

FORMA

THE MAGAZINE

LET'S SHAPE THE FUTURE TOGETHER!

VOL.06 - June 30, 2026



A Note from the Founder: The Evolution of Our Spaces

Every time I sit down to curate a new issue, I'm reminded — sometimes quietly, sometimes with a jolt — that architecture is never just about the materials we build with. It's about the conversations that unfold within those walls, the lives lived in those spaces, and the legacy we choose to leave behind. This June, releasing our seventh edition under the theme "Let's Shape the Future Together!" feels less like a milestone and more like a genuine call to action — one I hope you'll feel too.

As you move through these pages, you'll notice a quiet but powerful shift in how our industry approaches design. We are collectively moving away from structures that try to conquer their surroundings, leaning instead toward spaces that listen, heal, and restore. You'll feel this philosophy alive and breathing as we travel to Quebec's Laurentians to explore The Albatross — a home that gracefully coexists with its forested hillside — and as we step inside Ravine House, a sanctuary designed to draw the rhythm of the changing seasons and the warmth of natural light deep into the fabric of daily life.

Shaping the future also means holding a deep, almost tender respect for the past. It is profoundly moving to see how spaces like the 215-year-old Aubé House in Saint-Eustache are being given a new heartbeat — striking that delicate, improbable balance between historic preservation and contemporary vision. We are proving, again and again, that we can honour our history while completely rethinking our environmental responsibility. From our practical guide breaking down the realities of Net Zero Buildings to the bright, inclusive transformation of the century-old University of Alberta Commons, the mandate has never been clearer: intelligent, generous design is the way forward.

Ultimately, this issue is a celebration of connection. It is about the boundary-free, electric energy of Toronto's KEDD Neighbourhood Hop, and the tactile brilliance of innovations like the Eclos Maitake Table and Tafisa's new ICONIQ collection. It is also a moment to pause, breathe, and reflect on true longevity — as we look at the calm, deeply considered spaces Michael Taylor Architecture + Design has crafted with such devotion over a quarter of a century.

I hope this issue feels less like a presentation of projects and more like an open invitation — one sent to you personally. Whether you are drafting the plans, shaping the materials, or simply enjoying the spaces we share, we all have a hand in this evolution. And that, to me, is the most exciting thought of all.

Let's shape what comes next, together.

Giuseppe Gutta
Founder, Forma The Magazine

table of CONTENTS

ISSUE 06 - JUNE 30, 2026

Page **06**
The Albatross
a Modern Marvel in the Laurentians

Page **03**
FOUNDER'S WELCOME LETTER

Page **12**
Plateau Kyoto Residence
A Montreal Home Meets Japanese Minimalism

Page **17**
Competitions *by Buildner*

Page **18**
Tafisa Unveils the ICONIQ Collection at Montreal Design Week
HIGHLIGHT PRODUCT

Page **20**
Aubé House
Breathing New Life into a 215 Year Old Landmark



Page 26

Ravine House

A Modern Sanctuary in Harmony with Nature

Page 32

A Simple Guide to the Net Zero Buildings

The Power of Tomorrow

Page 43

Competitions *by Terraviva*

Page 34

Michael Taylor Architecture + Design

The Next 25 Years of Toronto Architecture

Page 38

Chez Lionel Opens Montreal

A Modern Twist on the French Brasserie

Page 44

Old Town, New Vision

Toronto's 2026 The King East Design District (KEDD) Neighbourhood Hop

Page 48

The Éclos® Maitake Table

HIGHLIGHT PRODUCT

Page 50

University of Alberta Commons

A New Campus Heart





The Albatross
A Modern Marvel in the Laurentians



Perched above the untouched shores of Lake Xavier in Quebec's Laurentians, The Albatross is more than a luxury home. It celebrates thoughtful architecture, natural beauty, and timeless design.

A Home Designed to Belong

Some homes dominate the landscape. The Albatross does the opposite. Nestled into a steep, forested hillside in La Conception, Quebec, this residence embraces its surroundings rather than overpowering them. Its design follows a simple philosophy: coexist with nature while offering an exceptional living experience.

The project required years of planning, technical precision, and creative problem-solving. The result is a home that feels innovative and deeply connected to its environment.

Architects

MU Architecture
Anik Patry

Team

Charles Côté, Jean-Sébastien Herr, Magda Telenga, Andrée-Anne Godin, Alexandre Arcens, Lou Émier, Baptiste Balbrick.

Structural Engineer

Génibois

Mechanical Engineer

Antoine Assaf

Geotechnical Engineer

Paskal Lamontagne

Landscape Architect

Josiane Léger

Landscape Contractor

Parker Charbonneau

General Contractor

Construction Metric

Project by MU Architecture & Anik Patry
Photography by Stéphane Groleau

Architecture That Moves Like Nature

Instead of carving away the mountain to make room for a massive structure, the design follows the site's natural contours. Interconnected volumes step down the hillside, preserving mature trees and uninterrupted views of the lake and surrounding mountains. From the road, the residence appears understated. As visitors move through the property, the architecture unfolds to reveal dramatic overhangs, expansive terraces, and floor-to-ceiling glass walls framing the scenery. Inspired by the graceful flight of the albatross bird, the home's cantilevered forms stretch outward like wings above the landscape, creating a sense of movement.





A Warm Interior

Inside, warm wood finishes soften the modern architecture, creating spaces that feel welcoming rather than minimal. Curved ceilings, flowing layouts, and custom-built cabinetry add warmth and character, showing that sophisticated design can still feel like home.



Designed for an active Canadian lifestyle, this area connects directly to a double garage and a massive, sports-oriented mudroom.

The Main Level: The Social Engine

The heart of the home is an expansive open-concept living space where family and friends gather naturally. A spacious kitchen with oversized islands anchors the interior, complemented by dining and living areas that open directly onto outdoor terraces. Practical spaces—including a large mudroom and service kitchen—support an active lifestyle without sacrificing elegance.

The Upper Level: The Private Sanctuary

The upper level offers a peaceful sanctuary dedicated to the homeowners. A primary suite is paired with a home office, meditation room, walk-in closet, and spa-inspired bathroom, creating a private escape above the main living spaces.

The Garden Level: Fun, Wellness, and Hospitality

The lower level transforms into a destination for relaxation and recreation. Children's bedrooms, guest accommodations, a home theatre, games room, fitness area, sauna, cold plunge, and outdoor hot tub create a resort-like experience for every season.



PLAN REZ-DE-JARDIN
TERRACE DES CARACTÉRISTIQUES - AREA DE JARDIN ET SPA



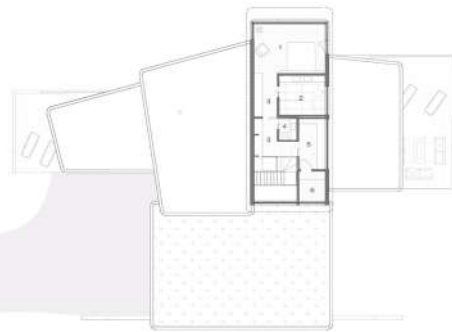
GARDEN LEVEL
NIVEAU SOUTERRAIN - TV + SPA



PLAN REZ-DE-CHAUSSEE
AREA DE VIE PRINCIPALE ET GARAGE



GROUND LEVEL
NIVEAU DU SOL ET GARAGE



PLAN ETAGE
CHAMBRE DES MÂTRES



1. CHAMBRE DES MÂTRES
2. BAIN DES MÂTRES
3. BUREAU
4. SALLE DE MEDITATION
5. TERRASSE





Engineering Behind the Elegance

While the architecture appears light and effortless, its beauty is supported by sophisticated engineering. A custom steel structure allows the home's dramatic cantilevers to float above the hillside and conceals mechanical systems within the walls and ceilings. Built-in furniture and hidden storage were carefully integrated into the architecture, producing interiors that are clean, functional, and highly refined.



More Than a Luxury Residence

What truly distinguishes The Albatross is its lasting vision. Instead of chasing trends, the home was designed with longevity in mind. Its sustainable relationship with the landscape, enduring materials, and timeless architectural language ensure it remains relevant for generations. The Albatross demonstrates that exceptional architecture isn't defined solely by appearance. It succeeds because it balances innovation with restraint, luxury with comfort, and bold design with profound respect for nature—and leaves a lasting impression that endures beyond trends.

Plateau Kyoto Residence

A Montreal Home Meets Japanese Minimalism



In one of Montreal's lively neighbourhoods, a typical family home has been turned into a peaceful retreat focused on calm, simplicity, and mindful living.

Project by Indee Design
Photography by Caroline Thibault

A Home Designed to Slow Life Down

In one of Montreal's lively neighbourhoods, a typical family home has been turned into a peaceful retreat focused on calm, simplicity, and mindful living. Instead of following trends, the renovation highlights timeless design, inspired by Japanese minimalism and the warmth of family life. Each room is designed to encourage relaxation, connection, and a deeper appreciation of daily life.

The Art of Intentional Living

The redesign began with a clear goal: to create an open, functional, and peaceful home while preserving its unique character. The house once had separate, closed-off rooms, but now features open spaces that connect easily. Moving the staircase opened the floor plan, letting in more sunlight and making movement easier. Large openings to the backyard integrate indoor and outdoor areas, making the garden an extension of the home. Each design decision supports movement, comfort, and togetherness.



Japanese Simplicity, Montreal Character

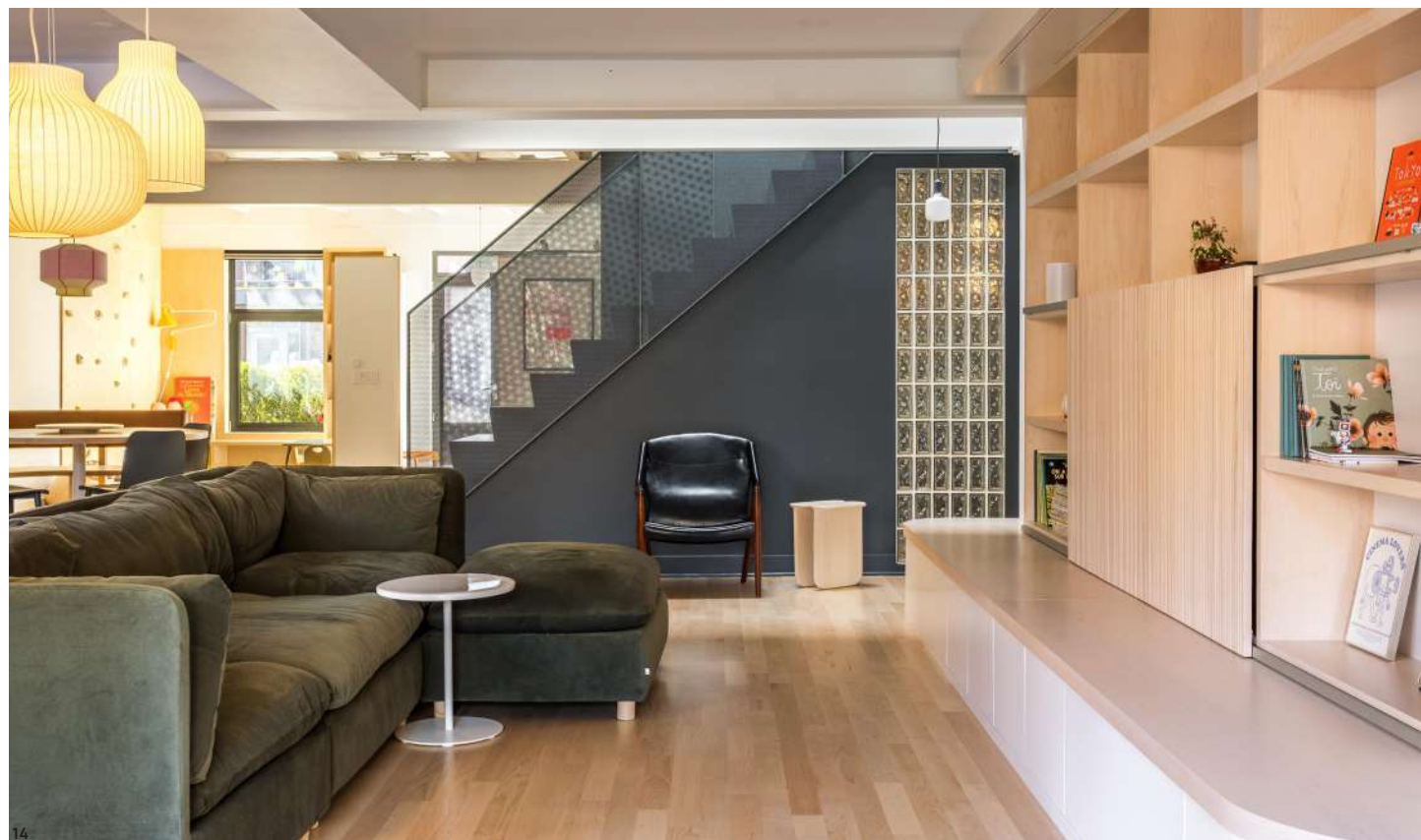
The designers applied principles of traditional Japanese architecture instead of replicating its appearance. The interior features simple forms, clean surfaces, and carefully selected materials. Warm maple, walnut cabinetry, natural textures, and soft neutral colors create a calm and inviting atmosphere. Subtle mid-century modern elements add character while maintaining simplicity. The blend of old and new creates a distinctive, stylish, and welcoming environment.

Custom Design for Everyday Life

Each built-in feature is designed for functionality. Concealed storage, integrated shelving, and multifunctional furniture are custom-designed to suit the family's routines. The kitchen retains original walnut cabinetry, complemented by contemporary finishes that update the space while honoring its history. A round dining banquette is now the home's centre, perfect for family meals, talks, homework, and celebrations. Even the smallest details were planned to last and adapt as needed.

