

Mass timber comes of age

Virtuoso showcases trend-setting construction

by Susan M Boyce

RAIN AND GREY SKIES didn't dampen the high spirits on March 2, when a select group of media met with the Adera development team and representatives from Penticton-based Structurlam at UBC. The occasion was the first delivery of cross laminate timber (CLT) panels that will be used to build Virtuoso, Adera's sixth condominium project on the campus.

Last year, Brock Common, an 18-story student residence near the Gage Residence, made headlines when it became the world's tallest timber tower. Now, the six-storey Virtuoso is poised to become North America's first market multi-family development using the cutting-edge technology.

"Yes, a lot of people are suspicious [of midrise wood construction] at first," acknowledges Eric Andreasen, vice-president of marketing and sales. "But the reality is that CLT — or mass timber, as it's also known — meets or exceeds concrete in many areas. It's seismically superior because it doesn't crack or shatter like concrete. You can't light it on fire because it self-chars, meaning oxygen can't get at it. It's more sustainably produced, requires less energy to recycle, and since the panels are pre-assembled by computer, there's virtually no on-site waste."

As a crane lifted the first panel off one of the two delivery trucks, a collective gasp echoed through the group. Each Crosslam CLT panel weighs somewhere between 4,000 and 5,000 lbs. — more than two tons of solid, prefabricated material. The panel then floated effortlessly to its predetermined spot, where two construction crew members gently guided it into its slot, ready to be anchored into the steel building frame. It was visual confirmation of the precision construction method



PHOTOS BY BEN NIELMS



TOP
Virtuoso's showhome highlights the luxurious finishings owners will enjoy

LEFT
A CLT is effortlessly craned into place

that had allowed Brock Common to be erected at the almost incomprehensible average rate of two floors per week.

"One of CLT's primary benefits is the way it influences design and scheduling," explains Ron McDougall, mass timber specialist. Unlike conventional construction, where you build the sheer walls and then frame with plywood, CLT panels are tilted up and connect directly to the steel columns — a 'click and play' method that's simple, fast and very accurate."

It's also virtually silent — a definite bonus for the neighbours. "If you compare the noise level on the Virtuoso site to the site right next door, there's a

significant difference," McDougall says.

Looking ahead, Andreasen and McDougall both predict CLT construction will continue to make inroads as a viable, environmentally superior alternative to traditional "stick-on-stick" construction or concrete and highrise market. "Virtuoso is shining a light on CLT," McDougall says. "As the market becomes more educated about the benefits of this product, demand will only continue to increase."

For more information about Virtuoso at UBC, visit adera.com. For information about CLT, visit structurlam.com.