

# Revitalizing Toronto's Massey Hall

## A famed venue retakes the spotlight



**Allied  
Professional:**  
KPMB

**Contractor:**  
Bothwell-  
Accurate Co. Inc.

**Manufacturer:**  
DRE/CETCO

Since opening its doors in 1894, Toronto's Massey Hall has become one of Canada's most iconic performance spaces and a host to the world's greatest talent. Over a century later, in July 2018, The Massey Hall revitalization project was undertaken to modernize the celebrated entertainment venue for the 21st century.

The project represented the most significant renovation in the Hall's 127-year history. Originally conceived by Canadian businessman Hart Massey as a gift to the people of Toronto that would offer spiritual and educational enrichment of classical music, the ensuing years saw new performances and audiences take the stage. Over time, the lack of lobbies and amenities became increasingly challenging for performers and audiences alike. As such, when a developer offered Massey Hall the ownership of the adjacent lot, an unexpected opportunity for transformation and renewal emerged.

## Accommodating modern audiences

Completed in November 2021, the multi-year revitalization includes reenvisioned architecture and interiors by KPMB Architects, which worked alongside heritage architects GBCA to create a design scheme that honours the building's legacy while providing a state-of-the-art performance venue for the future with enhanced acoustics and seating.

The project vision included three primary elements: a major addition, new suspended walkways (aka "passarelles") along the east and west sides of the venue, and an extensive renovation and restoration of the heritage architecture.

Now, the suspended walkways connect the balcony levels with the new lobbies in the addition, which itself complements the existing venue with generous new patron spaces, a loading dock suited to touring show needs, well-appointed dressing rooms, education spaces, and two new performance venues. What's more,





## A hallmark waterproofing

Massey Hall renovation was a prestigious undertaking. It required all the technical and physical resources at Bothwell-Accurate, DRE/CETCO, and KPMB's disposal to deliver the successful completion of the project.

Massey Hall is a Canadian heritage site. Due to the historical nature of the building a waterproofing membrane with long-term performance characteristics was crucial. Since the basement is a critical occupied space, the product selected had to have a meaningful long-term warranty. Anecdotal evidence suggested that a branch of the fabled Taddle Creek aquifer was present on or around the site and this demanded a robust and reliable waterproofing approach and waterproofing product.

The design team selected CETCO's Ultraseal for this application as the product's reliability in a blindside application condition was well understood by the consultant team based on past projects. The strong product and installation support by the manufacturer permitted the design team to collaboratively solve difficult detail conditions for the application, and the extensive experience using the product among local waterproofing trades promised a high caliber of workmanship in the application was possible.

Also, the chemical resistance of the Ultraseal

the Hall's acoustics have been dramatically improved while the space has become more adaptable thanks to the installation of a unique retractable seating system that converts the main seating area into a standing space for pop concerts.

Accommodating KPMB and GBCA's new vision in the middle of downtown Toronto meant navigating a tight, urban site. This proved challenging as the developer's condominium project required a street-level right of way, leaving limited space for Massey Hall's loading and stage dock areas at grade. With critically needed lobby space occupying the first two levels of the addition above grade, the only option for accommodating stage support spaces was below grade.

The solution: create two waterproofed basement levels filling the full site footprint with the lower basement dedicated primarily to services and the level above to dressing rooms and a green room that align with the expectations of major performers.





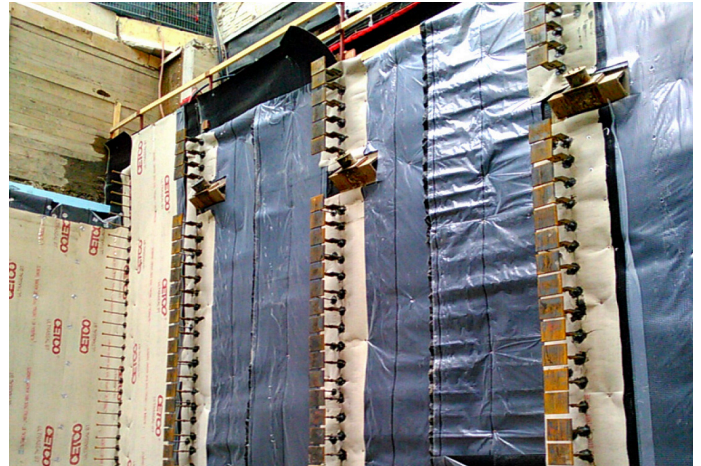
was a positive attribute in the urban soil conditions, which tend to display pH conditions that are problematic with some products.

This project presented unique challenges for the Bothwell-Accurate team. The site was tight and only accessible by one narrow road. This meant coordinating with different trades while ensuring each crew was operating safely. As well, a project on an adjacent site was being constructed at the same time by a different general contractor, meaning the crane from this site was shared between the two sites. This meant that all material and equipment deliveries had to be scheduled well in advance.

## Digging into the detail

Many of the project's site-specific details had to be considered by the team before commencing the project, and there were several technically complicated sections that required project-specific details during construction, including at the pile cap locations. Added to this was the tie at the Elgin Winter Garden Theatre Wall that required intricate detailing work

to ensure waterproofing between the two existing structures was technically sound and watertight. With this in mind, the team also had to think outside the box, which it did by proposing to build Massey Hall's existing wall up with insulation in lieu of concrete as void form filler. This practice is common today, but at the time, it was a novel idea.



An official preconstruction meeting was held as a requirement of CETCO's QA/QC program involving the owner, KPMB, Bothwell-Accurate, and all trades related to the waterproofing installation. In this meeting, the warranty requirements are reviewed to make certain that everyone is on the same page from the beginning of the project. As a part of the Hydroshield warranty provided by CETCO, the owner must hire a third-party inspector to review the waterproofing installation to ensure it meets the requirements. In addition, Bothwell-Accurate implemented its own Quality Control program. Bothwell-Accurate applicators are approved by CETCO, and this collaboration allowed for an additional layer of assurance that the workmanship and quality were met.

In the end, this project is a testament to what can be achieved by a dedicated team. It was an amazing team effort and a partnership between Bothwell-Accurate-Accurate, DRE/CETCO and KPMB that helped revitalize an aging icon. The team is proud to have provided quality workmanship that is befitting a cultural icon that is Massey Hall.

