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The 10 Best Canadian Architecture Projects of 2018

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Canada is as sprawling as it is diverse, so capturing the architectural zeitgeist is no small feat. But Azure's editors are up for the task. Here – from Calgary's library of the future to a new Indigenous student centre at Toronto's Seneca College – is the best Canadian architecture of 2018.

Best Multi-Unit Project: 62M Condominium



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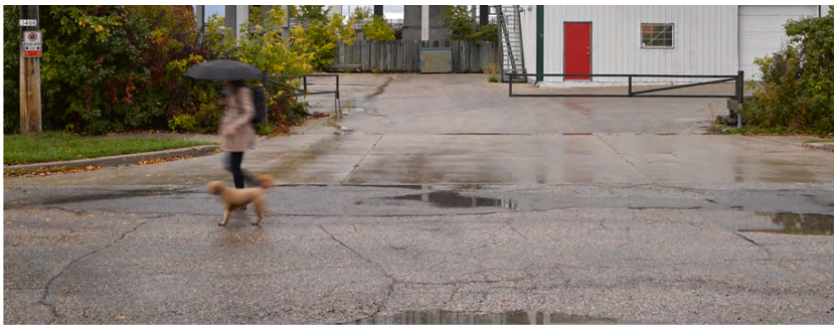
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Everyone in Winnipeg has their own name for it – the flying saucer, the UFO, even the hockey puck. But the official name of the floating disc on the fringes of the city’s downtown – a condominium complex designed by local firm [5468796 Architecture](#) – is 62M. Comprising two layers of 20 pie-shaped apartments resembling Trivial Pursuit game pieces, the innovative circular building planted on 20 sculptural columns radiating around its perimeter has become an unexpected fixture on the city’s skyline.



According to 5468796’s Sasa Radulovic, “we were not chasing iconography” when his team designed the building. But in creating the complex’s distinct shape to resolve the challenges of both a tight budget and an unpromising industrial site by the side of a highway, immediate iconic status is exactly what the firm achieved. The coup de grace is a two-storey jewel box of a suite at the top of the building’s central shaft, which is let out for temporary stays and just may be Winnipeg’s coolest Airbnb unit.

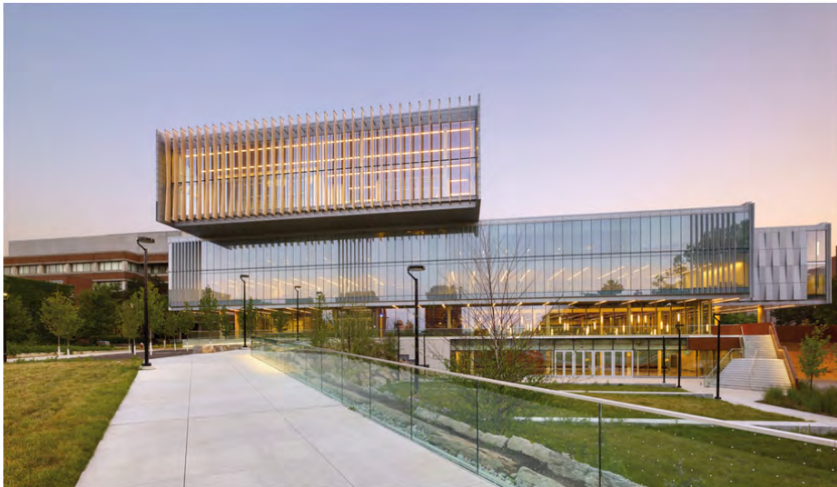
Why we like it: 62M is a textbook example of how site and budget challenges can inspire innovative, even delightful solutions – and a reminder that enticing, effective housing needn’t be cookie-cutter in nature nor expensive to construct.

