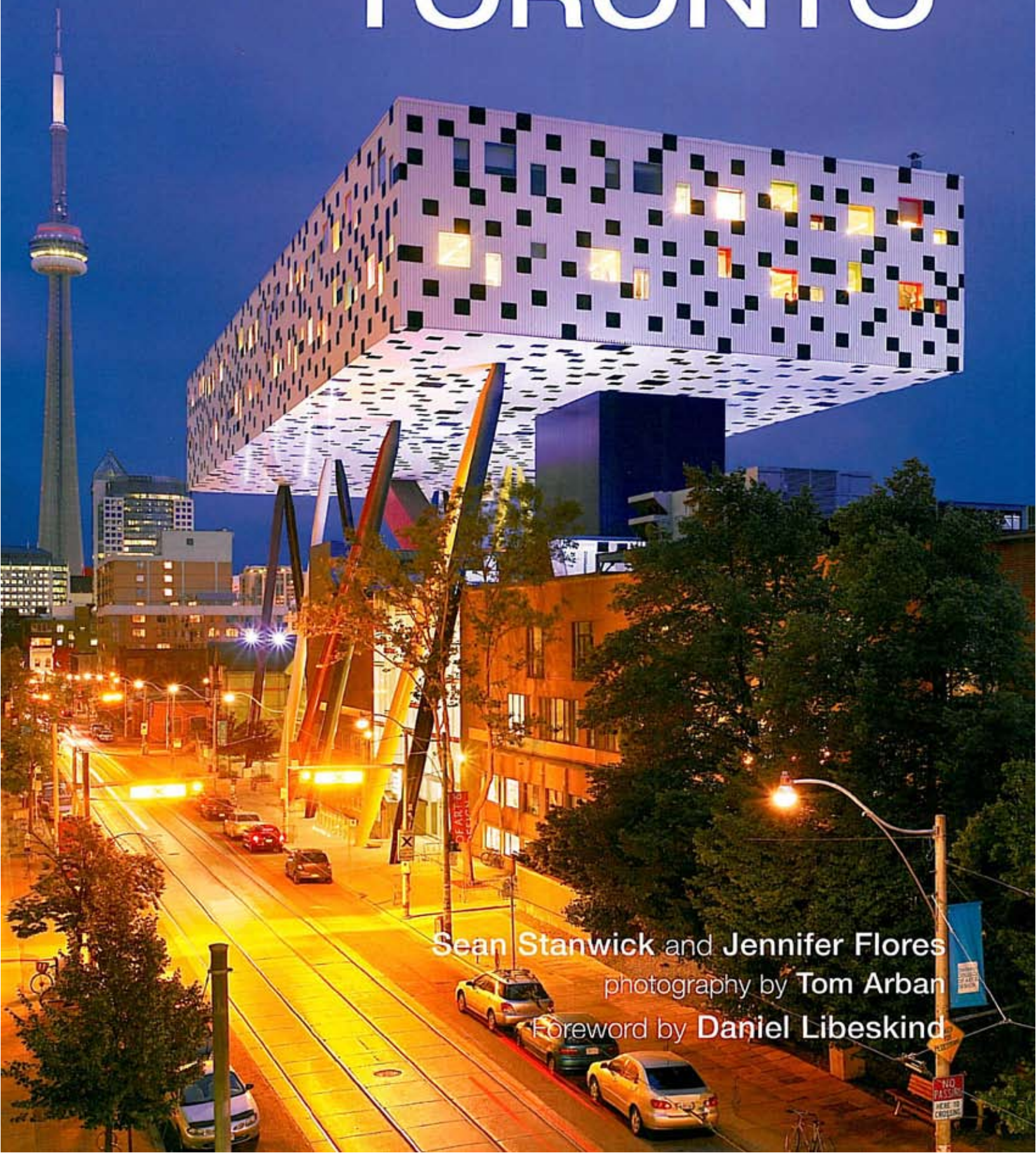


Design City TORONTO



Sean Stanwick and Jennifer Flores
photography by Tom Arban
Foreword by Daniel Libeskind



Left
The space improvises with a palette ranging from finely-detailed joinery and tiny glass mosaic tiles to rough-hewn 150-year-old timber beams



Boiler House Restaurant

Mackay|Wong Strategic Design / Eagar + Co Architecture + Design

Mill Street, Toronto 2003

With increasing frequency, the preservation of brownfield or historic buildings is being viewed as a popular antidote to declining urban neighbourhoods. It is no surprise then that 'going green' and the notion of sustainable design have become popular measures for designers and clients in determining a building's success. Often calculated in quantifiable terms such as 'payback period', is it possible that sustainability has been co-opted as 'preservation for commercial incentive'? Should sustainability instead be a qualitative and intentional methodology for design, fabrication and operation?

