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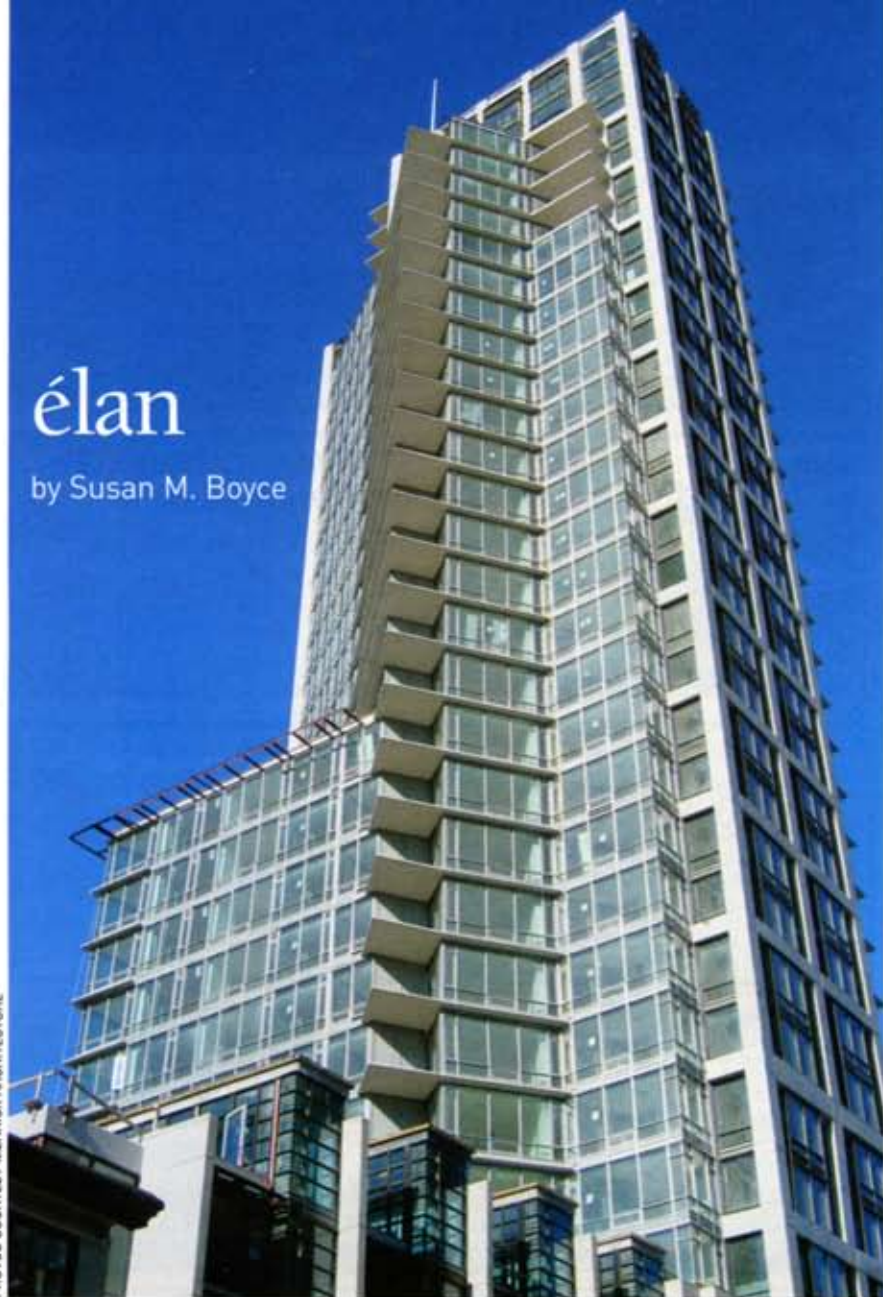
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Award

élan

by Susan M. Boyce

PHOTOS COURTESY MERRICK ARCHITECTURE



Situated at 1255 Seymour Street, this 34-storey residential tower's first six floors mirror the heritage building beside it, and a key inclusion of the project was the restoration of the adjacent Federal Motors Building. In return for preserving this turn-of-the-century heritage structure, Cressey Development Corp., owner and developer of élan, was able to transfer some much-needed density to the new structure.

Constructed in 1920, the Federal Motors Building is the most significant survivor of a group of automotive workshops that once flanked Seymour Street, and it was from this building that Greg Borowski, principal with Merrick Architecture, drew inspiration. "There is a simplicity and clarity to the Federal Motors Building's character that we wanted to emulate," Borowski says, adding that when originally built, this structure was considered almost outrageously modernistic in its styling – today it is considered a classic. He chose to express those same timeless lines on élan's first six storeys, alternating floors in order to maintain a sense of scale with the heritage building's over-height ceilings. "The rest of the building then emerges like a steel and glass crystal from the concrete."

