Robson Street prize

Developer sees his project of a lifetime in The Atelier condo tower

ALISON APPELBE
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For even the most successful developer, a really spectacular building site comes across once in a career. That once has arrived for Henry Man.

As president and CEO of the Vancouver firm Magellen 20/20, Man purchased one of the last remaining residential sites on Vancouver's best-known thoroughfare — Robson Street. Now, on Robson at Homer Street, kitty-corner with Library Square, he's building a high-end, mostly residential complex called Atelier on Robson.

NATIONAL POST, CANWEST NEWS SERVICE, FILE
Henry Man

"This site is as good as it gets. It's once in a lifetime," says Man at his elegant, loft-style offices in the adjacent Yaletown district.

"This is one of those locations that if someone is building a portfolio, it would be the key asset. A location like this gives you the ingredients to mould a flagship building."

A University of B.C. chemical engineering graduate, Man, 47, was recruited in 1982 by British Petroleum (now Talisman Oil) in Calgary. He spent eight years with BP, and earned an MBA from the University of Calgary.

Back in Vancouver, Man joined Concord Pacific Developments, and between 1994 and 2002 was involved in the redevelopment of the industrial north shore of False Creek into a dynamic residential community, now approaching 9,000 housing units.

Man served as Concord's senior vice-president and chief operating officer (COO). And from 1997, he was simultaneously COO of Concord Adex Developments in Toronto, builder of the similarly massive CityPlace complex.

Then in 2002, seeking more repose in his life (and with a personal portfolio to manage), Man decided to retire.

"I was doing 15 to 20 trips a year to Toronto, as well as between five and seven trips a year to Asia," says the father of three, now aged 11 to 15. "I was basically — every week — heading to the airport or heading back."

He wanted to spend more time at home, coach soccer and play tennis, and support the likes of UBC's Corpus Christi and St. Mark's colleges, and the St. Paul's Hospital Foundation, of whose boards he remains a director.

"But after a year of retirement people would come to me and say, 'Henry, I have this site, help me out.' Then I'd look at the building and say, 'No, no, that's not how you do it…' You get dragged in." In 2003, he established his own firm, Magellen 20/20.

And while residential projects continue to roll out — most recently the Freesia, a luxury tower a few blocks south of Robson — they are chosen and developed with care.

"I'm not the gung-ho developer," Man adds. "It's important I work with the right people, and that I feel comfortable. Balancing one's career and family is a process. You learn as you go along."

Library Square ambience

Robson Street, extending from Stanley Park to B.C. Place stadium, owes its fame to a string of flashy retail outlets — from Zara to Salvatore Ferragamo — that generate a non-stop sidewalk scene. It's the Bloor Street or Rodeo Drive of Vancouver.

This fashion-driven section of Robson — including Robson Square, with the Vancouver Art Gallery, and Pacific Centre — is the retail hub. Then south from Granville Street, and embracing the iconic Vancouver Public Library building said to resemble the Roman Colosseum, Robson Street becomes more residential.

The Atelier will inhabit one of few remaining building sites in the lively Library Square area.

Views from the Atelier take in the library and mountains to the northeast, or, to the southwest, a park planned for Smithe and Richards streets, and English Bay. Others span the downtown, Burrard Inlet and Stanley Park, False Creek, and the south and east of the city to the Fraser River — even snow-capped Mount Baker in the United States.

Half a block away is The Centre in Vancouver for the Performing Arts, and just beyond sprawls the Queen Elizabeth and Playhouse theatres complex. B.C. Place and General Motors stadiums are an easy walk northeast.

Neighbourhood amenities include coffee houses, and swish hotels with bars and restaurants. An IGA Marketplace is going up across the street from the Atelier, and an urban version of big-box Costco is close (but not too close). The Library Square area boasts attractive lighting, street furniture and public art.

Granville and Robson, three blocks north of the Atelier, will be the location of the Robson Street station on a new rapid-transit line between the downtown waterfront and Vancouver International Airport. This mostly underground system, the Canada Line, will be completed in 2009, in time for the 2010 Winter Olympics.

Large suites, great views

The Atelier on Robson, by Vancouver's IBI-HB Architects, is of a fluid, curvilinear design. "Architecturally it's very alive — very cultural," says Man of the work of a team headed by architect James Hancock.

