

Another Black Swan: Former Kitsilano record shop takes flight as luxe four-storey apartment building

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Vancouver Sun

Saturday, December 16, 2006

BLACK SWAN

Location: Kitsilano

Project size: 27 apartments over four shops

Residence size: 460 sq. ft. - 1,070 sq.ft.

Prices: \$322,900 - \$764,900

Sales centre: 5568 Kings Rd., in the Galleria building at the

University of B.C.

Hours: Noon to 5 p.m., Saturday to Thursday

Telephone: 604-225-2220

Developer: Orcawest

Architect: Studio One

Interior design: Creative Design

Tentative occupancy: September 2007

A vacant building in a Vancouver neighbourhood in which developable land is scarce, Black Swan Records on Fourth at Bayswater in Kitsilano must have seemed like a real estate developer's dream come true.

It wasn't that simple, of course, a consequence of its landmark status on a major east-west arterial.

Although it was undoubtedly a local landmark of sorts -- conjuring up nostalgic memories in the hearts and ears of musical hipsters -- the site didn't make the city's heritage list, even with its colourful jazz mural and quaint bevelled siding.

So, when Kal Bachra, president of OrcaWest, purchased the building to assuage the area's hungry housing demand, he saw only possibility, not obstacles.

"It's a pretty unique location. There isn't a lot of property in this area," says Bachra.

Standing inside the Black Swan sales centre on the location of another OrcaWest development (Galleria at UBC) he reflects on some of the twists and turns involved in getting the project to fruition.

The reincarnation of the site into a four-storey, 27-unit apartment development with two levels of underground parking -- with units ranging in size from 461 sq. ft. to 1,070 sq. ft. took six months longer than planned.

The two-storey walk-up, built in 1922, was vacant and rundown but once the demolition plans were made public people petitioned to rescue it.

The building was even placed on the top 10 list of "endangered sites" by Heritage Vancouver.

"Technically the site was not heritage but because there was an outcry, the people wanted to save it," says Bachra.

So instead of beginning the project as planned in December 2005 things were put on hold, he says. They didn't begin excavation until the end of March.

"We tried to take the public concern into consideration and keep the old building. We looked at all different options," says Bachra.

One option involved moving the existing structure, he says, and they considered using parts of the building in the new home construction. Neither fit in with their building plans, he says.

The most feasible option was to dissect the old bird and move it. The mural and some portions will be used in another building site by another developer who salvaged them for use in a home project to be built at Highbury Street at 10th Avenue.

The only thing remaining from the original building will be the name, Black Swan, says Bachra. Everything else about the project will be brand new, right down to the brick exterior and double-glazed vinyl windows.

"Historic-wise, it kind of keeps the name there," says Bachra of the decision to memorialize the record shop through the name.

"It just fit. [People] know where it is and people will always say 'that's where the Black Swan record store was.' "

And a good deal of the eclectic, trendy and hip qualities of the namesake will be present in the new swan, says Mike Sikich, the project's sales manager.

The ground level will be designated as four retail spaces, likely a coffee spot and some local shops.

"Maybe there aren't live jazz performances to go to but you might get together for a coffee below," says Sikich.

The top three floors will contain 27 living spaces, perfect for people who want to live in a central location with close proximity to the beach and Fourth Avenue shopping strip, he says.

"It's ideal for people who want to live in Kits and be in the heart of things," says Sikich. "You won't get lost in the shuffle either since it is a boutique-style building."

The red brick exterior of the new building is inspired by Scandinavian architecture with large patios attached to most homes.

Inside, floor plans are open, designed to maximize natural light. Hardwood floors will cover the living, kitchen and dining areas. Carpet will cosy up bedrooms.

Residents can choose cabinetry between dark laminate Wenge or pearl bisque, a lighter brown. Each home comes with a full stainless steel appliance package by Frigidaire and sinks and faucets by Kindred. Laminate countertops can be upgraded to granite.

In the bathroom resident "swans" will float in a Eurovit soaker tub and shower combination, finished with Paini chrome faucets. Underfoot and in the shower, porcelain ceramic tiles brighten the space. There are above-counter Eurovit vessel sinks with Paini faucets.

Homes went on sale early this month, priced from \$322,900 to \$764,900 or about \$700 per square foot.

Bachra says he is happy the project is well underway. The Black Swan is on schedule to be completed in September 2007.

"It was frustrating," he says of the process. "But at least something good came of it."

For the future residents of this new development, there is no swan song here, just a fresh start in a prime location.

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