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Winnipeg Free Press - PRINT EDITION

Old terminal a Modernist gem

Expert sees it as integral part of rich architectural heritage

By: Brent Bellamy / On Architecture

Posted: 10/31/2011 1:00 AM | Comments: 61 (including replies)

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The city airport terminal opened in 1964 (above) is one of the finest pieces of Modernist architecture in Canada. It adds to the richness of Winnipeg's architectural history, as shown in the downtown buildings below. So should the old airport terminal be torn down or preserved?

It is no coincidence that in no known language does the phrase "as pretty as an airport" appear -- Douglas Adams

Douglas Adams, author of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, might have felt differently about airports had he seen the new Richardson International Airport terminal that on Sunday welcomed its first visitors.



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The new airport stands as an impressive welcome mat for our city, a symbol of modernity and progress. Its dramatic curving glass walls anchor the building to the prairie horizon and celebrate in a single sweeping view the light and landscape that define our province. It has space, colour and light in proportions that stimulate the visitor and inspire a feeling of pride.

That last sentence, although an appropriate description of the new building, was actually written in the *Winnipeg Tribune* in

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1964 for the opening of the terminal it is replacing. The completion of the new airport has focused public attention on the fate of its familiar old neighbour, celebrated as one of the finest pieces of Modernist architecture in Canada.

The debate over the demolition of the old terminal highlights a broader question: Why should cities attempt to preserve elements of their built history?

Advocates of historic preservation are often criticized for being motivated by nostalgia while standing in the way of progress and growth. This can sometimes be the case, but successful cities are often able to capitalize on their architectural heritage as a way of attracting growth while enriching the character and livability of their urban environment.

Cities are like storybooks. The most compelling ones are those that weave together layers of complex narrative. We travel to places like Montreal and New York and are inspired by the rich texture of their streetscapes. The buildings narrate the stories of those cities, making them more interesting to visit, more comfortable to live in and more attractive to invest in.

The most interesting cities are those that maintain a rich mixture of buildings that represent different periods in history, knit together in an urban tapestry. It isn't loudly celebrated, but Winnipeg is lucky enough to be one of these cities. Our distinct collection of buildings uniquely illustrates the lineage of modern Canadian design throughout the last century.

Winnipeg's diverse assemblage of building styles has even piqued the interest of John Martins-Manteiga, director of the Toronto museum Dominion Modern, billed as "Canada's foremost archive of 20th-century Canadian architecture and design."

Dominion Modern is an institution that promotes and celebrates design through high-quality publications and sensational, almost theatrical exhibitions that inspire public dialogue and education.

Martins-Manteiga describes Winnipeg as a "tremendous city" with a "jaw-dropping inventory of 19th- and 20th-century architecture." He sees great potential to capitalize on this asset and celebrate the city's diverse architectural heritage on a national stage.

For these reasons, Dominion Modern has listed Winnipeg as a possible location (along with Toronto) for a long-sought-after permanent home for its collections. Martins-Manteiga foresees building partnerships with the local design community and with institutions such as the University of Manitoba, while using Winnipeg's architectural heritage as a base from which Dominion Modern could record and promote design across Canada.

A permanent gallery for Dominion Modern in the perfect container would be an exciting addition to Winnipeg's vibrant artistic and cultural community. Martins-Manteiga's hope is to find a well preserved Modernist gem in a busy location that invites passersby to wander in and explore its collections.

It is not often that a Toronto cultural institution considers relocating to a city like Winnipeg. Dominion Modern's interest is a testament to the unique physical character of our city and should serve to inspire an increased public awareness for our often unappreciated built environment.

Martins-Manteiga says the Modernist airport terminal has long been an important contributor to Winnipeg's diverse urban character. He sees it as a central part of our history, with few buildings holding a more prominent place in the city's narrative. He argues that exploring opportunities to facilitate the rebirth of the old terminal is not only environmentally responsible, but could enrich the character of the airport campus as a proud counterpoint to the new building.

Winnipeg's diverse collection of historic architecture is generally the product of low redevelopment pressure. The result today is an opportunity to capitalize on an asset that many other cities have lost.

