

# Artscape Wychwood Barns

## Top-Ten Teamwork List

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PHOTOS: DTAH

**CONSTRUCTED OVER THE COURSE** of eight years and completed in 1921, the Wychwood Barns served for more than 60 years as a garage and maintenance facility for Toronto's streetcars. Then, in 2001, after years of neighbourhood squabbling over the fate of the abandoned structures, Toronto architect Joe Lobko became involved in the process. Eight years later, after intensive community "consultation, design, approvals and construction," the Artscape Wychwood Barns have been re-energized and re-purposed as a LEED-certified multi-use arts facility offering affordable accommodation, studio space, and other arts-related functional spaces.

But the Wychwood Barns are not just an example of community collaboration. Like so many successful sustainable projects, they also provide a good example of prolonged professional collaboration. The following is Joe Lobko's Top-ten Teamwork List.

**1.** A magical building — 10 parallel, east-west, non-load-bearing, masonry walls defining a series of five, long, double-height spaces with continuous skylights and large openings at each end, surrounded by four acres of open space — that refused to be demolished after many years of great service to the City, with many stories to tell and much more life to live, despite more than 15 years of abandonment and neglect.

**2.** In Toronto Artscape, a client with enormous ambition and vision and the wisdom to stick to that vision notwithstanding the many, many financial and political challenges along the way.

**3.** A committed and dedicated community surrounding the Barns who insisted that something special be done here, with the stamina to deal with the broad range of opinions on offer and the resulting, often difficult, public debate about the future of this place.

**4.** In Joe Mihevc, a local municipal councillor who understood that the project needed a strong, public champion in the face of often bitter attacks from some colleagues on council (and some in the community), and through what, at times, must have seemed to be an endless uphill battle.

**5.** The recognition that the preservation of our built heritage and the green movement are complementary and natural allies in our collective effort to make great sustainable places — combined with the acknowledgement of that recognition in the form of financial support, from a vast number of people and organizations, like the Metcalfe Foundation, who stepped up very early on to lend encouragement and lead the way.

**6.** A truly great mechanical engineer in Mike Godawa and his colleagues at Stantec (formerly Keen) who helped us harness the earth's energy (50 holes — 400 ft deep) to deliver heating and cooling for the diverse array of spaces created, while harvesting an acre of roof water to drain every dual-flush toilet in the place, with water left over

for irrigation of the surrounding park, greenhouse and gardens.

**7.** A tough, effective and dedicated site superintendent in Matthew Myszkowski and a resourceful, committed and honest project manager in Michael Pharant (both of Dalton) who always had the project's best interest in mind in everything they did.

**8.** Throughout the project's long gestation period (and in spite of the assumptions of many to the contrary), a very supportive and creative city bureaucracy that went beyond the normal call of duty every step of the way to help tease this project along its tortuous and very complicated route of approvals.

**9.** A diverse and dedicated team of consultants who worked well together and gave it their all over a very long period of time, and with whom it was a joy to share in the birth of this renewed and unique place.

**10.** Unbelievable doses of perseverance and determination on the part of everyone involved.

### CONSULTING TEAM:

Joe Lobko Architect Inc., du Toit Architects Limited, E.R.A. Architects Inc., Stantec Consulting Ltd., Blackwell Bowick Partnership Ltd., The Planning Partnership, Gottschalk + Ash International, Brian Ballantyne Specifications, Leber Rubes, Dr. Michael Dixon, GRG Building Consultants Inc., BA Consulting Group Ltd., The Dalton Company Ltd. ■

*Joe Lobko is a partner with du Toit Architects Ltd.*

### References.

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