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Mark Kindrachuk of the Intermarket Group had a hand in converting the old Pine Grove school on King Street East in south Kitchener to a Borealis Grille & Bar restaurant.

Heritage on the menu

Old Pine Grove schoolhouse in south Kitchener is now home to a stylish restaurant

By Valerie Hill, Record staff

KITCHENER — Real estate developers are sometimes confronted by citizen groups who balk at the idea of tearing down old buildings, particularly if there is a sense of history in the crumbling bricks and yellowed mortar.

It was no different for Mark Kindrachuk when he purchased the 16-hectare King Street East site in south Kitchener (the former SportsWorld recreation centre) that today holds the SportsWorld Crossing shopping, office and recreation development.

On part of the site, the 122-year-old Pine Grove school building is now home to a stylish Borealis Grille & Bar restaurant.

Kindrachuk is an architect and developer who has worked on projects in Waterloo Region for several years. He understands that many locals have, well, an unusual attachment to their past. So he figured from the start that people would have something to say about the old school.

"We held a little function last year and met with three ratepayer groups," recalls Kindrachuk, president of the Toronto-based Intermarket Group.

"I met with them and they said 'Can you save that building?'

I said 'OK.'"

Simple as that.

Or maybe not. Legally, Intermarket Group was not obligated to save the schoolhouse, given that the City of Kitchener had yet to designate it for protection as a heritage landmark. And Kindrachuk soon learned that saving the building would cost "hundreds of thousands of dollars" more than if it was torn down and anew building erected.

First, he had to convince the pension fund investors backing the development that they should save the school — and he feared they might not share his vision.

Kindrachuk developed a cunning plan.

"They (the investors) wanted to meet at the site," he remembers. "I said no. I wanted to show them the package. 'This is what it's going to be.'"

So it was off to Balzac's coffee house in downtown Toronto's hip Distillery District. The Balzac's outlet there is located in an 1885 pump house and was designed in the style of a Grand Parisian café with an enormous Vaudeville chandelier audaciously hanging in the centre of the ceiling.

This, thought Kindrachuk, was exactly the ambience he was after for the Kitchener development. And the investors agreed.

Back in Kitchener, however, the old schoolhouse nowhere near resembled his lofty vision at that point. The site was first occupied by a log schoolhouse built in 1809. That school was replaced by a wooden structure in 1855 and then in 1889 the frame building was replaced by a yellow brick school house.

The property had been owned and lived in by the Heldmann family from 1955 until 2005 and since then it had seen various uses, including office space, but the building was deteriorating and attracting vandals and pigeons.

"I'm an architect, so I'm interested in history and architecture," says Kindrachuk, who says he spent hours researching the building's past.

When an engineering report declared the building structurally

sound, it was time to develop a concept on paper — one he eventually turned over to another architect for final renderings and which would include large additions added to the back and the side of the building.

Kindrachuk's first idea was to use the building as a retail outlet, but he then considered the possibilities for a restaurant. That was when the Guelph-based restaurant chain, The Neighbourhood Group of Companies Ltd., entered the picture. The chain, which owns the Woolwich Arrow Pub and the Borealis Grille & Bar in Guelph, learned about the Kitchener project through a broker. It seemed to fit their criteria of a unique space that would attract an older crowd.

"It was for people in their 40s and 50s, more upscale, (a space) that was both historic and relevant," he said. This new Borealis also promised to support local producers, meaning that whenever possible, everything from the meats to the vegetables to the honey and beer would be produced by area farmers and suppliers.

The focus on local would carry through to the reconstruction of the school, from contractors to artists to craftspeople. A sprawling, wrought-iron chandelier in the Harvest Lounge, for example, was made by Graeme Sheffield of The Ironwood Anvil in Guelph. And the historically correct tin ceilings throughout the building were made by Brian Greer's Tin Ceilings of Petersburg, Ont.

The windows in the school were returned to their former full size, letting more light pour in. The dank and dark basement was converted to a cosy, romantic wine-tasting cellar. The old cubby hole



WATERLOO REGION MUSEUM

The Pine Grove school was in a section of the old Waterloo Township that's now in Kitchener, near King Street East and Sportsworld Drive.

washrooms became wine storage vaults. And upstairs, hardwood floors were patched where necessary and refinished.