Best Collaborative Effort: York University’s Student Centre

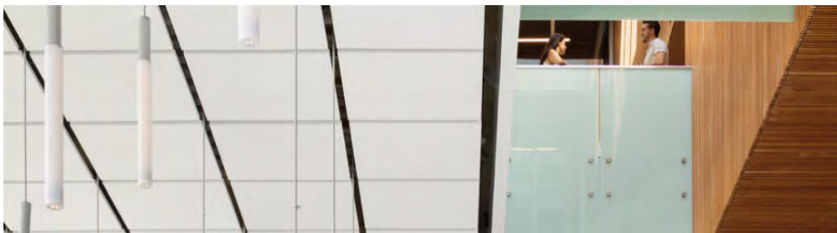




“By students, for students and founded on the promise of community” is how Toronto’s York University describes its new main-campus Student Centre. Designed to be open, accessible and accommodating to the institution’s 50,000 students – both domestic and international – the striking building is a perfect example of collaboration done right.



In a 2013 referendum, the student body voiced its desire for a building devoted solely to its needs. The university listened and brought in the Toronto office of **CannonDesign** to realize the project. The architects and designers consulted with students every step of the way, conducting countless surveys and engagement exercises to ensure that every need was addressed. The end result is an immediately iconic landmark on the school’s campus, one that promises to foster the sense of belonging and community that students require to thrive.





Opened in September, the 11,705-square-metre structure is a modern massing of four asymmetrically stacked volumes clad in high-performance crystal-clear glazing. This transparency is not a mere design move but a deliberate one, obliterating any obstacles to establish a strong visual connection inside and out. It was also a sustainable choice, allowing for natural illumination over artificial lighting wherever possible. Inside, concrete, steel and warm wood comprise the material palette and students have complete access to a multitude of user-led programs including study and meeting rooms, multi-faith prayer spaces, lounges, gender-neutral washrooms, showers and bicycle parking.

Why we like it: By working closely with the students who would ultimately use the space, CannonDesign has delivered a building that is visually stunning, completely accessible and, as the firm itself puts it, “one of the most inclusive university buildings in the world.”

Best Outdoor Pool: Borden Park Natural Swimming Pool



One of the boldest projects we've seen this year is an Edmonton recreational facility designed by **GH3**. The first chemical-free outdoor pool in the country (and only the second in North America), the Borden Park Natural Swimming Pool uses natural filtration processes to control the quality of its water.

Two systems filter the water: one is a biological-mechanical system housed in a long strip of a building that frames the pool on its south side. The gabion-walled structure also houses change rooms and staff areas and opens directly to a concrete pool deck that gradually extends into the water, enhancing the natural vibe by recreating the effect of a sandy beach. The deck also includes a series of showers, which much be used before visitors can enter the pool (no sunscreen or shampoos containing phosphorous can contaminate the water). The facility is designed to accommodate up to 400 swimmers, including in a kiddie pool.





At the north end of the pool is the second water-cleansing system, along with three pools filled with stone, gravel, sand, botanical elements and Zooplankton. Containing blue water iris, marsh marigolds, duckweed, water lilies and cattails, these “constructed wetlands” not only add to the quality of the water, but to the natural beauty of this ambitious project.

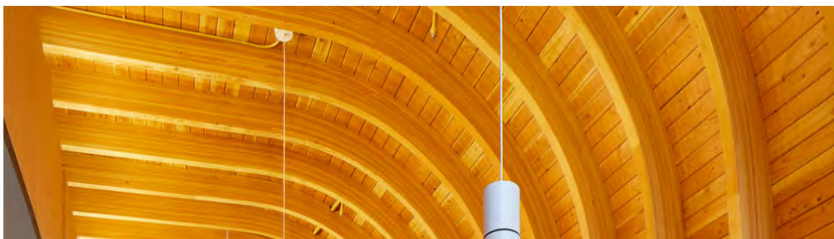
Why we like it: Designed to evoke the natural topography of the Prairies and the North Saskatchewan River, the pool isn't just a landmark for the city, but a benchmark for architectural excellence and environmental leadership nationwide.

