

# 'Shangri-La' is faster, higher, stronger

Vibrant Vancouver is a city of accolades preparing to become the focus of international attention, finds Lucy Hyslop

IF EVER a city were to embody the motto of the Olympics, then Vancouver would be it. Citius, Altius, Fortius (faster, higher, stronger) perfectly echoes the spirit of the young Canadian city, recently awarded the Winter Games for 2010.

As 'wow' factors go, a description of Vancouver needs no embellishment. Flying in from London, you finally reach the end of the exhaustive Coast Mountain range and witness a cosmopolitan oasis caressed by Christmas-tree-coated peaks; an ocean generously sprinkled with yachts and islands; and a Mt Fuji-like volcano (Mount Baker) on the horizon.

Glass towers dominate the skyline, floatplanes and cruisers add romance to the harbour and Stanley Park – some four kilometres square in size – is a vivid reminder that the city was carved out of a coastal temperate rainforest.

No surprises that the province's numberplates carry the slogan 'Spectacular by Nature', or that Vancouver is already a city of accolades: from regularly ranking as the top city in the world for quality of life to this year's "best city in the Americas", thanks to the readers of *Traveler* magazine.

"In the frozen Canadian context, the city seems almost unbelievable," says Jim Sutherland, editor of *Western Living*. Vancouver and Western Canada's monthly home-trends magazine.

"The climate is similar to western France or the south of

tallest – building to be stirring the masses goes by the same name. As one of the fastest growing cities (statisticians put the city's population as rising by 80 per cent between 1999 and 2040), real estate is almost like a game in Vancouver.

Sixty-storeys (640ft) high on the border between the downtown and more residential West End area of the city, Shangri-la is riding the post-modern trend for "live-work" suites with an emphasis on cutting out the commute. The development also features a supermarket, restaurant, 4,200sq ft spa/fitness centre and even a public art space managed by the neighbouring Vancouver Art Gallery.

According to one of the city's major condo marketers, Bob Rennie, sales are going swimmingly. "In six weeks, all 223 condos on levels 16-42 were sold," he states. "This is unprecedented activity in the luxury market."

"Vancouver may go down as the place where the North American high-rise was unexpectedly perfected," Sutherland points out. "With few major companies' head offices on its downtown peninsula, the city has re-zoned most of the land to be residential, leading to the construction of hundreds of narrow, glass-clad, view-seeking condominiums. At street level the ambience is almost European, while 30 storeys up the *Wallpaper* magazine ideal is finally being lived."

All this, and Shangri-La isn't



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Shining example: part of the skyline of Vancouver which has been dubbed 'best city in the Americas'

"The past three years have seen consecutive double-digit percentage increases in sale prices, especially for high-rise condos," Sutherland explains. "A lot of the action came from Americans who were attracted by the low Canadian dollar and the safe-resort atmosphere."

It's even spawned an industry of "assigning" your condo on to another buyer before it is

Tourism Vancouver offices, there's talk of it bringing "energy and optimism" to the city. "There are several capital projects under way or in the planning stages including expansion to the convention centre, a new transit system from the airport into downtown Vancouver, and many new commercial and residential projects in the downtown

participate in changes that make Vancouver even more liveable and welcoming to the world."

He adds: "We know that our city and province will become a focal point after the winter games in Turino as we continue our Olympic preparations. Having the world's attention on Vancouver particularly from 2008-2010, will be a tremendous opportunity to tell our story via international media."

Long dismissed by the more urban, financial Canada of the east as "Lotusland" – a haven for hippies and alternative lifestyle-seekers – Vancouver appears to be coming into its own. Sure, the city is full of fit-looking people who are seeking a healthier lifestyle. But there's also a strong urban and work culture.

As Rennie says: "We are undervalued for Canada for the level of quality that is standard in our market and we are undervalued in relation to the low-profit margins that Vancouver developers accept."

□ Lucy Hyslop is the former chief features editor of the *Vancouver Sun*

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