

NEW EMBASSY, NEW MESSAGE

Canada has opened a new embassy in Germany that celebrates the reunified and revitalized country and showcases the best of Canadian culture and technology.

Located in the heart of the city, within sight of the Brandenburg Gate and Reichstag and literally bridging the line that once separated East and West Berlin, the new embassy—Canada's first in Berlin—was opened by Governor General Adrienne Clarkson on April 29. With a theme of "Kanada: Die neue Botschaft" ("New Embassy/New Message"), the mission blends architectural, artistic, environmental and technological features to highlight the deepening political, business and cultural ties between the two countries.

Each day, hundreds of pedestrians are expected to use the building's Northwest Passage to cross between a major avenue called Ebertstrasse and the octagonal Leipziger Platz, which were formerly separated by the Berlin Wall. Suspended overhead the interior passageway is a 6.4-metre bronze canoe engraved with a map of Canada's major waterways, which was created by Canadian sculptor John McEwen.

In her speech to open the embassy, Ms. Clarkson recalled Canadian songwriter Stan Rogers, who sang of the Northwest Passage as "tracing one warm line through a land so wild and savage." Ms. Clarkson told the German dignitaries gathered at the event that as Rogers "recognized what the quest for the Northwest Passage meant to our history and to our identity as Canadians...may this building, in this land so rich and hopeful, be your passage to us and ours to you."

German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, guest of honour at the opening, said the embassy will contribute to the character of the new centre of Berlin, while German filmmaker Wim Wenders commented that the building, like Canada, "is open to the outside and inside; it represents this beautiful country."

Natural light floods the building with a sense of openness, according

to architect Bruce Kuwabara of Kuwabara Payne McKenna Blumberg in Toronto, the design lead for the consortium of three Canadian architectural firms that worked on the embassy. "The transparency represents Canada's inclusiveness," he says. "We are one of the most multicultural societies in the world."

The materials used in the design represent Canada's regional and geographic diversity. The exterior is faced with Manitoba Tyndall limestone, while inside are Eramosa marble from Ontario, Douglas fir from British Columbia and black granite and maple from Quebec. The materials naturally cool the building when temperatures rise, says Paul Dubois, Canada's Ambassador to Germany, a concept that "might also prove efficient in its diplomatic application."

Canadian art is featured throughout the new embassy. Five Canadian artists have created works, based on the theme of Canada's landscape, which are permanently integrated into the building's structure and design—the first time that a public call for commissioned art has been held for a Canadian mission. "In the era of globalization, intercultural understanding becomes more important than ever," says Mr. Dubois. "Artistic expression is of vital importance, both for the social cohesion of a nation and the possibility for its citizens to define their own values."

Built as a public-private partnership, the building also houses retail and residential space in the ground and upper floors not occupied by the chancery, integrating new construction and mixed uses into a historic location.

Over the coming months, a lively program of public events on culture, politics, trade and academic relations is planned for the embassy's conference rooms and auditorium.

Visitors to the building quickly become aware of the technology in the public areas. Plasma screens showing film shorts by young Canadian filmmakers placed along the Northwest Passage offer a window into Canada.



▲ New embassy: Mechthild Dubois-Utters, Ambassador Paul Dubois, Governor General Adrienne Clarkson and His Excellency John Ralston Saul tour the outside of the embassy, where a billboard announces Canada's "new message".



▲ Historic location: A remaining section of the Berlin Wall covered with graffiti stands in front of the embassy on Leipziger Platz.

▼ Berlin Mayor Klaus Wowereit opens the building's Northwest Passage, which is topped by a bronze canoe engraved with a map of Canada's major waterways.

