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A Note from the Founder: Designing with Attention

This is Vol. 0, Issue 9 of Forma. Each moment, we ask ourselves the same question: what should an architecture magazine offer you? It should provide not only beautiful photographs but also the reasoning behind them, information about the people who took them, and the questions they raise. This issue represents our most sincere effort so far.

We start by looking at buildings that achieve real results through simple and unobtrusive designs. The lake house in Ontario maintains its privacy using limestone and keeps the view of the sky with blue glass. A narrow house in Toronto is designed so that daylight can pass through it. In Calgary the AltaGas head offices prove that an old tower does not have to be pulled down, it only needs to be rethought. In Guelph a research centre was planned with its tiniest clients, the honeybees, in mind, and at McMaster a greenhouse turns science into something that can be observed from the sidewalk. In Esch-sur-Alzette a school opens its doors and becomes a village for the entire neighbourhood.

We now take a step back and pose some more significant questions: can prefabricated, mass-timber construction help to alleviate Canada's housing crisis? How are you supposed to select an architecture school when ten different programs agree on almost nothing? And what occurs when students adopt AI more quickly than their schools are able to teach it? We didn't intend to give you simple answers; instead, we wanted to show the disagreements on the page, since that is where learning begins.

We should also acknowledge the work that is seldom photographed. Since its foundation, RJC Engineers has been steadily supporting Canada's built future, and such care is also worthy of receiving attention.

For anyone who is ready to take action, the competitions section brings together open design challenges with upcoming deadlines. Through the Forma Registry, firms can receive recognition following a human-led evaluation.

The one thing we hope you'll take away from this issue is this: design should be concerned with people, place, and responsibility, not with size or fame. A good idea needn't have a well-known name attached to it to be important, and a student's first project should be given the same regard as the most recent work of an established studio.

Thank you for being part of this community of architects, designers, engineers, contractors, suppliers, and students.

Let's keep building, together.

*Giuseppe Gutta
Founder, Forma The Magazine*

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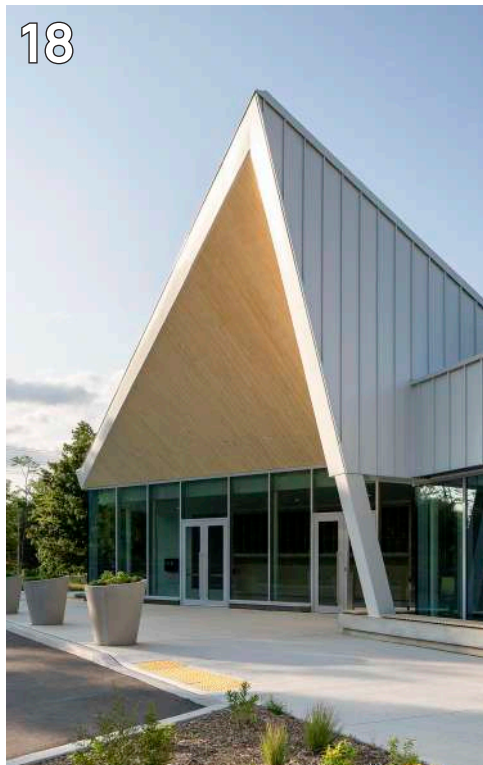
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ONTARIO LAKE HOUSE

Stone Keeps Its Secrets, Glass Tells the Truth



A house on the shoreline of Southern Ontario has two aspects — one facing the road and the other facing the water. Here, limestone fulfils the promise of privacy, and glass that of the sky.

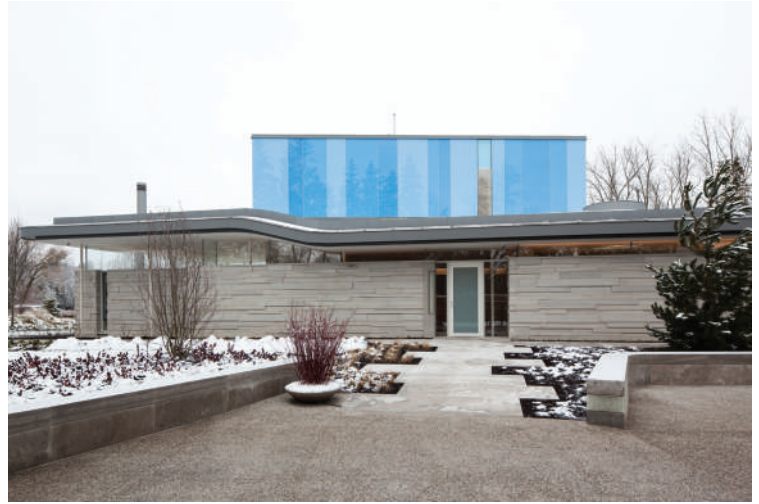


Design: Michael Taylor Architecture + Design
Photography: Ben Rahn, A-Frame Inc.

Next to a lake in Ontario, Michael Taylor Architecture + Design — the Toronto-based studio headed by architect Michael Taylor, the firm which he established in 2000 as Taylor Smyth Architects — has finished a residence of 3,400 square feet that doesn't settle on either of two tendencies which are very uncommon for a building to have. It wants to disappear while remaining completely open to views. From the road, the successive layers of Ontario limestone appear to form a defensive structure; from the water, the house itself melts into curved glass and changing blue light.

The appeal is not abstract; although people nowadays want quiet, they are not willing to give up the sky to have it, since this house makes it possible to have both in the same afternoon, using the same rooms.

You were looking for a house and instead came upon a wall. Low limestone walls surround the entrance, as if the building were designed for a garden rather than a family. They say nothing. No windows overlook the road, and no feature invites you in — only stone, uneven and quietly persistent, serving as a hedge or fence line. Only at the threshold do the walls separate. The house comes into view like a room when a door finally opens — suddenly, and only for you.



Limestone That Remembers Where It's From

The stone is native to the area; it is Ontario limestone dug from the same ground on which the house stands and has been chosen for its colour and grain to match that of the nearby landscape. This is not decoration; rather, the house speaks the dialect of its particular location.

The facade is composed of uneven, staggered courses rather than even, uniform bands, so it receives light differently throughout the day. In the morning, the shade lies in one direction, while in the late afternoon it lies in another. Instead of appearing as a blank, defensive wall, it has a rhythm — a texture that changes as the sun moves — so the '*fortress*' never looks the same twice.

Here, stone carries out two functions at the same time. It provides protection, and it offers welcome. It is rare for a single material to do both.



The Sky, Recorded in Glass



The top floor is made of glass rather than stone, with panels in gradually changing shades of blue enclosing the second floor — the colours having been taken directly from photographs of the sky taken at the site itself. It's a modest yet kind idea; the house doesn't merely embrace its surroundings; it becomes part of them. On a grey day, the blue in the glass retains its own quiet light, while on a clear day it responds to the sky above, the panel corresponding to the atmosphere. Most houses take in a view. This one takes in a colour.

The plan is well organized. The house has a rectangular central section; this includes the kitchen, the service areas and the main bedroom, all of which are contained within a single simple and clear volume. This core extends upward through the roof, and a further floor is raised from it, containing two more bedrooms.

The overall shape appears calm and sculptural against the sky — more like a composition of deliberately stacked volumes than a building with a roof. Nothing here is accidental; the organization constitutes the architecture.

The main roof has three oval skylights, each angled to catch the sun along a slightly different path during the day; beneath them, pools of light move from room to room and from hour to hour, forming a sort of ambient clock that no one needs to wind.

On two of the sides of the central section, there is a long and narrow skylight which runs like a seam, forming a thin, bright line that separates the interior of the house from the sky; where the ovals are large, it is restrained, acting as a quiet counterpart by carrying out the same basic function of keeping the outside present, even when inside and even in winter.

The light's movement is no ordinary aspect of living here; it's essential.



The Water Side Forgets the Rules

Face the lake, and the architectural style completely changes.

The glass extends all the way from floor to ceiling on the back side of the building; rather than having sharp corners, it curves – with soft, unbroken bends – that create comfortable areas for dining and sitting, each of these areas angled in such a way as to draw the eye and the entire room towards the water.

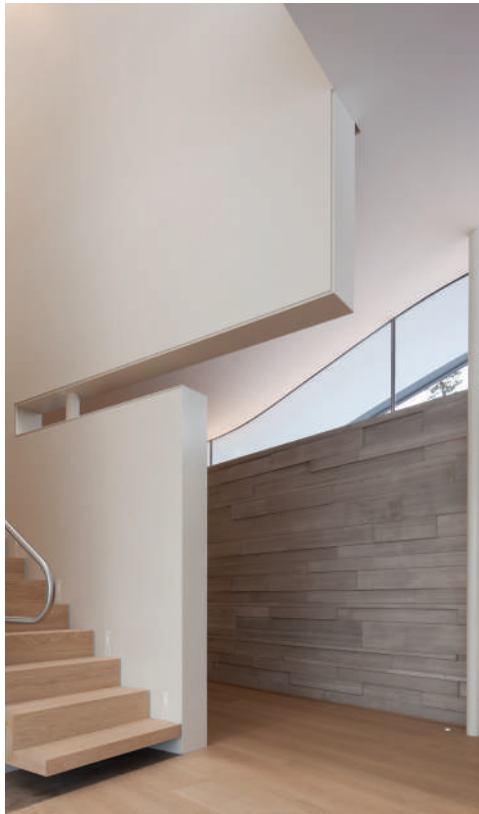
In the front, the material is stone and conveys certainty, while in the back it is glass and implies an invitation – it is the same house. Two completely different arguments are presented just a few metres apart.



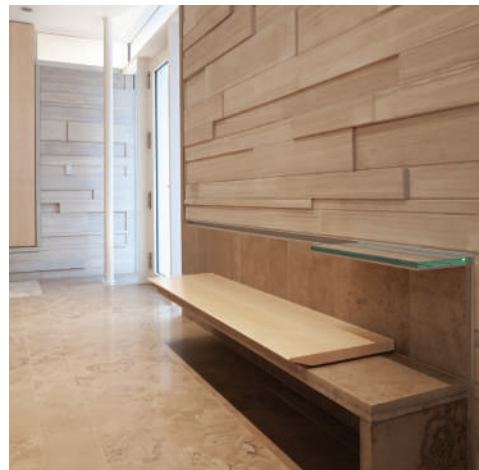


Compared with its neighbours, the house is not large because it doesn't have to be; all its features — such as the stone, the blue glazing, the three skylights, and the curved corners — support a single, clear point rather than several different ones.

The restraint observed there is in keeping with the approach of the studio, Michael Taylor Architecture + Design, which achieves its results through close and continuous collaboration with its clients, creating homes that are just as much influenced by daily routines as by views — for example, a lakeside kitchen island that is actually used for cooking and a reading nook that is genuinely used at 7 a.m. Privacy and openness are not presented as opposites in the brochures; instead, they are built into the same house as two different settings that can be switched between, depending on the needs of the day.