Spaces That Grow With the Family

While the home remains simple and uncluttered, it is thoughtfully designed with children in mind. Reading nooks, climbing areas, and smart storage transform everyday spaces into opportunities for children to imagine and explore. Ample natural light ensures these areas are bright and welcoming for learning and play. The design shows that simplicity doesn't mean sacrificing fun; it means giving every feature a thoughtful purpose.





Natural materials are central throughout the residence. Wood, glass, ceramic, and steel provide subtle contrast while maintaining visual harmony. Framed views of the garden strengthen the connection between architecture and landscape, allowing the changing seasons to enrich the interior. The material palette fosters calm reflection, avoiding overwhelming senses.



Minimalist spaces often depend on carefully selected accents, and this home is no exception. Contemporary artwork, vintage movie posters, playful graphics, and curated decorative objects add color and individuality without cluttering the interiors. These artistic elements introduce personality and reflect the family's interests and creativity.



The result is a home that feels lived-in rather than staged.

A Home Built for the Future

Plateau Kyoto Residence is more than a renovation; it represents a new approach to living. Its carefully planned layout adapts to evolving family needs while maintaining a strong emotional connection to its residents. Every decision, from custom furniture to window placement, supports comfort, functionality, and well-being. Rather than making a dramatic statement, the home succeeds through quiet confidence, demonstrating how thoughtful design can transform daily routines into meaningful experiences.



Plateau Kyoto Residence demonstrates that exceptional design is defined by intention rather than excess. Through restrained architecture, natural materials, and spaces tailored to daily life, the home offers a peaceful retreat in Montreal. Here, simplicity enhances every experience, and thoughtful design gives ordinary moments greater meaning. The residence serves as a quiet reminder that a home can shape the rhythm of daily life.





Saudi Arabia is currently the canvas for one of the most ambitious cultural metamorphoses in modern history. Under the banner of Vision 2030, the Kingdom is not merely building cities; it is weaving a new national identity that blends tradition and the cutting edge.



Registration Deadline
23 July 2026



Prize Fund
€ 50,000



For decades, the default solution to spatial challenges has been to build from scratch. What if the most sustainable, innovative solutions aren't found in new construction, but in reimagining what already exists?



Registration Deadline
10 September 2026



Prize Fund
€ 10,000



A country is far more than a set of borders or a flag—it is a collection of whispers, rituals, conflicts, and aspirations. Pavilion Atlas 2026 is a global call to architects and thinkers to strip away the national clichés and replace them with spatial narratives. How do you build the “feeling” of a culture?



Registration Deadline
16 September 2026



Prize Fund
€ 20,000



As cities rapidly expand to accommodate booming populations, urban planners and architects are locked in a relentless pursuit of space. We build higher into the sky and stretch further into the suburbs, continually redefining our vertical and horizontal limits.



Registration Deadline
17 September 2026



Prize Fund
€ 8,000



This competition is a sanctuary for the “what if”—a global stage dedicated to the boldest ideas that remain, for now, off the grid and on the boards. We celebrate the architectural alchemy that occurs when creativity is freed from the practicalities of the construction site, allowing for pure, visionary exploration.



Registration Deadline
23 September 2026



Prize Fund
€ 100,000

Looking for a design challenge?

The clock is ticking! Every month, we round up exciting BUILDNER COMPETITIONS with approaching deadlines.

What are you waiting for?

Grab your sketchbook and register before time runs out!

Think you've seen it all?
Scan to unlock the full lineup.



Canadian decorative panel manufacturer Tafisa captured the spotlight at the first-ever Montreal Design Week, unveiling ICONIQ—a premium collection of decorative melamine (TFL) and high-pressure laminate (HPL) surfaces that naturally blend state-of-the-art technology with the perpetual attraction of natural wood.

Created with architects, interior designers, and millworkers in mind, ICONIQ debuts synchronized embossing technology that perfectly fits the tactile texture of the printed wood grain. The result is a surface so true to life that every knot, crack, and grain pattern welcomes both the eye and the hand. This breakthrough brings the welcoming warmth and character of solid wood, paired with the strength, reliability, and easy care of engineered materials.



Tafisa Unveils the ICONIQ Collection at Montreal Design Week



HIGHLIGHT PRODUCT

Inspired by the graceful beauty of oak, the collection presents six distinctive woodgrain décors—Blonde Oak, Natural Oak, Honey Oak, Caramel Oak, Smoked Oak, and Black Oak—alongside two versatile solid colours, Noir and Greige. These finishes empower designers to craft harmonious interiors by blending layered textures and complementary tones in both homes and commercial spaces.



Produced at Tafisa's state-of-the-art facility in Lac-Mégantic, Quebec, the ICONIQ collection shows the company's ongoing devotion to innovation, expert craftsmanship, and eco-friendly practices. The launch underscores Tafisa's promise to deliver decorative surfaces that keep pace with the constantly evolving demands of the design world.

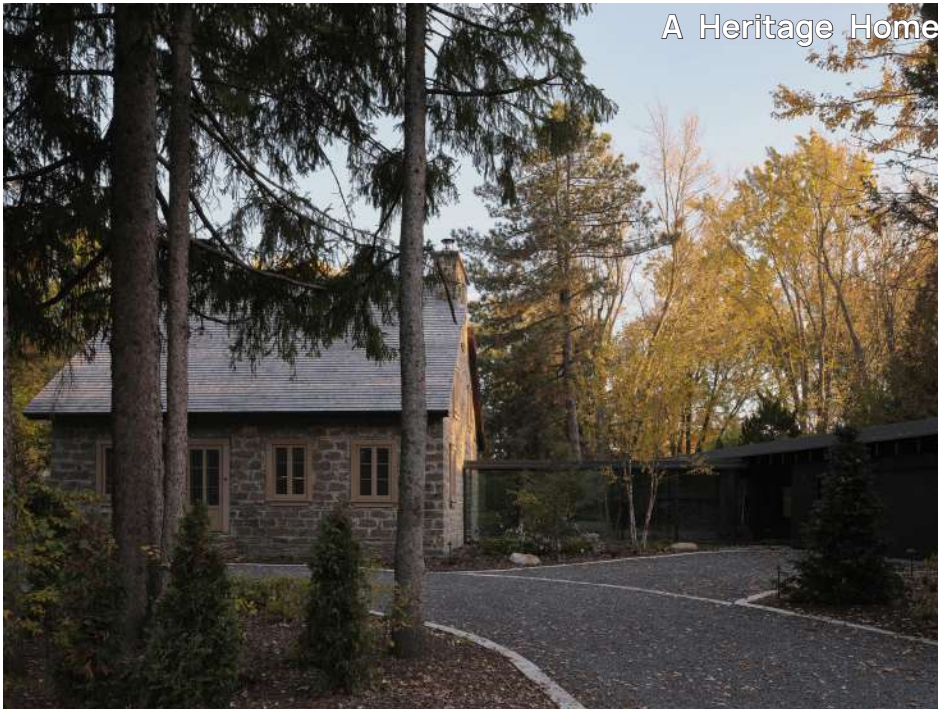
With ICONIQ, Tafisa elevates decorative panel design beyond simple aesthetics, offering surfaces which captivate both the eye and the hand. The collection presents a sophisticated, functional alternative to natural wood and boldly affirming the company's place at the forefront of decorative surface design

Aubé House

Breathing New Life into a 215-Year-Old Landmark

The Quebec Association of Architects (OAQ) recognized the importance of this project by awarding Aubé House the 2026 Award of Excellence in Architecture for its careful restoration and modern expansion.

Project by YH2 architecture
Photography by Maxime Brouillet

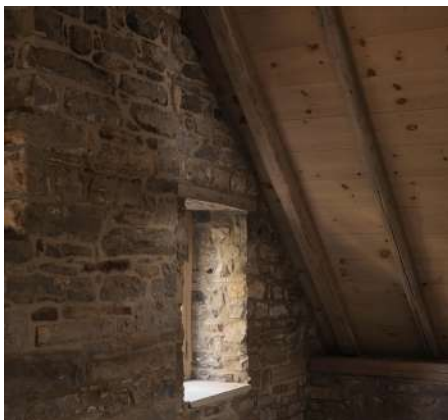


A Heritage Home with a Lasting Legacy Reborn

Aubé House, built in 1811, shows how historic homes can be updated for modern life while keeping their original character. As a classic Maison des Patriotes, it features sturdy stone walls, a gabled roof, a central chimney, and small, evenly spaced windows. These homes were designed with thick masonry to handle Quebec's cold winters and reflect the practical mindset of early settlers. The Aubé family has owned the house for generations, keeping its architectural and cultural history alive. Located by the Rivière des Mille Îles in Saint-Eustache, Québec, the house recently won the 2026 Award of Excellence in Architecture from the Quebec Association of Architects (OAA) for its careful restoration and modern addition.

Uncovering the Home's Original Identity

Over the years, as the family expanded, they added new sections to the original house to fit their changing needs. While these changes were useful, they slowly hid the home's true shape and historic charm. Tasked with restoring the residence, YH2 Architecture carefully studied the building's evolution before removing the later additions. This process revealed the original 1811 structure and allowed the architects to restore its defining architectural features while ensuring the house would continue to meet modern standards.



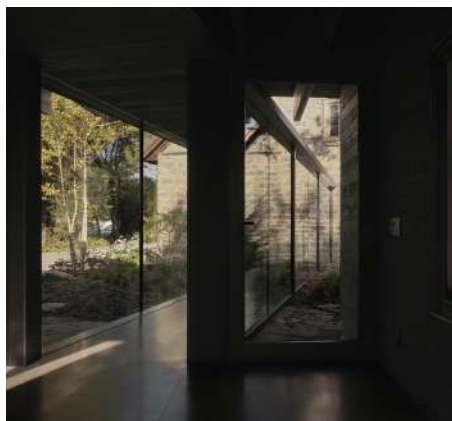
Key historic features, such as the large stone fireplace, hand-hewn beams, exposed stone walls, and traditional wood framing, were carefully preserved. The team sourced original materials and reused stone and timber from the site, cleaning them by hand to keep their aged look. Craftspeople used old joinery and masonry methods to respect the building's history. When repairs were needed, they used lime-based mortar to match the original stonework and help the walls breathe. The cedar shingle roof was rebuilt with hand-split shingles and traditional fasteners, just like the original. Local artisans made new windows and doors to match the old ones, bringing in more light and comfort while staying true to the home's character.

A Contemporary Addition that Respects History

Instead of copying the old house, the architects created a modern addition that fits in quietly with the historic building. Set among mature trees, the new section sits back from the original house so the historic structure stays in the spotlight. Clad in ebony-stained eastern cedar, the addition blends effortlessly into its wooded surroundings. Its dark exterior is paired with a unique river-pebble roof, helping the building disappear into the landscape when viewed from above while reinforcing its connection to the site's natural environment.

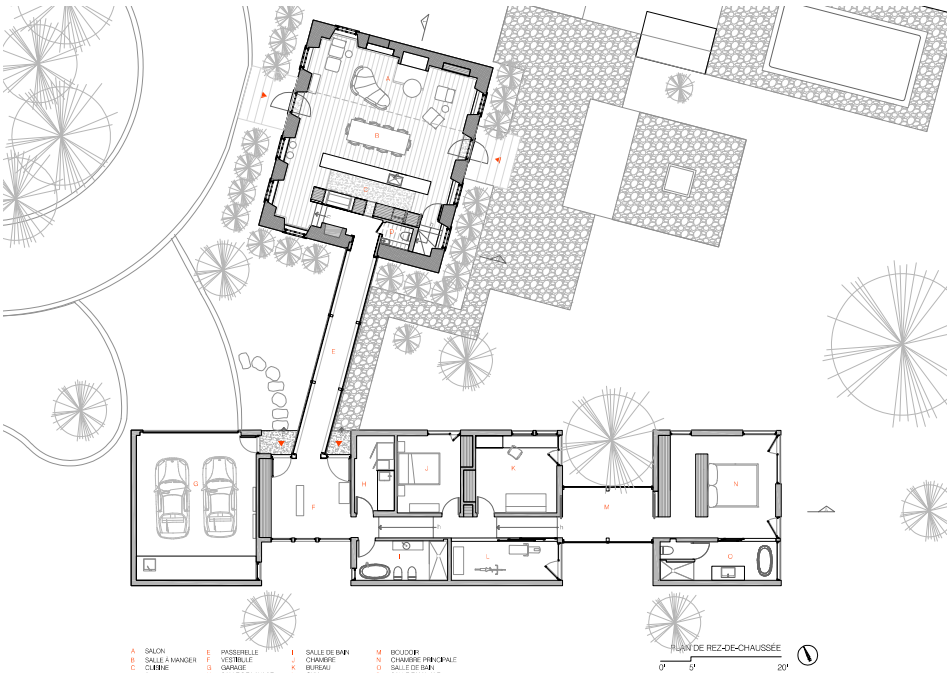


A fully glazed connector links the historic house and the new wing. This transparent passage creates a respectful separation between the two architectural periods, allowing visitors to clearly distinguish the original 19th-century home from its contemporary counterpart while maintaining a seamless flow throughout the residence.

