

Townhomes take on a treasure

King Edward Green will make Vancouver's Hobbit House its neighbour

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NEW-HOME PROJECT PROFILE

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The kitchens at King Edward Green will feature contemporary cabinetry, integrated appliances and polished quartz countertops.

Residents of King Edward Green will make their homes steps from the Canada Line, within a stroll of Queen Elizabeth and Douglas parks, and next door to an enchanting piece of Vancouver history: an iconic city residence affectionately known as the Hobbit House.

It's on this site, in the 500 block of West King Edward just west of Cambie Street, that developer David Mooney long wanted to build townhomes.

The City of Vancouver, however, envisioned something of a higher density, in keeping with its Cambie corridor plan. The two sides were somewhat at odds — that is, until the little home at 587 West King Edward came up for grabs.

"In the middle of these plans going back and forth, the Hobbit House came on the market," Mooney said. "And the city said to me: 'If you buy the Hobbit House and it's declared a heritage building, we will allow you to build the townhomes.'"

The Hobbit House, officially known as the James Residence after its original owner, was designed by architect Ross Lort, constructed in 1942 by builder Brenton T. Lea and based on a genre called the storybook cottage, reminiscent of Anne Hathaway's Cottage.

Its most distinguished feature is a roof where the cedar shingles, sometimes five layers thick, are shaped to

resemble an undulating thatched roof. That, and its diamond-shaped leaded glass windows, its half-timbering and its rough-cut rubble masonry have earned it a spot on the city's list of significant heritage homes.

Project architect Konning Tam of W.T. Leung Architecture Inc. said the design solution for combining the artsand-crafts style of the Hobbit House with the stark modernist look of the King Edward Green townhouses — to rise on what were four single-family lots — was to let each stand in its own right.



King Edward Green will take shape beside the Hobbit House just west of Cambie Street.

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587 West King Edward Ave. — called the James Residence, but better known as the Hobbit House — will be used as a sales office for King Edward Green until the development is completed next year.

"We didn't want to mimic the Hobbit House and its very special storybook architecture," Tam said. "The new project is intentionally opposite, with its modernist architecture, but it pays homage to the Hobbit House.

"They share commonalities. For example, there is white stucco on (the) existing Hobbit House and we've chosen a white brick for the new townhomes. We are using a lot of cedar railings on the new project that kind of mimic that cedar shingle thatched roof on the Hobbit House. We are having the two buildings talk to each other."

"The storybook-style rooflines are not easy to duplicate," firm head Wing Leung said wryly. "We gave the house a lot of space on all sides so it has room to breathe on its own."

Both architects said while the city's plan to densify the Canada Line route is a correct one for the area, a multi-storey condominium right next to the 1.5-storey Hobbit House would simply have not worked.

The site's topography — a slope of five metres over the 47-metre lot — provided some pluses, such as excellent views of the downtown core from both inside the homes and from the rooftop gardens over some of the homes. It also provided an opportunity to build an enticing feature in some of the homes: an extra room that can be separately accessed from the lane and locked off from the rest of the house. Owners could then rent it as a self-contained studio with its own kitchenette. Alternatively, the space

could serve as a recreation room, a teenager's bedroom or as accommodation for parents or out-of-town guests.

"The market I wanted to satisfy is the young family that wants to live in ideally in a single-family house in Vancouver on the west side, but can't afford it because the average home is now well over \$2 million," Mooney said. "Young families today who are living in a highrise downtown condo need ground-oriented homes so that they can get outside with their child in a pram or take their dog for a walk.

"I really wanted to do townhouses because I think there is a significant untapped market for them on the west side. And this was an appropriate site in my mind, relative to the neighbours in terms of scale and massing."

Mooney said his former townhouse developments have proven popular, including one called Boxwood, which he built in Vancouver and sold for between \$400,000 to \$425,000 about 15 years ago. Those homes today sell in the \$890,000 range.

A Vancouver businesswoman has contracted to buy the Hobbit House and plans to live in it after Mooney has mainly restored the exterior features to their original condition. Until the work is completed next year, Rennie Marketing Systems will use it as a sales office for selling the townhomes.

King Edward Green sales manager Justin Korotva said the townhomes are indeed attracting a lot of interest from young families.

"It is like the dream of a singlefamily home: a small backyard, your own door, you don't have to maintain the grounds because that is all taken care of," he said.

People also like the underground parking in an area where the options are often limited to parking on the street or in the lanes, he said. Each suite comes with two parking stalls.

Award-winning interior designer Alda Pereira said the interior materials

and finishes, which include wide-plank brushed white oak wood flooring, were chosen to allow the buyers "relaxed and easy-to-maintain lifestyles."

"I would describe the themes as very quiet and understated," she said. "The kitchens are designed to blend into the open-concept space rather than be a feature."

Kitchens come in light and dark colour schemes and feature contemporary cabinetry and integrated appliances with matte lacquer panelling, polished quartz slab countertops and mosaic glass tile backsplash.

The master ensuite bathroom has polished marble countertops, large-format porcelain floor tiles and matched rectangular wall tiles. A spacious walk-in shower with a frameless glass enclosure rounds out the offering.