It often takes an outsider's perspective to make us appreciate what we have. Dominion Modern's interest in Winnipeg highlights the contribution that buildings from different periods in our history, including the Modernist era of the airport, can make in creating an attractive urban character. It reinforces the argument that strategic preservation can act as a catalyst for growth and not be an obstacle to it.

Brent Bellamy is senior design architect for Number Ten Architectural Group. Email him at bbellamy@numberten.com

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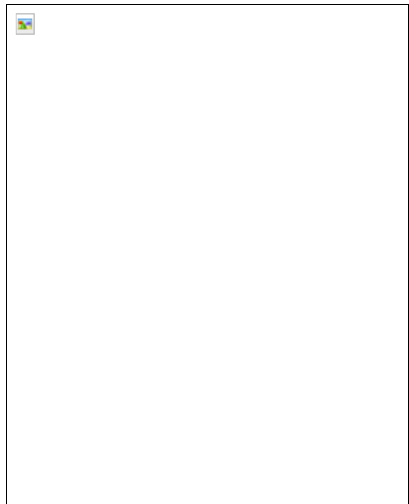
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“ For people who were born here, this is normal life. Winnipeg has convinced them that daily life has to include crime. It's like some sort of Winnipeg "Stockholm" syndrome. There will be concerns and complaints but little else. So sad. ”

Posted by: [TownieRC](#)
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Score: 4

Name withheld

redrabbit

10:21 AM on 10/31/2011

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I support keeping heritage buildings in order to preserve our history but the old airport has never been a "gem" in my mind. I understand the modernist history to the design but honestly it is plain ugly. Most people you ask on the street would probably say to just take the thing down. If no one is willing to pay to maintain it then who cares?

We have a BEAUTIFUL new terminal now and why do we need the old ugly ones falling apart right beside it still?



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CurtRK

10:31 AM on 10/31/2011

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If someone has a suitable use for the building and wants to spend the money, by all means, go ahead. If the building is just going to sit empty, than it's better to tear it down now.



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Score: -5

Name withheld

DaPegger

10:34 AM on 10/31/2011

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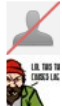
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Perfect place for the Aviation museum. If you could set up separate road access and parking, directing the museum traffic away from the terminal that would cut down on congestion along Wellington.

3 replies



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Score: 2

Name withheld

General Lee Specific

10:43 AM on 10/31/2011

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The Aviation Museum has already said that the building is impracticable for purpose and twice the space they need, nevermind the cost of renovating and making the floor suitable for planes to sit on. They already are getting the space (once the terminal is demolished) to build their own building. And they need to seeing as they're getting kicked out of their current building when their lease expires in 6 years time.



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Score: 0

Name withheld

mrpghornet

12:08 PM on 10/31/2011

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Thanks city planner for your 3 cent opinion. How about more traffic proposals for Portage Ave?



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Score: 0

Name withheld

kmc

1:39 PM on 10/31/2011

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"directing the museum traffic away from the terminal that would cut down on congestion along Wellington."

Yeah, those three cars going to the museum would otherwise mess up traffic for the hundreds of cars going to the actual airport right?



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Score: 2

Name withheld

StayPosi

10:41 AM on 10/31/2011

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I think the only people who should be advocating saving this building are those who are willing/able to put up the cash to do it.

1 reply



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Score: 0

Name withheld

ErikW

11:18 AM on 10/31/2011

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Yes and no... it's okay to think it's a nice building and regret that it is going to be no more, but I agree that a lot of people here have unrealistic ideas about saving it.

The simple fact is it's not worth the money it would cost to save it.



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Score: 1

Name withheld

Bad Ass

10:43 AM on 10/31/2011

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If the old one was so nice we wouldn't have built a new one! Hora-ah wrecking ball!



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Score: -1

Name withheld

finn

11:19 AM on 10/31/2011

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How would getting in to see this great building work? Would you have to pay airport parking fees? No way would I go if that's the case!



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Score: 0

Name withheld

mrpghornet

11:51 AM on 10/31/2011

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Modernist "turd" is more accurate.



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Score: 0

Name withheld

Myownpeg

1:39 PM on 10/31/2011

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I got an idea deconstruct the damn thing and haul it out to wolsley and see what the hipsters come up with, all they do is sit around and talk nonsense all day. i am sure they could come up with an silly plan.



1 2

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