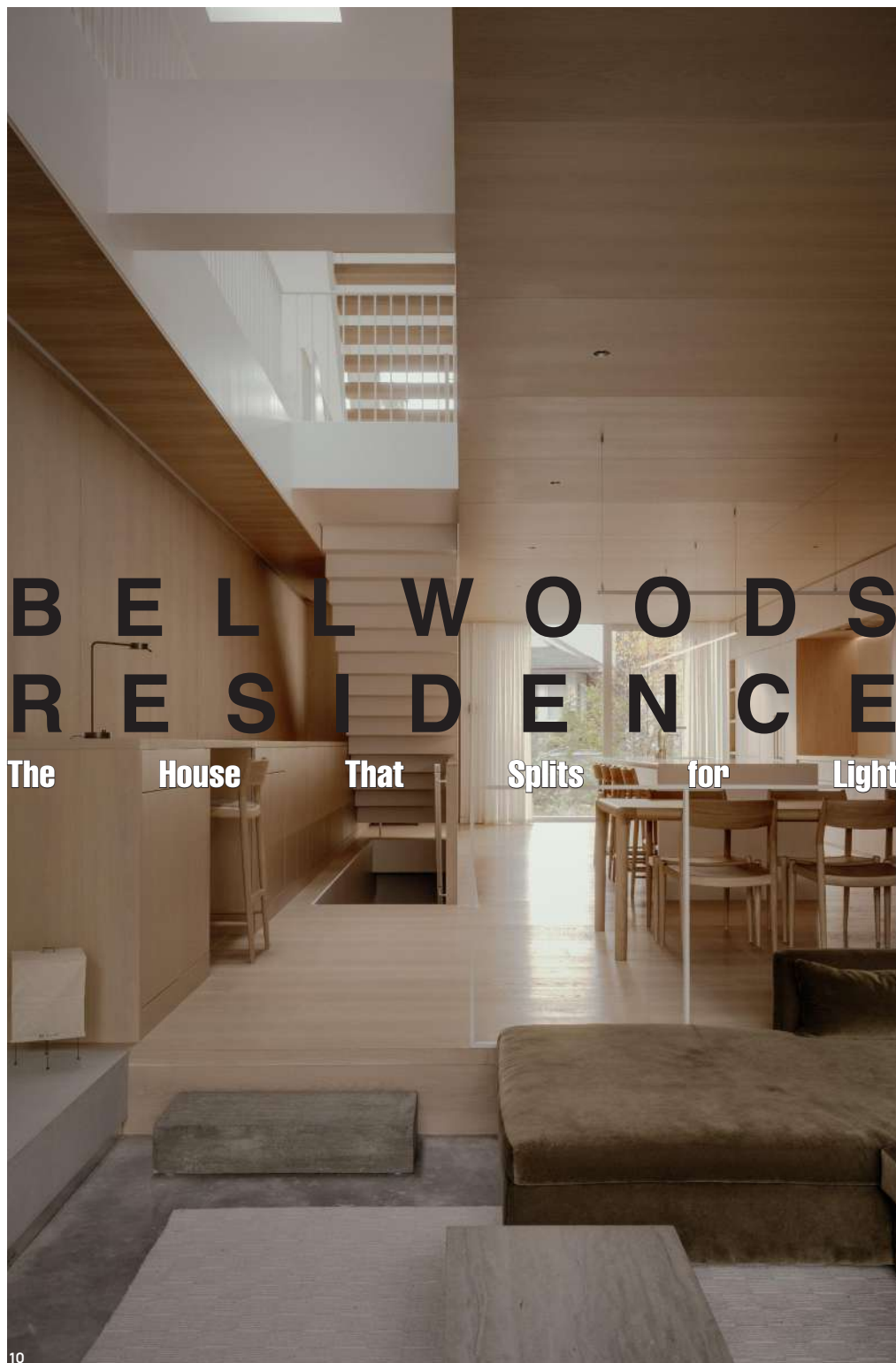


Small House, Large Ambition



If you return at dusk, the house will have changed its argument once more; the limestone becomes flat and grey as the light fades, nearly solemn, while the lakeside continues to glow — like blue glass and curved glass — and holds on to the last traces of the day longer than the stone does.





BELLWOODS RESIDENCE

The House That Splits for Light

On a narrow plot in Toronto's West End, a continuous shaft of daylight runs from the roof down to the basement. Where the white oak meets the pale plaster, a staircase zigzags down to the ground.

At nine in the morning, the light falls on the kitchen island; by early afternoon, it has moved down the oak panels and lies on the concrete floor of the sunken living room; by evening, it is no longer there, having been pulled back up through the roof once again. No one in the house needs a clock; they watch the walls.



Design: StudioAC Team
Photography: Felix Michaud

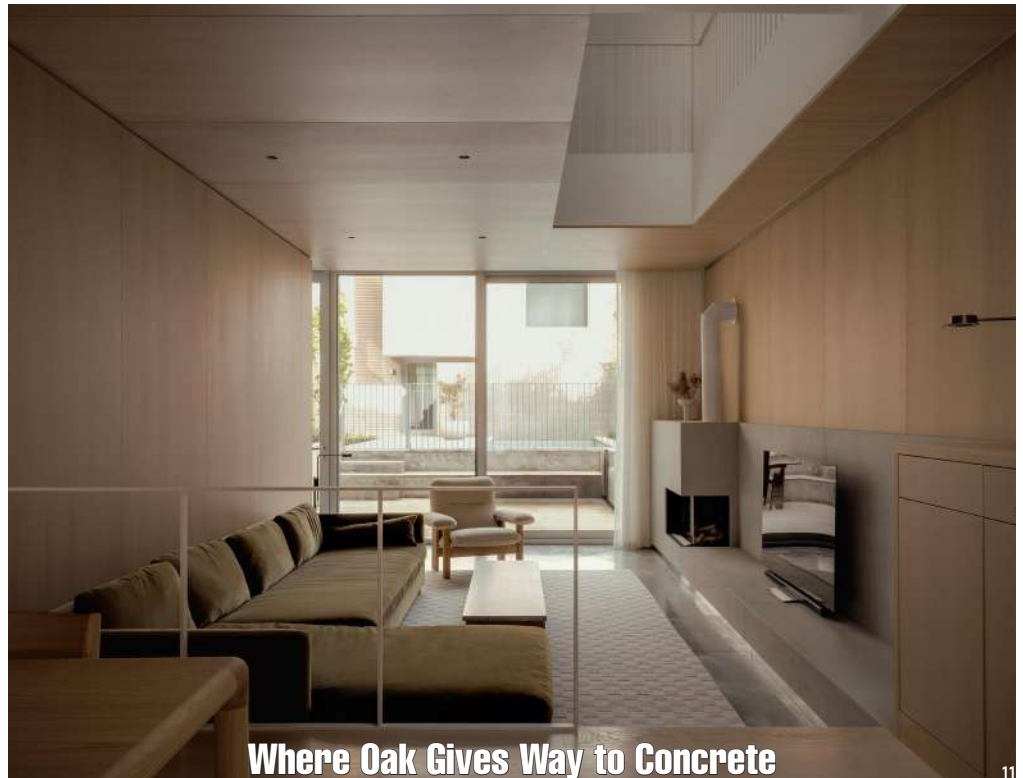
The house sits on a narrow plot in Trinity-Bellwoods, part of Toronto's West End, where century-old semi-detached houses fill the twenty-foot frontages and daylight has to be fought for rather than provided. In most cases, renovations in this area address the problem the same way: they hollow out the centre, insert a skylight, and then consider the job finished. StudioAC, the Toronto-based firm responsible for this project, had more space available — as Andrew Hill, a partner with the firm, points out, this allowed them to 'create a linear atrium and gallery on the second floor'. Instead of a single hole in the ceiling, they installed a full-height vertical opening that extends from a roof-level entrance straight down through three storeys to the ground, bringing not only daylight but also a sculptural white staircase. The idea underpins everything that follows: **a single cut of light and all the rooms arranged around it.**

Room Enough for a Gallery, Not Just a Skylight



Residents of the Trinity-Bellwoods area depend mainly on the front and back windows for daylight and nothing else. While this is a reasonable approach given the narrow streets, it is also, from an architectural point of view, a dead end. Hill points out that, after the recent renovations, the usual approach is to leave a central void and let light pass through. Because this site faces west, StudioAC had more space to work with and used this extra width by turning a gesture into a spine — that is, they created an atrium long enough to accommodate a gallery, not simply a hole in the ceiling. From the street, the house appears as two gabled sections placed side by side, both covered in beige Belgian brick.

On the ground floor, the room extends far and is almost completely furnished in white oak — including the floor, ceiling, and cabinetry. In front, two chairs face a sliding door, creating a sort of porch. Beyond that is a kitchen with an island, and then the floor drops down. Here, concrete takes over, supporting a living room built around a green velour sofa that opens directly onto a patio outside. The transition from oak to concrete is not subtle and doesn't aim to be; warm wood meets a cool floor, and the light slot sits precisely where the two meet.



Where Oak Gives Way to Concrete

Where the steel stair plate meets the oak handrail beneath, the two materials join in a zigzag pattern. This sawtooth edge shows, almost diagrammatically, where two different material languages meet. Throughout the rest of the house, wood and white remain confined to their separate areas. But at this one irregular joint, they don't.

Upstairs, the atrium continues to serve its function. An office on the second floor gets its light directly from the void. The children's rooms, by contrast, open toward the front and back, toward the street and the lane.

On the third floor, the main bedroom sits beneath a gabled ceiling completely lined with wood, and floor-length curtains soften the windows along its perimeter. This room uses the same materials as the ground floor — oak, white, and a moderate amount of natural light — but it has a more subdued character and was built for rest rather than activity.

Sleeping Beneath the Gable





A Window Shaped Like the Roof

Brick also appears in the main bathroom, where it sits against microcement floor and countertop surfaces in a similar pale green. A tall triangular window lets in daylight and offers a view straight up into a spruce tree; a second, smaller opening sits next to the bathtub, enough for ventilation and a narrower view of the outside world. The window placement recalls an earlier feature: the small windows found in other places in the Victorian houses of Trinity Bellwoods, except here they have been given a distinctly modern interpretation.



The House Behind the House

At the back of the property there is a laneway house which, like the main building, uses the same materials and has a gabled overall form but on a smaller scale – brick below with a garage and a bright apartment above accessible by a side stair – and its existence is due to recent changes to Toronto's zoning rules which have finally made it legal to have structures of this kind.

The family intends to use the house for their relatives, returning to a form of multigenerational living that was normal in this city a century ago and has mostly vanished. Between the two buildings, a garden wall hides the pool equipment and, at the same time, functions as a backdrop for the swimming, shining gold in the late afternoon. The entire outdoor area is set back, three feet lower than the adjacent properties; it is private, since the block generally offers very little privacy.

Late in the day, when the sun has moved west and the garden wall catches the last of it, the light slot upstairs goes dim first. It's the ground floor that holds the glow longest – oak turning gold, concrete turning grey, the green sofa the last thing still lit.

Somewhere in that hour, the whole point of the house becomes obvious without anyone having to explain it. It was never really about the walls. It was about what moves across them.

