

Water is the best of all things

Pindar, (522-438 B.C., Olympian Odes

H₂O is hot in new local homes

Stylish water features are in demand in Metro Vancouver

KOLBY SOLINSKY

One of the most distinctive features of Vancouver Aquarium is the sea otter tank.

The curious, hairy marine mammals jet back and forth across the rocky landscape, dipping their heads in and out of the water. They give quick glances at onlookers before shooting below the surface again to join the others.

Their only duties are to fishing and family. It certainly gives a humble approach to life.

It also complements the West Coast scenery that so many Vancouverites like to embrace, or even flaunt. After all, even our NHL team's colours are designed to represent the city's abundance of both the earth and the ocean.

It comes as no surprise, then, that several builders and designers bring this touch to their new homes.

Water features have always been popular among consumers for several reasons, not the least of which is the chance to take advantage of the summer swelter. It also pleases the eye as the sun dances in its reflection off pools and ponds, and steam rises up out of hot tubs and into the warm sky.

Of course, there are local manufacturers that help build this landscape.

At Raincity Rock and Waterscapes Inc., Ryan Spong and his team (which includes designers, Peter Heiss and Mark MacIsaac, and operations manager Malcom MacIsaac) specialize in artificial rock water features, designing and putting their own personal touch on pools, hot tubs and wine cellars, as well as waterfalls, fountains or ponds.

In the 1980s, Heiss helped create the Vancouver Aquarium's rocky architecture. While the firm itself is only four years old, it has no doubt continued to utilize its employees' proven traditions.

"It seems like every development wants to have some kind of outdoor space or water feature," says Spong, owner of Raincity.

"Our client list is varied; we do small projects right up to sort of a quarter of a million dollar pools."

Besides its continued projects at the



Raincity Rock and Waterscapes operations manager Malcom MacIsaac shows his company's ART-ificial granite at Green, an Adera development in Burnaby. Water features in new home projects are extremely popular right now, says Raincity owner Ryan Spong.

Rob Newell photo

CONTINUED ON P.8



A full view of the water feature at Green. Such design elements can help eliminate the noise from busy traffic routes, and adds aesthetic appeal, says Raincity owner Ryan Spong.

‘It’s much nicer to have than a plain, grassy landscape.’

CONTINUED FROM P.7

Aquarium – which is popular in its own right – Raincity Rock has also worked with locals Brian Jessel and Nickelback frontman, Chad Kroeger.

On the new home development side of things, their work can be seen in South Burnaby at Green by Adera Development Corp., where they built a three-tiered rock screen with waterfalls and a water feature that starts out as a dry river bed and becomes a creek that winds through the project.

The aesthetic advantages are obvious – Green’s style brings nature to the doorstep of nearly all its residents – but these features can also provide a tranquil residential setting, says Spong.

“A lot of times what water features do is cut noise,” he says.

“You’ll find developments on a lot of major noise routes, so we come in and create a lot of ‘white noise.’” He notes that instead of being forced to hear rigs storm by or ‘beep’ as they back up, residents are instead treated to the sound of a babbling brook or waterfall.

The goal is to bring new ideas and looks to each project, such as they did at Henderson Development’s Obelisk in Coquitlam (completed in 2007).

“The idea was to have the base of it look like there was bedrock that a ruin was built on top of,” he says, noting the rustic feel of Obelisk’s water feature.

While that project is long-done, business continues to be busy and Raincity Rock’s

designs continue to make their way into more and more new homes. It has certainly benefited Adera. The Green development is beautifully fitted with a river that runs through the middle of the complex.

“People and new visitors come and walk through and see the club and literally go, ‘Wow! This is like a resort!’”

Adera has brought the same approach to their Salus development, as well, located in Surrey, where (on a sunny day) the clubhouse looks like a resort patio that has been situated along the Fraser River.

“We did it for the long-term enjoyment of the home owners,” says Tony Flynn, sales manager for Green. “It’s much nicer to have than a plain, grassy landscape.”

“And when the plants are mature it’ll look green and lush, and require less watering.”

At Green, the overall message being portrayed is its environmental spin. The project has been built in according to BuiltGreen standards, and if the development’s name itself doesn’t portray its sustainable approach, its water features certainly do.

Green also contains the expansive Seasons Club, which is fit with a library, billiards room, double-sided fireplace, and an outdoor lounge area with a barbecue.

The club’s lower level features all the amenities that nature lovers desire, such as a fitness center, yoga room and sauna. However, the application of the two resources that British Columbians value most – water and grass – as exterior design imperatives drives homebuyers’ ecstasy even higher.

“People and new visitors come and walk through and see the club and literally go, ‘Wow! This is like a resort!’” says Flynn. “People are using it a lot now, but we’ll see more and more people using it as the summer comes.”

As the summer heat approaches, local weekenders constantly flock to our lakes or the Pacific Ocean in search of fun and relaxation. Others roll outside to their backyard patios, pools or clubhouses where these services are provided for them.

Either way you can go about it, it’s nice to know there are more options out there that make the journey just a little bit shorter.