

COASTAL LIVING

& Real Estate

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Heritage reinvented

Hudson brings a fresh approach to HBC building's classic architecture

By Jennifer Blyth
Black Press

While the on-going transformation of the Hudson's Bay building is being eagerly watched by prospective buyers, the massive renovation is also capturing the imaginations of many of the historic building's former clerks and shoppers.

As they tour the Blanshard Street presentation centre (formerly Earle's), stories about the old store, built by the Hudson's Bay Company between 1913 and 1921, the lengthy timeline the result of the First World War, notes sales manager Tracy Menzies. An addition increased the building's floorspace in 1948.

"Our clients come in with stories," says Menzies, recalling one visitor who had worked at The Bay for 30 years, and her friend for 25. "People who come in here are emotionally attached to this building.

"It has such a magical feeling to me; it feels so homey and I just can hardly wait to see the finished product."

The building has stood empty for several years since the Bay relocated to the former Eaton's location on Government Street. Now, builder Rick Ilich, of Townline Homes, has gutted the interior – discovering some wonderful historical treasures in the process – and is transforming it into a mix of contemporary, urban condomini-



ums above with retail space below.

The heritage buildings occupy a special place with Ilich, who as a child loved the purple amethyst glass studding the sidewalks. The building is, he says, "an emotional piece of real estate," valued even more here as the town of Victoria was founded as a Hudson's Bay Company outpost, notes Maggie Kerr-Southin, from Artemis PR, working with the Hudson project.

The Hudson stands in the heart of the central "uptown" neighbourhood, home also to the Save-on-Foods Memorial Centre and several other new developments. "It's a 'walk-to-whenever-you-want' neighbourhood," says Menzies.

Because of the lay of the land, the building also enjoys quite a high elevation, a feature better grasped in person, she suggests. "I often encourage people to walk around the building just to get a feel for it.

"There's a fabulous view from the fifth floor."

With the renovation designed by Graham Fligg, of Merrick Architecture, the Hudson is scheduled for completion in November 2009. Nothing definitive has been confirmed for its retail component, but the concept is for stores complementary to the residences, such as a grocery, pharmacy, small local boutiques, etc. – stores that will service the neighbourhood. Alongside the other construction revitalizing the area, "this is the start of a whole new community," Menzies says.

While the three existing open sides of the building will retain the heritage facade, with the removal of the parkade, the east side becomes a blank slate, offering space for balconies, for example. And from the second floor and above, the entire centre of the building will be removed to allow for a courtyard and some garden suites for the residences, "so this really allows us to have some outside living in a heritage setting."

Parking will now be underground and additional amenities include a guest suite for visitors.

The interiors, by Cecconi Simone and Evoke International Design, are as modern as the exterior is historical.

To help visualize that combination, the developer has gone beyond the usual floorplans and models, to also build several "dollhouses" for the display suite, offering a better idea of the layout and design, including the vast ceilings – 16 feet on the second floor (the first of residential units), 14 feet on the third floor and 17 feet for the two-level lofts on the



Photos by Jennifer Blyth

Amazing architectural details will contrast beautifully with modern interiors in Townline Homes' Hudson, featuring retail space at street level and three floors of residential above, along with upper level penthouse homes.

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Heritage reinvented

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fourth floor, allowing for an extraordinary amount of natural light.

Suite layouts range from one-bedrooms (about 620 to 749 square feet) to two bedroom-plus-a-den penthouses (starting at about 1,100 square feet), but all of the one-bedroom units also offer what the builder calls "more space," perhaps for a computer area, for example. Two-storey loft units feature a staircase to a master suite with ensuite. Prices begin at \$378,900 for a one-bedroom, one-bath, \$487,900 for a two-bedroom, two-bath loft, and \$860,000 for a "two-bedroom plus more," two bath penthouse.