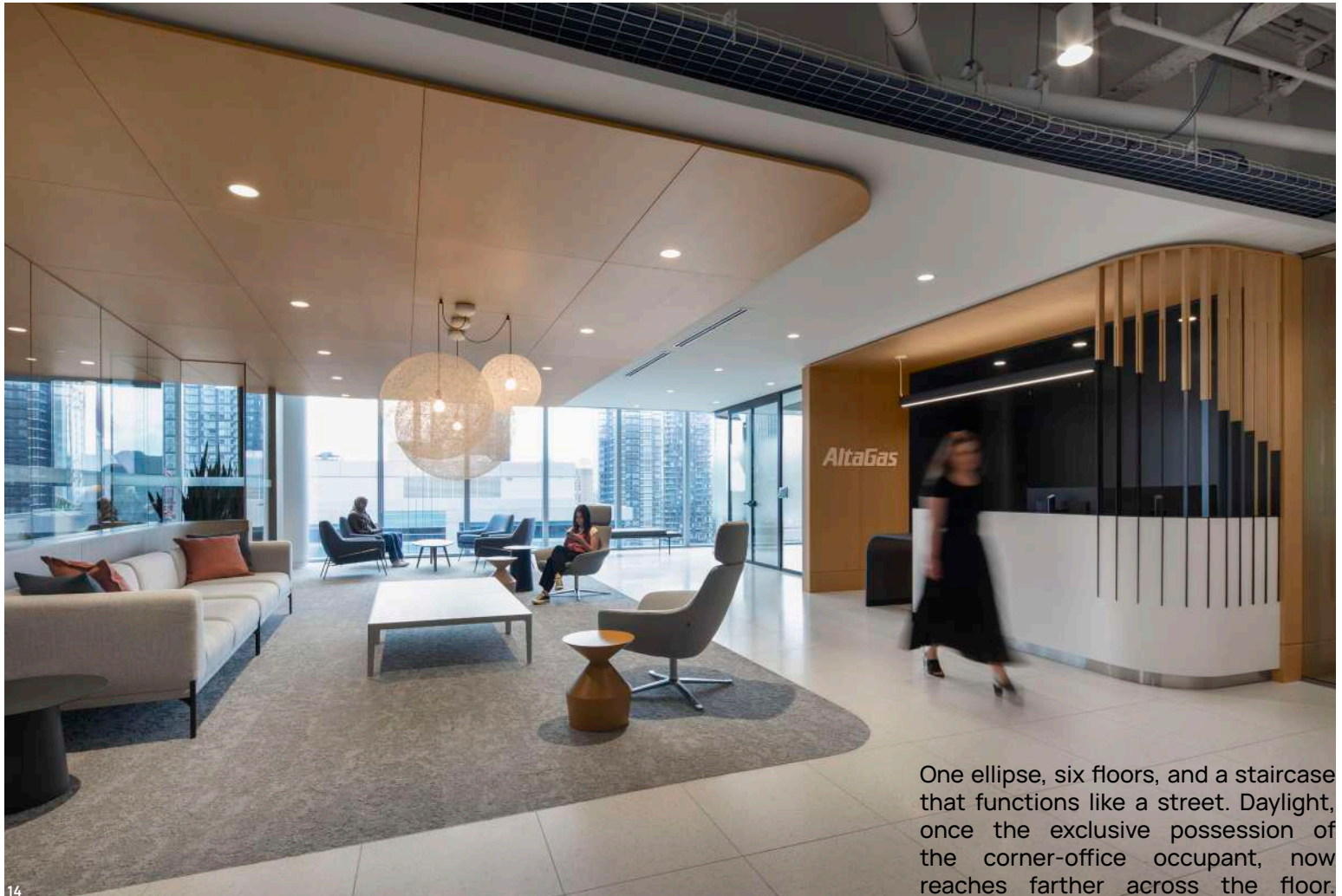


ALTAGAS HEADQUARTERS

How to Modernize Legacy Towers

Most office towers have rectangular plans, but this one is curved. At levels 10 to 15 of 701 Fifth Avenue Place in downtown Calgary, where an older building has an elliptical floor plan, the AltaGas head office has been designed around this feature: the office occupies more than 130,000 square feet over six floors.

Design: Zeidler Architecture
Photography: Adrien Williams



One ellipse, six floors, and a staircase that functions like a street. Daylight, once the exclusive possession of the corner-office occupant, now reaches farther across the floor.

Rather than creating odd corners and confusing workstation arrangements, the architects treated the shape as an asset. They created a single flexible planning scheme for each floor and connected the floors with a new internal staircase. The basic idea is that people work both together and individually, and from wherever they find themselves most productive, so the office must accommodate all these situations. No new tower was built, and none was demolished.



Reading the Ellipse: Six Floors, One System

Most buildings in downtown Calgary were designed for traditional work. They had deep floor plates and included private corner offices, with a clear hierarchy built into the plan. AltaGas, based in an older building at 701 Fifth Avenue Place, has shown that a tower like this can still be flexible and useful. Together with Zeidler Architecture and Colliers Workplace Strategy, it converted six floors of its head office into a layout that reflects how people actually work — sometimes in groups, sometimes alone, and often wherever they're most productive. It is a key moment: companies throughout North America are considering what a head office ought to look like, and this project offers a new example. Rather than constructing a new building, it addresses the existing tower to show how a building can be redesigned for hybrid work, fairness, and connection.

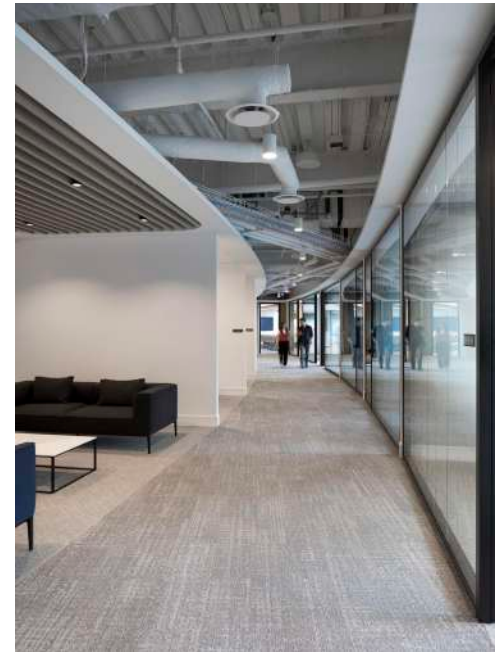
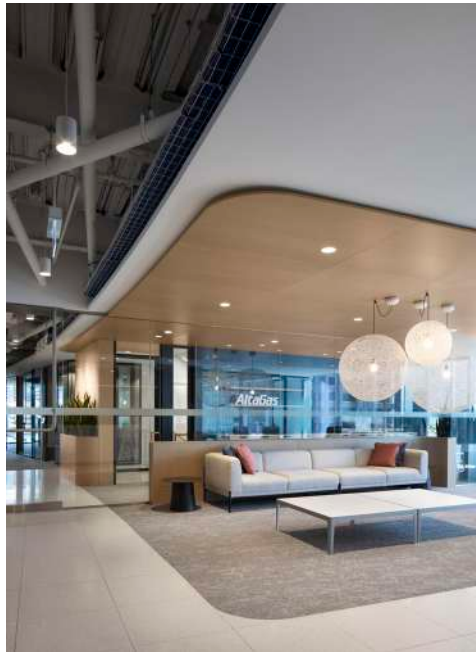


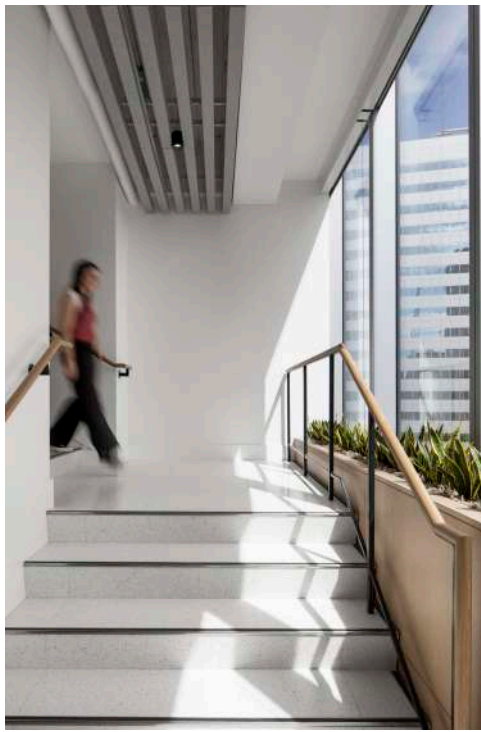
The same planning modules are used on each floor; if you get off the elevator on the eleventh floor, the layout is just as easy to understand as it is on the fourteenth floor. The result is familiarity: navigation becomes easier, and employees can focus on their work rather than getting used to a new environment on each level. Even with six floors and 550 employees, moving from one floor to another might have been ordinary. That has changed now that a new internal staircase has been installed, linking all six floors and functioning like a shared street. The meeting areas, informal gathering spots and social spaces all revolve around it. When you travel from one floor to another, you can meet colleagues from other teams.

The connection has a big impact; teams that previously felt divided because they were on different floors now share a common main route, and the headquarters feels like a single place. Services such as IT and mail handling are now based in these clear sections, and operational teams are present in everyday office life.

In most towers, the corner offices have the best light and views, and the people who work there are executives, while everyone else works inside under artificial light. In this place, more people can enjoy daylight and views. The cooperative spaces, support areas, and individual workstations are arranged so more people can benefit.

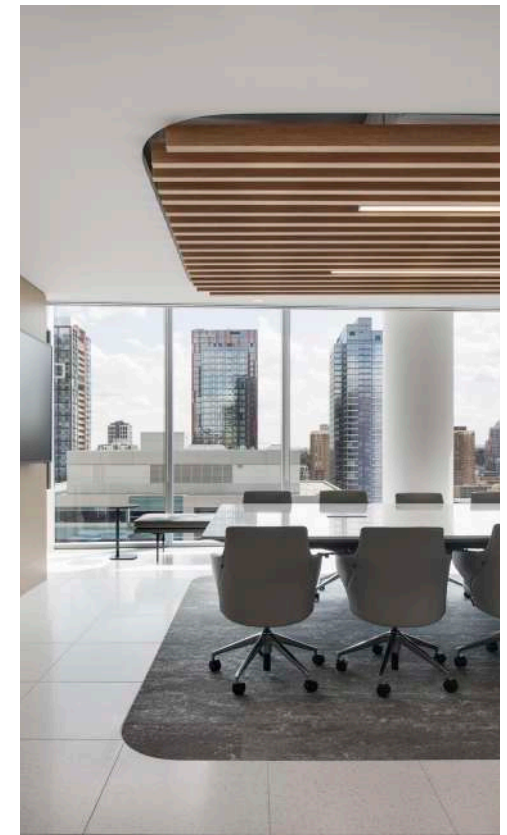
It's a minor change, and it makes the workplace feel much fairer for most employees.





The same applies to movement; the quieter routes along the side of the building give people a more private way to get around, which helps promote concentration and supports a variety of working styles. Informal meeting places along the busier routes encourage spontaneous conversations. The choice of materials establishes the atmosphere: warm wood and soft lighting produce a calm effect, whereas glass office fronts, the special ceiling designs and the careful selection of materials add to a reduction of noise. On the same floors, both focused work and open collaboration are possible.

“The project shows how existing tower workplaces can be re-planned to support better how people work today. Rather than applying a single workplace model across six floors, the design introduces a flexible planning framework that supports both collaboration and focused work within an existing downtown tower environment while strengthening connection between teams.”
 Ian Franceschi, Associate and Creative Director at Zeidler Architecture.



An old tower doesn't have to be abandoned to remain useful; it can be redesigned with a clear purpose by rethinking how people move, distributing daylight more fairly, and letting the floor plan guide the design. Zeidler Architecture and Colliers Workplace Strategy developed the headquarters so it can adapt as AltaGas grows and changes. The lesson extends to other buildings in Calgary; since many organizations now have to decide whether to build new ones or improve those they already have, this project gives them something specific to consider.

