

## CANADIAN DIPLOMATIC COMPLEX, SEOUL, KOREA – ARCHITECTURE AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT IN A UNIQUE SETTING

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### Summary

Started as a design build, the Canadian Diplomatic Complex project in Seoul was re-issued by DFAIT (Department of Foreign affairs and International Trade) as an RFP (Request for Proposal) to Consultants in 2002 at a budget of \$18M. The RFP requested assembly of consultant teams to deliver the 90,350 sf. Canadian Diplomatic Complex in Seoul Korea through a two stage tender process for base building and fit-up. The RFP requested an integrated team approach with Canadian and local consultants as required. After the initial Design Build team with BFC Civil, Zeidler Partnership assembled a team for the new RFP and was selected as the proponent to proceed. Zeidler entered into a Client Architect agreement with DFAIT and in turn, Zeidler retained the Canadian A/E consultants as well as the local architect, including local engineers and landscape architects. The project has recently received the highest CSLA award for 2008, recognizing its integration of architecture and landscape.

The objective was to create a new, permanent home for the Canadian mission in Seoul through the construction of this chancery and residence. The consultant team was committed to creating a project that would be integrated with the site and the neighbourhood.

There were several project challenges that arose: the incorporation of the 520 year old “scholar” tree, the site in a historic neighbourhood, the difficulty to obtain surveys, unprecedented “cultural deliberations”, and the need for a three package tender. The project shares the site with a 520-year-old tree in the historic Jeong-dong district. As a cultural treasure the tree required attention in design and construction phases. Specifically DFAIT retained academic professors to monitor the tree’s health and to comment on proposed measures to tank around the tree and protect it during construction. The site is in a historic neighbourhood that has accommodated embassies and palaces over hundreds of years. The current walk to the site follows the undulating stone wall of the Deoksungung palace and is a popular green walking avenue, removed from the city traffic. The project had the responsibility to become part of this walk and to accommodate the historic tree at its base. Simply to obtain an accurate survey for this tight urban site was a challenge. In a country subject to many historic occupations survey records are not standard files. The entire process of requesting, defining, and obtaining the survey was unusual. An unanticipated review by the “Gu” was required after submission for building permit and this focused on the cultural fit of the project in its context with materials and textures in this historic setting. The project required 3 packages (substructure, superstructure and fitup) with prequalification and tender of each package instead of the 2 packages originally planned. This revision addressed the requirements of local authorities to be under construction within one year of building permit issue but also affected the final cost of \$25 M.

The Economist Magazine declared this the most difficult place on earth to build. We discovered a solid team composition from both countries, Canadian on site representation during construction, selection of local academic tree specialists and Canadian curtain wall specialists, good

communication with DFAIT and a quick response to cultural conditions were all critical for success. We learned that the ability to be flexible, perseverance in efforts to communicate with local authorities and consultants and an approach to integrate the two cultures through an understanding of landscape were essential.