

For better or worse, skyline gets a facelift

Condo gold rush engenders a landmark year for architectural change

By J.C. SCOTT

The past year has been a remarkable one for architectural change to the Victoria skyline, with the results of that change only slowly beginning to be realized.

The best and some of the worst parts are only now beginning to show, but the changes set in motion will change the face of Victoria more than any year I can recall.

Chinatown is undergoing big changes with two projects. One is the almost complete Capital Regional District building, now overlooking both the Gate of Harmonious Interest and City Hall as the tallest building in Old Town. The other is Bambu, a condominium project now on hold — but the hole is dug for an even taller building to overshadow Chinatown.

The Bambu site, once open space on lower Fisgard, is no longer accessible for either parking or walking and is now surrounded by chain-link fencing. Vic West is also home to kilometres

of chain-link fence surrounding construction sites that will produce, when complete, the good, the bad and maybe even the ugly architecture that I have pointed out through letters to the editor of this paper in the past.

The big sharks are now here and they've taken their first bites of our city. Fortunately, one of these first bites will produce Shutters, an elegant midrise condominium at Songhees that may well become the jewel of that oft-maligned neighbourhood.

Not quite so nice and slightly too high by the same Vancouver developer, at Tyee and Wilson in Vic West, is the Parc, but from that highrise the neighbourhood has a new pocket park.

Across Tyee Road from the Parc is the first of two office buildings — called Upper Harbour Place — and the second is quickly rising.

Vancouver developer Arthur Griffiths has done a good job on the look and they will make a nice gateway to Vic West, coming across the Bay Street bridge. This is only the start of what we

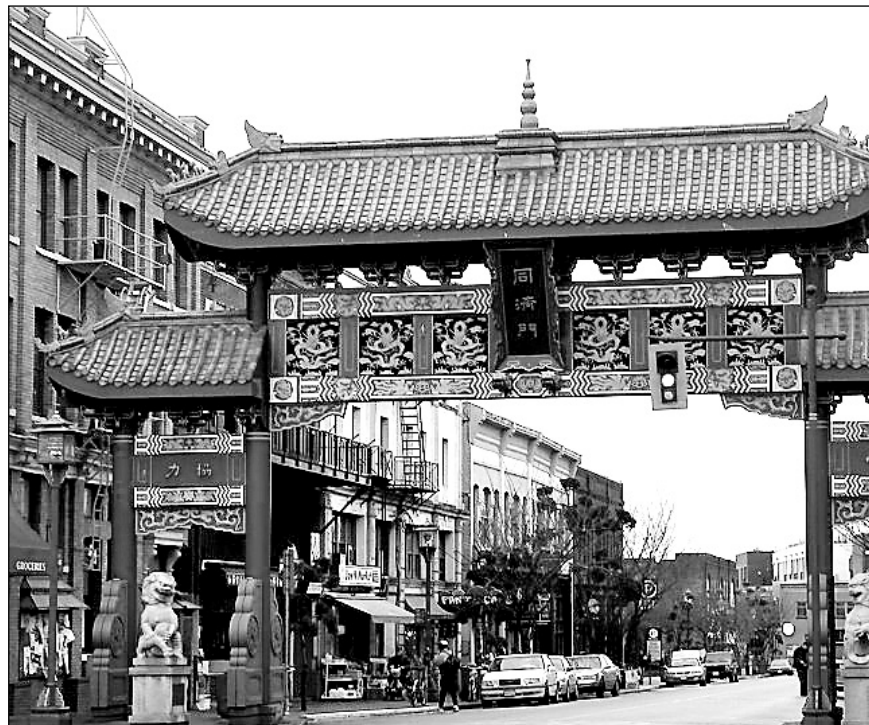
will soon see, however, in that block between Tyee Road and the harbour.

Dockside Green by Windmill Developments has the most promise to be the good, with a combination of mid-rise green architecture, a brownfield development site, water and energy management, and social sustainability all involved. When combined with the new facility at Point Hope Shipyard, the project might focus worldwide architectural attention on Victoria.

Diagonally across Tyee Road, at Esquimalt, is the type of project and developer I have been warning planners and citizens alike about.

Unlike Windmill, which has taken efforts all along to inform and involve the community, we have a stealth project with apparent civic blessing but with almost no community input.

And unlike the project that was originally zoned for this site, which allowed view corridors, this will be a solid obstruction — much higher than any neighbouring buildings in terms of storeys and also sited on the highest



Chinatown is undergoing significant change with two large projects.

Debra Brash/Times Colonist

rocky site overlooking Songhees.

