



HISTORIC NEW WEST BUILDING OPENS DOORS TO NEW RESIDENTS

By Justin Beddall

New West's historic downtown has gone back to the future, as the doors officially opened at the much-anticipated Trapp + Holbrook development.

The project by the Salient Group includes the redevelopment of the historic Trapp Block at 668 Columbia St. and the Holbrook building at 660 Columbia St., as well as a new tower that includes 196 homes and 6,000-square-feet of commercial space on Columbia and Front streets.

The landmark Edwardian-era Trapp Building proudly stood as one of the signature structures on Columbia Street in the early 1900s and was officially listed on Canada's Historic Places registry in 2004.

The Salient Group has been involved in a number of projects to retain and revitalize historic structures and neighbourhoods in Gastown.

Robert Fung, president of the Salient Group, purchased the Trapp and Holbrook buildings in 2005.

"The reason we are attracted to the area is because of that history, is because of that character, and there was a level of artistry originally and workmanship that's really difficult to find these days," Fung said in a 2014 interview. "That tactile texture of the materials is very difficult to reproduce, and it's important to keep that character."

Two weeks ago that vision became reality as new residents began moving into the sold-out development.

"People are excited and want to move in," Fung said.

"We're very proud of it. It's been a tricky, passionate long-term project," he said. "There's a ways to go before we get everybody moved in and everything finished up, but we felt it was probably appropriate in the process to celebrate the building."

Since the Army & Navy moved out in 1976, the historic Trapp Block has remained vacant, Fung noted.

"It was a pretty big building to stay vacant for 40 years in a prime part of New West real

estate and an area that's so important to the economy locally. (It's) really exciting for us and the project that is really symbolic of the evolution of New Westminster. It's got a strong foundation in its history and it's a great story and with such a great future."

Of course, historic restoration projects are never without unforeseen challenges.

"They are complex," said Fung. "It's an added component that sets projects like this apart from other new residential towers or developments, but it's also what makes them unique and special and ties them back into the community."

His company's previous experience with projects in historic Gastown helped.

"Had we not done the ones in Gastown I might have been more surprised by the surprises. We anticipate the surprises around the heritage and we plan for them."

He described the restoration process as "very complicated, extremely intensive," in terms of the level of meticulous detail required, from inventorying the pieces,

removing them, storing them, restoring them, and rehabilitating them back in place on the new structure.

"It has been a massive labour of love for a lot of people."

"The building is, quite honestly, one of the most beautiful façades we have in the Lower Mainland, if not in BC. It's absolutely beautiful, the Trapp Block. That seven-storey terracotta façade is unique and very special."

Fung said approximately half of the residents moving in are from New West and that overall there's a very high percentage of owner-occupiers.

"People are moving into new homes, it's not just investors."

In terms of the commercial space, Fung said an independent café and independent restaurant will be revealed on Thursday. Three other spaces will be retail based.

"We really believe in the notion of independent entrepreneurs, businesses that are complementary to the community and what's already there."