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# History, Legacy in the New Canadian War Museum

by **Raymond Moriyama**

*(This document was prepared for the opening of the Canadian War Museum, May 8, 2005)*

The new home for the Canadian War Museum will accommodate Canada's most promising high-profile national institution today. Its mandate is eloquent: to remember, to preserve and to educate. So, when our joint venture team of Moriyama & Teshima Architects of Toronto and Griffiths, Rankin, Cook of Ottawa was selected to design this new building, we were understandably ecstatic.

## The Inspiration

### The Canadian People

For architectural inspiration, our team of architects and designers first looked to the people of Canada. In order to ensure that we heard the voices of Canadians, Joe Geurts, Director and CEO of the Canadian War Museum, and I travelled across the country to listen to, and learn from, Canadians. The thoughts and opinions that were voiced were surprisingly varied, and the greatest divergence was evident between the male and female perspectives.

We realized that if the Canadian War Museum was to attract a larger audience, its architecture and its exhibitions would have to speak to women, youth, new Canadians from around the world, and Canada's First Peoples.

We pored over images and stories of war involving Canadians. We read about the loss of lives at Vimy Ridge, where Canadian troops led the Allies to a major victory, and at Beaumont Hamel in France, where so many Newfoundlanders were lost. Over and over, we saw photographs of heroic Canadian soldiers fighting in devastated foreign landscapes: ordinary Canadians accomplishing extraordinary deeds, seemingly modest and gentle, but capable of great unselfish feats in times of hardship.

### The Canadian Landscape

Our second source of inspiration was the diversity and beauty of the Canadian landscape: the rocky Atlantic shoreline, the brilliant fall colours of the eastern provinces, the ancient Canadian Shield, the vast flatlands of the Prairies,



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the Great White North, and the rugged mountain ranges in the West.

### The Site

The site is located in Ottawa, Canada's capital city, which displays a mix of buildings that are both picturesque and steeped in history. The most important of these lie just east of the War Museum's site, and include the Parliamentary Precinct and our national landmark, the Peace Tower. This is the seat of our country's decision-making, in peacetime and in wartime.

Thus, facing east, the context of the new building is urban and profoundly nationalistic. But the site has a second face — one that is wonderfully pastoral. Set in the LeBreton Flats, a former industrial precinct, the new building will overlook the upstream reach of the Ottawa River and enjoy a spectacular display of sunsets. To the north are views of the Albert and Amelia Islands, the Chaudière Falls, the Domtar industrial site, and beyond these, the Gatineau Hills in Quebec. However, in spite of its beauty, the site poses challenges: contaminated soil, which has now been completely removed, and a low floodplain.

LeBreton Flats promises to become a wonderfully active setting for the new building. To the north, the National Capital Commission is developing a

Riverside Promenade along the water's edge as a major outdoor space for walking, roller-blading and cycling. Immediately south of the Canadian War Museum will be a Common: a community and festival park with a Parade Square for civic celebrations.

### The Collection

The Collection, much of which is currently stored in a temporary warehouse, is impressive: valuable medals, artillery, vehicles, tanks, written documents, artwork, and uniforms. Storage of these

valuable artifacts is a critical issue, especially for artifacts like the 50-tonne Centurion tank. Equally important, however, is finding a way to provide public access to as many artifacts as possible, including the significant collection of Canadian war art.

### Images of War

Another source of inspiration for our architectural design was the imagery of landscapes ravaged by wars. Remembered in a poem by Siegfried Sassoon — "I died in hell — they



*Alfred Bastien, Over the Top, Neuville-Vitasse, 1918, which will adorn the new Museum's south elevation.*



*Landscapes ravaged by wars regenerate, yet the memory of destruction remains.*

called it Passchendaele” — the entire Belgian village of Passchendaele was reduced to a field of mud in 1917 in only four months. Only branchless trees remained, looking like lost souls with missing limbs.

We were also stirred by images of the undulating landforms at Beaumont Hamel where over 700 Newfoundlanders were killed or wounded. The trenches were only a few hundred yards apart, the battlefield between, red with blood. What is astounding is how the landscape has regenerated, gently healing the rifts in the earth (and burying unexploded munitions) with green vegetation. Yet the six-foot-deep trenches and bomb craters, like the memories of destruction and despair, can never be completely erased.

