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EAST MEETS WEST

BY JENNIFER PATTERSON PHOTOS BY BOB MATHESON

The visionary new Aberdeen Centre brings Asian and Western culture, cuisine and retail together under one roof, in a celebration of multiculturalism. The goal: to create a one-of-a-kind shopping destination that offers the best of both worlds.

On the corner of Cambie Road and Hazelbridge Way in Richmond, the unmistakable 420-foot curved glass wall of the Aberdeen Centre, with its luminous coloured panels comes into view. The building's distinctive architectural style (described by the architect as an "urban lantern") has more in common with a downtown office building than a regional shopping mall.

The east side of Aberdeen Centre tightly wraps the roadway and adjacent sidewalk and, unlike most shopping centres, parking is hidden within a parkade rather than sprawling across the front of the facility. The mall's stylish exterior hints at what's inside: an altogether unique shopping experience.

It is Sunday, July 25, 2004, the centre's grand opening day and already, at 11 a.m., the parkade is almost full. Inside, the three-storey shopping mall's curved, white, airy interior seems

somehow futuristic, as a smooth and organic as an egg. The interior is lit by randomly shaped skylights in the mall's elevated ceiling.

Today, in the central atrium, the opening reception is cordoned off by a semi circle of grand bouquets tied by scarlet ribbons — each one congratulating mall owner Fairchild Developments Ltd. and wishing the centre much future success. The gathering includes several federal, provincial and civic politicians. It's a good turnout for the event, complete with media coverage. Overhead, curious onlookers observe the speeches and performances from the two upper levels, the top-most of which includes an 800-seat food court with 24 vendors and a café.

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IN THE LIMELIGHT **ABERDEEN CENTRE**

IN THE LIMELIGHT ABERDEEN CENTRE



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Already, more than 80 per cent of the centre's 240 retail spaces have been leased and traffic to the mall during the first six months is better than expected. It's an auspicious start for a centre that had its soft opening last December.

The original plan for the new Aberdeen Centre was to create a second Chinatown that rivaled Vancouver's old Chinatown. But that vision changed when Thomas Fung, chairman and CEO of The Fairchild Group, decided to create a centre which would bring the cultures of East and West together, making it "Vancouver's pre-eminent cosmopolitan shopping destination."

Fung's creative approach to finding retailers for the mall has drawn comparisons to an art gallery curator. He spends most of his time travelling and inviting the best retailers in home, lifestyle, food and fashion to join his international mall. "He's always one step ahead," says Danny Leung, senior vice-president and general manager of Fairchild Developments Ltd. "This is a huge undertaking, to take down a shopping mall that was only 11 years old."

While Fung is on the road, Leung is the man who implements his vision and executes his ideas here in B.C. Leung deals with the architects, designers, construction managers, tenants and Richmond City Hall, as well as managing the day-to-day operation of the centre.

Built in 1990, the original Aberdeen centre was 118,000 square feet (gross leasable area) with 60 tenants set on 1.8 hectares of land. Fung wanted to update and expand the centre, giving it a more international flavour, so he hired architect Bing Thom to fulfill his vision. After coming up with more than 30 different designs, incorporating the old mall with the new development, Thom and Leung weren't satisfied. Finally, the architect suggested it would be easier to build an entirely new centre than to try to adapt the old mall to a new design. Leung recalls that pivotal conversation in Thom's office:

"Danny, I have a crazy idea," Thom said. "Why don't we

Designed by internationally renowned architect Bing Thom, the new three-storey Aberdeen Centre features a 420-foot glowing glass mural that wraps around the building.



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tear down the old mall and start from scratch?” Leung agreed, but said it was ultimately Fung’s decision.

“Thomas said yes over the phone,” Leung recalls. “Without hesitation.”

Fung then set about acquiring more land, with the new mall ultimately tripling the size of the original. Then came the challenge of vacating the tenants from the old Aberdeen Centre. “It took two years to vacate the tenants,” Leung says. “Longer than it took to build the new mall.”

Ground for the new site was broken in August 2002. The new building was completed, on time and under budget, just 16 months later, within one week of the mall’s slated opening date. The mall was soft opened to the public on Friday, Dec.12, 2003.

Already the mall is abuzz thanks to one-of-a-kind retailers found there, including anchor tenant The Daiso, a Japanese two-dollar store. Despite having more than 2,900 stores in Japan alone, the two-level, 26,530-sq-ft Aberdeen Centre location is Daiso’s first

architectural drawings of several boutiques. Chinese lettering is downplayed and signage resembles that of high-end boutiques in Oakridge or Richmond Centre malls. Although the look may share common features with other malls, the similarities stop there. Leung is quick to point out that Aberdeen Centre will not include “cookie cutter stores” or retail chains found in most malls.

The movie theatre and bowling lanes of the old Aberdeen Centre are a thing of the past as well. Instead, restaurants and weekend entertainment will include performances and fashion shows from different cultural communities on the central atrium stage. “We changed our focus to create an area where lifestyle is our theme,” says Leung. The lifestyle component is seen in a spectacular musical fountain similar to fountains in Las Vegas and Barcelona, seven international restaurants in the complex, and an indoor-outdoor market selling produce, fresh seafood, BBQ duck and meat, which opens in the fall.

