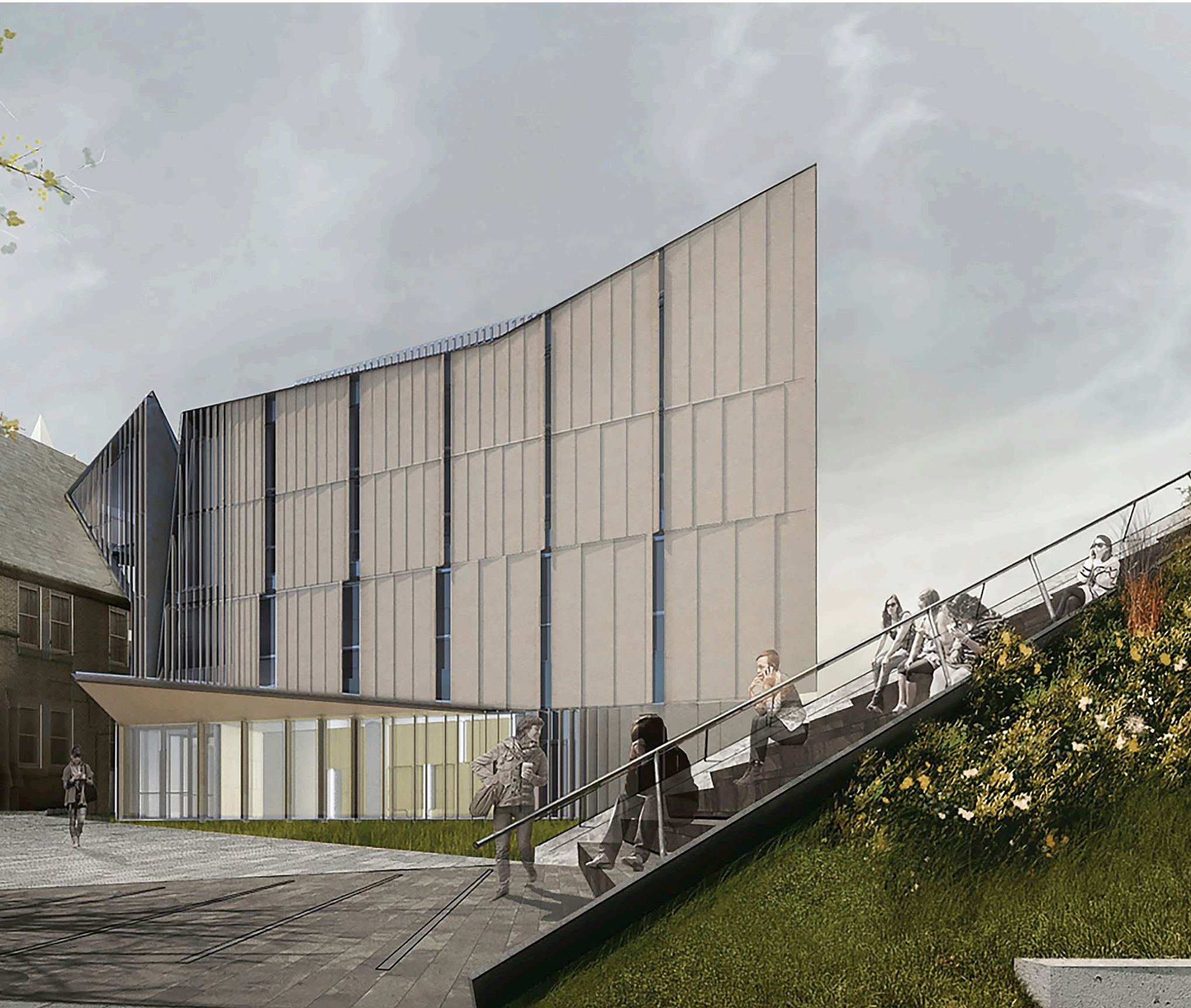


INFULL CIRCLE

Knox College gets a new lease on life as home to 1,400 University of Toronto architecture students with an extension by NADAAA that is not only institutional driven, but provides positive impact to the surrounding community and locale.

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IMAGES AND PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF NADAAA



It is a truth universally acknowledged that publicly funded institutions cannot be luxurious. After all, schools, prisons, government offices and hospitals all serve utilitarian functions, and are funded by taxpayers' money. Yet it is also a truth, albeit a lesser one acknowledged by fewer people, that good design and luxury do not necessarily go hand in hand.

Good design by its very definition should be available to everyone at all price points. To nurture good design is perhaps most important in the schools where it is taught.

