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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. The suites are billed as



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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 innards 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.

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The \$80-million development features 152 units.

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



DARREN STONE, TIMES COLONIST

The rooftop looks over downtown.