

CANADIAN

ARCHITECT

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LINEAR AND LEAN



# LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!

THE FIRST PHASE OF A DRAMATIC NEW BUILDING FOR CAPILANO UNIVERSITY'S FILM SCHOOL ESTABLISHES A LANDMARK PRESENCE ON A PICTURESQUE NORTH VANCOUVER CAMPUS.



**PROJECT** CAPILANO UNIVERSITY NAT AND FLORA BOSA CENTRE FOR FILM AND ANIMATION, NORTH VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA  
**ARCHITECT** CANNON DESIGN  
**TEXT** LESLIE JEN  
**PHOTOS** DYLAN DURST AND EMA PETER

A small undergraduate-focused institution that was until 2008 a community college, Capilano University has occupied a modestly sized campus since the early 1970s in Lynnmour, North Vancouver. An assemblage of buildings aligns along a predominantly north-south axis, and many of these structures are showing their age, surprisingly impermanent in character—save for the substantial Henriquez and Partners-

designed library, completed in 1996.

But now, Cap U is enjoying the arrival of a bold newcomer, big and brash in the best possible way. Under the design direction of Andrew King—currently based in Montreal—the Nat and Flora Bosa Centre for Film and Animation was the result of a combined effort of three of Cannon's offices—Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto. In 2009, the firm was commissioned to address Capilano's need for an expanded facility to house its film and animation program, not surprising given the region's thriving film industry and its reputation as Hollywood North.

Sited at the less populous north end of the campus, the Centre's front elevation faces south

towards a greater concentration of buildings, while its back end orients itself to the dramatic mountains, adjacent to two sizeable parking lots. The entire project can be broken down into essentially two components: a solid hulking mass that is firmly entrenched in its site, and floating above it a long, transparent horizontal bar stretching west to east. This single grand gesture forms a gateway or portal into the campus—both symbolically and literally; beneath the hovering bar, a critical transportation hub for students and faculty has been established, and buses rumble in and out of the loop, collecting and depositing their passengers on their daily route.



DYLAN DURST

**ABOVE** A STRIKING NEW ADDITION TO THE CAPILANO UNIVERSITY CAMPUS, THE GRAPHIC AND ELONGATED FORM OF THE NAT AND FLORA BOSHA CENTRE FOR FILM AND ANIMATION SUGGESTS MOST OBVIOUSLY A FILMSTRIP, BUT THE ARCHITECTURE EMPLOYS A VARIETY OF CINEMATIC DEVICES.

The building's long, low exaggerated horizontal form takes advantage of the topographical richness of the campus's thickly forested slope and meandering pathways. Only very minimal site manipulation was required to accommodate for the core program requirement of the massive three-storey black-box sound stage, which firmly anchors the building to the site. Additionally, a highly articulated exterior stair from the lowest level leads to the generous entrance platform of the building's main entrance—all part of the south-facing courtyard that was sculpted from

the slope, providing vital outdoor public space to students, faculty and visitors. At present, the courtyard is less defined than it will be when the project's second phase is realized; a three-storey volume tucked beneath the glazed bar will run on a perpendicular axis, creating a roughly cruciform plan upon completion.

Curiosity is immediately piqued upon approach, as an extended band of glazing on the lowest level of the promenade reveals wardrobe functions taking place. Enticing views of students toiling away at their sewing machines,

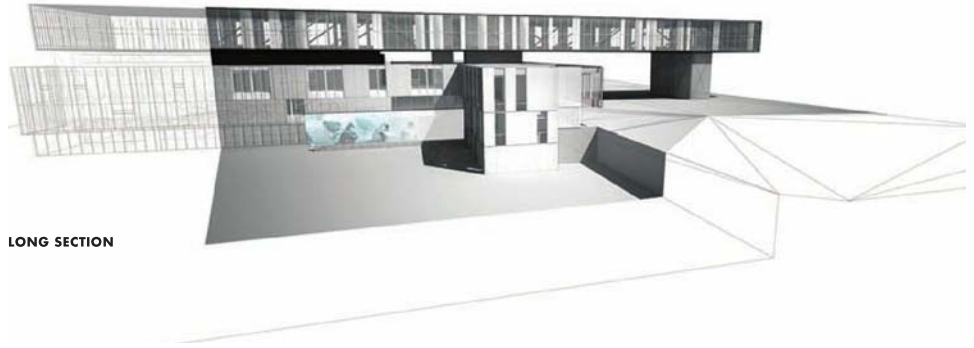
bolts of rich fabric unfurling, and ornate costumes hanging on dressmaker's dummies provide an insider's view of just one aspect of how behind-the-scenes film magic is made. Though not immediately visible, the big messy work happens on this level, too: carpentry, painting, sets, storage, mechanical functions and of course, the sound stage.

