

RESTORATION AND REHABILITATION OF THE EVERGREEN BUILDING

A PERSPECTIVE BY MARCUS LEYLAND OF OMICRON'S BUILDING REMEDIATION AND RESTORATION TEAM



The restoration and rehabilitation of the Evergreen Building comprises a \$9 million investment from a private investment company in this 27 year old masterpiece, designed by the great Canadian Architect, Arthur Erickson. This project represents a significant leap of faith in the value of the building, and considering its condition and architectural language, a significant progression in the Real Estate sector's understanding and appreciation of the legacy value of mid to late 20th Century Architecture.

It might have been easier, and a better investment to remove this unique building, and erase its vital contribution to the nascent story of Architecture in the Province. It would have been simple to replace its contextual response with yet another self conscious glass tower

with nothing more to say than to represent a simplistic play on plan, with an arbitrary tectonic form atop, as an apology to Architecture.

Instead, the combined imaginations and efforts of the new Owners, the City, the Heritage Lobby and the Arthur Erickson Conservancy have led to an opportunity that few realized possible even two years ago.

Erickson's Evergreen is to be given a further generation of life by the works now in progress. It is being "repositioned", to use that euphemism for commercially conscious rehabilitation, as a Class A "boutique" office location, with "unrivalled views over Coal Harbour and the North Shore Mountains". All this 'salesprecht' aside, the essence of the strategy is to breathe new life into the building, respecting the

integrity of the original Architect's intent, whilst making best use of contemporary technology to enhance the experience of the occupant and reduce the cost in use of the building to that fortunate inhabitant.

The value of the building, in terms of its heritage, is alluded to in the form of the City's Statement of Significance, and Schedule of Character Defining Elements. This semi-prescriptive document of course is intended merely to reflect an overview of the building, and a more sophisticated understanding has been developed from that point, in consultation between the Consulting Heritage Architect, Project Architects, the City, and the Owners.

Early in the process, an understanding was reached between the stakeholders and design team as to the essential Architectural Value of the building, and the priority with which we all held the various components of the City's Heritage listing. The maturity and reason the City has applied so far in their application of this potentially inflexible document is to their credit.

This process is essentially one based around the restoration and rehabilitation of the envelope, rehabilitation of glazing, and rehabilitation of the lobby. The nature of this Architecture is in the seamless logic between exterior and interior – a factor all too often forgotten in the consideration of older buildings of merit.



The geometric, repetitive, volumetric pattern of balconies to the north elevation contrasts with the horizontal rhythms of the street façades

The restoration of the façades represents a challenge, in that technical failure has left its mark on these key elements of expression, and cannot, and arguably should not, be removed. Cleaning and preserving concrete is no less a challenge than stone if it is to be done correctly. Whilst intended methods may be speculated on the back of desk top studies, much will be dependant upon what is found on site, with testing and sampling prerequisites in this process.

The balconies represent a more difficult problem where the destruction of the original assembly is necessary in order to resolve significant performance deficiencies. The thermal performance, weather resistance and ease of maintainability of the new mimetic technical solution are an acceptable rehabilitation of these areas.

The fenestration of the building has reached the end of its notional 'service life', meaning that it is now uneconomic to continue to maintain these assemblies, and that the impact on operational energy costs have become untenable by today's standards. The dilemma here is to determine on what grounds we might replace the glazing. In much older buildings, the difference between the original assemblies and present day equivalents is sufficiently vast to justify retention and continued operation and maintenance – at cost. With a building 27 years old, the situation

is less clear, as the systems are little different to their predecessors in terms of appearance and technology.

The Restoration Architect must consider both code issues and the thermal performance of the system, as against the intrinsic heritage value of the existing assembly and the principle of retention.

The decision in this instance has been for relatively costly replacement of most of the original glazing, except at ground floor level; where the original will be restored. This policy represents a balance between criteria; perhaps a compromise, but one that is mutually acceptable in the present day context.

