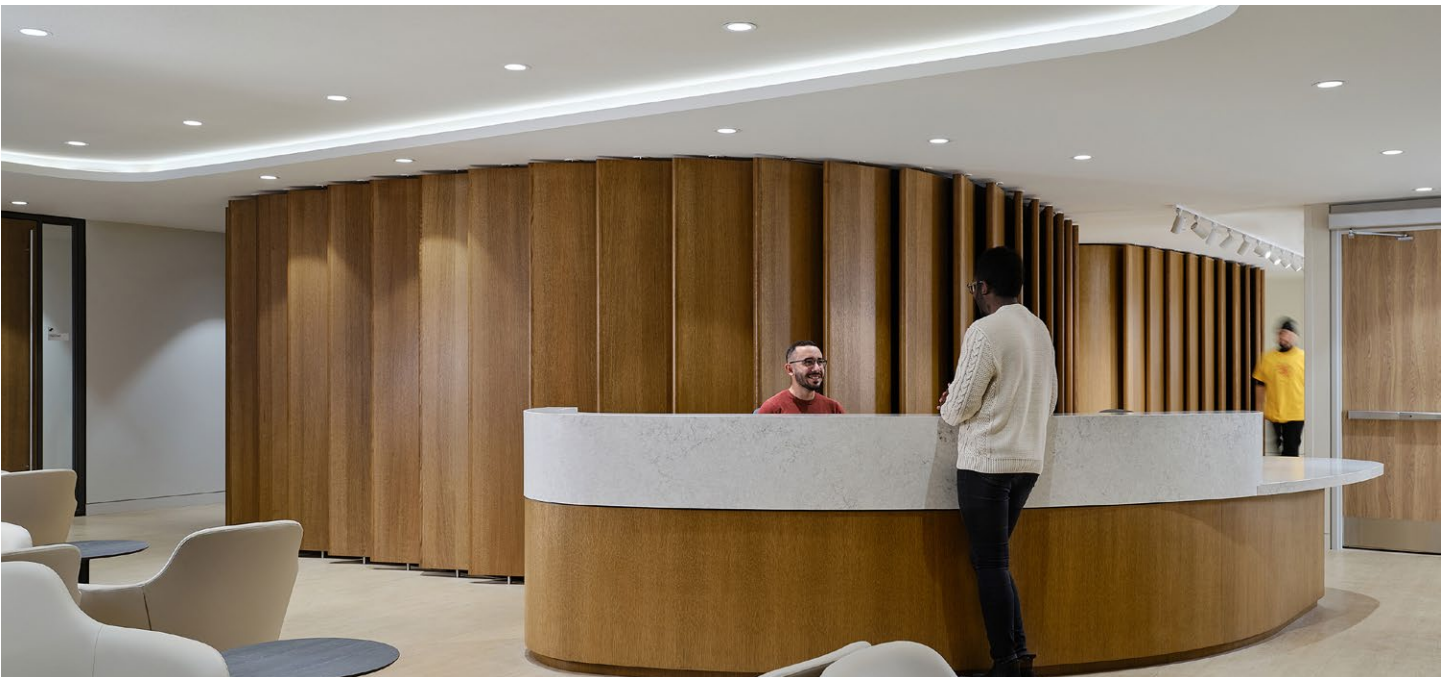


Architecture Counsel

HQ TORONTO

Combining the clinical efficiencies of an advanced medical facility with a gallery and event space dedicated to Toronto's LGBTQ communities



Toronto, ON | October 12, 2022

HQ Toronto is a welcoming health centre in downtown where all gay/bisexual men, trans, and non-binary (LGBTQ+) people can receive comprehensive, holistic person-centred services that support their physical, sexual, mental, emotional, community, spiritual, and social well-being.

All great designs tell a story. For the Ontario HIV Treatment Network's HQ Toronto project, Architecture Counsel was tasked with relating the story of LGBTQ+ people's health – shifting the narrative which once focused primarily on HIV treatment, towards a more holistic message highlighting concepts of well-being, culture, comfort, community, inclusivity, and positivity.

MEDIA CONTACT INFORMATION

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PHOTOGRAPHER

doublespace
photography inc.

Above: Reception and waiting area – Caesarstone was thermo-formed to create the semi-circular reception desk



In telling this story, our challenge was to create a welcoming and supportive environment that speaks to a community, while addressing the highly specialized program and sophisticated technical and clinical needs befitting a leading-edge health centre. It was crucial to create highly functional technical spaces – complete with current expectations for accessibility and infection prevention and control – in an environment that felt decidedly un-clinical.

