

**CANADIAN**  
**ARCHITECT**



# NEW MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

A QUIETLY ELEGANT STRUCTURE TO THE  
SIDE OF CENTRE BLOCK IS THE FIRST  
NEW BUILDING ON PARLIAMENT  
HILL IN ALMOST A CENTURY.

**PROJECT** Government of Canada Visitor Welcome Centre,  
Parliament Hill, Ottawa, Ontario

**ARCHITECTS** IBI Group Architects Canada (Prime Consultant),  
Moriyama & Teshima Architects (Design Architect)

**TEXT** Elsa Lam

**PHOTOS** James Brittain Photography

When I was growing up in Ottawa in the 1980s, you could walk straight through the grand neo-gothic front doors of Parliament Hill. Without too much fuss, you could stroll over to the public galleries of the House of Commons and Senate. Or you could head to the parliamentary library and admire the elegant wood-ribbed structure that had been protected from the great 1916 fire by its cast bronze doors. When the Hill was bedecked by Christmas lights in the winter, my parents would load up the car and we'd join other families who drove the loop in front of the East, Centre, and West Blocks, admiring the decorations.

Then, in 1997, a delusional man drove his jeep up the staircase in front of Centre Block, stopping just short of the main doors. After 9/11, private vehicle access to the hill was further restricted. In 2014, a lone gunman shot a sentry at the National War Memorial, then entered Centre Block and was killed in an exchange of gunfire with security personnel. Public access to the chambers of democracy has been maintained through it all, but with an increasing gamut of check-in points and security scanning measures, a cumbersome presence in those revered stone corridors.

