

The New Canadian Chancery in Tokyo

The new Canadian chancery is situated on a 4.3-acre site in the Akasaka district of Tokyo, opposite the crown prince's palace on Aoyamadori. The land was purchased in the early 1930s by Canada's first minister to Japan, Herbert Marler, who believed it was important that Canada have access to suitable legation office accommodation in Tokyo.

The Canadian government of the time approved Marler's plan to finance the project himself. Marler bought the property, selected the architect, supervised the construction contracts, and built a chancery and a residence. The government agreed to repay Marler's \$200,000 outlay at 5% interest a year, with repayment of the capital portion not required for a least five years. The chancery and Marler's residence were completed in November 1933.

Exercising its option, the Canadian government bought the property and buildings from Marler in 1935 for \$200,000. A second and adjoining piece of property of approximately 1.3 acres was purchased by the Department of External Affairs in 1952 for \$68,813.

As Canada's interests in Japan became more and more important, the embassy outgrew both the original 1933 office and the annex that had been built across from it in 1952. Other off-site offices and accommodation were rented.

By 1985, new chancery was made required to solve overcrowding in facilities located throughout Tokyo. To project the image of a modern, industrial nation in a single office building – one that would also showcase Canadian art and culture – the Canadian government approved a development plan in June 1985 that would consolidate all operations under one roof.

In December 1985, Mitsubishi Trust and Banking Corporation and Shimizu Construction were selected from four finalists to develop the property for office and living accommodation. Toronto architect Raymond Moriyama, of Moriyama and Teshima Planners Ltd., was contracted to design the project. The ambassador's residence, Marler House, and adjacent gardens were preserved.

In order to reflect the cultural duality of a Canadian building in Japan, Moriyama based his design on two parallel metaphors. One portrays Canada's industrial spirit, arising from her natural heritage and activated by her people, while the other symbolizes three elements of heaven (ten), people (jin) and earth (chi) which are central to "ikebana," the Japanese art of flower arranging.

Moriyama expressed these metaphors through the eight-storey building "Place Canada." In his own words:

A horizontally split building is divided into three symbolic components. The rectilinear base of stone represents the earth. The glass enclosed roof sheltering the upper four storeys is triangular in profile and recalls the Japanese symbol for heaven. In the middle is the fourth floor, the place where the people of the two countries can exchange experiences and thoughts.

Clad in light brown and pink granite, the building includes a number of unique features: an intimate 233-seat theatre with exquisite acoustics and a fully equipped audiovisual system available for cultural events, lectures and seminars; a gallery to display special exhibits and collections of Canadian works of art and culture; a state-of-the-art research and information centre