

1075 Pandora

by ROBIN BRUNET



LOCATION

1075 Pandora Avenue, Victoria, B.C.

OWNER/DEVELOPER

Cox Developments Ltd.

ARCHITECT

HDR/CEI Architecture Associates, Inc.

GENERAL CONTRACTOR

Farmer Construction Ltd.

STRUCTURAL/ BUILDING ENVELOPE CONSULTANT

RJC Engineers

MECHANICAL CONSULTANT

AME Consulting Group

ELECTRICAL CONSULTANT

WSP Canada Inc.

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

LADR Landscape Architects

TOTAL SIZE

104,000 square feet

TOTAL COST

\$40 million

With the completion of 1075 Pandora, Victoria in B.C. obtains what many say is long overdue: a badly needed addition to the city's apartment rental pool. But equally importantly, the 134-unit purpose-built complex has already been credited for raising the bar with regards to what rental units can be.

The complex, owned and developed by Cox Developments, consists of three buildings and ground floor commercial space, with each structure linked by bridges over a lower-level podium.

Despite being a rental complex, 1075 Pandora is finished with all the luxuries one would expect in a moderate to high-end condo: every suite has a washer and dryer, a dishwasher, stainless steel appliances and quartz countertops.

Cox Developments ensured that the design would result in a home for everyone, including families with children; accordingly, there is a secure second floor playground with a closed circuit camera. Extra wide courtyard corridors open to the outside, allowing for residents to walk their bicycles to their doors (each of the 134 suites has its own front door bike rack).

The concept for 1075 Pandora evolved through necessity, according to Cox Developments' president Dan Cox. "My father, Steve Cox and I have owned several rental buildings, and in 2011, while identifying a market need for more units, we came across

a 23,000-square-foot site containing an old 7,000-square-foot office in Victoria's downtown core and realized it would be the perfect location for our next development," he says.

The rezoning process took longer than usual but resulted in 1075 Pandora being the first project to be approved under the city's downtown core development plan.

Cox adds that he and his father had a distinct idea of what the project should consist of, and when they retained HDR/CEI Architecture Associates to further develop the site, "we literally drew the rough shape of the buildings on a napkin, and they took it from there."

Cox adds that the reason the three buildings would be connected by inner walkways "was because we hate hallways: they require cleaning all the time. Plus, without corridors there would be no heating and less lighting required, which would greatly reduce operating costs."

Three buildings rather than one would mitigate a "monolithic" apartment effect and provide a more intimate living experience. Two of the buildings would each consist of four suites, with the third consisting of five suites. "We decided that each building would face a different street, with the walkways being protected by overhead glass canopies," says Cox. "This would be augmented with oversize elevators for residents and their bicycles."



The developer says of HDR/CEI, "they immediately understood our vision and ran with it," and architect Curtis Knichel notes that in addition to dividing the project into three blocks, the blocks "are separated by a T-shaped breezeway to provide for natural ventilation of the common areas and cross ventilation of the individual units – a primary program requirement of the developer." He adds that voids between the suspended walkways "allow for visual connection between floors."

HDR/CEI created two separate outdoor gathering spaces for the residents in addition to the children's play area: an 11th-floor, south-facing patio with views of the Olympic

Mountains, the harbour and the ocean; and an art lounge on the second floor with a stair leading directly to the street and green space along Pandora.

HDR/CEI also created something that is increasingly uncommon for the B.C. rental market. Windows on both sides of each of the two bedroom suites were incorporated into the design, in order for the second bedroom to have glazing and increase the value of the property overall. Interior finishes included sandblasted ceilings and columns, exposed and painted sprinkler pipes and high lacquer white kitchens, while concrete floor hallways would do away with carpet maintenance. "All these elements are



strikingly modern and very unusual to the Victoria rental market,” says Cox. Each suite has a large balcony and features floor-to-ceiling windows.

As for the exterior, HDR/CEI used metal and cement panel cladding for durability and ease of maintenance, and the architects created subtle variations of decking on each floor for visual interest.

Farmer Construction Ltd. commenced excavation at the site in August of 2015, and while work proceeded smoothly, there were unexpected minor changes such as the electrical breakers being moved during the concrete pour to the main electrical room from their original intended location of an alcove area. “Farmer accommodated this without any interruption of schedule; they were really outstanding,” says Tyler Davidson, project engineer for WSP Canada.

Trevor Weber, Farmer Construction’s project manager, says at peak 110 people were working on site, and apart from taking extra care with machinery operations so as not to disturb nearby BC Hydro lines, all deadlines were met.

Lighting proved to be a major component in enhancing 1075 Pandora’s unique design. LED was used throughout the complex for resiliency, including

the suspended walkways. “Certain modifications were required,” says Davidson. “For example, originally we were going to use strip lighting in a channel for the entire exterior, but that would have made the formwork overly complicated, so we wound up using a surface application that is so subtle it almost has a pot light look.”

Photo and occupancy sensors would contribute to the lighting design exceeding the latest ASHRAE standards – but as Davidson points out, while energy efficiency was a major consideration, there was still plenty of room for creative inspiration. “For example, we designed the lighting for a V-shaped exterior showcase column to exhibit a very thin pencil effect, almost like a laser,” he says. “In addition, the lights of the balconies align vertically, which will help make 1075 Pandora look like a jewel at night.”

With occupancy scheduled for December or January, Cox is excited about 1075 Pandora’s long-term potential. “Everything was designed and constructed to attract long-term tenants, and we honestly believe this sets an example of how inviting rental living can be,” he says. “Most definitely, this complex is going to stay in our portfolio forever.” **A**

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