

Waterdown Library and Civic Centre

For the Waterdown Library and Civic Centre, RDHA applied the studio's practice of customizing off-the-shelf components to create an extraordinary building from ordinary materials. This objective, coupled with the building's location — on the Niagara Escarpment, a rocky ridge overlooking Lake Ontario — established the impetus for the building's design. The multi-use facility, which includes a library as well as a heritage society archive, police and municipal community service outlets, and a seniors' recreation centre, unites various demographics in a single building.

Throughout, RDHA adapted standard, warrantied systems and materials, allowing for experimentation and tailored architecture, while keeping the budget reasonable and removing the risk from the client. Even the most standard elements such as strip lights were treated with a degree of care that adds elegance.

The building sits at a high point on an escarpment, where the earth begins to drop down towards to the lake, changing three metres in elevation from this high point to the edge of a main thoroughfare below. The low, linear volume cantilevers out from the slope like a hovering block of dolomitic limestone. Stone slab fins and panels clad the exterior, creating a bold, near-monolithic appearance that is inverted within, where the design team used the geography to establish a plan that is based on a series of accessible, sloping walkways that wind visitors through the library and down to the recreation rooms.

The internal topography heightens awareness of the surrounding landscape. It reaches its peak in the library, where a series of four terraces step up towards the highest point in the building, demarcated by a path of Douglas fir book stacks. At the top, a large, sky-lit reading atrium provides striking views of the escarpment. Outside, an outdoor reading terrace and a sloping green roof with flowering sedums intensify the connection to the site.

Within the large, open-concept room, RDHA has carefully carved out intimate spaces and maintained a high degree of control over the finishes and furniture to ensure a cohesive interior environment. The Douglas Fir accents in the entry corridor are recycled material from the now-demolished Hamilton Central Library branch. In the children's area, the ceiling dips down, creating a space with child-friendly technology and activities, dotted with baby Panton chairs. Quiet study rooms in the larger library have load-bearing, laminated walls made entirely of glass, uncannily supporting seemingly heavy ceilings that block the sound while preserving site lines. The special quality of the branch is underscored by a line of glass-enclosed, ethanol fireplaces, adjacent to a grouping of Paulin Orange Slice and Tulip chairs in ember hues.

The new library incorporates automatic check-in and return equipment that has allowed frontline staff to focus on programming and increased customer service. Also, the staff now have access to technology while in the staff workroom, enabling their time to become less constrained.

RDHA took similar care with integrating sustainable features. The building has a flowering orchard to shade the parking areas, bio-swales in parking lots and green spaces in conjunction with an underground rainwater collection, and low-VOC, recycled and local materials thoughtfully integrated throughout the design.

The Library's standard metrics were up in every category as of August 2016 over the same period in 2015. Increases in visitors to the branch (150.1%), circulation of library materials (physical: 47.7%; digital: 33.7%), program attendance (220.3%), computer sessions used (103.9%), wireless use (1885.7%) and new library cards generated all saw huge gains. Library customers love that they have such a beautiful place community workspace to call home. Some customers have remarked they were unaware that Waterdown had a branch library before, so the new facility has certainly caught the attention of many new-to-library individuals.

Project Credits

Building: The Waterdown Library and Civic Centre
Location: 163 Dundas Street West, Waterdown, Ontario, Canada
Date of Occupancy: November, 2015
Completion: August, 2016
Size: 23,500 square feet
Construction Budget: \$ 6.8 million CAD
Photographer: Tom Arban

Architects

RDHA: Tyler Sharp (Design Partner), Bob Goyeche (Managing Partner), Sanjoy Pal, Andrew Cranford, Soo-Jin Rim, Ivan Ilic

Client

The City of Hamilton and the Hamilton Public Library

Consulting Team

Landscape Architect: NAK Design
Structural Engineers: WSP / Halsall Ltd.
Mechanical / Electrical Engineering: Jain Associates Ltd.
Civil Engineers: Valdor Engineering Inc.
Contractor: Bondfield Construction

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About RDHA

RDHA is a Toronto-based studio specializing in architecture for the public realm. Originally founded in 1919, the firm has a wide-ranging body of work, encompassing corporate headquarters, industrial facilities, academic buildings, transportation facilities, recreation centres, libraries, secure buildings and interiors. In the past ten years RDHA has focused on producing intelligent, concept driven architecture of the highest caliber. The firm now feels and acts like an emerging design studio, while our 97-year legacy provides a solid backbone of technical and managerial experience. Consequently, we have re-emerged as one of Canada's most acclaimed design firms, winning more than forty major provincial, national and international awards - most notably three Governor General's Medals and the 2014 Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC) Young Architect Award for Design Partner Tyler Sharp.

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