One of the messiest jobs involved removing peeling paint from the brick walls. Outside, a chemical peel did the job and inside, sandblasting was used. One stunning example of the cleaned brickwork can be found in the Harvest Lounge. The lounge is a modern addition, attached to what was once the rear exterior wall of the school. The exposed brick of that wall is now a dramatic two-storey backdrop for the bar.

The school's stone foundation was also repointed. Even the old staircase had a good going over after being relocated within the building. The original carpenter from 1889 had signed his name on the back of one of the stair boards, Kindrachuk noted, so the 2010 carpenter added his own signature before nailing the stair

boards back in place.

Up on the second storey, each section of wainscoting was removed while the walls were sanded. The plaster was left bare. Even today, it is decorated only with schoolhouse-style lamps and a few enlarged sepia prints showing the serious faces of 19th-century Pine Grove students, the boys in short pants and the girls in dresses.

"Older people come in here now and point to the photo and say, 'That's my mother,'" Kindrachuk says.

The restaurant opened for business at the end of February. Its official opening will be later this month, held in conjunction with a charity fashion show to support Anselma House in Kitchener, which provides shelter, education and outreach services to abused women and their children in Waterloo Region.

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IN THE GARDEN

Voodoo lily could be a problem (phew!) if spring doesn't arrive soon



David Hobson

I suspect many skiers rejoiced at the heavy March 23 snowstorm that postponed our spring, but I know many gardeners saw it as a blessing in disguise.

When temperatures plummeted the following week, to as low as -17 overnight — as cold as any night in the depths of winter — the 23-centimetre white duvet that was laid gently over my garden almost certainly saved a lot of tender plants. Winter is receding now, but it will still be another week or two before it's safe for plants to begin stirring — not counting the early risers like crocuses and snowdrops.

Inside, it's a different story, where spring can't come soon enough for the outdoor plants I have been growing, both under lights and at a window.

Last fall I was given a couple of large, unidentified bulbs, or bulbous rhizomes. At least I didn't know what they were for sure, and neither did the person who gave them to me. I left them in cool storage for the winter, but then about a month ago I thought I might as well plant them and see what I get. As soon as they sprouted, it was obvious; they were canna lilies.

Lovely you say, except I don't have room for a pair of very healthy looking canna lilies in my living room, even if they're regular garden cannas. The origin of the ones I was given is uncertain — something about a mother-in-law growing them in the old country, but what old country? Cannas

are native to tropical regions of the Americas, but they've travelled since they were first discovered. They've also been mixed and mingled and hybridized to produce the towering, floriferous plants that dominate many public gardens.

There are shorter cultivars, but anything closely related to the wild canna are so tall they could play for the Raptors — and I don't need a pair of plants like that in the house. Funny, the name canna originates from a Celtic word meaning reed or cane. Why on earth would I think it originated from the word canoe? It couldn't possibly be because of the huge, paddle shaped leaves that are already unfurling and have the potential to take the place of the drapes. It had better warm up soon so that I can get them out of here.

I may have a worse problem. Also sprouting well indoors is a

plant I grew last summer. It never flowered, but it did produce interesting foliage — deep, rich, and reddish purple. I stored the rhizome over winter and replanted it a couple of weeks ago. The bulb, or tuber, was much larger, having been fed all summer by the rich foliage. It should now be of sufficient size to produce a flower and I'm looking forward to seeing it, but not in the living room. It is a Voodoo lily, though like the canna, it's not a true lily; it's in the family Araceae.

The botanical name is *Dracontoloma vulgare*, also known as the dragon flower. Native to the Mediterranean, it's often found growing on rocky waste ground. They're grown as garden plants for their distinctive flower — purple black and similar to a large, Jack-in-the-pulpit. And that is my problem. The species name, *vulgare*, gives a hint of its true

nature. It's a stinker — said to literally smell like rotting fish or road kill. Spring had better arrive soon before it flowers or I'm in big trouble.

If the origin of plants interests you, and learning more about the history behind their uses, a new book by Bill Laws is well worth a read. *Fifty Plants that Changed the Course of History* (\$29.95 from Firefly Books) provides insight into the way plants used as fuel, food, weapons and medicines have had an impact on civilizations.

Note: Clarification about an item in my March 26 column: The Gardener's Hollow Leg product comes with its own belt, but not a clipper holster.

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