Quiet Edges, Busy Routes

**Towers are not outdated.
They need a better plan.**

INSIDE

GUELPH'S

LIVING

LAB

THE HOUSE THE BEES BUILT



Where the smallest tenants set the terms: On glass, honey, and the architecture of paying attention

Before a building exists, there is a sound — a low buzz that passes through the trees near the edge of the University of Guelph campus, just beyond the Guelph Arboretum's peaceful boundaries. If you follow that sound, you will reach the Honey Bee Research Centre (HBRC), a 14,000-square-foot research area designed by Moriyama Teshima Architects. The building does not make a statement; instead, it listens first. The whole basis of its architecture — the arrangement of the apiary, the laboratory, and the production room so that a visitor can follow the route from hive to jar without at any point having to go into restricted areas — was developed because the client was small enough not to be able to file a complaint but, at the same time, essential not to be ignored.



Design: Moriyama Teshima Architects
Photography: Riley Snelling & Wilson Costa

A Site With a Former Life

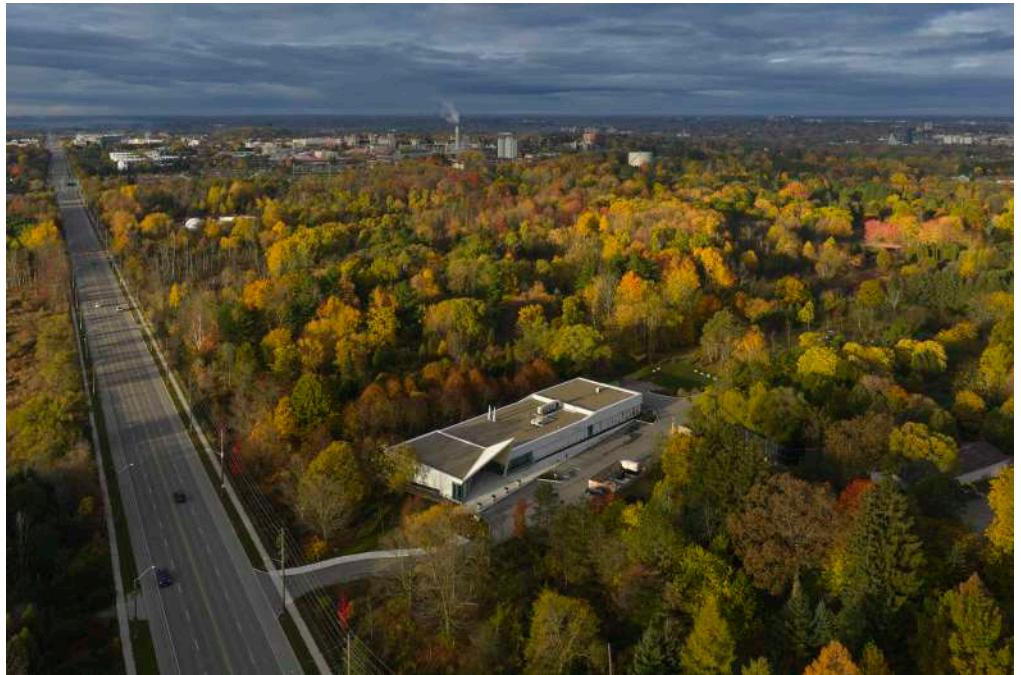
It was a tree nursery before it became a research centre. The history mattered; the design team limited excavation and worked to preserve the mature trees already on site, treating the existing landscape as a starting point rather than a hindrance.

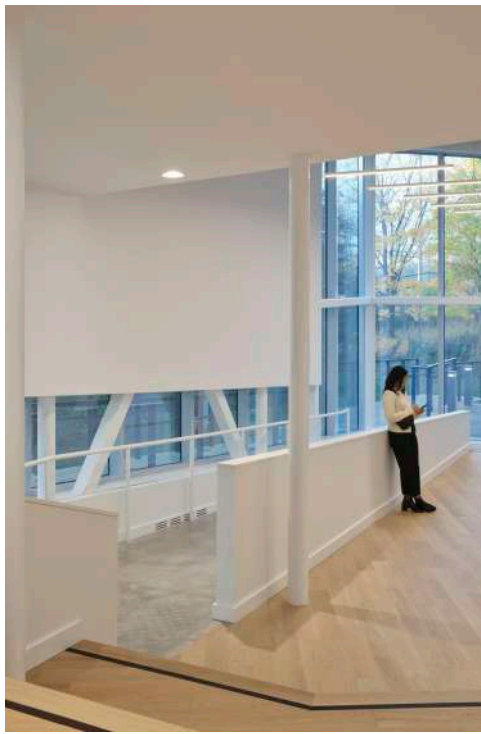
The outcome is a building that feels less like a new addition and more like a natural extension — the first use of the land gently passing on to the next.

If you look closely at the building's exterior, it begins to make sense. The facade is covered with folded metal panels which form patterns corresponding to the vertical lines of the trees, thus allowing the architecture to match the Arboretum's treeline rather than clash with it.

On the north side, a wall of climbing vines has been created with the passage of time in mind; it will thicken year by year and eventually cease to be a wall, becoming part of the landscape.

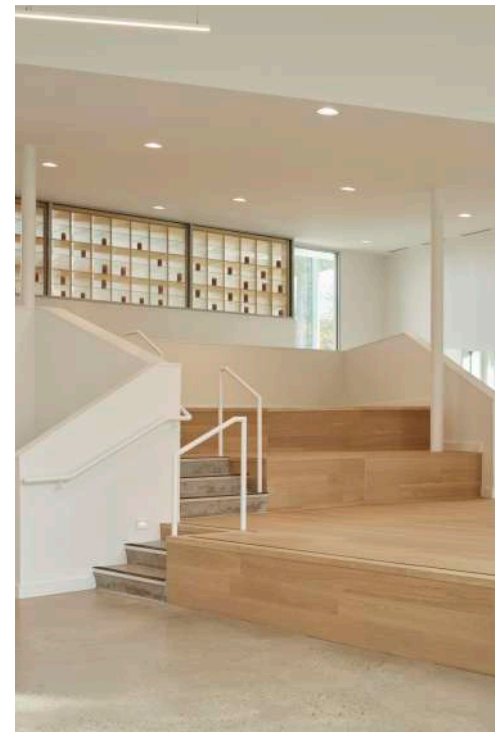
At the entrance, the plants change purpose again: along the path are species that favour pollinators, so the way to the building is already, in a small way, a habitat.



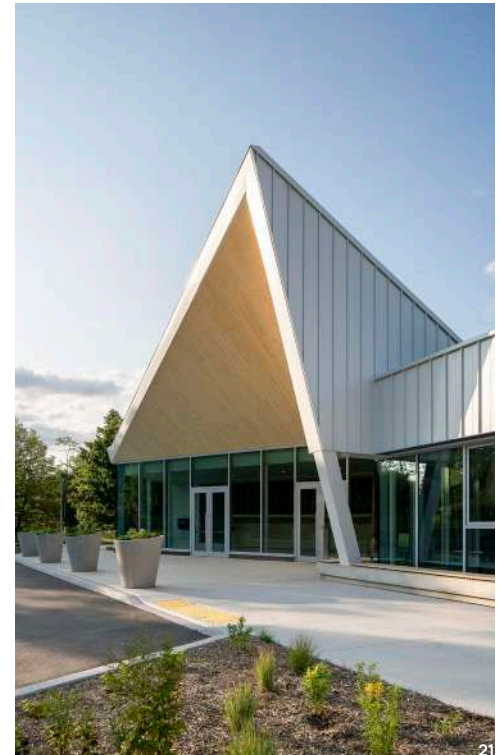


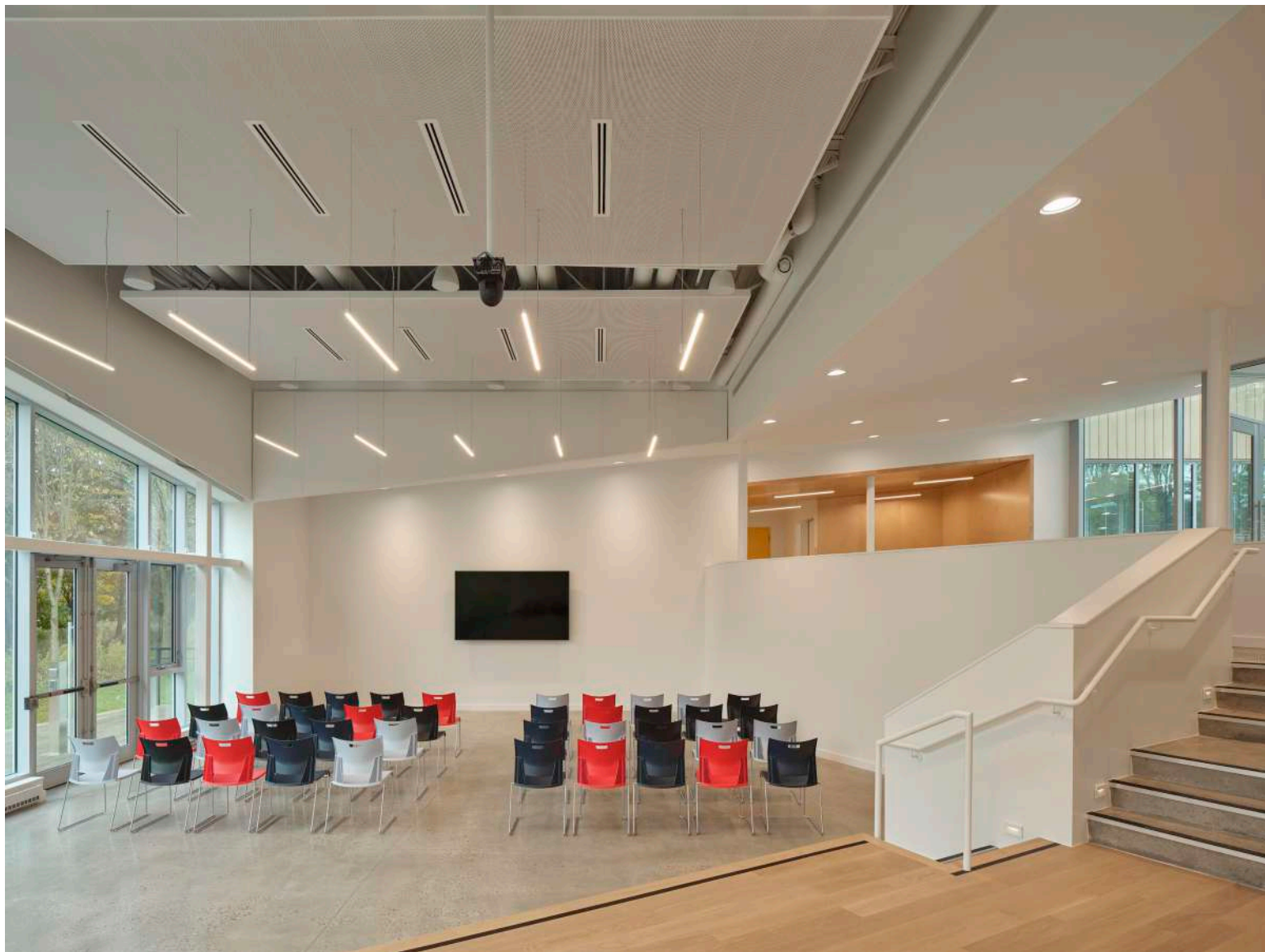
The interior plan is designed with observation in mind. People can go from the apiary to the lab and into the production rooms, where they can watch the honey being extracted and processed for sale – a live process that can be observed but not directly accessed, with restricted work areas remaining separate at all times. It is a simple architectural choice with a huge impact: science remains visible, and interest is never made to compete with the work itself.