Carl Sandburg described the regeneration of the landscape in his poem, “Grass”:

*Pile the bodies high at Austerlitz and  
Waterloo,  
Shovel them under and let me work —  
I am the grass; I cover all.*

*And pile them high at Gettysburg  
And pile them high at Ypres and Verdun.  
Shovel them under and let me work.  
Two years, ten years, and passengers*

*ask the conductor:  
What place is this?  
Where are we now?*

*I am the grass.  
Let me work.*

## The Key Concept: The Regenerative Landscape

Here, then, is the concept which suggested the central idea for the new Canadian War Museum facility: nature may be ravaged by human acts of war, but inevitably it survives, hybridizes, regenerates and prevails. From the healing process emerges hope.

As the landscape emerges gently out of the Ottawa River, so does the architecture. But as it rises towards the east and the urban cityscape, its grass-covered roof hybridizes into copper to match the rooftops of Ottawa’s other principal public buildings. It reaches up to its maximum allowable height — 24.5 meters (80 feet) — and forms a welcoming gateway to Ottawa and the Parliamentary Precinct when viewed from the Quebec side of the Ottawa River.

The concept of the Regenerative Landscape suggests an attitude of

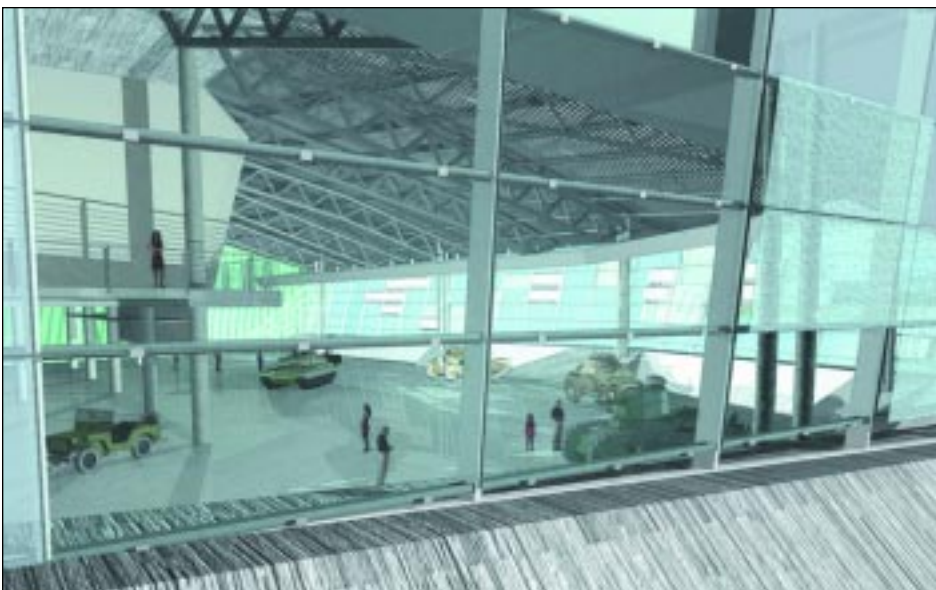
sustainability. River water will be used for cooling, concrete for energy-conserving mass, and recycled fly ash for concrete mix. The overall window area is minimized without compromising function and human need. Native, low-maintenance grasses on the roof, recycled and recyclable materials, operable windows, and energy-efficient systems will all help to achieve overall savings both initially and in the long term. In spite of all these energy-saving strategies, the building will maintain a vigorously controlled environmental that will protect the Museum’s delicate and irreplaceable artifacts.

To connect the future development of LeBreton Flats with the river, we designed the building almost like a bridge. People can, in fact, walk right over the building’s green roof on a North-South axis. Passage directly through the building is provided in response to a request from the National Capital Commission. There is no “front door” or “back door”. The north entrance facing the river is the same as the entrance facing south to the Common. And people can walk directly through the building’s Lobby from one entrance to the other.