The lobby presents a major dilemma in that the present day interior is not the original. This was replaced soon after the building's completion, on the orders of the previous owner. The ambiguity in the significance of the present day interior is a challenge to the conventional 'rules' of conservation that seek to recognize the value of subsequent alterations. In this instance the judgment has been that the present works are not of sufficient merit (or relevance to the original building), to justify retention.

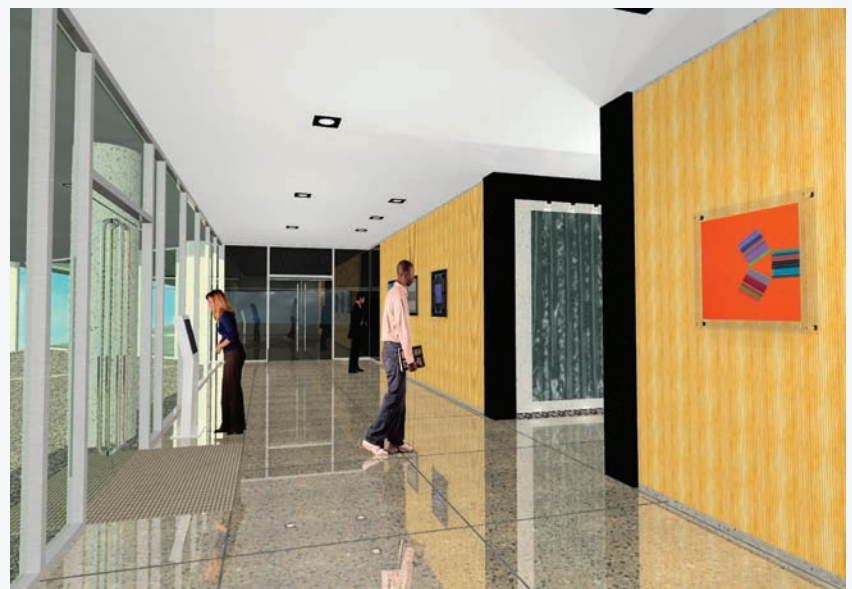
The policy is one of rehabilitation and re-creation of the intent of the original design using contemporary technology and materials. The manner in which creative thought

is deployed here is critical as it must be tempered against the broad commercial aspirations of the Owner, and an informed understanding of the Architectural significance of the space in the broader context of the building. The application on top of this solution of a temporary 'layer' of more aspirational thought, in the form of the installation of artworks and furnishings, will provide the relevance to the 'boutique' notion the Owner seeks to achieve - one that in time might be updated, without the wasteful and insensitive wholesale destruction of the Architectural interior that so often happens in the Commercial sector.

A final aspect of the project has equally resulted in conjectural thought, and challenged notions

of conservation. The rear of the building, at least at ground level, was originally conceived as a 'service' elevation of secondary importance. The urban context to this northeast elevation at the time of completion was diffuse, and utilitarian; in the form of rail yards and dirt roads.

Today, this context has been transformed by the City into a cosmopolitan boulevard with decorous planting and genteel sidewalks. Those parts of the building adjacent to this metamorphosis however remain the same in their function and character. This includes a small, informal parking lot and access lane. These are as simple, utilitarian and robust in their nature as the day they were created, albeit a little time worn.



Architectural rendering of lobby concept



Existing entrance on West Pender Street

In the interests of preserving the narrative that the building lends to the City's Heritage, the Owner wished to preserve this area in its historic manner. The City however wished this character transformed into the new urban language that now pervades this former service lane. The irony in this reversal in the usual juxtaposition of opinions is not common in conservation. We still await the outcome of the debate on this matter.

The Evergreen Building is not unique as a 'Heritage' project, but it does bring into profile the differences between how conventional conservation rules and assumptions may need to be revised in terms of more modern buildings and their technology. For example, matters of reversibility and apparency of

alterations are not easy to address with a monolithic concrete façade. Perhaps the most important issue however is that of the need to judge the value of detailed elements in terms of posterity. This is arguably simpler with a building that has the benefit of 200 years' distance between its invention and the present.

It is however fortunate that we have been given the opportunity for now to preserve this historic example of the work of a great Architect, and that in time the building's Heritage legacy will be understood more widely: perhaps in time for its next major restoration?