One floor up on the main level, the entrance foyer/lounge opens up to one of the project's key spaces—a big, dramatic theatre, whose plush red seats evoke the tradition and glamour of the



**ABOVE** HOVERING OMINOUSLY, THE DARK ZINC-CLAD CANTILEVERED BAR IS A POWERFUL FORMAL GESTURE AND AN UNDENIABLE LANDMARK ON THE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS. **BELOW, LEFT TO RIGHT** IN CONTRAST TO A FAIRLY MONOCHROMATIC MATERIAL PALETTE, RED WALLS IN THE STAIRWELL DELIVER CINEMATIC PUNCH; A VIEW OF THE SOUTH ELEVATION REVEALS THE VERDANT SLOPE IN WHICH THE BUILDING IS NESTLED; DRESSMAKER'S DUMMIES ON THE POLISHED CONCRETE FLOOR OF THE LOWEST-LEVEL CORRIDOR OFFER A CLUE ABOUT THE COSTUMING FUNCTIONS TAKING PLACE.





LONG SECTION

cinematic world. The space enables students to study film as precedent, and also provides a suitably grand environment for them to screen their own work. Studios for sound mixing and effects are housed on this floor, as are rooms for hair and makeup. A film library, faculty offices and administrative functions comprise the majority of the third level.

And then, the Film Centre's soaring moment: the defining formal gesture of the project—the elongated cantilevered bar measuring 120 metres in length that is comprised of classrooms, labs and other student-focused spaces. Essentially a massive glazed truss, the bar's ends and underbelly are smoothly and elegantly wrapped in black zinc panels. Conversely, its long elevations are completely transparent to allow daylight to illuminate every space on the entire floor while capturing expansive views of the campus and city to the south and mountainous terrain to the north. Visible through the seemingly endless walls of glazing, the diagonal steel structural elements form a rhythmic façade. A great deal of time and effort was dedicated to detailing the curtain wall to ensure a clean and untainted elevation, free of any spandrel panels. Because, according to King, the scheme is all about privileging the truss: "Transparency is key because it is important to get the reading of the truss, so the glazing is pushed right to the very edge of the curtain wall."

Not to be overlooked are the two concrete vertical shafts that support the eastern end of the bar. One contains mechanical and electrical functions, and the other a stairwell as a means of egress from the topmost floor. The stair tower itself is an enticing and iconic feature, and is fully glazed on one side to reveal movement within and interior walls that are painted a vibrant red. At night, with the benefit of illumination, the stair provides cinematic punch with its arresting vermilion glow.

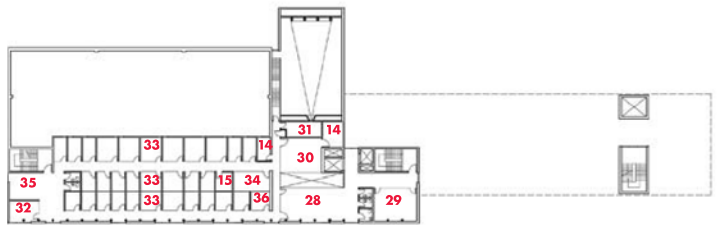
As one might expect, more dramatic episodes are rife in the Film Centre. Driven by King's fascination with the interface between film and architecture, a variety of cinematic devices have been employed that explore concepts of framing, voyeurism and movement. Most obviously, the cantilevered bar resembles at macro scale a filmstrip, a sequential frame by frame of various scenes taking place. The open transparency showcases the students and faculty inhabiting the classrooms and labs on this floor—whose activities provide a filmic event to be enjoyed by passersby.

The open gateway to the campus created by the building's unusual form operates as a metaphor for frame and aperture on a large scale, while this notion is further explored in a series of smaller gestures throughout the Film Centre. Windows overlook the sound stage from the third-floor offices, promoting viewing of and engagement with sets being prepped and scenes being shot, while a blind-controlled opening is cut into the wall of the linear stair running alongside the double-height theatre to permit surreptitious and voyeuristic glimpses of the screen and audience. The theatre



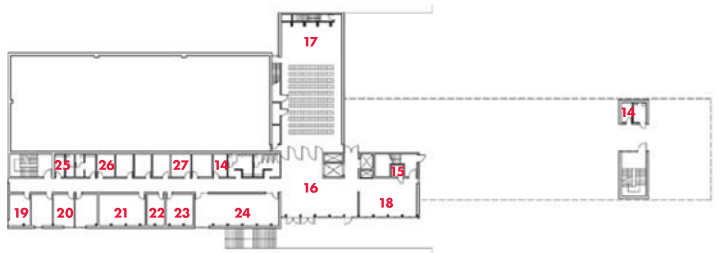
LEVEL 3

- 37 CLASSROOM
- 38 ANIMATION CLASSROOM
- 39 ANIMATION CAMERA ROOM
- 40 MACLAB
- 41 STUDENT LOUNGE/STUDY ROOM
- 42 INDIGENOUS FILM
- 43 VISUAL EFFECTS LAB
- 44 DIGITAL ANIMATION COMPUTER LAB
- 45 COMMERCIAL ANIMATION LAB



