

Centennial College Celebrates Mass-Timber Opening at Progress Campus

September 22, 2023 by Anthony Teles

[Centennial College](#) has announced the completion of the [A-Building Expansion](#) at its Progress Campus, located at 940 Progress Avenue in Scarborough. This project, overseen by [EllisDon](#) and designed by [DIALOG Architects](#) and [Smoke Architecture](#), is notable as Canada's first higher-education facility to be zero carbon and constructed with mass timber. The expansion adds approximately 14,000m² of both new and renovated space to the campus, which comprises 20 buildings.



A-Building Expansion at Progress Campus, image courtesy of DIALOG

Introduced in February, 2020, the \$105-million project's plans for the A Block Building expansion were unveiled in May, 2020, detailing a 6-storey institutional building connecting to an existing 3-storey structure, designed to house a mix of student classrooms and administrative offices. As construction progressed, live camera feeds from the site provided regular updates on the construction progress. By March, 2023, the project was nearing completion, with landscaping and exterior finishing touches finalized by July.

Craig Applegath and Chen Cohen, Partners at DIALOG, released statements to mark the completion of the project.

Applegath's statement reads "What was refreshing about this project was Centennial College's requirement that the design be rooted in an Indigenous notion of natural systems and the poetry of Indigenous culture. The idea of an Indigenous narrative was important for our team, and inspired key elements of the design that were contemplated through this lens. Our team also focused on exploring ecological narratives in the design of this project, especially as improving the wellbeing of our environment is central to DIALOG's mission. We wanted students, faculty and visitors of all backgrounds to be able to walk away with a new perspective and education from this new space."

Cohen's statement reads "We're incredibly excited to see the Centennial College A-Building Expansion become a reality. It was very important to us that this project highlights traditional First Nation Principles, while also celebrating the rich diversity of Centennial's students and faculty. Our aim was to create inclusive, welcoming, and accessible learning and working environments that allow all individuals to thrive."



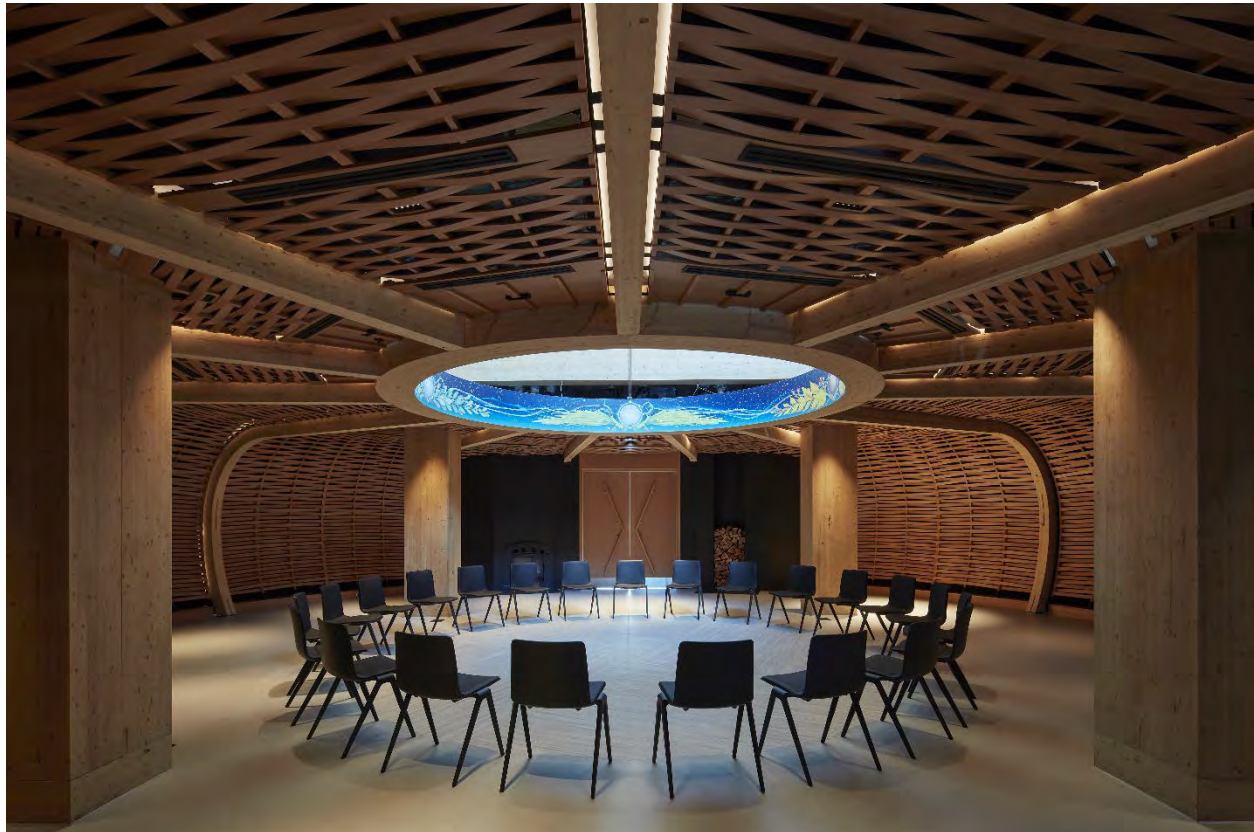
A-Building Expansion at Progress Campus, image courtesy of DIALOG