Above: Service users are linked to appropriate care and services in the Express Test Check-in waiting area

Our design solution was to create a plan that was flexible, adaptable, and highly convertible enabling the clinical programs to operate independently from the community, cultural, and event spaces. The program includes a mix of physical and sexual health clinic spaces; an express testing laboratory for sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections; mental and social health spaces, including private and group counseling rooms; five multi-use rooms that can be converted to accommodate a wide range of activities – teaching, seminars, smudging ceremonies, yoga classes, book clubs, poetry readings, social, and celebratory events; and communal and gathering spaces, including a curated gallery celebrating LGBTQ culture through art.



HQ occupies more than 9,000 square feet on the eighth floor of 790 Bay Street, a modernist heritage building designed in 1959 by Peter Dickinson, a celebrated Toronto architect. The original building served as headquarters for the Continental Can Company. Designed in the International Style, it featured reinforced concrete frame with precast concrete spandrels, horizontal strip windows with a stainless-steel sash, and vertical wall divisions constructed of precast concrete clad in stainless steel.

Above: Natural wood is used in all the common areas to provide a sense of comfort, warmth, as well as sound attenuation

To accommodate the project goals of a contemporary, technically advanced health facility, we were required to re-think and transform the space – architecturally, structurally, mechanically, and electrically. Typical of its era, the original base building could be aptly characterized as a forest of columns, orthogonal in design. Our challenge was to find a design solution that broke with this to a more organic space, obscuring the columns to achieve an open flow, and transforming its harsh angularity into a softer design featuring rounded elements.



Our interest in neuro-architecture inspired many of our decisions. Evidence supports that the way a person's brain and body respond to a physical and spatial environment has a profound impact on health, well-being, and behaviour. In this holistic, interdisciplinary approach, no one aspect of the design takes precedence; the design solution artfully integrates a wealth of elements to elicit a positive emotional response including colours, textures, materials, lighting, shapes, acoustics, and furnishings.

With the possible exception of interior designers or architects, most people will not likely recall the physical appearance of the environment where their last healthcare appointment took place, few, however, will forget the feelings associated with the experience. Consequently, a key objective of our team was to improve the experience of HQ's clients by making their visit as positive, comfortable, and stress-free as possible. Many in the LGBTQ community report negative experiences in the health-care system and there is widespread distrust and reluctance to access care. For patients waiting to see a physician, or clients accessing mental health/counselling or testing facilities, we recognized the importance of creating a calming environment that would alleviate anxiety, adopting a hospitality or residential vocabulary where possible. Respect for individual dignity and privacy, independence, and self-governance were also important drivers and reflected the client's mandate to provide a safe, supportive, and stigma-free environment for clients. To protect privacy, we created a moveable partition wall to separate the clinical areas from social/gathering/event space, while waiting rooms and group counselling areas feature acoustic gypsum ceiling treatments.

Above left: A kitchenette area supports activities in the multi-use meeting rooms and event area

Above right: Clinical spaces and laboratory can operate discretely from the community, social gathering spaces

Below: Leading-edge testing methods will be shared with researchers and health care providers in Canada and around the world





We looked to nature and Indigenous Canadian culture for inspiration. The neutral tones of the furnishings and fixtures lend themselves to a calming ambiance, while accentuating the colourful art pieces adorning the walls. A semi-circular front desk crafted from stained white oak greets the visitor in the main entry. Natural wood is used in all the common areas to provide a sense of comfort, warmth, as well as sound attenuation, while furniture with rounded edges and curved elements were selected to soften the space. The strategic use of sound-attenuated glazing brings natural light as deeply into the building as possible; in other areas, we employed specialty gallery-like lighting to support the displays of curated art and installations.

Prior to the creation of this facility, Toronto was one of the only major North American cities with a large LGBTQ population that did not have an integrated health centre to serve this community; now Toronto joins the ranks of San Francisco, Boston, and London as one of the leaders in this new model of holistic care.

