



Integrating Indigenous Design - Smudging Space, East Memorial Building, Ottawa – Department of Justice



RPIC Real Property Awards – Category 4: Engagement and Partnerships with Indigenous Peoples

- Department of Justice (Justice), PSPC and BGIS completed in March 2021, a project for a Smudging Room for Justice at the East Memorial building in Ottawa. Justice, PSPC and BGIS collaborated together to create and build this Indigenous space.
- The smudging room, through collaboration and consultation became more than just a smudging room, but a public space for indigenous reflection, wellness, diversity and inclusion. It became a welcoming public space for ALL.
- This project reflected the opportunity to advance reconciliation and renew the relationship with Indigenous team members and artists.
- The project also reflected the opportunity to integrate Indigenous design and art into real property and material assets where federal actions can reflect and intersect Indigenous interests and perspectives.



- This project was initiated by a request from an indigenous employee from the Department of Justice, for a room that could be used for indigenous wellbeing, reflection and smudging. Smudging is a traditional indigenous ceremony for purifying or cleansing the soul of negative thoughts of a person or place.
- The project involved many indigenous and non indigenous stakeholders. It started with engagement with the BGIS Director of Indigenous engagement, who helped guide the Indigenous perspectives of the projects. It included consultations and collaboration with stakeholders from PSPC, Justice, BGIS and the Architect. Following these extensive consultations, the room was designed to be accessible and inclusive, while ensuring Indigenous cultures/traditions were respected.
- The team's collective approach was based on clear, effective communication, through both impromptu dialogue as well as regularly structured, recurrent meetings that included all stakeholders to assure fulsome dialogue. Regularly scheduled structure meetings formed the cornerstone of effective communication and reporting through the project.
- Weekly design and construction meetings were organized by BGIS with the various stakeholders, to collaboratively elaborate the design according to the GC standards. Working sessions were also implemented to share ideas and concepts met the original request and occupant needs, as well as consideration and mindfulness of Justices' Indigenous team and local Indigenous community traditions and constraints.

- BGIS and Justice also engaged with [Pinock](#) Smith, an Algonquin Independent Arts & Crafts Professional to discuss indigenous elements that would be part of the room. Pinock is an Algonquin from the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg Nation near Maniwaki, Quebec. He builds canoes with a particular interest in Algonquin birchbark canoes. He is also a gifted craftsmen of toboggans, cradleboards, paddles, drums and other traditional crafts. Pinock created the Algonquin wigwam and dream catcher that was the main Indigenous feature that formulated the design of the room.
- Alain Fournier was the primary architect, Alain Fournier is a founding Partner of EVOQ and leads the firm's projects that are located north of the 55th parallel. His intent is to actively contribute to the promotion and development of the culture of the Inuit and First Nations. Alain has extensive knowledge of the challenges and issues that are specific to construction and development in a northern context, within the Aboriginal communities. His involvement in the design of community and cultural facilities, among others, earned him an enviable reputation in these localities. He is recognized for his efforts to translate and express the Native culture and traditions through the built environment.
- Department of Justice was the primary stakeholder and was involved through all phases of the project with focus on diversity and inclusivity. Their leadership during this project, and their commitment to do more than just a smudging room, is a reflection of the end design and the impact the room will have for people in the building.
- BGIS' and Justice Project Management processes include communication and engagement protocols during the different milestones of a project. This was extremely critical as the space was developed so that it that would support indigenous cultural awareness and wellness.

The Team

BGIS

Larry Chevrier, Sr Project Manager
Celine Girard, Property Manager
Enrico Camasso, Energy Manager
Brent Kahara, Health and Safety Coordinator
Christian Giansante, Heritage
Michael Wynoch, Commissioning Oversight
Tracey LaRue, Project Administrator

Department of Justice

Faina Grinshein
Elio Marcantonio
Jesse Ward
Celine Henry
Barbara Dumont-Hill
Mary Bullock
Brenda Carbonell
Jane Chartrand
Marylaine Choquette
Tasha Cloutier
Alexandra Dean