This structure by Ken Mariash of Los Angeles and Calgary will be by far the highest in that immediate area, but it may not be the highest on the west side of the harbour. Swallows Landing, which is a nicely designed highrise project by a local developer, is equally tall and sited on another rock outcrop overlooking the city and harbour from West Bay in Esquimalt.

So although few of these buildings are complete or even near their final

size and shape, the result is inevitable: The 2005 condo gold rush will result in the skyline of Victoria being changed more than in any other year since the Klondike gold rush.

And note: I didn't even mention the Humboldt corridor, where the really tall buildings by Vancouver developers are already rising as fast as they can be sold!

J.C. Scott is a designer based in Fan Tan Alley.

Circular reasoning invalid

Driver inside roundabout doesn't have right of way — unless a sign says so

By RENÉ Y. BOHEMIER

Over the past weeks I have seen many letters about the traffic "circles" and/or "roundabouts."

I do not believe that in B.C. there are any specific laws in the Motor Vehicle Act concerning these "circles/roundabouts."

I do know that the Insurance Corp. of B.C., in one of its driving manuals, "suggests" that persons inside the traffic circle have right of way over persons entering the circle.

In the absence of any signs at these intersections where circles/roundabouts have been installed, this is contrary to the current law.

If there are no signs (stop, yield, etc.) describing what approaching vehicles must do, then section 173 of the Motor Vehicle Act takes precedence and states that you must yield to the vehicle on the right.

In order to make it law that the vehicle inside the circle has right of way, the local authority who installed the circle/roundabout must also install signage that states who must yield to whom.

If there is a collision, the offending driver would then be driving contrary to section 125 of the Motor Vehicle Act (disobeying a sign, not failing to yield).

All legislation put aside, I would suggest that drivers treat these intersection with respect. Do not assume that you have right of way; use caution and avoid collisions.

But if there is a collision, be aware that your liability may not be as you have been led to believe unless there is signage at the intersection or the Motor Vehicle Act is amended to reflect these circles/roundabouts.

Here are the two relevant Motor Vehicle Act sections:

• 125. "Unless otherwise directed by a peace officer or a person authorized by a peace officer to direct traffic, every driver of a vehicle and every pedestrian must obey the instructions of an applicable traffic control device." (Note that a sign is a traffic control device.)

• 173 (1) "Except as provided in section 175, if two vehicles approach or enter an intersection from different highways at approximately the same time and there are no yield signs, the driver of a vehicle must yield the right of way to the vehicle that is on the right of the vehicle that he or she is driving."

(2) "Except as provided in section 175, if two vehicles approach or enter an intersection from different highways at approximately the same time and there is a yield sign, the driver of a vehicle facing the sign must yield the right of way to all other traffic." (Note that section 175 deals with intersections with stop signs.)

René Y. Bohemier is a retired police officer who specialized in traffic law and other related traffic matters.

LETTERS

CUTE PACKAGE



Even mature giant pandas, like these two in the Wolong China Giant Panda Research Centre in southwestern China, get high marks for being cute. How one views similarly shaped human adults is purely a matter of taste.

Niu Yixin/Associated Press

It's in the eye of the beholder

Re: "Why cute is smart," Jan. 3.

I must disagree with the idea that the cute characteristics of the baby panda evoke the same universal caring response.

Take me, for instance. The adorable bulging midriff?

Absolutely, and it bulges more adorably every year. The bright, forward-

facing eyes? Got 'em, and one of them is attractively light-reflective since my recent cataract surgery.

Floppy limbs? It's almost inevitable at 75, especially after those two glasses of Albanian Chateau Plonque at Christmas. The side-to-side teeter-totter gait? Certainly, especially if I leave my cane

at home.

One would think, with this complete catalogue of cute characteristics, that I would be cuddled and cosseted by young women at every turn. It just doesn't happen. And, my wife says, it had better not.

Dick Hainsworth,
Victoria.

Get tough on lawbreakers

Since we are in the middle of a national election campaign, what better time than now to bring up the question of law and order?

The recent spate of killings in Toronto and Vancouver has disgusted every law-abiding citizen. We know that most of these shootings have been related to the illicit drug trade, and yet those in power seem helpless to do anything about it.

Part of the problem, no doubt, is the shortage of police personnel to handle the situation. How long must this go on before firm action is taken to beef up our law-enforcement agencies?

A second problem is that our law-enforcement agencies are not allowed to the means to search out and do away with the growers and dealers who are at the root of the problem.

