

# The Transformation of Village by the Grange

By Eva Karpowicz



*Custom-designed sculptures set the lobbies of Village by the Grange apart.*

**VILLAGE BY THE GRANGE** is a seven building complex located in downtown Toronto. Across the street from the Ontario College of Art and Design, this busy condo is convenient to the Gardiner Expressway and University Avenue. Built in the late 1970s, the buildings are condominium residences with a variety of tenants ranging from students to retired couples. Suites are available at different price points from bachelor-sized units to three-storey townhouses. Though the paint and carpeting had been changed once in the last 25-plus years, the tile and fixtures have never been addressed or updated.

## ■ Time for a Facelift

In early 2004, the Village by the Grange board of directors decided that the buildings needed a facelift. The goal was to create something both timeless and functional – a design that would be able to withstand the heavy traffic of a downtown residence as well as one that would not have pieces vanish if someone took a fancy to the décor. The budget was substantial, but at the same time limited by the fact it had to cover seven entrances, main lobbies and elevator lobbies, 14 elevator cabs, and 54 corridors with elevator walk-offs. The board contacted three design firms for proposals. Winklém Design Inc. was awarded the project and set forth to design two concepts for the refurbishment of the complex.

Working closely with the board as well as the decorating committee – consisting of three tenants and a board member – Winklém Design identified the decorative and practical aspects needed for the refurbishment to be functional. Construction was carried out in three phases over three budget years. In negotiating fees it was decided that Winklém Design would focus on the design and products for all areas, and that Village by the Grange Property Management would handle project management, with Winklém on call for their expertise and whenever partial project management might be needed.

Corridors were recommended first, then elevators with their walk-offs, and finally the entrance lobbies and elevator lobbies. However, because of the outdated and worn elevator mechanisms, the reconstruction of the elevators was deemed to be the first phase. Schindler Elevator Corporation was awarded the contract.

Two design concepts for the lobbies and corridors were presented that owners could vote on at the Annual General Meeting. Both concepts were explained and, being different from each other, they had to coincide with the elevator renovations that were already in progress. The options for the lobbies and corridors had a similar feel but different colourways and patterns, both transitional and timeless.

After voting was completed, the corridor and lobby design options were finalized and the project could move forward. Part of the difficulty of designing for this project was the fact that the building's exterior did not reflect the existing interior décor well. The building's exterior is 1970s modern and minimalistic, with boxy shapes in monochromatic rusty brown brick. The interiors, however, were quite traditional, with elaborate moulding and detailing throughout the main level and corridors. The final approved design was a neutral monochromatic colour scheme, with rich



*Mirrors added a sense of expanse to the lobbies and improved security.*

taupes and accents of black and stainless steel. The black added a touch of elegance and contrast, and the stainless steel brought the space up-to-date.

#### ■ Phase 1 — Going Up

Schindler Elevator was in charge of the mechanical aspects of the elevator phase, with Wiklém overseeing

aesthetics of the elevator cabs. The new elevator cabs were to include a new key pad in conjunction with the new mechanisms of the elevators, a floating ceiling with down lights, and mirrors at the back wall for safety and spatial illusion. Security cameras were also installed, and a chair rail border was designed to take away some of the wear and tear that

would occur on the wall panels.

With phase two and three of the project ready to go shortly thereafter, four contracting firms were invited to bid. Three bids came in and Tri-Can Contract Inc. was awarded the project. Tri-Can did all of its own project management, but Wiklém was hired to manage the refurbishment on an as-needed basis. This included situations such as on-site brainstorming and quality control of any product that was being installed, with a deficiency report upon completion. Village by the Grange is a unique complex in that even though all lobbies are very similar and the basic design the same, they all have different layouts and floor plans. The board did not want to sink a huge part of their budget into having individual drawings made up for each lobby, so the tile layouts for each were the same concept and design but done on-site as they were being installed, making them custom to that particular building.

Halfway through the three-year project Dave Arnold, property manager from DEL Property Manage-

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ment was promoted to regional manager. His position was taken over by Lena DaRocha. The transition was made easier by the open communication and organization of both parties. The building was really pushing to have the lobbies and entrances done next. They wanted the tenants to be able to see and enjoy the finished product, get excited, and have an appreciation for the construction ahead.

### ■ Lobbying for Change

The lobbies were quite outdated with their 1980s décor; floor to ceiling mirrored walls and built-in flower boxes, complete with plants struggling to survive the dimly lit lobbies. Wiklém discouraged the idea of doing lobbies for Phase 2 because of the wear and tear that the lobbies would sustain with contractors and construction coming in and out of the building over a prolonged period of time. So corridors were deemed next, and lobbies immediately following corridor construction.

