

'Central' attracts family to Mount Pleasant's Social

BY ALISON APPELBE, POSTMEDIA NEWS JANUARY 28, 2011



Social is a new-home project from the Onni Group on Scotia Street in Mount Pleasant.

Photograph by: PNG, PNG

Social

Project location: 2321 Scotia Street, Mount Pleasant

Project size: 125 units, studio, apartments, town houses

Residence sizes: studio, 500 sq. ft; two-bedroom apartment, 1,035 — 1,080 sq. ft; two-bedroom town house, 1,275 — 1,295 sq. ft.

Prices: \$329,900 — \$698,000

Developer: Onni Group

Architect: Lawrence Doyle Young and Wright Architects

Interior designer: in-house

Sales centre: 2321 Scotia Street (between East 7th and 8th avenues)

Hours: weekends, noon — 6 p.m., or by appointment

Telephone: 778-867-0344

Web: www.onni.com

Tentative occupancy: spring 2011

In the spring, Rita and Julian Beckett will move from their West End digs into a new townhouse in a development called Social, near the heart of Vancouver's historic Mount Pleasant neighbourhood.

The buzz of this longtime nexus, where Main-meets-Broadway-meets-Kingsway, appeals to the couple, says Julian Beckett. They like the neighbourhood that has, in recent decades, evolved from a dusty backwater with mostly second-rate businesses into a revitalized and youthful commercial and residential epicentre.

The budget-minded Becketts, who are in their early 30s and have an infant, were seeking additional space, and also looked at housing eastward in Vancouver to the Commercial Drive area and beyond. "But we feel like we're still city people," explains Beckett, who works downtown, "and we wanted to be central."

"Mount Pleasant, with its new community centre and daycare, had what we needed, but we didn't want to lose what we have [downtown]."

Mount Pleasant's lingering rough-around-the-edges ambience is fine with them. "We got married in Gastown," Beckett recalls, "because we were close to the railway tracks and it had an industrial feel." They chose gritty Berlin for their vacation.

"I'm a banker and Rita's a pharmacist, but we both like to think we have a fashion sense. Our views aren't cookie-cutter."

Having bought into the Onni Group's 125-unit Social, located on Scotia Street between East 7th and 8th avenues, the Becketts are typical of younger professionals moving into the growing number of residential and mixed-use buildings around Mount Pleasant's hub.

Onni regional sales manager Jason Dolker believes the attraction of Social, which is to be completed this spring and is 90 per cent sold, is its value. Remaining apartments and town houses, the largest of which is just under 1,300 square feet, sell for between \$329,900 and \$698,000.

Dolker points to the easy accessibility to downtown workplaces, and the way the Social site segues into a leafy neighbourhood to the northeast, making it an appealing, but less expensive option to similarly endowed neighbourhoods further west in the city.

"The area is attractive to people who want an urban setting, but also want more space," says Dolker, who claims he could trade his Yaletown condo for a new Mountain Pleasant townhouse, and get an additional 600 square feet (and, in the case of Social, two parking stalls) for about the same price.

“I’m okay with sacrificing the more prestigious neighbourhoods like Fairview slopes and Kitsilano for something a little edgier,” he adds. “And so are a lot of young professionals — even (older) downsizers. That’s why you’re seeing the emergence of a lot of building further up the Main Street corridor.”

Victorian and Edwardian vestiges linger in what from what was, from the late 1880s, Vancouver’s first suburb. Today, well served by buses, the entire area is dubbed SOMA (from South Main), and the Broadway-Main-Kingsway area, centered around the landmark seven-storey Lee Building at Main and Broadway, a “hill town” or “uptown.”

A new community plan calls for the retention of the historic sites in areas like the slope northeast of Main and Broadway, known as Brewery Creek, where Social is located, says Peter Burch, the city planner responsible for Mount Pleasant.

Other pockets the public has said it would like preserved include the unique triangular “island” bounded by Main, Kingsway and Broadway. Stretches on the south side of Broadway, and along Kingsway and northward on Main Street, are seen to be better suited (and zoned) for new and higher buildings, Burch reports.

The Main Street corridor, which boasted an electric streetcar until 1955, retains the characteristics of “a streetcar village” with a “pre-auto walking culture,” says a city report on heritage. Importantly, the area supports a growing number of inexpensive and often excellent eateries and drinking spots, arty shops, galleries and alternative venues.

Says Beckett: “My wife works at VGH, and she likes to walk. It takes a good 20 minutes, and you’re there.”

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Social rises directly east of the ultra-modern Mount Pleasant community centre, with public library, on Kingsway. A low-rise residential neighbourhood extends on east and north towards the False Creek flats.

At Scotia and East 6th, the only brewery building remaining from the days when this stream-fed hill was chockablock with small bottling industries is now a live-work complex. Nearby, on East 7th, a residential complex incorporating a Mission-revival-style garage is nearing completion. And at East 8th and Scotia stands the all-wood Knights of Pythias building, built in 1922, and long occupied by the artist collective, the Western Front.

Social is nine storeys with street-level townhouses. A five-storey podium to the south will include a rooftop garden accessible to occupants. The generously glazed building is largely brick-clad in keeping with Brewery Creek’s industrial character.

Until recently, the development lacked an on-site model home, showcasing its interiors, and those of other Onni developments at a downtown location. The Becketts liked this cost-saving measure for the implication that purchasers were saving, if marginally, on the cost of the suites.

Today, you can visit a completed townhouse on-site. The bright, open-plan unit, accessed from Scotia Street, features floor-to-ceiling sitting-room windows. Ceilings are slightly overheight; the floor is dark-stained, wide-plank engineered oak.

The kitchen includes high-efficiency KitchenAid stainless-steel appliances, white stone countertops (also in the bathrooms), twin restaurant-style, under-mounted stainless-steel sinks and custom cabinetry. A powder room is off the kitchen.

Up the enclosed stairwell and on the second floor, the suite, painted shades of grey, is outfitted with Berber-style carpets. In this floor plan, there are two second-storey bedrooms, both with baths. The larger master suite includes a walk-in closet and bathroom with soaker tub and separate shower. Side by side, the bedrooms open on to a shared enclosed balcony space, suitable as a sitting area or home office.

The suite includes Energy Star washer and dryer and ample storage, multiple outlets for high-speed Internet, and comprehensive security measures, ranging from solid-wood suite entry doors to restricted resident access to each floor.

The building is designed to the LEED (green building certification system) silver standard. Features include low-flush fixtures and water-efficient landscaping, a system of “punched windows” that improve insulation, and a cistern tank for rainwater collection.

Open-air balconies or terraces are a good size. The rooftop patio, with landscaping, includes a play area for children. A fully equipped fitness centre is part of the project.

“Look around this area and see what you can get in the \$600,000 range — and it’s not a lot,” says Dolker, gesturing eastward. “If you find something, it’s a rundown home.”

So in the end, Dolker insists he’s selling value at Social. And for buyers like the Becketts, that’s a large package.