

project profile: case study

centennial college a-building

LOCATION	INDUSTRY	DESIGNER	DEALER	PRODUCTS FEATURED		
Toronto, Ontario Canada	Higher Education	DIALOG	The Collective	R&B Expansion & Casegoods Thesis Training HiSpace	Complements District Filing & Storage	Routes Seating: Around, Variable Zones



the challenge:

Melding western and Indigenous design.

The Centennial College design process for the expansion of their A-Building that houses their School of Engineering Technology and Applied Science programs (ICET) on their Progress campus is an embodiment of the College’s commitment to Indigenous Truth and Reconciliation. Key to this process was ensuring the final building would embody a ‘two-eyed seeing’ approach of incorporating western and Indigenous design principles into a cohesive whole. Centennial commissioned Smoke Architecture, an Indigenous architectural firm and DIALOG Design, a multidisciplinary design firm, to execute their vision. Together, they created a vibrant, functional, and usable space where everyone feels they belong.



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the solution:

Supporting Indigenous ways of connecting, teaching and being.

The building's experience begins with the landscaping. Native plantings surround and complement the building, providing it and its occupants an ecological sense of place. From there, the orientation of the structure aligns with the cardinal directions, situating the building and traffic within it to flow from the east entrance with the sunrise, westward to the sunset. It also connects back to the land outside by providing outdoor spaces that mirror the indoor space. Stadium seating inside is mirrored inside and out providing opportunities for students to learn, connect and gather through all four seasons. Honoring the planet, Centennial's A-Building is the first mass timber, net-zero, WELL certified, LEED Gold Academic institution in Canada. The interior design inspiration draws upon the materiality of surrounding region. Patterns found in traditional quillwork, beadwork and drum lacings, and those seen in nature like fish and snake scales are reflected in architectural elements inside the space like textured walls, ceiling baffles and signage. Additionally, red – a significant color in Indigenous practice that speaks to knowledge – is also incorporated as accent colors on furniture and in the tiles on the walls. The heart of the building is its ceremonial space, or Basket Room. Circular, with walls wrapped in a wood finish that reflects the geometric patterns on the outside of the building, it provides space for gathering and connection.

Throughout the space, active collaboration areas provide opportunities for students to connect, study, or have a quiet moment of respite. A range of soft seating and community tables – at seated and counter height – support ways to connect in comfort. The use of natural materials is carried beyond the timber structure into furniture choices like lounge chairs with wood arms and tables with wood legs in a natural finish. Office areas are modeled on the shape and activity patterns of a Haudenosaunee longhouse, a traditional Indigenous structure used by people of this region. Focused activity is supported along the sides of the space via workstations with height-adjustable desks and task seating, while private offices and informal meeting areas can be found in the centre. Ultimately the goal was to create a range of places for people to work where they're comfortable and feel included. Says Eladia Smoke, Lead Architect of Smoke Architecture, "This space is a demonstration of how strong a place can be when narratives from this land are brought through into an actual place." Concludes Henri Dekker, Leader, Strategic Facilities Planning and Operations, Centennial College, "When students came into the building, they immediately took it over. They felt at home and comfortable right from the start – which is a true sign of the project's success. We will take these learnings as the benchmark for what we do in the future across our other four campuses."

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