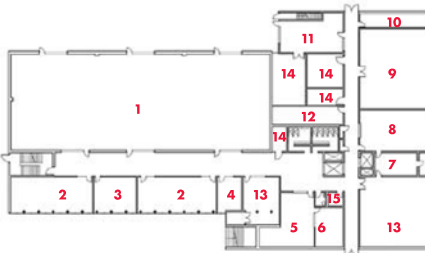
LEVEL 2

- 28 RECEPTION/WAITING
- 29 AUDITORIUM ROOM
- 30 SEMINAR ROOM
- 31 PROJECTION ROOM
- 32 DIRECTOR'S OFFICE
- 33 OFFICE
- 34 FILM LIBRARY
- 35 INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCE
- 36 COPY/PRINT



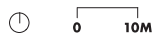
LEVEL 1

- 16 ENTRY/LOUNGE
- 17 THEATRE/AUDITORIUM
- 18 PUBLIC SEATING
- 19 GREEN ROOM
- 20 HAIR/MAKEUP
- 21 MIXING SUITE
- 22 ADR
- 23 SOUND EFFECTS
- 24 REHEARSAL ROOM
- 25 CHANGE ROOM
- 26 EDIT
- 27 COLOUR CORRECTION



LEVEL 0

- 1 SOUND STAGE AND GREEN SCREEN
- 2 COSTUMING STUDIO
- 3 COSTUME STORAGE/LAUNDRY
- 4 STUDIO TECH OFFICE
- 5 CARPENTRY/TOOL SHOP
- 6 PAINT SHOP
- 7 STUDIO TECH WORK ROOM
- 8 EQUIPMENT STAGING
- 9 SET DECORATING STORAGE
- 10 PREP STORAGE
- 11 LOADING
- 12 CAMERA/SOUND STAGE
- 13 STORAGE
- 14 MECHANICAL/ELECTRICAL/DATA
- 15 JANITOR





EWAN PETER

**ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT** A POETIC MOMENT IS ACHIEVED WITH STAINLESS STEEL SIGNAGE APPLIED TO TRANSLUCENT GLASS PANELS, CONTRASTING BEAUTIFULLY WITH THE TEXTURED CONCRETE WALL BEHIND; THE THEATRE/AUDITORIUM PROVIDES A STARKLY MINIMAL YET LUXURIOUS SPACE FOR STUDENTS TO SCREEN THEIR FILMS. **BOTTOM, LEFT TO RIGHT** A GLIMPSE FROM THE CORRIDOR INTO THE MASSIVE TRIPLE-HEIGHT SOUND STAGE WHICH ANCHORS THE BUILDING TO THE SITE; THE MAIN-FLOOR ENTRY AND LOUNGE REVEALS THE PRESENCE OF DOUGLAS FIR, A FAMILIAR WEST COAST MATERIAL CHOICE.

was deliberately designed not to be a sealed black box, and aperture is further evident in the full wall of doors—which, when flung open, provide a significant degree of porosity. The flickering projected images on the screen are visible not only to those loitering about in the Film Centre’s fully glazed front lounge space, but to those beyond the limits of the building itself.

Appropriating the language of film and the camera’s panning shots of sweeping vistas and action scenes, the design strategy manifests a sense of movement and temporal sequence. Long and protracted looping circulatory paths in the form of corridors, bridges, promenades and stairs emphasize the linearity of sequential movement and provide near and distant perspectives at all times. Additionally, overlapping

and interwoven spaces encourage the perception of cinematic scenes.

While the Film Centre is unquestionably a dynamic and inspiring addition to the Capilano campus, there is something not quite articulated in the finished building that was present in the seductive renderings which helped net the project a 2010 *Canadian Architect* Award of Excellence. Perhaps it’s not possible to achieve in real life the sublime monochromatic purity of form and line inherent in an exquisitely crafted rendering, or maybe it’s just the perpetual challenge of increasingly constrained budgets that begin to erode the integrity of these tough institutional projects. But hope remains that its promise may yet be fulfilled when Phase 2 is undertaken, where the assertive geometries of

intersecting and overlapping axes become apparent and the entirety of the scheme is finally realized. **CA**

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**STRUCTURAL** EQUILIBRIUM CONSULTING (ERIC KARSHI)  
**MECHANICAL** AERIS ENGINEERING (GEOFF MCDONELL)  
**ELECTRICAL** MIMM GROUP (ANDREW TASHIRO)  
**CIVIL** DELCAN (COLIN KRISTIANSEN)  
**LANDSCAPE** PVL PARTNERSHIP (CHRIS STERRY)  
**INTERIORS** GANNON DESIGN  
**BUILDING ENVELOPE CONSULTANT** MORRISON HERSHFIELD LTD.  
**GEOTECHNICAL** HORIZON (TROY ISSIGONIS)  
**CODE CONSULTANT** BTY (TOBY MALLINDER, ELLIS PANG)  
**ACOUSTIC CONSULTANT** BKL CONSULTANTS LTD.  
**A/V EQUIPMENT CONSULTANT** MCSQUARED SYSTEM DESIGN GROUP, INC.  
**CONTRACTOR** LEDCOR  
**AREA** 97,000 FT<sup>2</sup>  
**BUDGET** \$35 M  
**COMPLETION** JANUARY 2012



EWAN PETER