Best Implementation of Native Building Practises: Seneca College's Odeyto Indigenous Centre



Photos: Tom Arban

As the architects behind the new Indigenous centre on Seneca College's Newnham Campus in Toronto describe it, “Odeyto – the Anishinaabe word for ‘good journey’ – is a space where First Nation, Metis and Inuit students can gather not only to practice their traditions, but also to find new friendships and family when away from their communities.” To that end, the 1,800-square-foot facility – a renovation of and addition to an existing concrete building by [Gow Hastings Architects](#) and [Two Row Architect](#) – features a ribbed, canoe-like structure that beckons visitors from the outside and provides a “warm, womb-like” interior. In addition to a vessel resting on its side, the curved, purpose-built extension alludes to a Haudenasaunee longhouse, while two red doors at either end, aligned to the summer solstice, honour Canada's missing and murdered Indigenous women.





As these design features suggest, considerable Indigenous knowledge, incorporated in consultation with Two Row Architect, was embedded in Odeyto. From the structure's alignment with celestial cycles to the facility, craft and attention to landscape on display, the elements constitute a space that is both immediately recognizable as Indigenous and, in the words of Mark Solomon, the college's associate dean of student services and Indigenous education, a tangible "form of reconciliation" in Seneca's – and Canada's – ongoing truth and reconciliation process.





Why we like it: In a year when Canada's contribution to the Venice Biennale focused on Indigenous architecture, Odeyto pays more than lip service to the implementation of Native building practices, giving gorgeous physical form to an important – and long-neglected – aesthetic.

Best Library: New Central Library



In Calgary, there's palpable excitement around [Snohetta](#) and [Dialog](#)'s New Central Library, which [Azure](#) named one of its [Canadian buildings to watch in 2018](#). The enthusiasm, however, isn't based around the energization of the East Village; Kasian's National Music Centre, Allied Works' Studio Bell and condos (and lots of 'em) arrived long ago. Nor is centred around a love for the printed page, even if the NCL houses 500,000 items. Rather, Calgarians are hailing the library's placemaking power, celebrating the intersection of thoughtful architecture and civic services.





Prior to its opening, the guitar-pick-shaped building's exterior, with its modular hexagonal glazing refracting the Calgary skyline, received plenty of adulation. But the conversation has since shifted inward: The atrium, with 85-foot-high ceilings crisscrossed by wooden walkways, is the new heart of East Village. Punctuated by art from Treaty 7 First Nation, the library balances its wide-open atrium with numerous satellite areas, including a performance hall, a digital common (with studios and podcast recording suites), study rooms, pods, reading nooks, a café and tech resources for new Canadians and those seeking jobs. Welcome to the library of today.



Why we like it: With 50,000-plus people passing through on weekends, the New Central Library is

already a success – and a template for the civic spaces of tomorrow. Bonus for housing an entire floor dedicated to the city itself.

Best Event Space: Espace C2

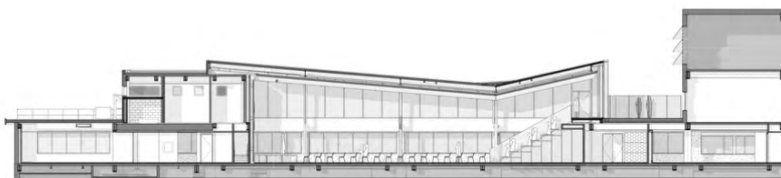


Best known as the hippie landmark where John and Yoko spent a week in bed, Montreal's newly revamped Fairmont The Queen Elizabeth Hotel has become one of the city's top luxury and business destinations – thanks in no small part to **Espace C2**, a rooftop event space designed by **Sid Lee Architecture**. It is the property's literal crown jewel.

Dropped into the roof of the building, the terrace-wrapped, double-height glass cube is topped with a dramatic butterfly roof. The main inspiration for the flexibility of the space within it was Sid Lee's own annual C2 creative conference: a unique networking experience that includes team-building workshops in which participants sit in chairs suspended from the ceiling, whimsical "labs" require attendees to assemble giant layer cakes and the odd circus performance is thrown in for good measure.



Built-in features at either end of the interior rise into the structure's soaring wings, echoing the angles of the roofline overhead. A grandstand ascends into the glass cube at one end of the space, while the opposite side is anchored by a stage and a three-by-six-metre LED screen. The auditorium's buttressed columns connect with the original building's structure to create the floating effect of the roof.



