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“We’ve always been innovators. We think of ourselves that way — we want to always do great design and feel that in order to do that, we must innovate and not be stagnant. We cannot rely on the way things have been done for the last few decades.”

— *Bruce Walck,*
Principal, Powers Brown Architecture

Building on innovation

Contributed

Powers Brown Architecture designs outside-the-box projects

By Sara Ericsson

Living by design has been the bread and butter of Powers Brown Architecture. While that may sound like a logical conclusion for an architecture and design firm, their work goes beyond normal barrier bending and breaks through current industry standards.

They’re looking to design and build better, more cost-effective and cleaner projects that play into — yet stand out from — their surroundings and brought this approach to Canada in 2015 via St. John’s, where Bruce Walck established their first Canadian office.

That move was soon met with success that has only continued to grow. Walck says client feedback continues to prove time and again that these new ideas and creative approach are the main reason the firm continues to thrive. “Clients value the way we think and we get our best results by being innovators in what we do,” he says.

Success in St. John’s

Walck joined Powers Brown Architecture in 2003 at its office in Houston, Texas, where it was originally founded in 1999. He is now a Principal with the firm and brought it to St. John’s in 2015 when his wife, Jennifer,

received a job opportunity to become President of Hibernia Management and Development Company Ltd.

And even though the firm was planning for success here, Powers Brown Architecture was still surprised to see business take off so quickly. “The interesting thing was that we began to build a thriving architecture practice, even without knowing the province. We did a lot of marketing, to be sure, but it was also because we brought things to the table that the industry didn’t yet have here,” says Walck.

With a working understanding of the country — Walck grew up on the American side of Niagara Falls and with a cottage north of Toronto — and some solid bedrock in place, the time was soon ready for capitalizing on the success of St. John’s and moving ahead with the firm’s expansion plan for the rest of Canada. “The plan for St. John’s was twofold: first, get established here and then expand to grow the company even further across Canada,” says Walck.

One part plan, another part chance

The St. John’s office has now become the firm’s Atlantic Canada headquarters and base camp from where its endeavours across Eastern Canada have since launched. The

firm has also established an office in Toronto, which acts as the base for their business across the rest of Canada.

“To grow the business to the size we wanted, we realized we had to expand out of Newfoundland and Labrador. But that did not pose a problem, since we saw how we could service all of Eastern Canada from here, with short plane rides to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick allowing us to tap into those markets,” says Walck.

This success was thanks, in part, to planning and chance, as they arrived in town at a time when St. John’s was independently thriving and producing consistent work opportunities. The work they have completed since 2015 has been focused in four sectors: office building and corporate office interiors, commercial retail with mall renovations and store fit outs, industrial work with warehousing and light manufacturing facilities, as well as multi-family apartment buildings.

Walck foresees a steady demand in the future that he predicts will only increase. “We’re seeing that high demand and also continued growth here in St. John’s and Eastern Canada. This makes us very optimistic, as we write proposals every day and have meetings about new projects,” says Walck.



Powers Brown Architecture has been involved in the design and building of Newfoundland and Labrador projects, including Churchill Square, St. John's (pictured here), and has focused primarily on projects within office building, commercial retail, industrial work and multi-family sectors.



Powers Brown Architecture has prioritized innovation above almost all else in their work to ensure they continue besting industry standards and pushing the architecture envelope. Pictured here is the Powers Brown-designed Water Street building in St. John's.

Innovation key to growth

Walck says that despite what those outside the industry may think, innovation and architecture do not always go hand in hand, with some industry members seeing it as a commodity, while others see it as an art form. He says while there is a big gap between such groups, he sees the work as a blend of both.

"We've always been innovators. We think of ourselves that way — we want to always do great design and feel that in order to do that, we must innovate and not be stagnant. We cannot rely on the way things have been done for the last few decades," says Walck.

The firm has consistently gone above and beyond industry standards in areas, including concrete tilt wall technology, for which their in-house research discovered a way to build higher and more cost-effective projects using the technology. Walck says

Powers Brown Architecture has designed and built the world's only six-storey concrete tilt building currently standing.

This outside-the-box thinking means the firm approaches projects differently than most, leaving preconceived ideas at the door in favour of treating each new design as unique. Walck says this means that not only is the firm a first choice for industry members looking for a groundbreaking design or build, but also one that creates lasting, artistic buildings that are well-built and solid investments for their clients.

"Our research and unique approach has gone a long way as well in creating striking building types and finished projects that work with their surroundings, but still stand out. A lot of people we work with value that, which means we have high hopes for growth in Canada," he says. ■



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