

Meredith MacLeod Thu Mar 21 2013 07:01:36

Lights are on again at the Royal Connaught

A woman sipping coffee now looks out from a parking lot, facing the Main Street traffic rushing by.

She's the first visible sign that the Royal Connaught will rise again.

Developers Ted Valeri and Rudi Spallacci were on hand Wednesday to unveil a large sign at the corner of Catharine and Main streets announcing their massive condo project, **The Residences of Royal Connaught** (<http://www.thespec.com/news/local/article/873235--connaught-owners-aim-for-condos-by-2015>). The billboard, featuring the 1940s-inspired woman, is the first of several that will dot the perimeter of the downtown landmark as the project ramps up promotion.

"This is the greatest building in Hamilton," said Valeri, president of Valery Homes, who has fond memories of visiting the former grand hotel as a boy.

"It's the best piece of architecture in Hamilton."

Work is under way inside to recreate the once-magnificent lobby that greeted before bankruptcy closed the doors in 2004. A sales office will be open in the lobby by the fall.

The developers say they will maintain the building's façade and restore anything inside that can be saved. That includes a winding staircase, columns, moldings, chandeliers and they hope, some decorative.

The interior mechanics and structure will be built new.

Spallacci, whose family has built homes and commercial buildings in the city for two generations, says it's an honour to be behind the revival of the Connaught.

"Being part bringing it back to life, we look at it as being fortunate."

There is now a **sales website** (<http://www.royalconnaught.com/>) that also celebrates the retro chic of the building.

The plan is to invest \$200 million in about 700 condo units over five phases, along with retail space. That includes 230 units in the original building and the remainder in three new towers.

"We want to maintain that fabulous historical envelope, that art deco classic and then infuse it with modern furniture and accessories," said Aldershot interior decorator Lisa Boyer of LB Design.

She's studied books and old photos of the hotel and listened carefully to her father's stories of his visits for meetings when he worked for CP Rail. The history will be celebrated with a gallery of photos in the lobby.

Boyer says condo buyers can choose from a variety of fully designed schemes for their units, ranging from classical to urban contemporary.

The architect on the project is Wayne Harrison of Karp Namisniak Yomamoto Architects in Burlington.

Valeri and Spallacci were part of a consortium to revive the imposing building beginning years ago. They have been quiet about their plans after that investment group fell apart and waited until they felt the time was right to move.

They know there have been false starts in the past, promises for development that didn't come through.

"There are no false starts this time," said Valeri. "We have what this project needs, expertise, money, everything. There is nothing missing."

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Developers Ted Valeri and Rudi Spallacci Wednesday unveiled the first of several signs advertising sales for their 700-unit condo project in the Royal Connaught.

Kaz Novak/The Hamilton Spectator