“The honey bees were our tiniest clients, each scarcely the weight of a raindrop. They taught us about food chains, pollination, the colours of honey, disease, surviving the winter, social structure, flight paths, hard work, and the delicate balance upon which every ecosystem depends.”
Diarmuid Nash, Partner, Moriyma Teshima Architects.



**Watching
Without
Interrupting**





Built by the People Who Would Use It

The layout wasn't based on any guesses. Early in the design process, researchers, employees, and commercial beekeepers were involved, and their practical knowledge shaped decisions as detailed as equipment placement and daily routines.

The most publicly accessible room is at the centre of the building. The Discovery Centre features a versatile space for exhibitions, workshops, talks, and events, and is open to people of all ages. It is directly connected to the demonstration apiary, allowing a lesson picked up indoors to be walked outside and seen in real time among the actual bees.

Accessibility was a core principle from the start, not something added later, shaping the building's design from the moment people arrived.



A Landscape Built for More Than Bees

The plants surrounding the HBRC were selected to meet the Arboretum's requirements, not just the hives. The decision extends the building's purpose to include the surrounding landscape, which now supports both the wider urban forest and its wildlife, not just the colonies on site. People usually don't notice bees until after they've disappeared. This building was conceived with the contrary instinct in mind – namely, one of noticing early on and remaining nearby.

“Having a world-class facility with the capacity for advanced research and outreach is essential to the apicultural industry in Canada. The Honey Bee Research Centre will now continue to be an even stronger model for Canada and the world of progressive and innovative beekeeping activity.”

Rod Scarlett, Executive Director,
Canadian Honey Council.

The sound remains just beyond the treeline. It existed before they built the structure meant to contain it.





A village built brick by brick, courtyard by courtyard, from a single school. The kingfisher is now leading the way where the locked gate used to be.

ÉCOLE BROUCH

The Future of School Architecture



In Esch-sur-Alzette, in the area known as Quartier Brouch, a primary school is helping the local community to understand the concept of openness. The site had previously been a closed-off block, separated from the surrounding streets. Today, a car-free route runs straight through the centre and is open to anyone who wishes to use it. The design firm JSWD, based in Cologne and the competition winner, in cooperation with Jim Clemes Associates from Esch-sur-Alzette, divided the site into three groups of buildings, each surrounding its own green courtyard. Two of the buildings are complete and already house children. The third school building and a new preschool, Building E, still have to be built. What is gradually taking shape is less a renovation than a small village, brought together by bridges, brick, and a common belief – that a school can belong to everyone, not purely to the pupils within it.

Design: JSWD & Jim Clemes Associates
Photography: Andrés Lejona & Franco Casaccia

The former École Brouh was essentially a fortress, cut off from the outside world and turning its back on the surroundings. The key to JSWD's success was structural rather than aesthetic: it involved breaking the building up so light and people could move through it. Now there is a nearly square courtyard made up of four buildings, one of which is Building A, the historic main building, at the centre and the point around which the rest of the village revolves. From every angle, the ground-floor openings offer views into the courtyard, and you can see through the school; the first-floor bridges join the buildings so the complex doesn't look like four separate blocks but rather one settlement made up of several individual houses.

A Block Becomes a Village

Building C sits to the south and has three floors, most of which are raised above ground level; Building D is west of it and has two floors, making it lower. Both buildings are new, and their overall form is clearly modern. But consider the brick. The colour was chosen to match the plaster and stone of the other historic school. The old and new parts are not trying to look like the same building; instead, they are having a conversation.



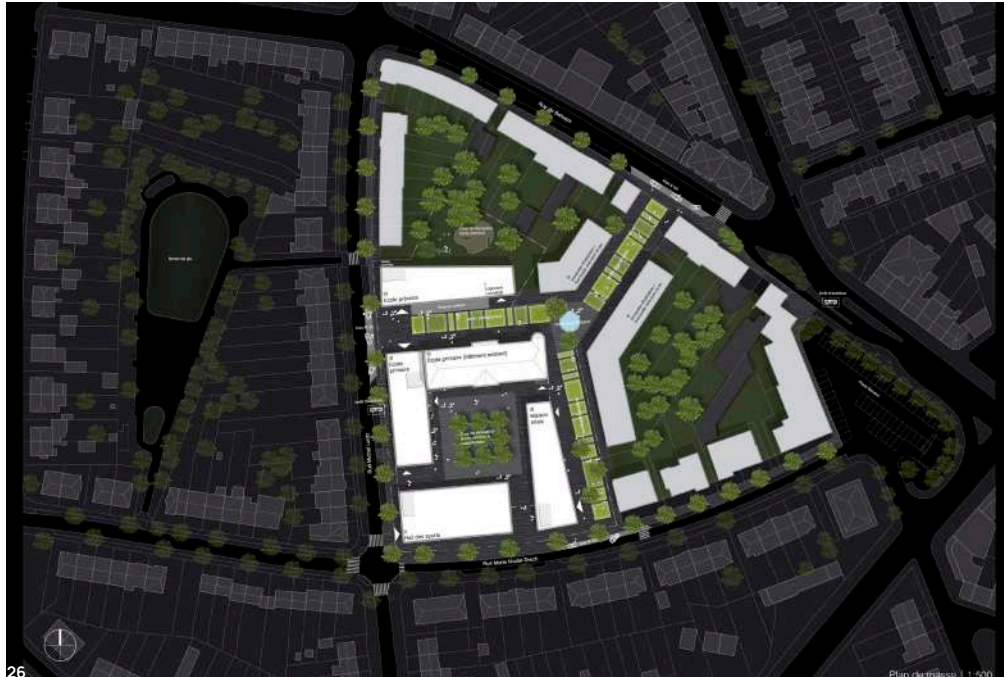
Within the school, the architectural reasoning becomes more distinct. In most schools, the classroom is separated from the after-school care room, keeping the teaching area apart from the waiting area. École Brouh does not do this. The architects call it a flexible learning landscape, with open areas, semi-open areas, and fully enclosed rooms adjacent to one another and ready for different uses depending on the time of day, the class, and the season.

No additional building is needed when there's a change in instructional methods since the building is already able to bend. Wayfinding is part of the geometry. The ring of buildings, joined by glass bridges on the first floor, takes you directly back to the historic school, and the children always know which way is home base. In Building C, six wooden steps are hidden beneath an open staircase in the corner. In fact, it's a small amphitheatre for sitting, meeting, and just existing between classes without needing a dedicated room.

A Sports Hall for the Neighbourhood

What most school gyms don't do, Building D does: it opens its doors to the whole community. The sports hall is only partly below ground level, filled with natural light, and can be split into smaller areas as needed. A separate ground-floor foyer lets visitors enter directly, without going through the school, so the hall can be used in the evenings and on weekends without interfering with what is happening upstairs.

Nearby, the kitchen prepares up to 500 meals each day for the school and an additional 200 for nearby schools. The deliveries are directed away from the main entrance – this small logistical choice means that the front door still stays a front door and not a loading dock. In the upstairs rooms, the dining areas also serve as group activity spaces. Apart from mealtimes, they serve as group spaces whenever the day requires it.



Two more buildings are coming, and both offer access and quiet as central features.

The third school building will be at the same level as the historic building's ground floor – no steps and no separation – with the entire site made walkable as a single continuous plane. The hall opens onto the courtyard and a covered outdoor area connected to the old loggia. A staircase with built-in seating can also serve as a small stage for classes or outdoor events.

The new preschool, Building E, has been designed for a younger, quieter pace; it surrounds a protected garden courtyard. The group rooms on the ground floor have direct access to sunny patios, while the upper rooms have views through loggias and provide enough space for sleeping, cooking, and eating, depending on the day's needs.

Two reasons led to the selection of brick: it is durable, and its colour matches the historic plaster and stone. The window proportions also match those of the first building.

On closer inspection, the brickwork appears calmer and more purposeful. The parapets and balustrades are laid in a random pattern and finished so they sit flush with the wall. At ground level, near the piers and window sections, the vertical joints create a rippling effect – almost sculptural, with the right lighting.

The heat carries indoors, with bronze-toned aluminum window frames giving way to oak for the sills, cabinets and fittings. Light beige terrazzo appears in the entrance hall, corridors, and stairs, and the rubber flooring in the classrooms matches the same tone. The exposed concrete ceilings meet the white plaster walls. To soften the sound and add variety to the rather serious material combination, coloured diamond-shaped felt panels are incorporated.



The Kingfisher in the Stairwell

The building's most personal feature appears in the corridors and open stairwell, where watercolour-style paintings by Daniel Mac Lloyd are displayed, and the ceilings are lined with wood. A kingfisher, a bird native to the area, appears among the abstract forms. It is a small bird, and in that moment the building ceases to be architecture and becomes this place, specifically one for these children. The Parieto facade system, located behind the artwork and behind the brick, performs the less conspicuous task of drawing in cool air in summer and capturing sun-heated air in winter. At the same time, roof fans and solar panels keep the system's energy requirements low.



Even though only two of the buildings are now in use and the others are still just in the planning stage, École Brouh is already operating as if it were something larger than its name indicates; by sharing its sports hall with the local community in the evenings, by having a kitchen that serves hundreds of children who are not even among its own students, and by using its staircase as a stage for children who haven't yet learned to read.

The rest of the village is still arriving, but the kingfisher is already perched on the wall, watching as the corridor fills up between lessons.





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
2 October 2026



Prize Fund
€ 7,000



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
9 October 2026



Prize Fund
€ 9,000



Designers must create a new visitor centre and subtle landscape interventions at Argentina's Sacred City of Quilmes. The primary goal is to respectfully blend modern architecture, natural terrain, and ancient Diaguita-Calchaquí heritage.



Registration Deadline
16 October 2026



Prize Fund
€ 9,000



Tactical Urbanism NOW! 2026 challenges slow city planning by calling for lightweight, low-cost 'urban hacks.' Participants must transform leftover spaces — like overheated plazas or traffic-heavy streets — into temporary, living prototypes that act as catalysts for long-term urban change.



Registration Deadline
30 October 2026



Prize Fund
€ 10,000



The competition in Pavia, Italy, challenges designers to transform an empty 6th-floor unit into modern housing for 2-3 university students. Proposals must balance privacy and community using multifunctional spaces, smart furniture, and adaptable layouts for hybrid lifestyles.



Registration Deadline
6 November 2026



Prize Fund
€ 8,000



The 6th Architect's Chair Competition, partnered with the Stockholm Furniture Fair, invites global architects and designers to distill their architectural philosophy into a single signature chair. Following the legacy of design greats, winning seats will be exhibited live at the upcoming fair.



Registration Deadline
3 December 2026



Prize Fund
€ 8,000

Villa Gioia

An Exclusive Residence for Longevity and Well-being

TERRAVIVA

Designers are asked to transform a historic Italian estate in Bedizzole into a vibrant modern retirement community. The project blends heritage preservation with contemporary accessibility to create an ecosystem of private, social, and healing wellness spaces.



Registration Deadline
23 October 2026



Prize Fund
€ 10,000

THE INTERNATIONAL GARDEN FESTIVAL 2027



Call for proposals: 28th International Garden Festival in Québec (June 19–Oct 3, 2027). The theme, “Making Visible: Alternative Geographies”, invites global architects and artists to reveal hidden landscapes. Five contemporary gardens will be selected. Apply by October 27, 2026.