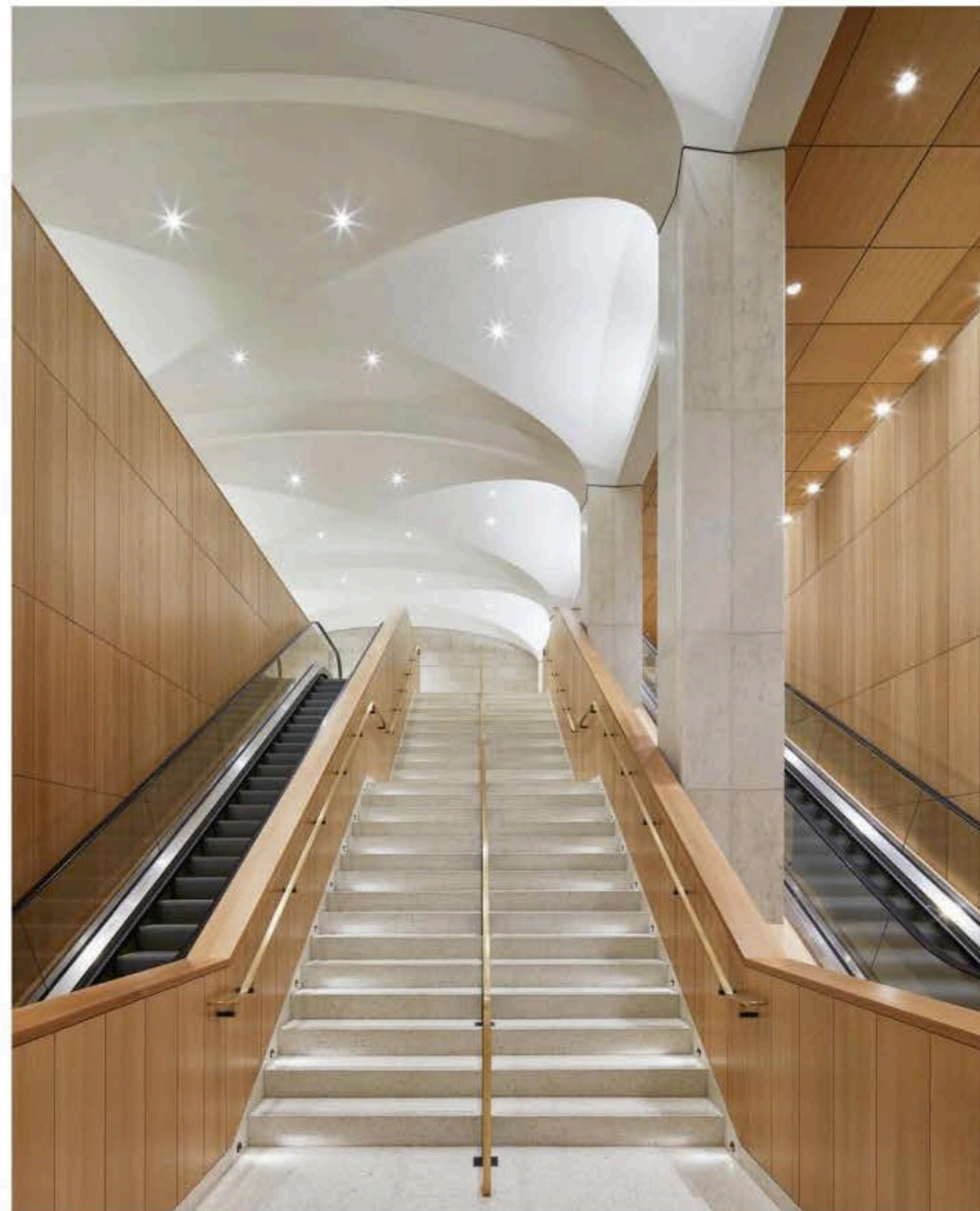
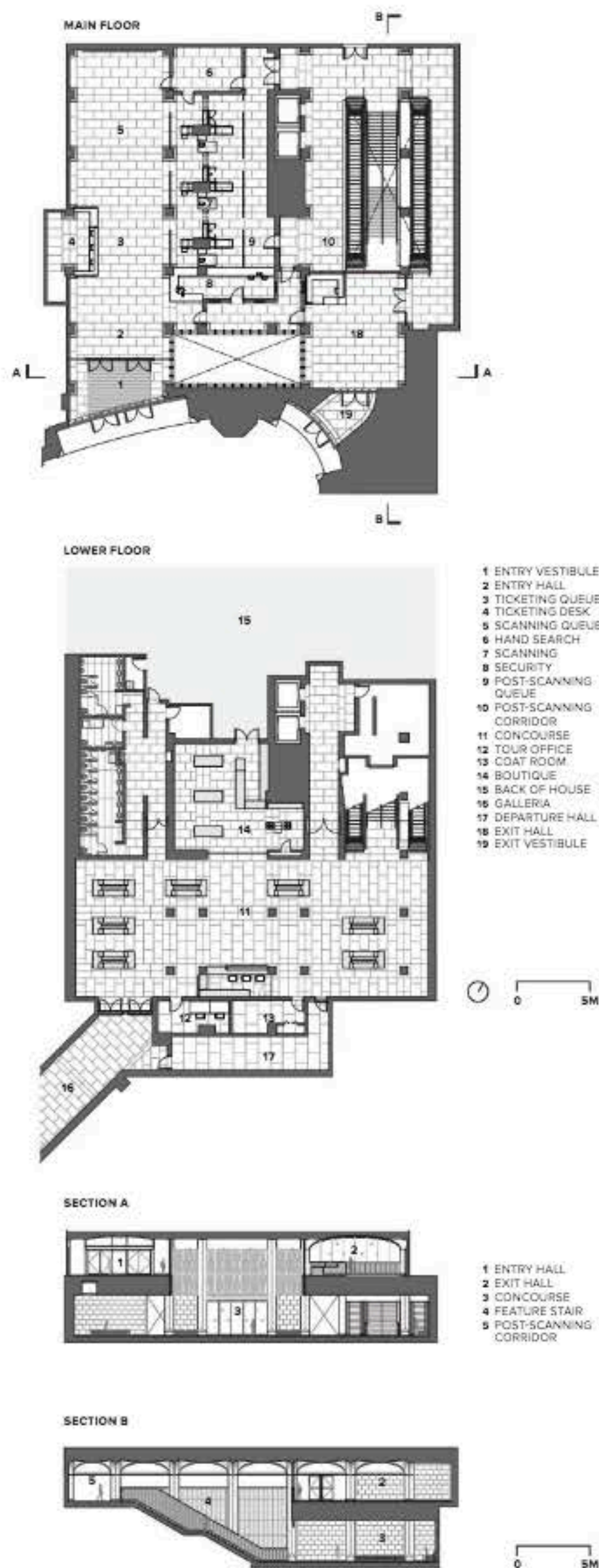
Now, the first phase of a fully accessible Visitor Welcome Centre greets visitors to Parliament Hill. It achieves the delicate feat of including updated, airport-like screening facilities, while preserving dignified, open public access to the seat of Canada's parliamentary democracy.

