



Intersection of engineering and art

BY KARL KESSLER

PHOTO BY TOMASZ ADAMSKI

Buildings often escape our notice. We navigate streets that thread in between them, we walk past and move through them, and for all their size and solidity they are merely the blurred backdrop to our travels.

And yet, some buildings grab our attention.

It's difficult to miss the University of Waterloo School of Pharmacy, which sprang up in 2009 at the corner of King and Victoria streets in Kitchener. Its architect, Siamak Hariri, incorporated

giant illustrations of medicinal plants into the exterior glazing.

The result is ... well, that depends. Opinions seem to be divided. I've heard from the unimpressed, but I've spoken with many more who are truly charmed by the effect. In spite of the former, such unsolicited, strongly positive feelings toward a building are rare.

Its design stems from the intersection of engineering and art. Along with its complement across the street, the renovated Kaufman factory, it has signaled the renaissance of the King-Victoria crossroads.

Pharmacy is a standout among the many new towers jutting into our skyline. The formal, vertically rectangular front is softened by the botanical images, as well as the varied massing and use of materials on the side elevations. The botanical theme continues – delightfully – throughout the interior.

Buildings profoundly affect us, emotionally and physically, whether we “see” them or not. Each time I see this one, my spirits lift. That's the fruit of imaginative design.

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