

## MUSIC

# Hotel hits high note with Fazioli suite

\$1,200-a-night deluxe accommodation at Fairmont is named after famed Italian piano maker

BY KEVIN GRIFFIN

VANCOUVER SUN

In the marketing of high-end, handmade grand pianos, an Italian company has pulled ahead of the competition in Metro Vancouver.

A recently opened luxury suite at the Fairmont Pacific Rim Hotel is a reflection of that success. The \$1,200-a-night unit is named for the company founder Paolo Fazioli, a pianist and engineer who decided in the early 1970s to design and make a new piano with an “Italian sound and voice.”

Since then, his firm Fazioli Pianoforti has established a reputation for making what many pianists consider to be the best-sounding pianos in the world, better even than German-made Steinways.

On Monday, Paolo Fazioli visited the 1,200-square-foot hotel suite named in his honour. With stunning views north and west over the Burrard Inlet and Coal Harbour, the suite displays photographs of a Fazioli piano being made, backlit artwork of a piano keyboard, and a miniature grand Fazioli piano.

The suite has a curving wall panel with the musical score of the *Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2* by Frédéric Chopin, which happens to be one of Fazioli’s favourite pieces. Not surprisingly, there is a Fazioli piano, valued at \$225,000, in the lobby of the Fairmont.

Fazioli said he was honoured by having the suite designed and named after him.

“It’s fantastic,” he said. “It makes me very proud, of course. I’m very moved about [it].”

One of the reasons why the Fairmont Pacific Rim has named a suite to attract piano fans is that Vancouver has a unique position in the world



WAYNE LEIDENFROST/PNG

Paolo Fazioli sits with his \$225,000 handmade piano in the Fairmont Pacific Rim Hotel lobby.

with regard to Fazioli pianos. Three years ago, when Showcase Pianos started selling Faziolis, general manager Manuel Bernaschek thought he’d sell maybe two or three a year. Since then he’s sold 30, which has put Vancouver among the top two or three markets for Faziolis in the world.

Later on Monday evening, Fazioli attended a concert that featured one of his pianos, valued at \$300,000, in a private home in White Rock. Prices for Fazioli pianos range from \$75,000 to \$500,000.

Why has the company sold so many of its pianos in Vancouver? Fazioli attributes it to several factors — including, not surprisingly, the sound and quality of his pianos.

“I can say that the music education in this area is very advanced — there is a lot of interest in teaching music,” he said, often pausing to choose the right English word.

“There is a big Asian community. Generally, the Asian community is much more — I can say — interested in teaching and learning music.”

When Fazioli first decided to make and design a new piano from the ground up, he spent several years assembling a team of acoustic engineers, woodworkers and piano makers. After they built the first prototype, Fazioli unveiled it at an international trade fair for musical instruments in Frankfurt in 1981. It created a sensation: nothing that new had been introduced into the high-end piano world in decades.

Six years later, the first Fazioli piano made its debut at New York’s Carnegie Hall.

Besides the quality of the instrument, what also makes Fazioli pianos unique is Paolo Fazioli himself. Outgoing and charming, Fazioli travels the world meeting with customers and inviting them to his

company’s piano factory in Sacile, northwest of Venice.

Fazioli said he’s never satisfied. He’s constantly working to improve the sound, including pushing the limits of technology by working with universities in Italy to improve the vibration of the sounding board so that it produces an even deeper sound that lingers as long as possible.

“The dynamic range is really very big. You can play from pianissimo to fortissimo and on this range, have a lot of different colour. The evenness of the sound of our piano is very special,” he said.

At the trade fair in Germany almost 30 years ago, Fazioli received his first commission from a German client and went on to make about eight grand pianos the first year. By 1998, Fazioli was making about 70 pianos a year; now it is about 120.

kevingriffin@vancouversun.com