

# McLaren Housing – 1249 Howe Street

by Robin Brunet

Of all the projects considered frustrating due to budgetary and civic constraints, non-market housing can sometimes be high on the list for developers. But the new 12-storey LEED Gold apartment complex on 1249 Howe Street, Vancouver, for the McLaren Housing Society of British Columbia is a rare exception.

In terms of visual appeal and overall design excellence, the \$22.3-million edifice may well become an inspiration for developers working for other benevolent organizations.

The McLaren Housing Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing safe, affordable housing for individuals in need who live with HIV/AIDS. “Our focus is peoples’ HIV health and wellness, and any residential project we commit to must reflect this,” says Kim Stacey, McLaren executive director.

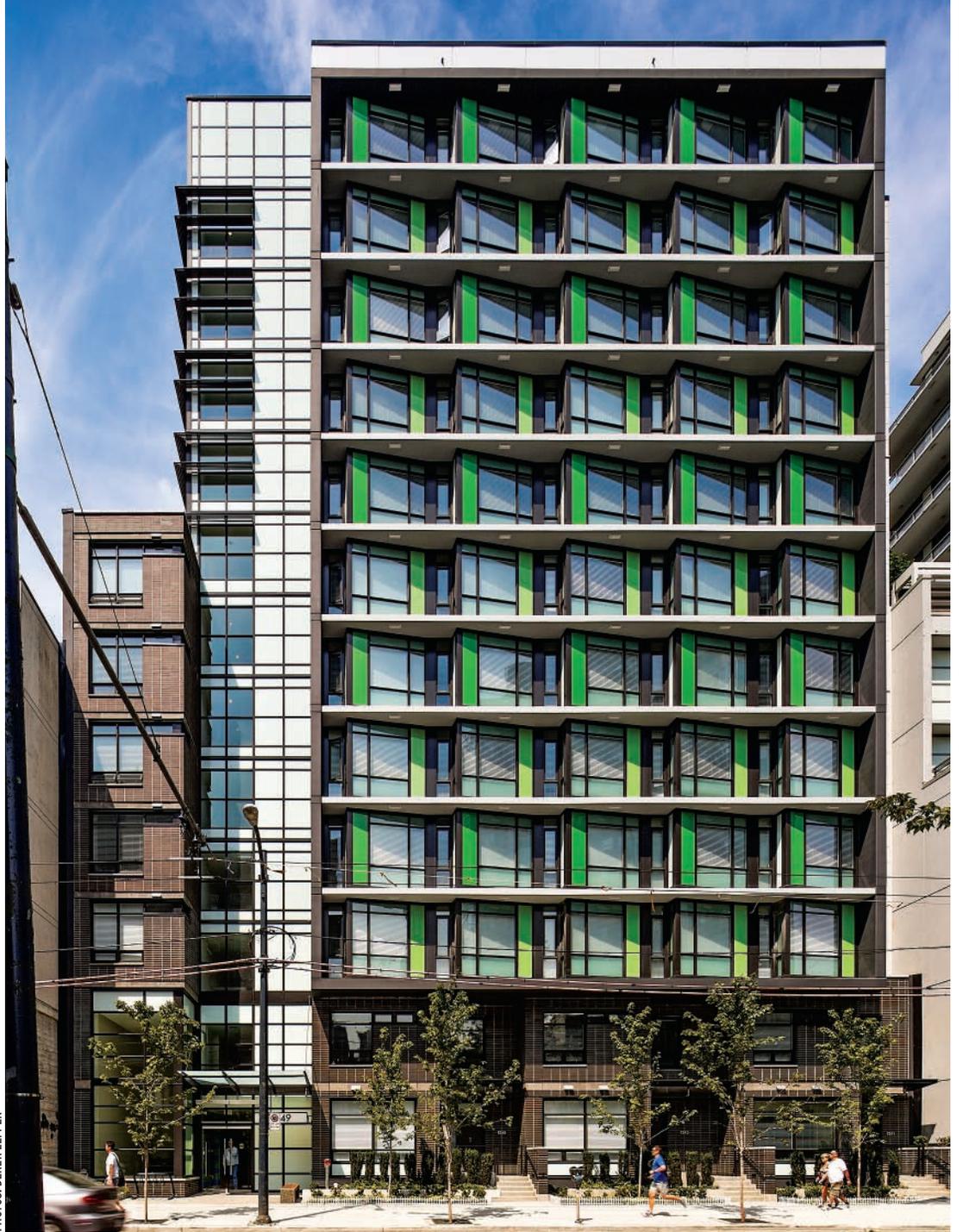
The Howe Street facility provides 110 new supportive housing apartments for individuals with HIV/AIDS who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. It is the ninth project under a partnership between the province and the City of Vancouver to build 14 new social housing developments on city-owned sites to help end homelessness in Vancouver.

