Centennial College

Ontario's first mass-timber academic building is taking shape at Centennial College

Designed in less than one year, manufactured in 12 weeks and erected in 100 days, Ontario's first mass-timber academic building is rapidly taking shape at Centennial College's Progress Campus in Toronto – thanks in part to its innovative wooden structure.

The $105-million expansion to the campus building will embody the college's commitment to Truth and Reconciliation, Indigenous education and sustainable design when it opens in fall 2023. Centennial is collaborating with contractor EllisDon, DIALOG and Smoke Architecture to construct the province's first zero-carbon higher-education building, designed based on the Indigenous concept of "Two-eyed Seeing."

"Indigenous perspectives inspired our core design narratives," says Eladia Smoke, Principal of Smoke Architecture. "We honour our host nations by reintroducing teachings from this territory, reinforcing relationships with the land and all our relations. Centennial College Indigenous staff and faculty worked with us to imbed these perspectives throughout, going beyond surface motifs to reach a deeper shared understanding that manifests in architectural space."

The six-storey addition will provide 150,000 square feet of academic space for Centennial's engineering technology and applied science programs, flexible classrooms that support Indigenous ways of teaching and being, as well as an engaging student "touchdown" area, collaborative spaces, administrative offices and food services.

"At Centennial, we view sustainability, inclusivity and Indigeneity as wholly interconnected and we wanted to create a learning space that demonstrates the importance of that tripartite relationship," says Dr. Craig Stephenson, President and CEO of Centennial College. "We're so incredibly excited to see our unique academic building rising quickly. Indeed, rapid construction is said to be one of the many benefits of working with wood."

Mass timber, which is composed of wood strips laminated together to form strong structural components, can substantially reduce greenhouse gas emissions, cut wastage, pollution and costs associated with construction, and create a more aesthetically pleasing and healthy built environment. Its zero-carbon emissions design, along with its ability to store thousands of tonnes of carbon in its sustainably harvested mass timber structure, sets an important precedent in the building sector.