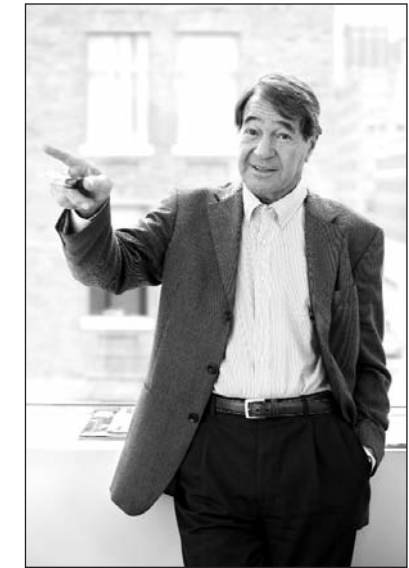


# The School That Jack Built

Award-winning architect Jack Diamond has big plans for Osgoode's new building



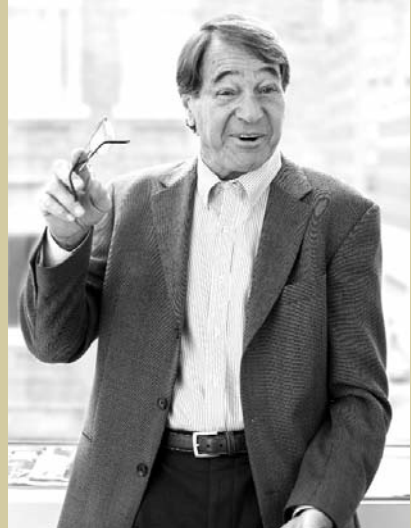
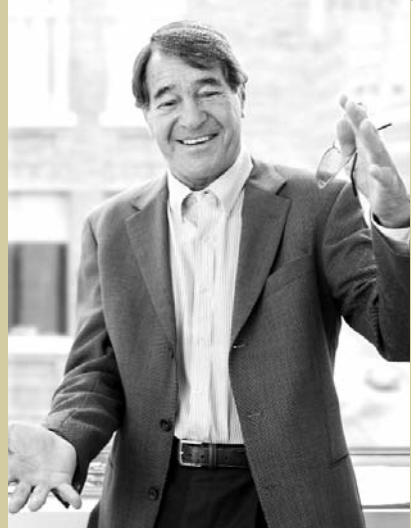
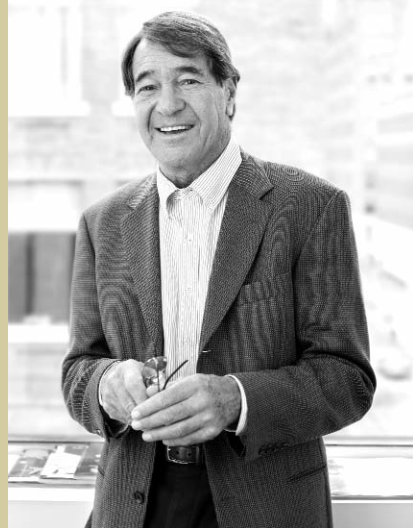
by Christine Ward Photography by Horst Herget



Photography by aka Photography

**W**hen Osgoode Hall Law School moved from Osgoode Hall in downtown Toronto to its current space on the York campus in 1969, education was mostly about what you learned, not how, and a law school building was little more than four walls and a roof.

So much has changed. Today, Osgoode has an ambitious vision of a bright new building that engages young minds, empowers a spirit of community and transforms learning into boundless possibilities. The building plan is the brainchild of Jack Diamond, a principal with Toronto's Diamond + Schmitt Architects Inc., and the inspired mind behind the city's Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts and the York University Student Centre, for which he was presented with the Governor General's Award for Architecture and the Award of Excellence from Canadian Architect.



Photography by aka Photography

**Continuum recently met up with Diamond to talk about his design for a Law School for the 21st century.**

**C: Diamond + Schmitt Architects has a vision of “architecture shaped by the life within it and the life around it.” What does this mean?**

JD: Too often, architects design from the outside-in and then stuff function into it. Practical people design from the inside-out, but their buildings sometimes lack creativity and beauty. We design buildings that support both the aspirations and the functional requirements of their users. It’s both content and context that inspire me.

**C: How might this philosophy apply to Osgoode?**

JD: The content in this case is a law school that is lacking in light and clear circulation paths. People work and study in silos. Visitors don’t know where to go or how to get there. There are no natural connections, which are so necessary in a learning environment. The context is the University’s surroundings. To the south is a woodlot, a future convocation hall is to the east and there’s a great vista to the west. Through our design, we’re challenged to

give views to and from these places.

