

The York University Magazine

Summer 2025

Pushing the Envelope

Kevin Zhang on better buildings with walls of wonder



YORK UNIVERSITY School of Medicine

Opening 2028



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The York University Magazine

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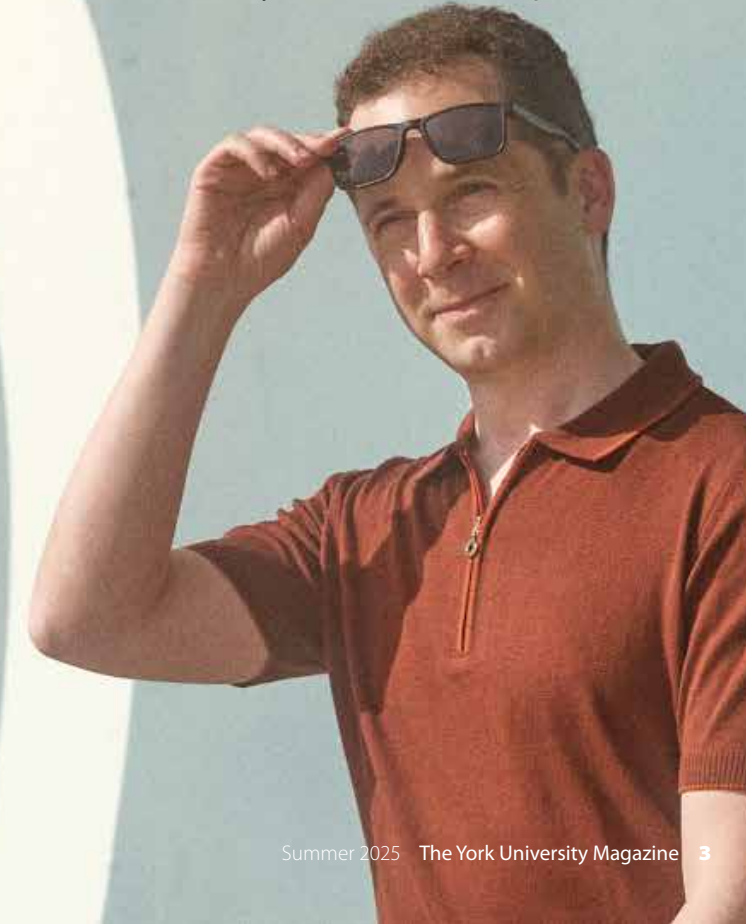
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THE PRESIDENT



RHONDA L. LENTON
PRESIDENT AND VICE-CHANCELLOR

FOR THE PAST FEW YEARS, I would not fault anyone for feeling that they need to steel themselves before turning to their favourite podcast or seeking out the news of the day. We are still recovering from the uncertainty and isolation of the pandemic, and the world continues to wrestle with some hard facts: global conflicts have doubled over the past five years, and we have seen a sharp rise in xenophobic rhetoric. The rise of artificial intelligence and campus protests around academic freedom and freedom of speech have led to increased skepticism about the post-secondary sector. This global context is having a profound impact on what, how and who we teach.

I write to you today though, with hope for the future, inspired in large measure by higher education.

York is particularly well-positioned to lead in this unprecedented time of change. As a progressive international university that has embedded the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into our University Academic Plan, collaborating across cultures, sectors and borders is central to York's mission of building a more sustainable and prosperous future. Over the past few decades, we have seen how international experiences and global partnerships enrich every area of our University.

Studies show that internationalization can foster greater social responsibility, inclusivity, and intercultural proficiency while also helping students gain a competitive edge in the workforce. At York, approximately half of our alumni report having a deeper appreciation for diversity and enhanced intercultural communication skills as a result of collaboration between diverse students, including through our innovative globally networked learning program.

Our partnerships with more than 300 international institutions have expanded our experiential education offerings, further priming our students for success in the workforce. This commitment to global co-operation has attracted international donors, including Dr. Taihua Wang, whose \$1.6-million contribution recently resulted in the opening of a new Science Student Success Centre.

In research and innovation, our global collaborations deliver real-world impact. At the Dahdaleh Institute for Global Health Research, a partnership with Doctors Without Borders resulted in the development of a groundbreaking AI-powered tool for improving water safety in refugee camps.

Through the Together Mission, a partnership between the Schulich School of Business and the Government of India, more than 600 student entrepreneurs, investors and mentors in India and Canada came together to support future entrepreneurial leaders.

As the academic lead of the UNITAR Global Water Academy and host of Canada's first UNITAR training centre, CIFAL York, the University and its many partners are addressing some of the most pressing sustainability challenges.

The world needs universities without borders to unite talented scholars and young leaders with a shared commitment to realizing a more sustainable, inclusive, peaceful and equitable future. The increasing number of rare and unpredictable events profoundly impacting the world do not make the challenge easy – but we continue to learn and adapt with increasing agility. As alumni, you can be proud of York's leadership in bridging divides and advancing a bold vision for a lasting positive impact.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SOPHIE KIRK

EDITOR'S NOTES



Moving Targets

IF YOU REALLY WANT TO KNOW what York is about, don't ask for a mission statement. Instead, look at what keeps its people up at night – and what gets them out of bed in the morning. At York, it's the stubborn questions that refuse easy answers, and the pulse of inquiry that animates every corridor. Here, change is always under construction, and the future is a moving target – never quite where you expect it, always just out of reach.

The Summer 2025 issue of *The York University Magazine* is a field guide to that kind of curiosity. Our cover story drops you into the work of Lassonde School of Engineering Professor Kevin Zhang, who doesn't just talk about climate resilience – he builds it, blueprint by blueprint, turning construction sites into laboratories for the cities of tomorrow. His approach reminds us that progress isn't always headline-grabbing; sometimes, it's the steady recalibration, the willingness to rethink what we take for granted, that leaves the deepest mark.