The sleek interiors are available in three colour palettes and include engineered oak wide-plank flooring and sliding translucent glass panels in the bedroom. In the linear kitchens, over-height smooth-fronted cabinets with rift-cut veneer or white fronts fully integrate the refrigerator and front-loading Bosch washer and dryer. Three-quarter-inch quartz slab countertops and backsplashes, square, undermount stainless steel sinks, recessed pot lights and under-cabinet lighting continue the modern, urban feel. Additional kitchen amenities include Miele appliances, in-cabinet microwave and, in levels five and six, a built-in Liebherr wine fridge.

In the bath, cabinetry echoes that in the kitchen, topped here with white solid-surface counters. Terrazzo tile sits on the floor and the tub skirt while full-height glass ceramic wall tiles add sparkle to the vanity wall and tub surround.

And just because the building itself is historic, doesn't mean it can't boast modern, environmentally friendly features.

"First of all, we're just thrilled that we're recy-



Photos by Jennifer Blyth

Sleek, modern cabinetry in the kitchen and bath is complemented by elegant fixtures.

cling an old building," Menzies says, noting that throughout the renovation process, the developer is incorporating elements of both the LEED program (Leadership in Environmental Design) and the Green Building program. In addition to features such as radiant in-floor heating, low-VOC paints and new low-E, energy-efficient windows, the Hudson will also include recycling rooms on every floor, along with "share shelves" where items no longer needed by one family may find a new home with a neighbour.

In addition, there's dedicated parking for a co-op car program, plug-ins for electric vehicles and secure bicycle storage.

The roof has been designed to incorporate

living space, landscape and technology, while a special storm water collection sys-

tem will filter runoff and reduce pressure on the public stormwater system.

And while the many environmental advances will lead The Hudson well into the future, in a building that embodies so much of Victoria's recent history, it is in many ways the historical aspects that remain so intriguing. Among the wonderful heritage finds during deconstruction were original blueprints and the original terra cotta moulds for the exterior facade, which will be re-used in the renovation process.

"When it opened, it was the hub of the city. It really is a great old building," Menzies says.



In the Know:

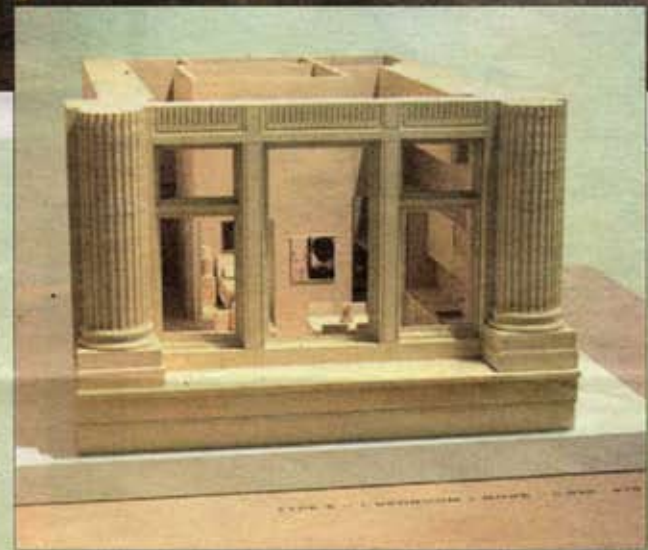
- Explore some of the Bay's early history (and that of Victoria) at the Hbc Museum, at the Bay Centre store on Government Street.

- In addition to the Hudson, Rick Ilich's Townline Homes has transformed heritage

spaces in Vancouver, such as Beatty Street's Crane Building (Metro Living). "The experience he got doing the heritage restorations in Vancouver just totally applies to this building," says sales manager Tracy Menzies.

- The Hudson's suites are more than 60 per cent sold, with buyers a good mix of largely Victoria and Vancouver, over-35 urban professionals. There are some out-of-towners buying here as a second home, "but the majority are local purchasers," Menzies says.

- For more details, see www.hudsonliving.ca, call 388-0018 or stop by in person at 1703 Blanshard St., from noon to 5 p.m. Saturday to Thursday.



"Dollhouse" model of a Hudson suite.