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SPECIAL FEATURE

# CONCRETE & MASONRY

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ELLISDON

The King Blue condo complex project required the highest facade restoration ever done in Canada.

# Masonry preservation, concrete pours critical to King Blue condo project

DAN O'REILLY  
CORRESPONDENT

Rising over King Street in downtown Toronto, the King Blue Condominium complex has been comprised of almost equal parts concrete pours and meticulous masonry preservation.

Designed by Page+Steele/IBI Group for the Greenland Group and built by construction manager EllisDon, the complex consists of a 48-storey north tower and 44-storey south tower (including podiums) and a five-level underground parking garage on the site of the former Canadian Westinghouse factory.

The original 22.9-metre-high, three-whyte-thick walls of that building were incorporated into the north tower podium as a facade along King Street and Blue Jay Ways, a small street on the west side.

"It's the highest facade restoration in Canada as far as we know," says Annabel Vaughan, project manager with E.R.A Architects, the heritage consultant.

Although in "fairly good shape" the facade needed work, says Vaughan who gives high marks to Clifford Restoration for its long list of restorative measures including brick repointing and the repair of the terracotta which frames the windows—with some new pieces added.

The heritage contractor also installed approximately 30,000 reclaimed bricks from the Westinghouse building as a veneer on the podium's east and south sides. Other aspects of the restoration included the installation of new steel windows with the "historic profile" of the original ones.

The retention/incorporation of the facade was the most complex component of the project which got underway in 2015, says EllisDon project manager Neil Christian.

It had to be supported by a special steel-truss system while it 'floated' over the garage excavation area. Subsequently, it was supported by the new foundation and then connected to the podium at every floor before the restoration could begin, he says.

There were also some challenges on the concrete ledger of the project.

Approximately 50,000 cubic metres of concrete were installed and a number strategies and operating procedures were put in place. The included stick built formwork on the podiums, the use of the Peri RCS formwork climbing system on the towers, utilizing both an electric and diesel concrete pump, and a "staggered approach" to pouring the concrete.

"We wanted the towers to go up at the same time," says Christian, explaining that this enabled interior work, such as mechanical/electrical systems to commence concurrently.

To meet that objective forming subcontractor Prem-form Limited used separate teams for the towers—with some overlapping between each, he says.

Because it would have interfered with traffic and, in particular, the movement of streetcars, concrete deliveries couldn't be made from King Street.

Instead, they were made at two alternate locations. The first and main location was a one-way westbound street known as Mercer at the south end of the development.

"We took over one of the lanes (on Mercer) and the sidewalk," says EllisDon assistant site supervisor Kevin Ryan.

In a fenced off staging area on that street, there was enough room to accommodate two concrete trucks—one truck driver making the delivery while the second waited.

The Mercer Street staging area was the location of the electric pump, which supplied approximately 80 per cent of the concrete. Just to the east is a hotel and that played a large factor on why the pump was placed there.

"It's quieter (than diesel) and there is less fumes," says Ryan, explaining the intent was to avoid complaints from the hotel, especially if work continued after 7 pm and a formal complaint could be lodged.

As for the diesel pump, it operated from a courtyard between the towers. There was just enough space to accommodate two trucks which had to back into that space along an alleyway, he says.

The piping could be reconfigured from each pump to service either the north or south tower.

Each floor took about four days to complete, including the floor slabs and walls, and the repetitive nature of the tower erection allowed EllisDon to submit its concrete orders to CBM near the end of one week for the following week.

"We knew our schedules and quantities," says Ryan.

With two batch plants in Toronto, the ready-mix concrete supplier was able to meet those time lines. There were occasions, however, that concrete trucks were delayed by traffic congestion or other reasons.

"When that happened we would have to slow down the pour or the line would dry out."

Ensuring a timely and consistent supply was also the rationale for the staggered approach where pouring would be occurring in one tower, while other phased work such as building/ taking down the formwork or installing rebar was underway in the second tower, he says.

There were some construction disruption and occupancy delays because of COVID-19, says the Greenland Group's director of construction and contract, Liwen Deng.