At the 16th level, the structure

changes to a crisp, angular wedge shape until the penthouse levels where Borowski once again introduced a square geometry – creating a stylized cap for the display case of the angular jewel below. "Cranking élan's façade makes the middle floors appear to be a rotating crystal and gives a dramatic shape that is quite different from what you'll see downtown where typically most buildings are square," he says.

In addition to being visually eye-catching and unique, this varied articulation was necessary for élan to meet city regulations that prohibit construction in any of over a dozen downtown view cones. "The City of Vancouver commissioned a study to establish certain view lines through the downtown core," Borowski says. The cone cutting across the élan site, he explains, allows a person standing on the Granville Island Seawall at Charleston Park to look across False Creek and clear through downtown to the Lions. Owners of upper suites at élan receive the additional benefit of unexpected views to Spanish Banks, Kitsilano, and the North Shore mountains.

John Zickmantel, consultant with John Bryson & Partners, notes the above average amount of structural steel detailing incorporated into élan's design meant time-consuming atten-

tion spent on extras like canopies, trellises and window detailing. "We also decided to use four-foot, two-way transfer slabs rather than beams because the alignment between the tower and parking would have made the required formwork overly complex and messy to deal with."

The site's limited footprint between two existing buildings – a high-rise on one side and a heritage building on the other – meant careful sequencing while doing foundation work. Both adjacent buildings were underpinned for support, and extra steel plus thicker concrete were used. "As we dug down for the four levels of underground parking, we were forced to excavate small, six by eight foot sections, then filled each one with shot-crete before moving to the next," says Jay Young, project manager with Cressey Development Corp.

Restoration of the heritage building included new sprinkler and HVAC systems, updated electrical, new roof and restored windows. "We took every pane of glass out and reglazed with original and antique glass," says Young. Repainting in heritage colours brought the entire structure back to its original condition. The building will now be reborn as retail to service the surrounding neighbourhood.

With vehicular access from Seymour Street impossible, attention turned to the rear lane where a *porte cochère* with water feature creates a stylish, pedestrian drop-off and second entry to the building, complementing the pedestrian-only foyer access from the street front off Seymour. "The lane is at a different grade than where the building meets the street, which allowed us to introduce a private entry space within a courtyard," says Pat Campbell, a principal at DMG Landscape Architects.

She adds that élan also incorporates two elevated gardens – a quiet, contemplative garden with plenty of seating as well as a more active, outdoor patio with barbecue area. "Techniques like integrating gardens above the townhouse component is now almost a Vancouver tradition, a reflection of the urban approach this city has proven to be so successful at."

Inside, Insight Designs kept the basic visual theme consistent throughout all units. "Details like tile floors, tub surrounds, carpets, countertops, and wall colours were the same in all suites," says Alisa Karvonen, lead designer from Insight Designs. "Then buyers could change items like fixtures, fittings, cabinetry surfaces and other finishing detail to create a different look for individual units."

Karvonen notes that while élan offered three combinations – contemporary, traditional, and minimalist/funky – the predominant choice



remained the more traditional look. "élan sales, in large part, were driven by the investor market," she says. "And investors typically like to play it safe."

To maximize efficient use of bedroom space, especially in some of élan's more compact units, Insight used custom, built-in millwork rather than space-hogging closets. "You could fit in a queen-sized bed, and because the cabinets flanked the bed it was not just functional, but looked fun as well," Karvonen notes. The model proved so successful, Insight has since incorporated the design into other properties.

Although the sheer variety of floor plans increased the demand for skilled trades in an already under-served market, Cressey's Young clearly believes the results will be worth every extra effort spent. "We wanted to build something that is unique in Vancouver, and élan is going to achieve that goal." ■

LOCATION

1255 Seymour Street
Vancouver, BC

OWNER/DEVELOPER

Cressey Development Corp.

ARCHITECT

Merrick Architecture

GENERAL CONTRACTOR

Cressey Development Corp.

STRUCTURAL CONSULTANT

John Bryson & Partners

MECHANICAL/ELECTRICAL CONSULTANT

MCW Consultants

GEOTECHNICAL ENGINEER

Geopacific Consultants Ltd.

INTERIOR DESIGN

Insight Design

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

DMG Landscape Architects

TOTAL AREA

229,655 square feet

TOTAL CONSTRUCTION COST

\$55 million