

# EDMONTON'S CHANGING FACE:

## OUR STRUCTURES ARE CHANGING FROM THE INSIDE OUT



BY NERISSA MCNAUGHTON

**ABOVE:** EDMONTON PLAZA CLOCK (WESTIN)  
PHOTO SOURCE: RPK ARCHITECTS LTD.

With the opening of Rogers Place, the anticipated Blatchford Development, and with both ICE District and the Brewery District under construction, the face of Edmonton continues to change. It's not just the facades and structures of our buildings that are evolving; this change affects how we perceive our environment and our willingness to move, work, live and play within it.

"We have witnessed a strong desire for people to return to or remain in the more established neighborhoods, creating the need for housing with modern amenities near the city core, whether that be complete renovations on older homes or infill," points out Jessica Brownell, interior design and sales with Aquarian, an Edmonton-based company that provides professional renovation services and custom home builds. "There's a need for homes that will accommodate aging in place."

Brownell finds herself expanding and improving bungalows instead of adding second stories, along with "designing elevators, wider doorways and curbless showers to accommodate future wheelchair access."

She also notes that, "Baby boomers are renovating their homes to suit their needs right now rather than keeping unused rooms in case they sell to a family. This gives them more room for open concept living with larger ensuites and nicer private spaces."

Aging in place and maximizing square footage aren't the only trends in residential homes.

"Energy efficiency has become a must in home renovation. It no longer makes sense for homeowners to have a beautiful space but be throwing money away because of poor insulation, leaky windows and inefficient HVAC. Homeowners and builders are becoming more educated about the importance of the building envelope and it's changing the way everyone is building," says Brownell.

"The Building Code and laws are requiring everyone to step up their game, eliminating the more toxic products from store shelves and replacing them with healthier, smarter options that will improve not only the environment, but the employee's health that is working with them.

"LED lighting just makes sense when updating things. It has become less expensive and now can emit beautiful warm light that is such an improvement from the compact fluorescent lighting that was considered 'sustainable' in the past.

"The popularity of reclaimed wood products has brought excitement to homeowners bringing history and natural beauty into their homes. To have a material that has a story and is also saving a barn from a landfill, or to turn old mill wood into a table or a sliding barn door has made sustainability even more desirable as well as responsible."

Brownell says an individual's choice on how to build, display and style their home, inside and out, has a far-reaching impact, and one that is worth the investment. "Every high-quality, custom-designed home is an opportunity to make a unique personal statement, upgrade your neighborhood and add something to your city that will last many, many years. With so many styles and products to choose from, you want to work with a company who can educate and work with you to find the look and materials that will suit your family, home and community. Well-designed custom homes don't come cheap, and they are not 'one of many'. They are the result of many skilled minds and hands and hundreds of hours planning, improving and revising. They are a reflection of you and what you value and the design process will take extra time and respect. The end result of a well-planned custom home is always worth the effort and will bring joy to you for years to come and add value to your community."

The changes to Edmonton's landscape are not limited to residential communities. Commercial retailers, institutions and industries are also changing how their buildings work; and this change comes long before construction commences.

"One of the most pervasive, and meaningful shifts to our practice comes from a fundamental change in how we work with clients, consultants, and contractors. Collaboration has become more than a catchphrase and is now becoming a tangible force in the construction industry," says Jan Kroman, Architect AAA, MArch, BSc, MRAIC, principal at RPK Architects Ltd. "We see this both in the tools we use, and in the cohesive team structures we have the privilege of being a part of.





**TOP:** MUTTART CONSERVATORY RENOVATION

**BOTTOM:** ARTSHUB 118

PHOTO SOURCE: RPK ARCHITECTS LTD.





“Technological advancements, such as the widespread adoption of Building Information Modelling (BIM), which allows for multiple parties to be working off the same resilient building model simultaneously, has aided this trend; as have new progressive contract structures such as Integrated Project Delivery (IPD), which sees all parties involved in the construction process sharing in a profit pool. The industry as a whole has started to look for efficiencies and quality across disciplines, rather than solely within their own organization.”

He also sees things moving in a more mindful direction. “We have seen the concept of sustainability change from a technically-based issue, predominantly discussed in the context of adopting new building technologies, to a more consistent presence that affects all design decisions, from building orientation to future-proofing building systems, and from material sourcing to employing dark-sky approaches. Much like the high-level concept of collaboration, sustainability is now a concern shared by all team members rather than a select few champions.”





RPK Architects has been in business for 47 years and has significantly contributed to Edmonton's landscape. The firm was there as the city started to grow, and the firm continues to evolve with, and at many times pioneer, changes in the industry.

"We believe that our success and longevity are tied directly to our community and the support we've received from it," confirms Kroman. "We are proud of our contributions to Edmonton's fabric, completing such projects as the Muttart Conservatory renovation, ArtsHub 118's housing cooperative, Western Supplies Building, Fire Hall No. 5,

Londonderry's leisure pool, and the Edmonton plaza clock (Westin). We feel that in all our projects we try to link back to the community, creating places, not objects. It's this sense of belonging and community that we believe has been our biggest contribution to Edmonton's built form."

As the face of Edmonton continues to change from the inside out to reflect more sustainable architecture, provide the ability to 'age in place' and incorporate technologies that mean leaner and more efficient processes, the benefit for us all are stronger communities with physical structures built to last. **B**

**ABOVE:** RENDERING OF SAKAW TERRACE, A NEW SENIORS' HOUSING FACILITY FOR THE GREATER EDMONTON FOUNDATION  
PHOTO SOURCE: RPK ARCHITECTS LTD.