Architect - EVOQ

Alain Fournier
Jayant Gupta
Bryan Mendez

Mechanical Electrical, Lighting Desgin

CIMA
Greg Santyr
Chayyon Thayaparan

Structural

AAR
Jean-Michel Carriere
Justin Vienneau

Artwork – Wigwam and Dream Catcher

Pinock Smith

General Contractor - Profex

Andre Durand

- This project started as a Department of Justice Indigenous employee request and ended with the design and construction of dedicated public space that reflects indigenous and wellness values. A space that can be used by anyone for reflection, prayer or contemplation. As buildings become more than just a place to work and we move to a hybrid office, this place reflects the opportunity of what CAN be. A space for all who wish to visit, as we move on this path of reconciliation and wellness.
- This project was one of the first projects that BGIS was able to effectively integrate Indigenous design perspectives, and provides us (BGIS, PSPC, Justice) with key lessons learned to apply to other projects, small, medium and large across Canada.
- Projects are an opportunity for long lasting indigenous engagement, as through design, we can support reconciliation, diversity, inclusion, knowledge sharing, education and design appreciation. Indigenous design gives a voice to Indigenous peoples and their culture.
- This is Reconciliation in ACTION. It actively promotes cross cultural expertise and team spirit based on mutual respect, learning, collaboration, engagement and respect for diversity and traditional Indigenous ways.

As with many construction projects all around the world, the contractors, subcontractors and supply chain vendors were challenged by the impact of the pandemic. The design and construction schedule was greatly impacted by COVID 19.

- Initial Schedule – August 2019 to June 2020
- Final Schedule August 2019 to March 2021

The project was successfully managed and delivered in collaboration with the various vendors and stakeholders. Because of restrictions and access to the site during COVID, their flexibility allowed the project to be completed, even though delayed.



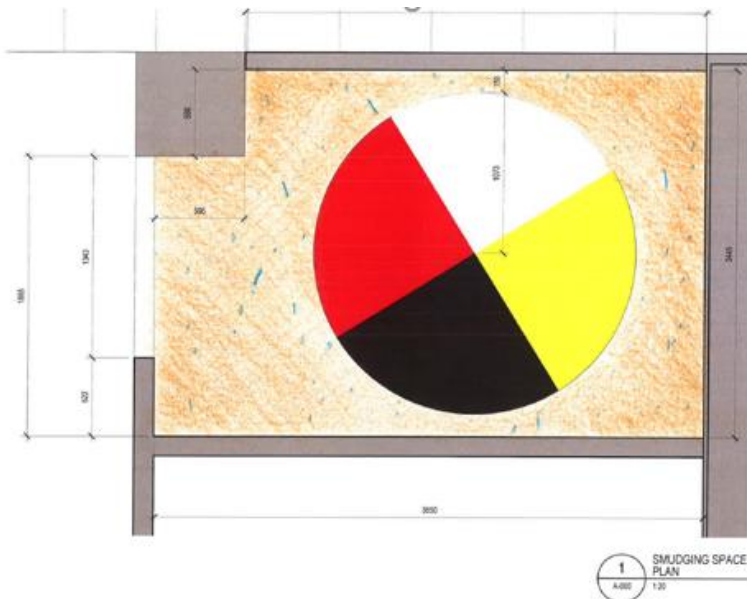
Project Schedule

- A proactive health and safety policy was developed and implemented to specifically address the pandemic. BGIS vigilantly implemented H&S regulations and policies as it was essential to the safety of those present on site, as well as those within the community. It was imperative for the project team to require adherence to the H&S policies set by BGIS to keep the job sites safe, with the added motivation of avoiding further site closures.
- A Project schedule was a key part of the process and supported the project through to completion including:
 - Stakeholder identification
 - Contract award and administration
 - Predesign
 - Schematic design
 - Design Development
 - Contract documents
 - Tender
 - Construction
 - Contract close out
- The key issues driving the project were evaluated and analyzed, so that the challenges and opportunities were clearly demonstrated.

- The Department of Justice's leadership for this project provided the opportunity for this project to go beyond a normal project. Their focus on indigenous elements, diversity and inclusivity provided an opportunity to have a project that could impact many.
- Through the RFP process for consulting services, the proponents were asked to demonstrate experience on similar projects. EVOQ was chosen for their experience and leadership in Indigenous Architecture.
- BGIS and EVOQ, working with Justices' steering committee, designed a space that was relevant to the envisioned requirements, from esthetic, spiritual and technical perspectives. EVOQ is recognized for their efforts to translate and express the Native culture and traditions through the built environment. They have completed numerous projects in Indigenous communities and have experience representing Indigenous voices within Architecture.
- BGIS ensured that specific Indigenous Art requirements were included during the procurement process, to ensure that the stakeholders' vision was maintained. BGIS has also developed a comprehensive Indigenous Engagement Program to support the development of projects like this. This Program is supported by a BGIS Indigenous Communications Committee of over 50 BGIS employees. This committee supports Indigenous community out reach, employee engagement, recruitment and vendor management.

