

The combination of architect, artist and owner, directed with panache, has helped overcome some of the perils inherent in such a large volume; art and architecture have come together to diminish a large volume which in another concept might have been so overpowering as to prevent the individual from experiencing it. The beholder savours the space, and is not swallowed by it.

The use of the central garden court, although not altogether novel and indeed reminiscent of Kevin Roche's Ford Foundation building, is nevertheless successful. The court contains a landscaped slope, fountain and a modest platform within the fountain area which serves as a small stage for entertainment. The pedestrian enters the banking hall from the lower concourse from a ramp around the court.

Office workers overlooking the urban room, and who form part of the building's 10,000 strong community, will probably emerge as the building's most satisfied users. Again, even though it contains elements of the Ford Foundation building, the urban room's changing patterns and reflective properties of the windows for the facing seven storeys, provides a changing vista for the office worker and pedestrians. The sculpture, light, reflection, colour, linear patterns created by the box beams, the change of levels via the escalators, the movement of people will all combine to make it a very stimulating place indeed.

Below the urban room, the two-level Merchant's Mall concourses, with their shops and restaurants, serve as a busy hub during early morning and evening for workers moving to and from the tunnels to the Toronto-Dominion Centre, the Royal York Hotel link and the Union Station. The shopping concourse is interesting in that once again it departs from the neighbouring Miesian concourse in the Toronto-Dominion Centre. In the latter, the pattern is similar in Toronto and Montreal's Westmount Centre: uniform graphics for the stores all at the same height and scale. This has always been, surely, the antithesis of the busy, noisy shopping centre, and the large shopping centres such as Toronto's Yorkdale and Sherway have been successful because of spatial and graphic variety — however hideous individual store signs might be. The Royal Bank concourse has no limitations, and this helps to retain a certain warmth lost in the more sterile Mies' concourse.

It is the Royal Bank Plaza's exterior that has provoked some controversy. For many, the mass of reflective, tinted glass combined with standard glass, scale and the diagonals of the facade, intimidate the passerby. The complex skin treatment, a paradox in a time when energy conservation is paramount, offers little indication of the spatial excitement within the complex. Much has been claimed for the changing colours of the glass during the day, but for the best part it ranges from a pleasant gold to a washed-out pink. The architects have provided a brief rationale for the skin treatment:

"Externally, the use of reflecting glass on the triangular tower, apart from inherent energy saving properties, has served to counteract the use of heavier materials such as stone, bronzed aluminum, dark glass and stainless steel on adjacent buildings. The 'corrugated' exterior walls of the tower, conceived originally to break up the otherwise apparent distorted reflections in the mirrored glass and to reinforce the building and siting geometry, provide internal alcoves from which there are some extraordinary views. The search for the appropriate colour for the reflecting glass was an interesting exercise. The intention was to achieve an essentially light warm colour, one which would make the building much less dominant on the surrounding streets than might otherwise have been the case, giving consideration to its horizontal bulk and proximity to street faces. The range of choices was limited, with each manufacturer's patented process giving distinct and characteristic colours which could not be varied.

"The available purple-bronzes, yellow-greens and blue-greens were rejected as inappropriate for this building. The yellow-gold on one manufacturer seemed close to what we wanted, but was somewhat harsh and overpowering. After much experimentation, we found the final colour by the innovative placing of the yellow-gold reflective coating on the third surface of the double glazing, i.e. on the outside face of the inside light, rather than on the second surface. The subtle gold colour achieved is very moody, and changes in a most interesting way with the weather. At its very best it is an off-white, warm golden tint and the stainless steel mullions are reflected and re-reflected in an intricate spider's web pattern. On an overcast day the wall is two-dimensional and not unlike orange sherbet in colour. Nonetheless, the overall effect is light and glassy and

serves to complement the planning."

What the glass does do is provide one solution for the alleviation of the glass box problem — imposing a high building on the existing landscape. From the south, the Royal Bank Plaza merges into its taller neighbours, supporting perhaps the hyperbolic use of the word "chameleon" by the press hand-outs.

One flaw in the use of glass for the urban room became evident in our tour of the building. Bank employees on the southeast corner overlooking the Royal York Hotel find the afternoon heat intolerable. Provisions are being made to cover the glass with blinds. Since this problem is not mentioned in our article from the mechanical engineers, we can only speculate that design decisions demanded the use of glass on that side. In any event, this is a curious after-the-event flaw.

What is perhaps disturbing is the way the building meets the sky. For many, it will always appear truncated, probably a penalty for the non-use of the traditional hennias on the roof, but more likely because of the illusion created by the "corrugated" skin design.

In all, the Royal Bank Plaza is a successful building that has yet to receive proper appreciation from profession and public alike. It is an attempt to humanize the traditional concept of the bank building, where the lavish use of money and marble extends the message: "This is a safe place to store your money." Of course money, more than \$100 million, has been spent in the Royal Bank, but the message comes through loud and clear in a big space, which, although bordering on that perilous margin of "thinking a building through" and the flaws created by a perhaps too-complex ingenuity, is not only successful but probably the first — and last — of its kind.

1
The "corrugated" skin.

2 & 3
The image and the reality — the built form is close to the model.

4
View from northeast, across Wellington Street. To the left the Toronto-Dominion Centre.

5
This construction picture shows the plaza from the northeast, on Bay Street.

6
The two towers, looking at the southern facade. The pinkish granite cladding was quarried in Sardinia.