**Architecture Walking Tour**

**Route**

Start walking south from Alumni House.  
Travel through Champlain College; make your way to third floor.  
Exit onto the Podium.  
Turn right and take Robert & Nancy Stephenson Bridge to Lady Eaton College.  
Travel through LEC, moving north from entrance in administration block.  
Walk through LEC quad to parking lot.  
Turn left and follow path to Bata Library.  
Take stairs up to Podium.  
Walk across Faryon Bridge.  
Explore Science Complex and all its later transformations.

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**Legend**

A Champlain College  
01 Alumni House  
02 Residence/Offices  
03 Thom Tower  
04 Senior Common Room  
05 Great Hall  
06 Fireplace Lounge  
07 Morton Reading Room

B Lady Eaton College  
08 Senior Common Room  
09 Dining Hall  
10 The Pit  
11 Residence/Offices

C Thomas J. Bata Library  
12 Podium

D Faryon Bridge

E Science Complex

F Peter Robinson College

G Catharine Parr Traill College

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Downtown Campus Map
**Ron Thom: Trent University’s Master Planning Architect**

In the early 1960s, Trent University founding president, Thomas H.B. Symons championed architect Ron Thom to design or oversee everything to do with the university’s physical presence, from the overall campus plan to the ceramic ashtrays. With a mandate that stretched from the transformation of empty fields to the specification of the smallest teaspoon, the Trent project was one of the most ambitious and comprehensive design commissions in Canadian history. Symons envisioned Trent as a composition of small colleges designed in such a way that students living at home and commuting to Trent could fully engage with university life; and conversely that students living away from home in residence would have common areas that offered the warmth, comfort and conviviality of home. In this way, the “great divide” between commuting students and those in residence could be eliminated.

The Trent commission drew on the resources of the firm’s gifted designers and staff, including Bill Lett, Peter Smith, Shanna Fromson, Molly Thom, Dick Sai-Chew, Paul Merrick, Bob Montgomery, Paul Martel, Bob McIntyre, Daryl Morgan; engineers Ted Crosse, Roly Bergmann and Morden Yolles; and many others. In September of 1964, the first students were officially admitted to the university, which September of 1964, the first students were presented itself as a place of aesthetic as well as intellectual excitement.

**Downtown Campus**

Before the main buildings at the Nassau campus on the riverside were designed and built, architect Ron Thom and his team renovated and expanded heritage houses in downtown Peterborough to serve as the university’s first facilities. At 751 George Street, one of the first buildings transformed by Ron Thom became the administrative office that came to be known as Sadleir House, named for Richard Sadleir, the first master of the college. First built in 1892 as the home of local businessman and politician James Kendry, the mansion was purchased by Trent University in 1963 for renovation into the first college of Trent University. The following year, it opened as Peter Robinson College, named after the official who brought the first wave of Irish settlers to the area in 1825.

The Thom-designed structure known as The Link connected the main house to the carriage house, providing easy passage to the dining hall and offering a modern contrast to the Queen Anne-style home’s ornate finishes. The Peter Robinson College library had the distinction of purportedly being the only academic library named for a current, living student: in the fall of 1966 it was christened the Harry Hobbs Memorial Library, after third-year student Harry Hobbs, who had served as the college’s first librarian in 1964 when it only held about 300 volumes.

Nearby at 300 London Street, the university opened the all-female Catherine Parr Traill College, named after one of the region’s early female settlers and writers. The college began as a collection of Victorian homes that were renovated by Thom to accommodate residents and faculty. The historic buildings were complemented in 1966 and 1967 by Wallis Hall, the three-storey brick building that serves as the hub of the college and features the small scale and pitched roofline evocative of a family home.

The structure was named for Katherine Wallis, a renowned Peterborough sculptor, and was also a nod to Colonel Hugh Wallis, one of the university’s original sponsors. In addition to bedrooms, Peter Robinson and Catharine Parr Traill College each contained common living and dining areas for the students to gather together, a crucial component of Tom Symons’ vision for the university.

**Nassau Campus**

Ron Thom designed Champlain College, the university’s flagship building, after a month-long tour of medieval and contemporary colleges in Great Britain with Trent officials. Despite visiting several newly built universities, Thom was most impressed by the centuries-old Oxford and Cambridge universities, whose conscribed courtyards generated a sense of haven and harmony for the students. He was also inspired by the hand-finished rubble-aggregate walls of Eero Saarinen’s 1962 Morse and Ezra Stiles Colleges at Yale University, and later worked with engineers Morden Yolles and Roly Bergmann on a similar construction method at Champlain.