Why we like it: The building-within-a-building effect is very cool, while the views from the terrace of the city's skyline were too good an opportunity to miss.

Best Residence: Treow Brycg House



The one house on our list of favourite Canadian buildings is by emerging star **Omar Gandhi**. Based in Toronto and Halifax (and having just completed a teaching stint at Yale), Gandhi is building projects that update the vernacular of their respective locales. Treow Brycg House is a striking example. The two-storey, 230-square-metre residence, which is featured in our **Jan/Feb 2019 issue**, reinterprets the gambrel-roofed barn common to its setting: the town of Kingsburg, Nova Scotia.





A black steel façade wraps one side of the home, a row of hurricane-proof windows opens up the opposite and a glass-enclosed vestibule provides the dramatic entry. Inside, the palette is sleek and minimal, with restrained hits of cobalt blue used to marvellous effect.



Why we like it: We always appreciate a house that reinvents the way we think about living– and Treow Brycg is just that type of project.

Best Meditation Space: Temple of Light





What's not to love about the Temple of Light at the Yasodhara Ashram in Kootenay Bay, British Columbia? Fittingly evoking a delicate lotus bud in mid bloom, the structure is a harmonious expression of both its breathtaking surroundings – it's perched on a hillside surrounded by a forest and overlooking a lake – and the design genius of its creators, [Patkau Architects](#).



Comprised of eight petal-like panels that gracefully dance around each other, the new sanctuary is a literal and figurative celebration of light, resilience and perseverance. After a fire destroyed the original ashram in 2014, the foundation wanted to renew the temple site with as little impact on the environment as possible. Masters of material research and manipulation, Patkau developed a structural system that relied on a single shell formation repeated eight times. Made from CNC-cut engineered timber, the panels were prefabricated offsite and delivered to the remote location via ferry, where they were attached to one another in a circular arrangement. Lifted gracefully at the bottom, each module allows light to filter through on all eight sides, with an oculus at the apex furthering the connection to sky and light.

Why we like it: Sculptural, elegant and beautiful, the temple is a stunning complement to its surroundings that even non-yogis will appreciate

Best Timber Building: The Dock Building





A lantern to the sea and a lantern to the land. That's how **Michael Green Architecture** envisioned the Dock Building for the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club. The low-slung edifice consists of two intersecting wedge-shaped volumes positioned so that their translucent facades cast a glow in different directions come dusk. The project's hardy materials and simple massing nod to the industrial heritage of the Jericho Beach site and to the utilitarianism of the program.

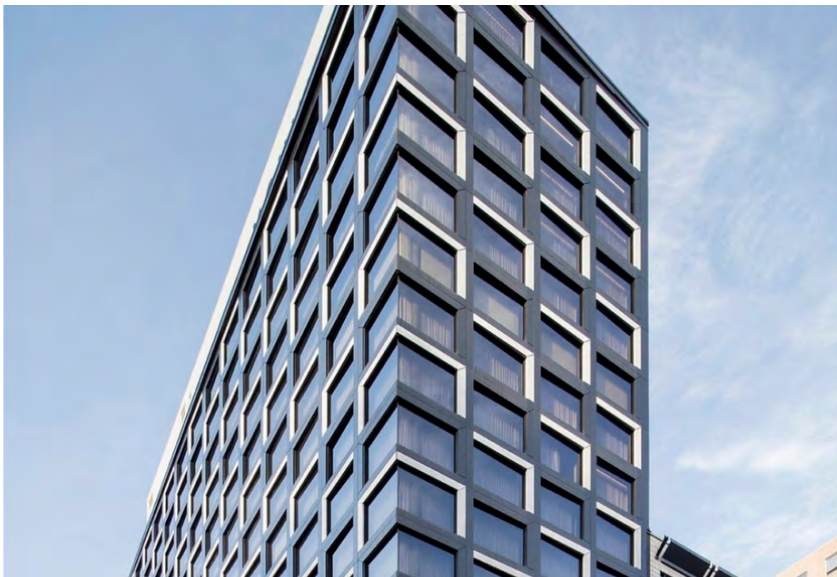




The building serves a large sailboat marina, with washrooms and showers, management offices, instruction space for kids and workshops for maintaining boats, sails and gear. White standing-seam panels give the building its coastal vibe. Facing the land, glulam and polycarbonate expanses bring light into the workshop spaces; facing the sea, garage doors and glazed offices provide access inside. The interior features a single finish almost exclusively: construction-grade plywood that exudes warmth. Completed on a tight budget, the Dock Building shows that elegant architecture is always possible.

