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Attention: Carolyn Quinn for David Fleming
Heritage Ottawa

Statement: New Project for Château Laurier a Triumph

The new design for the addition to the Château Laurier is, I believe, a triumph in the centuries old architecture battle of the new versus the old. The passing of time which changes ideas, needs and technology, leads to new solutions. During the changes of ideas during the Renaissance, Pope Julius II tore down the spiritually significant fourth century basilica built over Peter's tomb, to build a new church. Many were shocked. Fast forward to a mid-twentieth century master and a different battle. In Chicago Mies van der Rohe added a significantly different architecturally defined extension to a building he had designed 15 years earlier. The two languages side by side, surprising at first, lead the viewer to analyze and appreciate the ways in which one enhances the other.

This approach is similar for the carefully designed proposal to add to the Château Laurier, a National Historic Site. The crucial decision is the addition of two pavilions, one each to the 1927 east and west wings of the original 1912 Château Laurier Hotel. Critically they preserve the openness of form, and the essential views to and from Major's Hill Park, to Parliament Hill and beyond. The materials of the proposed pavilions, Indiana limestone and bronze, continue those of the historical building. The proportions of the pavilions have been carefully studied: their height aligns with the roof line of the Château, and base with base; the vertical proportions of solid and void of the pavilions relate to spacing of solid stone and window voids of the older hotel fabric, yet have their own character in a their offset rhythm and the differences of the height between the two pavilions, and the variance in height of tripartite horizontal divisions. To me, these variances consciously respond to the picturesque romanticism of the Château building. The two languages side by side, surprising at first, lead the viewer to analyze and enjoy the ways in which they enhance each other.

The contemporary design decisions for the proposed additions to the century old Château Laurier are in accordance with The Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada which states: "Conserve the heritage value and character-defining elements when creating any new additions to an historic place or any related new construction. Make the new work physically and visually compatible with, subordinate to and distinguishable from the historic place."

The addition to the Château Laurier is a triumph in the politics of Historic Preservation. The process has been indispensable. Determined citizen protest across the country to the former proposal led to a year of organizing and hard work to arrive amicably at a respectful solution to a Heritage building. This is a very great Canadian story. The process has been exemplar. Participants let go their personal preferences for the greater good. I like to think that when there is so much at stake people behave in this way.

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