

# Globe Real Estate

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## DEVELOPMENT

David Sorensen has a building lot to die for — 135 pristine acres on Bowen Island — and feels the weight of responsibility to construct his luxury homes while disturbing as little as possible. But as he sees it, 'If you're going to develop a rainforest, you might as well have tree huggers do it', writes **MARCIE GOOD**

## Building on tiptoe

He has yet to build a single home on the 135-acre Bowen Island property known as King Edward Bay, but David Sorensen already talks about it with the air of a proud father.

As he manoeuvres his Toyota four-wheel drive truck up and down and around the steep gravel roads of the site, he points out highlights: the maples known as widowmakers, delicate mosses like reindeer lichen, and a curious spindly-legged deer. An ordinary-looking clump of ferns along the side of the road, he explains, was carefully removed and then replanted after the road was complete. "If you're going to develop a rainforest," he says, "you might as well have tree huggers do it."

The owner (with his brother John) of Sorensen Fine Homes has more of a history in hammering logs than embracing them. They started their careers as carpenters in Toronto during the 1970s, focusing on building infill housing over the next two decades. When the early 1990's recession hit, all their construction work dried up. Now Mr. Sorensen calls it the best thing that happened to them.

They moved to the west coast in 1993, first working on small projects on Mayne Island. In 2000 they started Summerside, a 51-unit multi-family project on Saltspring Island currently nearing completion. They also have 15 lots at Patricia Bay, near Sydney, on the market. Working on the Gulf Islands, he says, changed his approach to development. "I started thinking maybe I should keep that 60-footer, instead of cut-

ting it down, building houses and then planting four-foot trees."

King Edward Bay is their largest project in terms of area and value. From the ferry docks at Snug Cove, the property is nine kilometres straight across the island, and provides what Mr. Sorensen calls "a priceless southwest exposure." That's certainly one of the factors making these lots valuable: they start at \$349,000 and range up to \$1.4-million for waterfront. Of the first 41 lots released in December, 21 have sold. As might be expected, Alberta buyers are on the books, but the second largest group of out-of-province interest comes from further: the U.K.

Homes will be built by his company to the owner's specs, and Mr. Sorensen estimates costs starting at \$300 a square foot. Buyers, however, do not have entirely free rein. A set of design guidelines ensures that the homes will suit the environment, both esthetically and environmentally. No vinyl or aluminum siding is allowed, and "passive design" is encouraged to make use of solar heating and cooling. The existing moss is also non-negotiable: "You can't mess around with those."

The prices are new highs for Bowen Island lots, and Mr. Sorensen admits that his approach was not the cheapest route. Before he acquired the property in January 2005 from a long-time family owner, he spent eight months in the forest with his trestle table and computer, mapping out the topography and position of the trees on the lower 48 acres. Careful to disturb as few as possible and using the skidder



SORENSEN FINE HOMES

**Builder David Sorensen aims to serve up Bowen Island's spectacular views while minimizing the impact on the natural environment.**

roads cut by loggers generations ago, he sketched out where each of the future homes should go.

Now, he estimates that at least 80 per cent of the original trees have been preserved.

The earnest tread-lightly philosophy was welcomed by the municipality of Bowen Island. As condi-

tions of development, council is encouraging park and green space dedication and protection of the water supply, which in many areas of the island comes from antiquated systems. Mayor Bob Turner says that one of the most important achievements of King Edward Bay was the agreement to build a well

with a reservoir tank that will be shared with the neighbours.

Increased interest from outside home buyers has led to what Mr. Turner calls an "affordability crisis," which has squeezed out a large part of the rental stock and caused many long-time residents to leave. The idea of sprawling vacation acreages

with luxury homes in many ways contradicts the nature-loving stereotype of islanders. Denser housing in an urban area encourages far less water and energy use.

To meet those ends, Mr. Turner says council is promoting more

See BOWEN on page S5

## ARCHITECTURE

### New U.B.C. Theological Neighbourhood is less than divine



**TREVOR BODDY DWELLING**

The University of British Columbia's theological colleges used to be set within a verdant park at the gateway to the campus. The colleges are still there, but now they have become almost invisible, lost within the latest of the residential neighbourhoods that have made the U.B.C. campus the Greater Vancouver Regional District's fastest-growing area. One of this city's most sublime sites has been densified, but the results fall far short of divine.

