



Bergstrand and Matthews had valuable support from the staff of Canada's mission in Rome, from the sage voice of Ambassador James Fox to the local savvy of LES trade commissioner Patrizia Giuliotti, who smoothed negotiations with Italy's Department of Civil Protection.

The final \$5-million project benefited from the entire team's hands-on nature and attention to detail. Concerned that the building's plan was utilitarian, they worked with the designers—Matthews even “sharing the pencil” with Italian architect Stephano Forina—to make it more open and functional. Despite challenges and setbacks, elements were upgraded and high-quality finishes were used, as a result of careful spending and a strengthening of the Canadian dollar against the Euro. “It's one of the best facilities of its kind in the region,” Bergstrand says proudly.

The 20,000-square-foot complex includes a gym and exercise room, a study space, a conference area and a café. The unique shape of the building has been said to resemble a maple leaf or an eagle—or *aquila* in Italian.

The final act was to plant 13 maple trees in the grounds surrounding the student centre, in honour of each of the students killed in the earthquake.

The Trouble with Truffles

The best-laid plans sometimes need altering. The site proposed for the student centre at L'Aquila University featured a small grove of trees. No problem, said the Italian officials who had appropriated the land, the trees can be transplanted. Not so, said a local farmer, these are truffle trees, their roots inoculated with a special fungus to cultivate the valuable underground delicacies. Well into the project, the news sent the designers back to the drawing board to move the building to land bordering the prized trees.