The owners of the Distillery District thought so and gave the design team the brief to reuse, recycle and plan innovatively, thus resulting in a place that not only celebrates the material essence and architectural spirit of the place, but also through the process of construction educates and gives back to the community.

A very ambitious mandate indeed; but then again the restored nineteenth-century Gooderham & Worts Distillery District is itself a very ambitious project. The largest and most intact brownfield site in Canada, the district is a wonderful collection of over 40 fully preserved, Victorian timber and brick warehouse and whisky production facilities. Amid the collage of heritage buildings that date between 1860 and 1900, there is a cooperage, a pumphouse, rack houses, stables and barrelhouses. Today, at the hands of Cityscape Development, the site has morphed into Toronto's first true pedestrian quarter; an arts and leisure community of resident artists and studios, cafés, galleries and restaurants.

Most of these buildings were constructed in a time when it made sense to produce everything you needed on site, from the barrels to age the whisky to the labels on the bottles. In fact, this improvisational and utilitarian approach became the same *modus operandi* for the new restaurant as well. Mackay|Wong, a Toronto design firm and project team leader, invited Eagar + Co Architecture + Design to collaborate with them in achieving the client's vision of adaptive reuse. Working with heritage preservation specialists ERA Architects, a collage of artifacts found on site during construction were reclaimed and cast into new uses. However, fully understanding the depth of architectural memory evident in the site, remnants selected first had to be proven programmatically relevant and functionally useful. Something to be engaged with and never nostalgic or trendy, history is not put on display but, instead, put to work.

Walking into the double-height brick shell of the former rack house, the experience is akin to entering a soaring wooden cathedral. Immediately apparent is the massive main bar, a concrete hulk that runs

project

Boiler House Restaurant

55 Mill Street, Toronto, Ontario

architect

Mackay|Wong Strategic Design in
joint collaboration with Eagar + Co
Architecture + Design

telephone

+1 416 203 2121

website

www.boilerhouse.ca

opening hours

Tues – Sat: dinner service 5pm to close

Sat: brunch 11am to 3pm

neighbourhood

in the Distillery District, a historic
industrial relic of Victorian buildings set
on 13 acres in downtown Toronto

style

recycled materials and modest con-
temporary design combine to create
an industrial but elegant setting

clientele

casual diners, local tourists and jazz
fans enjoy a soothing blend of music
and hearty fare

signature experience

sitting in the outdoor patio, with cobble-
stones underfoot and strains of jazz
filling the lazy afternoon air

other projects

Mackay|Wong: Wayne Gretzky's
Restaurant, Toronto; WEGZ Stadium
Bar, Toronto

Eagar + Co Architecture + Design:
Sistemalux Showroom, Toronto

Left

Entering into the double-height brick shell of the former rack house, the experience is akin to stepping inside a soaring wooden cathedral



Left

A collage of artifacts found on site during construction were reclaimed and cast into new uses

Below

Tables are hewn from recycled wooden slabs, while the sky-blue leather seating provides a decidedly modern feel when paired with crisp white tablecloths



the full length of the room, capped by a continuous 75mm (3 inch) thick plank of salvaged knotty spruce. In a miniature version of the massive storage racks of the adjacent cask building where thousands of whisky barrels once sat aging, the bar features a full-height, three-dimensional grid of rough-hewn timber where hundreds of wine bottles are stored. In a similar move, a stretch of heavy wooden slabs line up and wrap around individual tables and form intimate mini-cubbies for two.

The dining area shares the same industrial feel of the bar. Tables are hewn from recycled wooden slabs while the sky-blue leather bench seating provides a decidedly modern feel when paired with crisp white tablecloths. Completing the room, the matching blue back wall glows behind a filigree of vertical slats, painted black. Overhead, salvaged vintage lighting fixtures illuminate a metal catwalk detailed with wrought-iron spindles, also found on site, while underfoot the polished concrete floor provides a consistent datum.

Many of the details were made with reclaimed artifacts. The real art of sustainability is embraced and evidenced in the site's (hi)story of creation as an accretive, learned process of incremental development. Rather than pre-planning every detail, the district's restoration team was empowered with creating and fabricating the restaurant's interior details during construction. Improvising with a palette that ranged from finely-detailed joinery to rough-hewn 150-year-old timber beams, each detail has become imbued with a sensitivity and language that could only be translated through the individual hands of an artisan responding intuitively to whatever was on hand at the time. Of course, this desire to learn and then pass on the knowledge is ultimately what sustainability is all about.