The story of how an academic theological precinct became a theological neighbourhood mainly home to residents without campus connections is one of the collision of worldly mammon with

heavenly good intentions.

It all begins with special leases for college buildings granted in U.B.C.'s early years for each of the major Christian denominations: Roman Catholic, Baptist, Presbyterian, Anglican and United churches. So eager were campus officials to attract and keep theological colleges — the spiritual foundation for most older Canadian universities — they granted them leases running not the 99 years typical for other on-campus institutions, but for 999 years. Their future secure, a series of college buildings were then constructed from the 1920 through the 1950s on wide lawns backed with lush plantings, a serene, bucolic, and yes, meditative gateway to the campus along Chancellor Boulevard.

By the late 1990s, the theological colleges were facing both fading enrolments and failing buildings. With condo developments starting to rise all over campus, the college's long term leases turned out to be a hugely valuable asset, since exploited to the hilt.

Under the terms of their leases, revenues generated by the sale of college properties to developers have gone not to general U.B.C. accounts, but to the colleges themselves, turning some of nation's poorer theological institutes into some of its richest. I have no problem with this windfall, but the resulting architecture and public spaces are a huge disappointment.

This is particularly apparent in the spaces and buildings around the Iona Building, the severe grey granite 1927 building for the United Church that long acted as the entranceway citadel for the entire Point Grey campus. The stern bearing and Collegiate Gothic style of this six-storey college is no match for the 14-storey Corus condo tower that now looms behind it. The tower was moved to this unfortunate location because of strenuous objections from residents in the long-established Endowment Lands neighbourhood to the north.

With a dazzling view of Burrard Inlet and the North Shore mountains, the space in front of the Iona Building should have become the key urban plaza for the mid-rise, medium density development that now surrounds it. Instead this space is ungainly, unsightly and undefined, but the blame for this lost opportunity has to be spread around. Campus planners and on-campus developer UBC Properties Trust talked

about this as the hub for the new neighbourhood, but did not stand by their convictions through design and development. Intercorp, the private sector developer of three sides of this would-be square did not load retail functions and townhouse doorways around it, which might have enlivened this public space's edges. For its own part, the United Church college insisted on retaining a dozen parking spaces located at what is, by rights, the centre of the square. Vehicles stationed there now have one of the best views in the city, but then Hondas and Chevrolets don't have eyes.

Early plans for the neighbourhood show a grand boulevard with a rivulet-fountain proceeding from Iona's tower to Chancellor Boulevard. In a somewhat questionable appeasement to residents on the other side of this key campus access road, the new duplex housing along this edge are not only the smallest in scale, but also detailed with gables and period detail to recall suburbia — the suburbs of Calgary, it seems.

Formerly, U.B.C. visitors were greeted by vast lawns and quaint colleges; now they get a strip of Cowtown. What is worse, gainily mock-bungalows at either side of the entrance of this road up to Iona now effectively reduce campus visitor's views of the college to milliseconds as they pass by on

See U.B.C. on page S5

## JOB QUOTES

### Getting it in writing is just the beginning — but get it



**MIKE HOLMES MAKE IT RIGHT**

An estimate tells you more than the bottom line — about your contractor's character, his depth of knowledge, and the way he's thinking about your job in particular.

If a contractor you don't know that well gives a verbal estimate, he may not be that interested in the work. He may be competent, he may even be a good businessman, but he's likely not committed.

Or maybe he just doesn't want the job, which could be a big problem for you. There may be good reasons for that: he's too busy, your job's a pain in the neck, he has scheduling concerns, or maybe he just doesn't like you. So he'll push up the price to a point that, if you

accept the bid, he'll be crazy to turn it down. So you'll have a less-than-enthusiastic contractor and you'll be paying top price.

A verbal quote doesn't mean anything anyway because, when you ask the inevitable questions like, "Is this included?" or "Are you going to replace the sink?" the details will become so complicated as the price goes up and down, you'll still need something in writing so you know what you are buying.

Don't wind up tossing ideas and numbers back and forth. Just say, "Thanks, and can I now get that in writing, please?" The contractor might press you at this point with questions like, "If you go ahead, when would we start?" or "How likely are you to actually hire me?" He's worried that you are a tire kicker, and he needs some sense that you are serious. These are fair questions and he deserves to know you are not wasting his time, but you still need to get things in writing.