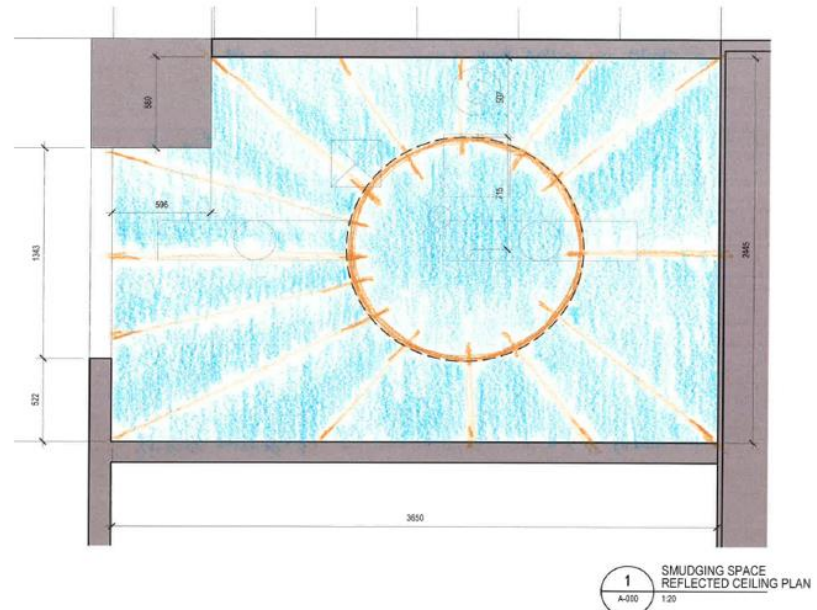
- Initial Indigenous design perspectives included the Indigenous medicine wheel, wigwam and dream catcher. Effective planning and leadership by all stakeholders allowed these indigenous elements to be effectively integrated into the project through collaboration and consultation.

Indigenous Medicine Wheel



ARCHITECTS
EVOQ
PROJECT
EAST MEMORIAL SMUDGING SF
DRAWING TITLE
PLAN - CONCEPT A

Algonquin Wigwam and Dream Catcher



ARCHITECTS
EVOQ
PROJECT
EAST MEMORIAL SMUDGING SPACE
DRAWING TITLE
REFLECTED CEILING PLAN

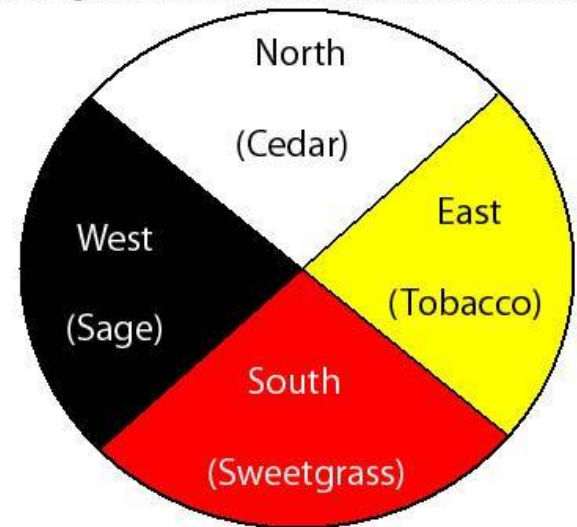
- This project was in response to an Indigenous employee's request for an Indigenous space for a smudging room. Through collaboration with all stakeholders, the design concept integrated local Algonquin teachings with the use of an Algonquin artist, to create the Algonquin wigwam and dream catcher.
- In February of 2020, BGIS, Justice and EVOQ visited Pinock, Algonquin Independent Arts & Crafts Professional in Kitigan Zibi. Pinock Smith was engaged to design and install the artwork for the space.

Pinock's Workspace Visit



- The design was built for Indigenous and non Indigenous occupants to support a path for reconciliation.
- The project integrated the medicine wheel (Circle) on the floor. First Nations use this wheel in very many different ways. The circle, being primary, influences how Indigenous peoples view the world. It reflects the process of how life evolves, how the natural world grows and works together, how all things are connected, and how all things move toward their destiny.
- Aboriginal peoples see and respond to the world in a circular fashion and are influenced by the examples of the circles of creation in our environment. Smudging is a sacred way to cleanse, balance, pray and connect to Mother Earth. The medicines used honour the teachings of four directions of the medicine wheel.