Champlain College, named for French explorer Samuel de Champlain, was designed to reflect and facilitate a different approach to higher education. In place of huge classrooms and lecture halls with separate buildings for student residences, Champlain would offer integration and intimacy. The student-to-teacher ratio would be very small, and instruction would take place in the faculty offices, common rooms and small seminar rooms—all within the same building that also would serve as the student dormitory. Wood-burning fireplaces, hand-made ceramic ashtrays and beautiful wooden furniture would reinforce the sense of warmth and communion throughout the College, as evidenced in the Fireplace Lounge (second floor) and the Morton Reading Room (third floor). The Senior Common Room, a space designed for relaxed, intimate conversation, is now the home of the Seasoned Spoon, a vegetarian café. An arcade was designed in the original scheme, but revised under cost pressures into a pergola-topped open pathway, which connects the three residential components to the dining hall. Elevating the entire Champlain structure is a modern bell tower, named Thom Tower in honour of its architect. Today the tower is bell-free, after one too many pranks initiated by mischievous students. Champlain’s small common rooms are no longer used for teaching as originally conceived, but The Great Hall has remained the heart of the college, a massive room with unique diamond-shaped protruding skylights and dramatic wooden lanterns. Although the fireplaces have been decommissioned and the ashtrays have long disappeared, the dining hall continues its original purpose, in use not only for daily meals but also for formal events such as receptions, dances and workshops.
Originally slated to have the same aggregate-rubble cladding as Champlain, **Lady Eaton College** required a different style of construction because of budget restrictions. The architects responded by creating a board-marked concrete cladding which, in tandem with the college’s slate windows, imbues the building with a sense of the Gothic. The proportions also evoke Japanese architecture, which Thom admired.

Inside Lady Eaton College, Thom’s designers created a number of magnificent hand-crafted wooden modular chandeliers and other lighting fixtures evocative of Frank Lloyd Wright, several of which illuminate the **Dining Hall**. The common room known as the **Pit** features a sunken lounge with a fireplace, offering a cozy, intimate feel. Named for Lady Flora McCrea Eaton, the wife of department store owner Sir John Craig Eaton, the college was originally women-only but is now co-educational.

Ron Thom and his top designers first conceived the **Thomas J. Bata Library** as a narrow curvilinear building that followed the bending shoreline of the Otonabee River. The scheme was overhauled to enable a greater volume on a more compact footprint, with one cubic inscribed within a second cube that has been rotated to create a series of unique architectural interfaces.

Its carefully calibrated design brings the building and its cantilevered brise-soleil right up to the shoreline, a design strategy that makes its rear façade seem to float over the water. The library’s various sections are united by the sky-lit **Central Atrium**, whose giant staircase connects all floors.

The steps outside lead to the outdoor podium and main gathering place of the university, which in turn connects back to Champlain College. The Bata Library was opened in 1969 and was the last building designed by Ron Thom’s design team. It is named for Thomas J. Bata, an international shoe manufacturing magnate who sat on Trent’s Board of Governors.

Ron Thom conceived Trent as a campus set on two opposing riverbanks, with a pedestrian bridge uniting them. Tom Symons gave the architect this basic instruction for its design: “I told him I wanted a bridge that students could write songs about, sing songs about, and make love on for a thousand years,” Symons later recalled, “in addition to whatever else it is supposed to do!” That connecting feature—the **Reginald Faryon Bridge**—quickly became an iconic feature of the campus.

Engineers Roly Bergmann and Morden Yolles designed its distinctively inflected arches, following Thom’s proviso to avoid the look of a “highway bridge.” The bridge’s upper balustrade and handrails were designed by Paul Merrick, then a young architect in Thom’s office and now a prominent architect on the west coast. The bridge was named in honour of the late Quaker Oats President Reginald R. Faryon, who lobbied for a post-secondary institution in Peterborough in 1937 and sat on the original Board of Governors of the university.

At the east end of the Faryon Bridge is the site of the original **Science Complex**. This structure was designed to hold the Chemistry and Physics buildings. Elegant and spare, it was built with board-marked sandblasted concrete similar to Lady Eaton College. An early idea to incorporate a residence within the complex was abandoned, as it would tend to isolate the science students from the humanities students, which would be against the university ethos.

The **Science Complex** has transformed over the years: in 1991, it was overhauled by Vancouver architects Henriquez Partners, whose Environmental Sciences building now defines the complex while providing interior connections to portions of the original structure. The Henriquez scheme’s signature feature is the slanted “environsphere” rotunda, whose axial incline evokes the revolving earth. The transformation also linked the structure to the Faryon Bridge with a wheelchair-accessible arcade.

**Furniture of Trent**

For better and worse, Ron Thom spared no expense in sourcing and designing the built-in and standalone furniture for Trent University. Students and faculty could work and study in chairs by world-renowned designers such as Arne Jacobsen, Alvar Aalto, Eero Saarinen, Janis Kravis, Hans Wegner, Bruno Mathsson and Harry Bertoia. Throughout the campus, one can see many of Thom’s original built-ins and standalone, custom-designed, wooden millwork tables and chairs: the Lady Eaton **Senior Common Room** is largely furnished with original designer pieces, including Arne Jacobsen Swan chairs, an Eero Saarinen Tulip table and custom built-in sofas. Largely inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright, Thom’s custom furniture is built mostly of solid wood and characterized by intricate Japanese-influenced joinery. Thom exhorted his team to take an artisanal approach to furniture design—for example, using up to three different woods in a single table and indenting its corners to create contrast and visual interest. Although much of the furniture was later broken, discarded or sold off, a movement is currently underway for the restoration, cataloguing and long-term preservation of the remaining pieces.

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**Photographs**

A Champlain College construction

B Students at Lady Eaton College, c. 1969—Roy Nicholls

C Bata Library construction—Roy Nicholls

D Faryon Bridge construction—Parks’ Peterborough

E Science Complex construction—Roy Nicholls

F The Link at Peter Robinson College—Roy Nicholls

G Wallis Hall construction at Traill College—Ten/Four Photo Service

H Students in the Library—Roy Nicholls

I Students in The Pit—Roy Nicholls

**Photos courtesy of Trent University Archives**