



Luxury Destination by Design

Columbia Cliff Villas
Hood River, Oregon

Article by Bobbie Hasselbring
Photography by Jennifer Gulizia



What happens when a developer buys the property next to the Columbia Gorge Hotel, one of most venerated and historic hotels in Oregon? If your Steve and Patti Tessmer of Aerie Development, Inc., you honor and amplify that heritage by skillfully blending old and new.

The Tessmers are the developers and owners of Columbia Cliff Villas, a luxury condominium hotel that sits adjacent to the 1921 Italian style Columbia Gorge Hotel. When they purchased the property in 2008, they wanted a marriage between the two properties, which is where the inspiration for the villa-like architecture springs.

“At any other site in Hood River, I would not have used this design,”

says Patti Tessmer, a veteran 30-year commercial designer who drove the project’s styling. “This is certainly not something you’d typically see in the Columbia River Gorge. However, building with modern architecture would have detracted from the property and we wanted to honor the old hotel’s history.”

Back in the 1920’s, Portland architect Morris Whitehouse, influenced by the Italianate aesthetic he’d studied in Italy, designed the Columbia Gorge Hotel in the Mission Revival style. With broad unadorned plaster surfaces, low-pitched roofs with wide eaves, red clay roof tiles, and Mission-style lighting, the historic hotel resembles a large Italian villa.

While the outside of Columbia Cliff Villas honors the past, the luxurious interiors are thoroughly modern.

Columbia Cliff Villas took its design cues from the hotel, replicating the broad expanses of yellow plaster, the wide eaves, Mission styling on exterior light fixtures, and red roof tiles (made of sturdier concrete rather than clay).

The two properties are visually seamless. It’s as if the new villas have stood next to the old hotel for decades, not just three years. However, the Columbia Cliff Villas feature even more architectural elements than the historic hotel.

The Tessmers enhanced the Italianate look of their development by adding more archways, shade trellises, nooks for large urns and pots, forest green shutters window detailing, and plenty of handmade iron railings. They also added

thick, custom-designed Cherry doors and woodwork that resemble fine works of art.

“Columbia Gorge Hotel’s charm comes from the yellow and green colors, the grounds, and its wonderful history,” says Patti. “I wanted to bring in more details like wood, which is where the trellises and heavier doors come in. Our detailing allows us to honor our neighbor and yet achieve a look all our own.”

Forever Views, Luxurious Amenities

Perched on basalt cliffs 250 feet above the mighty Columbia River and next to the rushing Wah Gwin Gwin Falls in the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area,

the setting for the old hotel and the new villas couldn’t be more spectacular. And the Tessmer’s design takes full advantage of it.

The development consists of four buildings – the two-story Euro-King building and the Carriage House building, and the three-story Pinnacle townhouse-style building and the Villa building. One final cliff-side building is planned for the site. Some units are privately owned and occupied, but most are available for nightly or extended stays. Each room or suite features “lock out” rooms, with its own bath, which can be combined to create a variety of rooms, suites, and villas (up to 2,500 square feet), depending on visitors’ needs and budget.



Discover Hood River

Columbia Center for the Arts
215 Cascade Avenue
(541) 387-8877
www.columbiaarts.org

Columbia Gorge Discovery Center
5000 Discovery Drive
(541) 296-8600
www.gorgediscovery.org

Maryhill Winery
9774 Washington 14
(877) 627-9445
www.maryhillwinery.com

“We host a lot of meetings and retreats,” explains Steve Tessmer. “We can set up all kinds of different configurations in these suites. For instance, some tables expand so that you can put 20-24 people around them.”

All buildings feature secure garages (for owners) with wooden doors that resemble the old styling of carriage houses. Together, the buildings create a village-like feel.

While the outside of Columbia Cliff Villas honors the past, the luxurious interiors are thoroughly modern. “The interior style is more transitional so we could offer an updated look that’s really fresh and clean,” says Patti, who was responsible for choosing the finishes.

Steve says quality was very important to them. “We wanted to include upgrades and finishes found in up-scaled private homes, but you usually don’t find in a hotel like gourmet kitchens, cherry cabinetry, and coffered ceilings. This is quality you’d want in your own home.”

Walk into the any of the suites and they exude luxury and comfort. At 1,500 square feet, the one bedroom Villa, Penthouse, and Pinnacle suites feature spacious great rooms with distressed cherry floors and large windows that capture breathtaking views of the river and the gorge. Ten foot ceilings add to the sense of spacious opulence.

The gourmet kitchens, equipped

with all the essentials, feature solid cherry jointed cabinets with soft closers, stainless steel Dacor ranges and dishwashers, extra-large KitchenAid wood-clad refrigerators, and plenty of workspace, with under-cabinet lighting. Black antiqued granite with chiseled edges on the countertops and breakfast bar stand out against swirling white patterns of ancient fossils in the grey limestone backsplash.

“The Gorge was created by the great Missoula floods that tore down from Montana and you can still find fossils from that era here,” explains Patti. “When I saw this grey fossilized granite I knew it was something that would

quietly play off the black granite and give an organic look. It’s also a nod to living in the Gorge.”

Kitchens come with walk-in pantries and master bedrooms with huge walk-in closets, something owners who rent their units often lock off for their private items.

The Villa suites’ large wrap around windows give both the great room and dining room jaw-dropping river and mountain views. The dining rooms feature expansive tables that can accommodate a crowd or scale down for an intimate dining experience. Just off the dining room are generous, private patios that can also be accessed from the master bedroom.

Suites have two gas fireplaces, one in the

great room that’s surrounded by stacked slate, and one in the master bedroom. The bedrooms have luxurious king beds, large walk-in closets, coffered ceilings, and sliding doors out to private patios. Just off the master is a tile and stone bathroom with twin sinks in a beautiful marble vanity, a six-foot soaking tub, and walk-in, double-headed shower. With Avenda toiletries and fluffy towels, these are baths meant for pampering.

While Columbia Cliff Villas are places to indulge in luxury, perhaps the best part of this condominium development is that it’s a place that feels like home.... a really, really nice home.

www.columbiacliffvillas.com 🐾