

# Makwa Waakaa'igan Indigenous Centre of Cultural Excellence



## LOCATION

Sault Ste. Marie, ON

## CLIENT

Algoma University

## SIZE

Net Program Area: 27,000 SF GFA: 37,000 SF

## PROJECT TEAM

MTA:

Carol Phillips, Partner in Charge Mahsa Majidan, Project Manager

Smoke Architecture:

Eladia Smoke, Partner in Charge Larissa Roque, Intern Architect

## AWARDS

Architizer A+ Award, Popular Choice Award  
World Architecture Festival, Future Projects  
Education Category [Shortlisted]

World Architecture Festival, WAFX Award  
LOOP Design Award, People's Choice

Award, Concept & Unbuilt [Nominated]  
Architecture Press Release, Global Future  
Future Design Award, Education Category –  
Gold Winner

Canadian Architect Award of Excellence

A new heart for Algoma University in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, the design of the Makwa Waakaa'igan Indigenous Centre of Cultural Excellence intends to provide a safe space, welcoming visitors from across the globe to engage with and learn from Indigenous heritage. The architectural design has been articulated through consideration of Indigenous teachings, from building form to material selection.

At the gateway to campus is Shingwauk Hall, a former residential school that operated between 1875 and 1970. Since the school's official closure, the Children of Shingwauk Alumni Association (CSAA) have been working with Algoma University to teach the truth about the residential school system's history in Canada and work toward healing. The new Cultural Centre's architectural expression comes from the land, rising up through three paths that represent the past, present, and future, and standing above the residential school. This lifted position provides visitors a stronger, more dominant, and dignified vantage point from which to look upon the site's history.

The sustainable focus of this project is exemplified by the use of mass timber - a renewable resource that can be sourced locally, an effective insulator for the region's extreme cold winter temperatures, and a natural sequester of carbon from the atmosphere. A key task as part of the landscape integration is to restore both the dry and wetlands, stimulate the recurrence of natural plant species, and rejuvenate the overall health of the Eastern forests. The Makwa Waakaa'igan will connect visitors to this restored natural landscape, immersing them in Indigenous culture.

Through its integration with the existing natural landscape, Makwa Waakaa'igan blurs the lines between building and land, indoor and outdoor, and creates choices for students, staff, visitors, and faculty. These choices are places of learning and gathering, ceremony and contemplation, but also pathways that permit encounter with the difficult history of the site, allow exploration of new experiences and perspectives, and reveal our place on the planet.

\*Moriyama Teshima Architects (MTA) in joint venture with Smoke Architecture