This spirit of adaptation runs through every corner of York. Our business minds, for example, are giving luxury a reality check. In a world where sustainability is no longer a buzzword but a baseline, status symbols are being redefined – less about exclusivity, more about ethics. These days, it turns out the most coveted accessory is a conscience.

Elsewhere, York researchers are rethinking youth and gaming – not by echoing the usual anxieties about screen time, but by examining how digital spaces become arenas for experimentation, strategy and new forms of friendship.

Innovation at the University isn't limited to the digital realm. At Keele Campus, the new Goldfarb Gallery is set to become a launch pad for the next generation of art makers and thinkers. Meanwhile, over at Markham Campus, our recently established sports management program shifts the focus to data, strategy and building real community – preparing students for the realities of the modern sports industry.

And York alumni? They're rewriting the rules in every field. Mitchell Marcus is transforming Downsview's old airport lands into a cultural epicentre for Toronto. Pamela Shainhouse's journey as a mature student proves that it's never too late to start something new – or to give back. In the background, there's the legacy of Harold Levy, whose decades at the *Toronto Star* helped force the justice system to reckon with its own blind spots – a reminder that lasting change often begins with asking the uncomfortable questions.

As you turn these pages, I hope you find something that unsettles you, inspires you or simply makes you see things a little differently. After all, the only thing more dangerous than standing still is not noticing when the ground shifts beneath your feet. So, what will move you this summer? ● — *Deirdre Kelly*

THE ALUMNI MAGAZINE OF YORK UNIVERSITY

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ON THE COVER



Kevin Zhang
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YORK
UNIVERSITÉ
UNIVERSITY

View

OUTLOOK & IDEAS

Level Up



PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS ROBINSON

*York University researchers turn gaming
into a powerful tool for education and mental health*

PEOPLE HAVE BLAMED video games for a laundry list of societal ills – according to some alarmist headlines, they’re responsible for everything from social isolation, to youth violence, to shortening our attention spans. But at York University, researchers are harnessing the power of video games for good.

Far from being a distraction, the right games can be powerful learning tools. School of Nursing Professors Celina Da Silva and Eva Peisachovich (PhD '14) are working to develop a series of virtual simulation games to help nursing students build empathy and tackle challenging situations in a safe, controlled environment. “They’re designed for more than pure entertainment,” Da Silva says.

Peisachovich focuses on simulated-person methodology – a teaching technique that crafts realistic scenarios using either real-life or virtual actors. The goal of this approach is to help nurses-in-training learn how to respond to situations and crises that might arise on the job. This allows them to test their skills in a stressful yet low-stakes way. But for Peisachovich, the biggest advantage of using simulated-person games is that they invite students to develop emotionally. For example, some games reproduce the frustration stroke patients might feel when trying to communicate with a care provider, or the distress a parent could experience when receiving a diagnosis for their child.

“Nursing is about how students interact together,” she says. “It’s about experiencing different perspectives while making empathy-driven decisions.”

For Da Silva, who studies gamification – the principle that elements from games can be incorporated into other aspects of daily life to make them more engaging – watching her students light up while using educational video games in the classroom was a revelation. “That was my aha moment,” she says. “I realized that students loved it.”

Research has shown that video games can aid with memorization and engagement. Gamified learning triggers the brain’s dopamine reward system, Da Silva says, which causes

students to feel a rush of joy as they play. In turn, this helps them retain more of the new information they’re taking in.

In order to help democratize virtual learning, Da Silva and Peisachovich helped develop a platform called Moirai. This virtual learning tool allows educators to customize video games for different courses, from surgical training to military tactics, without extensive coding knowledge.

In addition to education, York professors are also turning video games into mental health resources. Psychologist Yvonne Bohr in the Faculty of Health is part of a research team collaborating with communities in Nunavut to create games that help equip Nunavummiut youth with mental wellness skills.

The idea came from a similar project in New Zealand directed toward young Maori people. Initially, the researchers presented the original version of the game to their Inuit partners, who found the play mechanics engaging – even if the New Zealand imagery was baffling. “In retrospect, I would say that was not entirely appropriate for the context,” Bohr says.

But the game delivered on its promise. So the team, working closely with a council of Inuit youth, started developing a version that spoke to the experience of life in Nunavut. They also outlined a new set of outcome goals that were better tuned to the communities. The result is called the Virtual Qaggiq, a project that delivers useful, culturally specific mental-health resources to Inuit youth in the form of a mobile game.

The youth council and their research partners are currently putting the finishing touches on the Virtual Qaggiq, which will start trials this summer. Far from alienating young people, this digital space aims to bring them together and empower them. “We have young artists on our team, and musicians,” Bohr says. “They’re very, very committed to making this as authentic as they possibly can ... it’s just been a joy working with that team.” ●

— *Joanna Thompson*

SHARPE THINKING

York University Professor Christina Sharpe wins prestigious Killam Prize

CHRISTINA SHARPE, a professor at York University and a leading voice in Black studies, has been named a 2025 Killam Prize laureate for her exceptional contributions to the humanities. The award, one of Canada's most prestigious academic honours, includes a \$100,000 prize and celebrates scholars whose work has had a transformative impact across disciplines.

Sharpe's research examines Black diaspora experiences through literature, art and theory, reshaping conversations about race, identity and belonging. Her work has earned international recognition for its innovative approach and its ability to challenge conventional narratives. The Killam Trusts describe her as "one of the most influential voices shaping Black studies today."

The Killam Prizes are awarded annually to Canadian scholars who demonstrate sustained excellence in research across five fields: engineering, health sciences, humanities, natural sciences and social sciences. Funded through Dorothy J. Killam's legacy, the National Killam Program has provided more than \$1 billion to support higher education in Canada since its inception.

At York University, Sharpe has spearheaded The Alchemy Lecture, an interdisciplinary series designed to foster new ways of thinking about complex issues. Previous lectures have explored themes such as borders, human itineraries and collective dreaming. Each lecture is expanded into a book published by Knopf Canada; this year's theme focuses on sound and its intersections with history and imagination.