Leung says leasing out retail space



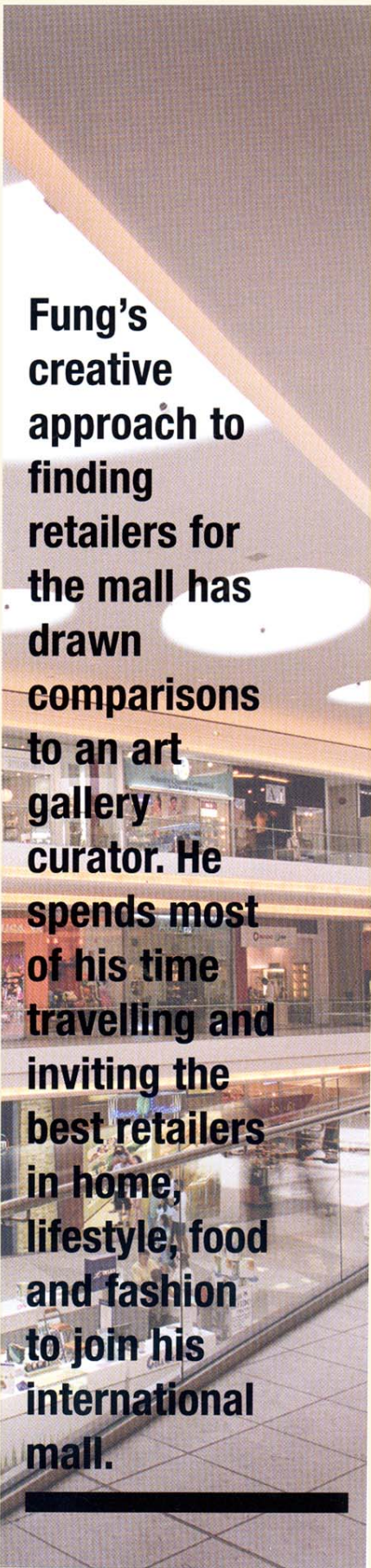
The Aberdeen Centre team (left to right): Luciano Zago and Bing Thom, Bing Thom Architects; Danny Leung, senior vice-president and general manager, and Thomas Fung, chairman and CEO, The Fairchild Group; Robert Chenier, president, and Colin Stephens, chairman, Design International.

in North American. Other specialty stores include Thailand’s high-end version of Ikea, a BMW lifestyle store, and specialized tea and jewellery shops that are well known in Taiwan, Hong Kong and China, but are making their Canadian debut.

The façades of each store have been modified from the more traditional Chinatown look, in favour of a more upscale international image that is, in theory, more welcoming to non-Asians. In his offices in nearby Fairchild Square, Leung displays the before and after

allows the property manager to carefully select the type of tenants in the centre and makes it easier to manage multiple tenants. “It gives the property manager more control,” adds Leung, which is paramount to maintaining the high standard that was envisioned.

According to Leung, the biggest challenge since the mall has opened has been to coordinate so many tenants and fitting out each space. “We want to maintain a clean environment for the general public while the other tenants are doing renovations inside their premises.”



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IN THE LIMELIGHT **ABERDEEN CENTRE**

The future bodes well for the Aberdeen Centre. With the new Richmond-Airport-Vancouver line now approved and the 2010 Olympic Games in sight, there seems to be only more growth and prosperity on the horizon for the unique facility. In fact, expansion plans for the centre include the construction of an additional 128,000-sq-ft condominium development next to the mall, with a slated completion date of late 2005. The eight-level condo containing 118 units, also designed by Bing Thom, will match the mall's architectural style and appearance. ♦



"My vision for the new Aberdeen Centre is to see it become Greater Vancouver's pre-eminent cosmopolitan shopping destination. The first Asian/Western centre of its kind, anywhere." – Thomas Fung (pictured).

FAST FACTS	
OWNER/DEVELOPER:	Fairchild Developments Ltd.
PROPERTY MANAGER:	Aberdeen Property Management
LOCATION:	4151 Hazelbridge Way, Richmond
SQUARE FOOTAGE:	over 500,000 (including condo development)
BUDGET:	\$130 million
STORES:	approx. 240
PARKING STALLS:	over 1,400
GENERAL CONTRACTOR:	Dominion Construction Co.
ARCHITECT:	Bing Thom Architects
INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN:	Design International
LIGHTING/AUDIO-VISUAL:	Illuminating Concepts
RETAIL DESIGN/SIGNAGE:	Stantec Architecture Ltd.
STRUCTURAL:	Bush Bohlman & Partners
ELECTRICAL:	R.A. Duff & Associates
MECHANICAL:	Keen Engineering Co. Ltd.
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE:	Fred Liu & Associates

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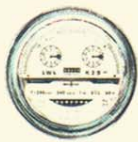
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