Above

A stretch of heavy wooden slabs line up and wrap around individual tables to form intimate mini-cubbies for two



Above

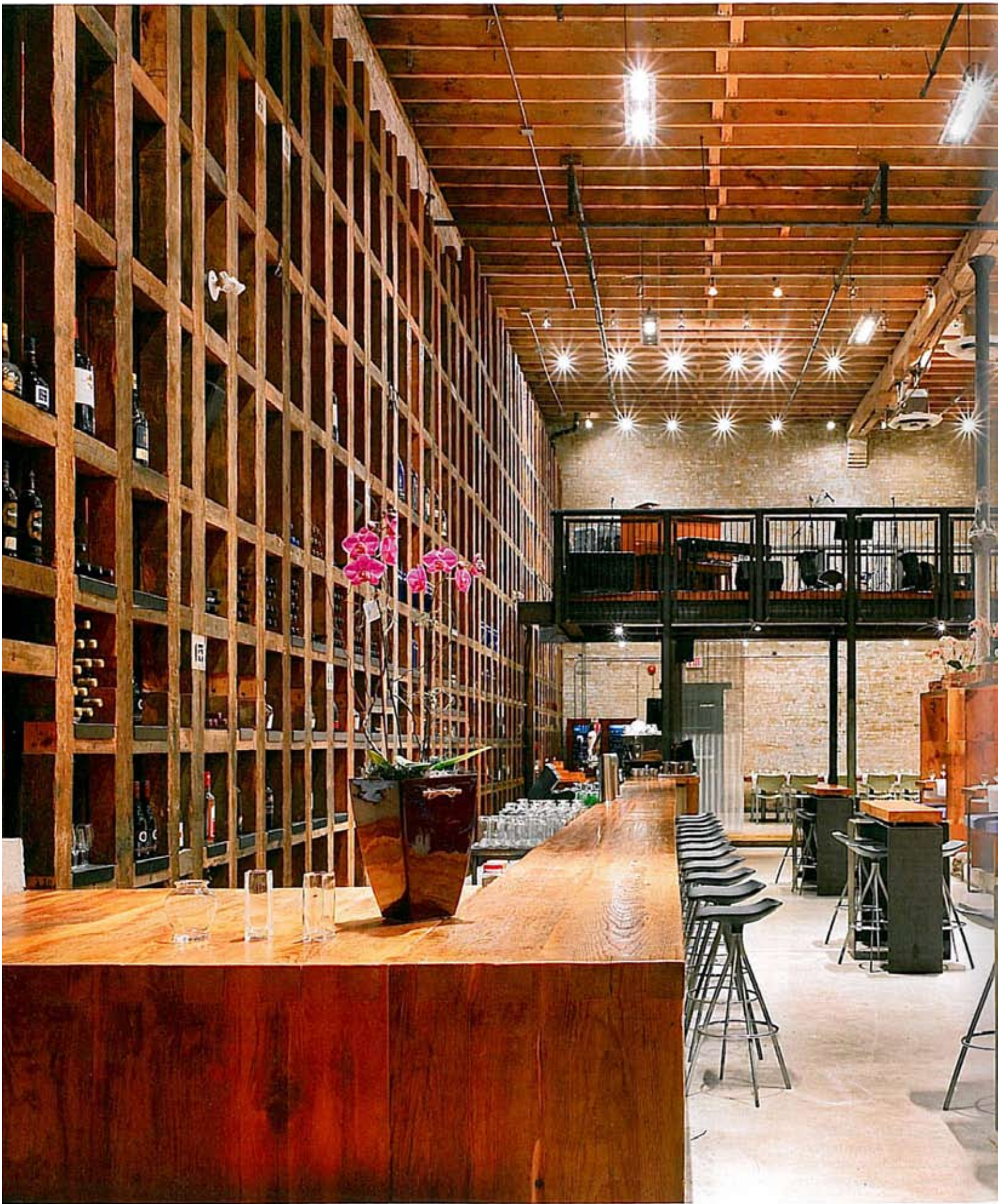
The bar features a full-height, three-dimensional grid of rough-hewn timber where hundreds of wine bottles are stored, identified by original distillery reference markings



Right

The building sits within the Distillery District, a wonderful collection of over 40 fully preserved, Victorian timber and brick warehouse and whisky production facilities

Boiler House Restaurant





Left

Immediately apparent in the lounge area is the massive main bar, a concrete hulk that runs the full length of the room, capped by an equally impressive continuous 75mm (3 inch) thick plank of salvaged knotty spruce

Below

The blue back wall of the dining area glows behind a filigree of black vertical slats, while salvaged light fixtures illuminate a metal catwalk detailed with wrought-iron spindles, also found on site. Underfoot, the polished concrete floor provides a consistent datum