Sharpe believes this recognition highlights the importance of humanities scholarship at a time when such programs face increasing challenges. "Receiving a Killam Prize bolsters the work we do in Black studies and the humanities – work that is crucial to imagining other ways of being in the world," she said.

Bernard F. Miller, KC, managing trustee of the Killam Trusts, praised this year's laureates for their contributions to advancing Canadian research. "Now more than ever," Miller says, "their work is needed to foster innovation and collaboration across disciplines – core pillars of Killam values." ●

— Neil Armstrong



PHOTOGRAPHY BY RACHEL ELIZA GRIFFITHS

**Harold Levy's crusade
against wrongful convictions**

UNMASKING INJUSTICE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HORST HERGET

IN 2001, Harold Levy (BA '64, LLB '68), then an investigative reporter for the *Toronto Star*, wrote his first article about Dr. Charles Smith. Little did he know this story would consume the next two decades of his life, exposing a trail of wrongful convictions and upending Canada's forensic pathology system.

Levy's unique background – an Osgoode Hall Law School-trained criminal lawyer turned journalist – proved crucial in unravelling the complex web of Smith's cases. "I felt a horror at what he was doing to these innocent people. It was horrible. It was mean. It was cruel," Levy recalls.

Between 2001 and his retirement from the *Star* in 2006, Levy filed more than 40 stories about Smith, meticulously documenting how the once-revered pediatric forensic pathologist's flawed testimony had sent innocent parents to prison for killing their own children.

Levy's relentless reporting didn't just expose individual injustices, it sparked systemic change. The Goudge Inquiry, prompted by Levy's exposés, led to 169 recommendations that reshaped Ontario's forensic pathology system. These suggestions included creating the Ontario Forensic Pathology Service, developing accredited training programs for forensic pathologists and emphasizing an evidence-based culture.

The province also committed to reviewing 220 "shaken baby syndrome" cases and exploring compensation for those wrongfully convicted based on Smith's testimony. Levy's work had effectively rewritten the rules, with civil procedure now explicitly requiring expert evidence to be "fair, objective and non-partisan."

But retirement didn't end Levy's quest for justice. Instead, he launched a blog to ensure his continued media access to the inquiry. The blog went on to transform his retirement into a global crusade against wrongful convictions.

"I called it the Charles Smith blog – chutzpah! – which was fun. I just co-opted his name," Levy says with a hint of mischief. What he expected to be "an interim thing" has since exploded into a formidable force, amassing more than 10,000 posts and 4.2 million visits.

Today, Levy's blog spotlights similar injustices worldwide, where flawed science and personal biases have robbed

innocent people of their freedom. "This is essentially my obsession," Levy says. "But I think it's the healthiest obsession that anybody could have."

His tireless efforts have now earned him the 2024 Rubin "Hurricane" Carter Champion of Justice Award from Innocence Canada. The award was presented on Oct. 2, at the 10th anniversary gala event for International Wrongful Conviction Day, held at the Ontario Bar Association Grand Salon in Toronto. Levy accepted the honour in a room filled with those whose lives he'd touched – including several of Smith's victims.

"It really gave me a kick in my heart," Levy says, recalling the moment Susan Milgaard, sister of the late David Milgaard, presented him with the award.

In his acceptance speech, Levy highlighted the case of Iwao Hakamada, a Japanese former boxer who spent nearly five decades on death row before being released in 2014. Hakamada, whom Levy referred to as "the Japanese Ruben Carter," and his case exemplify the global nature of wrongful convictions and the importance of continued advocacy. Hakamada was finally acquitted in September 2024, just days before Levy's award ceremony, after a retrial found that key evidence had been fabricated.

Ron Dalton, co-president of Innocence Canada and an exoneree himself, emphasized the importance of the award. "Frank and open discussion about the causes of wrongful convictions can lead to positive change in our criminal justice systems and help reduce future wrongful convictions, and avoid the immeasurable suffering of innocent people and their families globally," said Dalton in the award announcement.

Levy's penchant for impactful journalism began during his undergraduate days at Glendon College. Before enrolling at Osgoode Hall for his law degree, Levy and some friends decided the fledgling University needed a student newspaper. "We couldn't find a name. We couldn't agree on the name. I thought, 'OK, we need a name for the time being, pro tem. We'll call it *Pro Tem*.' And of course, it's funny but 60-plus years later, they still call it the *Pro Tem*, and it's still going." ●

— Carolyn Gruske

CAMERON SEARS started coaching soccer at age 12, worked her way up to leadership roles in youth recreational sports in her Montreal community, and eventually landed jobs with Formula One and the Canadian Elite Basketball League – all before she was 20 years old. So when she heard about York University’s new Bachelor in Sport Management program, she knew she had to apply.

“I saw it as the best way to continue developing my skills, expand my industry knowledge and build the connections needed to succeed in the field,” says Sears, part of the first cohort of BSM students.

First proposed in 2021 by Parbudyal Singh, a professor in York’s School of Human Resource Management, the program, which began last fall at Markham Campus, fills a gap in a burgeoning discipline. While one other Ontario university offers a standalone sport management degree (independent from commerce or kinesiology), and there are a handful of programs across Canada, York’s is the first in the Greater Toronto Area.

“Toronto is the centre of the sport world in the country, and sport management professionals are in growing demand as that world evolves,” says Professor Daniel Wigfield, who was the first BSM Faculty member. He cites technology, globalization and ongoing ethical and social issues as some of the central issues driving change. “It just makes sense to have this program at York. We also fit perfectly within the Markham Campus’s mandate for new and innovative areas of study.”

The BSM degree attracted attention from the time it was announced, with applicants competing for just under 60 spots. “Most of our students are lifelong sports fans who have some recreational athletics in their backgrounds, and they want to pursue the business side of sports,” says Wigfield, noting that class sizes are small and allow for a close-knit student body.