"But we worked hard to ensure that we were able to receive permits despite many obstacles, including the City (of Toronto) shutting down for a period of time."

The north tower podium has been reserved for commercial uses including Qube Hotel, a part of the Greenland Hotel Group Division. Other commercial and retail users will be announced at a later date. All of King Blue's 914 units have been sold, says Deng.

As for the restoration of the facade, she says Greenland want to contribute to the vibrancy and energy of the neighbourhood and that has been accomplished by combining the complex's historic and modern elements.

## Economic Snapshot

# Saskatchewan almost, but not entirely, out of the COVID-19 woods



John Clinkard

Approaching the final quarter of a year most would like to forget, Saskatchewan's economic prospects have been weighed down first by the impact of low oil prices on what was, until late 2019, the province's highest-value export commodity and, more recently, by the impact of the COVID-19 virus.

### Gradual pickup in global growth bodes well for Saskatchewan's exports

Although the outlook for the world economy remains overshadowed by COVID-19, the [improved outlook for oil prices](#) suggests that petroleum exports will make a positive contribution to the province's exports in the second half of this year and into 2021. Moreover, the somewhat brighter outlook for the global economy should help to underpin the province's foreign sales of food/agricultural exports, which are up by 19% year to date.

Responding to the gradual downtrend in the incidence of COVID-19, the province started to implement a plan to re-open its economy on May 4 and moved to [the final phase of this plan on July 16](#). Recently, COVID-19 case numbers have increased slightly, largely on account of a slight rise in the south and central regions of the province. However, despite this increase, the mortality rate from the virus at 1.3 per 100,000 population is the fifth lowest in the country. Also, a country-leading 76% of the province's small businesses reported they were still open for business, according to a [survey conducted by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business \(CFIB\)](#).

### Re-openings trigger wave of full- and part-time staff rehiring

The gradual re-opening of the Saskatchewan economy has triggered a strong rebound in both full- and part-time hiring. Not surprisingly, industries that were hit hardest by the coronavirus-driven lockdowns have exhibited the strongest rebounds. Over the past two months, retail and wholesale trade have rehired almost all (94%) of the 10,600 staff members they shed in March. Other significant job gains have occurred in health services (+4,700), transportation services (+3,900), manufacturing (+1,900) and construction (+1,700).

Despite lingering uncertainty about a second wave of COVID-19, there is ample evidence of strong pent-up demand for both consumer goods and existing homes, to be fuelled by a combination of the recent rebound in hiring plus extremely low-interest rates. The fact that retail sales jumped by 15% m/m in May indicates that a significant number of "unlocked" consumers headed back to the mall. Increased sales of motor vehicles accounted for almost a third of the total retail sales gain, followed by building materials that were up 20% y/y in the month.

Following a 47% m/m decline in April, [the volume of existing-home sales jumped by 66% in May and by a further 49% in June](#). June sales were up by 50% y/y, while average house prices rose by

1.9% y/y, after a decline of -0.9% y/y in May. Fuelled by the very strong rebound in sales and the accompanying shrinkage of both the number-of-months supply of homes for sale and of the inventory of completed and unoccupied dwellings, housing starts rose by 25% m/m in June, led by strong gains in row and apartment units. For the whole year, we estimate starts in the province will total 2,600 units, followed by 3,700 in 2021.

With non-res building construction in Saskatchewan down 8% year to date (May), it is clear investment got off to a weak start in 2020. Moreover, a 32% year-to-date decline in non-residential building intentions casts a pall over the near-term capital spending outlook.

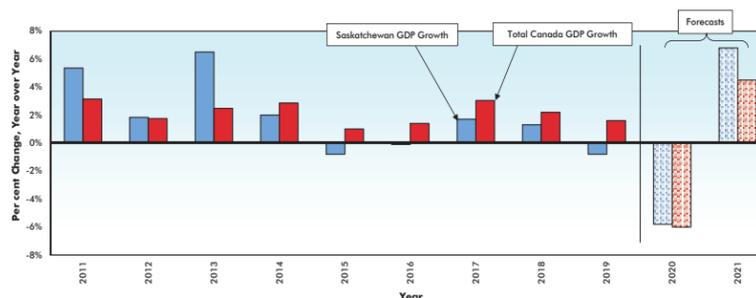
Looking ahead to 2021 the outlook for non-residential spending is brighter due to the recent announcement by the [provincial government of a \\$3.1 billion capital investment plan](#). Specific projects which are likely to move forward later this year or in 2021 include the [Saskatoon Freeway](#), the [Moosejaw Natural Gas Plant](#) and the [Sask Energy Regina Pipeline Expansion](#).

