

Dolce and Vita at Symphony Place in Vancouver. The bold 360-unit, twin residential tower project complements City development objectives for the area, while responding creatively to adjacent context restraints and opportunities. The project features a unique laneway arrival courtyard serving the lobbies of each tower.



MERRICK ARCHITECTURE - BOROWSKI SAKUMOTO FLIGG LTD.

Structural integrity

MERRICK ARCHITECTURE FINDS FREEDOM AND FULFILMENT BY REMAINING TRUE TO ITS PRINCIPLES

MERRICK
ARCHITECTURE ■
BOROWSKI
SAKUMOTO
FLIGG
LIMITED

FOR A PROFESSION THAT IS SO STRONGLY ASSOCIATED with creativity and iconoclasm, architecture is undergoing a significant upheaval. Increasingly, independent firms are being acquired by conglomerates, and while on one hand this provides a greater access to resources, on the other it frequently leads to a phenomena called 'design by committee', which in many cases leads to compromised ideas and watered-down outcomes.

The principals of Merrick Architecture would be the last people to resist change, but the one thing they steadfastly refuse to relinquish is their independence. The company was founded by Paul

Merrick in 1984, and although it has undergone several leadership restructurings, principals Gregory Borowski, Graham Fligg, Mitch Sakumoto and their 30-odd staff are driven by the same design objective: to reconcile human needs with the natural and man-made environment. It's something they call 'humanistic architecture.'

Although Merrick has typically kept its geographical focus to the environment it knows the best – the Pacific Northwest – its design philosophy has been applied to an unusually wide range of projects, from single-family dwellings to internationally recognized facilities such as the \$1-billion Olympic Village development in Vancouver. Borowski, Fligg and Sakumoto can also cite numerous projects in which the final product is remarkably similar to the conceptual drawings – something they credit their clients for helping achieve. "Our best clients are attracted by our individuality and are committed to carrying their vision through to the final phase," says Fligg. One example is the recently completed Clubhouse at Riverway Golf Course in Burnaby.

Merrick also has expertise and passion for restoration, and one recent project in which it exercised this enthusiasm is the 96-year-old Hudson's Bay building in Victoria, which Merrick's office worked on in collaboration with Townline Group of Companies. As the largest heritage and redevelopment project in Victoria's history, Merrick was required to fully restore Hudson Bay's neo-classical exterior and create contemporary lofts, retail space and luxury condos.

Merrick's rehabilitation and restoration of Vancouver's Pennsylvania Hotel, an opulent facility built in 1906 that gradually succumbed to the societal elements that have eroded so many Downtown East Side buildings, is considered a benchmark of revitalization for that particular area. "Forty-four suites have been completely restored and are fully occupied by previously homeless people and those turning their lives around from previous substance abuse," says Sakumoto. Merrick's work earned it the 2009 City of Vancouver Heritage Award of Honour and the 2010 Heritage BC Award of Honour; this adds to the roster of awards the company has received, for projects such as the Segal Graduate School of Business and the Federal Motors Building.

With an eye towards varying its portfolio even further, Merrick is currently at work on the new Coquitlam-based Transportation Management Centre for the B.C. government's Crown corporation, TI Corp., a facility that is being built to LEED Gold



MERRICK ARCHITECTURE – BOROWSKI SAKUMOTO FLIGG LTD.

The Hudson in Victoria is a conversion of the historic Hudson's Bay building with condominiums and main level commercial uses in phase one. The project was made possible by means of an ambitious rezoning which permits three future adjacent towers.



BIRD CONSTRUCTION

The recently completed Riverway Golf Course Clubhouse represents the final and most significant component of Merrick Architecture's complex of golf course buildings for the City of Burnaby.

"Our best clients are attracted by our individuality and are committed to carrying their vision through to the final phase."

*– Graham Fligg,
principal, Merrick Architecture*

standards and will consolidate several government services plus, amongst other things, oversee tolling operations for the new Port Mann Bridge. "We like the stability of government work, so we regard this as somewhat of a transitional project for us," says Borowski.

Borowski, Fligg and Sakumoto are candid about the challenges they've faced during their careers. "The architectural sector in general has just emerged from two really awful years, and in that time we consolidated our ownership to the present three partners," says Borowski. "But despite this, we experienced an extremely low turnover of core staff and added five associates.

That's because our people care about our projects, about each other, and about our design philosophy."