This is the first building to be constructed on Parliament Hill in almost a century, and the responsibility to the historic site weighed heavily on designers IBI Group and Moriyama & Teshima Architects. In response, to a remarkable degree, they've made the four-story building disappear. Three of the stories are sunk underground, with only the entrance making an appearance at grade. Even this entrance is integrated into the site. A stone retaining wall designed by Calvert Vaux subtly elevates Centre Block above the Great Lawn; that wall has now been extended to cap a new courtyard next to West Block. Arched entryways form porticos in the stonework, with recessed doors crafted in a weave-patterned bronze.

Inside, visitors enter a cross-vaulted entry area that overlooks the concourse, a level below. After passing through the scanning area, they descend to the concourse—a double-height space that includes interpretive projections, a boutique, and a gathering point for guided tours. A barrel-vaulted passageway leads to the renovated West Block. Additional phases will eventually expand the facility to connect with East Block and with Centre Block, currently under renovation. The building's main spaces are topped with a shallow cross-vaulted ceiling, rendered in acoustic plaster.

The ceiling design—a contemporary version of a shallow groin vault—gives a traditional inflection to the minimalist building. Early on the commission, recalls Moriyama & Teshima principal Carol Phillips, FRAIC, the architects decided to make a full inventory of the processional spaces and façades throughout Parliament Hill. What emerged was an appreciation of the Hill's vaulted hallways and hierarchy of arched window openings—from pointier ones higher on walls to squatter ones lower down. They also developed a detailed understanding of how these arches were geometrically generated.

**PREVIOUS PAGE** The main concourse of the Welcome Centre is topped by bronze screens and vaulted ceilings whose forms derive from the gothic geometries used throughout Parliament Hill. **OPPOSITE** A grand stair leads from the security screening level down to the concourse. The interior's minimalist palette includes white oak wall panels and Danby marble columns.



