



# Robert H. Lee Alumni Centre

by ZUZANNA WODZYNSKA

The latest addition to the University of British Columbia (UBC), the Robert H. Lee Alumni Centre, has opened its doors. Located right at the heart of campus and next to the newly built Student Union Building, the Alumni Centre is a 40,000-square-foot rentable venue with a variety of spaces for events.

The modern looking three-storey building – a collaboration of Hughes Condon Marler Architects and KPMB Architects – has been named after the prominent B.C. business leader and philanthropist Robert H. Lee.

The UBC Robert H. Lee Alumni Centre is designed to provide street level vitality and energy while establishing a landmark building for the University and a home for its alumni for life. “The building contains a welcome centre for the university, learning facilities, meeting spaces, banquet facility, dedicated meeting space for UBC’s Board of Directors, offices and an upmarket café. Its timeless design expresses the collective values, legacy and aspirations of the institution and its alumni,” says Richard Fisher, chief communications officer at UBC.

The exterior is primarily unitized curtain wall that required a state-of-the-art mechanical system. “The high-end air-to-water heat pump system is only the second unit to be installed in Canada,” notes John Polglase at Syncra Construction Corp., the construction

manager on the project. “The system is manufactured in Italy and is referred to as the Cadillac of the industry.”

Welcoming visitors into the building is the four-storey, open atrium space that boasts an extensive use of Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified wood, in particular rough sawn cedar. The Welcome Centre within is the first stop for alumni, current students and visitors to campus. The first floor foyer can accommodate 300 people and features built-in, modern-classic lounge furniture, an inviting fireplace, and an interactive media display area showcasing the story of UBC and its alumni.

Also on the main floor is the much smaller Achievement Lounge with its stylish lounge furniture and a capacity of 40, along with a cafe and a library, all ideally designed for informal networking.

One level below there are four meeting rooms with HD flat panel display screens and an in-house sound system. These rooms can hold anywhere from six to 12 individuals. The level also hosts entrepreneurship@ubc, a unprecedented combination of mentorship, education and venture creation to support the UBC community.

Long-span cedar-clad staircases lead up toward the second floor. These created a structural challenge for the engineers on the project at Glotman Simpson Consulting Engineers. “The

brief was to keep the structure as slim as possible while still spanning the full atrium, without immediate support,” explains Anthony El-Araj, partner at Glotman Simpson. The solution was a truss within the guardrails. “We modelled this using E-tabs to calculate the frequency of the structure and therefore ensure a safe and esthetically pleasing result,” says El-Araj.

The second floor has three rentable spaces: a large, 4,700-square-foot Celebration Room and two smaller classrooms. To enhance the spaciousness, the Celebration Room has 14-foot glass walls. The combined, through-and-through natural light with the exposed cedar ceiling create an open, airy experience, while room dividers provide flexible staging.

The two smaller classrooms are located directly behind the Celebration Room and are 500 and 590 square feet, respectively. The smaller room has direct access to the catering kitchen and both rooms feature built-in audiovisual services.

Above them, on the third floor, is the boardroom that affords wonderful views of the central campus. It is a modern-classic design in a private setting and features a large U-shaped table. The board table can accommodate up to 32 guests, with an additional 30 spots available in theatre-style seating along the side.

Next to the boardroom is the terrace lounge area. It’s a 450-square-foot space with access to the top floor balcony. Again, furnished in the modern-classic style it can be used for standalone events or as a support space for events held in the boardroom.

Throughout the building, an automated lighting controls system was provided to allow for both manual and automatic operations. The lighting controls include integration with a Crestron audio-visual control system for event spaces to create flexible and functional scenes within these spaces.

There were, however, some challenges facing the electrical engineering team on the project at Stantec Consulting to incorporate electrical design features and also meet the building code’s aim for alternative solutions. “The provision of an emergency generator to ensure operation of smoke exhaust extraction fans that serve the interconnected floor space was one such challenge,” says Jim Jay, senior associate at Stantec. “The generator was designed to be placed on the roof of the building, as there was no space available on the ground level.”

Like many of Vancouver’s buildings, the new alumni centre is targeting LEED Gold. “The Robert H. Lee Alumni Centre will become the heart of campus,” says UBC president, Stephen Toope. “Bob is the perfect symbol for the alumni centre because he brings people together.”

“My experiences as a commerce student laid the foundation for my career and I hope that other alumni and friends will understand the importance of UBC to future generations,” says Lee. “My family and I are deeply grateful for this honour.”

Most of the \$18.5-million budget was funded by UBC alumni through UBC’s start an evolution campaign: the most ambitious fundraising and alumni engagement campaign in Canadian history. **A**

**LOCATION**  
6163 University Blvd, Vancouver, B.C.

**OWNER/DEVELOPER**  
UBC Properties Trust

**ARCHITECTS**  
KPMB Architects / HCM Architects

**CONSTRUCTION MANAGER**  
Syncra Construction Corp.

**STRUCTURAL CONSULTANT**  
Glotman Simpson Consulting Engineers

**MECHANICAL CONSULTANT**  
MMM Group Ltd.

**ELECTRICAL CONSULTANT**  
Stantec Consulting

**LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT**  
PFS Studio

**TOTAL AREA**  
40,000 square foot

**TOTAL COST**  
\$18.5 million