The program prepares graduates for management positions in recreational, amateur or professional sport, though Wigfield says most students start out with dreams of working in the big leagues. “Our graduates will have an edge there,” says Wigfield. “But we want them to be aware of the wealth of potential opportunities at the grassroots community level, for example, and in the corporate world of sponsorship and marketing.”

To create that awareness, the BSM program embeds

experiential learning throughout the student experience. There are two co-op placements, real-world projects with community partners, volunteer opportunities (at the neighbouring Markham Pan Am Centre, for one) and frequent guest speakers, ranging this year from national sports organization executives and professional team managers to a sports arbitrator.

“We’ve already had a lot of chances to hear from leaders in the industry and get involved in the sports world in Toronto,” says first-year BSM student Owen Smith, who secured an internship after reaching out to a guest speaker from a company that specializes in building athletes’ brands.

Sears has job-shadowed with the Raptors 905, participated in an MLSE networking event and volunteered with the Women’s Basketball Fund, among other resume-building activities. “I wanted real, hands-on experience in a sport management program,” she says, “and I’ve gotten that.”

Rich cultural and ethnic diversity defines the inaugural BSM class – an obvious advantage in an increasingly globalized industry. “It allows us to have a broader lens, so we don’t just study traditional sports like hockey and baseball, but talk about things like international basketball and soccer, and cricket,” Wigfield says.

Beyond internationalization, other factors shaping the industry include advances in AI for athlete training, data-driven decision-making in sport organizations, the popularity of competitive gaming, the rising influence of social media marketing and mounting efforts toward gender equity. Wigfield says the curriculum is designed to address these issues with courses in electronic sports (esports), the sociology and psychology of sports, sport entrepreneurship, risk management in sport, sport communications and more.

While the program now falls under the School of Human Resource Management, it will eventually be a full-fledged School of Sport Management. BSM applications for fall 2025 are already surpassing last year’s numbers, and Wigfield says he’s confident that this is just the beginning. “The response we’ve had from students and the sports world in the GTA tells me that there’s absolutely no reason why we shouldn’t be the best sport management program in Canada.” ●

— Megan Easton

PLAYMAKERS

York University scores big with Toronto’s first sports management program

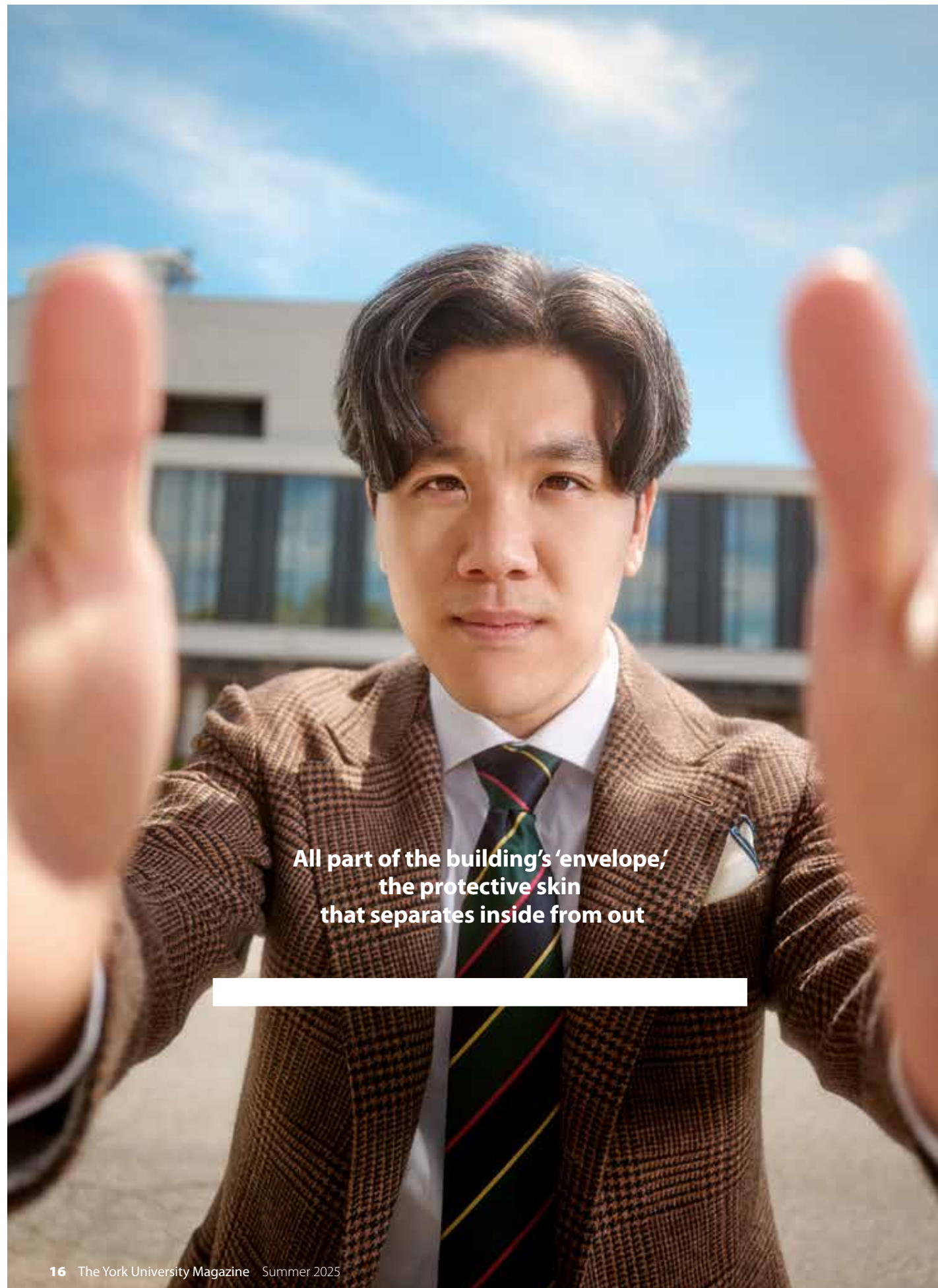
PHOTOGRAPHY BY HORST HERGET

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

Why the future of climate-ready buildings starts with better design

BY DEIRDRE KELLY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS ROBINSON





All part of the building's 'envelope,'
the protective skin
that separates inside from out



Kevin Zhang outside the Rob and Cheryl McEwen
Graduate Study & Research Building at York University

KEVIN ZHANG can't hide his enthusiasm as he strides through the Rob and Cheryl McEwen Graduate Study & Research Building at York University. He stops in the atrium, points upward and grins. "See that big glass tower sticking out of the middle of the building? That's the solar chimney," he says, his voice rising with excitement. "It's one of the coolest features here."

