



Broadway Central – Neelu Bachra Centre

by Jerry Eberts

COURTESY MAGNUM PROJECTS

A new retail space set to open this summer on Broadway in Vancouver is a tribute to both the owner-developer's late wife and to the changing face of the neighbourhood.

"This is more than just another project to me," says Kal Bachra, president of Orca West Developments Ltd. "We named the Neelu Bachra Centre after my wife, who passed away six years ago from breast cancer. The way Neelu lived her life was an inspiration to those around her and I can't think of a better way to ensure her memory lives on. The BC Cancer Foundation is right behind our building and, while I thought this was the last place I would build, it seems kind of appropriate."

The six-storey building – plus four parkade levels – includes offices on the top floors, all being sold under

strata title. This makes a change from most of the retail space along the Broadway Corridor. "There are many medical professionals in the corridor," says Bachra. "[However] our project is unique because people who are looking for a 500- to 700-square-foot office can now own their space, when before renting was the only option. The space we have created is pretty flexible with many buyers purchasing multiple units to get the office size they want."

Studio One Architecture was the architect on the project. Tomas Wolf, one of the principals, says there were some complex rezoning issues with the process starting in late 2008. Construction began in August 2012 and completion of the project is slated for July.

Steven Hart was associate architect on the project. He worked on behalf of the owner, specifically on permitting and building code related matters. "Rezoning was complicated," says Wolf. "There is a view corridor towards the City Hall from the pedestrian walkway along the north shore of False Creek and we had to develop a new approach for the height and massing for the building.

"We worked with the city's planning department and changed the required two-storey podium to four, and stepped the top two storeys back. The new form and massing of the building works for the intended use, and the unobstructed view towards the City Hall has been preserved. The seventh floor amenity space is located outside the view corridor and an expansive landscaped roof deck will no doubt be very popular with the occupants of the building."

The ground floor is retail and the higher floors are office space, with the upper four floors stratified. "This was decided before construction began," says Hart. "Orca West will retain ownership of the first and second floors."

The slightly curved front elevation glazed curtain wall will be a distinctive building component on the front facade. "It's a reference to the widening of the sidewalk in the direction of the Cambie and Broadway intersection," explains Wolf. The composition reflects the importance of the emerging major commuter and commercial hub of the West Broadway corridor.

Marc Williams, operations manager for Syncra Construction Corp, worked closely with both the design and trade contractors to achieve an efficient flow of work. Working on one of Vancouver's busiest corridors meant Williams and his team had to carefully plan when to access the upper floors to ensure minimal disruption to both vehicle and pedestrian traffic, while always considering the safety of those near the site.

Williams says one of the most impressive aspects of the project is the spectacular glass facade, adding that one of the two passenger elevators – the one closer to Broadway – has a glass wall to allow expansive views of False Creek, downtown Vancouver and the North Shore mountains.

Ovidiu Abrudean, with SRC Engineering Consultants Ltd., was the mechanical consultant for the project. While Abrudean was in charge of "the whole design for plumbing, heating, ventilation and air-conditioning," he joined the team after the zoning changes

had been ironed out.

Ramon Alinas, project manager at SRC, was the project designer and electrical consultant. He says that while the original design was created seven years ago, he was able to tweak it to ensure the design remained as close as possible to the owner's standards. "With a commercial building you have no idea what kind of clients you'll wind up with," says Alinas. "It's very different from a high-rise condominium building, which doesn't grow much or change.

"[On] that part of Broadway, we wanted to wire the ground floor to accommodate restaurants, which need a lot of power. And the entire building has the latest in communications technology and data connections. All power is fed from a central electrical room on each floor."

Amenities in the impressive structure include a fitness room and change/shower facilities, as well as an expansive 12,088-square-metre landscaped roof terrace.

The Centre has been built to meet LEED Silver specifications, however Bachra says his company "went to bat with City Hall" over the distribution of the LEED points, including building a green roof. "We fought to make the roof a more useable space," he says. "Some parts are the traditional green roof, but other parts are more functional. We had to convince City Council to approve a park-like roof where the occupants could sit and enjoy their lunch while taking in the spectacular view."

Bachra concludes that the Neelu Bachra Centre is going to be a spectacular building and a wonderful tribute to his late wife. ■

LOCATION

550 West Broadway, Vancouver, B.C.

OWNER/DEVELOPER

Orca West Developments Ltd.

ARCHITECT

Studio One Architecture Inc.

ASSOCIATE ARCHITECT

Steven Hart Architect Inc.

GENERAL CONTRACTOR

Syncra Construction Corp.

STRUCTURAL CONSULTANT

John Bryson & Partners

MECHANICAL/ELECTRICAL CONSULTANT

SRCEngineering Consultants Ltd.

BUILDING ENVELOPE CONSULTANT

Aqua-Coast Engineering Ltd.

TOTAL AREA

217,000 square feet

TOTAL CONSTRUCTION COST

\$26 million