A written estimate is not a con-

See HOLMES on page S5

## Market supports high ideals

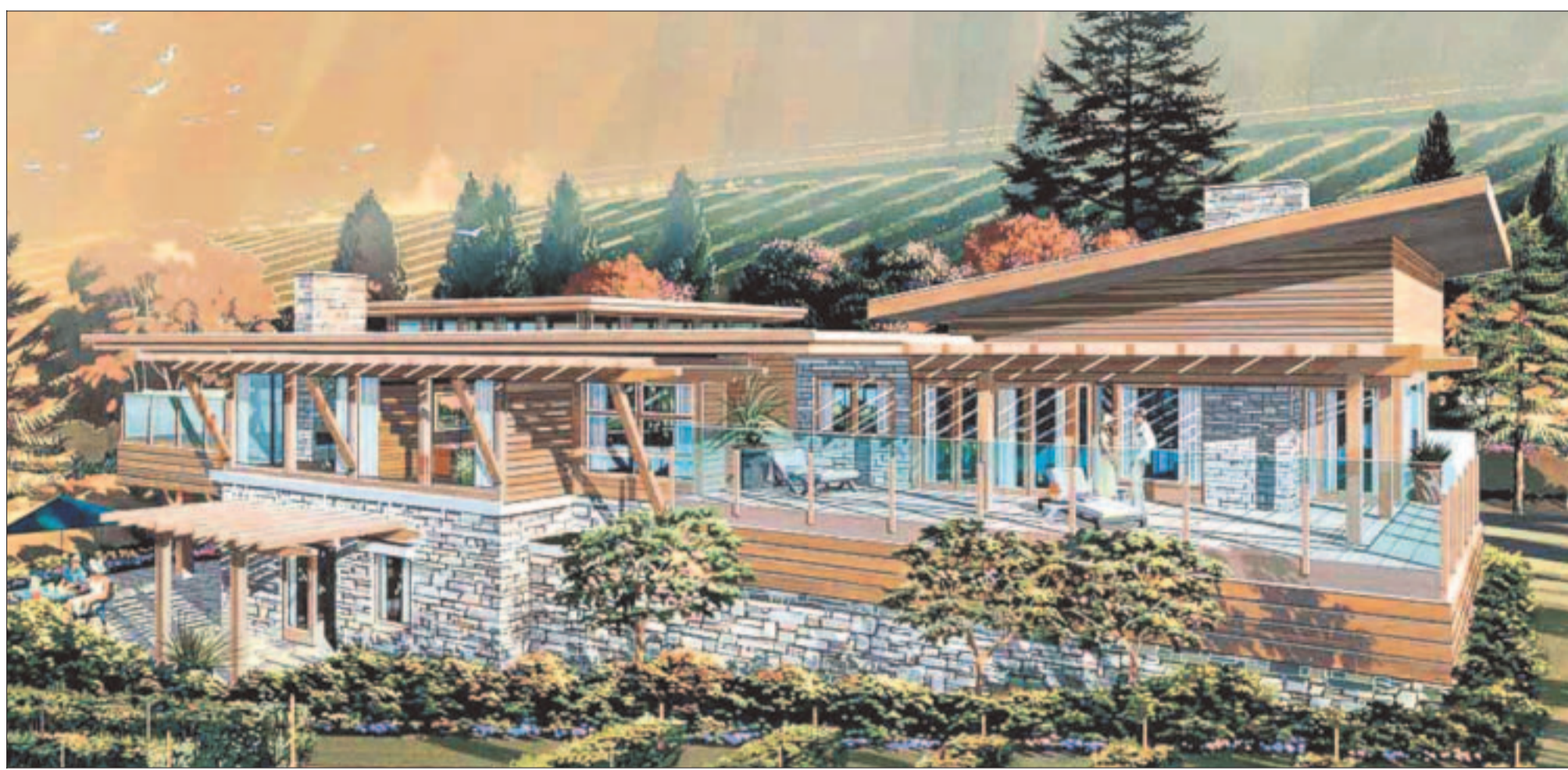
**BOWEN** from page S4

compact development in Snug Cove, the island's only town. The municipality recently acquired 40 acres of former parkland from the Greater Vancouver Regional District, and plans are under way for a civic facility and housing. Two other recent re-zonings also clear the way for residential development in the area. "Rather than being just a getaway in the woods, we're keen to build community," says Mr. Turner, pointing out the irony that Bowen residents often rely on their cars and the ferry.

