



989 Johnson

by ROBIN BRUNET

Although it couldn't be more dissimilar in appearance than Cox Developments Ltd.'s previous residential project, the 989 Johnson complex shares the same design philosophy that informed 1075 Pandora, which is located just a block away in Victoria, B.C.

Namely, 989 Johnson is another project in which Cox president Dan Cox and his father, Steve Cox, wanted to provide something unique to residents: two 15- and 17-storey glass towers with 206 homes of varying shapes and sizes, rising from an angular six-storey podium that resembles boxes stacked unevenly against and on top of each other.

Cox says, "We've tried to make every aspect of 989 Johnson special. For example, our building will contain a giant courtyard and two opposing lobbies, which you simply don't see in Victoria. It's also a building with very cool angles throughout: we're angling everything instead of just constructing a monolithic structure."

As was the case with 1075 Pandora, Cox, HDR/CEI Architecture Associates, Inc., and Farmer Construction Ltd. are also striving to raise the quality bar. "That's why, when the podium and towers take shape later this year, you'll see a maximum of glazing and minimum of solid wall," says Cox. "This is something that will be challenging to replicate in Victoria given the impending new building codes."

And while it isn't a design feature, Cox points to a conspicuous lack of one element that will set 989 Johnson apart from most new multi-unit residences in Canada. "When prospective buyers ask me what kind of amenities we have, I reply, 'none,'" he says. "And then I quickly explain

that this keeps strata fees very low in a city of rapidly rising prices. Besides, 989 Johnson is all about the surrounding amenities: there are 30 restaurants and cafes, and four or five gyms in a two block radius around the towers, plus theatre, film, dance, shopping – you name it."

As of March work was only beginning on the podium, and the project was proceeding smoothly, which can be attributed to 989 Johnson using virtually the same crew that had developed 1075 Pandora: the architects, builders, the structural, mechanical and electrical consultants as well as the landscape architect. "It's great because we all know each other enough to be able to communicate in shorthand," says Trevor Weber, project manager for Farmer Construction Ltd. "Also, we're taking lessons learned on 1075 Pandora and applying them to this project to increase efficiency."

The 989 Johnson site was real estate that developers had been trying to secure for decades due to being in the heritage area of downtown Victoria. "We got the property by luck in 2014 after another developer was unable to complete work," says Cox. "The property had already been zoned for a 10-storey building, so the first thing we did was get a height variance for our towers."

Curtis Knichel, architect for HDR/CEI, says, "Cox Developments came to us with a proposal to develop the high-rise towers in a single phase – a bold vision at a time when smaller single tower developments were the norm."

Knichel goes on to say that in order to reduce the scale of the project, "each tower took on a unique expression but complementary to the other. The building was planned with a wide

range of unit sizes and designs, to attract a broad range of homebuyers and to establish a diverse community of residents. The tower cores were offset with the floor plans of each tower to increase the livable space with southern exposure and views.

"The ground floor was developed for retail use, and special attention was paid to allow the opportunity for a restaurant tenant on the north east corner, complete with an outdoor patio area in an effort to establish an active and vibrant street scape."

To encourage interaction between residents, both tower entrances are situated around a south facing common courtyard planned as a gathering space and outdoor amenity area. "A rich pallet of cladding materials was selected for the exterior of the building, which includes fritted and coloured glazing," says Knichel. "As warming elements, wood and brick accents were added to articulate the lower floors."

Excavation work for the subterranean parkade began in August of 2016, and Weber reports that, "apart from pilings being driven into some areas where bedrock was deeper than expected, we maintained schedule."

Cox says there was a distinct advantage in 1075 Pandora nearing completion as the parkade was being built. "We moved work crews around when necessary, and we brought extra product from 1075 over to 989," he says.

Tyler Davidson, project engineer for WSP Group, says 989 Johnson is proving to be easier to design electrical systems for than 1075 Pandora. "It's a very satisfying project, and I especially like the lighting for the lobby, which includes in-ground fixtures, pot lights, and entryway fixtures that subtly lead you to the courtyard," he says. "For the

residential units we'll be using lots of recessed floor boxes due to so much glazing. We've also value engineered the electrical room by shrinking it from two rooms to only one.

"But if there's something I'm really happy about, it's the main transformer. Originally I designed it for a lot larger load, but I compressed it to a much smaller footprint with fans that will kick in during large load situations."

Knichel says, "So far we're very pleased with the progress made, and Farmer is doing a fantastic job."

Cox is equally enthused by what is taking place on site. "We're 70 percent sold already," he says. "We were extremely fortunate to obtain this property, and even though it may have been bad timing since we were still busy with Pandora, everything is coming together smoothly – thanks to our terrific team of architects and builders." **A**

LOCATION
989 Johnson Street, 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
180,000 square feet

TOTAL COST
\$75 million