

# OAKVILLE COACH HOUSE

David Lasker +VG Architects

The official opening of the picturesque, Shingle Style Oakville Coach House last year marked the completion by +VG Architects (The Ventin Group Ltd.) of the adaptive reuse of the Erchless Estate, a cultural heritage property designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act as an intact surviving example of an estate developed by a wealthy settler family at 8 Navy St. in Oakville, Ontario.

This ensemble of historic buildings on an elevated natural embankment overlooking Lake Ontario, the mouth of Oakville Harbour and Sixteen Mile Creek, comprises the Custom House (1856); the Italianate-style residence (1858) in which several generations of the town's founding Chisholm family lived and was restored as the Oakville Museum by +VG in 1991; the Post Office (1835); and the Coach House (1901).

They repose on 1.6 hectares of landscaped grounds maintained by the Town Parks and Open Space Department, including an alpine rock garden that survives as a rare example of this early twentieth-century landscape design feature. Walkways on the site link to the waterfront parkland east of Navy Street.

The Corporation of the Town of Oakville commissioned +VG in September 2019, construction began in March 2021, and the Oakville Museum Coach House Restoration Project officially opened on May 14, 2022.

The most elegant building on the site, the 5,150-square-foot Coach House was designed by the Toronto-based architectural firm Dick and Wickson around 1899. Their other built work includes the Royal Canadian Yacht Club and (under the name of Wickson and Gregg), Timothy Eaton Memorial Church, and Ardwood, the (demolished) mansion for Sir John Craig Eaton.

The building comprises three-parts: horse stables and tack area, a coach storage with hayloft extending across both; and a two-storey gardener's cottage. The exterior charms the eye with eclectic features such as the steeply pitched cross-gable roof and its irregular slopes, eyebrow dormers, bell-cast and bowed projections, shingled cupola, and bay window and mullioned windows.

The project mandate was to create a new programming venue for the museum and restore the gardener's cottage; strengthen links and enhance visual access to the Coach House; enhance the indoor and outdoor connection and presence of the Coach House in the Oakville Museum campus;

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The Coach House from the southeast with the gardener's cottage in the foreground.



Living room of the gardener's cottage and the stairway to the second storey.



Close-up from the south of the steeply pitched, cross gable roof clad in wood shingles (L)  
Close-up of the corbeled oriel window on the south façade of the second storey of the gardener's cottage (R).



The south façade's barn doors added during a 1997 renovation were replaced with a new operable glass wall panel system with a film graphic depicting horses.



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harmonize the landscape design with the larger Erchless campus and broader park, river, lake and road settings; integrate path systems, wayfinding and visual accessibility from within and outside the museum campus; protect the archaeological and cultural heritage significance of the Coach House and surrounding grounds; and changing the building's use from storage to assembly occupancy. Bringing the building up to current accessibility standards necessitated interior renovations such as door and washroom access improvements.



In the stable area, the original ladder to the hayloft and its trapdoor, and their patina, were conserved.

Our alterations and additions conform to all applicable Parks Canada's Standards and Guidelines, following the accepted heritage practice of restore first, repair next, replace last. Replacement was in-kind, and compatible, distinguishable, based on sufficient physical evidence, and documented.



The ornamental wooden gate at King Street, a significant landscape feature, leads to the Coach House's east entrance. A barrier-free entrance was created by rebuilding the existing porch 46-cm higher with the entrance preceded by a gently sloping path over an archaeological zone that brings the visitor to the level of the door threshold.

A barrier-free entrance was created on the east side by rebuilding the existing porch 46-cm higher with the entrance preceded by a gently sloping path over an archaeological zone that brings the visitor to the level of the door threshold.

The other modern adaptation to improve accessibility is at the south façade, where the existing barn doors (added during a 1997 renovation) were replaced with a new operable glass wall panel system that slides into a side pocket, providing visual access from the multi-use space (formerly the carriage storage area) to the gardens and estate beyond. A film graphic on the glass panels depicts horses, reflecting the structure's initial use while deterring bird strikes.

Our work on the Coach House has created a much-anticipated addition to the Oakville Museum's cultural and heritage programming capacity, and a welcoming feature on the publicly accessible cultural heritage landscape.

*All photos courtesy David Lasker Photography.*

## ONTARIO HERITAGE CONFERENCE 2023

After a two-year respite, the OHC was hosted by Heritage Elizabethtown-Kitley from 16–18 June 2022 in Brockville. It was a resounding success, showcasing the beautiful Leeds and Grenville County.

The 2023 conference is being held in London from Thursday June 15, 2023 to Saturday June 17, 2023. The programme for the conference is firming up; for more information go to: <https://ontarioheritageconference.ca>



We will provide more information about the OAHP session at the conference when details are available.

OHC 2023 is sponsored by Community Heritage Ontario, ACO and OAHP.