Registration Deadline
27 October 2026



Prize Fund
CA\$ 27,000

Architecture Competition

KINDERSPACE

Architecture for Children's Development

EDITION #4

Registration Deadline: October 28, 2026
architecturecompetitions.com/kinderspace4

The 4th “Kinderspace” competition invites everyone – no degree needed – to design modern kindergarten spaces blending nature and architecture. Participants choose any site in their home country. Submit alone or in teams of up to 4 to inspire young learners and rethink early education!



Registration Deadline
28 October 2026



Prize Fund
€ 10,000

The Civic Kiosk

Micro-Architecture for Everyday Encounters

TERRAVIVA

The Civic Kiosk challenges designers to reinvent the forgotten newsstand. With no fixed site, participants must reimagine its form, materials, and modern function – like a micro-library or art space, transforming it into a dynamic, 21st-century public landmark.



Registration Deadline
4 December 2026



Prize Fund
€ 8,000

Architecture Competition

PORTUGAL LONG TABLE RESTAURANT

Registration Deadline: December 9, 2026
architecturecompetitions.com/longtable

This Competition invites everyone to transform a rural horse barn near Braga into a communal dining space. Participants must also design lightweight guest huts for an overnight retreat. Proposals must balance nature, connection, and cost-conscious buildability.



Registration Deadline
9 December 2026



Prize Fund
€ 10,000

Looking for design challenges?

The clock is ticking! Every weekend, we round up exciting Competitions from **Buidner**, **Terraviva**, and **V2com**, 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.



Architect/Project Lead: Perkins&Will
Structural Engineer: ASPECT Structural Engineers
Renderings: Aesthetica Studio courtesy of Perkins&Will



Can Prefab Mass Timber Solve the Housing Crisis?

Imagine a set of cross-laminated panels, precisely cut in a factory hundreds of kilometres away, arriving by flatbed truck and soon becoming a place someone calls home. This is the proposal currently being considered across Canada, a country where cities are growing faster than they can build rooftops. In response, Perkins&Will has put forward a system rather than a single building: a scalable, prefabricated mass timber housing solution developed in collaboration with ASPECT Structural Engineers, Introba, and Simon Fraser University's School of Interactive Arts & Technology, and financed by DIGITAL's Housing Growth Innovation program. Wood replaces concrete and steel as the primary material. The bet is clear: that the solution to the housing crisis has always been in the forests across the country.

Prefab has a bad reputation because it implies a lack of individuality — identical boxes stacked on top of one another, with no room for a designer's personal touch. Perkins&Will rejects that premise.



The system is based on a well-defined structural grid and uses a specific range of prefabricated components. That is what gives it discipline. However, the grid is only a starting point, not a prison. Architects working within the system can vary unit types, building forms, and exterior treatments without reinventing the manufacturing process each time. One system. Many buildings.

Perkins&Will Reimagines the Prefab Home, One Timber Frame at a Time. A System Built for Speed, Warmth, and the Long Life of a House.

Engineering for a Life That Changes

An apartment for beginners, a first real home for a young family, a place to grow old.

The study altered the structure to address all of this, investigating whether the units could be reconfigured to match how people's lives really unfold, without altering the building's main frame. From the very beginning, livability was at the heart of all decisions, not something added as an afterthought once the engineering work had been completed, but rather an instructive principle in the design phase.

Why Wood, Specifically

Timber offers practical advantages: it is widely available in Canada. It can be prefabricated quickly and with a level of accuracy that's hard to match with on-site concrete or steel construction. If the material composition shifts from concrete, steel, and gypsum to mass timber the building's environmental impact decreases.

There's also the section that can't be covered in a specification sheet.

Exposed wood affects a room in ways drywall cannot match. It adds warmth, texture, and a kind of material genuineness that is frequently missing from ordinary, conventional interior designs. When combined with big windows, daylight, and fresh air, it brings the outside in. This is what biophilic design actually looks like.

The object of this is to make it clear that it is not a speculative sketch. The study compared the system with current manufacturing standards, code requirements, and livability benchmarks — rules the industry already follows. Each building standard and construction detail was assessed against practical conditions, not left to theoretical considerations. Trust is the main form of exchange here. Cities and funders need evidence that a new approach will prove effective in practice and not create new risks. Our aim has always been to build as quickly as possible without changing the rules; instead, we have worked more efficiently within the rules so we can build more homes.

The research wasn't carried out in isolation. DIGITAL, Canada's partner in the commercialization of digital technology, supported the study via its Housing Growth Innovation program — this shows that the country's innovation funders regard it as viable infrastructure rather than just a hypothetical exercise.



A house somewhere between the forest and the factory floor is waiting to be cut up, transported, and then occupied.

Kathy Wardle, Perkins&Will's regional director of regenerative design, frames the immediacy plainly. We should use every opportunity to decrease the environmental impact of the built environment; even though the industry as a whole tends to change slowly, we regard it as our duty to promote change through effective design solutions that are resilient and have a low carbon output. The industry is proceeding with care. This care comes at a cost, in the form of years and of houses which have not yet been constructed.

Tested Against the Rules That Already Exist



A Program Behind the Proposal

"We need to leverage every opportunity to reduce the environmental impact of the built environment. While the industry in general may evolve slowly, we see it as our responsibility to drive change with impactful design solutions that are resilient and low carbon."

Kathy Wardle, regional director of regenerative design.

"We face a housing crisis across Canada, and the impact of a rapidly changing climate is real. These are issues that demand decisive action. At the same time, we have outstanding potential in our industry, and an incredible wealth of natural resources. This study brings all these pieces together and proves that we can do much better. We can start today."

Derek Newby, regional director of Perkins&Will practices across Canada.

BEST ARCHITECTURE SCHOOLS IN CANADA

Ten Schools, One Country, No Consensus

Canada never designed its architecture education to be internally consistent. Insights from ten accredited programs show what it means for a discipline still at odds with its own geography.

Vancouver has the mountains behind it and the ocean in front of the city. Toronto sits within a skyline so constantly changing that it can never be properly sketched. In Montréal, teaching takes place in layers – layers that cover centuries – with two schools offering education in two languages concerning the same city. This is the map of architectural education in Canada, and it firmly resists being reduced to a single best option. Currently, only 12 programs have received accreditation from the Canadian Architectural Certification Board (CACB), the organization that oversees the professional route to licensure nationwide. There is no official national ranking. The following is Forma's own assessment – taking into account reputation, design culture, the extent of research, professional preparedness, and most importantly, location – of where the next generation of architects in Canada is actually being trained.

RANK	UNIVERSITY	CITY	MAIN STRENGTH
01	University of Toronto	Toronto	• Research + urban architecture
02	University of British Columbia	Vancouver	• Sustainability + interdisciplinary design
03	McGill University	Montréal	• Research + architectural culture
04	University of Waterloo	Cambridge	• Technology + experimentation
05	Toronto Metropolitan University	Toronto	• Practice + building science
06	Carleton University	Ottawa	• Architecture + urbanism
07	Dalhousie University	Halifax	• Design-build + co-op
08	Université de Montréal	Montréal	• Urban + cultural design
09	University of Calgary	Calgary	• Climate + landscape
10	Université Laval	Québec City	• Heritage + context

Here are the ten schools in our ranking.

#1 University of Toronto

Ranked #1 in Forma's assessment: the University of Toronto's John H. Daniels Faculty. Few environments in Canadian architectural education carry as much weight. Daniels sits in the centre of Toronto. Students work inside one of the country's largest, fastest-changing urban environments, and it shows in the curriculum. The professional Master of Architecture pairs design studios with architectural technology, history, theory, building science, professional practice and research. Location does a lot of the teaching: here: heritage buildings, condominium towers, infrastructure projects, adaptive reuse, and major public developments. Toronto hands Daniels students an unusually dense architectural laboratory, and the school uses most of it. Daniels also draws on the University of Toronto's broader research ecosystem, bringing architecture students into subjects that lie well outside traditional studio culture.

Best for

Students who want architecture education at the intersection of design, research and urban development.

Why it stands out

Strong academic reputation, research culture, major-city exposure and a powerful professional network.

#2 University of British Columbia

The School of Architecture + Landscape Architecture – SALA – works within Vancouver's unique mix of mountains, ocean, dense urban growth, and a sustainability culture that shapes almost everything the school does. Its three-year Master of Architecture pairs design studios with architectural technology, structures, environmental systems, history, theory and professional practice. Students can also take on design-build projects, exchanges, study abroad, and other interdisciplinary work. The relationship with landscape architecture matters too. Architecture students can cross into landscape studios and electives, which pushes them toward a wider read of the built environment – buildings, yes, but also the ground they sit on. Community engagement and sustainable design run through the program, reflecting Vancouver's role as a testing ground for environmental and urban innovation.

Best for

Students interested in environmental design, sustainable architecture and interdisciplinary practice.

Why it stands out

Sustainability, interdisciplinary design and an exceptional geographic context.

#3 McGill University

McGill pairs one of Canada's strongest university brands with Montréal's unusually rich architectural and cultural environment; a rare combination. The Peter Guo-hua Fu School of Architecture has a long history and a strong pull toward architectural research, history, theory, technology, and design. Downtown Montréal does a lot of the work here. Historic architecture. Contemporary interventions. Cultural institutions. An active design community, all within the studio's reach. McGill's research environment matters, too. Graduate architecture research spans climate conscious design, building technology, computation, urban studies, housing, spatial justice, history and theory — a wide net, cast deliberately. For students who treat architecture as both a professional discipline and an intellectual field, McGill offers an unusually strong environment.

Best for

Students interested in research-driven architecture and critical architectural thinking.

Why it stands out

Architectural history, research, theory and Montréal's distinctive design culture.

#4 University of Waterloo

Its School of Architecture sits in Cambridge, not on Waterloo's main campus — a smaller architectural environment, but one still wired into one of Canada's strongest universities for technology, engineering and innovation. Waterloo's wider reputation for technological entrepreneurship bleeds into its architecture culture. It shows in the studios. The program suits students drawn to the relationship between architecture, technology, fabrication, sustainability and contemporary practice. Location adds an interesting contrast: a smaller urban environment day-to-day, with Toronto's major architectural market close enough to reach.

Best for

Students interested in architectural technology, fabrication and experimental design.

Why it stands out

Technology, experimentation, design research and connections to a highly innovative university environment.

#5 Toronto Metropolitan University

Toronto Metropolitan University runs one of the most practice-oriented architectural environments in the country. Its education is tied tightly to the realities of a large metropolitan construction and development market. Students build skills in architecture, building science, and project management within the Department of Architectural Science, with co-op and experiential learning built into the curriculum. Downtown Toronto matters here too. Students work within the city's construction industry — architectural offices, development projects, and a fast-changing urban environment — close to the studio. TMU's professional M.Arch. is CACB-accredited. It forms the professional pathway together with the university's pre-professional Bachelor of Architectural Science.

Best for

Students who want a strong connection between architecture, construction and professional practice.

Why it stands out

Professional orientation, building science, technology and direct exposure to Toronto's construction industry.

#6 Carleton University

Carleton offers something few architecture schools can replicate: architecture education inside Canada's national capital. Ottawa offers students direct exposure to government architecture, institutional buildings, heritage, urban planning, and national-scale projects — a different diet from a private-development-heavy market. The Azrieli School of Architecture and Urbanism also carries a strong reputation for pairing architectural design with urbanism and critical thinking. Its position between Toronto and Montréal offers another advantage: access to multiple architectural cultures while studying in a city with its own very different urban character. Carleton's professional Master of Architecture has held CACB-accreditation since 2005.

