The market should decide, but...

Thank you for another issue of Focus, whose articles run the gamut from thoughtful to humorous to provocative and back again.

I always enjoy Susan Musgrave’s column, but this time, Gene Miller’s piece nearly convulsed me with Schadenfreude, except that I reined myself in because we now all understand that this particular emotion is, if not politically incorrect, at any rate regressive.

Besides, even though Miller is right that Victoria has a special genius for self-mutilation, I, along with everyone else here, am Victoria, and at some point self-mutilation just gets too...painful. Clinically, we’re ripe for a diagnosis of pathologically low self-esteem, as we self-medicate with dangerous cocktails made of bombast and indecision. At some point, though, you just want to shout, “Oh, grow up!”

Which is exactly what Sam Williams suggests in his piece, “Should the Market Decide?” He’s right, of course, even if he does use a bit of shock therapy (if I may continue with the psycho metaphor).

I can only imagine that some of my acquaintances are mortified at the prospect of 25-storey-and-higher towers in downtown, but dear friends: if not downtown, where? In Langford or on Bear Mountain? Oh, wait...some of them are going there, begging the question, how come we keep underbuilding with low-rises here? And to those people who argue that high-rises are environmentally unfriendly, I’d ask you to become familiar with the work of Kenneth Yeang.

I do disagree with Williams on this point, though: aesthetically, the Corazon is a superior building, and not the stumpy, cheap-finish failure he accuses it of being. The Astoria, not without its flaws in terms of exterior finishing, has the advantage of existing on a street section that was nearly a blank slate in terms of older urban architecture. Together with the Belvedere, it has done a very good job of acting as a foil (much like a good ring setting shows off its gemstone) for the Church of Our Lord, which incidentally does not now look dwarfed or insulated, but instead looks resplendent as it welcomes its new neighbours.

Unlike that architectural disaster known as the Victoria Conference Centre (which hogs entire city blocks, squatting like an undefined mass covered in a thick layer of green mold, even as it dares to trick itself out in faux Edwardianisms), these new high-rises don’t steal the Church of Our Lord’s thunder by drawing undue attention to a hopped up sense of “history.” If anything, they could (should!) have been taller.

As could Corazon, granted. But give it credit where due: the building is a miniature masterpiece in terms of how it fits into its surroundings.

Here’s what I mean: Corazon expertly picks up its neighbours’ architectural elements, playing with them to create a rhythm across its own facade, a harmony and counterpoint to the surrounding facades. This creates pleasing visual dynamics and interest. For example, Corazon uses yellow brick (which picks up on the Fairfield Hotel, located two buildings to the west); grey parapelling and glass bloc (which picks up on and literally beautifies and ennobles the otherwise unattractive dark-grey lowrise next door); a rigorous geometry in its window patterning and use of railings and panels (which picks up on the grey building’s utilitarianism as well as the more boring generically modernist building set back closer to Balmoral); and green painted sheathing (which picks up on the green window glass of the set-back building). Note that this contrast of Corazon’s painted green panels to the other building’s green glazing enhances the “conversation” Corazon has with its neighbours.

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