Noted interior designer Bob Ledingham created the 25-foot-high lobby, fronted by frameless structured glass. It features walls of creamy travertine and floors of dark basalt. A concierge station, staffed round the clock, will be of marble, wood and granite.

The podium includes a landscaped courtyard and some retail at street level. A separate entrance accesses a double-height storey above the lobby, with offices and a fully outfitted fitness facility and terrace. Above that, a garden level features plots in which residents can exercise a green thumb, and a lawn, play area and well-appointed garden lounge.

Both the latter levels overlook Robson Square.

See ATELIER / J5

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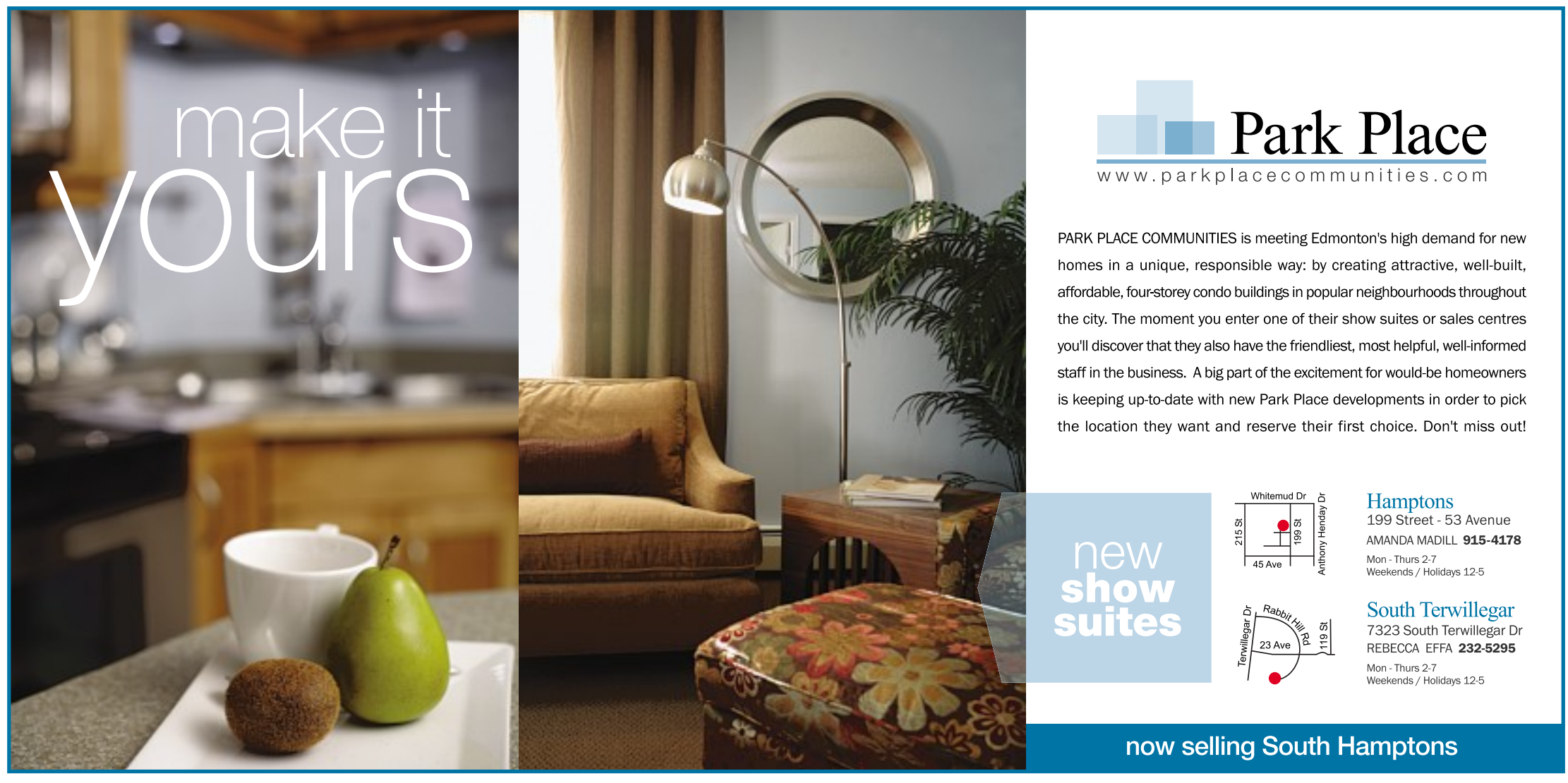
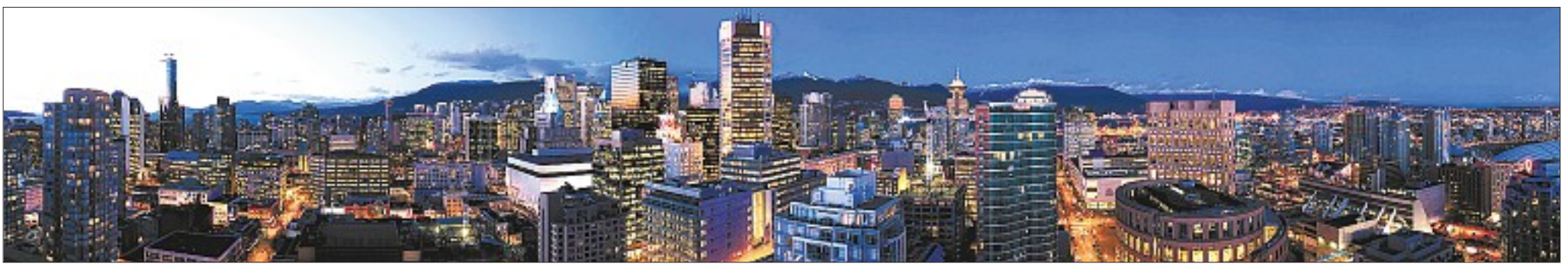
The Atelier project is kitty-corner from Library Square, dominated by the Colosseum-style Vancouver Public Library.