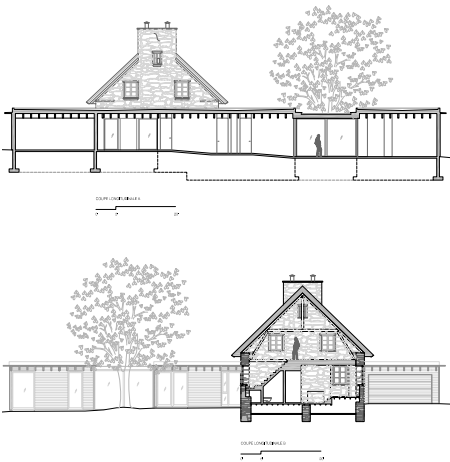
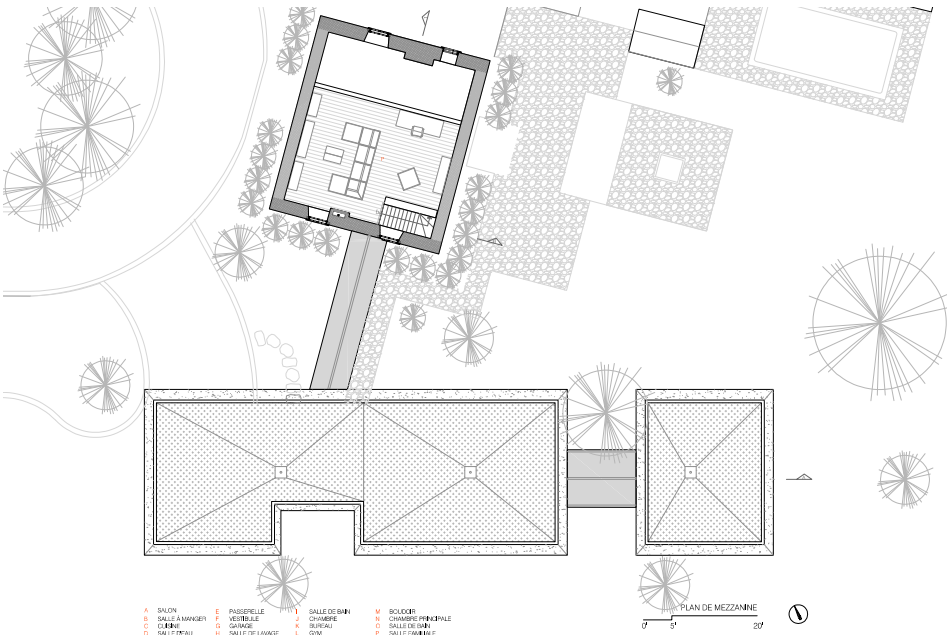


Designed for Contemporary Family Life
 The addition was designed to accommodate several generations of the family, providing more space while preserving the original home's character. The extension includes modern features such as private bedrooms, flexible living areas, workspaces, and recreation rooms. A main hallway follows the land's natural slope, helping organize the inside and making it easy to move between rooms. Large windows let in lots of daylight and offer wide views of the forest, gardens, and the Rivière des Mille Îles. The architects made sure the inside and outside always feel connected, so nature is part of daily life.

Balancing Sustainability and Preservation
 This project shows that saving old buildings can also be good for the environment. By keeping the original house instead of tearing it down, the design cuts down on waste and helps the home last even longer. The team chose natural materials like cedar, stone, wood, and glass, so the new parts will age well with the old house. They also added energy-saving upgrades, such as better insulation, triple-glazed windows, and a quiet, efficient heat pump for heating and cooling.



Energy-saving LED lights and improved airtightness help lower energy use, all while keeping the home's historic look.



An Award-Winning Vision for the Future

Aubé House is more than just a restoration. It celebrates tradition, skilled work, and careful design. YH2 Architecture turned this centuries-old family home into a modern space while preserving its history. The finished home creates a lasting conversation between old and new, showing that heritage can be adapted for the future. By respecting the past and welcoming modern design, Aubé House sets an inspiring example for preserving Canada's architectural history and proves that tradition and innovation can work together.



This breathtaking contemporary residence reimagines what a home can be: not a fortress against the elements, but a beautifully calibrated threshold between the warmth of domestic life and the untamed energy of the natural world. Conceived on the principles of biophilic design, it is, at its heart, a place built for restoration.



Ravine House
A Modern Sanctuary in Harmony with Nature



A Facade Grown from the Forest Floor

Approach Ravine House and you immediately understand its intentions. The front elevation is a sculptural love letter to its surroundings: a delicate, abstract leaf-like relief pattern stretches across the facade, held aloft by tall, slender steel columns that echo the verticality of the trees behind them. Deep overhangs cantilever outward like the boughs of a mature oak, recreating the sensation of standing beneath a forest canopy. These are not merely poetic gestures — they are working elements that keep the home naturally cool and reduce solar gain during the warmer months without sacrificing a drop of light.



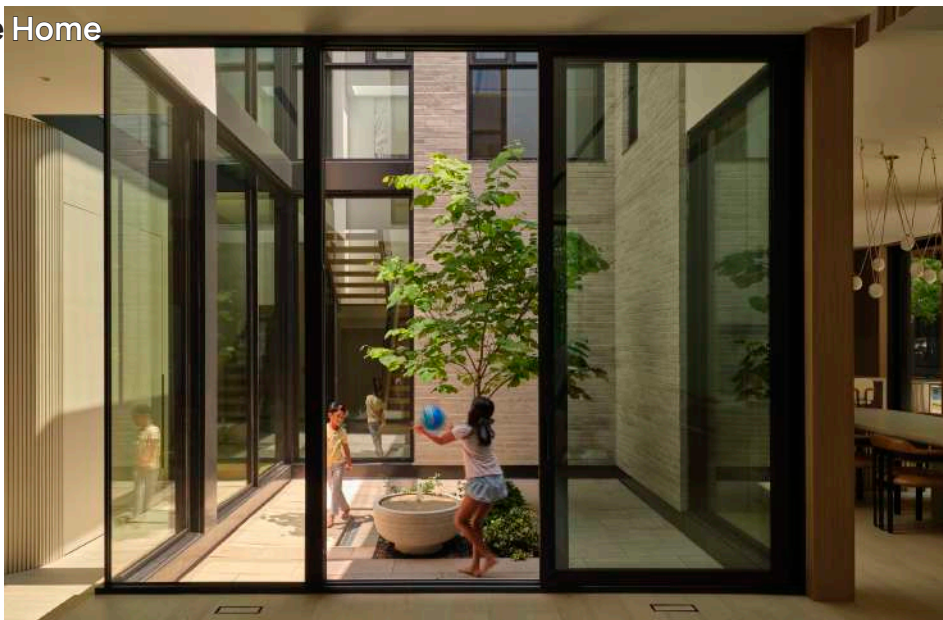
At the rear, floor-to-ceiling glazing dissolves the wall between interior warmth and the outdoor pool, the wild landscape beyond bleeding seamlessly into the glow of the living spaces within.



Project by Prosun Design Build
Photography by Riley Snelling

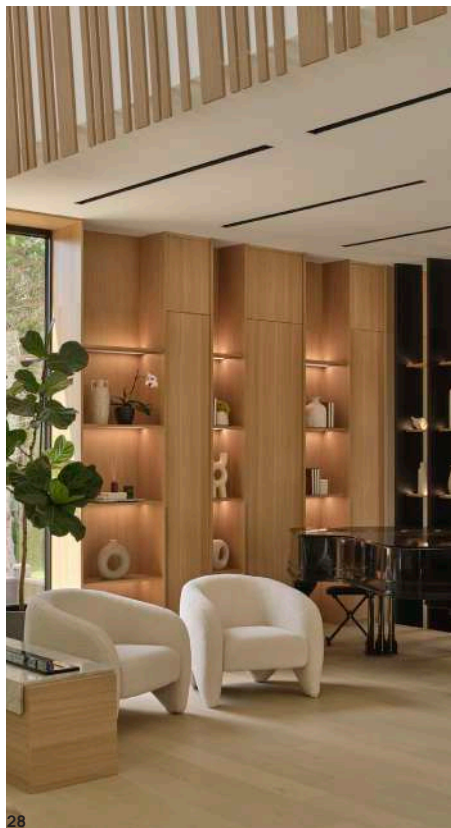
The Courtyard: The Lungs of the Home

Step past the threshold and the home reveals its most extraordinary gesture: an open-air courtyard at its very core. This is no ordinary architectural amenity. It is the environmental and emotional heart of the entire residence — drawing fresh air, shifting daylight, and intimate forest views deep into the bedroom level above. Because it is open to the sky, the courtyard becomes a living calendar. Summer floods it with a lush green canopy. Autumn ignites it in amber and copper. Winter delivers a hush of snow that settles like a still-life painting. The seasons do not happen outside this home; they happen inside it. A glass floor at the interior level and a series of carefully placed skylights further dissolve any remaining boundary between inside and out. The architecture does not just frame nature — it invites it to move through.



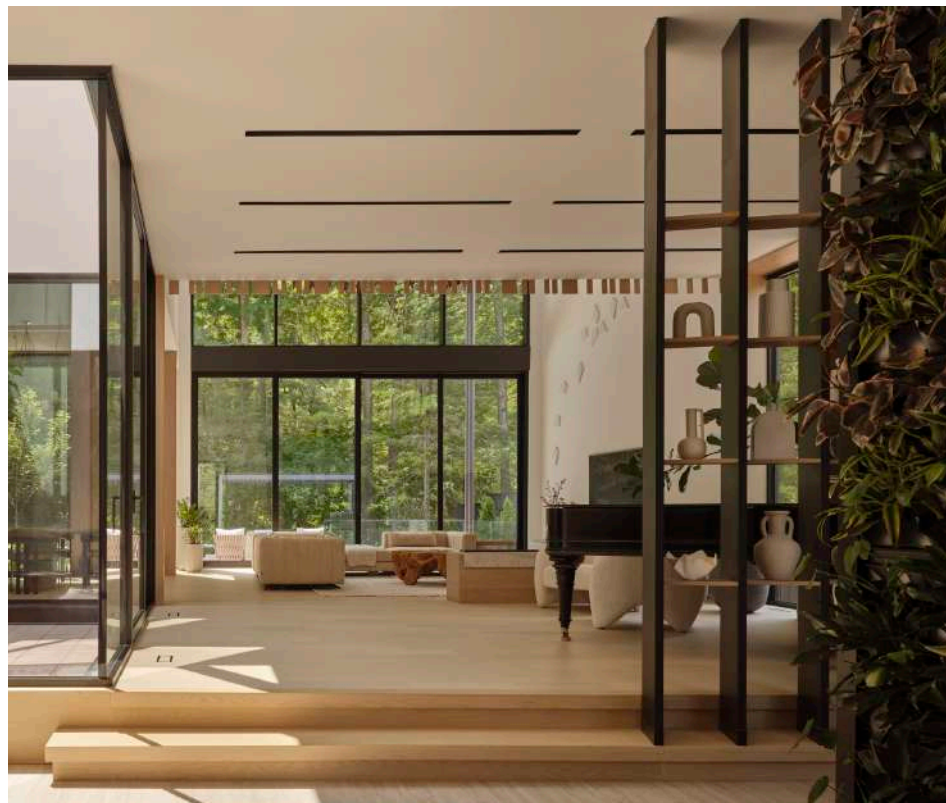
Light as a Living Material

Nowhere is the home's sensory intelligence more evident than in its double-height living room. The eye rises immediately to a custom suspended art installation — an ethereal sculpture inspired by the motion of falling leaves, designed to catch and fragment natural light as the sun arcs across the sky. Throughout the day, this installation casts shifting patterns across the surfaces below, giving the room a quiet, organic pulse. It is not decoration in the traditional sense; it is a timepiece, marking the passage of hours through shadow and shimmer. This attention to light's movement — the way it enters a space, how it travels and transforms — is woven into every corner of Ravine House, making the home feel perpetually alive.



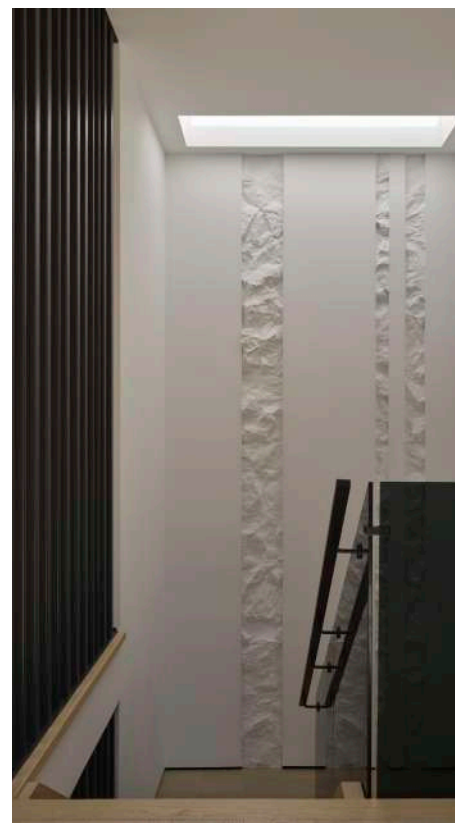
Textures That Tell the Story of the Land

The material palette of Ravine House is restrained by intention, rich in sensation. Warm natural woods draw the eye toward the treeline beyond. Charred Shou Sugi Ban — timber carbonized in the ancient Japanese tradition — introduces a dramatic, almost primordial darkness that anchors the palette with gravitas. Rich stone and dark steel ground the spaces with permanence and weight, while a towering 12.5-foot living green wall anchors the dining area. This vertical garden is far more than a design statement: it purifies the air, softens the room's acoustics, and exhales a quiet, vegetative calm into every meal shared beneath it. Transitions between spaces are treated with equal care. A luminous timber staircase descends to a serene rock garden at its base. Upstairs, bathroom mirrors are suspended to frame the forest like a living artwork. In the kitchen, stone countertops and natural wood cabinetry fold open entirely to the patio — the line between cooking inside and dining outside all but erased.



