

Greater Vancouver Edition

Builder/Architect



British Pacific Homes

British Pacific Homes

By Susan M. Boyce

The British Properties. For almost three-quarters of a century, the name has held a special allure, a mystique that speaks of extraordinary quality melded with exclusivity and Old World graciousness. And one company has long been synonymous with this elegant West Vancouver neighbourhood: British Pacific Properties.

PIONEERING HERITAGE

Founded in 1931 by the Guinness family, British Pacific Properties was born from the desire to create a dream suburb, an exclusive residential community unlike any other in North America.

Seizing a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, the Guinness family purchased 4,700 acres of the south-facing mountainside from the Municipality of West Vancouver. It was the perfect setting to convert their vision to reality — with one significant obstacle. The only way to reach the property from Vancouver was by ferry boat or a long detour via the old Second Narrows Bridge, a bridge that was later rebuilt and renamed the Ironworkers Memorial Bridge.

British Pacific Properties also agreed to build a second,

permanent link to the North Shore: an innovative suspension bridge now known as the Lions Gate Bridge. The new, three-lane crossing opened in 1938, and during construction provided much-needed employment for a large percentage of the local workforce. It also marked British Pacific Properties' debut as one of North America's most prestigious emerging neighbourhoods, a neighbourhood designed by the Olmstead firm of landscape architects.

VISIONARY OUTLOOK

Since that time, British Pacific Properties has developed more than 4,000 home sites in addition to the much-loved Park Royal Shopping Mall and Capilano Golf Course. Although headquarters remain in West Vancouver, many signature structures across Canada, the United States and as far away as England bear the British Pacific Properties heritage: landmarks that include the British Empire Building, Rockefeller Center and the Guinness Tower.

In the mid-1990s, British Pacific Properties saw a new opportunity in a changing marketplace. "Ten years ago, we morphed from land developer into a fully integrated design/build company





with our own in-house design team called British Pacific Homes,” explains James McLean, President. The change allowed the company to maintain the meticulous standards of quality they had built their reputation on. But perhaps more importantly, it meant that during a period of skyrocketing cost escalations — especially in the luxury residences market — British Pacific Homes’ fixed costs made them one of the few builders who could guarantee the final sales price.

The transition was also the bellwether of an exciting new addition to the British Properties’ product mix: high-end strata. Named The Aerie, these residences, like British Pacific Properties’ single-family homes, are trendsetters, not trend followers. “There has been a titanic shift in demographics,” McLean says. “We identified an unfulfilled niche among buyers downsizing from single family to luxury condo — and we set about to meet it.”

INCOMPARABLE LIFESTYLE

Aimed squarely at well-heeled, well-traveled urbanites, The Aerie and The Aerie 2 (now under construction) are sister buildings, each housing only eight condominium residences that seem to grow organically from the side of the mountain.







In reality, however, hundreds of truckloads of rock and glacial silt had to be removed to carve out room for each four-storey building. “It is exponentially more difficult building on a mountainside than on flat land because you are building in 3-D rather than on a flat plain,” McLean notes, although the glint in his eye suggests it’s that very degree of difficulty he finds irresistible.

“The Aerie was created to appeal to the 50+ buyer who doesn’t want to feel as if they are living in an apartment,” McLean stresses. “The design is inspired by decades of the world’s great pioneers in architecture — pioneers like Wright, Pratt, Ericson, Merrick and Hollingsworth. This is West Coast Modern — clean, angular, flowing. We are not trying to be Yaletown.” He adds that Creekside Architects was chosen to complement the British Pacific Homes design and construction team headed up by Vice President Mike Courtenay.

Inside, The Aerie presents an ambiance of classic refinement tempered by the casual charm intrinsic to our West Coast lifestyle. Clear-span construction allows different spaces to be defined by furniture rather than walls, thus creating a fluid openness — a sense of interconnectivity and visual rhythm.

Here, in one of the two remaining penthouses, the lineal kitchen includes a 15-foot by 4-foot granite slab centre island — a slab McLean says weighs 3,000 pounds and was maneuvered into place by crane; the living room boasts a soaring vaulted ceiling with





two-storey fireplace; and there is a separate wine lounge area with matched wine fridges and comfy armchairs. There's also a private elevator from the underground parkade to each of the two floors. In all, this home is 4,600 square feet of pure luxury.

But the most startling and arguably the most beautiful feature is the use of outdoor spaces. Balconies — all four of them — are expansive and wrapped by frameless glass railings so the magnificent ocean views beyond seem uninhibited. A double-sided, stone fireplace becomes a dramatic focal point on the balcony, spanning both master bedroom and a casual seating area beside the dining room. The effect is one that blurs the distinction between indoor and outdoor living.

ENVIRONMENTAL SAVVY

Like all other aspects of their design, British Pacific Homes' commitment to environmental stewardship is leading edge. "The Aerie is built to LEED Gold equivalency," McLean says. And this commitment goes far beyond low-E argon windows, nonoff-gassing

paints and carpets, and low-flow plumbing fixtures — although, naturally, all these features are present. Heating and cooling is provided by a geothermal energy system, rainwater is harvested and stored in underground cisterns for irrigation, and special care is used when choosing indigenous, eco-friendly shrubbery and plants.

LOOKING AHEAD

"For now, we are going to continue concentrating on West Vancouver," McLean says. "Once The Aerie 2 is finished, we will begin working on Roger's Creek — a 200-acre property adjacent to Cypress Bowl Road." With a project build-out value of \$1 billion, the community is anticipated to be 80% multifamily and 20% single family. "The maximum height will be 12 storeys — that's the height a fir tree grows to in this location, so the project won't poke out above the tree line," he explains.

The company is also taking a long, hard look at potential opportunities arising from current economic conditions. "We are developers and long-term land owners," he says. "So, we recognize that now may be a good time to begin buying again because prices are low and we have the mature assets that make us able to handle self-financing."

He pauses just outside the front door of The Aerie, and his gaze sweeps across the panorama of the Lions Gate Bridge, Burrard Inlet and across to UBC. In the distance, the Gulf Islands appear to float on a pillow of mist and cloud. Unconsciously, he takes a deep breath of the crisp, fresh air and sighs. "This is the most fantastic view in Canada. You just don't find such beauty very often, do you." It's a statement, not a question. "This is why we love BC, why we will always keep our headquarters right here in West Vancouver." ■



BRITISH
PACIFIC
HOMES

British Pacific Properties
(604) 925-9000
Suite 1001 — 100 Park Royal
West Vancouver, BC V7T 1A2
www.britishproperties.com