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HARBIN OPERA HOUSE, BY MA YANSONG OF MAD

CAN/US \$8.95 MAR/APR 2016
PM40048073 R09064 PRINTED IN CANADA



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ARCHITECTURAL GLASS THAT CAPTURES WATER'S MANY FORMS

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Harbin Opera House The unstoppable Ma Yansong's magnum opus lands in northern China. *By Michael Webb*

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Guildford Pool An aquatic centre in Surrey, B.C., bathes in light and ingenuity. *By Adele Weder*

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Philip J. Currie Museum A unique dinosaur museum rises up on a site rich in Mesozoic fossils. *By Omar Mouallem*

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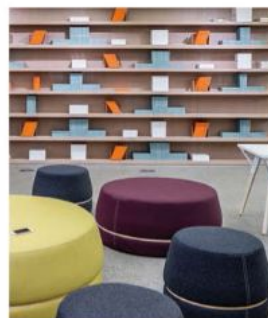
Bahá'í Temple Siamak Hariri's poetic temple in Chile is a legacy built to last 400 years. *By Noah Richler*

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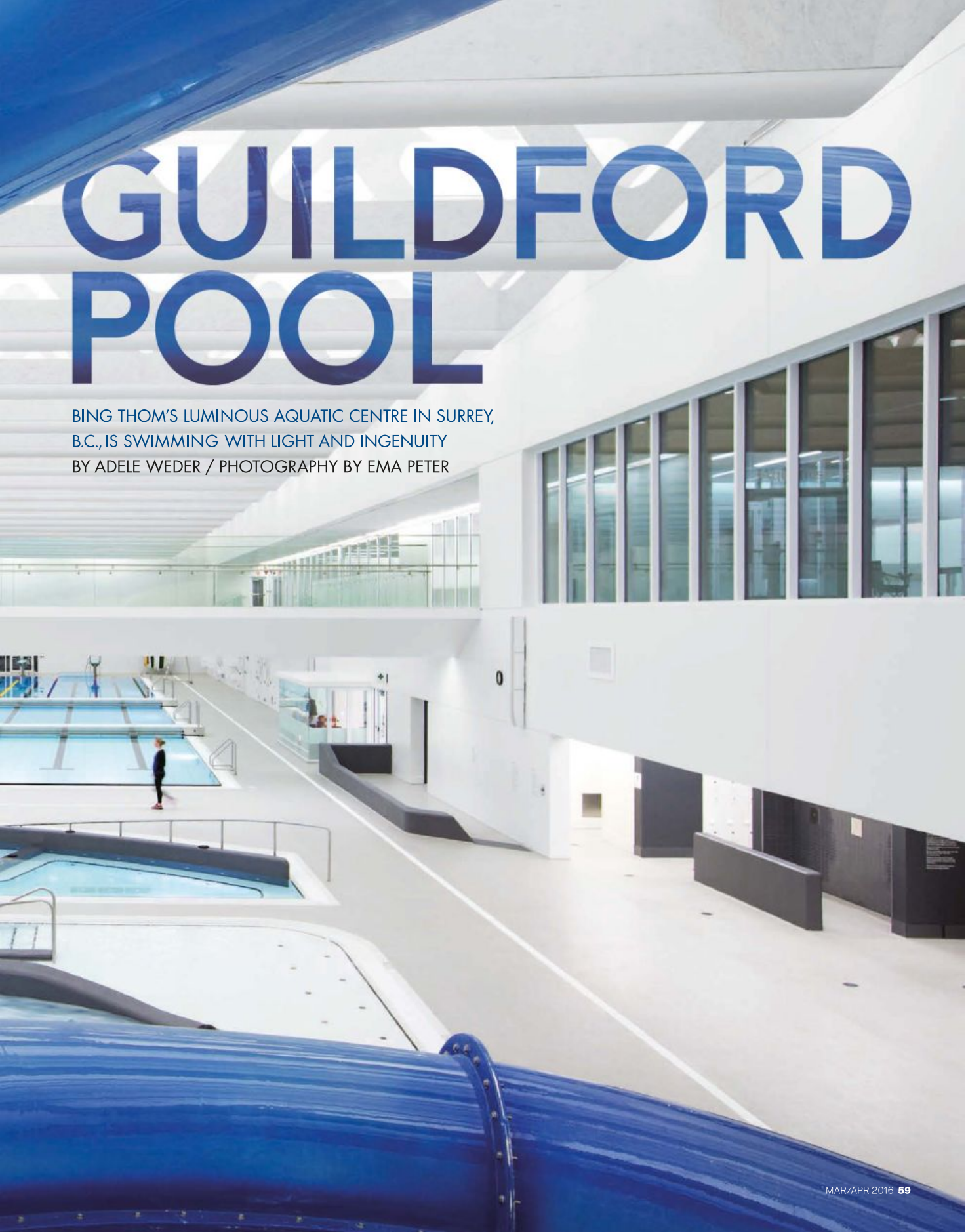


ICONIC
BUILDING
TWO

The centre integrates an Olympic-sized pool, a leisure pool, therapeutic waters, and a children's area with an inviting water slide.

