

Home > News > St Andrew's-Wesley United Church, Vancouver

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A look inside Ryder Architecture's restoration of the historic church.

By Canadian Architect On Jan 5, 2022



Vancouver's monumental St. Andrew's-Wesley United Church, just a decade shy of its forthcoming centennial, is reinvigorated with new life by Ryder Architecture, in collaboration with RJC Engineers.



Photo by Adrien Williams

Originally built in 1927, St Andrew's-Wesley United Church boasts a Gothic revival style using locally sourced materials such as Nelson Island granite and Haddington Island stone by brothers and architects Twizell & Twizell.

The historic stone-clad concrete structure has suffered years of natural deterioration and has resulted in leaking roofs, requiring intermittent repairs. The decline of the plastered church interior initiated a broader investigation of opportunities for preservation.



Photo by Adrien Williams

RJC's team envisioned a holistic approach for a successful restoration. Ryder leveraged its Building Information Modeling (BIM) expertise to facilitate an integrative design and construction process. Adam James, Principal at Ryder Architecture, describes the process as "using a 21st-century skill set to analyze and facilitate remediation and upgrades that retain the building's heritage value for the next hundred years." Analog drawings and 3D digital scans created a detailed model of the most up-to-date existing conditions. The ability to visualize the model as layers of structure and better understand site conditions through digital excavation informed significant design decisions.



Photo by Adrien Williams

Michael MacLean, Project Lead and Associate at RJC, explains, "The entire team understood the importance of maintaining the building's historic character while providing a revitalized structure that meets the Church's vision for a modern-day gathering place."

The project's comprehensive scope involved seismic retrofitting and substantial architectural, heritage, structural, building enclosure as well as electrical, mechanical, code, and acoustical upgrades. "It was an exciting opportunity to combine RJC's in-house services and work with a solid consulting team with design expertise in heritage buildings. The team was deeply committed to working together, recognizing that this collaboration played a critical role in making the revitalization project successful, enjoyable, and something we, and the Church, will look back at with pride for years to come."



Ryder and RJC considered the church's history at the heart of the restoration process, respecting its character and charm while offering the most current amenities of a revitalized modern building.

The locally quarried granite and stone façades were repaired and fortified on the exterior while a new copper roof was installed to resolve recurring leaks. Copper was selected for its durability, visual appeal, and historical compatibility. Structural work on the interior involved removing plaster from the walls and vaults; a meticulous casting process allowed the seamless replacement of surfaces and ornamental details. Other implementations include accessibility and mobility aids such as ramps and upgrades to audio and visual systems.



Photo by Adrien Williams

St. Andrew's-Wesley United Church officially reopened its doors after two years of renovation on November 14th. Executive Director of Operations at St. Andrew's-Wesley, Diane Mitchell, credits the team led by Ryder and RJC with "navigating the complexity of the project and delivering a beautiful result that the church can be immensely proud of."

St. Andrew's-Wesley United Church Renewal project is the recipient of a 2021 North American Copper in Architecture Award and 2021 BC Heritage Award in Conservation.