

ZAS ARCHITECTS

Intensely focused design firm brings history of sustainability and excellence to new office in Dubai

BY CHRISTINA PELLETT

AT A GLANCE

LOCATIONS:
TORONTO, ON;
VANCOUVER, BC;
AND DUBAI, UAE

EMPLOYEES:
100

AREAS OF SPECIALTY:
ARCHITECTURAL
DESIGN, PLANNING,
AND PROJECT MAN-
AGEMENT

THE BILL CROTHERS SECONDARY SCHOOL, LOCATED in Markham, Ontario, was conceived by the York Region District School Board to promote active and healthy living among its students. Offering classes on nutrition, health, and exercise and accommodating all types of learning—kinetic, rote, visual, and oral—the board needed a building that would, in turn, reflect the mission of the secondary school.

It seems only fitting, then, that ZAS Architects would take the lead role in designing the 4-storey, 220,000-square-foot facility. When the Toronto-based architectural-design and planning firm was first opened in 1984, it focused on school design and the idea of creating

collective experiences for the individuals who work in the buildings.

Though a wide variety of work can be attributed to ZAS today—institutional (schools, community centres, libraries, and cultural facilities), residential (high-rises) and commercial (office spaces)—the firm still holds true to its founding principles. “Our firm was founded in education, designing buildings to allow for learning experiences,” says Peter Duckworth-Pilkington, a ZAS principal who joined the firm in 2000. “We’ve translated that work into all other aspects of our work.”

As one of the first firms in Toronto to be founded by a woman—Margaret Russocki—ZAS operates today with a team of more than 100 architects and designers and has offices in Toronto, Vancouver, and, most recently, Dubai.

Along with the Bill Crothers School, which is targeting LEED Gold certification, other projects include:

- The Honda Canada headquarters in Markham, a LEED Gold-targeted building scheduled for completion in 2010 that features solar and photovoltaic panels, energy efficiency, indoor air quality, and natural daylighting (joint venture with HOK Architects);
- the Edithvale Community Centre in Toronto, with green roofs and a grey-water system, which is currently under construction on an existing park site.

As illustrated by the Bill Crothers project, Duckworth-Pilkington says that ZAS’ work is focused on two main themes: sustainability and the promotion of collective experiences.

“People can sit at their desk anywhere in the world and access the Internet, but it’s really about collective experiences,” Duckworth-Pilkington says. “It’s the reason... people still go to movie theatres, even though you can get any DVD you want—the serendipitous connection of having individuals come to the same place and interact. Our architecture is meant to support that serendipitous

connection and interaction between individuals that you can’t achieve by being in isolated boxes.”

ZAS also is seeking LEED Gold certification for its 1,000-unit residential project, River City Development in Toronto, one of the waterfront’s first projects and one of Canada’s first to target total carbon neutrality. ZAS, along with joint-venture partner Saucier + Perrotte Architectes from Montréal, is working both to maintain the ecological quality of the site and foster a sense of community by using green roofs and social spaces around the individual condominiums.

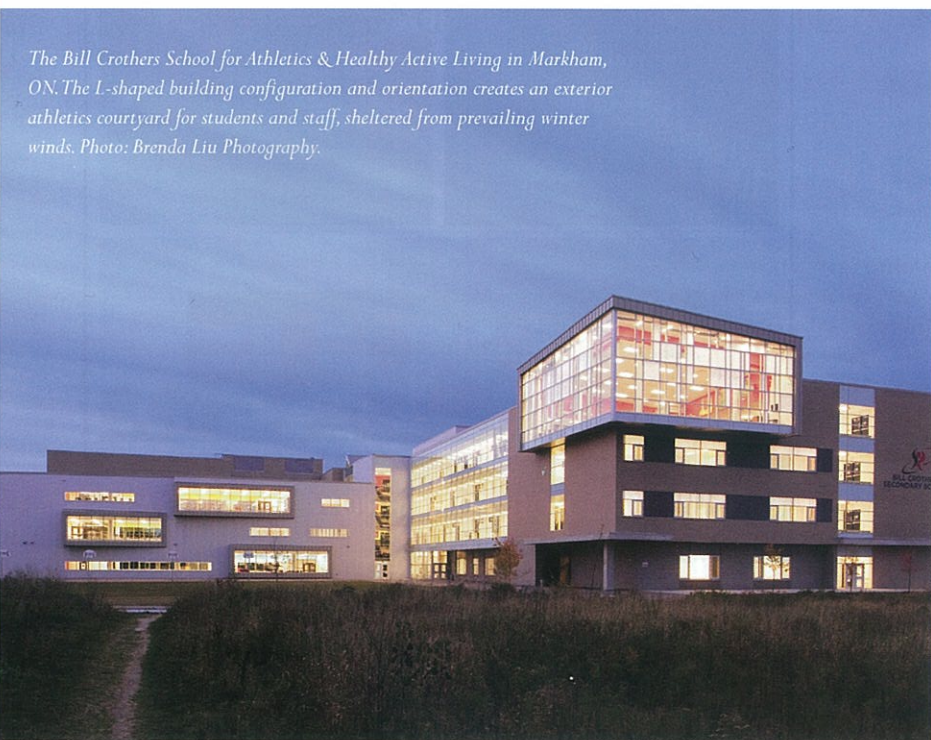
“It’s a very dense downtown area, so there’s a lot of area that is taken up by roofs,” Duckworth-Pilkington explains. “We’re providing an ecological opportunity for habitats and creating visual relief. The elevated landscape of the green roofs provides condominium-unit owners when they move in with these collective spaces to create a collective experience within a setting that has a natural theme to it as well.”

ZAS is looking to further expand, beyond even the opening of an office in Dubai, where, according to Duckworth-Pilkington, the firm has a chance to continue its focus on sustainability in an area of the world that has historically been criticized for its approach to environmental standards. Both in Dubai and its local regions, the company plans on staying true to its roots and getting back to basics.

“The economic crisis, to a certain extent, has caused a lot of rethinking and refocusing,” Duckworth-Pilkington says. “We’re looking very hard at fundamentals and cost over the long term. We’re a little less focused on the glitz and glam and more focused on good fundamentals and good basics.” CBQ

A MESSAGE FROM A.W. HOOKER

Alison Hughes (partner) and the A.W. Hooker team have provided ZAS Architects with expert cost-consulting services across a spectrum of project sectors. Our diligence, detail, and strategy have contributed to the successful cost control of our assignments. The People | The Difference... A.W. Hooker. www.awhooker.com



The Bill Crothers School for Athletics & Healthy Active Living in Markham, ON. The L-shaped building configuration and orientation creates an exterior athletics courtyard for students and staff, sheltered from prevailing winter winds. Photo: Brenda Liu Photography.