### Bottom line — expect a bumpy second half and a much better 2021

The rebounds in consumer spending, existing home sales and hiring in the wake of the phased re-opening of the economy have significantly brightened Saskatchewan's growth prospects during the remainder of this year and well into 2021. However, the recent uptick in cases of COVID-19 across the country, as well as in the province, has tempered enthusiasm among small businesses, as reflected by the CFIB's [June Business Barometer](#) which reported little change in full-time staffing plans in Saskatchewan over the next three months. Given the COVID-depressed first half and a lackluster second half, Saskatchewan's economy will likely shrink by -5% to -7% this year and post growth of +6% to +8% in 2021.

John Clinkard has over 35 years' experience as an economist in international, national and regional research and analysis with leading financial institutions and media outlets in Canada.

## Real\* Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Growth — Saskatchewan vs Canada

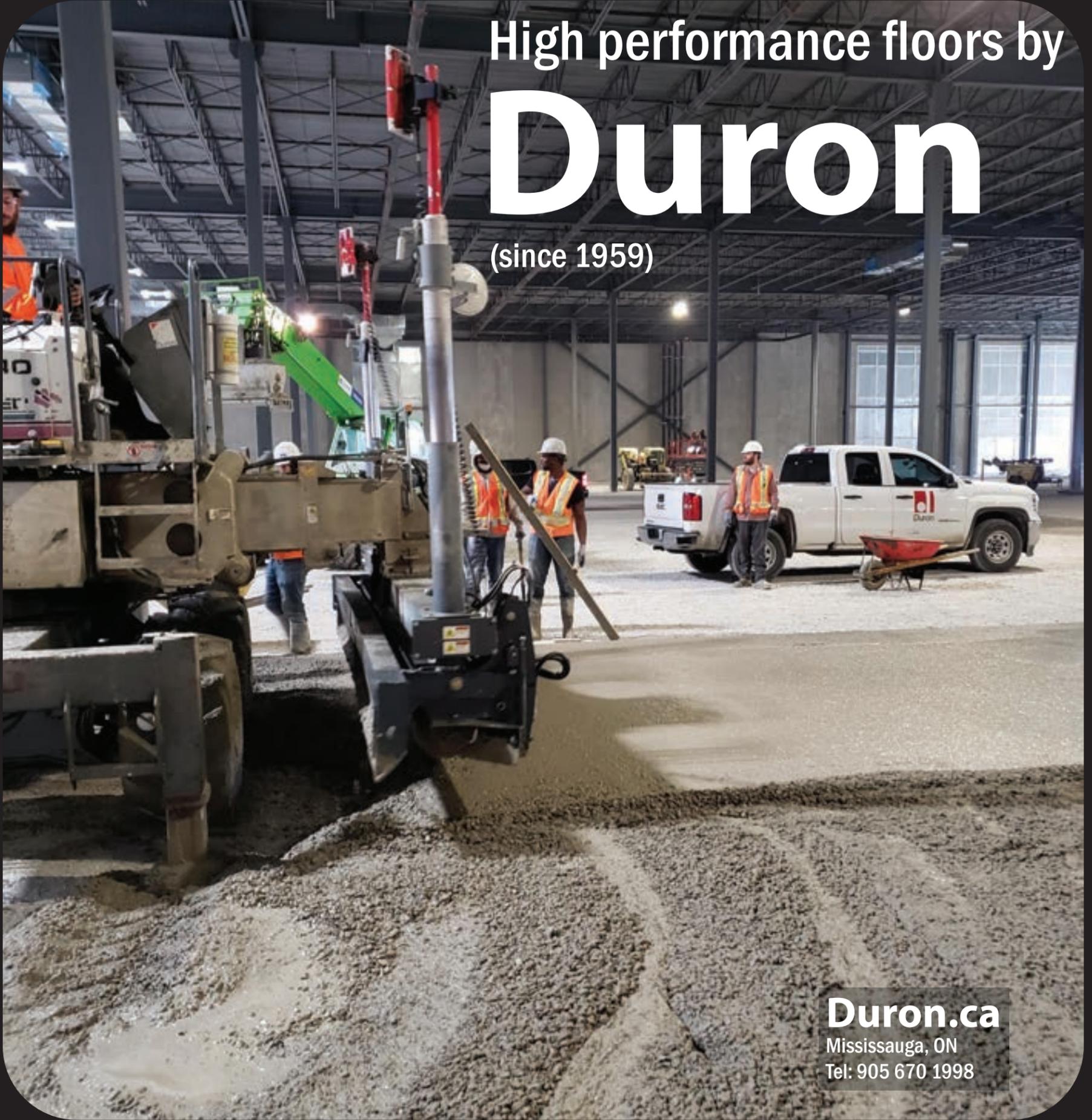


\* "Real" is after adjustment for inflation.

Data Sources: Actuals — Statistics Canada; Forecasts — CanaData.  
Chart: ConstructConnect — CanaData.

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# Canada's largest brick restoration project ready for its close-up

IAN HARVEY  
CORRESPONDENT

It's taken five years but a bold plan to dismantle a heritage building brick by brick and rebuild it as the centerpiece of a commercial and condominium complex is completed.

Starting in 2015, 100,000 bricks and other pieces of masonry, which formed the Loblaw Groceries Company Building at Lake Shore Boulevard West and Bathurst Street were carefully taken down, cleaned and stored.