Above left: One of five flexible, convertible multi-use rooms that can accommodate a range of activities

Above right: Semi-circular front desk crafted from stained white oak greets the visitor in the main entry

CLIENT NAME

Ontario HIV Treatment Network

SIZE

9,268 sf/ 861 sm

COMPLETION

July 2022

ABOUT ARCHITECTURE COUNSEL

Architecture Counsel Inc. (ACi) is a full-service architectural practice founded in 2011 to provide clients with expertly crafted designs that address each client's unique aspirations and needs. Our dedicated team works diligently and consistently to uphold our tradition of exceptional design, rigorous project management, and technically advanced projects. While our initial focus was on higher education projects (45+), today our portfolio has expanded to include visionary new projects in health and wellness, affordable housing, hospitality, and senior living. As we continue to grow and evolve, Architecture Counsel remains steadfast to its mission to create meaningful, humane spaces and buildings that promote well-being, encourage positive social interaction and connections, and enhance the quality of life. For more information, please contact: info@architecturecounsel.com

PROJECT TEAM

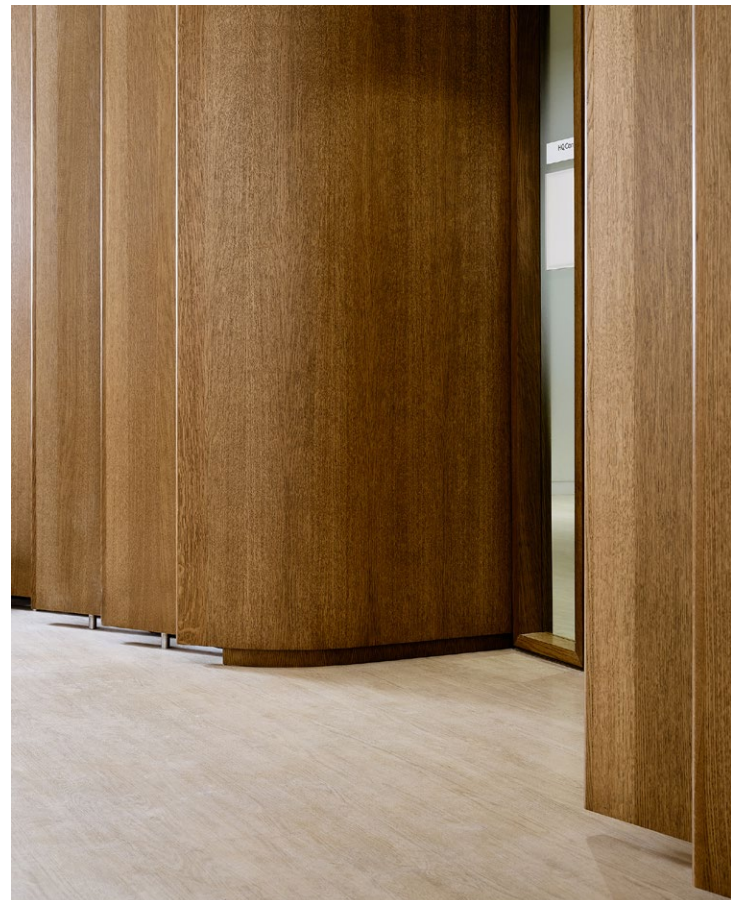
Architect: Architecture Counsel Inc. (ACi)
 Mechanical/Electrical: MacGregor Allsop Limited
 Structural: Paul T. Keenan Consulting Structural Engineer
 AV, IT/Communications, Security Systems: Tech Wave Com
 Signage: Frontier