Sustainability Built Into the Bones

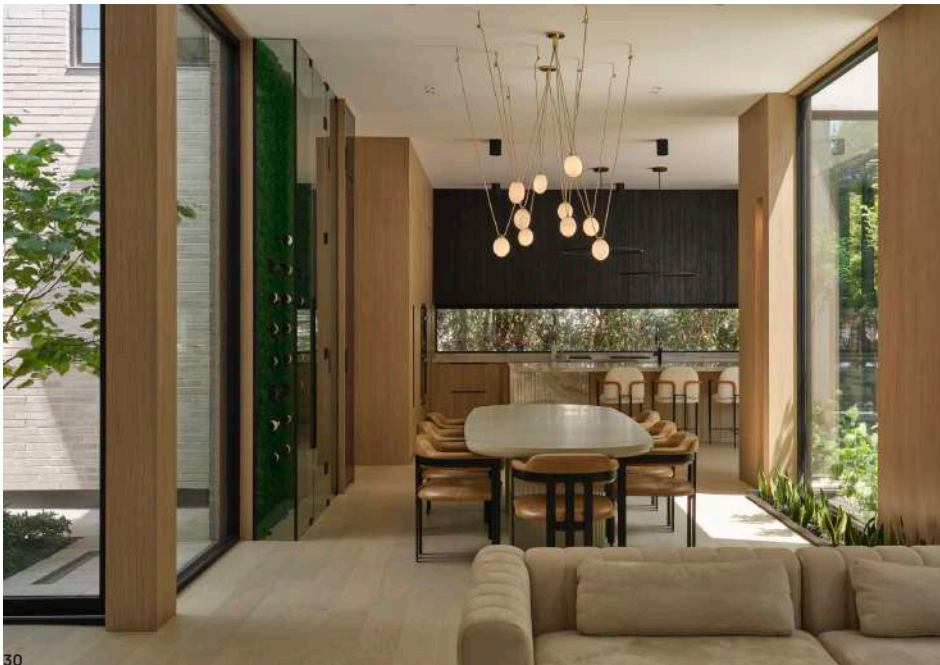
In an era when eco-conscious design can feel like a catalogue of bolt-on technologies, Ravine House takes a more elegant approach. Its environmental ambitions are woven invisibly into the architecture itself — no bulky add-ons, no visual compromise. High-performance glazing and precisely calibrated roof overhangs maintain comfort through every season. The courtyard-driven layout generates natural cross-ventilation, dramatically reducing the home's reliance on mechanical cooling. And a deliberately compact footprint ensures that the property's original ecosystem — the ravine, the woodland, the wild — remains essentially untouched. The result is a home that treads lightly on its land precisely because it has been designed to belong to it.

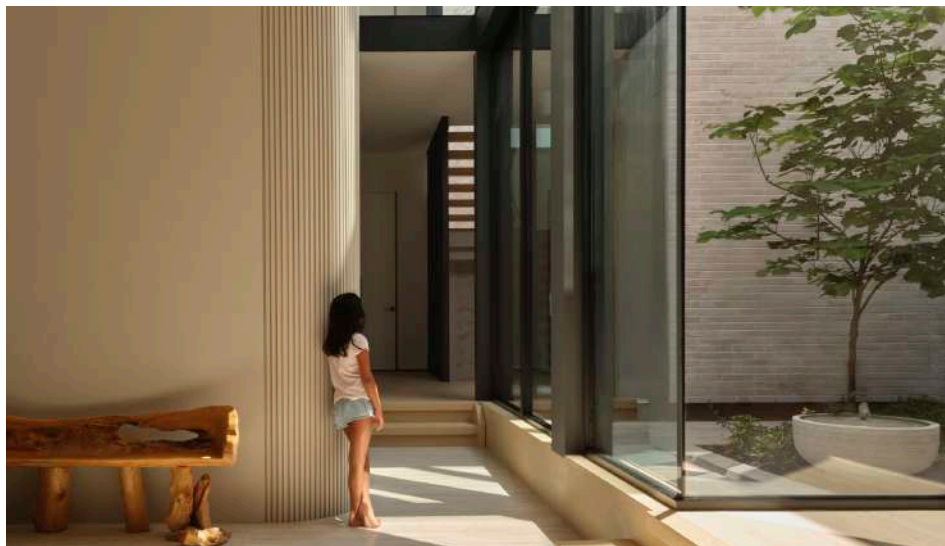




A Blueprint for the Future of Living

Ravine House poses a question that more architecture should ask: what if a home could go beyond shelter to actively support the well-being of the people inside it? What if the natural world, rather than being kept at bay, was invited in as a collaborator? The answer, made manifest in timber and stone and glass and living green, is a residence that functions as restorative infrastructure — a space designed not just to be inhabited, but to heal, to ground, to restore. It is a model for a future in which the built and the natural are no longer in opposition.





To live in Ravine House is to inhabit a different relationship with time. Morning light enters through the courtyard and slides across the stone floors. A breeze moves through rooms that are open, in the most deliberate way, to the sky. The forest presses gently against the glass. The seasons perform, daily and without announcement, their quiet theatre of change. This is a home that does not ask to be admired from a distance — it asks to be lived in, slowly, with attention. And in that invitation lies its greatest achievement: a space so thoroughly rooted in the natural world that the boundary between shelter and landscape, between the built and the wild, beautifully ceases to exist.



How Net-Zero Buildings Work

Clean Energy. Smart Technology. A Better Future.

1 Solar Power

Solar panels on the roof capture the sun's rays and convert them into electricity for daily use.



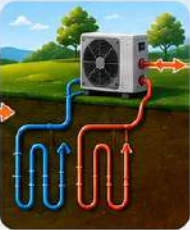
2 Heat Pumps

Instead of burning gas to create heat, net-zero buildings use advanced heat pumps. These extract existing heat from the outside air or the ground—even on cold days—and move it indoors.

Air Source Heat Pump
(from outside air)



Ground Source Heat Pump
(from the ground)



A Simple Guide to the
Net Zero Buildings
The Power of Tomorrow

3 Smart Systems

Smart sensors know when a room is empty, automatically turning off lights and adjusting the climate control to save power.



Motion Sensors detect when a room is empty.



Lights turn off automatically when not needed.



Climate control adjusts for comfort and efficiency.



Better for People.
Better for the Planet.

**Net-Zero =
A Sustainable Future**



There is a quiet revolution rising along the rooftops of our cities not announced by steel-and-glass ambition, but by something far more radical: restraint, intelligence, and generosity. The net-zero building is not a building of the future. It is already here, and its promise is clear: to reshape the streets we walk while demanding less from the world around us.



Imagine a home as a living ledger. Every light switched on, every warm morning, every cool summer evening — each a quiet transaction. But unlike the homes of the past, this one earns as it spends. By definition, a net-zero energy building generates as much clean, renewable energy as it consumes over the course of a year. By December, the account always returns to zero. It is a beautifully simple idea with profound consequences: net-zero buildings can change how we live, how our cities grow, and how gently we press against this warming earth.

The Art of Holding Heat

Before a building can give energy back to the world, it must first learn not to squander it. This is where the architect's philosophy begins — not with the solar panel or the smart thermostat, but with the wall itself. The “building envelope” — the skin of walls, roof, windows, and doors — is the first and most eloquent design decision. In lesser buildings, heat bleeds out through gaps and poorly insulated surfaces like warmth escaping a cupped hand. In a net-zero home, the envelope is more like a perfectly crafted thermos: sealed, intentional, serene. Materials like mineral wool insulation do extraordinary double duty here. They wrap the interior in a thick thermal cocoon while simultaneously muffling the noise of the world outside — a quiet luxury that becomes deeply felt in the dense city.

Smarter Cities, Gentler Growth

Net-zero design is not the exclusive domain of the standalone eco-mansion. It is, in fact, most powerful when applied to the way cities grow from within. Across urban centres worldwide — and with particular urgency in Canada — a movement called “gentle density” is transforming neighbourhoods. Fourplexes, garden suites, and multiplexes are rising where single homes once stood alone, building community into the very structure of the street. When homes share walls, they naturally share warmth. Each shared surface is a barrier against heat loss, making the entire building more efficient simply by virtue of proximity. It is neighbourliness made architectural.

Designed to Follow the Sun

The orientation of a building is its first conversation with the climate. Architects of net-zero homes listen carefully to that conversation before laying a single foundation stone. Passive solar design — the practice of positioning a building to capture winter light and deflect summer heat — is ancient wisdom made precise. South-facing windows welcome the low winter sun deep into living spaces, flooding rooms with warmth and natural light when it is needed most. And when summer arrives, a thoughtfully designed roof overhang casts its shadow over those same windows, keeping the interior cool without ever demanding a single watt of air conditioning. The building reads the seasons. It adapts. It knows.

Clean Power, Quietly Delivered

Once a building has been designed to need so little, filling that need with clean energy becomes elegantly achievable. The technologies involved are no longer experimental — they are refined, reliable, and increasingly beautiful in their own right. Solar panels crown rooftops, harvesting daylight and converting it into the electricity that powers daily life. Heat pumps — those remarkable devices that pull warmth from the very air outside, even on a cold winter morning — replace the gas furnace entirely. And woven throughout, smart sensors quietly monitor occupancy, dimming lights in empty rooms and easing the climate control when no one is home. The building, in this sense, becomes attentive. A good host, always adjusting.

A Standard, Not a Statement

What once seemed aspirational is rapidly becoming the expectation. National frameworks like Canada's Green Buildings Strategy are setting the construction sector on course toward a future where the net-zero building is not the exception but the rule. This is not mere regulatory ambition. It reflects a fundamental shift in what we believe a building owes the people inside it — and the planet beyond its walls. The industry is proving, project by project, that beauty and sustainability are not competing values. They are the same value, seen from different angles.

The Life Inside

For the residents of a net-zero home, the experience is less about ideology and more about daily comfort. Energy bills that approach zero. Air that feels cleaner, lighter, more alive. A stillness indoors that the city outside cannot penetrate. These are not small things. They are the texture of a life lived well — quietly supported by a building that was designed, from the very beginning, to take care of the people inside it.

The most profound shift in net-zero architecture may not be technical at all. It is philosophical: a recognition that a building need not be a burden on the earth to be a joy to inhabit. In the careful layering of insulation, the angle of a roofline toward the winter sun, and the silent efficiency of a heat pump on a cold morning, a new kind of architecture is emerging — one that measures its success not in height or grandeur, but in how lightly, and how lovingly, it treads upon the ground.



Where memory meets material, and restraint becomes its own kind of luxury. Twenty-six years of listening, building, and knowing when to let the landscape speak.

Michael Taylor Architecture + Design The Next 25 Years of Toronto Architecture

Top: Percy Lake Cottage.

Photo: Tom Arban.

Bottom: Russell Hill Road Residence.

Photo: Ben Rahn / A-Frame Inc.



Toronto's skyline is in a constant state of becoming. New towers arrive faster than the city can catch its breath, and with them comes a familiar pressure on architects to pivot, to reinvent, to signal relevance through novelty. Against that backdrop, Michael Taylor has done something quietly subversive: he has simply refused to chase. For more than two decades, his studio — now operating as Michael Taylor Architecture + Design — has pursued a single, deepening idea: that the finest homes are not built so much as they are uncovered, emerging from an intimate understanding of who will live in them and where they will stand. The result is a body of work that spans ravines and lakefronts, urban infill sites and ancient rock, yet carries throughout it an unmistakable sense of calm.

MTA+D is a Toronto-based, internationally acclaimed architecture and design firm. Under the direction of Michael Taylor, the studio works with clients on custom urban residences, lakefront properties, cottages, and commercial and institutional buildings.



A Legacy Earned in Increments

Founded in 2000 under the name Taylor Smyth Architects, the studio spent its first two decades establishing a reputation that was never loud and never needed to be. Today, reborn as MTA+D under Michael Taylor's sole creative direction, the practice offers something increasingly rare in design: a single authorial vision, carried through every project from the first sketch to the final fitting. Taylor himself is a registered architect since 1993 and a Harvard Graduate School of Design alumnus — credentials that speak to rigour but hardly explain the warmth that runs through his buildings. That quality is harder to teach. It comes from years of sitting across from clients, of learning to hear what they cannot quite articulate, of translating the shape of a life into the shape of a room.

The Team That Stays

Longevity, in architecture as in any creative field, is its own form of fluency. Senior associates Marco Bonatti and Brian Harmer — both licensed through the Ontario Association of Architects — have worked alongside Taylor since 2006, joined more recently by architectural intern Benjamin Bomben. These are not rotating collaborators or hired guns; they are co-authors of a sustained conversation about how people should live. That continuity shows in the work. When the same minds return, year after year, to the same questions about light and material and the way a threshold feels underfoot, the answers grow richer. MTA+D's homes feel resolved not because they follow a formula, but because they are the product of a practice that has been paying close attention for a very long time.

House on the Bluffs.

Photo: Ben Rahn/A-Frame Inc.

A Portfolio That Reads Like Memory

The studio's five landmark projects are best understood not as a catalogue but as a meditation — each one a distinct response to place, each one unmistakably the work of the same hand. The House on a Ravine, completed in 2001 in North York, announced the studio's intentions immediately. At seven thousand square feet, the home opens onto a conservation ravine through ten-foot mahogany-and-glass doors, its split-faced limestone exterior giving way inside to walnut floors and polished plaster. The effect is of a threshold crossed — from the geological patience of stone to the warmth of lived-in wood. It earned two national design awards in 2004, the first of many. The Bishop Street Residence arrived a few years later, a post-industrial Yorkville building transformed into a two-bedroom home wrapped around a private courtyard and plunge pool. Clad in black standing-seam zinc and grey concrete block, it is architecture as understatement: severe on the street, generous within. The OAA Award of Excellence in Design followed in 2009.

