

Stark Park Lane still naked

by David Mansvelt

According to full-page advertisements in newspapers and magazines this summer and fall, "The most important fashion statement this year" is "Park Lane opens October 5th". But six weeks later the much-flaunted mall on Spring Garden Road still has a lot of opening to do if it is to fulfill its boast.

The main entrances are still carpeted with bright green door carpeting (the type that usually surrounds swimming pools) that clashes with the pink and turquoise facade. The temporary wooden entrances sway under the weight of the shoppers. The Dresden Row entrance is largely blocked with sand and stone.

While "Still Under Construction" signs greet you at the doorways, "Coming Soon" signs are everywhere inside. For example, of the 42 available spaces on the

Dresden Row level, only seven are occupied, one of them by the management office and another by a surprising art exhibit from the Sobey Collection now showing works by the Group of Seven.

The white boarded-in fronts of the vacant spaces add to the austere, spacious halls. White shiny floor tiles, six-foot-wide support columns that extend to the concrete parking garage visible above the skylight roof don't help either. It's sometimes like being in a space station. For example, the circular marble-topped security desk with its defender plopped inside at eye level with the counter looked like Station Commander. Glass elevators and their exposed shafts with a string of lights ascending into the "coming soon" offices, the rows of black holes along the top of the walls (wiring still visible within and without), and metal struts hanging from the food hall ceiling as decoration continue the effect.



PHOTO: ARIELLA PAHLKE

This may look like the Toronto Eaton's Centre, but it's smack dab in the middle of Halifax. Park Lane, "the most important fashion statement this year".

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The basement food hall is cold, empty and dark and the noise from the nearby fountain distracts. This should worsen though because in one corner of the hall is a large boarded-in area that says "Waterfall: Coming Soon". The water, the neon-lit atmosphere, the cafeteria-style seating layout of McDonald's-type tables with marble tops all spell "Teenage Hangout". Here they can buy cinnamon buns, cookies, A&W fare, frozen yoghurt, sandwiches or bagels. The most appealing feature of the food hall is not to be found in the hall itself but in the balconies above it where the smell of the in-store baked buns and cookies is strongest.

Also in the basement are the eight Famous Players cinemas. The lobby is dark, neon-lit, sharp and snazzy. Finally no more trips to Dartmouth's Penhorn for first-run movies.

Oh yes, the fashions. The shops' wares are attractively displayed, opulently or abstractly depending on their target. No mannequins here. And those rather risky-looking curtain changing rooms abound. The stores look like any that you might find in other malls such as Spring Garden Place across the street except that they appear to have more display room and likely higher prices as a result. There is also an abundance of brand-name stores like Benetton, Esprit, and California Republic. More fodder for the Yuppie trough. Next year's "most important fashion statement?" "Park Lane Clothing Co.", complete with Pink Swan logo on the front. "Coming Soon", of course.



PHOTO: ARIELLA PAHLKE

Fountain distracts shoppers as they glide up and down the Park Lane escalator.

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