The public lobby splits the Museum into two parts. The area to the west of the Lobby is the non-paying public zone. Without paying admission, people can enjoy the waterfront Café with its outdoor patio and wonderful view, browse in the Museum Shop, attend events in the 250-seat Auditorium, take classes in the four Ateliers, and visit the Research and Reference Library. This allows these public areas and the exhibition areas to be used independently.

All areas requiring paid admission are located east of the Lobby, including the Permanent Gallery, Art Gallery, Temporary Gallery, Large Artifact Area (tanks, etc.), and Regeneration Hall.

Administrative offices and the entrance to pay parking for 300 vehicles are located west of the Lobby. Back-of-house facilities, shipping and receiving, and storage are located east of the Lobby.



*View into Large Artifacts Collection from the southern end of the building/south side of the building/southern exterior.*

## Memorial Hall

Located in the Lobby, the Memorial Hall is a place of quiet remembrance and reflection. Its walls are incised with a grid pattern that is proportioned after First World War Canadian gravestones — a sombre reminder of Canadians left behind. On Remembrance Day (November 11) at 11:00 a.m., the Memorial Hall will be the site of a special solar event. Carefully positioned at the intersection of the view corridor to the Peace Tower and the location and angle of the sun each

November 11 at 11:00 a.m., the Memorial Hall permanently links the Peace Tower and Remembrance Day — both of great significance to Canadians — with the sun. The event should be phenomenal.

## Regeneration Hall

Both the building and its roofscape speak of regeneration, but Regeneration Hall is the repository of experiences that speak to the future and to hope. Located within the Museum's east-facing vertical element, Regeneration Hall is spiritual without being religious.

Regeneration Hall is a place of rest: sublime and subdued, solemn and quiet, dramatic and memorable.

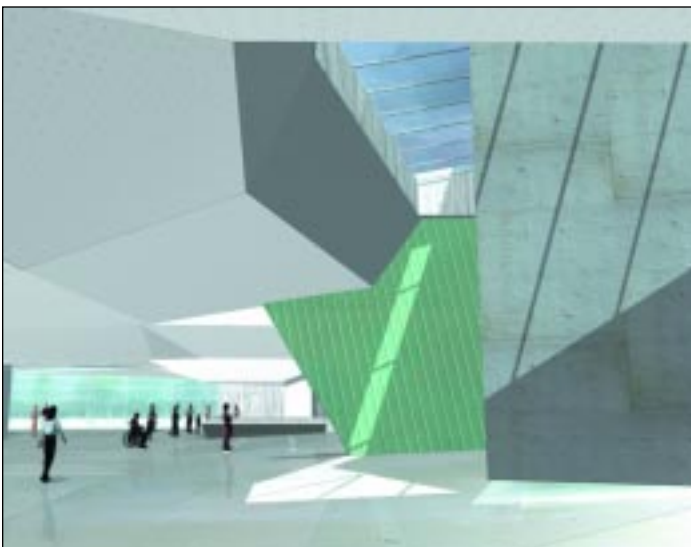
Visitors enter the dramatically vertical space of Regeneration Hall at its upper, mezzanine level. Subdued lighting slows the pace, forcing visitors to pause as their eyes adjust. Straight ahead is a triangular window, soaring through the full height of the space and offering a tightly framed view of the Peace Tower, silhouetted against the sky.

A staircase leads visitors down between two expansive walls to the main level. The north wall of Regeneration Hall is soft and smooth, with a warm-coloured finish that resembles Venetian plaster. The surface is animated by shifting sun spots spelling out “Lest we forget” and “N’oublions jamais” in Morse code. The ever-changing dappled light speaks to the ephemeral and transient nature of human life. The smooth north wall contrasts with the industrial, exposed steel structure of the south wall. This contrast suggests the duality of war — “us” versus “them” — a duality that splits human nature to the core.