But he notes a positive aspect of the high-end development at King Edward Bay: the market seems to support high-minded ideals. It's not surprising, because well-packaged nature is one of the selling points of a luxury property. In order to give waterfront buyers the best possible view, Mr. Sorensen negotiated a relaxed 15-metre setback from the shore. While the rules require double that distance, he showed council pictures of other waterfront homes to prove what often happens: clear cuts from the house to the ocean. In return for the relaxed requirement, he promised to keep the trees alive.

There's still room for development on the upper 87 acres of King Edward Bay, on the steep slope of Mount Gardener. Here, Mr. Sorensen has begun discussions with the municipality for a different kind of project. He wants to build a dozen "affordable" cottages, aiming for a more diverse community and providing homes for ordinary islanders. "Wouldn't that be magical?" he enthuses, pointing out the muddy clearing where he imagines such a settlement along with a "mom and pop" grocery store. Then the developer makes perhaps his most heretical statement yet: "The vibrancy of a community is proportional to the right mix of people. You cannot have an elitist environment if you're going to have a vibrant community."

*Special to The Globe and Mail*



20/20 RESORT GROUP

An artists rendering of the Vineyards at LakeStone, which will be the largest residential resort in the Okanagan.

### KELOWNA RESORT PROPERTIES

# ON SITE Vineyard project plans ripening

BY THOMASINA BARNES

Building on their experience in both Mexico and B.C., 20/20 Resort Group has outlined an ambitious development plan for a 1,300-home lakeshore community in the Okanagan called LakeStone.

But the developer says that while lessons learned at Sotovolta on La Ropa Beach in Zihuatanejo, Mexico and their proposed European-style ski resort in Smithers will be applied to LakeStone, the Okanagan project will have its own distinctive style.

"We have not duplicated an existing formula for resort development for LakeStone," says Peter Withers, the Project Manager. "We have drawn on an international

team of experts to create a master-planned community that will set a new standard of excellence for the region."

With a 12-year construction plan to include a Robert Trent Jones II-designed 18-hole golf course, boutique shopping village, vineyard, hotel, spa and private marina, LakeStone aims to offer every luxury amenity while complementing its natural backdrop with a low-impact design.

"Everything here, all of our ideas, our vision, our master plan — all of it has been inspired by this amazing piece of land and its connection to the water," says architect John Sproule, who is LakeStone's master planner.

The project, spanning 500 acres

of lakeside and hilltop land, will be the largest resort development in an area becoming known as the "Napa of the North."

The architecture features an indoor/outdoor design concept using natural materials and indigenous rock and timber, as well as glass to properly highlight the Southern exposure and lake views.

"The idea is to create a seamless aspect between the beauty outside and the beauty within, so that each is, in effect, a mirror of the other," says Mr. Sproule.

The interiors have been designed by the award-winning Portico Design Group to emulate the architectural theme of "connecting to nature," says Mr. Sproule. Homes at LakeStone flow from indoors to out

### Lakestone

**Developer:** 20/20 Resort Group  
**Price:** \$800,000 to \$2,400,000  
**Square footage:** 1,427 to 2,900

**Sales centre:** On site at the base of Finch Road on Lake Okanagan.  
**Contact:** 1-888-997-7776

through folding glass panelled doors with oak floors and outdoor fireplaces.

While there are 20 exclusive waterfront and water-view estates now on sale, the official launch of the first phase of LakeStone will come this summer with the release of "The Vineyards."

"The Vineyards" comprises 72 single-family and villa homes with Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired architecture and interiors that reflect the natural environment.

"The homes in 'The Vineyards' are stunning," says Lorne Borgal, 20/20 Group president. "Terraced on the slopes of a charming vineyard looking out to the lake, these homes are at one with nature," he says.

The LakeStone site is just 10 minutes north of the Kelowna airport by car, making it a convenient location for Albertans, British Columbians and international buyers.

*Special to The Globe and Mail*

## Ideas borrowed from the Dutch

U.B.C. from page S4

the main boulevard. As there are many ways this density could have been achieved without blocking views to the old building, I am obliged to ask: what profiteth it a theological college to gain a housing development, if it looseth its own presence?