A building scientist and professor at York's Lassonde School of Engineering, Zhang then launches into a rapid-fire explanation. "Hot air rises because it's less dense. If you have a tall cylinder – a chimney – inside a building, and you open a hole at the top and a door at the bottom, the rising hot air creates suction. It pulls cooler air from the lower part of the building up and out. It's like free air conditioning, just by letting physics do the work."

He gestures again, tracing the path of invisible air currents. "Humans have known about this for centuries. Old clay buildings in the Middle East used the same principle. The solar chimney here isn't as tall as the one at Manitoba Hydro Place in Winnipeg, which runs almost the full height of a skyscraper, but it works on the same idea – using natural convection to keep the building cool and comfortable, with hardly any energy."

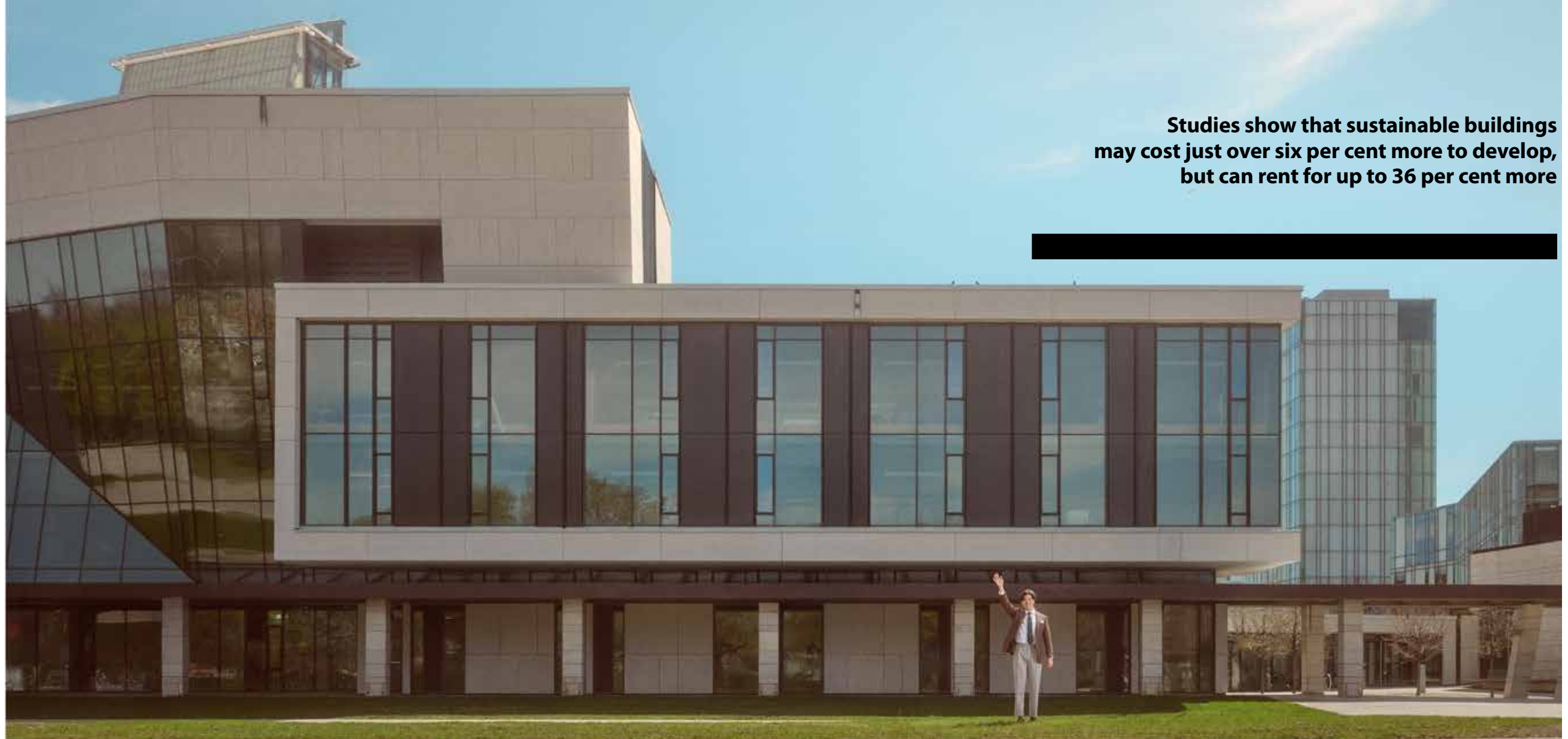
The McEwen building, which opened in 2019 on York's Keele Campus, is a showcase for these ideas. Designed by Baird Sampson Neuert Architects, the \$50-million, 67,000-square-foot facility stands among the most environmentally sustainable academic buildings in North America, with features such as the aforementioned 27-metre solar chimney, green roofs, rainwater recapture and more

than 200 operable windows – all part of the building's "envelope," the protective skin that separates inside from out. The building is naturally ventilated about 40 per cent of the time it's occupied, and its advanced, climate-adapted design has earned national recognition, including a Canadian Green Building Award.