Enter the role of the benefactor: his deep pockets for an institution of choice can help catapult it into thought provoking inspiration for an entire city, all within a context that is exciting, contemporary and without a single blingy gesture. It was a perfect storm of benefactor, visionary and architect that resulted in the Daniels Building, the new home for University of Toronto's (UofT) Faculty of Architecture.

John H. Daniels studied architecture at UofT and has gone on to become a Canadian legend. He went from milestone to milestone, pioneering the contemporary downtown shopping mall

1. A rendering of the Daniels Building's north facade, where a wall of glazing in the extension by NADAAA captures diffused northern illumination that floods undergraduate and graduate studio spaces within

with Toronto's Eaton Centre and then establishing Daniels Homes, now one of the biggest residential developers in the city. To date, he has donated in excess of CAD\$24 million (SGD\$25.4 million) to his alma mater.

"John Daniels was a powerful advocate for the project," recalls Nader Tehrani, founder of NADAAA who eventually won the commission for Daniels Building; Tehrani also serves as dean of Cooper Union Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture in Manhattan. "Not only conceptually, but specifically to advance design ideas and the strength of the project at large. He became an important vehicle to look beyond the daily skirmishes on site—to imagine a mission that is of a larger historical and civic importance."

VISIONARY DEAN

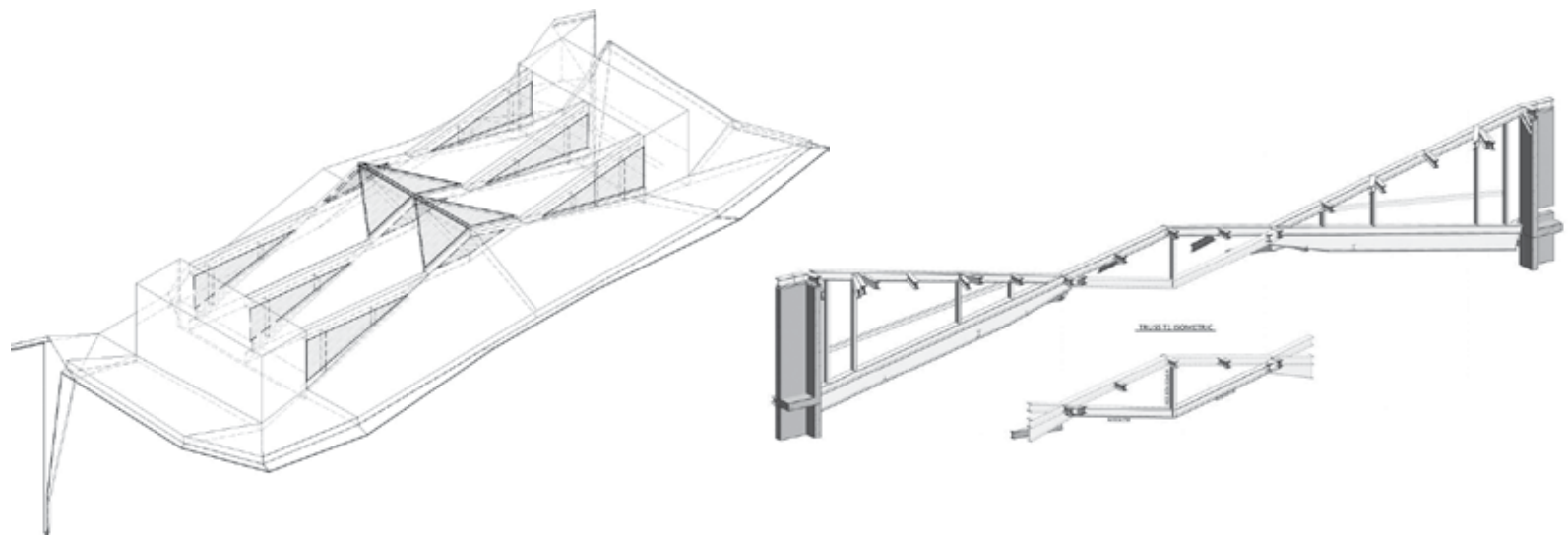
The project was the brainchild of Richard Sommer, architect and dean of UofT's Faculty of Architecture. Sommer originally pushed for an open architectural competition to renovate and upgrade the school's former premises on 230 College Street in the heart of downtown Toronto—it quickly became obvious that with the school's increasing enrollment, there was no room to expand unless they moved.

"The dean was involved in all phases and all aspects of the entire project, from beginning to end," Tehrani acknowledges. "The project would not have happened without him."

