

Irving Greenberg Theatre Centre Currents Residence

By Christine Peets

Having outgrown its old location, the Ottawa-based Great Canadian Theatre Company (GCTC) needed a larger state-of-the-art facility still allowing it to be part of an energetic downtown community. The Irving Greenberg Theatre Centre with 43 luxury condominiums in The Currents residence tower accomplishes both objectives.

The first two levels of the theatre centre are accessible to the public. Sharing the third floor are GCTC's offices and residential condominiums. The ground floor has the 262-seat Irving Greenberg Theatre with modernized sound and lighting systems designed by theatre consultant Martin Conboy Lighting Design. The October 2007 set design is "The Man from the Capital" by Scott Windsor.

A café and wine bar, The Local Bar by Thyme & Again Encore, is in the main lobby on the ground floor. The lobbies on the first and second floors are brightly lit and very versatile for social gatherings, which can be catered by Thyme & Again. The Studio Theatre is accessed from the second level. "This is a black box rehearsal and performance studio with flexible seating for 90 people," says Lise Ann Johnson, Artistic Director for GCTC. "It has its own sound and lighting systems; is appropriate for intimate theatrical presentations and workshops, and will appeal to independent companies or artists seeking to present their work in a professional venue". The Lorraine Fritzi Yale Gallery, a new visual arts exhibition space, is on the second floor. "It will display contemporary artworks by a range of local artists, solo or duos," says Johnson. The mechanical and electrical rooms, wardrobe, storage and the control room for the studio theatre are on the mezzanine level. When not in use by GCTC the facility can be rented for dance, music, awards shows, lectures, showcases and other live performances. There is two-level underground parking for theatre staff and residents.

This is the first project of its kind in Canada. "The lead development company is Windmill Development Group of Ottawa. They approached GCTC with the idea of sharing a building. As well, they are entirely responsible for the greenness of the building," says Arthur Milner, the building project director for the theatre centre. "They designed and built the outer shell of GCTC's theatre and the residential tower; and then GCTC designed and built the inside."

Griffiths Rankin Cook Architects (GRC Architects) from Ottawa worked on the GCTC fit-up of the building. Hélène Tremblay-Allen from GRC Architects says, "We were involved with the design of the fit-up for the podium of the building, which consists of the ground floor, second floor and mezzanine level, and part of the real [residence] third floor."

Jonathan Westeinde, Managing Partner for the Windmill Development Group says "This [project] is targeted to meet a LEED [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design] Gold designation which is consistent with all of our other projects that are targeting LEED gold or platinum. In addition, this project is consistent with our triple bottom-line approach [socially, environmentally and financially responsible], practiced on all our projects with the inclusion of the non-profit Great Canadian Theatre Company." Westeinde notes there are several significant elements including: cleaning up a brownfield site that had been used as a drycleaner and a gas station; a car sharing program; high fly ash content used in the concrete structure reduces greenhouse gases (GHG) in the production of the concrete (concrete production is responsible for approximately 10% of Canada's GHGs); the building is approximately 50% more energy and water efficient than the national energy code model; a passive solar wall on the southwest face of the building; a large cistern to catch rain water and re-use it for toilet water; all interior finishing materials, including VOC (volatile organic compound) paint have close to zero off-gassing providing superior indoor air quality; wheat board kitchens and bamboo and havea flooring. The wheat board, bamboo and

havea are more easily harvested and renewable resources than the wood and particleboard usually used for kitchens and flooring.

The building envelope consists of approximately 45% fenestration and an average of an R-22 wall. The cladding is a Swiss Pearl cementitious panel providing a modern and differentiated look to the building. "Cementitious panel cladding, like hardy panel, is unique to Canada with only a few other installations," says Westeinde. "Except for our other buildings, we are unique in Ottawa and perhaps Canada in using these specialized materials."

The architectural firm for the Base Building was Busby Perkins+Will from Vancouver. Architect Stephan Chevalier from Chevalier Morales Architectes, worked under Busby Perkins + Will and was in charge of the construction phase.

Designing the combination of the residential tower on top of the theatre posed some significant structural and acoustical challenges. "You basically have eight-storeys of condominiums balancing sideways on six steel beams on the podium," says Daniel McLean, the Project Manager from Aecon Buildings in Ottawa. "We essentially installed a residential tower on top of a theatre void (space)," says Chevalier. "Several steel beams support the tower partition of the building. Some are two metres high. This is very similar to constructing a bridge. The team and our structural engineer were very creative to suggest these structural strategies necessary to the idea of merging a theatre space and residential units. The acoustical separation between the residential tower and the theatre space is crucial in order to have the performances, and to provide at the same time a quiet environment for the residents. Each construction detail between these two building compartments was carefully looked at and controlled in order to minimize sound transmission through the residential area".

The total project cost was \$23.5 million, according to McLean. "The theatre construction was divided into three parts, one of which (the part Griffiths Rankin Cook Architects was responsible for) cost about \$5.5 million. The costs for the theatre as a whole were \$11.7 million," says Milner. "GCTC got excellent support from the Department of Canadian Heritage (\$3 million), the Province of Ontario (\$2.6 million), the City of Ottawa (\$1.3 million) and the Greenberg family (\$2.5 million)."

"This building provides a vibrant street-front presence with the theatre and complements the existing density in the area," says Westeinde. "This is an excellent area with everything you need right outside your doorstep—lots of fine restaurants and shops in a central location with all the amenities around the site. It also has close proximity to downtown and employment areas that easily allow you to live without a car."

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