Then, they were rebuilt to form a Loblaws superstore integrated into the commercial development. It was no easy trip and stands as the biggest undertaking of its kind in Canada.

Today the West Block is a waterfront condo complex of a pair of towers, 37 and 41 storeys. They'll have a combined 876 units on the 3.5-acre site sitting on top of a Loblaws supermarket, whose facade is the faithful reconstruction of the building where it all started: the 1927 former headquarters and warehouse of the supermarket chain created by Theodore Pringle Loblaw in the 1920s.

At the time it was a Toronto wonder, with its own electric tram, huge baking ovens and drums for blending tea and 22,000 feet of refrigeration piping. Employees had a private bowling alley and an auditorium where they could put on entertainment.

Nearly 100 years later the exterior looks the same but everything inside has changed.

Plans were first submitted in 2004 but because it was a heritage structure it took 11 years to get a shovel in the ground.

Tony Grossi, president of Wittington Properties, under Choice Properties REIT, the real estate arm of the George Weston conglomerate which owns Loblaws, says ultimately the structure had to be preserved for two reasons, first a demand from the city but also perhaps more importantly because it's an important part of the brand.

As he notes, the best intentions and most meticulous of planning don't always result in the easiest path.

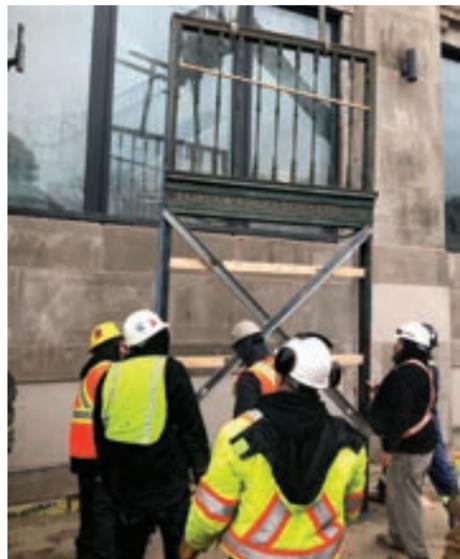
"It's like an old suit, you take it off, put it in the cupboard and then 50 years later your tailor tries to fit it to you, it's maybe going to be a little tight," he says. "In putting the old material back, it had to go on a wall and there's ton of extra metal to hold up the components because we needed two storeys of open space for the store that that's there."