The police should be allowed to do whatever is necessary to detect these grow-ops and destroy them. Any homeowner allowing an illegal grow-op should not only be prosecuted but have to forfeit his property as well.

In addition, we should start at the bottom and prosecute those street dealers that are peddling drugs to our children and the downtrodden.

The final problem lies with the court system. Since the 1960s, the courts have been steadily focusing on rehabilitation of criminals rather than punishing them for breaking the rules of our society. Rehabilitation should be used for some

lawbreakers, but those who consistently and without remorse break those rules of society by which most of us live should be punished and not let off with a slap on the wrist. If we are not prepared to deal with these lawbreakers, our society will gradually slide into anarchy.

D.S. Terrell,
North Saanich.

Martin delivered a sermon

All the hints were that Paul Martin was going to make a policy statement on Jan. 2, so I tuned in because I was baffled as to what policy statement he could possibly make. Sure enough, there wasn't one, just a chest-thumping sermon (is he practising for a new job as an evangelist preacher?). However, he did clearly define the difference between himself and Stephen Harper. If you want a "hand up," vote Conservative. If you want a "hand out," vote Liberal.

Charles Reid,
Nanaimo.

Coalitions work in Germany

Looking at the groan emanating from those who expect another minority government in the next election, I wonder whether a negotiated coalition, though hardly ever discussed in North America,

may not be a valid solution.

What if NDP Leader Jack Layton, instead of informally supporting the Liberals during the past year, had negotiated a formal coalition with Paul Martin?

It took Angela Merkel nine weeks to negotiate a "grand coalition" of Social Democrats and Christian Democrats (roughly the equivalent of NDP and Liberals) in Berlin, but everybody expects it to last the full four years of government.

Of course, the price is a haggling over what portfolios will be given to each of the coalition partners and agreement on basic policies. But it has worked well for decades in the German government. And they have five parties, just like Canada.

Otfried Spreen,
Victoria.

Demand results or take to the streets

Crime and health care, in my opinion, are the most important issues in this federal election. After the election, if these issues are not greatly improved upon, then we the people should take to the streets and demand positive change. Canadians, generally speaking, are apathetic, which is likely why we are in this present situation.

This country is in a state of lassitude. Canada will either go ahead positively or backward. It, like people, does not stand still.

Elizabeth Murray,
Victoria.

SCULPTURE Enjoyment a factor

Re: "Sculptor's audience is a failure," Jan. 3. The debate over Mowry Baden's piece has brought a great deal of opinion out over the very definition of art, and to what extent we ought to cater to those who are allegedly deficient in their capacity to understand works that, to the "untrained" eye, seem to be little more than oddly assembled scrap metal.

My only qualm is with those who insult the audience for not appreciating a particular work of art. It seems that the approach of blaming the capacities of the dissatisfied viewer allows for just about anything to be passed off as good art by those in the business of creating and selling it.

In fact, one could even extend the argument and say that a lack of overall appreciation is a testament to Pavillion, Rock, and Shell's true greatness!

Perhaps. And while this principle may be true on rare occasions, I am more keen to the emperor's-new-clothes notion that much of abstract modern sculpture is in fact junk.

If we are to spend public money on outdoor art, we ought to invest in something that is intellectually accessible, and generally enjoyed by the public. I don't see what's so hard about that. Sculpture can be both understandable to the layman and artistically brilliant — Bill Reid's beautiful canoe sculpture at the Vancouver International Airport for example. Perhaps the city would consider such a compromise next time public art is in the budget.

Jared Faber,
Oak Bay.

Avert the eyes, hold the nose

Now that I have cooled off a mite, let's get on to more important things. The two letters Jan. 3 on the arena "public art" beg a reply from one of hoi polloi. The orgulousity of the glabrous argument advanced in support of the arena's bazooka-like wastements, foisted on an assumed inerudite public, is execrable. Being one of those gifted with a capacious eclectic gustation, I forfend my difficulty and avoid an "esthetic experience" by averting my eyes and firmly holding my nose until I have passed by. Thanks for the help, TC.

Bill Doherty,
Sidney.

Send Us Your Letters

Mail: Letters to the Editor, Times Colonist, Box 300, Victoria, B.C. V8W 2N4

Fax: 250-380-5353

E-mail: letters@tc.canwest.com

Letters should be no longer than 250 words and may be edited for length. Include your name, address and telephone number. We won't publish anonymous letters.

Copyright in letters and other materials accepted for publication remains with the author, but the publisher and its licensees may freely reproduce them in print, electronic and other forms.

More Letters Online
www.timescolonist.com