

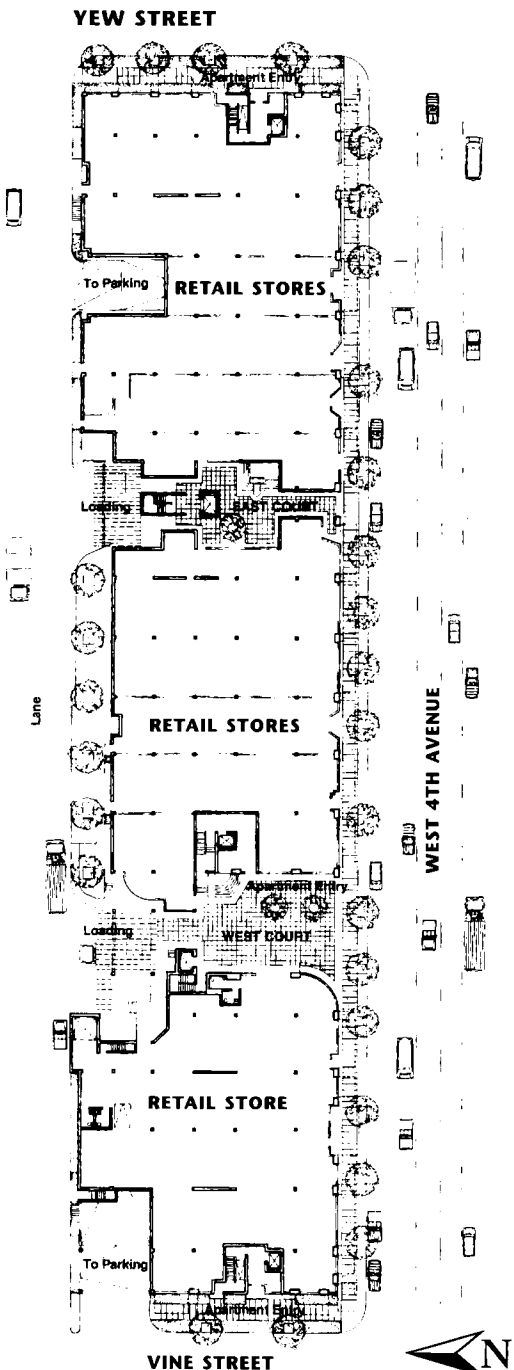
'Capers Block'

- 2211 WEST 4TH AVENUE

Developer/Owner: **Salt Lick Projects Ltd.**
 Architect: **Hotson Bakker Architects**
 Landscape Architect: **Durante Kreuk Ltd.**
 City Staff: **Ralph Segal, Margaret Sutherland (Dev. Planners)**
 Year of completion: **1995**

PROJECT DATA

Zoning:	C-2B
Site area:	55,500 sq. ft.
FSR:	2.5
Use:	Retail, office, residential
Floor area:	138,800 sq. ft.
Height:	50 ft.



One of Vancouver's most successful mixed use projects, the 'Capers Block' development is a textbook example of mixed-use densification on a neighbourhood retail street.

The development programme called for retail at grade along West 4th Avenue, with office space on the second floor and two to three floors of residential above that. The site covers the entire north block of West 4th Avenue between Vine and Yew Streets in Vancouver's Kitsilano neighbourhood, at the centre of a vibrant neighbourhood commercial 'High Street'. One of the project's key urban design objectives was to optimize its contribution to this street and to provide street-front, retail continuity. Another urban design objective was to achieve residential intensification, while respecting the existing surrounding residential neighbourhood. The project achieves both objectives admirably.

Significant effort has gone into maximizing retail continuity and providing a pedestrian scale along West 4th Avenue. The building is constructed right to the property line along this street edge thus reinforcing the streetscape and sidewalk continuity. Retail uses front on to the street with a series of relatively narrow 25 foot bay storefronts to provide diversity and pedestrian interest. Traditional storefront windows are used for all shops, with raised masonry sills, recessed front doors and fabric weather awnings, all of which help to integrate with the existing retail street character. The residential lobby entrances are located on the two side streets to avoid disrupting the retail continuity of West 4th Avenue.

A key urban design strategy to deal with the significant length of the project was to break the building into three sections separated by small courtyards. These courtyards, particularly the westerly one adjacent to the Capers store, contribute to the street's pedestrian amenity by providing places to rest and people watch. They also reduce the apparent bulk and length of the building thus further integrating it into the existing, fine-scale character of West 4th Avenue. Yet, the spaces are small enough to maintain the crucial streetfront, retail continuity which is the hallmark of successful urban streets. The retail ground floor is further articulated as a series of diverse shops through the use of different materials, colours and individual signage, rather than "project" storefronts and signage standards.



The second floor office space continues the vertical street line, as does much of the third floor residential. The fourth floor then terraces back from the street, creating decks and reducing the apparent bulk of the building. At the westerly end of the project, an additional fifth floor residential penthouse has been included, which helps anchor this end of the building on the high point of land and maximizes views. The penthouse is set back from West 4th Avenue to minimize its impact. Upper residential units also step back from the northside property line and are oriented around two U-shaped courts. These spaces create light wells at the heart of the building, maximizing northerly views, and increasing sunlight penetration into the units. This strategy also helps reduce view intrusion and overshadowing of the adjacent, single and multi-family residences across the lane.

Another key urban design strategy was in dealing with the rear service lane. An attempt was made to treat the lane as a more positive public edge than is typical, through the introduction of landscaping, different paving materials, carefully screened loading bays, and building setbacks. The originally proposed special paving treatment was ultimately replaced with standard asphalt due to functional City Engineering requirements. The mid-block courtyards also provide connections back to the lane, thereby introducing a fine-grained, pedestrian network into the block.

An important aspect of the project is its component of environmental sustainability. It responds to environmental sustainability objectives not only by being dense, fine-grained and of mixed use, but also by using a renewable, passive energy source (ground-source heat pump system) for heating and cooling the complex.

The vertical mix of uses is very well handled with a clear separation of entrances, orientation and architectural styles between the commercial and residential zones. The combination of housing over retail shops and offices adds to the vitality and diversity of the street and reinforces this area as a neighbourhood centre. The quality and scale of the project's public and semi-private spaces are very successful. The individual expression of tenants through their storefront designs adds to their distinctiveness and marketability while creating maximum public amenity along the standard width sidewalks. Finally, highly crafted urban design moves are an important lesson in how buildings can act to reinforce the urban fabric in a relatively modest, non-monumental way.



West courtyard open space





HOTSON BAKKER ARCHITECTS PHOTO

Upper floors terrace back to maintain the pedestrian scale of 4th Avenue and provide sunny roof patios.



Vine Street terraced massing steps down to respect lower density housing to the north.



Decorative metal hubcap details recall the former automotive history of the site



Yew Street facade with generous balconies and tightly spaced street trees to enhance residential livability.