For buyers who don't like cookie-cutter units, The Hudson is made to order, with 33 different style of homes.

"From a marketing perspective, a sales perspective, it was a nightmare, but for a homeowner, anyone buying, you've got something with a little bit of personality in each of them," Grant said, showing off the extra storage space beside the kitchen in one unit.

All feel spacious, even if the square footage would suggest otherwise. That's because of the dramatic overheight ceilings, some as high as 17 feet.

Architect Paul Merrick of Merrick Architecture says, "people respond to volume, to space. And as we just found with the group of people going around looking, you put a dozen people in a 500-square-foot unit with an eight-foot ceiling and it feels crowded, you put the same [number] in a space like that and it feels quite comfortable."

Units at The Hudson range from 647 to 1,435 sq.-ft, some with a loft. Sleek, modern kitchens with Miele appliances hidden from view help create the impression of spaciousness.



Project name: The Hudson

Location: Downtown Victoria at the corner of Douglas Street and Fisgard Street. (Entrance is 770 Fisgard Street)

Project size/ scope: a part of a phased strata development consisting of 152 suites ranging from flats to two-level lofts and innovative courtyard homes from 647 sq. ft to 1435 sq. ft.

Prices: \$377,000 – \$911,000 (PH's not included)

Monthly fees: The strata fees are from \$248 per month and cover items as one would expect to pay on private, non-strata property such as geothermal heating and cooling, landscaping, repairs and main-

And as Grant pointed out, the contemporary, clean lines and neutral interior colours don't fight with the heritage elements.

And owners certainly won't forget this is a heritage building they're living in.

The front entrance boasts a chandelier cobbled artfully together from lamps found in the old store.

Heat and boiler pressure gauges also decorate the lobby and neon letters that once directed shoppers from the parkade to the old store now point owners and visitors to the condominiums.

In a 1932 Beaver, a writer noted that visitors to

tenance of the common areas, and common lighting.

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Developers: Townline Group of Companies

Builder: Townline Construction Inc.

Architect: Paul Merrick, Merrick Architecture, Vancouver

Interiors: Cecconi Simone and Evoke International Design

Occupancy: Immediate

Sales centre: 1803 Douglas Street, Victoria

Victoria often want to "take a run through the ... store ... for of Victoria it can be truly said — as of Winnipeg and Edmonton — the Hudson's Bay Company founded this city and the Hudson's Bay Company is still here and with a store of outstanding interest to visit."

No doubt residents of Victoria will continue to feel the same way about the new Hudson — especially if they call it home.

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

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