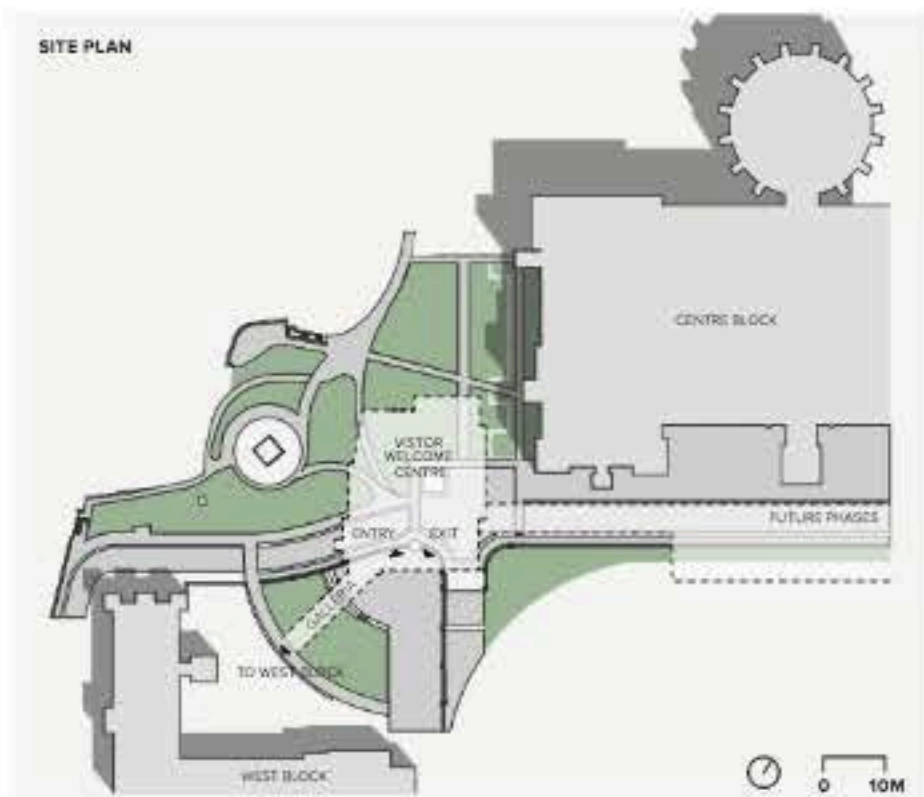
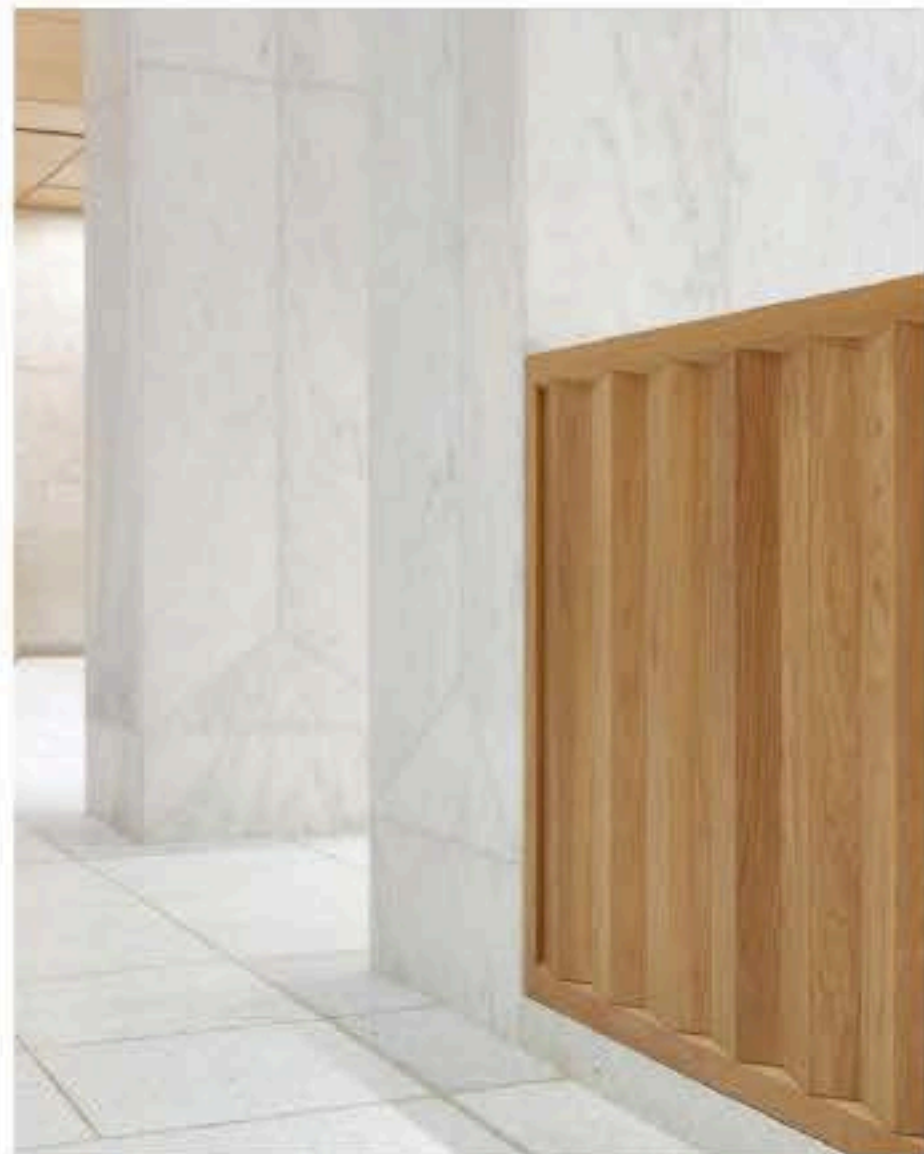
To fine-tune the entry archways through the stone wall, the design team looked to Vaux's bridges and tunnels in Central Park, whose forms also derived from Gothic principles. The logic of using different arch types to denote the relative importance of spaces informed the interior geometry of Welcome Centre elements ranging from the broad ceiling arches to details such as the patterning of the grand stair's bronze screen. The latter is a filigree of cascading pointed arches, in equal part neo-gothic and art deco.