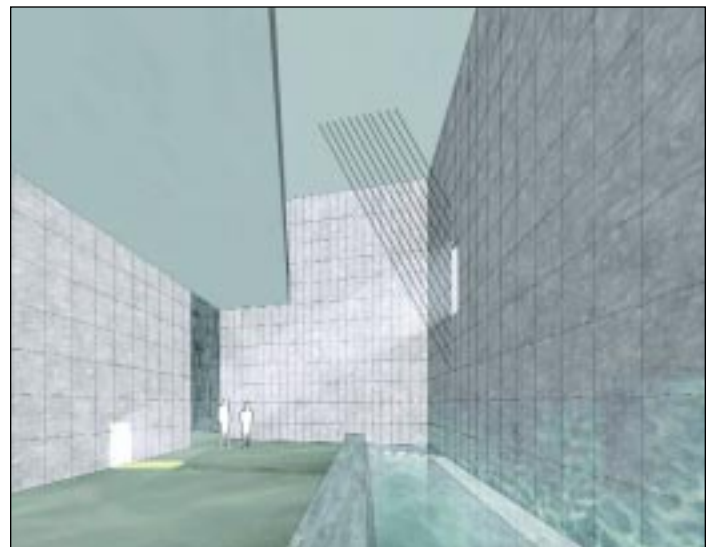
As visitors descend the stairs, the perspective shifts, and the view of the Peace Tower is lost — just as peace can so easily be lost. Instead, a compelling sculptural figure comes into view. The original plaster maquette of



*The intersection of the viewing corridor to the Peace Tower and to the position of the sun on November 11.*



*An interior rendering of the Lobby, looking towards the North. Looking northwards through the Main Lobby.*



*Interior view of the Memorial Hall, showing how a beam of light will strike it at 11 a.m. each November 11.*

Walter Allward's sculpture *Hope* floats in front of the window. The glass behind is translucent, providing a quiet backdrop and obscuring the view outside.

Dramatically lit, this compelling figure of *Hope* draws visitors down to the lower level, where more of Allward's figures from the Vimy Memorial inject a sense of human strength and spirit into Regeneration Hall.

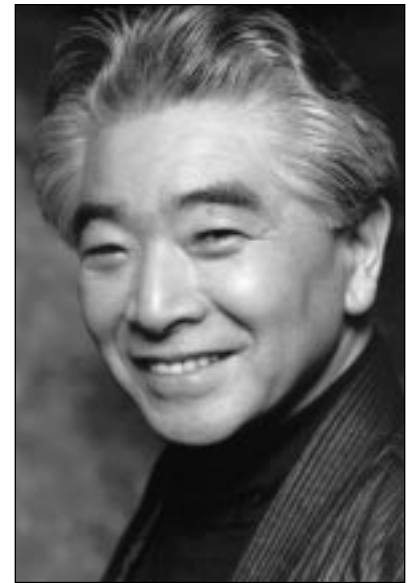
### The Structural Module

Wartime references provided inspiration for the entire 40,000-square-meter (430,000-square-foot) building — even the structural system. Our research revealed that soldiers on land travelled in a single line because their lives depended upon a nine-meter band: 4.5 meters (30 feet) to their left and 4.5 meters to their right. Anything outside the nine-meter band was considered a “no mans’ land”. Thus, the structural module for the Museum is nine meters by nine meters. Even the Memorial Hall measures exactly nine meters by nine meters.

When the building opens in May 2005, some of these references will be readily apparent. Others may require interpretation. I believe they are all part of the stories that must be told if the Canadian War Museum is to remember, preserve and educate.

*Born in Vancouver and educated in Toronto and Montreal, Raymond Moriyama is one of Canada's most respected architects. Among his award-winning projects are the Canadian Embassy in Tokyo, the Toronto Reference Library, the Bata Shoe Museum in Toronto, and the Saudi Arabian National Museum in Riyadh. Since founding his own firm in 1958, he has received many personal honours, including the Confederation of Canada Medal, honorary degrees from nine Canadian universities, the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada Gold Medal, and Honorary Fellowship from the American Institute of Architects, and the Golden Jubilee Medal.*

*Raymond Moriyama is also an Officer of the Order of Canada, a*



*Raymond Moriyama, Moriyama & Teshima Architects.*

*Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts (England), and a Fellow of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada. As Chancellor of Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario, he is the first architect in Canada to hold such a position.*



*Regeneration Hall, with sculptural figures from the Vimy Memorial in France.*



*Alex Colville, Infantry, near Nijmegen, Holland, 1946.*