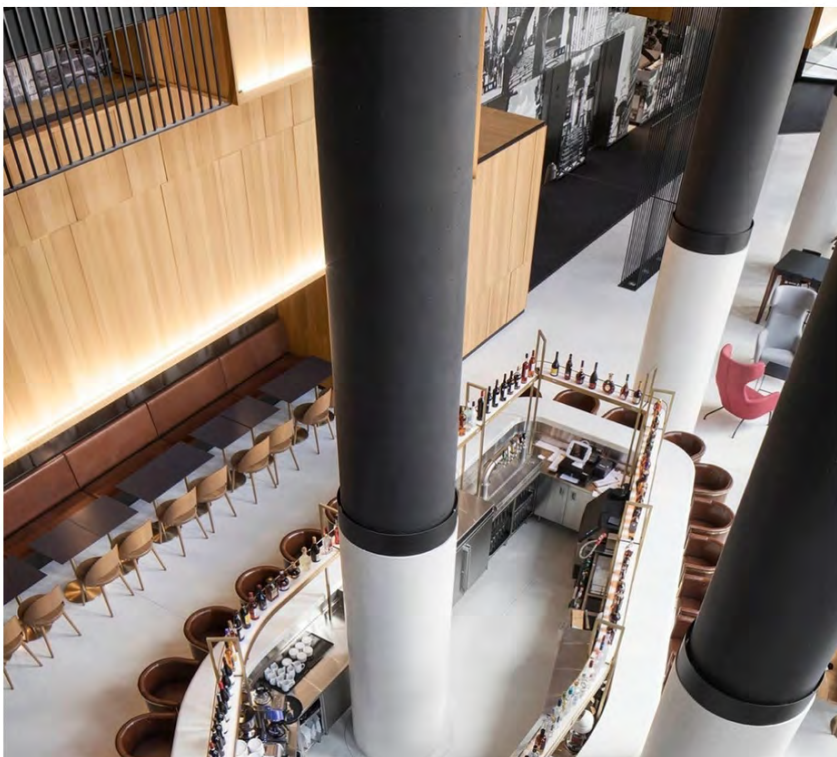
Why we like it: Michael Green Architecture is best-known for its innovations in tall-timber buildings in B.C. and beyond. We love the attention to detail at this smaller, more poetic scale.

Best Hotel: Hotel Monville





If you haven't been in a while, Vieux Montreal is long overdue for a visit. In addition to a host of new eateries and cultural destinations – which are scrubbing its rep as a tourist trap – the Old Port is also adding modernism to its stock of historic chapels and colonial mansions. Principal among its new additions is the ACDF-designed Hotel Monville, which rises from a plot adjacent to the Palais de Congres, itself an icon of Montreal's contemporary architecture. From a distance, the 14,900-square-metre, 263-room building is defined by its black-and-white trompe l'oeil facade, with white-framed glazing giving certain windows the illusion of depth.





But approach the building and it's a celebration of all things Montreal. At street level, the eye is drawn to the building's dramatic lobby, which, thanks to a three-storey curtain wall, almost seems like part of the streetscape. Dramatic monochromatic columns lend a cathedral-like air, with stacked oak volumes adding much-needed warmth. Peer in closer and the space is organized into DJ booths, a terrazzo-lined bar and gathering areas dotted with leather banquettes, with details that celebrate Montreal: spot lighting designed by Lambert & Fils, murals by artist Valerie Jodoin Keating, photos of the city framed on the walls and even uniforms designed by Frank & Oak. And that's not mentioning the ultra-luxurious rooms, which, thanks to the building's height, offer some of the best views of Montreal.

Why we like it: Old Montreal just got a swoon-worthy living room and it's magnifique.

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