Tehrani won the competition while still with his former firm Office dA, and tweaked the concept when the building switched from renovation to adaptive reuse with an extension that dramatically increases the original site's footprint. By this time, he had established his current firm NADAAA.

He confides: "I believe we won the commission due to our ability to incorporate the existing building into the new, bringing a nuanced idea towards historic restoration, renovation and intervention. At the same time during the process, we demonstrated an ability to communicate and incorporate the faculty as part of our design process, making collaboration a central part of it. When the site was changed to Spadina Circle, our participation was extended onto the new site even though its challenges varied a great deal. It is important to note that the brief changed from the old to the new site, and so too did it change again during the process. Our team oversaw that process and established a way to absorb the dynamic between dedicated studio





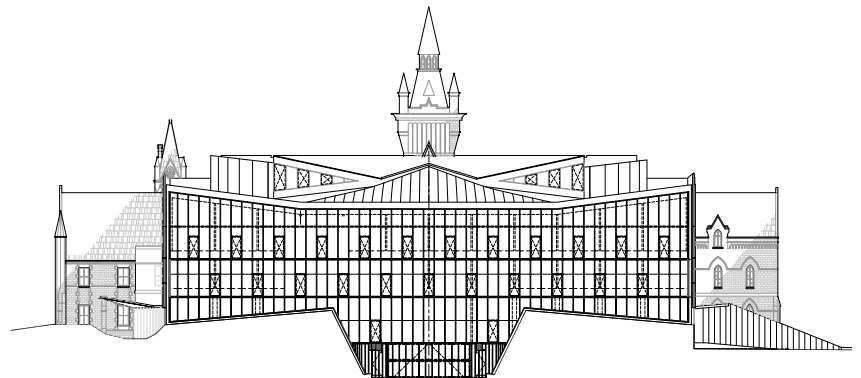
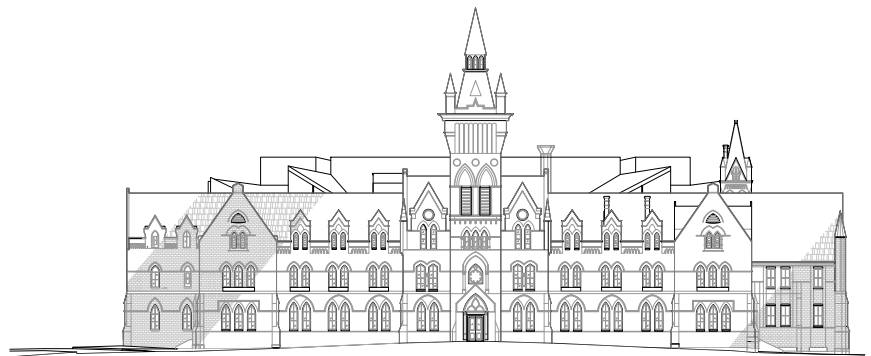
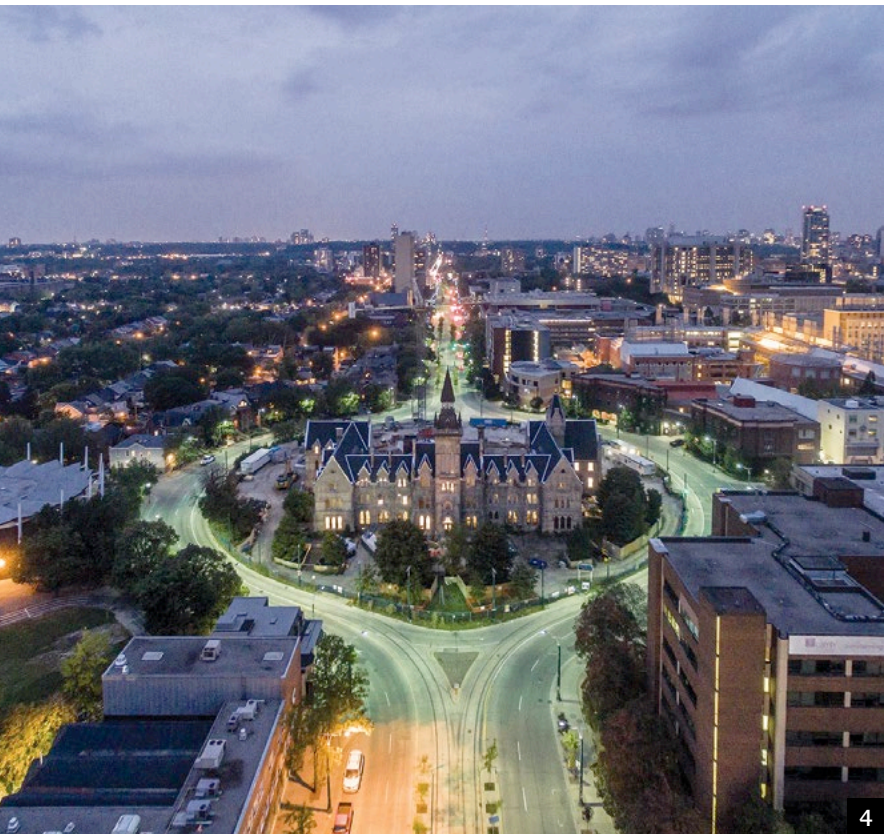
spaces, hot spaces and the flexibility of other joint spaces in between.”

