

# Shining Symbols of Canada

by Colette Cibula

In life, we are often struck by nature's beauty: the panorama of Lake Louise, high tide in the Bay of Fundy, fall colours in the Laurentians. Extraordinary architecture also has the power to move us—and convey a strong sense of national pride and strength. Such architecture shines at a number of our missions around the globe. *Our World* recently took an inside look at four of these properties, in Seoul, Lima, Madrid and Berlin. The following focuses on Canada's mission to the Republic of Korea. For the other missions, see *Our World Online*.

**A**t a whopping 520 years old and 17 m tall, the Japanese scholar tree at the front entrance of the Canadian embassy in Seoul is a sight to behold. This historical monument and protected plant species is so impressive it was directly integrated into the embassy's design and construction in 2007 by the department's Physical Resources Bureau.

The job of the Bureau, made up of architects, engineers and experts in realty, construction, security and other disciplines, is to provide the space and facilities for the Government of Canada to deliver its programs around the world. The team responsible for constructing the embassy building around the tree and its massive root system faced a number of challenges, including enhancing the tree's physical environment, erecting supports to prevent branches from bending or breaking and undertaking delicate surgery to repair damaged bark.

"At first, the South Korean government was concerned about how committed we were to preserving this tree, an important symbol in a city with too few of them," says Christal Becker, the project manager who oversaw the construction. "But after officials and the public saw the lengths to which we went to preserve and even improve the health of the tree, DFAIT was awarded the 2007 Green Award from the Korea Forest Service. Canada is the only foreign entity to have received the honour."

The chancery is a magnificent glass and steel building that incorporates the latest in modern technology. Both the design and the efforts to integrate the fabulous scholar tree symbolize Canada and South Korea's reverence for nature. For some, the embassy grounds even evoke the landscape paintings of Lawren Harris, a member of the Group of Seven.

The building that has played host to Canada in South Korea since November 2007 and the tree itself are attractions for South Korean tourists from across the country. The public plaza at the embassy's entrance provides a welcome place to rest and admire the marriage between the ancient tree and the modern facility. In the daytime, one isn't surprised to see a family having lunch together in the shade; in the evening, young couples stroll in intimate conversation under a leafy canopy of branches.

The Embassy in Korea was designed and carefully constructed around a 520-year-old Japanese scholar tree—a protected plant species.