The principals acknowledge that budget and community development constraints make it a constant challenge to fully realize the Merrick philosophy. However, there never seems to be a shortage of standout projects in the company's portfolio, and one that the principals are especially proud of is O2, a boutique mixed-use and strikingly contemporary residential project created for Barco Canada Ltd. Merrick's achievement with O2 is that it proved a functional yet stylish edifice could be created in a small space, in this case sandwiched between two highrises at the tip of Davie and Denman streets in Vancouver. "We were confined to a 66-foot-wide site," says Borowski. Inspired by the site's proximity to English Bay and the surrounding buildings, Merrick designed O2 to have angled balconies aimed at the Bay, giving the building the appearance of a ship's prow.

Although Paul Merrick is now a senior design consultant for the practice, his name is synonymous with humanism in the design world and his influence in daily activities throughout the company is enormous. "Paul's work contains multiple layers of detail, and everything is designed with a specific purpose," says Sakumoto.

Merrick Architecture flourished early on "thanks to Paul's renowned creativity balanced with an attention to business operations and a commitment to satisfying the needs of a client," according to Fligg.

Paul Merrick famously refers to the results of design by committee as "pablum," and his personal quirkiness has always endeared him to staff. "When he renovated the Orpheum Theatre decades ago, he had portraits of his then-infant children painted on the ceiling fresco of the facility," recalls Borowski. "When asked why, he replied, 'We wanted angels up there.'"

Sakumoto points out that the design community is just starting to catch up to concepts that Merrick worked with decades ago. "The narrow urban streets and the maximization

of space, which is all the rage today, are elements that Paul was experimenting with as a young designer." Fligg interjects, "He was also practising responsible design long before LEED came along."

A significant restructuring of the company occurred seven years ago when Borowski, Fligg and Sakumoto became partners. Their transition to equal ownership concluded just over a year ago, although it began approximately five years ago. "This gave us a strong base with which to continue our design philosophy while Paul stepped back from some of the daily responsibilities of running the company," says Fligg. Accordingly, the trio recently appointed five new associates with the intent to develop a new generation of company leaders. Fligg explains, "The three of us have always been committed to installing senior people who can take on the job of shepherding projects, and now we can focus a little more on where we're going as a company while still providing mentorship and leadership."

Now that the economy seems to be recovering, Merrick is busy with a host of projects and looking forward to upcoming opportunities: in addition to tackling more government work, it's on one of the shortlisted teams for the long-anticipated Evergreen transit line.

Not surprisingly, the principals are also looking forward to maintaining their status as an independent in a world of conglomerates. "Even back in the 1990s we were approached with acquisition offers from mega firms, and although we were flattered, we've always said no: we loathe corporate speak," says Fligg. To which Borowski adds, "I don't want to justify what I'm doing everyday to a board of 35 people. And I never want to be in the position where I'm part of a company that doesn't provide personalized service or stick around through the entire project process."

However, given that architectural conglomerates today bid on projects in far-flung locations, Borowski, Fligg and Sakumoto see a chance to work on projects farther afield than the Pacific Northwest. "We would be willing to work internationally, but only as long as we maintain our identity," says Fligg by way of conclusion. "Our identity is our brand, and we're very proud of it." ■

This promotional feature was prepared for Merrick Architecture by BCBusiness magazine's Special Advertising Features Dept. Writer: Robin Brunet. For information, contact VP of Corporate Features John Cochrane at 604-299-7311. Email: jcochrane@canadawide.com



T. (604) 736.6562
WWW.NEMETZ.COM

PROUD TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH
MERRICK ARCHITECTURE

NEMETZ (S/A) & ASSOCIATES LTD.
ELECTRICAL CONSULTING ENGINEERS



PIONEER ENGINEERING CONSULTANTS LTD.

Certified Professional, Fire Protection and Building Code Consultants

Congratulations on your success!

1933 West Broadway, Vancouver, BC V6J 1Z3
Tel: 604-737-0333 | Fax: 604-737-0388 | ktchow@pioneerconsultants.net
www.pioneerconsultants.net



409 GRANVILLE STREET, SUITE 950
VANCOUVER, BC V6C 1T2 CANADA

P 604 689 4449
F 604 689 4419
www.ghl.ca

GHL IS PROUD OF ITS ASSOCIATION WITH
MERRICK ARCHITECTURE • BOROWSKI SAKUMOTO FLIGG LTD
AND OFFERS ITS CONGRATULATIONS ON THEIR CONTINUED SUCCESS



GHL provides Fire Protection Engineering, Building Code consulting and Certified Professional (CP) services. Our knowledge, experience and specialized expertise bring a distinct advantage to the project team in successfully achieving their design goals.

MEMBER COMPANY
SAFFIRE
SAFFIRE CONSULTANTS INC.

VANCOUVER ► TORONTO



Imagine

**MERRICK
ARCHITECTURE ■
BOROWSKI
SAKUMOTO
FLIGG**
LIMITED

Vancouver: 604.683.4131
Victoria: 250.480.7811
www.merrickarch.com