



**LOCATION**  
76 Grenville Street, Toronto, Ontario

**OWNER**  
Women's College Hospital

**AGENCY RESPONSIBLE**  
Infrastructure Ontario

**ARCHITECTS**  
Perkins Eastman / IBI Group Architects Inc. (joint venture);  
CannonDesign (compliance)

**DBFMO CONTRACTOR**  
The Walsh Group / Bondfield Construction

**STRUCTURAL CONSULTANT**  
CH2M Hill

**MECHANICAL CONSULTANT**  
The Mitchell Partnership

**ELECTRICAL CONSULTANT**  
Mulvey & Banani

**LANDSCAPE CONSULTANT**  
Janet Rosenberg & Studio

**TOTAL SIZE**  
420,000 square feet

**TOTAL COST**  
\$460 million

# Women's College Hospital Redevelopment

by **ROBIN BRUNET**

Extensive public consultation has become the norm for institutional building projects – but, understandably, with the ultimate aim of soliciting approval rather than seeking in-depth design input.

However, this concept was turned on its head with regard to the Women's College Hospital in downtown Toronto, which, after providing almost a century of research and care in women's health, announced in 2010 that it had signed a contract with Women's College Partnership (the project team) to design, build, finance, and maintain the facility's redevelopment. Women's College Hospital worked closely with Infrastructure Ontario to plan and deliver this Alternative Financing and Procurement (AFP) project.

Described as a hospital intended to keep people out of hospital, the \$460-million LEED Silver redevelopment is a state-of-the-art, 420,000-square-foot L-shaped reinforced concrete nine-storey structure and a two-storey steel-frame pavilion fronting Grenville Street. The rebuilt facility focuses on consolidating primary care, chronic disease management, surgical services, diagnostics, and mental health programs, all delivered on an ambulatory and out-patient basis. The new hospital is also dedicated to advances in women's research, care and education.

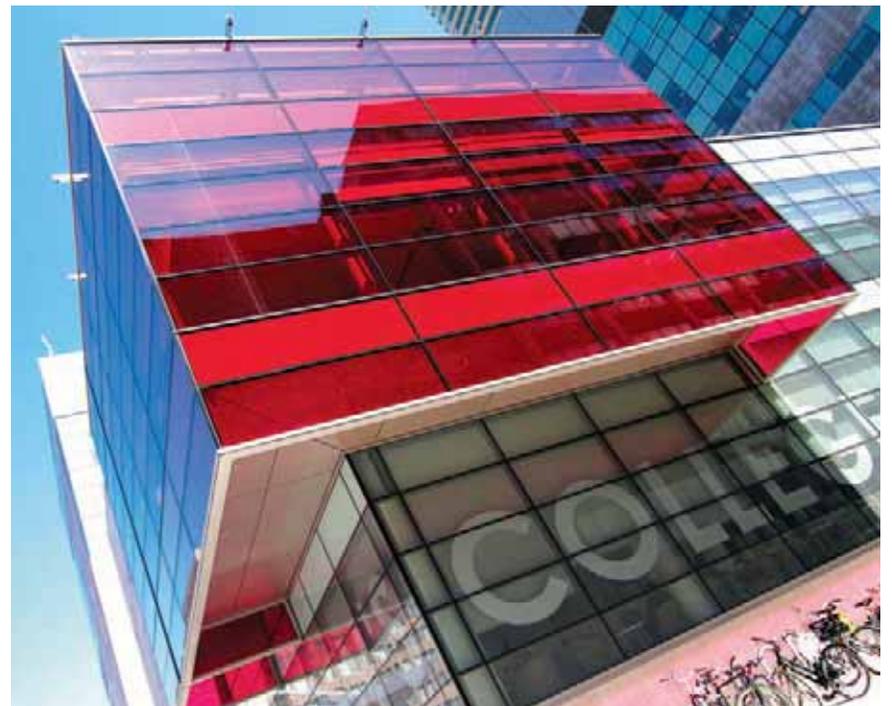
From the outset, Infrastructure Ontario and the hospital board stressed that the new facility would be designed differently than any other hospital, with a singular focus on catering to the way different women lead their lives, and informed by enormous input from women across Ontario to determine what the project should consist of.

CannonDesign was brought in as part of the compliance design team who reviewed the documents for

functionality and adherence to the design guidelines. Leading the design team was Susan Black, partner with Perkins Eastman, in a 50/50 joint venture with IBI Group Architects, the architects of record working for the project team. "Amongst other objectives, the hospital wanted to increase its physical presence and engagement within the community and to maximize future flexibility and adaptability in response to evolving healthcare delivery," says David Wood, associate for IBI. "This was achieved through the unique facility massing and exterior cladding of feature elements, as well as modular planning of multi-use exam/treatment rooms, planning of modules to allow generic use of different care teams, and careful planning of vertical shafts to achieve unobstructed floor plates."

