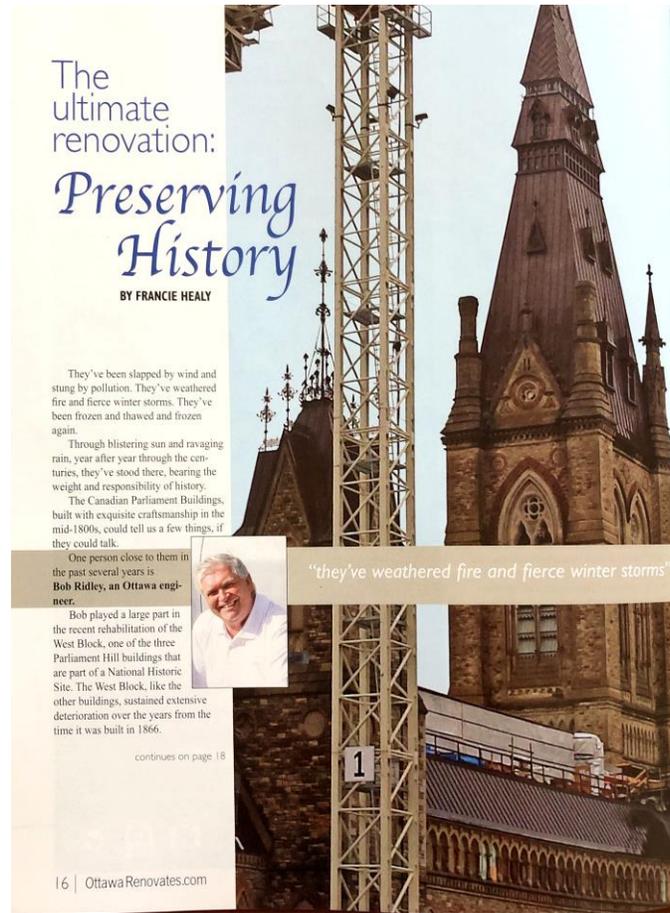


The ultimate renovation Preserving history

By Francie Healy



They've been slapped by wind and stung by pollution. They've weathered fire and storms. They've been frozen and thawed and frozen again.

Through blistering sun and ravaging rain, year after year through the centuries, they've stood there, bearing the weight and responsibility of history.

The Canadian Parliament Buildings, built with exquisite craftsmanship in the mid-1800s, could tell us a few things, if they could talk.

One person close to them in the past several years is Bob Ridley, an Ottawa engineer.

Bob played a large part in the recent rehabilitation of the West Block, one of the three Parliament Hill buildings that are part of a National Historic Site. The West

Block, like the other buildings, sustained extensive deterioration over the years from the time it was built in 1866.

Now, its heritage characteristics carefully and respectfully preserved, it is repaired and updated for many more years to come.

Bob is co-owner of RJW-Gem Campbell Stonemasons Inc. With its specialty in the heritage restoration of significant public buildings, RJW-Gem Campbell Stonemasons Inc. was awarded the contract for the West Block's stone restoration.

The West Block is entirely built of masonry elements, with load-bearing masonry walls clad in various types of natural stone. In common with the other major buildings of the Parliamentary Precinct, the building also displays a large number of sculptural stone elements, including colonnades, vaults, grotesques and friezes.

RJW-Gem Campbell Stonemasons Inc. did the restoration of historic masonry and sculptural elements, hand cutting and replacement of damaged stones, implementation of seismic reinforcement and cleaning of stonework.

Bob began as Construction Manager of the West Block project in 2012. His job was a big one. It was to provide full leadership to the project team. That meant the planning, organizing, directing and control of all the stone masonry restoration and conservation. He was responsible for health and safety, environmental sustainability, risk management, quality assurance and control.

The construction management firm, PCL Constructors Canada Inc., led the project. EVOQ Architects, in joint venture with Arcop Architects, were the prime consultants. Smith and Barber Atelier, stonecarvers, acted as a sub-trade to RJW-Gem Campbell.

The West Block rehabilitation restored structural integrity and included the upgrade of seismic capabilities. Existing exterior load-bearing stone walls, rubble-fill walls, and sculptural stone elements were restored, and outmoded building systems were replaced. The magnificent copper roof was restored; windows were also restored (or replaced). The courtyard was enclosed with a glazed roof over the new House of Commons Chamber.

Almost finished now, the project took several years and required a staff of 220 stone masons.

The East and West blocks, which were built between 1859 and 1865, are the original structures, designed by the architects Thomas Stent and Augustus Laver in a Gothic Revival style. Construction costs at the time were \$641,036.

Bob Ridley has more than 40 years of experience. He says “in one way or another” he has been involved in construction for his whole life. He is part owner and business manager for SkilBilt Construction Inc., which does residential renovations in the greater Ottawa area. He is also part owner, builder and developer with KRB Developments in Ottawa.

He has extensive knowledge of the management consulting, land development and construction industry and also: strategic business planning, business administration and process management, issue management and business continuity planning, management of multi-disciplinary teams, land development planning and engineering, communications and mediation, technology development and management, customer experience management — all in addition to project and construction management.

It sounds exhausting, but to Bob it’s his life’s work, and he loves it.

“It’s fun,” he says. “It doesn’t feel like work.”

He’s also busy in the community. He is president of the Greater Ottawa Home Builders’ Association and Chairman of the Board of Habitat for Humanity.

“I’m at a stage in my career,” he explains, “when I like to give back, and to be a mentor to younger people.”

He enjoys residential home building.

“It’s really a noble thing,” he says, because you’re building shelter for people, just as farmers provide food for people.”

And his time spent on Parliament Hill has been an unforgettable experience.

“It’s an honour to walk onto the Hill each morning and know you are working on one of the three most significant buildings in Canada,” he says, “and the biggest stone restoration project in Canadian history.”