House on a Ravine.

Photo: Kerun Ip



When a Childhood Returns as Architecture

Of all the projects in MTA+D's portfolio, the House on the Bluffs carries the most personal weight. Built in Scarborough on the very foundations of the owner's childhood home, the 2,300-square-foot residence is less a new building than a re-inhabited memory — a place reconstructed not from blueprints but from feeling. The design earned a trifecta of recognition: the 2011 International Property Award, the 2013 OAA Award of Excellence in Design, and — perhaps most meaningfully — the OAA People's Choice Award. That last honour matters precisely because it is not given by a jury. It is given by the public, by people who simply felt something standing in front of the building. That is a different kind of success altogether.

Fitting Into Forest Hill Without Disappearing

The Russell Hill Road Residence presented a different challenge: how to build something genuinely new in Forest Hill, one of Toronto's oldest and most storied neighbourhoods, without the building announcing itself as an intruder. The answer came in materials that spoke the neighbourhood's language — Indiana limestone cladding, a base of split-faced Algonquin stone — while the interiors, developed in collaboration with Cecconi Simone, brought a quiet contemporary warmth to rooms that could have tipped easily into pastiche. At 5,700 square feet, the home feels neither oversized nor apologetic. It earned a 2019 BLT Built Design Award and an honourable mention at the 2021 Architecture MasterPrize.

Learning to Disappear Into the Landscape

The studio's most recent work suggests an architect still asking new questions of himself. Percy Lake Cottage, completed in 2024 near Algonquin Park, is built to vanish. Set into a steep, wooded slope on the Canadian Shield, only its chimney and roofline are visible from the road. Dark wood siding pulls the structure back into the treeline. Inside, Douglas fir ceilings flow from the living spaces directly out to a screened porch, dissolving the boundary between shelter and forest. At 2,800 square feet, it is not a small building — but it carries itself lightly on the land, as if it arrived by agreement rather than imposition. In a career full of notable buildings, Percy Lake may be the most quietly radical of all.

The Philosophy Behind the Portfolio

What connects a Yorkville urban infill project to a lakefront cottage on the Canadian Shield is not a material palette or a formal gesture. It is a process — and a principle. At MTA+D, every project begins not with drawings but with dialogue. Three-dimensional models are built early, tools for conversation rather than presentation, so that clients can inhabit the idea of a space long before a single wall rises. Architecture and interior design are treated not as separate commissions but as one continuous thought, resolved together from the very first meeting. The result is homes that feel not designed but inevitable — as though the building always belonged exactly where it stands, and simply needed someone patient enough to find it.

Not a Finished Story, But a Foundation

Twenty-six years is long enough to establish a reputation. It is also long enough to know that the best work is never quite finished — that every completed house is a question posed to the next one, every award a prompt to go further.

Michael Taylor Architecture + Design carries its legacy

not as a weight but as a compass. The Ravine Homes, the Urban Conversions, the Cottage Folded into the Shield — they are proof that a practice built on listening, on material honesty, and on the deep belief that architecture should serve the people who live inside it, can endure anything a restless industry throws at it. The next twenty-five years, it seems, are already well underway.

Bishop Street Residence.

Photo: Ben Rahn/A-Frame Inc.



Chez Lionel Opens Montreal

A Modern Twist on the French Brasserie

In doing so, they have given downtown Montreal more than a new restaurant. They have given the city a place to remember – a room where the old world and the new coexist not in tension but in the most elegant conversation, night after night, glass after glass.

CHEZ
LIONEL

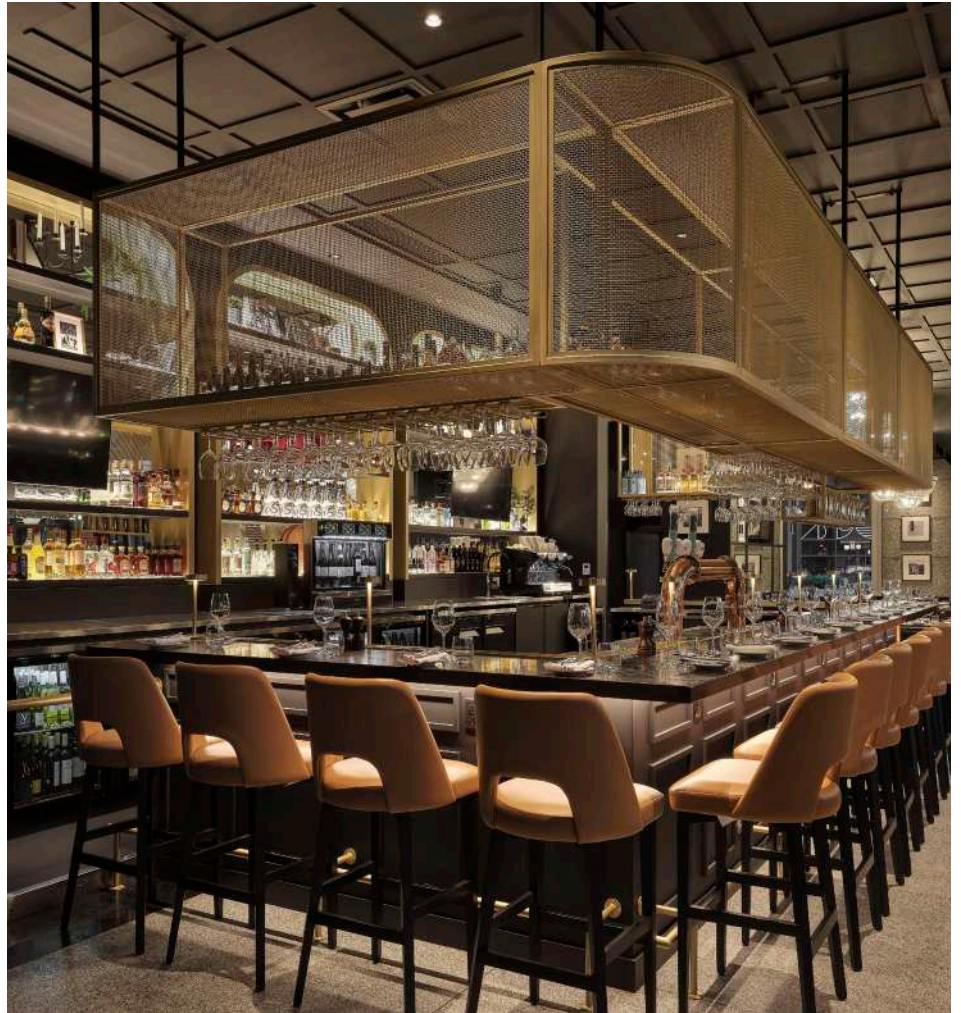
BRASSERIE FRANÇAISE

Project by Cleo Katcho Design Architectural Inc.
Photography by Maxime Brouillet



The Obstacle That Became The Soul

Every great design story has a villain. Here, it was a monolithic granite core — an immovable emergency staircase planted squarely in the middle of the room, fragmenting the space before a single guest had set foot inside. Designer Cléo Katcho refused to treat it as a problem. Instead, she made it the anchor of the entire composition, allowing the room to orbit around it with intention and grace. What could have been a liability became the very element that gives Chez Lionel its distinctive spatial drama.

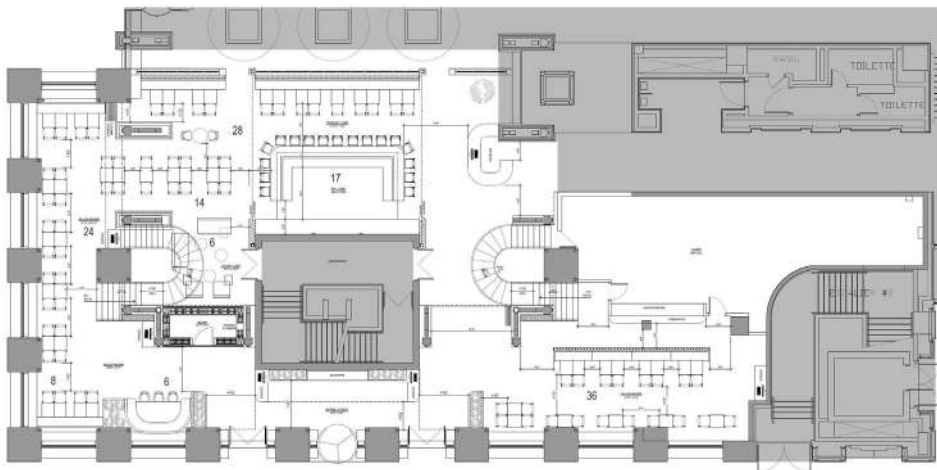


Stepping Off the Street, Into Another World

The restaurant's footprint spills boldly into the building's main lobby — a decision that sounds counterintuitive yet, in practice, feels like pure genius. Rather than a hard threshold between public and private, guests are drawn through a seamless lounge zone that dissolves the boundary between the street and the dining room. The transition is gradual, seductive, almost cinematic. By the time you reach your table, the city outside feels pleasantly far away. [39](#)

The Bar at the Center of Everything

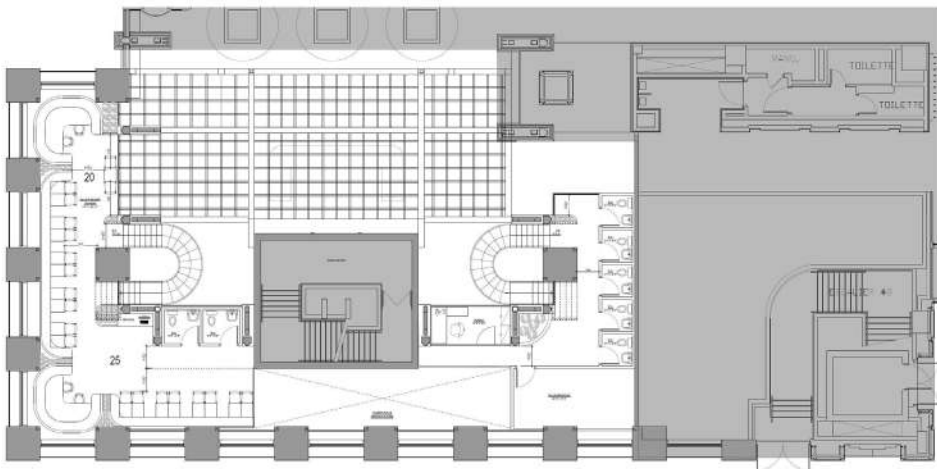
In its previous incarnation, the bar was banished to an upper mezzanine — a curious afterthought in a space that should pulse with energy. Cléo Katcho brought it back down to earth, placing it at the heart of the ground floor. Now it is both a runway and a gathering point, a place to pause, to be seen, and to begin the evening. Guests moving through the room naturally gravitate toward it, drawn by the warmth of its woven mesh details and the glimmer of gold. It is, as every great brasserie bar should be, the room's undeniable protagonist.



*Where the Soul of Paris Meets the Pulse of Montreal
A Love Letter to the Art of Gathering, Reimagined for a New Era*

One Room, Seamlessly Unified

Above the bar, two separate mezzanine levels once created a fractured, disconnected upper story. The design team merged them into a single, flowing balcony — a unified perch from which diners look down on the animated ground floor. The effect is theatrical in the best possible sense. Whether you are seated downstairs in the thick of the action or lingering upstairs with a view of it all, you are never removed from the restaurant's living, breathing energy. Wherever you sit, you feel the room.