A simplified material palette—terrazzo floors, honed Danby marble columns, near-white Adair limestone walls, white oak partitions, bronze fittings—makes the building feel exceptionally calm and composed. This restraint is also shown in a series of sensitive details. For instance, to diminish the visual weight of the large square columns—a heftiness needed to keep the facility secure and carry the landscape above—slight V-grooves are carved into the column profiles on all four sides. At the top of the columns, these pleats accentuate the spring point of the vaults. Similar folded details appear on the deeply chiselled stone frames at the front arches, a fold in the bronze stair handrails, and pleated millwork on the front doors and at the reception desks.

"Our building is so robust," says Phillips. "Introducing grace to its spaces was always part of the mandate." The commitment to making a building that feels elegant and spacious—despite being largely underground—is also evident in the planning. In most airports, screening processes entail maze-like routes. Here, however, the visitor spaces are purposefully expansive and intuitive to navigate, with overlooks and glass walls allowing glimpses into the rooms ahead. Back-of-house spaces are almost invisibly integrated, including access to the secure lower two levels, which are used for mechanical systems and materials handling.

An exterior aspect that Phillips is especially proud of is the steel guardrail that tops the extended Vaux wall. At first, this seemed a minor detail—but then, the team realized that it would set a precedent for retrofitting the original Vaux wall along the entire forecourt of Centre Block, which currently lacks a guard rail. "It started to take on much more weight," says Phillips. "It became this little piece of sculpture that had to work seamlessly with the gothic language—it had to look like it could have always been here, but it had to be contemporary, of its time, and had to have movement." Turning to the gothic geometries they had studied, they created a series of double-helices that interweave in three dimensions to form pointed arches.

The resulting railing—understated, elegant and timeless—is a microcosm of the project's success as a whole. "When we tour MPs through the Visitors Centre, they often ask, 'is this new?'" says House of Commons Chief Architect Darrell de Grandmont. "It's telling of our creating a design that integrates what they think is heritage architecture and a modern intervention. This is all new, but it looks as if it may have been here before." ▲▲



**CLIENT** GOVERNMENT OF CANADA | **ARCHITECT TEAM** IBI GROUP—DIANE PHILLIPS (FRAIC), HEATHER SEMPLE (MRAIC), FARHAN HAQQANI, BERNIE DUQUETTE, JAMY BEAUCHAMP, MARK D'AGOSTINO, CHRIS TUDIN, EARL REINKE, OM MADAN, BOB WINGATE, RYAN MAGLADRY, SANDY NG, ROSEMARIE ALBERT, MORIYAMA & TESHIMA—DIARMUID NASH (FRAIC), CAROL PHILLIPS (FRAIC), EMMANUELLE VAN RUTTEN (MRAIC), CHEN COHEN, AMANDA GILBERT, GREG PERKINS (MRAIC), WILL KLASSEN (MRAIC), CHRIS ERTSENIAN, SHAWN GEDDES, MARIA PAVLOU, MEI CHOW, CLAUDIA COZZITORTO, HAMIA AGHAJEMEBODI, LOUIS LORTIE. | **STRUCTURAL** ADJELEIAN ALLEN RUBELI LIMITED / WSP GLOBAL | **MECHANICAL/ELECTRICAL** PAGEAU MOREL | **CIVIL** IBI GROUP | **LANDSCAPE** LEMAY | **INTERIORS** MORIYAMA & TESHIMA ARCHITECTS | **CONTRACTOR** PCL CONSTRUCTION | **SUSTAINABILITY/ENVELOPE/CODE** MORRISON HERSHFELD | **LIGHTING** GABRIEL MACKINNON LIGHTING DESIGN | **HERITAGE** DFS INC. ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN | **ACOUSTICS** STATE OF THE ART ACOUSTICS | **ELEVATOR** KJA CONSULTANTS | **ACCESSIBILITY** BETTY DION ENTERPRISES | **WAYFINDING** JAAN KRUSBERG DESIGN | **HARDWARE** CANADA SPECIALTY HARDWARE | **COSTING** HANSCOMB LIMITED | **AREA** 41,800 M<sup>2</sup> | **BUDGET** \$129.9 M | **COMPLETION** JANUARY 2019

**TOP** To soften the appearance of the robust structure, a pleated language was used for elements including the columns and millwork. **OPPOSITE TOP** A contemporary version of a shallow groin vault was used for the ceilings, giving a grand, spacious feeling to the security screening level. **OPPOSITE BOTTOM** A two-storey space in the lower concourse faces the welcome desk, and forms a meeting point for tour groups.

