



# From yesterday to tomorrow

By Caroline Tapp-McDougall

*Located in the hub of Toronto's financial district, the Art Deco building at 234 Bay Street, now known simply as the Design Exchange, was home to the Toronto Stock Exchange (TSE) from 1937-1978. Incorporated into a skyscraper in 1991, the DX has been a respected public museum and 40,000 square foot event venue ever since.*

Over the past several months, Sebastien Centner and his team have given the interior spaces a magical refresh that pays tribute to the iconic architecture of the original design.

Homefront's editorial team caught up with Sebastien on the DX trading floor during an event walk through in late August to discuss the new Design Exchange.

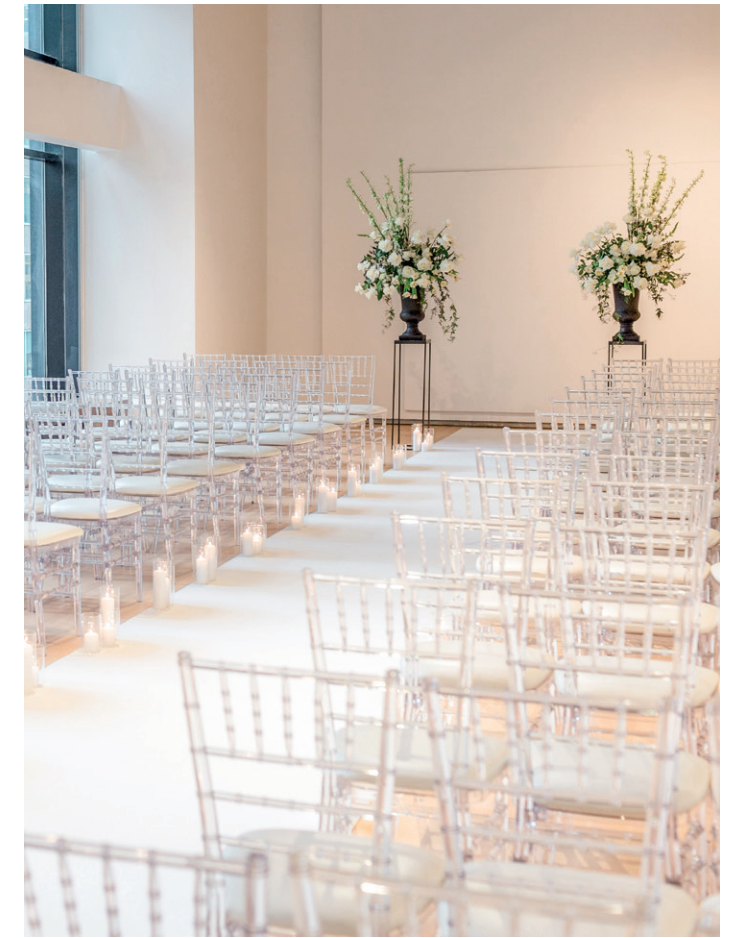
**Q** Art Deco combined modern styles with fine craftsmanship and rich materials. During its heyday at the time the Stock Exchange was built, Deco represented luxury, glamour, exuberance, and, quite fittingly faith in social and technological progress. With your refurbishments, how important was it to stay true to the building's heritage.

**A** To us it was essential that we not lose sight of the historical significance of the venue as we worked to bring a more contemporary look to the spaces. Modernizing art-deco can get tricky and in the case of the Design Exchange specifically there were so many elements that had to be considered to ensure the combination of the two styles were seamless. A perfect example of this is the

colour palette applied to the Trading Floor. Originally a bleak mustard yellow with gold accents the space felt dated and worn down, we chose softer whites and charcoals instead of too strong a contrast with stark tones. The end result is a space that feels fresh and contemporary without the obvious glare of a renovation.

**Q** With its elegant vibe, the DX is unlike any other in the city. It comes with history, traditions and wonderful stories of days gone by. It's an almost hallowed space when you think about who has walked up and down these marble staircases and rung the TSE's opening bell on the trading floor. How does that affect the mood and ambiance of the events that you'll play host to in the space?

**A** That is such an excellent observation and coincidentally so poignant since we are seeing more and more clients coming into the space and recognizing how some of the original elements still reverberate through today even as we approach the 90th anniversary of the space.



Lizz McKenna—  
Director,  
Design Exchange.

While it is well known that the internationally recognized Canadian artist Charles Comfort is responsible for the etchings on the exterior façade of the building and the stainless-steel front doors bearing his industrial motifs, his most majestic work hangs on the Trading Floor. Here, where Comfort's interior panels capture the spirit of the 1930s, there was a spirit of entrepreneurship and a belief in progress and modern industry. It is not lost on us the fact that today's tech and innovation leaders are still some of the early users of the "new" space.

**Q** Who did you work with and what exactly have you done to give the space a new lease on life?

**A** Our team had the vision and we managed the renovation project ourselves. This is often the case with our event environments given our familiarity with what is needed. Elevate Tech Festival and Scale Hospitality, our partners, gave their input on the design and then we formed a cohesive plan.



The contemporary refresh and timeless elegance of the Trading Floor makes for the perfect backdrop for fairytale weddings and corporate events alike.



We worked with Bill Govedaris from Atlas Worx for the cosmetic portions of the renovation (painting, floors, etc) and with our select team of contractors for the remainder of the work (plumbing, electrical, etc) but managed the overall project ourselves. For the AV systems, it was the CCR Audio-Visual team who began by designing a completely upgraded AV system with the newest in sound, light and video technology. They also helped bring a long time vision of mine to life by helping us install an exciting new projection mapping system.

**Q** One upgrade of note is on the technology side. You now have the ability to create fully immersive event environments. We've heard this is a first in Canada?

**A** Indeed, we are thrilled to officially announce that the Design Exchange is the first venue in Canada with a dedicated fully immersive event environment. Corporate and social clients get a completely unique setting which can be transformed with the press of a single button. Fully immersive mapping projection goes well beyond hosting in a conventional environment. It transports attendees or guest to anywhere their hosts want them to be. It lets us create breathtaking visual landscapes and virtual backdrops that will, quite frankly, turn the ordinary into the extraordinary.

**Q** The venue now has six spaces and is run by Director of Events, Lizz McKenna. Can you tell us about the capacity of each area and what makes it



The immersive space features 50ft ceilings and a 270 degree projection surface that can be changed with just the press of a button.

unique and the type events the space is now best suited to host?

**A** The six spaces include: The Lobby which is able to host events up to 200 guests; The Trading Floor which can host up to 600 guests reception style, 300 for seated receptions or 500 theatre style; The Gallery 250 guests reception style, 220 for seated receptions or 300 theatre style; The Library 120 guests reception style, 80 for seated receptions or 100 theatre style, and finally our two boardrooms; the Library Boardroom 40 guests reception, banquet or theatre style and the Main Boardroom which is more suitable for meetings for around 30 guests.

The opportunities to span multiple spaces throughout the building are endless, according to Lizz. For weddings for

example she suggests hosting the ceremony in the Gallery and a magical seated dinner and party on the Trading Floor. Meetings and breakouts can be held in the gallery.

**Q** And, a final question for you and Lizz. If you could invite anyone to dinner in the space, who would it be?

**A** Wow, the list would be pretty long I think, but if we could only have one person, maybe Ed Burtynsky, since he could appreciate the scale of the canvas.®

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