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# MODEL BEHAVIOUR

IN OUR RED-HOT MARKET, THE DISPLAY SUITE HAS BECOME AS MUCH A STUDY IN CUTTING-EDGE DESIGN AS IN THE ART OF SELLING SPACE

BY GUY BABINEAU





WITH THE FUTURISTIC VIBE OF 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY, JAMESON HOUSE'S SHOW SUITE WOULD IMPRESS STANLEY KUBRICK HIMSELF.

**T**he closest thing to a display suite or show room that I can recall from my childhood is the model home they gave away at the PNE every year, which was kind of tacky. There was also the General Electric Carousel of Progress I saw at Disneyland when I was 11, with its creepy audio-animatronic family ushering you through various stages in the progress of the American home. Since then, however, a whole new design industry has taken shape to accommodate the need for model suites and presentation centres to promote property before

ground has even been broken, or to beef up the sales potential of identical, and usually unfinished, units.

As today's red-hot speculative real-estate market reaches critical mass, the pressure is on to get the attention of (and close deals with) prospective home buyers and investors. A hilariously biting article by A. A. Gill in a recent issue of *Vanity Fair* savaged the sales materials and techniques of New York's condo developers, particularly their sameness. However, as consumers grow savvy, developers are getting with the program and realizing

they need to differentiate their offerings from everyone else's. The strategic design of spaces that catch the eye, forecast how they could look and feel, and lead to someone signing a cheque is fast becoming an art and science. Three local developments illustrate how it can be done. One is a high-end tower. One is a boutique condo. One is a row of Craftsman-style townhomes.

### Conquering space

The Jameson House show room at 830 West Pender Street (noon to 6 p.m. daily

except Fridays, [jamesonfoster.com](http://jamesonfoster.com)) offers a glimpse of the future. Designed by Britain's Foster and Partners for Jameson Development Corporation, the 37-storey mixed-use residential tower will rise from an existing heritage façade and is being positioned as a gem of sustainability. With projects around the world, Lord Norman Foster is the international architect most strongly associated with green design.

Renderings of Jameson House show four sleek cylinders rising on one flank, hinting at a curvilinear theme continued inside. There are 131 units available on



ALDA PEREIRA PUT A HUGE EMPHASIS ON COLOURS, PATTERNS, EDGES, AND NUANCES FOR METROLIVING'S DISPLAY SUITE.

floors 14 through 37, ranging in price from \$594,000 (1 bedroom) to \$3.5 million (two-storey penthouse).

When you visit the presentation centre, prepare to be beamed up. The journey through space starts in a pitch-black gallery filled with miniatures of various suite options, each mounted on a pedestal. Animated visual presentations play on wall-mounted panels. When you step up in to the full-scale model suite—and after your eyes have adjusted to a blinding blaze of white—you find yourself in an atmosphere that is slightly suggestive of the space sta-

tion in Stanley Kubrick's 1968 vision of the future, 2001: A Space Odyssey. The film's interior designs remain surprisingly fresh and relevant today.

"That's not a bad analogy," says Lee Hallman by phone. The associate partner with Foster and Partners, who also designed the show room, is in Vancouver to oversee the site's development. "We wanted to show that contemporary design can be sustainable. Often design [trends] tend to be on the side of fashion rather than architecture. Architecture is about environmental context. The display

suite is intended to show an appreciation for the integrity of design."

According to Hallman, the display suite is an amalgamation of all the available units, including a number of circular, so-called "organic" residences. Corresponding surfaces and furnishings with rounded edges and accents include a dynamic Dada kitchen designed by Italy's Molteni Group, and wicker PK22 lounge chairs by Fritz Hansen, an Arne sofa by Antonio Citterio, and a stunning bent-beechwood chaise longue called Body Raft by Giulio Cappellini, all supplied by Inform Interiors

(97 Water Street, 604-682-3868).

"The main job of the display centre is to get across the level of quality," says Hallman.

This space-age show room nicely balances architectural, interior, and industrial design. It's also a trippy exercise in space exploration.

### Creating character

All of the suites in Townline Homes' Metro-living condo at 1168 Richards in Yaletown have sold. However, the developer plans to maintain **SEE NEXT PAGE>>**

the display suite in order to promote residences in a similar "sister" building at 1241 Homer. Designed by Alda Pereira (aldapereiradesign.com/), this sumptuous model suite breaks with the dubious tradition of boxy, hard-edged, retro-modern minimalism used to flog small, cramped spaces across the city. To be fair, the homes here offer much more room and higher ceilings. Nonetheless, Pereira's design, which plays a rich variety of surfaces, edges, colours, and patterns off one another, speaks volumes about the seductive power of nuance. This space has personality.

"Our mandate for this particular property was that it had all the qualifications of a boutique. You're not on the second floor of Plan B, Type F, like so many buildings downtown," says Pereira, sitting in her office/studio in the Waterfall Building near Granville Island. "You have 12 very unique suites."