GUILDFORD POOL

BING THOM'S LUMINOUS AQUATIC CENTRE IN SURREY,
B.C., IS SWIMMING WITH LIGHT AND INGENUITY
BY ADELE WEDER / PHOTOGRAPHY BY EMA PETER

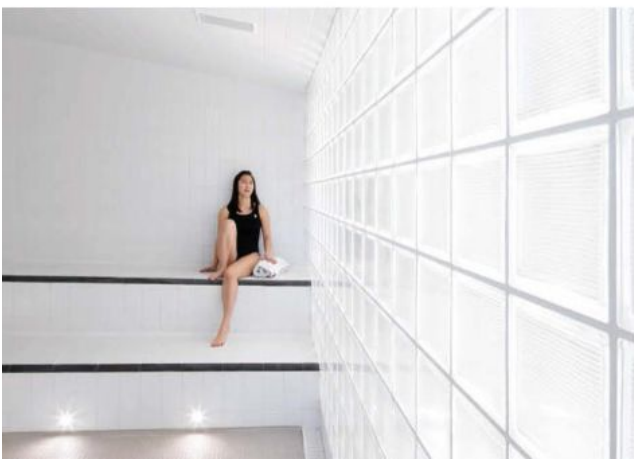




↑↑ Visitors enter the centre via a concrete bridge that spans above both pools.

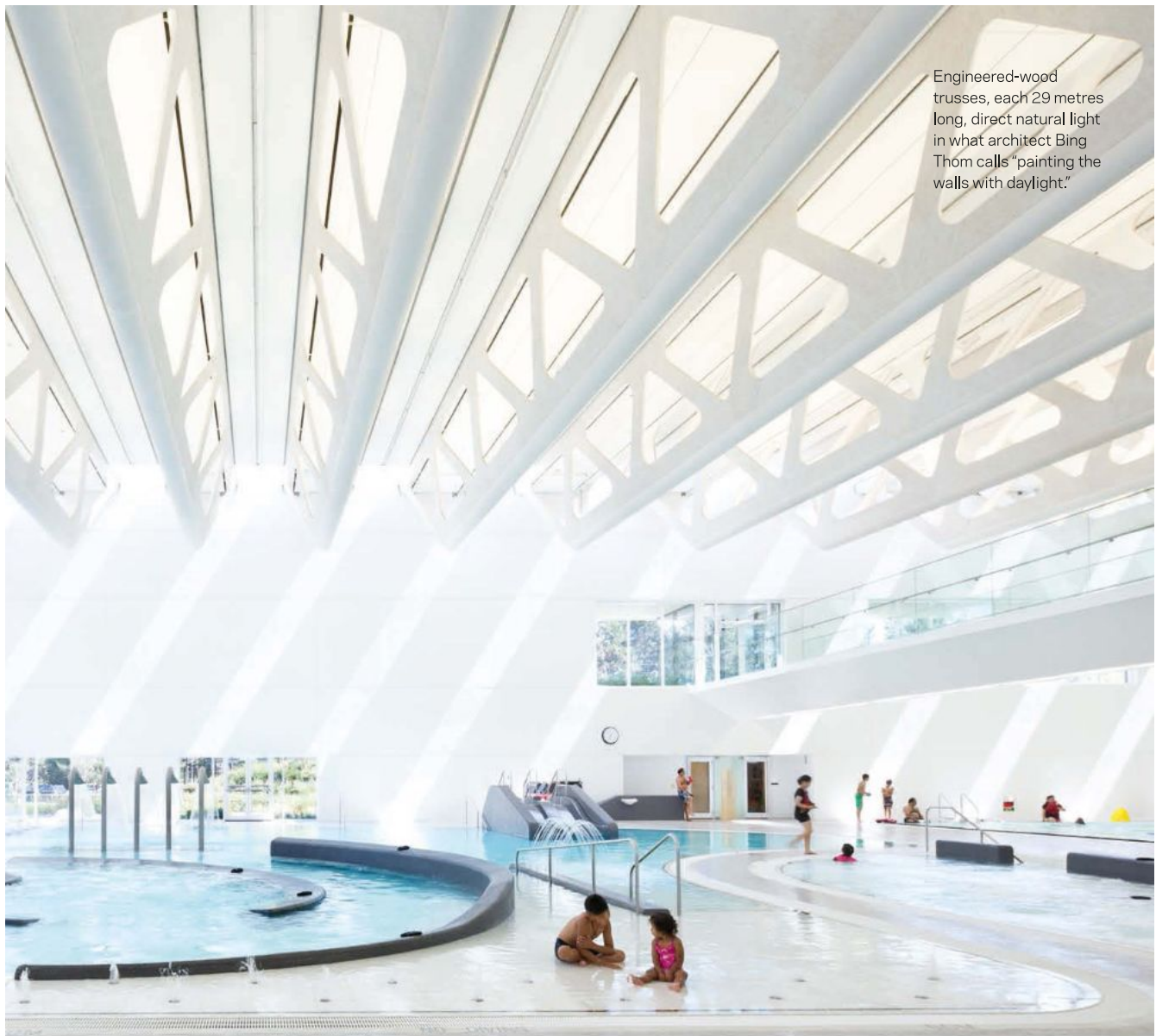
↑ Change rooms have clear sightlines, to reduce the incidence of theft.