But the most memorable aspect of the design came from the objective of providing a relaxing, calming ambience and truly making this a hospital for women of all backgrounds. Hence, no less than 1,000 women were interviewed over a two year period, according to hospital president and CEO Marilyn Emery; based on their input, design elements such as privacy, safety, flexible family eating areas with diverse food options, open spaces with curved walls and staircases, and accessibility became big priorities.

This input was particularly inspirational for Black, whose involvement with the project dates back to 2008. "The ideas generated by the input were both practical as well as creative," she says. "For example, indigenous women talked of mother earth, and this led to me putting a split boulder in the atrium space to honour the concept of gaia and serve as a unique visual feature."



Black describes her work as, "Applying multiple layers of design elements to complement architectural components that were equally inspired by the input from end users: for example, an auditorium with curved display walls in some ways resembles a womb and is augmented with a backdrop curtain made of chicken wire and intertwining fabric ribbons. Another example would be a cultural wall accompanying the atrium staircase, which on the first level is a hand-made ode to quilting – with many of the women we interviewed having helped apply the fabric."

While these "layers" would help create the all-important visual texture and welcoming ambience, the architects, owners, and other groups worked hard to determine the optimum physical structure of the new hospital. "Initially the design

resembled a square donut, but thanks to lots of input from the design team and builders, this eventually evolved into a L-shaped building with the tower of the L containing clinical functions and the lower part of the L containing public spaces and administration," says Wood.

This arrangement of functions was dictated largely by practical considerations: David Steiner, Infrastructure Ontario project manager for Women's College Hospital, explains that phase one of the project would consist of demolition of an old apartment building on site to create the extra space required for the new facility. "The clinical tower and all work was constructed by a partnership between The Walsh Group and Bondfield Construction. This was followed by the existing hospital being vacated and moved into the new facility, followed by phase two

demolition of the old hospital and then construction of the phase two tower and podium that includes the atrium.”

Steiner adds, “It sounds straightforward on paper but was an incredibly complex undertaking. Because the site contained an operational hospital there had to be intense coordination between hospital administration and the builders; both parties communicated daily to minimize disturbances to staff and patients.”

For structural consultant CH2M Hill and electrical consultant Mulvey & Banani, the project wasn’t so much one of unforeseen surprises as it was tackling the challenges inherent with the sheer scope and type of delivery method. “Our design was straightforward, but typically with projects like these the construction proceeded before our work was even halfway done,” says Mulvey & Banani senior associate Ian Ma. “So we had to prioritize what was most required in order not to impede the schedule.”

The Mitchell Partnership was obliged to design a mechanical system for the tower of the new hospital that would also tie into and effortlessly accommodate the needs of the expanded facility upon completion

of phase two. As for the challenges encountered by The Walsh Group and Bondfield Construction, they included everything from asbestos removal (for the old hospital) to working on a confined site. Monitors were installed in the old facility to sense vibrations during the construction process, as a way of ensuring that operational disturbance was minimized.

Jayashri Deshmukh, senior associate for CannonDesign, points out that, “The physical limitations of the downtown site, along with the scale of the ambitious project being built while keeping the hospital’s primary functions running, meant that the complexity of the project was anticipated very early in the project’s evolution. Therefore a lot of time and user engagement was invested to allow the building’s planning and design to be refined before ground broke in 2010.”

But of all the care and attention to detail expended to make Women’s College unique, one element of the design, created by Susan Black, would quickly prove to be an iconic signature feature: a huge pink cube built during phase two of the project that was enclosed in fuchsia glass and intended to serve as a meeting space. Wood remarks, “It’s a



deceptively simple design, but once you see it you never forget it – which is exactly what an icon should be.”

To which Black adds, “The cube can be seen from far away, and where it sits we included the name of the hospital in huge dimensional glass letters, positioned in such a way that the name unfolds as you walk or drive by.”

The pink cube would also become part of an overall landscape design developed by Janet Rosenberg & Studio with a green roof and trees on top that could be appreciated

by staff and patients in the upper levels of the clinical tower. Extensive green space was also allocated to the front of the hospital.

Black, who as of April was still applying finishing touches to Women’s College, noted that every aspect of the hospital tells patients “we belong to you,” and adds, “and this is due to the foresight of the hospital and the incredible collaboration between the design and construction parties, all committed to outdoing themselves. We’re very proud of the final result.” **A**