

MEWS

BY STACEY MCLACHLAN

In the heart of the University of British Columbia's Wesbrook Village, the REAP Gold Mews development is making its mark on an already vibrant campus. Developed for mixed-use, the 84,000 sq.ft. space promises to be a vital part of the neighborhood's developing community and to change the standards of rental housing for students, faculty and Vancouverites alike.

Because the Mews is on university land, it was important to the design team to pull inspiration from both traditional and modern sources. "Our intent is to produce a building with a high level of traditional qualities to reflect the long term nature of the collegiate environment, while expressing a degree of contemporary design features that would stand the test of time," says architect Keith Hemphill of Rositch Hemphill & Associates Architects. Details like brick masonry and timber accents are a nod to UBC's historical roots, while aluminum window walls and Energy Star vinyl windows speak to the school's commitment to a progressive, eco-friendly future.

These green features weren't a last minute addition: from the first stages of planning, the developers were committed to sustainability. "Achieving the challenging REAP Gold rating was of utmost importance," says Michelle Paquet, Development Manager at UBC Properties Trust. "[It] guided the design and development from the onset." This bottom-up planning resulted not only in the use of standard energy saving devices like low-flow toilets and Energy Star in suite appliances, but in an innovative heat-recovery system as well. "Next door to our building is a Save On Foods, with freezer systems that work by rejecting heat," explains Freeman Lane of Jakin Engineering & Construction. "We have piping to recover the heat from that building to heat our domestic water." The Mews' boiler management system then efficiently modulates that water according to demand, only boiling it to high temperatures when necessary. Lane also points to the individual hot and cold water meters for each suite, providing residents with a monthly statement on water usage. "A big part of reducing water use is just knowing how much is being used," says Lane.

While a ground floor concrete base provides units for retail shops and services, the top four storeys are constructed around a wood frame; this was a new experience for the developers, as recent changes to the building code now allow for taller wood frame construction. Thomas Leung, structural consultant from Thomas Leung Structural Engineering Inc., says that they went above and beyond to meet and exceed the new guidelines. "we applied the bulletin from APEGBC [Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of BC] for five- and six-storey buildings, even though this is a mixed-use building," he

says, adding that the building is also fully designed for seismic and wind regulations.

Despite high sustainability standards and new building codes, the greatest challenge the Mews' development faced was the location. Bound on three sides by streets and a public square on the fourth, the situation made for very tight logistics to get materials in and out without affecting pedestrians and cars," says Lane. It took cooperation with UBC, clear communication with the public, and a lot of flag people, but eventually everything was delivered – on schedule and still under the \$26-million budget. And while the completed building may still face some challenges integrating service aspects like loading, the overall benefit in animating the village is considerable. "Essentially, the building does not have a back," point out Paquet. "There is great opportunity for retailers and café operators to take advantage of our indoor/outdoor climate for much of the year [with] the provision of outdoor plazas, patios and seating.

Careful thought was put into the landscape design to accommodate this outdoor community space. According to Michael Patterson, principal landscape designer for Perry + Associates, "Our intent is to carry through the materials and patterns established in the neighbourhood to maintain continuity. The intent for the retail village is to create a pedestrian environment similar to Granville Island." Overcoming a grading challenge was the first step in creating a continuous landscape, but numerous steps in the underground parkade slab accommodated a north to south grade change to allow a smooth transition from interior to exterior.

Completed in January 2011, the Mews' 72 apartments units are already garnering attention from interested tenants. UBC Properties Trust hopes to attract "anyone and everyone who wants to live on the UBC campus" as well as "vital shops and services to support a growing neighbourhood," says Paquet. "This building supports the healthy and environmentally friendly lifestyle that Wesbrook Village promotes."

The concept of designing for high-end rentals was new for interior designer Laura Vroom of Laura Vroom Design. "The Mews was challenging in that we tried to create a living environment that uses commercial grade materials." The result is one and two bedroom suites finished in materials selected to meet and exceed UBC's criteria for energy efficient, long lasting buildings" the kitchen and bathroom countertops are a hardy engineered quartz, while the cabinetry is formaldehyde-free MDF substrate with Greenlam-Phillipine Teak full wrap fronts. Features like water saving faucets and LED lighting make the design as sustainable as it is attractive. Durable polyester carpeting will protect the floor from wear and tear while

wooden door casings, a dynamic glass kitchen wall backsplash and polished chrome hardware make the apartment feel more like a home than a rental.

Hemphill is confident that the Mews will “enhance the richness of life in the neighbourhood by providing variety of shopping, entertainment and social activity”; UBC’s newest residents are sure to agree.