↓ A calm environment prevails in both the main pools and the ancillary spaces.



A GIANT SHOEBOX MAY BE THE LOGICAL FORM for a natatorium, but the Guildford aquatic centre in Surrey, British Columbia, relays an imaginative approach that imbues it with a complexity worthy of its program. The 10,400-square-metre expansion of the existing recreational centre harmoniously knits together an Olympic-sized pool and a leisure pool with a water slide. Along with universal change rooms and a fitness centre, there is a sauna, a steam room and spectator seating for up to 300. Bing Thom Architects worked with Shape Architecture, both based in Vancouver, to meld these diverse elements into “a meditative space, like a library,” says lead architect Bing Thom. “We are playing with this mystery of the box.”

The public welcome begins outside, where the landscape has been transformed into a raised green buffer zone that separates the aquatic centre from a ferociously busy thoroughfare outside. Before reaching the main lobby at the nexus of the building, you are first invited – indeed, compelled – to stroll across a five-metre-wide concrete bridge overlooking the pools, a dramatic element that serves as a viewing gallery, a corridor and a means of breaking up the massive interior.



Engineered-wood trusses, each 29 metres long, direct natural light in what architect Bing Thom calls “painting the walls with daylight.”

The ceiling support system, aside from structural practicalities, is groundbreaking in its multi-tasking. Each of the 22 trusses has a series of mechanical elements concealed in its vertex, and the beam itself enables technical staff to walk on it to repair mechanicals or lighting. At most aquatic centres, the public has to live through maintenance shutdowns, when the pool is drained and scissor-leg ladders are placed in the empty pool to reach the ceiling. “It’s ridiculously great,” attests the centre’s coordinator, Jennifer Farrell.

The approach also resolves a perennial pool design conundrum: diffusion of light. Glass ceilings provoke jarring flares of sunlight for backstrokers, and glazed walls tend to make a space like this seem under lit. At Guildford, the skylights are instead positioned along the perimeter, supplemented by naturalistic, upward-facing track lighting concealed along the beams. The surfaces of the four-metre-wide trusses help to capture, diffuse and gently reflect the light. “The trusses act as giant light fixtures,” notes Shape Architecture principal Nick Sully. And as a dramatic aesthetic bonus, the afternoon light throws diagonal stripes onto the east wall, what Thom

calls “painting the walls with daylight.”

For mostly practical reasons, laminated strand lumber was used for the trusses, rather than the usual steel, as it stands up much better to chlorine-saturated air. On the aesthetic front, the white-stained and painted wood reads as warm and friendly – artisanal, even. You can see the texture and chip pattern of the wood underneath. That’s part of the plan: to make swimmers feel a sense of warmth, even amid chlorine and chaos. “I’m hanging on to that, creating calm spaces for people,” says Thom, “so even if it’s noisy, it’s calm spiritually.” **AZ** bingthomarchitects.com, shapearchitecture.ca

Architects: Bing Thom Architects (architect of record and design), Shape Architecture (associate architect, aquatic features) **Client:** The City of Surrey **Cost:** \$39 million **Engineers:** Fast + Epp (structural), AME Consulting Group (mechanical), Applied Engineering Solutions (electrical), CoreGroup Consultants (civil) **Size:** 10,400 square metres **Pool features and water-slide:** Acapulco **Tile:** Jensen Tile + Stone **Trusses:** StructureCraft Builders **Glazing:** Glastech Glazing Contractors **Completion:** February 2015