Best for

Students interested in public architecture, urbanism and institutional design.

Why it stands out

Architecture, urbanism, public institutions and Canada's unique political and cultural landscape.

#7 Dalhousie pairs its Bachelor of Environmental Design with an M.Arch. and a rare extended co-op term, plus its hands-on Free Lab and Halifax's intimate scale.

#8 Université de Montréal blends European heritage, modernism and contemporary design in a lively cultural setting. Accredited since 1999.

#9 University of Calgary reflects its mountain-adjacent, fast-growing, climate-extreme context, with strong ties to planning and landscape architecture. Accredited since 1995.

#10 Université Laval sits within Québec City's dense historic fabric, ideal for heritage and conservation studies. Accredited since 2002.

Canada currently has 12 CACB-accredited architecture programs, so a top-ten ranking leaves two out. University of Manitoba, accredited since 1996, stands out for its Prairie setting, where climate, housing and northern contexts shape the work in distinctive ways. Laurentian University, accredited in 2021, holds Canada's newest CACB accreditation; based in Sudbury, it gives students a rare northern Ontario perspective which few programs offer.

Choosing an architecture school is more complicated than chasing the highest overall ranking. A university can be academically prestigious and still not be the right environment for a particular kind of architectural education. The two things aren't the same. Students weighing their options should consider at least five factors.

ACCREDITATION

CACB-accreditation is critical for anyone planning to become a licensed architect in Canada. The CACB treats completion of an accredited professional program as the educational step in the country's path to licensure – internship and examination follow.

LOCATION

The city becomes part of the education. Toronto exposes students to a huge construction and development market. Vancouver teaches sustainability and density. Montréal offers an unusually rich cultural and architectural environment. Ottawa introduces institutional architecture. Halifax offers a smaller-scale relationship between design and community.

CONNECTION TO PRACTICE

Architecture stays a professional discipline, whatever else it becomes in the studio. Co-op programs, internships, design-build projects, relationships with firms, real exposure to construction – these can matter more after graduation than anything printed on a transcript.

DESIGN CULTURE

Architecture isn't learned from lectures alone. Studio culture. Critiques. Experimentation. Real interaction with faculty. These shape a student's development as much as any syllabus does.

TECHNOLOGY & RESEARCH

Architecture is changing fast. Digital fabrication, computational design, artificial intelligence, environmental modelling, building science, advanced materials – all increasingly central to contemporary practice. The strongest schools aren't just teaching how architecture has been practised. They're questioning how it will be practised next.

Right now, we can say with confidence that no single school is objectively "the best" for every student. That claim doesn't hold up when you consider how different these 12 programs actually are – when you weigh academic reputation, architectural culture, research, innovation, professional preparation, and location.

Today we discover that Canada has no single dominant architecture school, but rather a dozen programs that agree on almost nothing except the CACB paperwork.

Toronto trains for scale, exposure, and a market that never stops building. Vancouver pushes sustainability against mountains and ocean, refusing to treat architecture and landscape as separate disciplines. Montréal folds theory, culture, and centuries of architectural history into its studios – through two different schools, in two different languages, teaching the same city in different ways. Waterloo bets on technology and experimentation, close enough to Toronto's market to matter but far enough to build its own identity in Cambridge. Halifax teaches by building things with your hands, on a co-op timeline most other schools don't attempt. Ottawa puts students inside institutions and urban policy the rest of the country only reads about. That range may be Canada's real advantage over a single dominant program. A ranked list forces a number onto each school. The number was never really the point.

So the question for an aspiring architect isn't "Which university is ranked number one?" It's this:

"Which architectural culture will make the architect they want to become?"



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AI IN ARCHITECTURE

The Unbuilt Curriculum

A student puts her own models into an image generator and gently asks it to complete what she has begun. Meanwhile, another student in the adjacent class has never opened that software and has no intention of doing so. Both are studying at the same university, and neither is wrong. This contradiction is the focus of this discussion. It is not the technology itself, but the vacuum beneath it, that is in question. A survey carried out by UNSW Sydney found that 60% of architecture firms already using AI were teaching themselves how to do so. Neither schools nor employers provide much formal instruction.. The gap isn't narrowing; it is slowly growing, class by class.

3 Schools, 3 Answers

The **University of Miami** is now officially introducing AI in its first-year course in Visual Representation, rather than leaving it to whoever discovers it first.

The **University of Maryland** has gone even further by introducing a new minor in AI and Architecture which, starting this fall, covers the basic concepts of AI and its ethical aspects through five required courses that are linked to studio work. This is a genuine structural commitment and not simply a single elective that has been added quietly.

The **Parsons School of Design** took a completely different approach — rather than viewing AI as a skill to be certified, it sees it as a habit to be monitored. Associate Professor Mark Gardner describes it as a tool for interaction, not one intended to do the work for you.

Three schools of thought offer different interpretations of what “catching up” should mean, and they disagree.

While architecture schools still haven't decided what to do about AI, their students are making up their minds without any direction from the schools. It's an elective studio course. A silent refusal. A small initiative launching this fall. No one agrees, and the results are no different.

Natalie Yuen, a TMU graduate, can recall only a single elective course on AI-assisted rendering; that was all. She still used the tools: ideation, preparing early-stage proposals, and finding relevant sections of the Ontario Building Code faster than sifting through a binder page by page. There is no doubt it sped things up, but it also left her uncertain whether the work she completed at the end still belonged to her.

Esther Bailey, also a TMU graduate and currently at the Mason Studio, shares a similar story. AI was not incorporated into her coursework and spread around like contraband — some classmates got hold of it while others ignored it, and no teacher said which approach was correct.

It is no surprise that experience is so common. The Royal Institute of British Architects estimates that AI use across the industry is 41%. The American Institute of Architects, however, carried out a more stringent measurement — looking at regular and integrated use rather than just occasional experimentation — and discovered only 6%. Most new graduates fall somewhere between those two figures: they know such tools exist, but haven't received adequate training and must bridge the gap themselves. No formal instruction from either schools or employers. The gap isn't narrowing; it is slowly growing, class by class.

If you ask the students, the disagreement becomes even more pronounced.

What Do the Students Actually Want?

Natalie Yuen believes that AI should be incorporated into the core curriculum, accompanied by a specific ethics class. That is where it should be and where its limits should also be taught.

Olivia Condo, who is in the same program at Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU), favours the opposite: less time on screens and more time on fabrication, with real clients rather than simulated ones.

E.L., a master's student at Politecnico di Torino, would like a whole course focused on AI; although her training gave her some general knowledge, it left her with very little else, and she had to pick up the rest on the job without supervision.

G.S., who recently earned his degree from the Politecnico, is less diplomatic on the matter. That was not the case when he was a student; in his opinion, universities have to act faster. Turin has in fact already begun to take action. Last July, the Politecnico organized a summer school focused on AI-enhanced architecture at Castello del Valentino in collaboration with the Rotterdam firm MVRDV, aiming to simulate a complete design competition under AI-assisted conditions. None of the Politecnico students who were interviewed for this article took part.

One Tool, Two Verdicts

No one agrees on what the tool is actually intended *FOR*.

Olivia Condo uses AI only to improve grammar and to edit a script, and remains cautious in all other areas. She has reviewed AI-produced floor plans, and describes them as undercooked: mistakes that are repeated and details that are overlooked – the type of error that becomes apparent when someone with proper training actually looks at the drawing.

***“Decorating, maybe.
Planning, definitely not.”***
Olivia Condo.

A.S., a student at TMU, goes even further. She has never used an AI design tool and has no intention of doing so; she finds the idea that it could improve her work a little off-putting and is glad her program hasn’t suggested it. If given the choice, she would prefer to be taught SketchUp properly than to be given an AI plugin. She said you would have to struggle to learn, and that if the only thing you knew how to do were ask an AI chatbot for help, you would be a useless employee.

Esther Bailey positions herself closer to the middle and sets a more reserved boundary. She never asks the generator to create a form out of nothing; instead, she provides her own models and photographs of real scenes and asks that it improve what is already hers. That is a minor distinction but has a significant implication – the difference between directing a tool and handing it a decision.

The term for that distinction exists, even though none of the students employed it themselves. Professor M. Hank Haeusler from the School of Built Environment at UNSW Sydney divides architectural work into two types. “*Action tasks*”, which are standardized and can be carried out, are generally given to junior staff, and “*decision tasks*”, which involve judgment, an understanding of the context and knowledge of who a space is actually for. The first category includes rendering, while the second involves deciding whether a floor plan works in actual use. This is the same distinction Esther Bailey makes instinctively, and the one Olivia Condo draws between decorating and planning.

Schools keep debating. The tools keep coming out. One still under development would directly link BIM software such as Revit to the building codes specific to each jurisdiction – such as those in Canada, Europe, and Italy – checking the model rather than having a junior architect use a PDF and spend an afternoon to carry out the lookup. This is similar to the exact task that Natalie Yuen described doing by hand, section by section. The company promises it can turn a rough sketch into a high-fidelity concept render, with developers saying this approach may save up to 75% compared with a traditional workflow. However, the company provides that figure itself, not independent testing. For now, treat it as a claim rather than a fact.

Blurring this comes at a cost, and that cost becomes apparent before students graduate. At a recent HOK Up Next panel, Humbi Song, a professor at the University of Toronto, spoke about what she refers to as the “*illusion of knowledge*” – namely, that students submit well-polished assignments which AI has assisted, yet are unable to justify the reasoning behind them when someone poses a direct question. This difficulty only appears during a conversation. Once the rendering is complete, Song has begun to reintroduce pencil and paper into her classroom as a remedy. It’s a concern that has always been there, merely given a new form. Back when there were no generative tools, design critic Eric Cesar claimed that architecture had developed an obsession with images – a society in which a striking rendering could replace a genuinely tested idea, even covering an entire career. AI didn’t create this habit; it simply made it usable to anyone who had a laptop and a Wi-Fi connection. That is why Cesar maintains that the image can no longer stand on its own as proof. A convincing render can now be produced with a single prompt. Creating one is no longer an achievement in itself.

Another one, just launched, is called Roomagic. All you have to do is upload a single photo of a room, include a text prompt, and in a short time you will get back several different styled versions. It is a quick way to show a client what’s possible before deciding on a particular direction. General tools such as ChatGPT and Gemini may try something similar, but with less precision – neither was designed specifically for this purpose.

No matter how advanced these tools are, they do not replace the judgment that Olivia Condo or Humbi Song describe; they automate operational tasks, not decisions. Yet they are appearing quickly and are mostly being introduced outside the classroom – precisely as the interviews indicate. The tool is launched, and the profession then adjusts to it, with the curriculum only catching up if it ever does.

“Looking at AI today is exactly like looking at BIM in the early 2000s, or CAD and CAM in the early 1980s. Designers were scared. Draftsmen were terrified of losing their jobs. Big firms sat lost in thought about the future. And today? CAD is the foundation, and BIM is the standard. Software like Revit, Archicad and AutoCAD are used every single day to design the world we see around us. Look around you: many of the houses, high-rises, even sheds, were designed using one of the three systems people once feared. What will happen with AI, we cannot know. But we can learn from the past: technology always finds its place in society, whether we want it to or not, and with AI, that has already begun. It’s our duty to decide whether we run with it or fall behind without it.”
Giuseppe Gutta, M.Arch., Founder of Forma.

