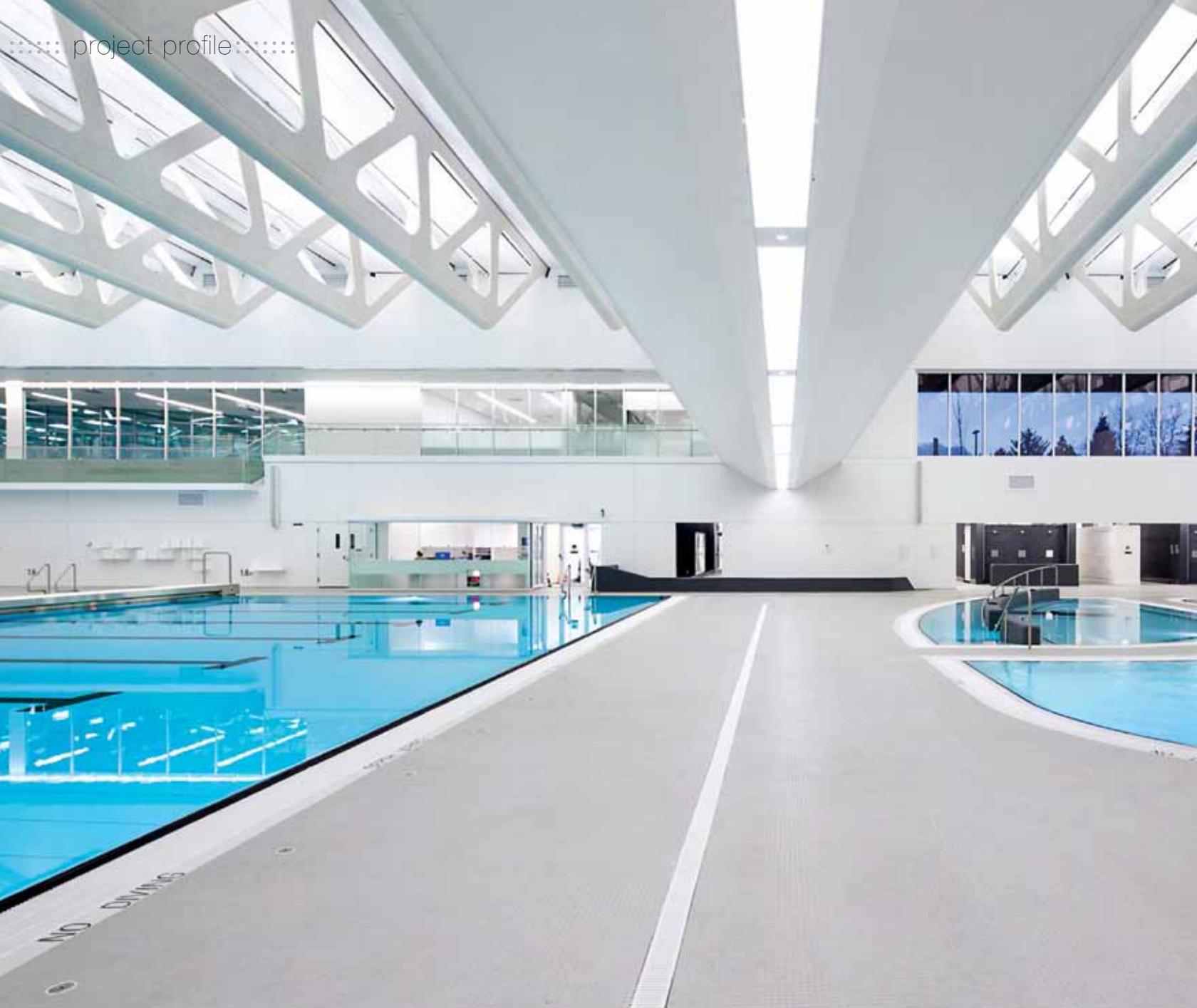


# creating aquatic magic

BY CHERYL MAH



The long desire to have a swimming pool in the Guildford community is now a reality. Boasting striking architecture and modern pool features, the newest aquatic facility in the City of Surrey has it all. The 75,000 square foot Guildford Aquatic Centre is a dynamic and inviting facility that will meet the recreational needs of a growing community with the capacity to host competitive swimming events.



