

Ritchie Bros. auctioneers move into spacious new home

'The design ... has succeeded in providing a really workable environment. There's lots of light and fresh air'

BY DERRICK PENNER, VANCOUVER SUN OCTOBER 28, 2009



The new Ritchie Bros. Auctioneers Inc.'s headquarters in Burnaby.

Photograph by: Ian Smith, Vancouver Sun

BURNABY — Ritchie Bros. Auctioneers Inc.'s first Lower Mainland headquarters was a house on Bridgeport Road in Richmond — homey, but it would be a bit cramped for today's home-base operation of 312 employees overseeing the operations of 39 auction sites around the world.

In fact, the company has twice outgrown Richmond locations, which eventually sprawled to three corners of the municipality.

To that end, the company has just moved into an expansive, 160,000-square-foot global headquarters replete with fitness centre, cafeteria and in-house daycare centre more fitting for the world's largest industrial auctioneer.

The gleaming glass and steel structure is still on the banks of the Fraser River, but upstream in Burnaby in the Glenlyon business park — at the bucolic end, bordered by trees and riverside park trails. It is officially opening this Thursday.

"We just want to make a nice place for people to come to work and enjoy their time here, and maintain

the culture that we have at Ritchie Bros.," president Rob MacKay said in an interview, adding that he hopes the company will be in the new location for a long time.

MacKay said building the new headquarters was a four-year process during which the company mapped out possible locations to give employees easier and shorter commutes and surveyed workers on what amenities they wanted in their own workplace.

High on the list, MacKay said, were the daycare, fitness centre and cafeteria, the last of which has turned out to be a useful gathering spot.

"It allows you to interact with your staff, particularly the senior management," MacKay said. "You can go down, get your lunch and meet with different people every day and talk to them about what's new, what's on their mind."

That was harder to do previously when operations were spread across three locations.

"We realized we could no longer survive where we were living," said Bob Armstrong, Ritchie Bros. chief operating officer. "We had a beautiful building; we're sad not to be there anymore. But we built a nicer one, so we're happy to be here."

Armstrong added that Ritchie Bros. seized on the opportunity to bring all its employees under one roof, and in pleasant surroundings.

The design includes lots of natural materials such as the timber columns, laminated wood beams supporting skylight ceilings at the top of a soaring three-storey atrium that runs down the centre of the structure.

Armstrong said the environmentally friendly LEED Gold building, designed by Vancouver-based Bunting and Coady architects, also has a lot of unfinished steel and concrete surfaces, in recognition of Ritchie Bros. being more of a blue-collar than white-collar-oriented company.

"The design, hopefully, has succeeded in providing a really workable environment," he said. "There's lots of light and fresh air."

He noted that all the windows open, some 75 per cent of work spaces have natural light and 90 per cent of work areas have views to the outside "so you can see trees where you work."

Another feature of the building, Armstrong said, is its openness. He invites visitors to look around the three-storey atrium to notice the amount of glass, which allows employees to see each other.

"We're all about transparency," Armstrong said.

Ritchie Bros. developed the office project in conjunction with a commercial landlord, buying the land, designing the building and commissioning its construction, but then sold the whole project to a group of investors, GWL Realty Advisers.

Armstrong said the 160,000-square-foot building was built for the long term. There are several areas of open space that can easily be converted into work space later. A 35,000-square-foot area is available for another tenant in the short term, with a likelihood Ritchie Bros. will grow into it later.

"We designed the building knowing we needed a building that we would be in, hopefully, for 20 to 30 years," Armstrong said.