The A-Building Expansion, covering 12,356m² of new construction and 1,486m² of renovations, is inspired by the Mi'kmaq concept of "Two-Eyed Seeing." This philosophy blends Indigenous wisdom with Western perspectives. The building's eastern entrance, which aligns with regional Anishinaabe architectural traditions, leads to the Wisdom Hall's staircase. This space not only serves a functional purpose but also resonates with the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe creation stories.

The building's design, crafted using advanced parametric software, has a facade intended to resemble fish scales, adding dynamism to the structure. Additionally, it enhances natural air circulation by integrating the envelope at specific corners.

Central to the building is the Indigenous Commons, a dome-shaped area influenced by Anishinaabe Roundhouse principles. This space, opening to a courtyard with native plantings, is envisioned as a hub for cultural ceremonies and fosters a sense of community.

Eladia Smoke, Principal of Smoke Architecture, spoke about how the practice, that provides architectural services for First Nation and Indigenous projects, coordinated with DIALOG on the Indigenous aspects of the design. "When we listen carefully to our knowledge carriers and Elders, the students, faculty, and people who will do work here, the places we create have life. This is a place that remembers its stories. This is a heart building. Teachings about ode' (heart) are critical, as a sincere commitment to uphold our responsibilities to each other and the life systems that support us."



Indigenous Commons, image courtesy of DIALOG

Sustainability is integral to the A-Building Expansion. The use of mass timber, an alternative to traditional steel or concrete, aligns with Indigenous teaching lodges and enhances energy efficiency. The building's framework employs glulam posts and beams made from sustainably sourced mass timber, which support floor panels crafted from cross-laminated timber. The timber used equates to powering about 500 homes for a year and offsets the emissions of 1,000 cars. EllisDon indicates that this expansion might pave the way for more widespread use of mass timber in Toronto's post-secondary institutions.

Notably, the building is recognized as one of Canada's higher-education facilities that boasts LEED Gold certification, while also being WELL certified. Advanced mechanical systems, paired with a well-insulated exterior, work cohesively to minimize energy consumption. Furthermore, solar photovoltaic systems cater to approximately 5% of the building's energy needs.



The timber frame and ceiling architectural feature, image courtesy of DIALOG

The expansion features diverse academic spaces, including flexible classrooms that support both active learning and Indigenous teaching methodologies. The School of Engineering Technology and Applied

Science (SETAS) benefits from new labs, and various informal spaces promote student collaboration and interaction.



Indoor space of the A-Building Expansion, image courtesy of DIALOG

The A-Building Expansion at Centennial College's Progress Campus strives for architectural innovation combined with environmental consciousness. As Canadian institutions evolve and grow, such projects provide insights into sustainable design strategies.

"We are grateful to DIALOG, Smoke Architecture, EllisDon and all of our project partners for helping to bring Centennial's vision for A-Building to life," Dr. Craig Stephenson, President and CEO of Centennial College, declared in a statement. "Only by design could the expansion embody the College's Commitments to Truth and Reconciliation the way that it does, along with establishing inclusive spaces and prioritizing environmental stewardship amid the climate calamity. A-Building gives us a standard-setting blueprint for future projects like this at Centennial."

UrbanToronto will continue to follow progress on this development, but in the meantime, you can learn more about it from our Database file, linked below. If you'd like, you can join in on the conversation in the associated Project Forum thread or leave a comment in the space provided on this page.
