

## Preservation — Alive and Well in Manitoba

by Don Lovell

Winnipeg has one of the largest inventories of turn-of-the-century office and warehouse buildings waiting empty for their turn to be renovated, retrofitted and revitalized. This rich resource of majestic buildings has not been totally neglected and the efforts to preserve the built environment while instilling new economic and social life vary as significantly as the reasons for conservation.

Les Stechesen, a Winnipeg architect, combined his interest in older buildings and love for interior design detailing, with the renovation of a 1912 commercial building. The three storey brick building was remodelled to provide four levels of boutiques, restaurants and offices centering around a covered interior court complete with balconies and circulation route. The complex renamed 'The Courtyard' features Mexican tile to add warmth and colour to the floors while interior brick walls were stripped and sandblasted. Austrian bentwood chairs, a fountain, plants and a fig tree complement the atmosphere.

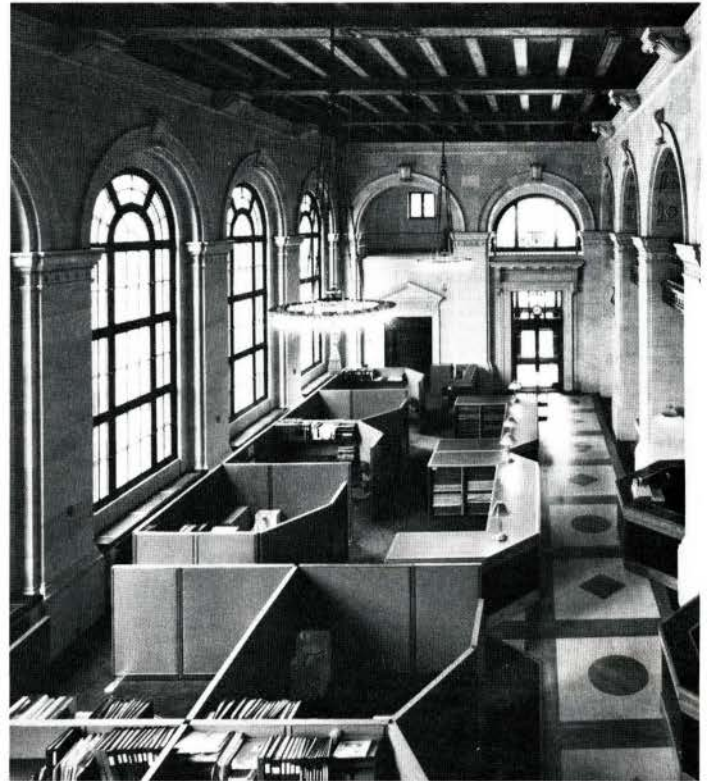
Located within walking distance of downtown Winnipeg and adjacent to numerous large apartment buildings. The Courtyard galvanized the adaptive reuse of two blocks surrounding it. The area now thrives as Osborne Village, a popular shopping and dining centre.

In the mid seventies the Bank of Montreal took a significant step on the side of preservation by the 2.2 million dollar renovation of their Portage and Main Branch. This 1913 McKim, Mead and White banking hall is a neoclassical masterpiece which combines a temple facade with a basilica interior.

No less important, however, is the 1916 Hamilton Bank Building which the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce sought to demolish in 1979. The City of Winnipeg recognized the value of this fine Italianate Revival multi-storey office tower and in 1982 decided to adapt the building for its Environmental Planning Department. The Prairie Partnership, architectural firm, was commissioned to restore the main floor and mezzanine areas, redesign the front and rear access to meet handicap and code requirements and to introduce office facilities on the main floor.

Robert Gregoire and Keith MacFarlane, architects, executed the architectural design and co-ordinated the project with a number of consultants including interior design by Arnott Mitchell and Associates to achieve a very satisfying restoration. The conservation of the ceiling was conducted by Catherine Collins of the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature.

The restoration of a building to a particular period while allowing it to serve a new function provides an introduction to another example of an architectural solution to a building requirement. In 1980, Rudy Friesen, MRAIC, was retained by the Mennonite Village Museum, Steinbach, to design a structure which would house a



*The Hamilton Building main floor features the original Botticino Italian marble on the floors and walls. 65 years of accumulated dirt was cleaned from the ceiling and the original paint restored. All fittings in the building are lacquered brass. The Prairie Partnership was the project co-ordinator for this renovation.*

large 1904 Reeve Steam tractor as well as provide shelter for spectators during special events. The structure was to complement the existing historic buildings of the village. Several of these buildings inspired the design for the tractor shelter, notably an 1877 windmill (reconstructed) whose Y column braces and cedar shakes are repeated by Friesen. The farm vernacular is continued in the use of red and white colours, steep roof slopes and materials.

Within the context of a museum village the use of vernacular or historical design elements is well accepted. The trend to incorporate these symbols in new construction is increasing, notably with the Post Modern style. The adaptive reuse, restoration or revitalization of the existing building stock in Winnipeg has only begun. If the United States, where historic renovation provides the fastest growth area for architectural work, is any indication of the future, the number of these projects will be



*Rudy Friesen's design for the tractor shelter received an Honourable Mention award in the Manitoba Premier's Awards for Design Excellence and was a finalist in the Governor General's Medal for Architecture program.*



*The Y supports of the wooden windmill, an accurate replica of one constructed in 1877, are repeated in the tractor shelter.*

increasing in Canada. The recycling of older buildings, now perceived as a viable option for city planners, when combined with new construction, offers new and innovative design options. One example with which the reader can be left to consider is the use of the exterior of an historic building as a shell for a new facility. The Empire Arts Centre design proposes that the pressed metal facing and cast iron columns of the Cauchon Block (Empire Hotel) 1884, be used as the facade for a new structure that in conjunction with the remodelling of the Pantages Theatre will form a large performing arts complex. At present the Empire Hotel facade remains in storage following the building's demolition in 1982.