

# New Canadian Embassy Turns Heads in Washington



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**P**ennsylvania Avenue . . . the elegant Washington promenade is filled with gleaming buildings and grand monuments that symbolize the best of official America. But now this most American of American streets also symbolizes the best of Canada.

The six-storey Canadian chancery, designed by Arthur Erickson of Vancouver, has drawn rave reviews from architects, the media, Canadian tourists and Washingtonians in general.

"Arthur Erickson has given a powerful new building in a place that calls for one," extolled *Washington Post* architecture critic Benjamin Forgey.

"No doubt about it, this is one of Erickson's finest efforts to date," wrote Christopher Hume in the *Toronto Star*.

Much of the attention lavished on Erickson's tour de force is the inevitable result of the embassy's unique location. Sitting at the foot of Capitol Hill, the marble-clad chancery is the only embassy in the ceremonial heart of the city.

Interestingly enough, Canada is the only country to conform to Pierre Charles L'Enfant's grand vision for Washington. In 1791, the urban planner suggested that Pennsylvania Avenue become a centre of civic activities with embassies flanking the Mall, the park-like esplanade stretching from Capitol Hill to the Lincoln Memorial. But foreign embassies were relegated to sites far from the Mall and

Pennsylvania Avenue, and the area became a showplace of museums and monuments instead.

Dreams of a new Canadian embassy on Pennsylvania Avenue began in 1978 when Canada bought a trapezoid-shaped parcel of land for \$5 million from the District of Columbia and considered consolidating its operations under one roof.

Construction of the \$90 million building began in March 1986 and was completed in March 1989. It now houses the offices of the Ambassador, the Economic, Political and Public Affairs divisions, Defence Liaison and Administration. As well, the 26 662 m<sup>2</sup> building includes a 175-seat theatre, an art gallery, a library, a general purpose room, a staff

## The new Canadian Embassy in Washington.

cafeteria and an underground parking garage.

The embassy was officially opened by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney at a reception in May.

## Blending the Old and the New

Erickson's building blends the neoclassic elements that characterize the area and many modern concepts. The façade of smooth, unpolished Canadian marble echoes its monumental surroundings.

The Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC), the organization that acts as the guardian of heritage and development for the