CELEBRATED PAST

The Daniels Building doubles the faculty’s square footage from 73,000 at 230 College to 150,000 at Knox College and a new extension directly north of the building. Originally constructed in 1875, the Neo Gothic structure was perfect for the Presbyterian theological school in its first few decades. It served as a military hospital during WWI, where aviation pioneer Amelia Earhart famously volunteered as a nurse.

2. A rendering of the graduate students’ studio: the column free open area was designed with 400 dedicated workspaces illuminated by skylights and a northern orientation

3. The main auditorium, dubbed the large principal hall, sits in between the original Knox College and the concrete and glass extension by NADAAA



4. The Daniels Building at night in the centre of Spadina Crescent, looking north towards The Annex and Yorkville; this view underscores the strong north/south axis that orients the school

In the 1940s, insulin was invented there when the building was known as Connaught Laboratories. Though UofT purchased the building in 1972, it was abandoned for decades due to the Spadina Expressway infrastructure project that was supposed to pass directly through the circle. Then the municipal government had a change of heart, caving under pressure from the district’s concern groups about increased noise and traffic. Left to decay, Knox College soon gained a reputation for being haunted.

“The building’s history is marked by its flexibility, in face of the many programmatic changes it has seen over time,” muses Tehrani. “At the same time, the cellular nature of the spaces within Knox College made it ideal for adaptation into offices and classrooms, leaving the extension to provide for the long span spaces of studios, workshops and auditoria. The two phases of the building complement each other by effectively using the resilience of the old to furnish a key programmatic element of the new.”

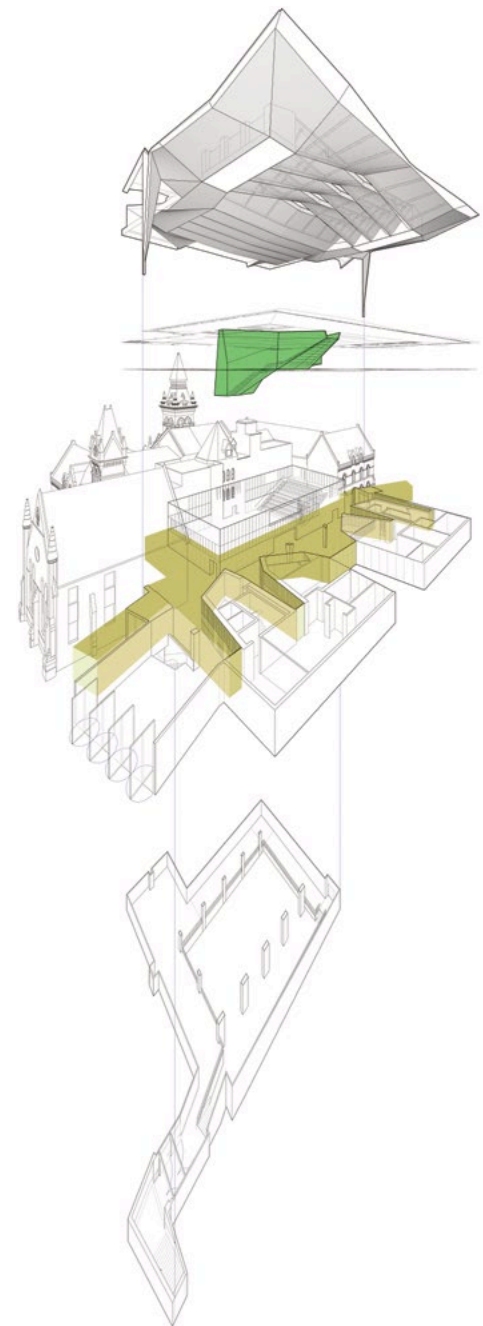
URBAN ALIGNMENT

Knox College’s strong north/south orientation along Spadina Avenue meant that it still commands views

south to Lake Ontario and north to the upscale residential neighbourhoods of Yorkville and The Annex, more than a century after it was first erected. NADAAA’s extension exploits views north by orientating open studio spaces with skylights and uninterrupted glazing that capture glare reduced illumination ideal for creative endeavours.

