

called "Big Chinky." It will be shipped here from New York.

# Martin Selig: a mover & a shaper builds on success

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back at the public hearing on Columbia Center. Venerable Seattle architect Victor Steinbrueck had just denounced Selig and his building, calling it "an obscene erection of ego edifice" and a "vulgarity."

Selig sat and listened to the sexual analogies. Then he went up to Steinbrueck after the architect was through speaking and shook his hand.

"I found what you said rather interesting," Selig told his critic with a grin. "But I don't agree with you."

"A charming man," Steinbrueck said later. "I just wish he didn't have such a knack for mediocrity in his buildings."

Another time Selig unexpectedly invited a reporter to dinner at his waterfront home. Selig transported the reporter to dinner in his inboard speedboat, an elegant touch offset by the evening's menu: hamburgers from the grill.

However, Selig lived up to his image with an after-dinner drink: a rare and expensive brandy. The reporter was sufficiently charmed.

## 'Provincial town'

Some architects say Selig is the only builder in town who has any guts, any flair for boldness and drama. There are few drab "Bauhaus boxes" among Selig's slew of office buildings.

"Seattle's such a provincial town," said Chris Simons, the designer of the Columbia Center and the Fourth and Blanchard Building. "And Martin adds another dimension to this town."

Selig says he doesn't like to do routine buildings, and despises large boxes with "blank walls." While he is often accused of building "economic models" — buildings designed to bring in maximum dollars in rental money — Selig says "we design buildings around architectural concepts."

Selig cuts a dashing figure in his dark trench coats, with his Robert Duvall sideways grin, his sleek Mercedes Benz SEC.

He came roaring up to his child's Little League baseball game the other day in the \$60,000 car, then blended in with the other parents and watched the game while going through his pile of office work.

He has been involved in several controversies with local politicians — most notably news reports alleging that former King County Assessor Harley Hoppe undervalued his buildings. But he has been sued only once — a tenant dispute — and that case never made it to court.

## First venture

Though he contributes heavily to local Republican candidates for office, he is "probably more of a Democrat than a Republican," said Hempelmann.

In the winter, Hempelmann spends a lot of time on the ski slopes with Selig, who skis with wild abandon at helicopter destinations in the Bugaboo Mountains or steep mogul slopes at Sun Valley.

"He is the same kind of skier as he is a developer," said Hempelmann. "All out."

Selig's first property venture was a deal he made for \$4,500 down. Now he is juggling property said to be worth almost half a billion dollars. He started with suburban shopping centers, then moved into lower Queen Anne Hill and finally to the fringes of downtown.

His entry into the Denny Regrade in the 1970s was dramatic: three large glass office buildings along Fourth Avenue. With the complaints about the powerful-looking buildings came compliments about the grass and artwork Selig placed in front of his buildings.

Schell said it was clear in the path Selig blazed toward downtown that he wouldn't stop until he had the biggest building of all.

"I said four years ago he's not going to stop until he gets what he wants," said Schell. "Now that he's done it, what else is there?"

Schell said Selig "has to be sweating it" because competition is fierce in Seattle among developers

trying to sell office space and Selig has rolled just about everything he owns into his current mammoth project.

According to the most recent estimate from Coldwell Banker, the vacancy rate in Seattle increased in the last quarter to almost 15 percent. Bellevue has a vacancy rate about 10 points higher.

"He really went out on a limb with this," said Seattle city planner Jim Parsons. "Most developers wouldn't do that, but he may end up hitting the market just right."

Columbia Center still has only one announced major tenant — Seafirst. Selig claims his building is 42 percent full, but won't give out the names of the other tenants.

Selig has been using the same occupancy figure for more than two years. But in a town where downtown gossip would have ferreted out the names of the other major tenants long ago, there is doubt if Selig has the commitment he claims to have.

Selig smiles when pressed on this point and insists the building will be full, like all his other buildings, when it opens.

"I'm not sweating it at all," he says. "Risk means different things to different people. To me, this is the ultimate challenge."

What motivates him?

Some say he is insecure.

"If Martin were six-foot-five instead of five-foot-six his buildings would be a lot different," said architect and Selig friend Fred Bassetti.

Hempelmann said Selig "is not an egotist, he's just having fun."

Selig, also, says what motivates him is "fun."

As a youth selling T-shirts about 20 years ago, he made a deal with the contractor to take him up to the top of the Space Needle — long before the general public got a view.

Why?

"I wanted to go to the top."

# Man kills self in front of police

A 30-year-old engineer shot himself to death yesterday with a semi-automatic pistol after police stopped him on a highway east of Woodinville for traveling too slowly on a small motorcycle

The victim, identified as Robert C. Fischer, of North Seattle, was pronounced dead at the scene, near the intersection of the Woodinville-Duvall Road and 165th Avenue Northeast.

Officers said late yesterday that it was not known why the man took his life.

According to King County police Lt. JoAnn Cratty, Officer Jim Gray was eastbound on the Woodinville-Duvall Road when "he noticed a motorcycle with a rider traveling very, very slowly and decided to pull him over and see what the problem was."

She added: "He (Gray) had barely gotten out of the car when he saw the man pull a handgun out and shoot himself in the head."

Another officer said Gray had no intention of giving the man a traffic ticket. The incident occurred about 1:30 p.m.

David Osborne, proprietor of Mack's Corner Store and gas station at the same intersection, described the man's small, red motorcycle as a 110 Honda trail bike.

"Nobody saw where it (the weapon) came from, not until he pulled it out," Cratty said.

She said that it was not known as yet whether there were any warrants for the man's or arrest or whether he was a suspect in a crime. "We have just run a license plate check," she added.

According to the King County medical examiner's office, Fischer is survived by his parents, Eugene and Pearl Fischer, of Yelm. He worked at Boeing.