Opened in March 2015, the facility features a 50 metre FINA certified lap pool, a leisure pool with a lazy river and toddlers area, water-slide and a family friendly universal change area. The project, which is an expansion to the existing recreational centre, also includes 2,600 square feet of expanded fitness space, a new lobby and 300 spectator seats.

Designed by Bing Thom Architects (BTA), the \$47 million facility is a destination aquatic facility that strives to reimagine contemporary pool design.

Light was the driving inspiration behind the design concept with the interior conceived as a “magic box.”

“We wanted to take a slightly different approach for the swimming pool to create this idea of a magic box by bringing in light very deliberately and in different ways,” says BTA principal Michael Heeney. “It’s a swimming environment unlike anything that I’ve seen before, certainly not in B.C.”

Modern pool design has typically concentrated on using large windows to achieve the

desire to have lots of natural light, which is counterintuitive

“One of the challenges with natatoriums is that there’s a tremendous amount of energy that gets pumped into them to heat the water and make the space warm,” says Heeney. “With large windows, loss of heat and other issues have to be addressed.”

Instead of large windows, the architects strategically used a ribbon of glazing at the deck height as well as a series of skylights around the perimeter of the space to bring in light.

“The natatorium is a white space — ephemeral Zen like space. It really reflects and bounces the light that comes into the space. On a sunny summer day, light from the skylights streaks down the walls to create these wonderful dramatic patterns of sunlight on the walls which then reflect into the pool,” says Heeney, adding another feature is the landscaping outside which will act as a stormwater retention pond and reflect additional light into the space.

Another key design driver was the prominent location of the facility along 152nd Street. From an urban design perspective, it was important for the facility to have a presence on that main artery.

“The site fronts 152nd street, which is one of the gateways into the City of Surrey, so we really wanted to give the complex a presence and an entry on the ceremonial street,” explains Heeney, and move away from the more suburban feel of the recreation centre which has its entry in the back opening up to a parking lot. “The bulk of the complex is also sunken into the ground so that the volume wasn’t overwhelming.”

Another new entrance was added off the parking lot on the west side. The two entrances are linked with a large concrete bridge that overlooks the natatorium.

“The bridge provides a wonderful viewing platform looking down into the pool areas,” he notes.

The eight lane competition pool had to meet all the stringent and technical requirements of FINA. BTA teamed up with Shape Architec-



ture to ensure the complexities of the aquatic components were delivered. Competition lighting levels were also required and the resulting truss lighting system creates a unique and defining feature in the natatorium.

“Instead of traditional glulam beams, we have these white stained laminated strand lumber trusses and they are filled with all of the building services,” says Heeney.

The 22 specialty trusses, prefabricated and installed by StructureCraft Builders, contain the mechanical ducts, sprinklers, electrical, and acoustic ceiling insulation. The large 95 foot long trusses also facilitate easy access for maintenance of the systems, which is normally difficult in a pool environment.

“The trusses were fully assembled offsite, trucked to the site and dropped into place... no scaffolding or interruptions to other trades. It worked incredibly well,” he says.

The exterior is equally striking with the use of different sized precast concrete panels.

“We had a very limited budget but we were able to use precast concrete with different

sizes, textures and colours. By mixing and matching, we got this wonderful patchwork of colours — different shades of grey on the facade,” says Heeney. “It’s a building that behaves different in the rain than it does in dry weather. There’s this latent dynamism integrated into the building.”

Construction of the centre began in late 2012 with substantial completion achieved in December 2014. Challenges included a fast track schedule and unanticipated poor soil conditions.

“We ended up taking advantage of the bad soil conditions and were able to add a two level parkade, one level below grade and one at grade which provides needed additional parking for the complex,” says Heeney, noting the busy recreation centre also had to be kept operational throughout construction.

This project is the latest by BTA in Surrey who also designed the iconic Central City Tower and City Centre Library.

“We’re huge fans of Surrey. They appreciate architecture perhaps more than many

The exterior is equally striking with the use of different sized precast concrete panels.

other municipalities,” says Heeney, noting the city (ie demographics, income levels) has changed significantly since the firm first started doing work there in the late 90s. “It’s a very progressive government both at the political and staff level. One of the most exciting and vibrant cities in the Lower Mainland in many respects.”

The Guildford Aquatic Centre is part of the city’s capital infrastructure program called Build Surrey, which is intended to facilitate and manage growth over the coming decade.

“Swimming pools are wonderful meeting places and are the perfect amenity for the growing communities in Surrey,” says Heeney. □