“From an urbanistic perspective, the building’s presence on Spadina is an important one, becoming part of the larger city,” believes Tehrani. “It furnishes a new northern face for the first time in the building’s history. Spadina offers UofT an unprecedented opportunity to act as a public landmark, punctuating the southwest corner of the campus. In this way, the north/south axis is marked by the monumentality and civic importance of the building, while the east and west facades assume new responsibility to activate the daily promenade through the building in a more dynamic way. The centrifugal organisation of the building also attempts to activate the entire edge of the circle, bringing new pedestrian activity to its landscape.”

Where the old meets the new is where the Daniels Building is most exciting. Original Gothic details such as ornamental arched windows lend the library a cloister-like hush, while the stacks on a lower level adjacent in the



extension is discreetly lit with fluorescent that surround each bookcase to give them an otherworldly glow.

An auditorium bridges new with old, underscoring the former with a rainbow of vertical bands on one wall and the latter with the weather bricks of a former exterior wall on the opposite side. Volumes and masses are cleverly manipulated to create a progression of spaces that open up to double or triple heights, with something intriguing to be revealed around every corner.

“The white box approach to the interiors is, in great part, an acknowledgement that as architect, we are to bring an extraordinary workspace to the students and faculty while leaving it to their work to adorn the walls and give it surficial character,” explains Tehrani.

5. Where the original Knox College meets NADAAA's intervention are the most exciting aspects of the Daniels Building

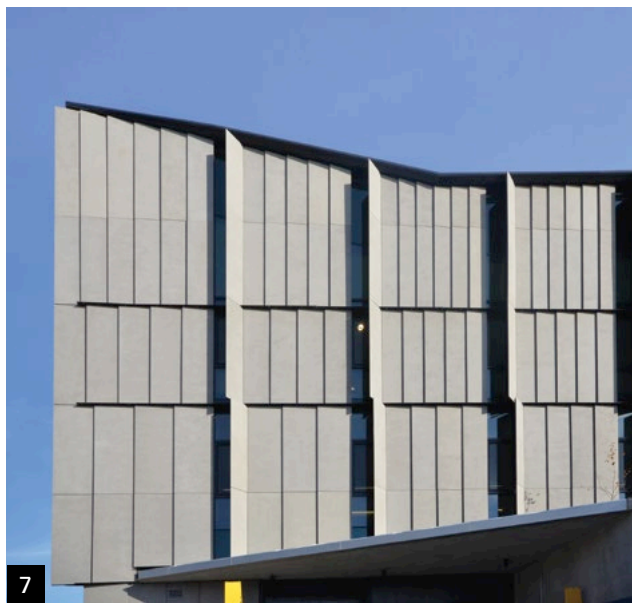
6. As seen during the construction phase, three cantilevered trusses in a bow tie configuration form the 11 skylights that hover above the graduate students' studio





7. The fins cladding the exterior of the extension are repeated indoors as colourful stripes above the principal hall

8. Gentle mounds and young trees are currently being added to the landscape surrounding the school, such as this one to the left of a secondary entrance



7



8

“As a concrete structure, we tried to reveal it in most places. All interior built in furniture is conceived in exposed birch plywood, which is both readily available and easy to manufacture within the context of the school. The layering of space can be witnessed on the north/south section of the building with an amphitheatre that connects the third floor studio to the auditorium; with natural lighting coming into the auditorium through the amphitheatre and two vertical crit spaces on the south; with a connection between the internal east/west pedestrian street and the studios on the second floor—the under belly of the amphitheatre; and with a visual connection to Spadina north from the pedestrian street across the Fablab, a double height space in the centre of the building.”

On the lower level where a large oil tank previously resided, an 8,000 square foot publicly accessible architecture gallery still under construction will foster exchange of creative ideas around the globe. At the main entrance facing south, a soon to be completed belvedere is intended to be a platform that welcomes the city to the school.

“There are currently four key landscape thresholds into the site: a plaza to the east, a fabrication court to the north, a walkway to the west and a terrace café to the south,” describes Tehrani. “I think there are some key civic spaces that are simply extraordinary: the third floor studio, the auditorium, the Fablab. As episodes, each of these contributes to the larger narrative of Toronto, because they operate as public spaces for the city.”