Will Alsop on 10 Years of the Sharp Centre for Design

The architect reflects on OCAD University’s iconic downtown building, which turned ten Tuesday under a cloud of both architecture

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Will Alsop

Speaking at a public lecture held on November 25 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of OCAD University’s Sharp Centre for Design, the London-based architect reflected on how his unconventional design went on to win accolades (including a 2005 AZ Award). At the lecture, Alsop discussed the Sharp Centre’s origins, development and influence. Below, his seven best comments.

1 On his own ambitions for the building…

“I wanted a rough, tough building – not too precious. I wanted to do something that was a bit of a public space but also a kind of private place within that.”

2 On OCAD U’s original project brief…

“It was not aspirational at all. It was written as though it was for a hospital. It was a mind-stultifying read.”

3 On his aspirations for the project…

“I saw City Hall, and Mies [van der Rohe’s Toronto-Dominion Centre towers], but I also saw 1960s, 1970s brutalist buildings down. He sympathizes with the fact that familiarity can make people history.”

4 On the building’s construction process…

“Towards the end of the construction phase, I sent Alsop a photo of the hollow, eight-tonne stilts, captioned “weapons of mass construction.””

5 On OCAD U’s older campus building…

“Aslso said that, over the course of his career, he’s come to be against knocking old buildings down. He spoke about in his lecture. Open to the public during school hours (7:30 – 12:00)

6 On that wire fence in Grange Park…

“The fence is a barrier, but also an enabler. It allows you to throw a bucket of paint around if you want to.”

7 On structure’s uses…

“Another of my ideas was to have a garbage room that was connected to the students. They could make their own.”

Among the interesting projects under construction: two Alsop-designed subway stations in the new York City subway system. The first is the Second Avenue Line that will connect Manhattan to the upper East Side. The second is the Second Street Line, which will travel along First Avenue.”