James McKellar, an architect by training and professor emeritus at York's Schulich School of Business, oversaw the project's development. "The building achieves a 50-per-cent reduction in energy use compared to similar modern structures," McKellar says. "People comment about the air. In a normal building, the air is constantly being recirculated. In our building, the air is very fresh and people notice." He adds that the most significant advancements centre on the occupants: "The goal is to use technology to create spaces that improve people's experiences."

For Zhang, these engineering solutions are more than clever tricks – they're essential tools in the fight against climate change. He points out that buildings account for about 30 per cent of Canada's carbon emissions, mostly from construction and operation. "This is still a big chunk we can reduce," he says.

Zhang's experience isn't limited to academia. Before joining York, he worked as a consultant on sustainable building projects across Canada, helping design building envelopes for both new and retrofitted low-carbon buildings. "Many of [those] projects were to use local labour. We had forgotten that, coming from Toronto, construction folks often had experience with newer methods and materials for sustainable buildings. Out in smaller communities, there wasn't as much experience."



Studies show that sustainable buildings may cost just over six per cent more to develop, but can rent for up to 36 per cent more

To bridge that gap, Zhang's team brought in manufacturers to train local crews on high-performance products. "Having large projects like this helps to spread the knowledge – a rising tide raises all ships." Retrofitting old buildings, he says, is one of the most effective ways to cut carbon. "The literature estimates that retrofitting existing buildings results in up to 75 per cent less carbon than building a new building. We have lots of existing old buildings! Let's fix 'em up!"

But even with technical solutions in hand, the path to greener buildings isn't straightforward. "We're at this strange place where all of these signed agreements – the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement – that have big global fanfare end up fizzling out a bit because countries cannot commit to the targets due to financial and political challenges," Zhang observes.

"It's come down to smaller governments, especially at the municipal level, to really spearhead policies to drive change."

Toronto is one of the cities leading the way, with its Toronto Green Standard requiring all new developments to meet strict guidelines on energy use and carbon emissions, aiming for net zero by 2040. "They are quite stringent and have a set path to become more stringent every few years."

Other cities, among them Boston and New York, are setting similar standards. But cost and public awareness remain major barriers. "Generally, with higher-performance buildings, there are more resources required for materials and time spent on designing and quality controlling the construction. This can really add up on a large project," Zhang says. Still, he's encouraged by the market's response.

"Developers are able to pass on some of the cost to their tenants as the market is very pro-sustainability. Studies show

that sustainable buildings may cost just over six per cent more to develop, but can rent for up to 36 per cent more," he says. "That premium shows there's real demand for greener buildings."

But while commercial construction is adapting, the situation is much tougher for individual homeowners. The challenge, he says, is even greater for those who often lack access to capital and technical guidance for sustainable upgrades. "This is a huge part of the building stock that could benefit from sustainable upgrades. We had some programs to help with this, but they really only chip away at the cost. Plus, not every homeowner has access to an engineer or sustainability person to guide them through the process."

It's a dilemma Zhang often discusses with his students at Lassonde, reminding them that the impact of today's choices will be felt far into the future. "What we're doing today, no

matter how good or bad, won't really affect us that much. It won't affect our children or grandchildren ... but their children and grandchildren will feel it. Humans in the end are a bunch of mammals and we respond to consequences, so when there are none in our lifetime, how can we convince people to do better?"

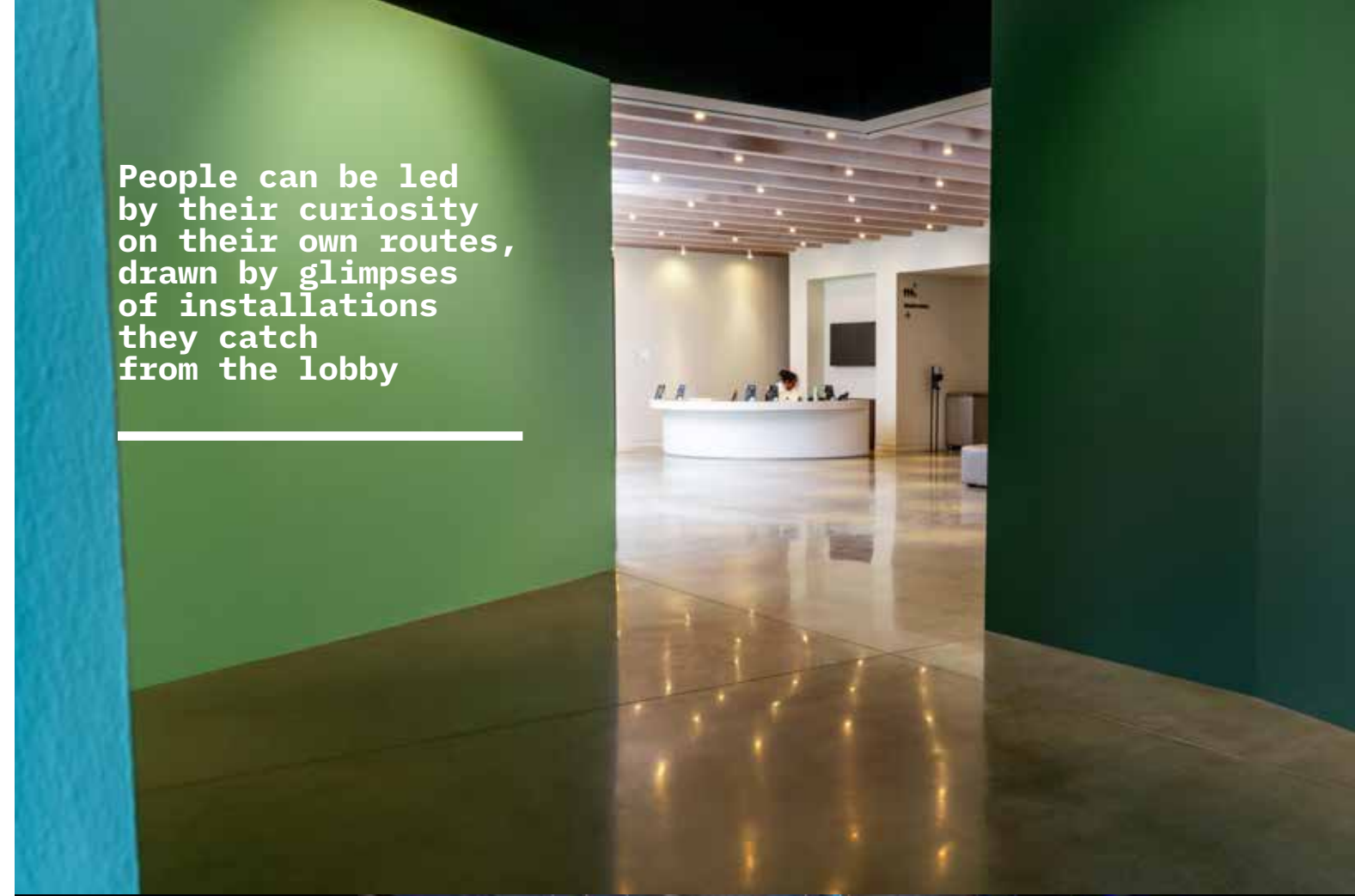
Back at the McEwen building, where sunlight pours through the atrium's glass, Zhang's excitement is contagious. For him, the future of building science is as much about sharing knowledge and changing mindsets as it is about bricks and mortar. "A well-designed building envelope enhances resilience to heavier rainfall and extreme fluctuations in heating and cooling," he says. "It's about making sure our buildings are ready for what's next – and that we are, too." ●

