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Jenkins: Ottawa's best and worst buildings



PHIL JENKINS

More from Phil Jenkins [HTTP://OTTAWACITIZEN.COM/AUTHOR/PHIL-](http://ottawacitizen.com/author/phil-jenkins)

JENKINS)

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Green Pavilion, ca. 1900

Library and Archives Canada

“Thank you for the chance to vent.”

That was the sign off for a goodly proportion of the responses I got to my invitation to nominate Ottawa's ugliest building. The steam was also rising for several days off the online comments section. In truth, I don't recall a column generating more high-octane feedback.

Clearly, we take our collective architecture seriously, and take loud umbrage at egregious examples of it. It has something to do, I believe, with the notion of “hometown.” As well as our individual homes, we call Ottawa home and a bummer building evokes a distasteful response, as though someone had walked in off the street and hung a ghastly painting in our living room. The kind that puts the pain in painting.

Several people bothered to send in photographs of monstrosities and I now have a swelling scrapbook of eye-ball bruisers. Which, if you don't mind, I'll only refer to infrequently in the future. One gentleman sent in a before, during and after album of a renovation on his street that he used the phrase “monstrous tumour like barnacle” to portray. Another reader apparently went to considerable expense and sent in an aerial snapshot of the new buildings on the Sisters of Visitation Convent site of Richmond Road, highlighting the shadow they cast on what was before a sunny stretch of street. This theft of daylight by sidewalk-side condos, thereby creating corridors of gloom, is an unpleasant side-effect of infill. One reader asked if we could have a separate competition for the worst and best infill, which is not a bad idea. One thing at a time.

Also, there were quite a few blasts at federal buildings, which I had

SECTIONS | ided from the, um, contest so as to keep the whole thing in-house. This
out two of Ottawa's collection of Brutalist architecture, the National Arts Centre and the Lester B. Pearson structure on Sussex.

While many signed up to finger the warts on the face of Ottawa, there were a considerably reduced number of advices as to Ottawa's beauty spots. This is understandable; any critic knows there is more joy in attack than there is in defence. No-one sent in photographs, but several churches and mosques got the nod, including the sublime, pure white St. Elias cathedral on Riverside and the purpose built, Italianate First Church of Christ, Scientist on Elgin. Perhaps a discussion at a later date on the connection between spiritual architecture versus utilitarian, and the effect the former has on getting a beautiful result.

So, drum roll please, here are, based on your votes, winners (?) of the 2014 Edies, the Wart and the Beauty Spot awards. Ottawa's ugliest building by a long stretch is the condo complex on Phase One of the LeBreton Flats redevelopment. Dishonourable mentions for the City Centre, the Central Public Library, Centrum shopping mall in Kanata, and the Royal Bank on Sparks. I was particularly pleased to see the bank rank high on the list. It is the ruination of Sparks Street — an on-going project — and breaks every rule pertaining to beauty that I mentioned in a previous column. The tower that money built. And Ottawa's most eye-pleasing building is, and this was one not on my published list, the Aberdeen Pavilion, alias the Cattle Castle. Honourable mentions to the old Registry Office on Waller that sits like an old man on a park bench at the foot of the ramparts of the Rideau Centre, the George Bayne 1828 house on Fuller Avenue, and the old Nepean Town Hall on Richmond.

My thanks to all the readers who contacted me, and whose blood pressure may have dropped a little after venting. Let's do it again next year, when we will have a new council, one that is hopefully more interested in restoring

preserving Ottawa's reputation as a pretty city.

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Top of the list are the condos on the LeBreton Flats. And now the next phase, the siblings of the ones already built, are underway. It's getting worse.



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Photos: Best and worst buildings

(<http://ottawacitizen.com/gallery>)

Columnist Phil Jenkins tallied your votes for Ottawa's Best and worst buildings. Here are some noteworthy few.

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Comments

**Leah Meredith**

Amen to the choice of that hideous condo complex at LeBreton Flats as the ugliest building!! Whoever thought that building was aesthetically less than ought to have his or her eyes checked. It's an embarrassment.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · 2 · 11 hours ago**Molly Young Vallières** · Works at Blissfully unemployed

LeBreton Flats condos hands down. You can't mix Lego and Duplo blocks , just doesn't work !

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · 2 · 11 hours ago**Kirk Lamirande** · Top Commenter · Algonquin College

The City Centre gets my vote for ugliest building. It looks like it has been abandoned for years, so every time I walk by I'm always surprised how many businesses are open and currently being run there.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · 2 hours ago**Maggie McCoy**

LeBreton is a prize example of the aesthetic ineptitude of our city planners and managers.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · 3 hours ago

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