

FROM II

# VISION: Close to city centre

The lot at 2102 27 Ave. S.W. is a duplex infill site with the two homes open for viewing Thursdays and Fridays from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. and Saturdays and Sundays from noon to 5 p.m.

"This is the first infill we have built, but we have a number of others finished already so people can move in immediately," says Kazmi.

"We have two in Killarney that are approximately the same size (1,880 square feet on two levels. The one show home has an additional 870 square feet developed downstairs), but with different features.

"These Killarney homes are single-family homes. We have another in Capital Hill that's similar."

In all, DaVinci has amassed about 22 lots, which will accommodate either single-family homes or duplexes — all customized and with high specifications. Prices range from \$729,000 (with GST) to \$979,000 (with GST).

They are in areas such as Shaganappi, Parkdale, or the above-mentioned neighbourhoods, all established and close to the city centre.

"Fazan (Kazmi's brother who is also involved in the business) has been wanting to build inner city for years, ever since we opened our office (in a renovated home) in Killarney in 1999," says Kazmi. "We like the inner city because we don't have to follow the strict architectural guidelines of the developer of the suburban developments."

Those controls are meant to protect a buyers' investment by ensuring that high standards are kept up by all new homes built within the community, and that the development is cohesive throughout. But at the same time, the builder is restricted in choices for the exterior look of the home.

"It has more to do with design because there, you can't replicate the classic homes that are found in the inner city."

Because builders in the suburbs are competing with each other, it's also harder to do extensive exterior work on a home simply because of the costs.

"Here (in the inner city), we can do much more, such as the large amount of stonework on the front and around the corner of the duplex show homes," says Kazmi.

The larger builder brings a different opportunity to the infill market, says Tom Chisholm, chief operating officer of Unity Builders Group.

"The small builder has been the norm in inner city developments, building just three or four homes a year. They have no big overhead, but the economies of scale aren't there. The larger builder can bring a big-market, professional focus to the business."

Elite and Today's Homes, both part of Unity Builders Group, have done something similar, says Chisholm.

"We've realized that both of our companies have had some overlap, so we're laser focusing our operations," he says.

"Both Elite and Today's were doing infill homes as well as single-family homes in suburbs and areas around Calgary.

"We've put them together, with Ashley Sage heading up and focusing on the inner city for both companies, and both Elite and Today's as one entity in the suburbs. Bruce Botterbusch will be president of both new homes' divisions.

"We have about 22 homes in the inner city we're building now as duplex or single-family homes, and we see this as a great opportunity. We want to grow that part of the business to well over 100 homes a year."

The new group, which has taken the construction and sales team from Today's Homes to its infill side, is now building a show home in the Marda Loop area.

Prices have not yet been established, but "we will be competitive," says Chisholm.

"We still believe a lot of people want to stay close in and not deal with the traffic and the distance to the suburbs. They like the established neighbourhoods, but they want new product."

Another builder has turned to the inner city in a big way.

Birchwood Properties, which has made its mark in residential development of small areas of suburban land, where it builds homes and condos as well as developing the land, has just opened a sales centre in Mount Pleasant in the northwest to market its CityLife Homes by Birchwood division.

The company has as many as 25 lots scattered throughout three northwest inner-city communities, Mount Pleasant, Banff Trail, and Capitol Hill.

Homes are both single-family and duplexes with prices from \$569,900 (with GST) for a 1,386-square-foot attached home, and from \$619,900 (with GST) for single-family homes of 1,505 square feet.

"We feel there hasn't been the choice for the consumer in the inner city," says Steve Joseph, general manager of Birchwood.

"We offer a choice of lots, where before, people would either have to find a lot first, then find a custom homebuilder to construct the home for them, or they would have to just drive around neighbourhoods in the hopes of finding a new home under construction that wasn't yet sold — and if they didn't get it soon enough, they wouldn't have the choice of cabinets, colour selections, etc. We are bringing the new home concept into the inner city with a choice of lots."

The builder is in the process of constructing a show home at the corner of 20th Avenue and 19th Street N.W. which should be open in October. Meanwhile, the sales centre is located at 1106 17th Ave. N.W. and it's open from noon to 8 p.m. Mondays to Thursdays and noon to 5 p.m. weekends and holidays.

"There is a gap for homes for sale in the inner city," Adele Kerr, marketing manager for Birchwood, said in an earlier interview.

"There are either older, smaller bungalows, or new \$1 million homes — nothing in-be-

“We feel there hasn't been the choice for the consumer in the inner city”

STEVE JOSEPH, BIRCHWOOD PROPERTIES



Calgary Herald Archive

An example of infill houses constructed within an older, inner-city neighbourhood.

tween. We feel we are in the middle. We can offer a more affordable price point for homes that are brand new in these desirable inner-city locations.

"Empty-nesters with bigger homes on the outskirts have come forward, as have families with older children who are going to SAIT or the university," Kerr says. "People are looking for that quality of life and the proximity to the downtown core."

The first buyer who finds a lot they like will have the choice of whether they want a single-family home or a duplex. If it's a duplex, the other side will be built at the same time and offered for sale.

Birchwood is currently building as well in Birchwood Green in Royal Oak and in Access

Cougar Ridge, where approximately 15 townhouses are left to sell.

Elite and Today's Homes' suburban division, meanwhile, will be looked after by Botterbusch, who is president of all the Elite and Today's amalgamations. That side of the business is active in several neighbourhoods on Calgary's edges, as well as outside the city in places such as The Lakes of Muirfield and Speargrass, the new development close to Carseland.

DaVinci also has a multi-family site in Parkdale, where the builder is planning a 23-unit condo apartment right along the Bow River. It has amassed several large tracts of land in the northeast and north central sectors of the city.

## WHEN PICKING A HOMEBUILDER IT'S IMPORTANT TO:

- Make sure he looks like Mike Holmes
- Really like the sales person
- Get a nice, shiny brochure
- Go by the look of their showhome
- ✓ Get the answers at [www.albertanewhomewarranty.com](http://www.albertanewhomewarranty.com)



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Dean Bicknell, Calgary Herald

Naheed Kazmi of DaVinci Homes inside the first infill house built by the company.