— *With files from Tina Knezevic*

The Joan and Martin Goldfarb Gallery
makes an exciting addition to campus
– and the Toronto arts scene

BY ERIC MUTRIE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KYLE FINBOW

York's New Gallery Takes Shape



People can be led by their curiosity on their own routes, drawn by glimpses of installations they catch from the lobby

ART LOVERS MIGHT DETECT a hint of cubism in the architecture of York University's new Keele Campus gallery. Officially, Hariri Pontarini Architects, the Toronto firm behind the project, points to another source of inspiration. "Imagine a butterfly with its wings extending from a central core," says founding partner Siamak Hariri. But rather than the curved structure that might suggest, the design is instead a combination of hard-edged geometric shapes. In other words, it's an abstract, cubist butterfly – or at least, it would look like one from above. And after two years of construction, it has finally emerged from its chrysalis.

The 1,115-square-metre Joan and Martin Goldfarb Gallery opened this past fall with art spread across three main exhibition spaces – the Rectangle, Square and Triangle galleries, all with six-metre-high ceilings – that each radiate from a long lobby block. A fourth room, a glassy box dubbed the Pavilion that hosts talks and performances, sits in the final corner. "People can be led by their curiosity on their own routes, drawn by glimpses of installations they catch from the lobby," Hariri says.

This summer, ethereal video animations of a wooden boat by Tuan Andrew Nguyen fill one area, while multi-layered landscape paintings by Andrea Carlson hang in another. This latest season of exhibitions runs through Aug. 3.

Standing in Harry Arthurs Common outside, the Goldfarb Gallery is easy to spot, thanks to its Algonquin limestone facade – a kind of canvas unto itself. "This particular cut of stone was once considered leftover – the rough edge of quarried rock – and has been likened to crust," Hariri says. "I found its textures appealing." Sloped toward the front entrance, the building's long stone wall draws passersby inwards, while also giving the Triangle Gallery its distinctive shape. Apart from a few floor-to-ceiling windows, the rest of the exterior is covered in a dark, textured stucco that has its own rugged character.

Previously, this site was home to an east-west colonnade structure, as well as a fenced-in stormwater garden and a north-south footpath that offered a shortcut across campus. To maintain that connection, the walkway remains in place, now joined by fresh landscaping. "The design encourages students to pass through the building as they move about campus," Hariri says. Sure enough, visitors to the Goldfarb



With its new name and unique architecture, the Goldfarb Gallery will soon become a recognizable space and a highly coveted venue for artists to show

Gallery have their pick of three different points of arrival: the front door, a secondary south entrance and a ramp that connects to the building next door.

That adjoining facility, the Accolade East Building, was actually the former home of York's art gallery, previously known as the AGYU. As part of the institution's expansion (funded by a \$6-million donation from the Goldfarbs), this earlier space was converted into a storage vault for the University's permanent collection, which includes works by artists Helen Frankenthaler, Norval Morrisseau and Frank Stella – all gifts from the Goldfarbs. Art from this permanent collection now rotates through view as part of a "Visible Vault" display.

Hariri Pontarini Architects, which won the commission for the project through a design competition, is well-known for its cultural work – the studio is also designing the Royal Ontario Museum's next big transformation. (Its portfolio includes another York project, too: the nearby Schulich School of Business.) Goldfarb Gallery director Jenifer Pappararo praises the firm's vision. "The biggest surprise was the Triangle Gallery," she says. "None of us have worked in a shape like that before – we generally get white cubes – but once you're in there, it feels bigger than it is and it gives a great sightline across campus."

