


SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2011

 A retained old building, such as the Château Laurier, is kept intact because it has value. The value is inherent in its unique design, historic importance, classic urban environment qualities and as a tourist attraction. — **Bernard A. Poulin**

Don't let them ruin our castle

Re: Management of Château Laurier plans expansion, Sept. 15.

I gaze in horror at the addition that the Château Laurier is contemplating. Taking one of the true gems of the city and turning it into a piece of architectural scar tissue is not progress. Why do we need to import a Toronto architect who designs condos? Have you seen the mess that these condos have made of downtown Toronto?

If we want to look at an architectural horror show, all we need do is visit the Royal Ontario Museum.

Robert C. Mercier, Ottawa

Will hotel be on The Highway to Hell?

The proposed architectural design for the Château Laurier resembles gigantic speakers from a AC/DC concert. Let's not have future generations give directions by saying: "The Château Laurier ... it's right over there on The Highway To Hell."

Terry Toll, Campbell's Bay

Understand how to honour the Château

A retained old building, such as the Château Laurier, is kept intact because it has value. The value is inherent in its unique design, historic importance, classic urban environment qualities and as a tourist attraction. If the original building is to retain all of these qualities, the addition should be designed in such a way as to "fade into the background," not attack the integrity of the

values described above. Adding on is exactly that: becoming a part of what is, not dragging in an "unwanted appendage."

The Château Laurier is the most powerful element on an iconic street. Not only is it adjacent to a historic canal, it is an integral part of an overall urban landscape design that has always incorporated old and new in a classic way.

Overall, the environment of which the hotel is a cornerstone cannot exude history and pride without its integrity being respected. To have it demeaned by a "splash" of arrogance is tantamount to a denigration of the original intentions of the architect Bradford Gilbert of Ross and David Huron MacFarlane. It would also be an additional snub to the capital's "clean and classic lines."

Adding to an architectural gem is a specialty in which few architectural firms excel and an exercise for which even fewer should apply. Authors of such "add-ons" should, prior to initiating a design, already know what "disappear" and "fade into the background" mean.

In this case, basic composition and design elements demand only two possible considerations:

First: "Marry" into the original design, that is, become one with it in both classic architectural form and respect for detail. This would be the optimum recognition of the importance of the original building. Nonetheless, such a design choice could be too costly an undertaking.

Second (this is a "tolerable"

second-best scenario): The intent (which should not be difficult for a seasoned architect to emulate) would be to meld both the old and the new into something that says respect and integrity and knowledge in the area of connectivity of line and form.

An add-on should never be a garish attack on, or a brazen counterpoint to, an original classic. The feeling Ottawans seem to have from this proposal is disrespect. Intentionally or not, this "overall busy" design has nothing in common with the Château and makes us feel like someone has sprayed Disneyesque graffiti onto a Frank Lloyd Wright masterpiece.

Bernard A. Poulin, painter and author, Ottawa

Design could wreck city's beloved building

The owners of the Château Laurier are going to break a lot of hearts in Ottawa and face angry public reaction with their proposed addition.

Surveys have consistently shown that the Château is Ottawa's favourite building. It's not mine (too Disney for my taste) but the location is beautiful and it fits well with other historic buildings in Ottawa.

The proposed addition may be very nice inside but externally it is incongruous. Unless the owners come up with a plan that mimics the chateau style, I think they are ruining what is a picturesque spot, and should be roundly criticized for doing so.

Cathy Haley, Ottawa