**C: Share with us your vision for a renovated and expanded Law School building that is responsive to the changing realities of legal education and practice.**

JD: I see the modern world as a place of individual capsules. Every day, people move from living room to car, to our office and back. At other times, people indulge in solitary activities – in front of a computer or television screen. There’s little sense of community. The casual meeting in the park or on the street has been lost. It’s critical for an institution that wants to transfer knowledge and that prides itself on interdisciplinary work to reclaim that. With our design for Osgoode Hall Law School, we’re aspiring to bring people together, to recreate a sense of community. We’re building a place that people will want to spend time in.

**C: How will you do that?**

JD: By celebrating natural behaviours. This building will have great light, simple pathways and accessible gather-

ing places. The central space will be a main street or a piazza that links the old building and the new. It will be about 25 feet wide and feature a glass roof and a series of upper-level bridges, which are actually lounges connecting the two buildings. In fact, we’re planning to integrate informal meeting spaces throughout the building in all of the places people go naturally. We’re putting lounges at vertical and horizontal crossroads of movement, instead of at the end of corridors. Some of the best informal meetings take place en route to somewhere else. Our design celebrates that.

**C: Take me through the expanded building. What will I see when I step inside?**

JD: Entering from the parking lot on the west or from main campus on the east, you’ll step into the atrium with a view of the bridges and lounges above connecting the old building to the new faculty wing. It’s modernism without the sterility. We’ll have lots of wood paneling and natural light. To one side will be the cafeteria, and space for student clubs and activ-

ities; to the other you’ll find a renovated and expanded library featuring study space for individual and group work. The stairs at the far end will lead to the first floor and what is now the building’s front lobby. It’s all about convergence – finding inherent ways to bring people and disciplines together toward a common goal.

**C: Forty years ago, when the original Law School building was constructed, both the study of law and the practice of architecture were something very different. What would you imagine the first architect set out to achieve?**

JD: You’re right – priorities were very different then. They simply got buildings up with little thought for social dynamics. People didn’t think about how learning takes place. As part of this process, we interviewed every constituent group from the Dean to the janitor. Administrators, faculty members, staff and students all got to share their wishes and their complaints. There’s an overriding sense that this is a dingy place to study and work, but it’s also a law school that

prides itself on delivering outstanding student experiences.

**C: Is the space challenge we face unique?**

JD: At Diamond + Schmitt, we have more than 25 universities and colleges as clients. Whether it’s McGill or UBC, Stanford or Harvard, they all have the same concern. The rigid boundaries between disciplines and professions are dissolving and we’re now more interested in how things come together than in the individual parts. There’s really no sense in putting people into silos if what they really want to achieve is an understanding of the whole.

**C: How will Osgoode benefit from your past successes?**

JD: We’ve put the notion of convergence into place at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology in Oshawa where we received a top prize for campus planning and the best academic library in North America award from the Society for College and University Planning. At the UBC Life Sciences Centre, we received a gold LEED, one of just four in all of North

America [Editor’s Note: the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Green Building Rating System is used to measure the effective use of green building strategies]. There are many ways to tackle the same challenge. At Osgoode, we’ll pair the best of these strategies with new ideas. Responsible environmental design will be a driving factor in our design. The availability of natural light and surroundings is a big plus. When we get into the detailed design phase, we’ll also look at ways of creating and conserving energy, employing recyclable materials and conserving water.

**C: The early design plans are complete. What’s the next step?**

JD: Conceptually, we know where we’re going. With the space requirements now complete, we’re working to modify the design to include necessary detail. We want to start construction within the year. Osgoode’s new Law School will open in 2010. ☺

## The Right Architect for the Job

Jack Diamond is no stranger to Toronto, to education or, for that matter, to York University. The South African-born architect’s design for the York University Student Centre earned the Award of Excellence from Canadian Architect and the Governor General’s Award for Architecture – one of six to date awarded to his firm, Toronto’s Diamond + Schmitt Architects Inc.

A graduate of the University of Cape Town, Oxford University and the University of Pennsylvania, Diamond has called Toronto home since 1965. In 1996, he was named an Officer of the Order of Canada and he received the Royal Architecture Institute of Canada Gold Medal, the field’s highest honour, in 2001.

Evidence of Diamond’s award-winning work extends around the world to include the Israeli Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem, Manhattan’s Jewish Community Centre, UBC Life Sciences Centre, the Marion McCain Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Building at Dalhousie University, the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts and the Metro Central YMCA in Toronto.