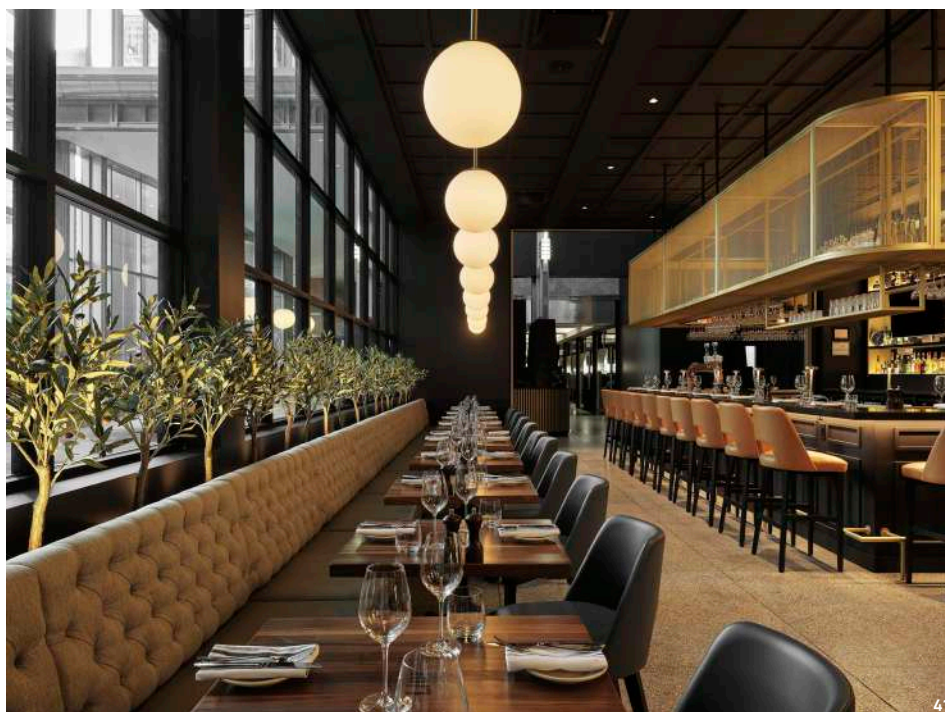
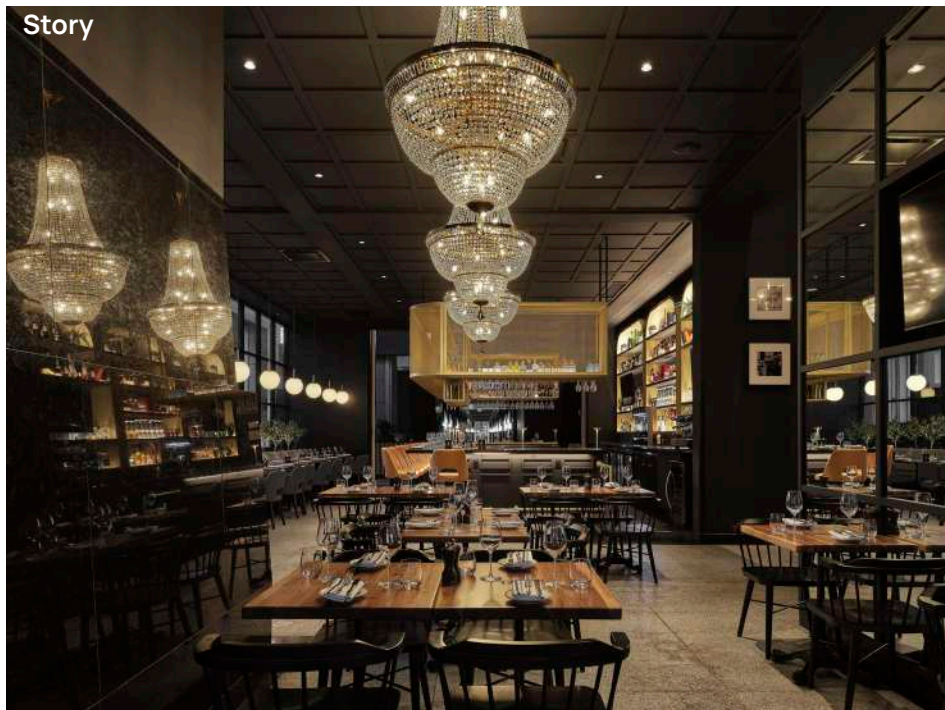
A Material Palette That Tells a Story

The interiors of Chez Lionel read like a love letter to two eras at once. Raw brick and cool metal accents speak the language of the modern city; gold finishes, crystal pendant lighting, and delicate woven mesh at the bar whisper of grand Parisian dining rooms from another century. Lush greenery, arranged with a curator's eye, evokes the romanticism of a European glasshouse, softening the urban textures without undermining them. Beneath it all, the building's original 1990s granite floors and columns remain — untouched, unapologetic, grounding the space in its own downtown history.



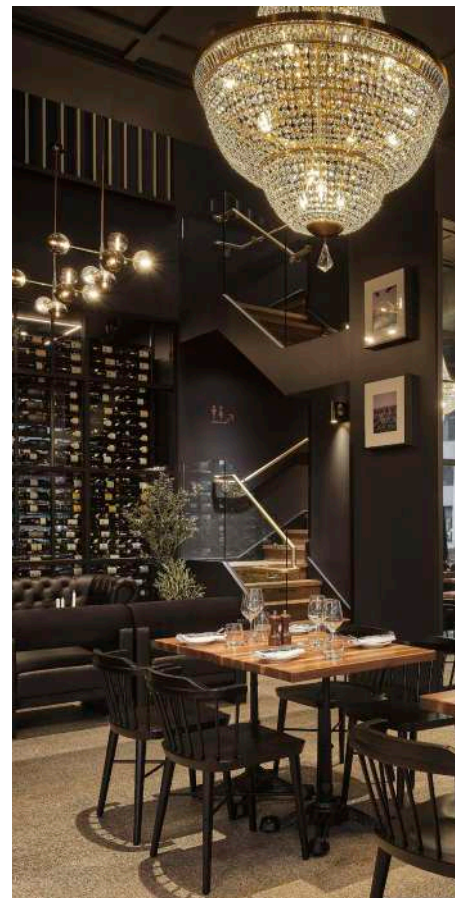
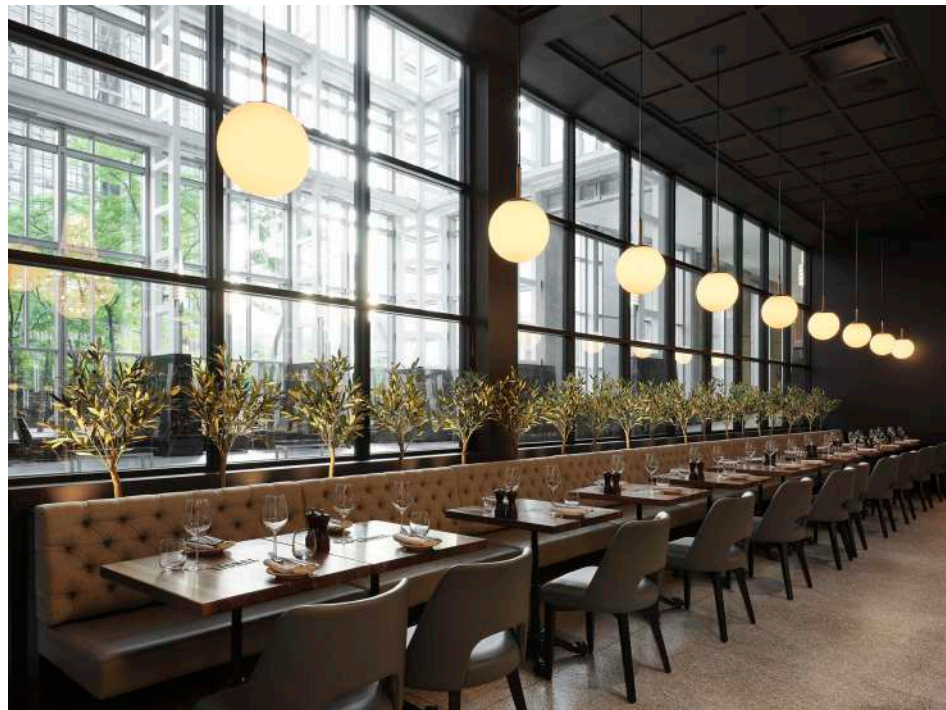
The Invisible Art of Comfort

A stunning room that sounds like a gymnasium is no room at all. With so many hard, reflective surfaces — granite, glass, brick — the acoustic challenge was significant and largely unnoticed by the final guest. Sound-absorbing materials were discreetly woven into the darker ceiling finishes, silencing the echo without altering the atmosphere. Lighting levels in the public lobby were negotiated and adjusted in close collaboration with building management, so the journey from the bright entryway to the intimate interior feels like a slow, welcome exhale. The most important design moves are always the ones you never notice.



A Space for Every Mood, Every Hour

From a swift aperitif at the bar to a long, unhurried dinner in a velvet banquette, Chez Lionel has been designed to hold you — whatever version of yourself you arrive as. The variety of seating — casual lounge chairs, intimate two-tops, generous banquettes — lets the restaurant shift its identity gracefully throughout the evening, from animated happy hour to candlelit supper. It is a space with the rare gift of feeling both effortlessly chic and deeply, genuinely welcoming.



Innovation Born from Limitation

Chez Lionel ultimately proves what the best designers have always known: a blank canvas is a luxury, but a set of immovable constraints is an invitation to think more boldly, more creatively, more humanly. Cléo Katcho and her team took a disjointed 1990s commercial shell and coaxed from it something warm, layered, and full of life — a room that does not simply house a brasserie experience but embodies it.





Milan Design Loft

Milan doesn't just host design; it breathes it. In Città Studi, home to the Politecnico di Milano, a brand-new challenge has emerged. The Milan Design Loft competition calls on architects and interior designers to transform one classic loft into the sanctuary.



Registration Deadline
03 July 2026



Prize Fund
€ 8,000



Urban Toilets

Public restrooms are often a city's invisible, neglected infrastructure. However, the Urban Toilets competition flips this script. It challenges architects to view public toilets not as a plumbing issue, but as a powerful symbol of care, dignity and inclusion.



Registration Deadline
10 July 2026



Prize Fund
€ 8,000



Nidos de Agua

At La Albufera Natural Park, architecture's most powerful statement is a whisper. Nidos de Agua challenges designers to create a microarchitecture pavilion that bridges the gap between human perception and an incredibly fragile Mediterranean wetland ecosystem.



Registration Deadline
11 September 2026



Prize Fund
€ 8,000



Situér Milano

Design is rarely about a single object; it is about the conversation between elements. The Situér Milano Design Challenge invites designers to move beyond the standalone piece and conceptualize a coordinated mini-collection speaking one sophisticated language.



Registration Deadline
02 October 2026



Prize Fund
€ 7,000



Call of the Sea

Imagine a village with no land—just the rhythmic pulse of tides beneath wooden planks. This is Torosiaje, an Indonesian Bajau settlement. The Call of the Sea competition seeks not a luxury resort, but a profound bridge between two distinct worlds.



Registration Deadline
09 October 2026



Prize Fund
€ 9,000

Looking for a design challenge?

The clock is ticking! Every month, we round up exciting TERRAVIVA COMPETITIONS with approaching deadlines.

What are you waiting for?

Grab your sketchbook and register before time runs out!

Think you've seen it all?
Scan to unlock the full lineup.





Old Town, New Vision Toronto's 2026 KEDD Neighbourhood Hop

As the last golden light of a late-May evening dissolved into the cobblestones of Old Town Toronto, something remarkable stirred in the air. The King East Design District—a quarter defined by heritage facades and a quiet sense of permanence—became a living, breathing canvas for the city's most creative minds. For one electric evening on May 29th, 2026, the annual KEDD Neighbourhood Hop, presented by DesignTO in collaboration with the Old Town Toronto BIA, opened the doors of seven extraordinary venues and invited everyone in.

Great design, at its best, does exactly this—it transforms not only the spaces we inhabit but also the way we inhabit them together. With a new generation of Toronto designers this eager and an established community this generous with its knowledge, the skyline of tomorrow is in the hands of extraordinarily capable people.

The Beautiful Collision of Eras

Walking down King Street East that evening felt like moving through time. On one side: distinguished architects and storied interior designers, people who have spent decades shaping the Toronto skyline. On the other: waves of bright-eyed students from local architecture and design programs, sketchbooks tucked under their arms, wide-eyed at every material demonstration and surface innovation. For one luminous night, the usual hierarchy of the design industry simply ceased to exist. Seasoned principals mingled with twenty-somethings learning their craft. Ideas flowed in every direction, and Old Town became an open-air studio.

An Evening Without Boundaries

Entry was effortless—a single check-in wristband granted access to all seven venues. There were no admission hierarchies, no VIP cordons. The Neighbourhood Hop was, by design, radically inclusive. With a crowd spanning every career stage and discipline, conversations sparked organically: a master builder discussing structural poetry with a second-year student; a supplier learning, in real time, what the next generation of designers truly craves. This is the quiet genius of the Hop's format. It does not arrange people into panels and audiences. It simply opens rooms and steps aside.

The Bosch Experience: Moonlight, Metal & Rattan

The BSH Experience & Design Centre created an atmosphere unlike any other at any stop on the circuit. Thermador's 'Moonlight Blue' installation, curated by Kilowatt Kate, was less a product showcase and more a sensory journey. Soft illumination—the kind that makes you lower your voice instinctively—traced the contours of finely crafted metalwork, the sinuous weave of rattan, and the clean geometry of bamboo. Oceanic accents rippled through every corner of the space, evoking the suspended calm of a night before a full blue moon. It was a masterclass in mood: proof that appliances can be the poetry, not just the prose, of a well-designed kitchen.



Candace & Basil: Proudly Canadian

In a landscape increasingly dominated by international design conglomerates, Candace & Basil made an emphatic statement about the power of homegrown craft. Their showroom was a deep dive into Canadian luxury—furniture built not merely to fill a room but to last a lifetime and earn its place. The experience was part gallery, part manifesto: ergonomic comfort and hyper-customization woven into each piece, proving that the finest things need not travel far to be found.



Cosentino: Stone, Surface & Story

If one moment crystallized the evening's ambition, it came at Cosentino City. The centrepiece was the breathtaking Maitake table—a sculptural triumph by Patkau Architects that served as a living demonstration of Cosentino's new Éclos surface material. To touch it was to understand it: a surface that honours the weight of natural stone while reaching toward something entirely new. Having John Patkau himself on hand to speak—alongside Cosentino leadership—was a rare gift, especially for the students pressing closer to catch every word. Here was a pioneer of the built environment, speaking without a podium or projector, in the middle of a room filled with people who may one day shape cities.



Design Within Reach & EQ3: Sip, Wander, Discover

Design Within Reach lived up to its name, with an atmosphere that was warm, chic, and entirely unhurried. Guests wandered through displays of authentic, built-to-last modern furnishings with a drink in hand, reminded that great design need not feel intimidating to be significant. Just a few blocks away, EQ3 offered something altogether different: exuberant energy. Live music bounced off the showroom walls; cocktails clinked; animated conversations competed with the sound of genuine excitement. The real coup was the exclusive preview of unreleased products—and the unexpected accessibility of EQ3's President and Head of R&D, mingling among attendees as if the evening belonged to everyone equally. Because, of course, it did.



