



HOME AT LAST

"I looked at older buildings and wondered what enabled them," says designer-owner Mark Shieh. "What makes them adaptable, transformable, sustainable"



The Schoolhouse

LOCATION
595 E. Georgia St.

BUILT
1940



ORIGINALLY
The Chinese Catholic Mission's
Saint Francis Xavier School

PROJECT COST
\$2.3 million construction cost
(not including land fee)

COST OF A UNIT
\$900,000

OCCUPANCY

Then



Now



"The building has a second life. It's neat, everlasting, efficient"

THE "NEW OLD SCHOOL" was conceived when developer Mark Shieh and his sister took a trip to China. Shieh wanted to bring the courtyard concept, symbolizing independence and shared space, back to North America. He had been in discussion with the owner of 595 E. Georgia—built in 1940 as Saint Francis Xavier School by the Chinese Catholic Mission—for about a year. Construction started in July 2008, as soon as classes were over. Shieh, of Take Root Properties, teamed with Bruce Haden of Hotson Bakker Boniface Haden Architects and David Hamilton of Trillium Project Management to transform the schoolhouse into a five-unit townhome that achieved Built Green Platinum certification—the highest eco-rating in Canada.

"We were systematically taking apart the building," says Hamilton. The schoolhouse, with two front units and three side units, boasts the original entrance. Green features include geothermal heating, permeable pavers, bamboo flooring, and a master switch to turn off all electrical items. Each unit was built to accommodate live-work lifestyles. Shieh is currently using his flex space as his wife's community-oriented art studio; the space will ideally one day be converted into an organic café or coffee shop. "It was about changing the use, not just tearing it down and rebuilding," says Hamilton. "The building has a second life. It's neat, everlasting, efficient."—C. S.