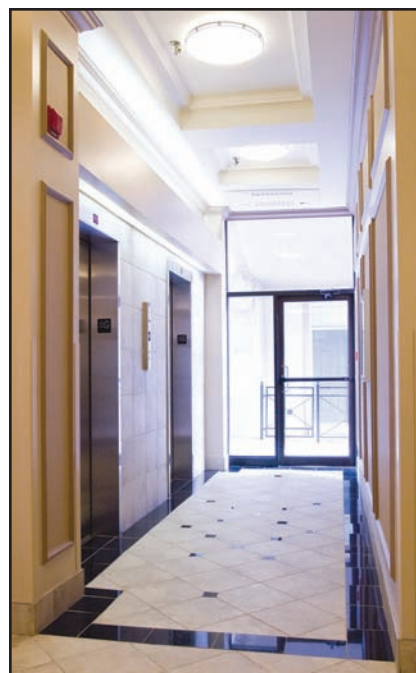
With a hodge-podge of work in progress, the existing corridors came complete with different profiles and sizes of mouldings and wainscoting that had been repaired and replaced over the years. Tri-Can removed all wainscoting throughout, but kept the detailing around the doors to add character. New light sconces with opal lenses were custom designed to cast maximum light, as only one side of the corridors was wired for lighting. Each suite's threshold was sanded down to its original colour, so as to withstand the wear and tear of continuous traffic.

The carpet colour scheme matched the colours throughout the building, and consisted of a simple pattern on a neutral background with a speck of red in the centre pattern for contrast. The pattern was kept simple for several reasons – there would be less waste, and consistency could be maintained throughout the 54 corridors. Once the project was started, the board also opted to smooth out the ceilings and install pot lights in the elevator walk-offs, as well as order custom door signs for each suite. These additions to the original scope added a nice finishing touch.



*Features of the new elevator cabs include a floating ceiling and mirrors.*

In the lobbies, the outdated flower boxes were removed and a built-in bench was installed in its place. The decorating committee, along with the designer, decided on a tile base and a practical solid granite top. Tri-Can took down part of the bulkhead, but kept the existing crown moulding to save on the cost of repairs, as well as to hide existing wiring and boxes (as this would have been very costly to rewire). The remaining crown moulding created a nice canopy for the built-in bench that was created below. The existing wainscoting on the walls was kept as well, but updated with a wallpaper insert and two-tone paint colours.



*The approved design for the lobby, corridor and elevator renovation of Village by the Grange.*

An elegant and simple dropped ceiling light was custom designed to create ambiance and to tie in with the rest of the lighting scheme that was used throughout the buildings.

### ■ Custom Touches

The walls behind the bench were built out on a 45° angle to create a bay seating area. A rounded back niche was inset behind the bench area complete with lighting and a granite base within, to showcase a custom sculpture created by local Toronto artist, Danella Durante. The building did not want to spend a fortune to make seven custom sculptures for each individual lobby. The



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artist, therefore, created a sculpture that could be turned to different angles and flipped upside down, to produce the illusion of a collection of seven different pieces – one for each lobby. A huge metal post and extra hidden supports were bolted into the niche so that the sculptures would not disappear overnight. Pewter-framed mirrors flank each side of the niche – also bolted down with security hooks – to create the illusion of a more spacious lobby. In addition, the mirrors provide added security for the tenants – people can now see who is coming in behind them and who's waiting at the elevators without having to look around the corner.

To make the lobbies seem even more spacious, the floors were tiled in a diamond pattern. The textured and neutral tiles camouflage dirt and salt, and provide a non-slip surface for added safety. The tiling was carried through the entrance, lobbies and elevator lobby, elevators, and walk-offs on each floor with a black granite border with accents and porcelain field creating a defined space.



*A built-in bench and custom sculpture complete the new-look lobbies.*

In the elevator lobby, new stainless steel frontages were installed, and the same tiling was taken up the wall for practicality. In the entrance, stainless steel garbage cans and black walk off mats complete the colour scheme.

Over the course of a three-year

period, Village by the Grange went through a huge transformation from outdated and tired to up-to-date and fresh. The project could not have gone as well as it did without the well organized and realistic planning done by building management, the decorating committee, and trades all working together to create a beautiful and functional environment for the tenants – on time and on budget. The result is understated elegance that will be enjoyed for many years.

If you wish to see more Before and After photographs, please visit [www.wiklemdesign.com](http://www.wiklemdesign.com).

Should you have any questions regarding this project, do not hesitate to contact the following: DEL Property Management – [www.delpropertymanagement.com](http://www.delpropertymanagement.com), 416.661.3151; Wiklém Design inc – [www.wiklem-design.com](http://www.wiklem-design.com), 416.934.9161; Schindler Elevator Corp. – [www.ca.schindler.com](http://www.ca.schindler.com), 416.332.8280; Tri-Can Contract Inc. – [www.tricancontract.com](http://www.tricancontract.com), 905.475.6703; Danella Durante – [www.durante.ca](http://www.durante.ca), 416.830.5969; Jorjas Photography – [www.jorjas-photography.com](http://www.jorjas-photography.com), 416.524.3685. ■



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