



Allard Hall – MacEwan University

by ZUZANNA WODZYNSKA

Faculty and students at MacEwan University in Edmonton, Alberta have a brand new space to look forward to in the new school year. Known during construction as the Centre for Arts and Culture, the building will open its doors this fall as Allard Hall. From a multi-campus institution with four locations around the city of Edmonton, the construction of this newest addition is the conclusion of the University's long-term plan of unifying in one downtown location.

"The Faculty of Fine Arts and Communications was held in the west end of Edmonton and the University had clearly outgrown it," comments David Atkinson, who until recently was president of MacEwan University and a driving force behind the project from conception to completion. "The existing facilities were badly dated, the programs couldn't grow, they couldn't take on any more students and new programming was difficult. There just wasn't sufficient space for it."

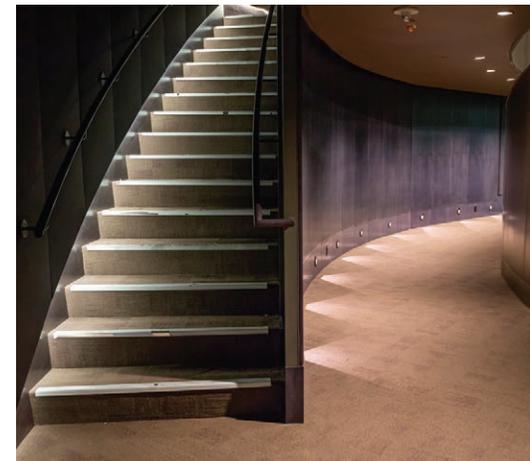
Those struggles are now behind them as Allard Hall answers all of its predecessor's deficiencies. "Allard Hall is a dynamic new addition to MacEwan University's city centre campus: consolidated, functional and sustainable," notes James Brown, project architect on the venture from Bing Thom Architects. "It is located on a major thoroughfare at the western edge of downtown Edmonton and is an elegant entrance landmark for both the University campus and the city."

The architecture team of design architect and architect of record, Bing Thom Architects of Vancouver, B.C., and associate architect Edmonton's Manasc Isaac Architects, worked together on Allard Hall, one of the last projects embarked upon by Bing Thom himself before his sudden passing late last year and one that will certainly add to his impressive architectural legacy.

Described simply, Allard Hall is two buildings connected by a large atrium, but that atrium is the defining feature of the project. "Bing Thom showed us a slide of a bush in the winter, with four or five nests among its leafless branches and announced that this was his concept for the building," remembers Atkinson. "A surprising statement at the time, but if you go into the atrium now and look up, you'll see exactly what he meant; a large airy space with a number of nooks and crannies, or nests, connected by open and irregular staircases." These nests are areas that allow for informal learning and are intended as meeting places for the students to be filled with public art.

The five-storey building was initially intended for the sole use of the Faculty of Fine Arts and Communications, but the project took off from there. The fifth floor was left purposely undeveloped with the possibility of housing other university programming needs.

The previous centre for arts and culture had each space in a silo, away from the others, partially due to the



design but also due to the building code. "We were able to use methods, which allowed for the main feature stairs to be the main exit stairs and thus open up for the possibility of a large, student-focused space," notes Brown. "Given the scale of the building, we wanted to break it into two parts and develop an interior street which stitches back the city grid on this site." Moreover, in keeping with the overall building's purpose, it was designed to double as the Hall's fourth performance space.

While the atrium was intended as its crowning glory from inception, Allard Hall was redesigned at the start of construction. Due to challenging market conditions in Edmonton, the project suffered some serious cost overruns at tender. "To keep the project going, the design team working with the client redesigned the facade, the main structural system and many of the interior spaces to bring the project on budget," says Brown. "This was achieved while the building was under construction and with no loss to the program for the University."

Part of this redesign was the decision to make the primary structural system post-tensioned in concrete, an interesting choice for this style of project. "Although unbonded post-tensioning is most frequently used in concrete flat plate buildings such as condominiums where the spans tend to be fairly consistent and the floor plates repetitive, this building has a lot of irregular geometry and areas with generous spans," notes Tanya Luthi, the lead structural engineer on the project from Fast + Epp. "Post-tensioned [PT] structures have been

around since the 1940's but no building in the city of Edmonton had been built using PT in decades, primarily due to concerns about durability after some well-publicized tendon failures."

Despite the PT industry's corrections of these problems, the fear of repeated history stayed. "MacEwan University showed real leadership in their willingness to break with local tradition," adds Luthi. "The whole team, from the owners to the design consultants and contractors have helped bring this technology back to the Alberta market."

Despite challenges, Allard Hall was finished a month ahead of schedule with a grand opening slated for September 27 of this year. **A**

LOCATION

11110-104 Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta

OWNER/DEVELOPER

MacEwan University

ARCHITECT OF RECORD/ DESIGN ARCHITECT

Bing Thom Architects

ASSOCIATE ARCHITECT

Manasc Isaac Architects

GENERAL CONTRACTOR

Clark Builders

STRUCTURAL CONSULTANT

Fast + Epp

MECHANICAL CONSULTANT

MCW/Hemisphere Engineering Inc.

ELECTRICAL CONSULTANT

Stantec Consulting Ltd.

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

Dialog

TOTAL SIZE

430,000 square feet

TOTAL COST

\$180 million