KPMB Architects: Behind the Curtain

For the student contingent, no stop carried more meaning than KPMB Architects. The award-winning studio—responsible for some of Canada's most transformative civic and cultural buildings—hosted a genuine open house: not a presentation, not a tour, but an invitation to simply enter and inhabit the spaces where ideas become buildings. To stand in the rooms where city-shaping projects are first imagined is to feel the discipline's weight and thrill at once. For many in attendance, it was a reminder of precisely why they chose this path.



Sub-Zero, Wolf, & Cove: Couture Meets Culinary

The final venue on the circuit offered a thesis statement for the evening: that the boundaries between design disciplines are, at best, suggestions. The Sub-Zero, Wolf, and Cove showroom fused culinary engineering with haute couture—kitchen-performance appliances of the highest calibre, set against four pop-up window displays crafted from the finest artisan fabrics and textiles. It was a reminder that a well-appointed kitchen and a beautifully cut garment share the same essential DNA: precision, restraint, and a deep respect for materials.



The Future is Already Here!

Walking back through the lamplit streets of Old Town in the small hours—past the brick facades that have witnessed a hundred years of Toronto's becoming—it was impossible not to feel the particular warmth that follows a genuinely meaningful evening. Not the warmth of spectacle, but of genuine connection. The 2026 KEDD Neighbourhood Hop was free to attend and offered something priceless: a room, then seven rooms, in which the rigid distances of professional life were set aside. Mentors became peers. Students became collaborators. A neighbourhood became a living curriculum.

The Ėclos® Maitake Table

The Maitake Table asks something simple of those who live with it: to slow down, to notice light travelling across a tapered edge, and to feel the cool, mineral smoothness beneath a resting hand. Stone, reborn as song.

Project by Cosentino X Patkau Studio
Photography by Doublespace

HIGHLIGHT PRODUCT

There are objects that furnish a room, and there are others that transform it. The Ėclos® Maitake Table — born from a dialogue between global surface innovator Cosentino and the visionary minds at Patkau Studio — belongs unmistakably to the latter. It is a piece of furniture that feels as if nature itself decided to sit down. Set within a modern living space, the Maitake Table doesn't simply occupy a room — it anchors it. The product of a creative dialogue sparked by a single material sample, it challenges everything we thought we knew about stone.

An Unlikely Origin Story

The story begins, as the best design stories often do, with a moment of quiet curiosity. A small sample of Ėclos® was placed on a boardroom table. That modest gesture unlocked a profound question: what could this material truly become? Patkau Studio, the celebrated Canadian architecture and design practice, was the ideal creative partner to answer it. Rather than imposing a predetermined form on the material, the designers chose to listen — to understand the grain, weight, and visual depth of Ėclos® before a single line was drawn.

A Material Reimagined

Éclos® is not stone in the traditional sense. This new generation of mineral surface carries the visual richness and tactile depth of natural stone while offering structural advantages that nature alone cannot provide. Its intrinsic grain shifts subtly with the light – warm one moment, cool the next – creating a living surface that rewards a second glance. Originally conceived in solid wood, the Maitake Table was beautifully reimagined entirely in Éclos®. Where wood offers warmth tinged with the unpredictability of season and time, Éclos® delivers a visual unity that elevates every curve and edge to something approaching the absolute.

The Geometry of Growth

The table takes its name and spirit from the maitake mushroom – that extraordinary organism whose frilled, overlapping forms seem to defy the logic of straight lines. Look at the Maitake Table, and you sense this same energy: an exuberant, organic impulse coaxed, with extraordinary discipline, into something functional and precise. Gracefully curved edges taper to an almost impossibly fine profile, while flat linear edges interlock with sister modules without a whisper of a gap. It is an exercise in controlled contradiction – fluid yet exact, expressive yet restrained. The hand wants to trace its outline; the eye keeps returning to the point where softness meets precision.

The Craft Behind the Curve

To achieve the Maitake's signature tapered profile – gossamer-thin at the edge, confident at its core – the design team turned to advanced CNC stone routing. This is precision work of the highest order: technology in the service of something that must never feel technological. The intrinsic grain of Éclos® emerges through the routing process, rewarding the craftsman's attention with a surface that feels hand-finished even as it meets engineering tolerances. Even the legs were fully redesigned: new curved forms, carved entirely from Éclos®, married to discreet steel brackets and threaded inserts hidden from view. Structural integrity is felt, never seen.

A Table that Adapts

One of the Maitake Table's most quietly radical qualities is its modularity. Individual modules interlock with a satisfying inevitability, their curved edges nestling together like the fronds of the mushroom that inspired them. A single module creates an intimate centerpiece for a reading corner or quiet study. Three modules joined together become an expansive lounge surface, commanding attention at the heart of a generous living room. The table does not dictate the room's arrangement; it negotiates with it, gracefully, on the resident's terms.

Beauty with a Conscience

The most sophisticated design asks not only how something will look but also what it will cost the world to produce. Here, Cosentino and Patkau Studio demonstrate an ethical intelligence as deep as their aesthetic one. Éclos® contains a significant proportion of recycled content – a fact the team chose not merely to acknowledge but to celebrate. The production layout developed for the Maitake Table is a masterpiece of responsible engineering: nine fully compatible modules are cut from a single sheet of material, an arrangement so efficient that waste is reduced to a near-irreducible minimum. In this collaboration, beauty and sustainability are not competing values – they are the same value, expressed through different disciplines.

The Dialogue Between Indoors and Out

There is a particular quality to objects that carry the memory of the natural world into interior spaces. The Maitake Table possesses this quality. Its forms are borrowed from the forest floor; its material speaks of geological time and mineral patience. Placed within a living room, it becomes a point of stillness – a surface that invites objects to rest upon it, conversations to gather around it, and light to play across its curves as the day moves. It does not compete with the architecture of a room; it completes it.

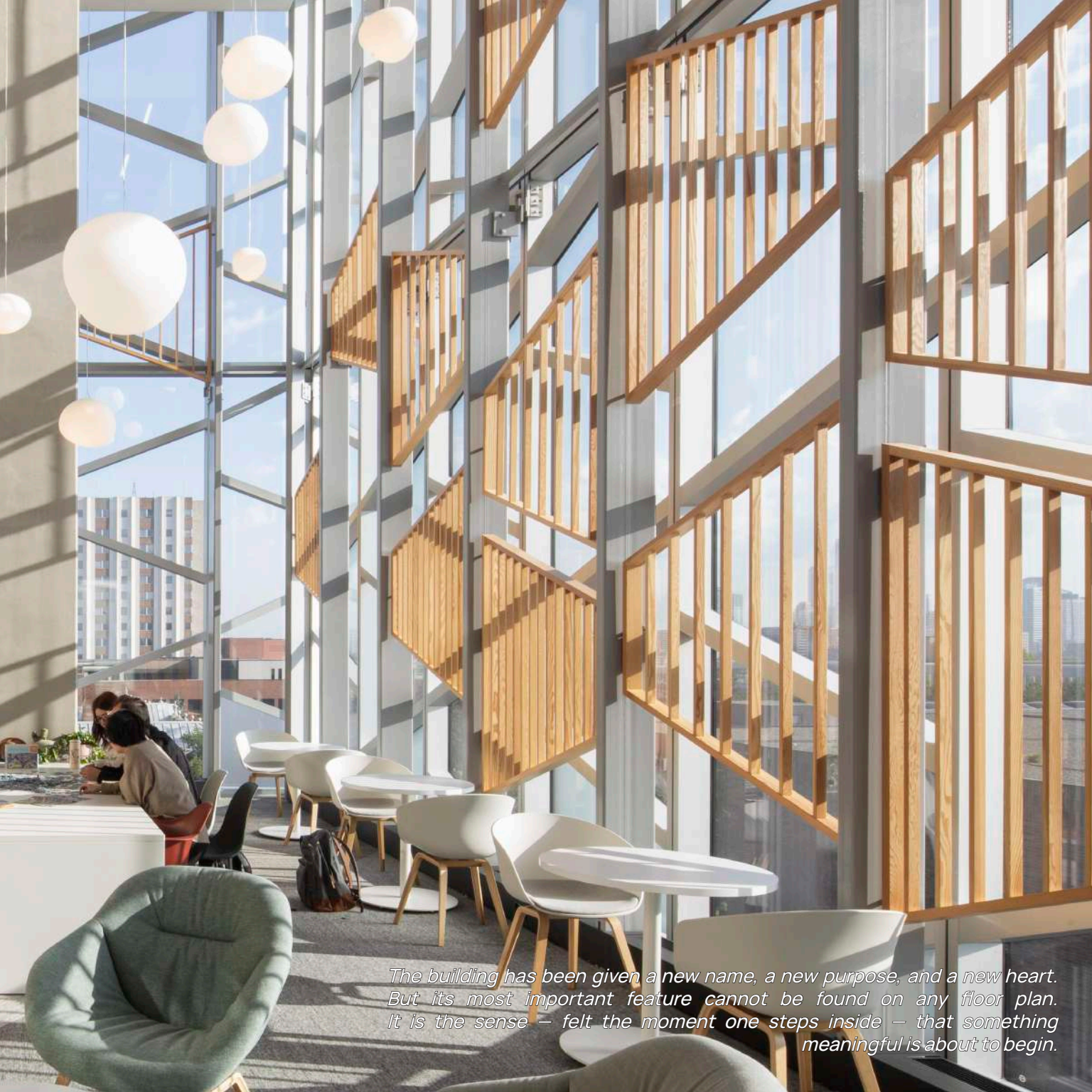


University of Alberta Commons

A New Campus Heart

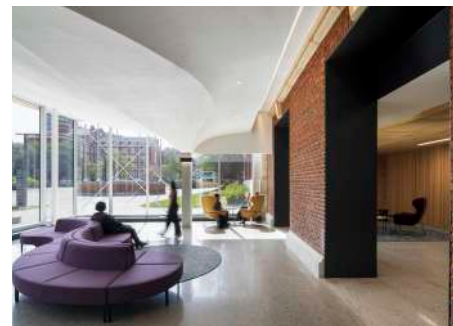
Project by Zeidler Architecture
GEC Architecture, ERA Architects
Photography by Adrien Williams





The building has been given a new name, a new purpose, and a new heart. But its most important feature cannot be found on any floor plan. It is the sense — felt the moment one steps inside — that something meaningful is about to begin.

There is a particular quality of light that arrives just before noon in Edmonton — wide, northern, uncompromising. It was that light the architects must have had in mind when they imagined what would become University Commons: a sweeping, 405,000-square-foot reimagining of the University of Alberta's century-old Dentistry and Pharmacy building, now reborn as the campus's boldest statement yet. Situated at the principal gateway of the north campus, this is not merely a renovation. It is a declaration — that a university's greatest asset is not its laboratories or lecture halls, but the unplanned moment when two students from different faculties sit across from one another and simply begin to talk. Designed by the visionary team at Zeidler Architecture, University Commons is a masterclass in the art of belonging. In every corridor, every corner, and every carefully chosen piece of furniture, the message is the same: you are welcome here.



Architect of Record & Base Building
GEC Architecture

Interior Architecture & Fit-out
Zeidler Architecture

Heritage & Preservation Architect
ERA Architects

General Contractor
Clark Builders

**Structural & Building
Envelope Engineer**
RJC Engineers

Mechanical Engineer
AME Group

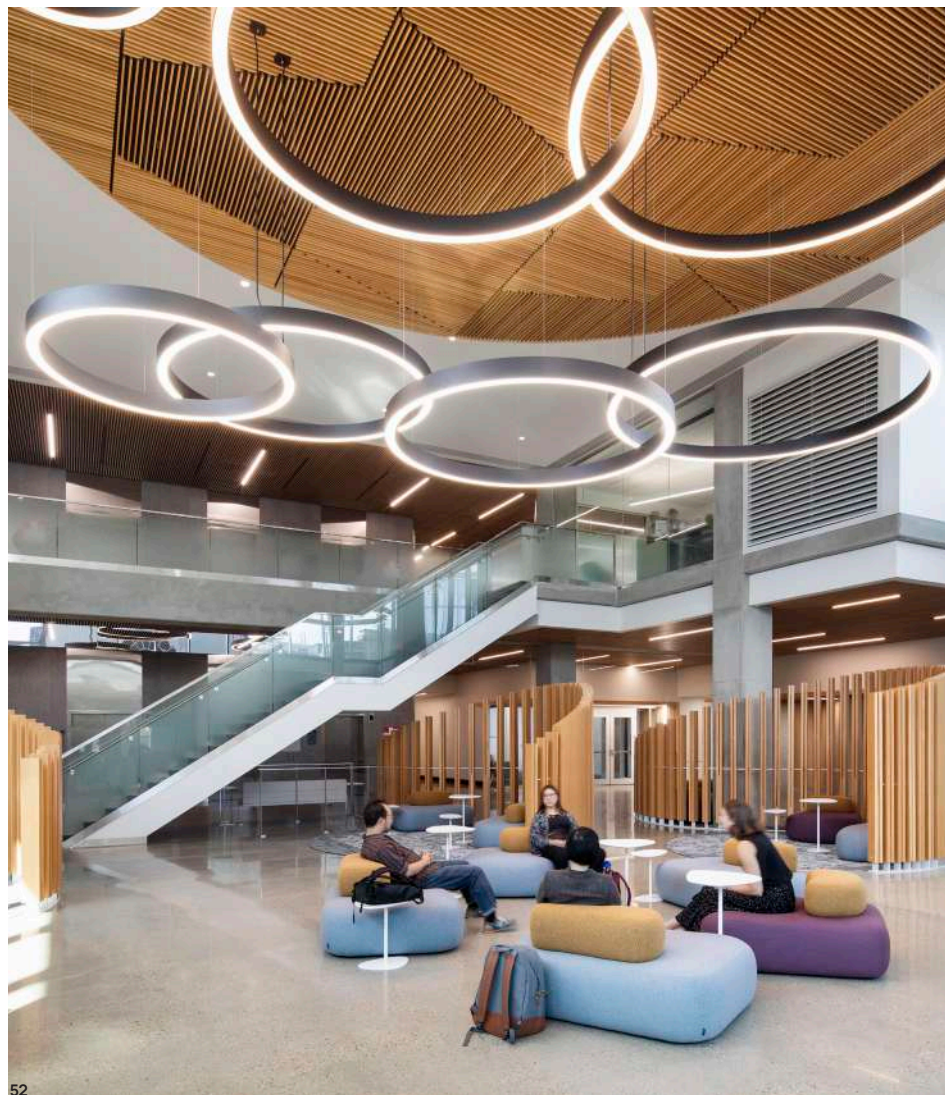
**Electrical Engineer &
Lighting Design**
SMP Engineering

Civil Engineer
V3 Companies

Shoring & Retention Design
Isherwood Geotechnical Engineers

Landscape Architect
Janet Rosenberg & Studio

Featured Indigenous Artist
Christi Belcourt





The Architecture of Belonging

For decades, the old Dentistry and Pharmacy building served its purpose — functional, faculty-specific, and deeply siloed. Corridors belonging to one department ended abruptly; public life was a stranger to its interior. The renovation's first and most radical act was to open the building. Zeidler Architecture replaced the fragmented maze of hallways with fluid, flexible environments centred on a central organizing principle: that everyone — regardless of faculty, year, or background — deserves equal access to daylight, community, and space. The result is a building that no longer merely houses academic functions but actively shapes academic culture.