The Medicine Wheel
Representing Four Directions and the four Sacred Herbs



- The design integrated elements of a wigwam design and a dream catcher in the ceiling. A wigwam is a type of house used mainly by Algonquian peoples but also other Indigenous peoples in the eastern half of North America in precolonial days. Wigwams had a cone shape or a dome and were typically made out of wood. Sometimes, animal hides would cover the outer walls of the structure. Wigwams were built for easy disassembling and reassembling so that hunting parties and travelling families could have shelter in their new location.
- The dream catcher was woven at the top of the Wigwam. The dream catcher acts as a web or net and can be a form of armor and protection. Dream catchers are also widely viewed as a symbol of oneness among numerous Indigenous cultures and tribes.

Wigwam

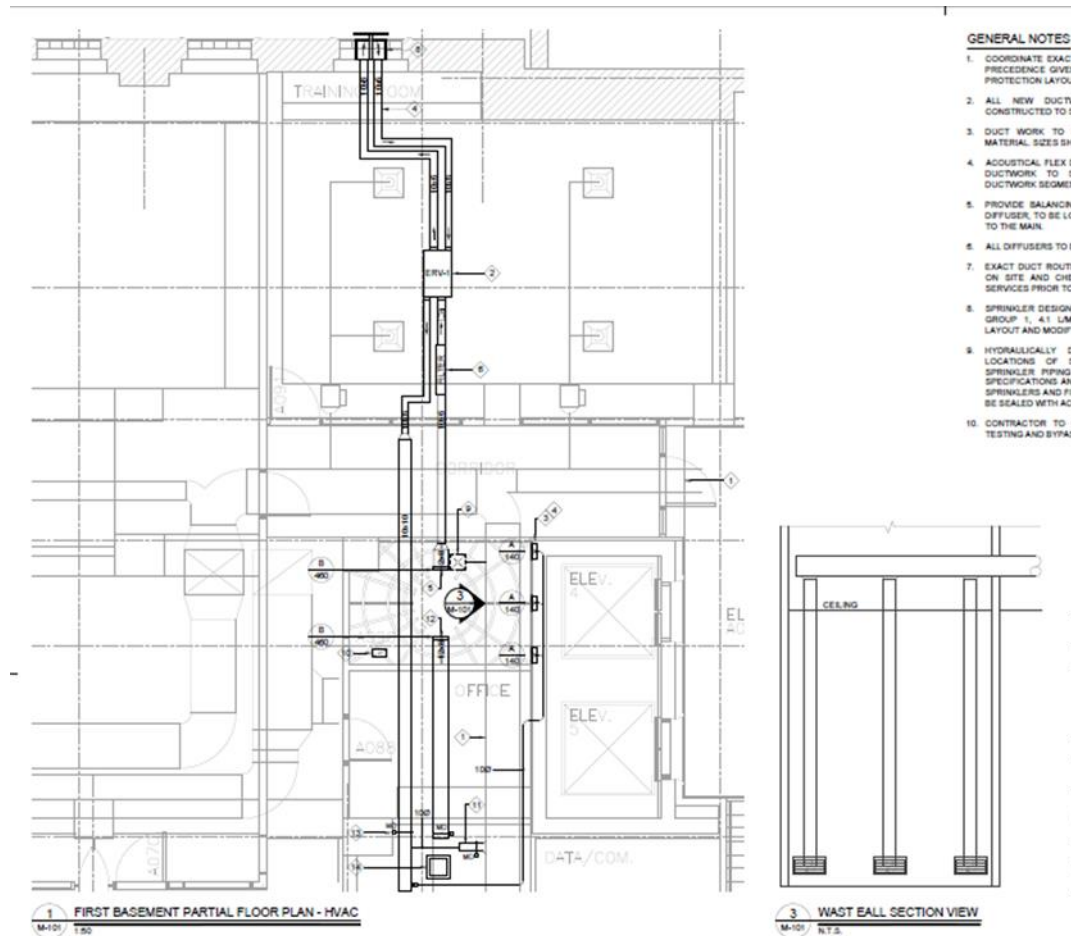


Dream Catcher



- Mechanical and electrical considerations were also paramount. The BGIS Energy team was engaged and evaluated all options from an energy standpoint. Soundproofing, structural, fire and life safety, HVAC, lighting were all carefully evaluated to create a safe and thoughtful space.
- For example, the HVAC had to be upgraded because of the smudging process and ventilation requirements.
- Because of the ceremonial aspects of the room, special lighting also had to be installed to reflect the different aspects of Indigenous celebration and wellness (i.e. mood lighting).