The architecture and housing layouts completed to date by InterCorp and Bastion developments are the equal to or better than other recent condos on campus, but this is faint praise, as U.B.C.'s new housing design standards elsewhere are surprisingly low.

Some of the best parts of the new

development are the student residences that come in at double the condo area development of 1.2 times as much building as site area. Parking for these uses the Dutch idea of "Woon Erfs," with pavers removing distinctions between roadway, sidewalk and the stoops of flanking student lodgings.

This urban design idea and the residence architecture comes from Delft-trained architect Jan Timmer, commissioned directly by the university. Mr. Timmer saw the project through an early phase, but alas, the university did not retain him when designs and development plans got more specific — and in

need of independent judgment — later on. Mr. Timmer is frank in admitting that the built result does not always rise to the hopes expressed in his own 2001 planning guidelines: "a dynamic interplay between economic, social, ecological and spiritual issues in the building of a sustainable community."

This is the most physically blessed and high profile of all the redeveloped corners of the U.B.C. campus. Too bad the neighbourhood's stewards at the UBC Properties Trust and university administration did not treat it that way.

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## Estimates help size up contractor

HOLMES from page S4

tract, but it should be close to the latter in the level of pricing detail it provides. There should be a set price for everything that can be fixed, and everything else — such as exclusions or allowances — need to be clearly separated from the rest of the bid.

Sometimes a solid price just can't be established until work begins. Excavation is an example. If there are questions about the soil conditions or if there is an environmental issue, it may need to be separate from the bid. Fair enough, but you should still be told in the estimate how it will be eventually brought into the bid when the cost is known. If there are a lot of exceptions, however, it can mean the contractor just doesn't know enough about the work he's being asked to do.

A sign of someone with too little experience is an obsession with detail at the estimate stage. Good estimating is a matter of "feel," and someone with no experience usually lacks that. He thinks nit-picking and drilling down to each little step and detail will make him look like he knows what he is talking about. That's not an experienced contractor.

Sure it matters whether the siding is blue or pink when it comes time to install it, but not at the estimate stage (unless it's a more expensive custom colour). A contractor with a "feel" for the work will have solid numbers that can allow for small variations and changes.

There should be a proposed start and completion date, or at least a timeline that indicates how long the work will take once begun, and a promise of more detail to follow. Is it too much to ask? If the contractor has done an accurate estimate, he already knows how long it will take. He can put it in the estimate.

Pay attention to how the contractor presents his price. Does it feel like a sales pitch? If he waits till the very last minute to give it to you, having filled the first 30 to 45 minutes with details of his company's expertise, quality work and reputation, he's probably a salesman, and might not be the guy who will actually do the work. When I get a full-on pitch like that, I ask if I can meet the guy who is going to be doing my project because his experience is a lot more important to me.

If a pitch like that is followed by the appearance of a contract and pressure to sign then and there, the guy has had serious sales training. I won't sign anything in the same meeting that I receive a quote, and you shouldn't either. It tells me the guy is just too motivated by money, and not motivated enough by delivering quality.

Another thing to look for is how he breaks down the pricing. Most fixed-price contracts will either give you a single number, or a single number with a breakdown. In some cases, the breakdown will include an "overhead and profit" line as well.

A breakdown should be included; if you get a single number,

there's likely a large profit margin hidden in there — no matter how good the guy sounds.

The first estimate is when I also want to see all the paperwork proving that worker's compensation, general liability insurance and appropriate licenses are in place and paid up.

Finally, any estimate should include a payment schedule. Here's my hard-and-fast, no-exception rules for payment schedules. It does not matter whether the price is \$1,000 or \$1,000,000.

- Upon signing, no more than \$1,000 to \$1,500 down. You are only scheduling a start date here.
- 10 per cent on the start date, when workers arrive on site with their tools.
- 10 to 15 per cent in stages as certain aspects — such as framing, rough-ins for plumbing and electrical, drywall and painting — are completed, not started.
- Any big items, such as kitchen cabinets, and custom doors and windows have to be paid for upon ordering. Make a request that you pay the amount direct to the manufacturer/supplier, rather than go through your contractor.
- Make sure you have 10 to 15 per cent of the price held back for 45 days after the job is totally completed. At the end of that time period, if everything is good, pay your contractor.

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