This piece integrates Forma’s reporting and interviews with external data and commentary, including RIBA, AIA, UNSW Sydney, University of Miami, University of Maryland, Politecnico di Torino, HOK’s Up Next series, and Parsons School of Design. We highlight the RIBA AI Report 2025 and the paper “Architectural Design in the Age of Generative AI: Toward a Balance Between Efficiency and Responsibility.”



R J C E N G I N E E R S

78 Years of Shaping Canada's Built Future

78 years of listening to buildings before deciding what they need. A Vancouver practice that grew into a nation's quiet infrastructure of care

In 1948, a small practice in the field of structural engineering opened its doors, with no idea that it would still be in business and continuing to grow nearly eighty years later. Today, RJC Engineers is one of the leading engineering firms in North America, with offices across Canada and expanding into the United States. However, growth was never the objective. From the very beginning, the company regarded engineering as a discipline that should serve people before it served materials. That original principle – which was Canadian in origin, unshowy and thoughtfully developed – still influences the way RJC deals with the built environment today.

An Ownership Model Built to Last

If you ask the structural team at RJC what their role is, the answer won't be merely "*to keep the building standing*." It's a fine balance between cost, function, and sustainability, addressed from the very first sketches. The engineers work with the architects and the owners right from the start, guiding not only whether the building is solid but also how it feels to be in it. At times, the structure is intended to be hidden by the finished surfaces; at other times, it is deliberately left exposed. When this occurs, RJC sees it as an opportunity, treating a column as a feature and a beam as part of the building's story about itself. The firm's structural influence is visible from Vancouver's skyline to Toronto's, usually invisibly, and at other times visibly.

The number of employees at RJC has now exceeded 700. Yet that figure by itself tells us very little. What is important is the structure lying underneath it. The company is entirely owned by its employees. The engineers who approve the calculations for a project are also the ones who have something to gain from the project's outcome. No distant shareholders means no pressure to cut corners to meet someone else's quarterly returns. It changes behaviour quietly. Senior engineers stay and take on mentor roles rather than leaving. The company expresses its basic philosophy in three words: engineering that "*listens, leads, and lasts*." The phrase is small but involves a great deal of commitment.

Canada does not treat its buildings kindly. The building science team at RJC was established on that fact; their focus is the building envelope – the walls, windows, and roofs – the thin barrier that separates the interior from the exterior. The team works against the effects of freezing and thawing, humidity, and many winters that put every joint and seal to the test.

Over the years, the team has inspected and repaired hundreds of enclosures, from ancient downtown masonry to modern glass skyscrapers. This variety matters because old and new buildings fail in different ways, and RJC's engineers have learned to interpret both. The lessons aren't kept in repair files; instead, they carry directly into new designs and shape how RJC builds enclosures meant to withstand what's coming, not simply what has already occurred.

Restoration as an Act of Respect

Not every project begins from scratch. RJC's structural restoration team takes the opposite approach: instead of replacing things, they aim to extend the lives of what is already there. This applies to heritage sites, parking structures, and mid-century towers which are approaching the end of their expected lifespan. The decline usually isn't due to a single factor, so the team uses its knowledge of engineering, building science, and materials to identify problems step by step. Each project is considered in its own right, and there is no blueprint for a building which has already experienced one life and is now being asked to lead a second. Over the years, the outcome has been that buildings have remained in use rather than having been sent for demolition – a more peaceful kind of legacy, achieved by removing waste rather than by increasing size.

Sustainability isn't a separate department at RJC; it is reflected in day-to-day decisions – such as which materials to use, how much energy to consume, and how long something should last before it needs to be replaced.

The company has many LEED Accredited Professionals and Green Associates on its team. This means sustainability is built into most projects from the start, so there is no need to bring in outside consultants later. RJC has also signed on to SE 2050, a formal commitment to lower the carbon footprint of its structural designs by mid-century. The Embodied Carbon Action Plan explains how RJC will achieve this goal on real projects, using real materials and following a clear schedule.

RJC is continuing to build its legacy, one structure at a time.



Art Gallery of Alberta



Centennial College A-Building Expansion



CIBC Square



Erin Mills Town Centre Redevelopment



Guildford Town Centre Redevelopment



Square One Shopping Centre Redevelopment



Sunalta LRT Station & Elevated Guideway



The Well



UBC Student Union Building

Photography courtesy of RJC Engineers. Photography of The Well courtesy of RJC Engineers & Dustin Fournier.

Much of what RJC carries out will never be photographed. For example, a repaired enclosure, a column that has been retrofitted and is now hidden behind drywall, and a structural choice which makes certain that the heritage building remains standing for another fifty years without being noticed by anybody who passes by. That invisibility is, in its own way, the point. The firm's value was never meant to announce itself. It was meant to hold – quietly, structurally, for as long as the country needs it to.

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**We don't simply
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**We share the stories
that shape the future.**

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The Story Behind FORM A

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What started out as a simple blog, a venue for sharing projects and the unvarnished truths of working in architecture and design, developed into a journal, a magazine, and a community registry. Forma is not a final product; it is a live platform which is developing itself issue by issue and conversation by conversation.

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build what
comes next.”**

MCM MASTER GREENHOUSE

Where Nature & Innovation Unite





A greenhouse that turns its research into a public show. During the day, it collects sunlight; at night, it becomes a lantern.

On University Avenue at McMaster University, green plants are now held up to the street by a sawtooth roof and a glass front. The Life Sciences Building and Greenhouse, the result of a multi-year renovation of the existing five-storey building, includes an 11,400-square-foot greenhouse positioned as far west as possible to receive maximum sunlight.

It replaces an earlier off-site facility and, for the first time, connects the greenhouse directly to the main building. The concept is simple and rather radical: research, teaching, and student life should share a single bright entrance, and the science should be visible from the footpath.



Design: Moriyama Teshima Architects (MTA)
Photography: Riley Snelling

The Landmark After Dark: Chasing the Light

The greenery and the research are integrated within campus life because the roof has a sawtooth shape and the building features a glass front facing University Avenue.

In the evening, the glass walls glow, and the building becomes the campus's new landmark.

The greenhouse wraps the west and south sides of the building, the two façades that receive the most sunlight. It was a sensible choice: light reaches plants, researchers and passersby alike.

It is more than a greenhouse; it is a showcase of both science and nature.



To enter, people go through a doorway framed in wood, then cross an overhead bridge spanning the two-storey greenhouse — no lobby to wait in. The research is right there, right beneath your feet, from the very first step.

The path leads to a bright lobby built from mass timber, now at the heart of the Life Sciences Building; it's open, welcoming, and suited to gatherings, studying, meetings, and events.



Rainforest, Savannah

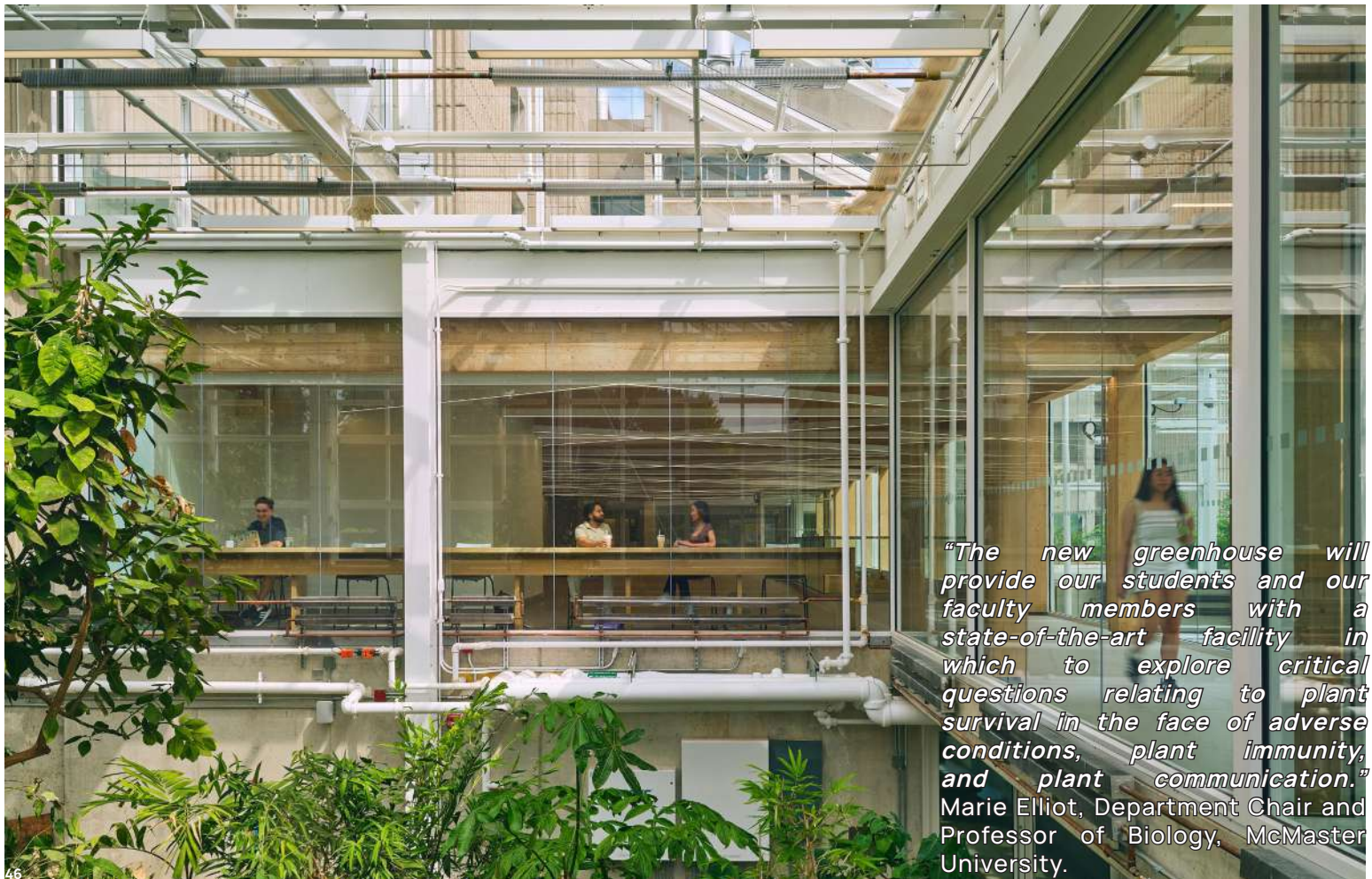
The greenhouse has wet rainforest and dry savannah areas, and it contains more than 200 plant species. The site offers both open and secured research areas so that visitors can see and observe science in action. Specialized research rooms and support areas are located behind them and provide controlled environments for studying plant genomics, microbes, soil health, and other natural systems. The glass walls let people watch the work in real time.



The greenhouse doesn't stop at its glass; natural materials carry its atmosphere into the building, including mass timber, wooden details, plenty of daylight, plants, and views back into the greenhouse. The result is a warm, healthy space. The big renovation goes beyond the glass; it adds new spaces for gathering and joint effort, improves accessibility, increases natural light, and also brings McMaster's first geothermal heating and cooling system. The project has earned LEED Gold certification and aligns with the university's sustainability objectives.

Beneath the Building A Greenhouse Atmosphere, Indoors

With the building renovated and the greenhouse now in place, the space offers an immersive experience where science, architecture, and nature come together to encourage discovery.



"The new greenhouse will provide our students and our faculty members with a state-of-the-art facility in which to explore critical questions relating to plant survival in the face of adverse conditions, plant immunity, and plant communication."
Marie Elliot, Department Chair and Professor of Biology, McMaster University.

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