Drawing of HVAC Upgrades

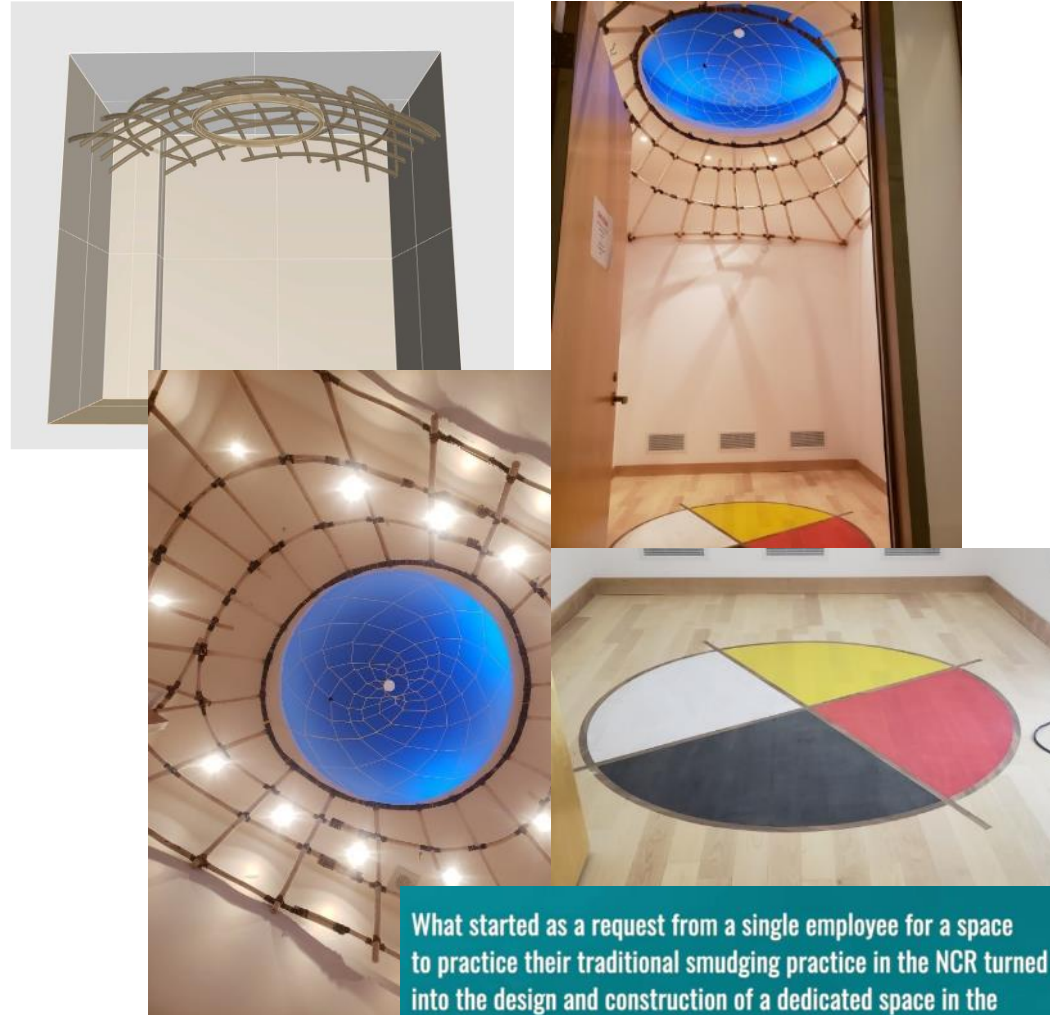


In March 2021, a project for a Smudging Room for the Department of Justice (Justice) East Memorial building in Ottawa, was completed. Justice, PSPC and BGIS collaborated together to create and build this space. Justice received an award for this project: *Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Award- Justice's Smudge Room – Reconciliation in action.*

“I would like to thank you and your team for your effort, hard work, dedication and exceptional performance. I am so fortunate to work with such dedicated and talented people from the BGIS team. Larry Chevrier is the true star, he is dedicated, client oriented and very good communicator. This was an exceptional project that brought us (the Justice, BGIS, consultants, contractor and the artist) together . For the duration of the project we became a big family with the same objectives and values.”

Video Links:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTZ28gezR60>



What started as a request from a single employee for a space to practice their traditional smudging practice in the NCR turned into the design and construction of a dedicated space in the East Memorial Building for this practice by all who need it or wish to visit — no matter who you are.