

Faculty of Law – UBC

BY COREY VAN'T HAAFF

Libraries are the definition of quiet, reflective spaces, so when UBC embarked on building a new law school, the challenge was what to do with the law library? Students couldn't afford to be without the library. But the idea of moving it from its current location into a temporary one, only to then move it again into its new space, proved unpalatable.

"The challenge," says Rob Brown, vice president of UBC Properties Trust, "was to try to construct around the existing law library. It had to remain accessible. The sprawling nature of the site meant we had to cut the existing concrete building in half, and then isolate the library so it was open and fully accessible. ITC Construction Group and the demolition contractor did a great job mitigating noise, vibration and dust."

The law school, mostly built in the 1970s, was pretty low density with a dearth of natural light and mechanical deficiencies. "The vision was to create a world-class law school," says Brown. The site already commanded one of the most coveted views, overlooking Howe Sound. "UBC wanted to make better use of the site and created two independent sites; the law school on the north side and on the south side, in the future, a housing hub of mixed institutional and student housing."

The building came in under budget, says Brown, due to a perfect storm created by the market crash of 2008/09 and UBC Properties Trust's deep and detailed information used for benchmarking projects, drawn from over \$2 billion of construction over the past 8 years. "We have great tools for assessing the cost of a project, and continually sound the market to get a sense of where the prices are heading," he says.

The building will also be completed on time. "It's opening in September 2011. We achieved constructing a building with an aggressive schedule' 160,000 square feet in 17 months. For an institutional building, that's an incredible accomplishment. We have a new high-performance product because of the excellent management on site."

The new Faculty of Law building was designed by Diamond + Schmitt Architects Inc. (DSA) and BC based CEI Architecture Planning Interiors in joint venture. Derek Newby, architect with CEI Architecture, explains the collaborative of the joint venture with Diamond + Schmitt, with DSA leading the design, construction documents being shared between the two firms, and CEI driving the field administration.

For Don Schmitt, architect and principal with Diamond + Schmitt Architects, the law school project remained true to its original vision. "The vision was to create a new forum for teaching law in the 21st century. The existing building was concrete, divided into small spaces, not connected; each was in their own silo. The new building opens up the interior and is more connective, bringing different law years and faculty and research together in a collaborative environment," he says.

"There's the law forum at the common crossroads. All paths lead to the centre, horizontally and vertically. The stairs land in the centre of the plan. It's for gathering, study, food. It makes the community and connects to the landscaping," says Schmitt. He says moot courts will be held in there and the space can be opened and closed to accommodate groups.

The library rises three storeys, with a mezzanine overlooking the lower floor. "It's filled with light and views of the interior and out to the landscaping," he says. "It's a place where students spend a huge amount of time. It's a great work environment with natural light that encourages students to collaborate."

There are two outdoor rooms that open to the north and south. Landscape Architect Nastaran Moradinejad of Phillips Farevaag Smallemberg says she created spaces conducive to the social aspect of law school; gathering and seating spaces incorporating the view and lay of the land on the north slope. "We chose material that was indigenous. There was a lot of hardscaping for practical reasons. The university has a strong relationship with the Musqueam," she says, wanting to reflect the heritage of the people of the river grass. "There's a water feature. The esthetic is fairly dark so we lightened it with water. The river's edge and grass plantation evoke the Musqueam reference. It's a contemplation space in the north," she says.

The project is built to achieve LEED Gold. There is groundsource heating and cooling for high-performance energy, a high-emissivity roof, a courtyard and enough natural light to reduce reliance on artificial light, says Schmitt.

CEI Architecture's Derek Newby speaks of the technical and logistical challenges involved in taking down half of a building, building a new facility, and then removing the second half of the derelict building. "It's a tight space. The old library was cast in concrete and the effort to demolish it was significant

and a huge challenge due to the proximity to the new building,” he says.

Paul Sum, senior project manager at ITC and site manager, agrees. “On this particular project, demolishing the building still connected to the existing library was a tough challenge, to demolish it without disrupting the quietness of the library. We had to go in and saw-cut the concrete structure into separate buildings then start with asbestos removal,” says Sum.

Deep excavation resulted in a lot of fill-in as the new building only had one partial basement. The geoexchange drill holes proved difficult due to uncertainty in ground conditions. “We drilled one hole per day and there were 150, 160 holes, some under the building and some around the site. We found a mass of underground utilities and it was difficult not to knock out utilities as we worked around power and gas lines,” he says.

It was a challenge at almost every stage, but the vision of providing a world class law school that was both supportive and sustainable kept everyone focused on the end result.

“We are confident the building will serve to support the goals of the school and can inspire students and accommodate them,” says Newby, “But more than accommodate, the new building will support in the best way possible all the pursuits to allow students to excel. It will be an exceptional facility.”