

Restoration of Montréal's City Hall: Honouring Heritage, Embracing the Future

Constructed between 1872 and 1878, Montréal's City Hall stands as a landmark in Canadian municipal history. As the first building in the country designed solely to house a city's administration, its monumental Second Empire style reflects both the city's growing influence in late 19th-century North America and its deep-rooted French heritage. Devastated by fire in 1922, the building was reconstructed in 1925, preserving its original stone walls and gaining an additional storey.

Launched in 2017, the recent restoration of this iconic monument represents one of Québec's most ambitious heritage conservation undertakings. Led by Beaupré Michaud et Associés in collaboration with MU Architecture and a team of expert consultants, the project unites architectural preservation with functional reconfiguration and forward-looking sustainability.

The architects sought to restore spatial clarity by reintroducing natural light and placing the citizen experience at the heart of the intervention. By opening walls, redefining public access, and creating a public route through key civic spaces—including the Hall of Honour, Council Chamber, *Salon de la Francophonie*, and historic *Balcon du Discours*—the building has become more accessible, vibrant, and symbolic.

Interior reorganization strengthens the relationship between the public and elected officials. A redesigned open reception hall, repurposed service counters, a press room, exhibition areas, family-friendly spaces, and a café all reflect a strong commitment to openness and inclusivity. The layout adheres to the highest standards of universal accessibility.

A contemporary addition, elegantly crafted in brass and granite, replaces a former temporary structure on the terrace. This refined intervention harmonizes with the historic architecture while offering sweeping views of Mount Royal and downtown Montréal. It reinforces the building's current identity: a bridge between heritage and innovation.

The upper floors, once dark and fragmented, have been reimagined into bright, flexible work environments. Natural light, acoustic comfort, biophilic design, and discreet technological integration contribute to user well-being. Prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the project rethinks workplace configurations, introducing varied spaces for collaboration, rest, and digital communication.

The restoration also embraces sustainability at its core. Targeting LEED v4.1 certification, the project has achieved a 79% reduction in energy consumption through the conservation of original materials, high-efficiency systems, and a nearly carbon-neutral energy strategy. Facilities promoting active mobility—showers, lockers, bike garages, and EV charging stations—complement this environmentally conscious approach.

The meticulous attention to detail underscores the project's rigour. Over 12,000 tonnes of original stone and 169 historic oak sash windows were painstakingly restored, preserving their appearance while enhancing performance. Traditional craftsmanship—from

stonemasonry and metalwork to carpentry and tin-smithing—was showcased and passed on to new generations.

In sum, this exemplary restoration restores Montréal's City Hall to its rightful stature as both a civic monument and a living institution. A dialogue between memory and modernity, this project stands as a model of urban resilience, sustainable design, and participatory democracy for the 21st century.