SUPPLIED
Artist's rendering of The Atelier on Robson in Vancouver





The view, at dusk, of downtown Vancouver and the North Shore mountains from The Atelier site on Robson.

SUPPLIED

Suite design makes Vancouver builder unique

ATELIER

Continued from J1

Residential units — 200 on 26 storeys, all with 8.6-foot ceilings — begin 50 feet above the street, with some large, terrace-style homes.

On subsequent storeys, suites in one- or two-bedroom designs, some with a den, range from 530 to 1,200 square feet. All have a large balcony.

There are also two levels of penthouses.

And it's here, in the suite designs, that Man has focused his attention.

"Part of the reason I've been successful is that everything I've done is my own," he says, producing an advertising flyer of floor plans of another new Vancouver building and explaining how the space has been thoughtlessly chopped and ultimately wasted.

> "If there's been talk of the Vancouver market levelling off, there's been no burst of the bubble with the Atelier. When you have a compelling location like this, and a reputation like that of Henry, people are very savvy."
>
> Lily Korstanje, of the Platinum Project Marketing Group

"We plan our buildings efficiently, maximizing the power of the square footage," he continues, comparing the floor plans for the Atelier.

"We ask, 'how are you going to use your square footage? Where will the TV go? Where will the couch go?' We take care with the layout."

European-style kitchens will have prestigious Sub-Zero or Liebherr fridges and AEG gas cooktops, wall ovens and dishwashers. Countertops will be of stone and granite.

Home away from home

The cost of property on Vancouver's downtown peninsula is high.

According to Man, the average per-foot price of a new suite is in the low $700 range; inner-city waterfront sells somewhere between $1,600 and $2,000 a square foot.

Given that sales of the Atelier, beginning in April, get off to a speedy start, Man hopes to sell the units for between $650 and $700 a square foot.

That puts more than half the units at under half a million dollars — "a bargain," he says. "For Albertans, as a home away from home, or as real estate on an internationally branded street, it's tough to beat."

Lily Korstanje, of the Platinum Project Marketing Group of MacDonald Realty, says: "If there's been talk of the Vancouver market levelling off, there's been no burst of the bubble with the Atelier. When you have a compelling location like this, and a reputation like that of Henry, people are very savvy."

Completion of the Atelier is scheduled for fall 2009.

For more information about the Atelier, or to pre-register, call Platinum at 604-228-2020 or visit www.atelieronrobson.com.

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