

“Design an institution of international significance.” That was the brief given to Raymond Moriyama by the Minister of Public Works in 1964. The brief would become the Ontario Science Centre (OSC), and when it opened its doors in 1969, it instantly achieved its simple, maybe even naïve, but indisputably ambitious goal. Every Torontonians remembers the hair-raising feeling of an electric current running through their finger while on a school trip.

Science is the study of structure and behaviour in nature. The Ontario Science Centre is a landmark building, purposefully nestled into the natural ravine of the Don Valley, where it has succeeded in bringing that joyful study to the masses for over fifty years. The purpose of the Science Centre is inseparable from the site it currently inhabits. At Moriyama Teshima Architects, we believe the science is unequivocally telling us that we need to be preserving and regenerating our buildings. The carbon embodied in these structures is too valuable to discard.

We all grew up with the Science Centre, and in turn, the city grew up around it. Toronto is not the same city it was in 1969, and Ontario is not the same province. There are millions of more people who call this province home, and many thousands who now live in the Flemingdon Park neighborhood. Our collective memories and the future memories of those yet to discover the OSC are too precious to discard.

This is precisely the moment where we need to be investing in more public institutions. If there is a need for the Science Centre to modernize and evolve, the goal should be to regenerate it in a way that builds on its heritage, celebrates its unique architecture, and restores its commitment as an amenity to its neighbourhood. When Raymond Moriyama was designing the OSC he told the administration the programming should change every eight years—“If it didn’t change, it would die.” A regenerated Science Centre should continue its legacy of education, and can accommodate other uses such as community space, or even housing, if deemed appropriate.

Likewise, if there is a need for a new public institution along the shores of Lake Ontario, let’s expand the mission and the footprint of the Science Centre, and explore a new facility that celebrates and explores that site’s unique surroundings.

Science North in Sudbury is Canada's second largest science centre. It was inspired by the success we cultivated in Toronto. Five years ago, Science North began a full review of its outreach efforts in Northwestern Ontario, to evaluate future opportunities for growth in the region and better reach underserved and underprivileged communities. The results demonstrated a strong business case for expansion and efforts have been ongoing ever since. The roadmap for an expanded, re-imagined and regenerated Ontario Science Centre already exists in this province.

Ontario designed an institution of international significance once before. Let's save the one we have and do it again.

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