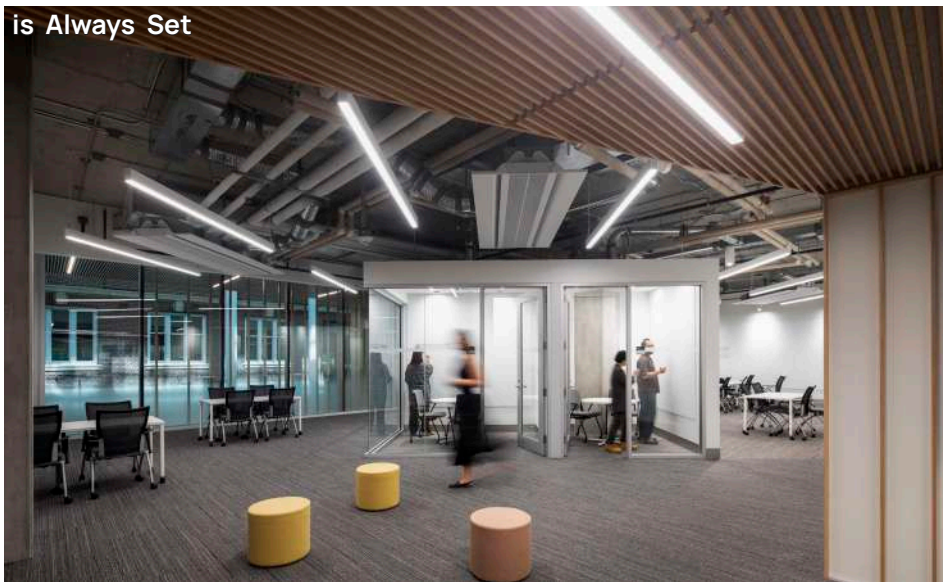


The Central Atrium: Light as Architecture

At the heart of University Commons lies a spectacular central atrium — the project's defining spatial gesture. Flooded with northern daylight and spanning multiple levels, it serves as both the building's spine and soul, drawing people inward and directing movement outward toward the surrounding collaborative zones. This is architecture as choreography. The atrium does not merely connect spaces; it orchestrates encounters, ensuring that the path from one destination to another is never purely transactional. Every journey through the building becomes a small opportunity for serendipity.

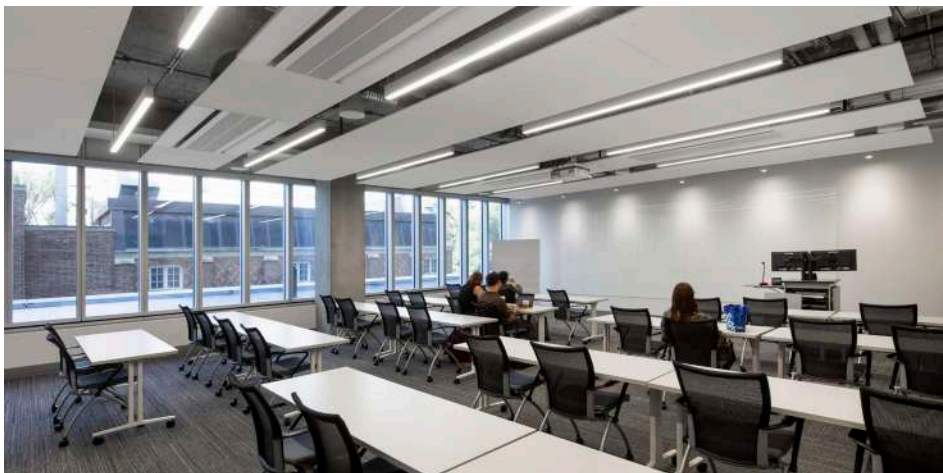
Seasonal Neighbourhoods: the Table is Always Set

Perhaps the most quietly radical idea within University Commons is the Seasonal Neighbourhood. Positioned at each corner of the building, these double-height gathering areas were deliberately left unprogrammed — a rare and generous act of architectural restraint. Much like the ritual of a shared meal, these spaces ask nothing of those who inhabit them. There is no agenda, no assigned purpose. A student might linger with a coffee; a professor might hold an impromptu tutorial; a small student ensemble might simply find a corner to practise. The space adapts, as all good spaces do, to the people inside it. James Brown, a Partner at Zeidler Architecture, describes this nature-inspired approach as one that encourages spontaneity — helping students explore their relationships with peers and the wider world. The Seasonal Neighbourhoods are, in this sense, a kind of daily gift.



Designed for Every Mind

The guiding principle of University Commons extends beyond spatial generosity to a more precise recognition: that students learn, rest, and recharge in profoundly different ways. Modular classrooms reconfigure to meet the needs of each lesson — a seminar demands a different geography than a lecture, and the building knows this. Custom acoustic treatments absorb the ambient energy of a busy campus day. Warm materials — designer furniture chosen for comfort over the long stretch of an afternoon — signal that this is a place built for staying, not merely passing through. And then there is the Calming Room. Conceived as a sensory-conscious refuge from the stimulation of campus life, this quiet sanctuary was not designed by a professional studio or a seasoned practitioner. It was designed by a University of Alberta student, selected through a campus-wide competition. That decision — to trust a student with a real and meaningful design problem — says everything about the philosophy underpinning this project.



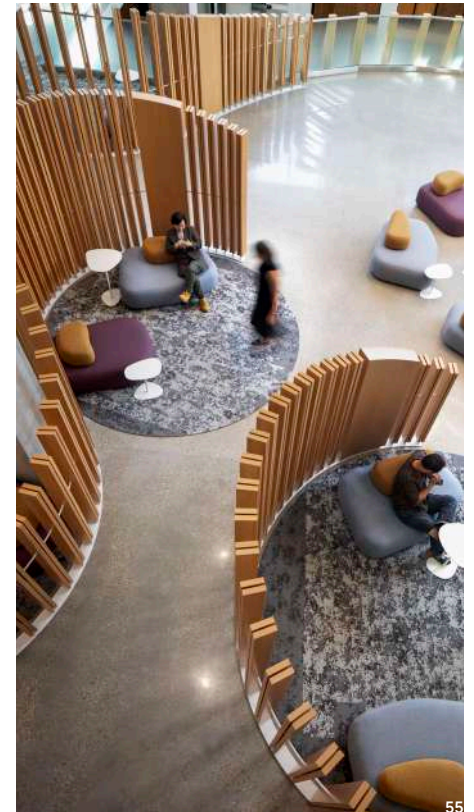


Christi Belcourt: Art as Indigenous Memory

A building can be beautifully designed yet still feel rootless — disconnected from the landscape and the people who preceded it. University Commons refuses that fate. Throughout the shared spaces, the naturalistic artwork of acclaimed Métis artist Christi Belcourt animates the walls, ceilings, and circulation routes with a profound sense of place. Drawing on native flora and traditional knowledge, her storytelling practice transforms what might have been a decorative surface into living cultural testimony. Her most striking contribution — a radiant circular ceiling mural of interlocking florals, visible from below in a moment of sudden, upward wonder — ensures that the building's most spectacular encounter is also its most grounded. To stand beneath it is to understand, in a visceral and immediate way, that this campus exists within a much older story.

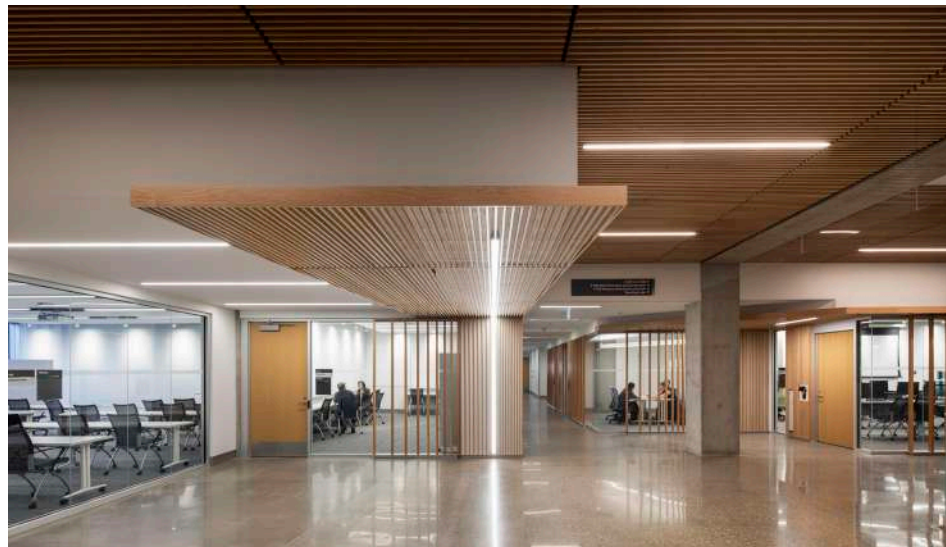
A Masterclass in Adaptive Reuse

Breathing new life into a century-old building is not a matter of aesthetics alone. It is an act of extraordinary technical precision — threading modern infrastructure through historic bones without erasing the past or constraining the future. Zeidler Architecture achieved this through advanced Building Information Modelling (BIM), which enabled the team to navigate the original structure's complex geometry and align contemporary systems within it with surgical accuracy. The result is a building that feels entirely of the present moment while remaining respectful of its origins. This project joins an impressive portfolio of post-secondary renewals across Canada, including landmark works at York University, the University of Victoria, and the University of Toronto — each a testament to the studio's belief that existing buildings possess the capacity for transformation.

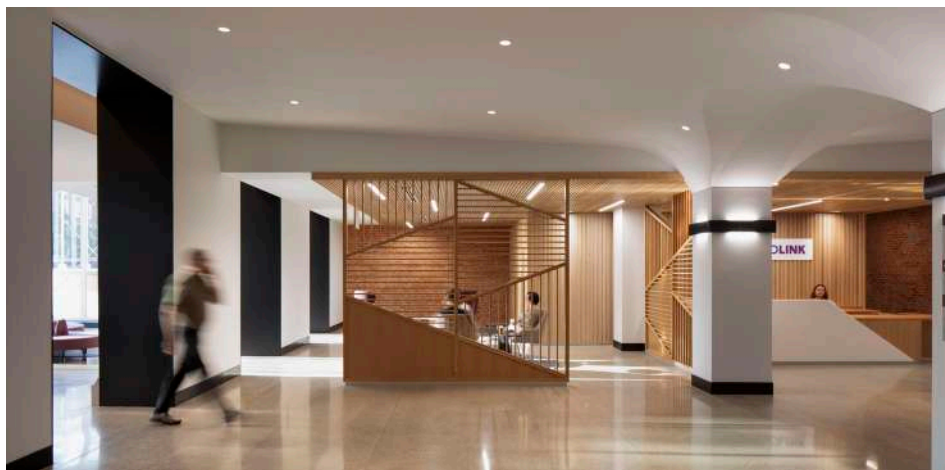


A Sticky Campus, Reimagined

University President Bill Flanagan describes the aspiration behind University Commons with disarming simplicity: students want a campus that is sticky. A place where the desire to linger outlasts the demands of the schedule. A place that feels, in the best possible sense, like home. The administrative services that once occupied distant corners — the registrar, the dean of students — now sit alongside open lounges, bookable meeting rooms, and academic departments. The traditional distance between student and institution has been deliberately and thoughtfully compressed. Walking through University Commons, one senses that the university is not asking students to navigate a bureaucracy — it is simply asking them to come in.



University Commons is now open. The doors — wide, generous, built to withstand the weight of thousands of daily crossings — stand ready. And what pours through them each morning is not merely the human traffic of academic life, but something harder to quantify: the slow accumulation of conversations, collaborations, and connections that, over time, constitute a university's truest achievement.



FORMA

THE MAGAZINE

The intersection where architecture, design, and innovation meet.

www.formathemagazine.com