Still, he says, the result is all that matters



WITTINGTON PROPERTIES

Starting in 2015, 100,000 bricks and other pieces of masonry, which formed the Loblaw Groceries Company Building at Lake Shore Boulevard West and Bathurst Street were carefully taken down, cleaned and stored.



WITTINGTON PROPERTIES

The 1927 headquarters and warehouse of the supermarket chain created by Theodore Pringle Loblaw has been converted into a waterfront condo complex.

now: "It's very handsome and we're happy with the result."

Paul Goldsmith of Historic Restoration got the call for the masonry and says when it came to putting the pieces back, the real challenges started.

"It's like a jigsaw, you'd normally start in a corner and work your way across," he says. "But in this case we'd have to work where they were ready for us," he says. "So we were putting pieces back all over the place."

Tolerances were extremely tight, he adds, and shaving bricks wasn't the optimal choice so there was a lot of fiddling and fussing to get it right.

Essentially, he says, you're fitting one form onto another and a shift in dimensions of a few millimeters can cause havoc in trying to get the brick and stones back into their rightful places and to be true to the heritage and the over esthetic result.

Looking back, Grossi says, it was a bold step but there wasn't a lot of leeway.

"It's iconic to the brand and location," he

says. "And to see it come out the ground without the patina, the grime, it's now historic but not neglected."

Budgeting was always going to be tricky because there was no way to really predict how long it would take to resolve the giant jigsaw puzzle to everyone's satisfaction and to incorporate the creative skills needed as much as the stone mason's skills, making it a unique project.

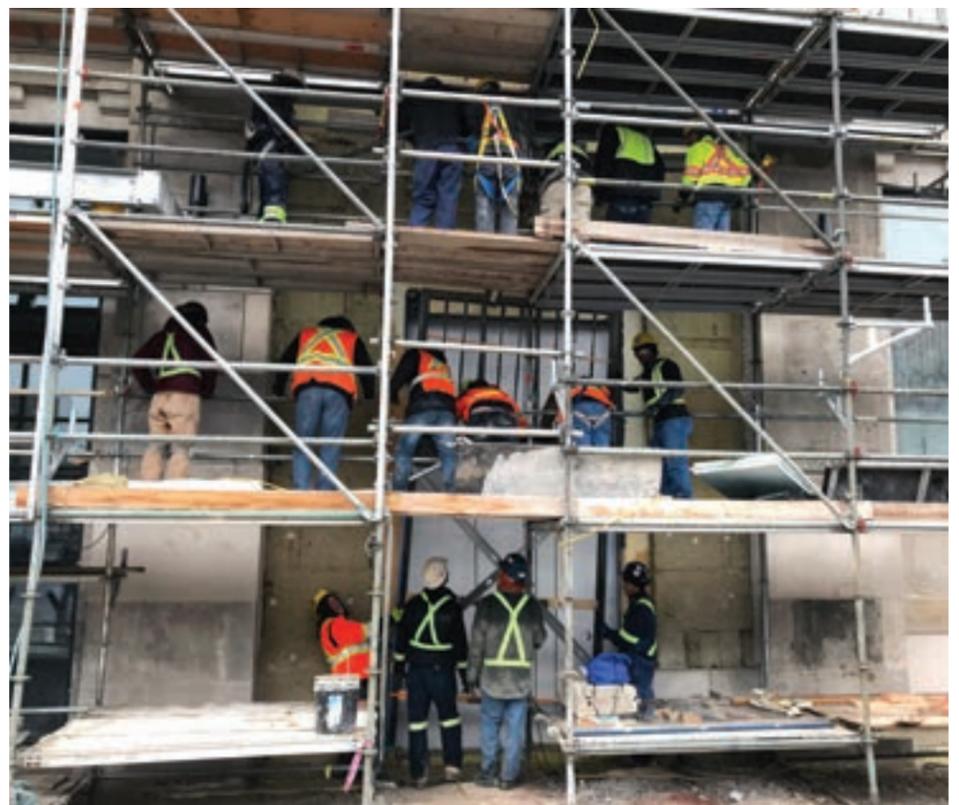
"Paul (and crew) was the first to come on site and the last to leave," says Grossi. "It really is a bespoke structure."