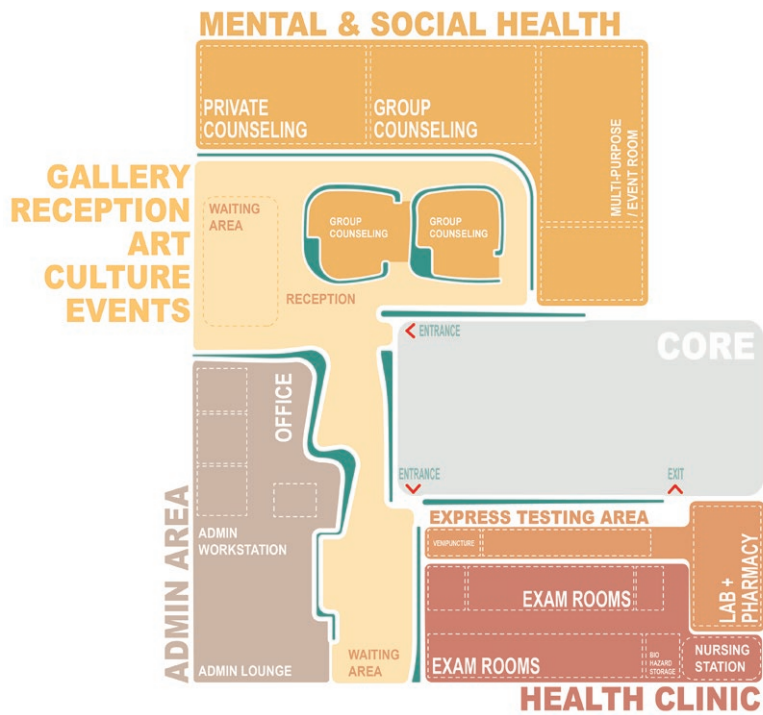


Left: A curated revolving gallery celebrates gay and bisexual men, trans, and “two-spirited” peoples through the medium of art

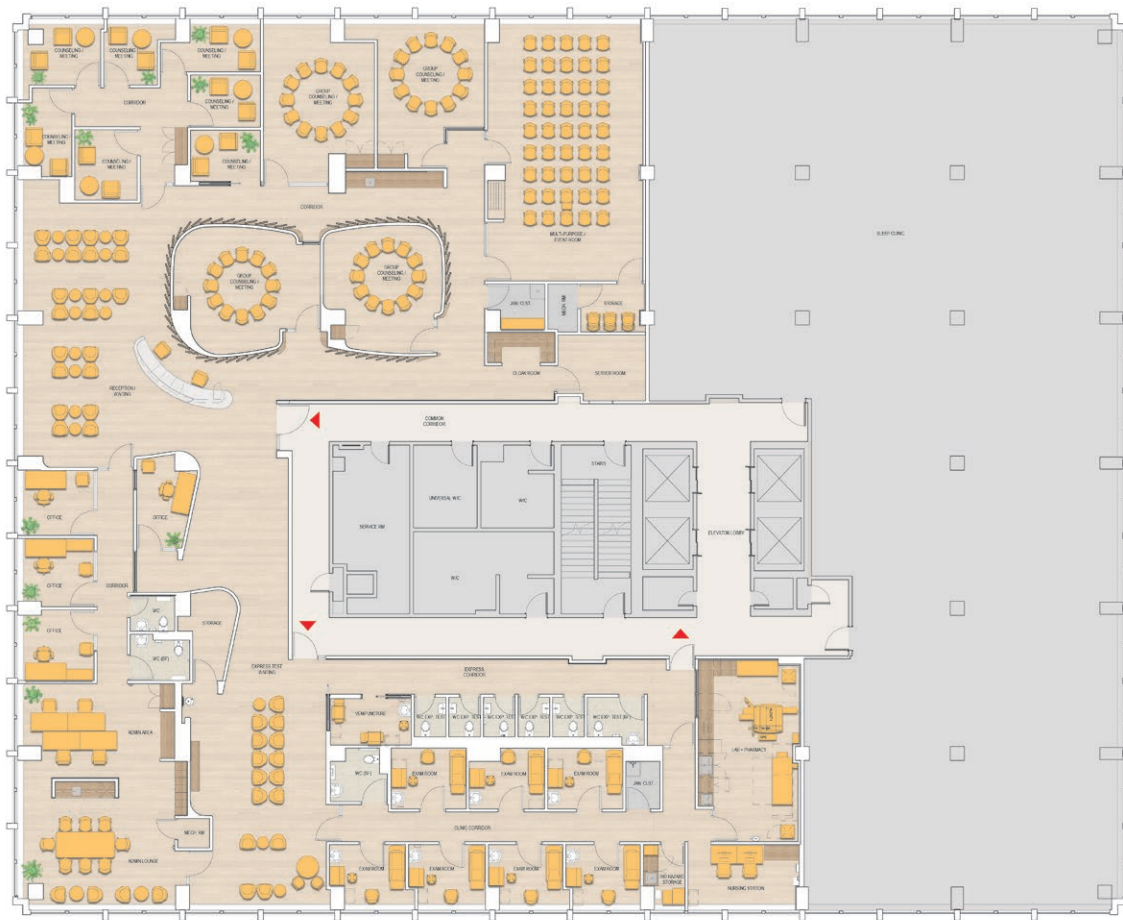


Above left: Detail of the semi-circular reception desk’s thermoformed Caesarstone
Above right: Detail of the feature wall’s stained white oak “fins”





Program bubble diagram



HQ floor plan