

For Immediate Release

Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre Wins 2008 Governor General's Medal in Architecture

The Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC) announced in Ottawa this week that the Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre in Osoyoos, built by the Osoyoos Indian Band, is one of twelve recipients of the Governor General's Medal which recognizes outstanding achievement by Canadian architects. The centre was designed by Bruce Haden of Hotson Bakker Boniface Haden of Vancouver. An international panel of architects selected the winners. "The award-winning projects are indeed world-class and demonstrate that, as architects, we Canadians can create buildings that are second to none," said RAIC President Kiyoshi Matsuzaki.

Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre is noted for its dramatic rammed earth wall, which is the largest example in North America of this building technique. The building design was inspired by traditional aboriginal architecture which uses earth as insulation. Built against a hillside, the colourful earth-tone layers in the wall mimic geological strata. The thick walls, combined with a "green roof" of earth and native plants, is an energy-efficient design suited to the arid climate of Osoyoos. The Osoyoos Indian Band made the choice to invest in additional sustainable building technologies such as radiant heating and cooling, low-water washroom fixtures, and drought tolerant native landscaping. Beetle-affected blue-stained pine is used throughout the building to profile the use of this lumber as a viable material.

Architect Bruce Haden wanted to use architectural expression as a way to convey the rich past and transforming future of aboriginal culture. The building features indoor and outdoor exhibits that explore the cultural history of Okanagan First Nations and their traditional lands. "The project speaks to the advanced vision of the Osoyoos Indian Band, and their commitment to environmental, social and economic sustainability," stated Haden in Vancouver earlier this week. "It celebrates the Okanagan Nation's long tenure on this extraordinary endangered landscape, as well as the bright future of First Nations in Canada."

Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre, which is open to the public year-round, is also noted for its rattlesnake research project and visitor programs highlighting the endangered species of the sage grasslands. This is the fifth architectural and design award for the centre including a 2007 Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia Medal of Excellence in Architecture, and the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada Award of Excellence in the Innovation. The centre has also won three awards presented by the Aboriginal Tourism Association of BC.

http://www.raic.org/honours_and_awards/awards_gg_medals/2008recipients/nkmip_e.htm