

Citizen City explores the community building side of architecture



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Gregory Henriquez, managing partner, Henriquez Partners Architects, BC. June 15, 2016. *ARLEN REDEKOP / PNG*

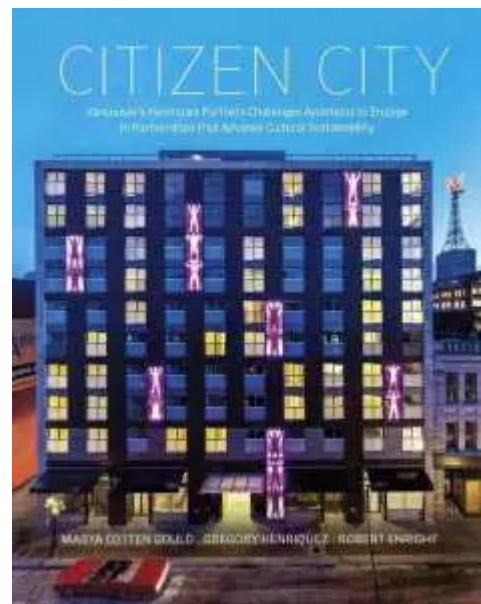
Citizen City

By Marya Cotten Gould, Gregory Henriquez and Robert Enright

Blueimprint

For years, Central Presbyterian Church (<http://www.centralchurchvancouver.ca/>) wanted to replace its aging building while staying put in the West End. Located at the corner of Thurlow and Pendrell for more than 35 years, the church needed a new sanctuary and more space for its varied programming that included ESL classes and counselling. But none of the church members had the kind of expertise required to turn dream into reality.

As recounted in Citizen City (<http://bit.ly/299b5vB>), the impasse started to change when architect Gregory Henriquez of Henriquez Partners Architects met a church trustee by chance at a community meeting about another nearby development. Shortly after, HPA was hired and arranged for three options for the church: sell the site to a developer, do the rezoning and sell the rezoned land to a developer, or rezone and develop it themselves.



Much to Henriquez's surprise they choose the third option.

"I was shocked," Henriquez says in *Citizen City*. "I really thought that they'd pursue the second option which is an innovative model itself, but they wanted to develop it themselves."

The new building at 1155 Thurlow is now under construction. In addition to a new sanctuary with a capacity of 300, CPC will be getting a 90-seat chapel, more community and meeting space, a commercial grade kitchen and ground floor retail. Above the space dedicated to the church will be three floors of 42 units of affordable housing created without government support. Subsidies for seniors and other adults will range from 50 per cent to 10 per cent. Those units will in turn be subsidized by the top 15 floors of 168 market housing suites.

Central Presbyterian Church is one of ten case studies of projects by Henriquez Partners Architects in Citizen City. In a city where discussion on urban issues often focuses on small but important details such as floor-space ratios and the merits of spot rezoning, Citizen City is about much bigger issues such as building community and the relationship between ethics and aesthetics. It's about how one firm has managed to survive in the market place, accomplish social goals and practice architecture rather than acting only as an instrument to help developers maximize profits. It looks at the role architecture and architects have played in helping to create Vancouver's vibrant urban environment.

The case studies by Marya Cotten Gould look at some high profile Vancouver projects. HPA was part of the revitalizing of the York Theatre (<http://bit.ly/29hyOvi>), the century-old theatre at 639 Commercial Dr. operated by the Vancouver East Cultural Centre. The firm designed the recently opened Welcome House for Immigrant Services Society of B.C. (<http://issbc.org/>) at 2610 Victoria Dr. A couple of projects include proposals that were never realized such as a bike and pedestrian bridge over False Creek.

The case studies read like mini urban histories of Vancouver. They could easily have been dull and pedestrian but they've been brought alive by including comments of key players. While they're narrowly focused on particular buildings and/or projects, they connect to a larger vision of creating a Vancouver where people can live, work and raise families. One recurring theme is how the city is capturing a significant amount of the increase in property values by requiring developers to contribute parks, child care facilities and other public amenities through initiatives such as the community amenity contributions.

They're not all rosy portraits either. One of the case studies is about all the changes HPA had to make to The Lauren at Comox and Broughton in the West End in response to significant opposition from nearby residents.

Architecture is a family business for Henriquez. He's a fourth generation architect and managing partner of HPA which was founded by his father Richard who started his own practice in Vancouver in 1977.

The most readable part of the book is an extended interview with Henriquez by arts journalist Robert Enright. It reads like a real give and take exchange between two people.

One of HPA's high-profile projects Henriquez talks about is [Telus Garden](http://www.telusgarden.com/) (<http://www.telusgarden.com/>) in downtown Vancouver. It has one of the city's most unusual urban features that's part architecture, part sculpture: a wood and glass covering over the north plaza on Georgia. Henriquez says the "fabulously bizarre" structure was created because Telus president and chief executive officer Darren Entwistle wanted something "west coast gothic."

For someone who heads one of the city's award-winning architectural firms, Henriquez is brutally frank about how his ideas about developers have changed radically over the years.

"I saw developers as the type of people I didn't want to have lunch with, let alone work with," he says.

"I made a decision that real meaning was impossible at a larger societal level so that if I could house some homeless people, create a community centre, do grassroots stuff I could make a difference in people's lives. If it was beautiful at the same time, it would be this merging of ethics and poetics."

What changed Henriquez was the \$330 million Woodward's Redevelopment project which involved juggling the many different needs and interests of three levels of government, the developer Westbank Projects Corp., and the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood. In the end, Woodward's gave him gave him so much hope that he calls everything he's done since then — including the 10 case studies in Citizen City — as "Children of Woodward's."

"I got a real high out of it," he said. "I thought: 'My god, Maybe we can shape the forces of the world and convince developers to do the right thing if we can get them more density, convince cities to be partners and give the community the amenities they need in order to make the city more livable.' I started to dream a little bit.

"Maybe there could be a practice for us that was a merging of the more profane aspects of commerce with the more ethical compass of a desire to make a more inclusive world. That's what this little practice is about and that's what this book is about."

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