The Vanity Fair article cited above was especially vociferous about every property's claim to be "unique", but in this case, the word rings true. Working with the developer, Pereira created a profile of the ideal residents: a sophisticated, well-read and -travelled couple who are downsizing from a larger home and don't have other commitments.

"It's not about posturizing, about where you live. These aren't 'Yaletown' or 'downtown' people. They're one-of-a-kind, very individual. I thought maybe they might be UBC professors. They have a certain confidence level and aren't reading magazines to find out what their style is. We wanted to give the idea that they've probably been collecting modern classics [in furniture] for about 20 years."

To make this suggestion concrete, Pereira staged the layout with Wishbone dining-room chairs and Shell chairs for the living room designed by Hans J. Wegner, and an MR Lounge by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Eclectic is the word she uses to describe the overall aesthetic, which doesn't mean all over the map. It means that every room offers new and pleasant surprises, such as a sunroom with a Moroccan motif, a zebra throw rug in the Blue Room (the den), and the playful, if judicious, use here and there of patterned wallpapers and unusual fixtures sourced from global shops.

Pereira's show suite creates the impression that somebody already lives here. What better way to characterize the essence of home?

## Telling stories

Tucked away amidst the tree-lined streets of the East Side's pleasant Cedar Cottage neighbourhood near Trout Lake, Stories (show room at 1708 East 20th Avenue, livingstories.ca/) is a collection of 60 three-storey row homes built in the Craftsman style. Prices range from \$509,900 (1,238 square feet) to \$574,900 (1,561 square feet).

Although the interior of the model home edges toward contemporary tastes rather than the charming vintage-modern feel of the exterior, flourishes throughout create a consistently homey feel. The residents conceived by the developer, Mosaic Homes, are a professional couple from the West Side looking for something more affordable, but with some high-end flair. He's a chef in a trendy restaurant. She's a designer of custom wedding dresses. The first thing you see, to the right of the front door when you enter and before you scale the stairs, is her design studio, an imaginative feature considering she doesn't really exist.

"When we figured out who the target market was going to be, we started to have fun with how to put a home together," explains Andrea Camp, Mosaic's sales and marketing manager, during a tour of the home, which was designed by BYU Design. "What are their interests? What do they read? What do they cook?"

Vegetables apparently, if the plastic veggies casually arranged on a chopping block in the kitchen are telling the truth. If God is in the details, then this place ought to be beatified. In the junior bedroom, a book about Chanel is perched nonchalantly beneath the window. It's fake, a notebook of blank pages with a doctored cover picking up on the room's blue accents. A curvaceous walnut breakfast tray (Designhouse, 1110 Mainland Street, 604-681-2800) with two champagne flutes rests on the bed in the master bedroom. Graphic black vines tendrill upward on the white wall above the headboard, making you look up and admire the high, vaulted ceiling.

"People experience rooms vertically, then horizontally," says Camp. "We try to create areas of interest and dimension."

A recessed niche in the dining room is trimmed in wood and outfitted with a multilayered cubist mirror (Koolhaus, 2199 West 4th Avenue, 604-875-9004). Another nice touch is the funky 21st-century Cellula chandelier

above the dining table (Inform Interiors).

This model home is designed to tell a story. Is it believable? Yes, thanks to the details. ♦

## MR. X-IBIT REVEALS THE BRAINS AROUND BRANDING

How do you get people to buy into a lifestyle community when all that exists is a master plan and a developer with big ideas? You brand it, that's how, with an experiential space that connects the developer's vision to people's hearts and minds (and pocket-books) using innovative architectural, industrial, and multimedia design.

"It has to tell a real story and build an emotional connection. It's really important to figure out how the space will work: how people will go through it and how each component [of the proposed community] is told," says Stu Waddell, creative director of X-Ibit (x-ibit.com/). "Basically it's an experience, and it evolves as aspects of the community grow or change.

"If there's nothing of interest or unique or special about a project, then there's nothing to tell. A good discovery centre depends on a good project." Waddell's firm designs multidisciplinary museum exhibits, art installations, cultural and commercial interpretive centres, and marketing spaces for high-end residential communities—also known as discovery or presentation centres. Waddell's background as an award-winning graphic designer, self-taught interior designer, "cool hunter" for a large international liquor company, and all-around Renaissance guy, has found the perfect outlet in this field. Recent projects include discovery centres for Tobiano, a high-end residential and resort community near Kamloops, and Espiritu, a mountainside community in Mexico for the well-heeled, plus a new interpretive centre for the Port of Vancouver.

X-Ibit's discovery centre for Tobiano had to evoke everything from the land's history to architectural guidelines. Some "cues" are provided via a low-slung double roofline inspired by ranch architecture, a central stone wall symbolic of the hoodoos found nearby, and a glass-art feature wall by this is it's Robert Studer, inspired by colours in the natural environment. >GB