While 100,000 bricks and stone pieces is a mammoth sized job, there is one feature of the project, Goldsmith fondly remembers as feeding his creative needs.

"Personally, it was restoring the bronze frame of the door and polishing the front faces of the stone around it," he says. "That took a lot of work and it really pops out now."

Would he do it again?

"Of course," he laughs. "But I'd charge a lot more money next time."



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The restoration of over 100,000 bricks required meticulous planning, say project stakeholders.

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# EllisDon Forming helps One Richmond Row rise in London, Ont.

DAN O'REILLY  
CORRESPONDENT

Judging by what is occurring in London, Ont., more high-rise residential projects like the ones dotting the Toronto skyline are rising in the province's smaller cities.

After approximately 18 months of work, EllisDon Forming recently completed pouring 10,000 cubic metres of concrete for — what is now — London's second tallest building and its highest residential one.

Designed by SRM Architects, One Richmond Row is a 32-storey, 175-unit luxury rental tower being built on Richmond Street in the city's downtown by local property developer Old Oak.

Highlighted by punched windows and perimeter balconies, one of its iconic features is the "twisting" of the balconies on some of the levels.

"We had to reshore several levels to dealing with the loading," says EllisDon Forming manager Nathan Campbell on the concrete pour challenges posed by that design.

The Peri RCS formwork climbing system and falsework also had to be cantilevered out to the furthest extent of the slab edges, he says.

One Richmond Row and other planned projects in London typified the intensification of downtown cores in cities outside of the Greater Toronto Area such as Hamilton and Kitchener/Waterloo, says Campbell.

"This means we're seeing more and more infill developments with point towers and other

mixed used structures."

Many of the projects occurring in those smaller centres are utilizing the same systems and methodologies for the concrete pours as those used in Toronto, says Campbell, who uses One Richmond Row as a prime example.

Unlike most other developments in London which tend to be on greenfields, the tower is set on a tight infill site adjacent heritage buildings, other structures, and busy pedestrian and traffic areas, with no laydown space, he says.

Faced with those constraints, EllisDon Forming reviewed another EllisDon project — the King Blue condominium in Toronto where the Peri RCS formwork climbing system and handset slab system were used for public protection as forming tables could not be flown over the busy streets.

"We had the same scenario in London," says Campbell, noting use of the same system at One Richmond Row provided protection for the workers and prevented debris from falling on pedestrians. An exterior platform was also used to store material which overcame the issue of lack of laydown space.

Comprised of about 20 managers and 80 onsite workers, EllisDon Forming was established as division or subsidiary within the parent firm two years ago after EllisDon assessed the building boom in Southwestern Ontario and "recognized the gap" in the ability of existing formwork contractors to serve that growing market. Its customers include developers



ELLISDON

An EllisDon crew raking and vibrating concrete for a suspended slab pour on the One Richmond Row project.

and other construction companies.

Creating the division was also way to retain its own workers and avoid layoffs, says Campbell.

As for One Richmond Row, it's nearing partial completion. Occupancy of the lower floors will begin early in the fall, followed by the higher units later in the season and the 32 floor by next April or May, says Old Oak brand manager Robert Bierbaum.

"There is a market for luxury rent-

al buildings in London," says Bierbaum, explaining the primary target clientele are city residents downsizing from suburban homes, with some potential renters coming from Kitchener/Waterloo, Cambridge, and Guelph.

In terms of height, the building is only surpassed by One London Place, a commercial tower. But construction of an even higher residential building by Old Oak is now underway.

To be comprised of a first-phase 652-unit 40-storey rental building which will ultimately be connected to 29-storey building via a nine-storey podium, The Centro will be the highest residential tower in London and probably all of Southwestern Ontario, he says.

"We're just wrapping up excavation (of the first phase)," says Bierbaum, who expects the first tower to be completed by the end of 2022 and the 29-storey tower by 2023/24.

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