

Patina & Robert Lee YMCA

by Mary Frances Hill

In an urban neighbourhood as populated as Vancouver's West End, the Patina & Robert Lee YMCA development stands as an icon of stability and community.

Today, a 10-year, \$250-million project has revitalized the once-aging YMCA building, and offered new purpose to a popular space devoted to family development, fitness and health. It has also reshaped the downtown skyline with Patina, a 42-storey, concrete-and-glass residential highrise designed to be a Vancouver landmark.

Concert Properties helped kick off the project when it acquired the property behind the YMCA, securing 'air rights' for residential development – in this case, Patina, according to Ken Bogress and Paul McGuire, ConcertProperties' respective vice president of development and senior construction manager. "This project has proven that if you provide amenity space for the community, it will accept high density, because the community members are getting something out of it," says Bogress.

"Set on Barclay Street just west of Burrard, Patina stands where vintage West End tranquility embraces the cosmopolitan pace of downtown," says Rod Wilburn, Concert's senior vice president of sales and marketing. "One of the most interesting aspects of this landmark highrise is how the bold urban architecture reflects and responds to the juxtaposition of its unique location. The eastern face is designed with glass and steel to reflect the heart of Vancouver's downtown core while the western face showcases concrete, brick and punched windows to complement the more intimate and distinctly warmer character of the traditional tree-lined West End neighbourhood."

For lead architects Doug Hamming of Stantec Architecture and Alan Endall of Endall Elliot Associates, the project stands as a testament to how residents of all ages can thrive in a dense urban community. "Finding a business plan that allowed the YMCA to stay downtown was the 'greenest' thing that we could've done; it makes it a more livable community," says Hamming.

The decade began with complex re-zoning approval processes, earning more density for recreation amenities, density transfers and heritage density bonuses for heritage rehabilitation of the YMCA's 1941 building. With the original building's aging structure, deteriorating exterior envelope, and varied ceiling heights, it was a feat to retain much of the original building while at the same time integrate it with its new portions.



The original front portion of YMCA – about 32 feet by 100 feet – on a sloping stretch of Burrard Street was retained, while a portion behind the original gym and pool was demolished, according to Read Jones Christoffersen Ltd.'s Grant Newfield, the structural engineer.

The heritage front that stands on Burrard Street was built in the late Art Moderne style, reflected in the nearly symmetrical entrance projection, geometric cornices, and a buff brick and red terra cotta tile facade. "It was very challenging to retain this portion of the building as well as integrate its existing structure with the new functional requirements of the YMCA," he adds. "The south portion of the building was stripped down to concrete, while the front brick facade was kept intact, seismically restrained and cleaned up." The facade was tied into the new structure with concrete and steel.

The 92,000-square-foot YMCA facility stands six storeys tall, with 15,450 square feet coming from the original heritage building. The facility includes a two-storey, 69-space childcare, preschool and family development centre with rooftop play areas, a 25-yard indoor pool, whirlpools, steam rooms, a gymnasium, fitness and yoga centres.

With few avenues for light to stream in through the YMCA's heritage frontage, Endall and Hanning were able to optimize daylight by adding the most eye-catching feature: a five-storey atrium that gives a stunning outlook between the interior and the street; it also shows the obvious delineation between the new and heritage portions.

"The Vancouver YMCA may not be the most complex heritage-related project we have worked on, but it was certainly one of the most challenging," says Endall.

Grant Newfield of Read Jones Christoffersen says timing and strict adherence to a specific sequence in construction was vital. "It was very challenging and required quite a bit of coordination with the developer, contractor, architect and geotechnical engineer."

The project's phased occupancy posed one of the biggest tasks for the construction team, says Jordan Thomas, project manager for Bosa Construction. "The YMCA and parkade opened one year prior to us turning over Patina, and that involved extensive coordination between the shared components on the project, in particular the fire alarm systems."

This February, Patina residents began moving into their new homes. The Patina's 256 suite interiors boast clean, contemporary lines and the eco-sensitive finishes have a soft edge. "One of the challenges was to create something that had identity, warmth and personality to it and wasn't a downtown generic box," says designer Scott Trepp, of Trepp Design in Vancouver. Trepp graced the suites with porcelain tiles that contain recycled content as well as teak paired with

glass. Floor plans at Patina translate to free-flowing, light-filled spaces that are flexible in both purpose and presentation. Suites feature long, bold runs of Italian-made floor tile in charcoal, cream or espresso porcelain. The open kitchen design boasts richly grained wood cabinetry, appliance panelling in teak, walnut or white oak, paired with textured glass set in aluminum or white lacquer, and textured granite countertops.

The tower sits at the western edge of the building site, with the double-height residential lobby (and parkade entrance) off Barclay Street, a quiet offshoot from busy Burrard Street. This setback, as well as the amber-coloured wood walls and indigenous dark grey basalt stone flooring, makes the residential entrance an intimate and relaxed area. Up a grand staircase from the lobby's mezzanine level, residents connect to a private colonnaded exterior courtyard overlooking the main entrance. This courtyard is an oasis with its water feature and generous planting – what Durante Kreuk Landscape Design's Pawel Gradowski designed as a sort of 'livable landscape.' The eighth floor contains the Patina Club, a private amenity where residents can host gatherings or use the fitness facilities. The club opens onto an expansive rooftop garden.

On the YMCA side, children's play areas on levels five and six feature resilient plants "that do the job as far as esthetics but are hardy," says Gradowski. One children's area is suited for the daycare, with another designed for the children of parents occupied in the fitness centre.

The marriage of landscape, urban modernity and heritage reflects the wide-ranging philosophy behind the need and the importance of the YMCA & Patina project in this neighbourhood as an icon of comfortable urban density.

While moneyed singles and couples can always consider downtown Vancouver an urban playground, a more lively community is founded upon valuable amenities suited to a

LOCATION
Patina: 1028 Barclay Street
Robert Lee YMCA: 255 Burrard Street
Vancouver, B.C.

OWNER
YMCA Canada

DEVELOPER
Concert Properties

ARCHITECT
Stantec Architecture Ltd. in association with
Endall Elliot Associates

GENERAL CONTRACTOR
Bosa Construction Inc.

STRUCTURAL CONSULTANT
Read Jones Christoffersen Ltd.

MECHANICAL CONSULTANT
Sterling, Cooper & Associates

ELECTRICAL CONSULTANT
Nemetz (S/A) & Associates

LANDSCAPE CONSULTANT
Duranre Kreuk Landscape Design Ltd.

INTERIOR DESIGN CONSULTANT
Trepp Design Inc.

TOTAL AREA
Patina: 285,000 square feet
Robert Lee YMCA: 92,000 square feet

TOTAL CONSTRUCTION COST
\$250 million

diverse population, says Doug Hamming. "The eight-year-old and the 85-year-old need places like the YMCA. They need all those amenities that allow them to stay in downtown Vancouver and bring a full spectrum of humanity to the place." ■