

## FEATURE PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

# 'It's a very small building, but it's very rich,' new Hill space opens with Sir John A. Macdonald Building addition

There's now an extra 33,400 square-feet of space for Parliamentarians. Before construction, it was simply an empty courtyard with some parking space beside the Old Bank of Montreal building. Now it's so much more.

By LAURA RYCKEWAERT

There's some new square footage available on the Hill with the new addition to the historic Sir John A. Macdonald Building, which includes a multi-purpose room and was designed to be a contemporary, modern match to the main heritage hall, say architects involved in its design.

"It's a very small building, but it's very rich," said David Clusiau, a senior principal at NORR Ltd., who was head of the building design team.

The final product, specifically the glass atrium connecting the new infill addition to the heritage building, came together even better than expected, he said.

"The glass roof is supported on glass blades, glass beams. ... It casts this series of bands across the whole façade of either the existing building or the new, depending on the time of day, and it is stunning," he said. "Even if you're walking down the street and peek in at the right time, you'll see it. It's pretty dramatic."

"We always did the glass for this idea of an outdoor space, but not recognizing that the structure itself would create this beautiful pattern on that wall; that is a pretty neat discovery."

Previously the Old Bank of Montreal building—and originally the bank's main Ottawa branch, built between 1930 and 1932—the building at 144 Wellington St. was renamed in January 2012.

Construction on the Sir John A. Macdonald Building began a few months later in April 2012 and included asbestos removal, stripping back the old interior including teller booths, seismic upgrades, masonry restoration, replacing electrical and other systems, and the construction of a new two-storey infill addition in a courtyard to the west of the building.

The renovation cost about \$99-million and is part of Public Service's plan to fix up the entire parliamentary precinct. The building has been a classified heritage space since 1986 and was used as a bank until 2005.

EllisDon Corp. was awarded the contract for construction management for the building, while NORR was awarded the main design contract and worked with MTBA Associates Inc., which focuses on heritage conservation.

Mark Brandt, senior conservation architect at MTBA, said his job was to ensure the design of the new addition "was in harmony" with the original building,

meaning it needed to be "physically and visually compatible with, subordinate to and distinguishable from" it.

"We don't want to make it like Disney World and just kind of do the same architecture over again," he said.

The addition, with limestone and bronze dominating its façade, was intended to be an expression of "its own time," said Mr. Brandt, but with a similar "big stone box" look as the original building.

Complimenting an historic space is "much harder when you're putting an addition on, like, a Greek temple, which the original building is," said Mr. Brandt. While it was a "huge concern" whether the addition would blend with the street-scape, he's happy with the result.

Construction wrapped up last spring, and the building was officially handed over to the House of Commons administration for management in the summer. It opened for use in September. Since then, about 50 events have been held in the building, including orientation sessions for new MPs, ministerial briefings, and legislative associations have also met in the space.

Already, the renovation of the building and the design of its addition have been lauded by Canada's architectural community with four awards, including the National Trust for Canada 2015 Cornerstone Award for Heritage Rehabilitation/ Adaptive Use and the City of Ottawa 2015 Urban Design Award for Excellence of Urban Infill—Low Rise.

Overall, the building has been renovated to replace West Block's old Confederation Room as the go-to spot for special parliamentary and ceremonial events on the Hill.

The addition serves as the main entrance through which Hill visitors enter the building, as it's where the security screening is set-up. It also includes space for the "support functions" required for



The glass atrium of the new addition that connects to the main hall is pictured. The two-storey addition sits between the historic Sir John A. Macdonald building and the National Press Theatre, previously an empty courtyard with some parking. *The Hill Times* photograph by Jake Wright

the building to function like a conference facility, such as food storage and new bathrooms. It also includes a loading dock facing Wellington Street, which is easy for pedestrians to miss behind bronze doors that match the overall façade.

"It's got such a prominent location across from Parliament Hill, we couldn't just create an ordinary loading dock. We had to do it in a very discreet manner," said Mr. Clusiau.

It's now an extra 33,400 square-feet of space for Parliamentarians. Before construction, it was simply an empty courtyard with some parking space beside the old bank, largely blocked from view by a screen wall.

"It fills in a missing tooth in the street-scape of Wellington. ... We were able to fill that in with something that I think is quite complimentary to the buildings on either side," Mr. Clusiau said.

A glass atrium connects the two-storey addition to the original building and serves as a lobby for building guests to mingle as they enter. The atrium was designed as an all-glass enclosure, with glass walls to the north and south, and a glass ceiling supported by glass beams, allowing the

original eastern exterior of the Sir John A. Macdonald Building to still be visible, including from street view.

Glass technology has come a long way in the last 10 to 15 years, said Mr. Brandt, and it's a "very exciting time for glass in architecture."

Bronze wall-length panels along the back west wall of the atrium can be moved to accommodate food serving stations or tables. Large doorways connect the atrium to the gold-toned and limestone- and marble-filled heritage hall.

Up stairs wrapped around a large, red Cape Breton marble slab, on the top floor of the addition is a large multi-purpose room that can fit as many as 200 people, with a "crush room" in front featuring a large floor to ceiling window facing the Hill. On the right is a smaller multi-purpose space (including a kitchenette), built above and into the old heritage building. As well, the addition is topped with a green roof.

"It's got a million-dollar view looking out over the Parliament buildings," said Mr. Brandt of the addition's view.

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