The McLaren Housing Society was chosen by provincial and city officials seven years ago to manage and operate the building.

GBL Architects Inc. and Performance Construction Ltd. were retained for the project. Both firms had worked with non-profit housing providers in the past and the former was well acquainted with the demands of the non-market sector. “We’ve undertaken a lot of projects in this realm and the main challenge is always the same: to create as many units as possible without compromising the liveability of the tenants,” says Andrew Emmerson, GBL associate. “1249 Howe Street was a unique challenge due to its strong urban context, sandwiched mid-block between two large market housing developments.”

Emmerson adds, “We wanted to design a high-quality building that helps to remove the stigma attached to non-market housing typologies.”

Emmerson and his colleagues were able to design the facility according to principles it had developed during past non-market projects. “We opened up circulation areas such as stairs and elevator lobbies to improve the opportunity for social interaction,” says Emmerson. “We widened corridors and glazed the main stair allowing access to natural daylight, all of which encourages tenant use.”



PHOTOS: DEREK LEPPER

Each apartment facing Howe Street was positioned at a slight angle. The resulting saw-tooth appearance provides visual flair (by breaking up the monotonous nature of apartments stacked on top of each other), enhances privacy and reduces solar glare.

**LOCATION**  
1249 Howe Street, Vancouver, B.C.

**OWNER/DEVELOPER**  
McLaren Housing Society of British Columbia/  
BC Housing

**ARCHITECT**  
GBL Architects Inc.

**GENERAL CONTRACTOR**  
Performance Construction Ltd.

**STRUCTURAL CONSULTANT**  
Bogdonov Pao Associates Ltd.

**MECHANICAL CONSULTANT**  
Williams Engineering Canada Inc.

**ELECTRICAL CONSULTANT**  
MMM Group

**LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT**  
Durante Kreuk Ltd.

**INTERIOR DESIGN**  
Cristina Oberti Interior Design Inc.

**TOTAL AREA**  
64,930 square feet

**TOTAL COST**  
\$22.3 million

“Because this was a LEED Gold project we wanted to extend natural light and ventilation wherever possible into the building to help reduce the mechanical and electrical loads,” says Emmerson.

Additionally, a diverse range of amenity spaces are located throughout the building to encourage social interaction among the residents: a double-height meeting space beside the main entry, kitchen and lounge facilities adjacent to a large outdoor space on the second floor, and a small outdoor garden allotment on the eighth floor.

“Rooftop solar tubes and other mechanical systems were carefully implemented to achieve LEED Gold standards. This required close collaboration with the electrical, mechanical and landscape consultants,” says Emmerson. “The overall objective was to create a building that was both environmentally and socially sustainable.”

Other LEED Gold initiatives include a five per cent renewable energy from a solar hot water system, use of non-urea formaldehyde wood products and a large green roof. Other initiatives include a 40 per cent reduction in water use over conventional building, a 40 per cent reduction in energy use over Model National Energy Code of Canada for Buildings and a green housekeeping and operations program.

Acknowledging the high number of HIV/AIDS people who have families, three two-bedroom town homes were also created at street level.

“We’re extremely pleased with the finished product and the work performed by GBL and Performance. This is the largest residential building for people with HIV in Canada, and we think it’s the best,” says Stacey. ■