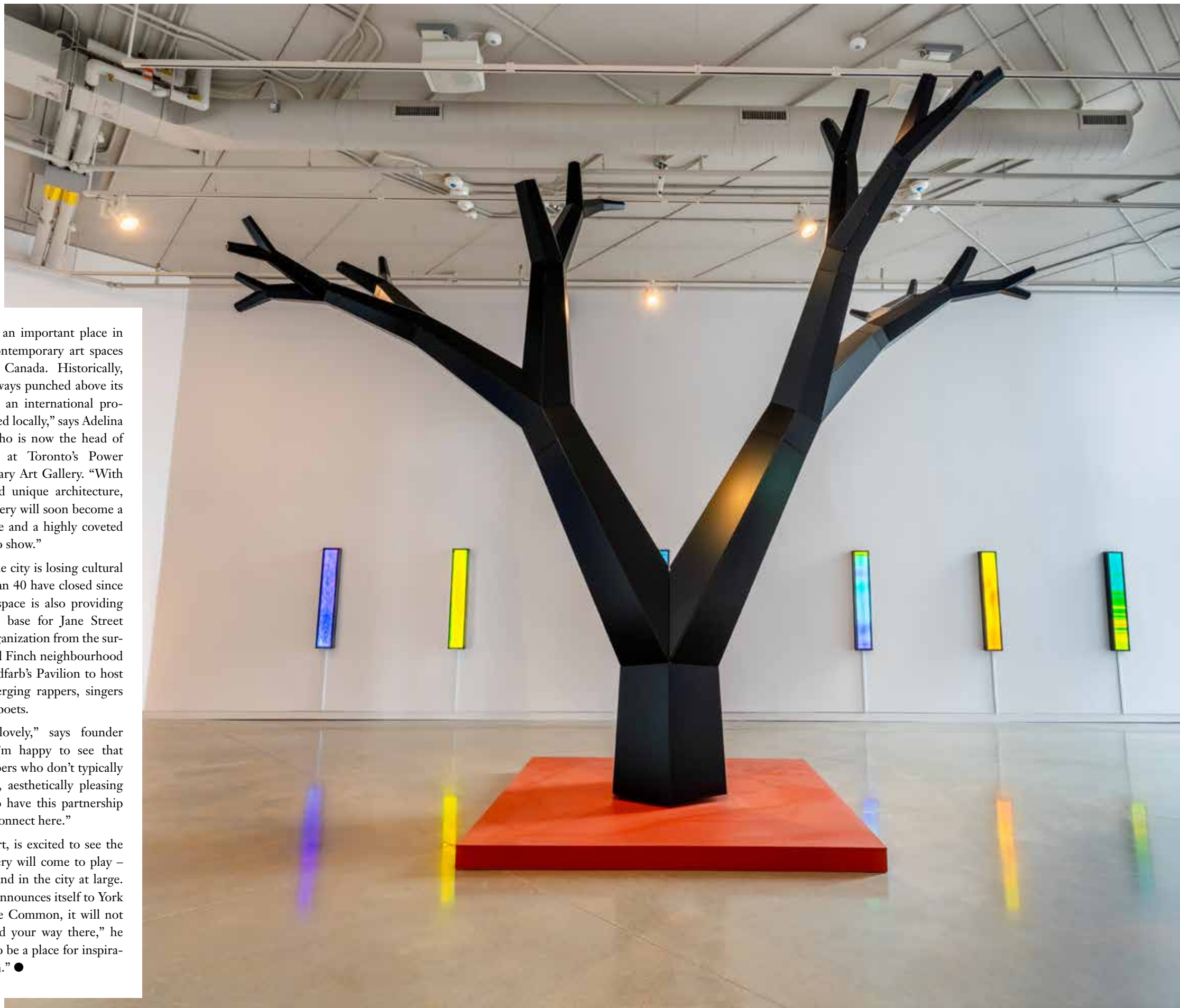
The new building's impact is being felt beyond York, too.

"AGYU has held an important place in the ecology of contemporary art spaces in Toronto and Canada. Historically, the gallery has always punched above its weight by having an international program that resonated locally," says Adelina Vlas (MA '02), who is now the head of curatorial affairs at Toronto's Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery. "With its new name and unique architecture, the Goldfarb Gallery will soon become a recognizable space and a highly coveted venue for artists to show."

At a time when the city is losing cultural venues – more than 40 have closed since 2019 – the new space is also providing a welcome home base for Jane Street Speaks, an arts organization from the surrounding Jane and Finch neighbourhood that uses the Goldfarb's Pavilion to host showcases of emerging rappers, singers and spoken word poets.

"The space is lovely," says founder Nathan Baya. "I'm happy to see that community members who don't typically benefit from new, aesthetically pleasing spaces are able to have this partnership that allows us to connect here."

Hariri, for his part, is excited to see the role that the gallery will come to play – both on campus and in the city at large. "The way that it announces itself to York Boulevard and the Common, it will not be difficult to find your way there," he says. "It's meant to be a place for inspiration and reflection." ●





York experts explore how AI and algorithms meet luxury retail

Tech Chic

BY JOHN LORINC



A complex environment where data-driven personalization must navigate carefully curated brand images



WHEN ANABEL MALDONADO (BA '11) began studying psychology at York in the 2000s, she never imagined her career would meld luxury fashion and artificial intelligence. During her undergrad, she discovered a passion for the biological aspects of psychology, particularly how brain imaging revealed mood patterns. Despite a professor's encouragement to pursue psychiatry, Maldonado's plans changed during a gap year in London in 2008. Initially working with autistic children, she found herself captivated by the city's vibrant fashion scene. "I ended up pivoting into luxury fashion e-commerce," she recalls, echoing a mentor's wisdom, "you end up where you're meant to be."

Today, Maldonado runs PSYKHE AI in New York, a "personalization engine" for fashion e-commerce retailers that draws on insights from her psychology background. Her innovative "psychographic" recommender system combines personality traits from 90,000 survey responses with consumer preferences. "People that score higher in neuroticism prefer black," she explains, illustrating how her system uncovers unexpected connections. "It was really a machine learning problem to understand the relationships."

The result is a "super personal shopper" algorithm – "teaching machines taste" is the company's slogan – that operates behind the scenes on retailer platforms, generating highly nuanced online recommendations for luxury fashion shoppers. Maldonado has raised US\$3.5 million to date, with investors including Net-a-Porter, a London-based luxury retailer and one of fashion's e-commerce pioneers.

These innovations offer a glimpse into the rapid evolution of the multi-billion dollar global luxury brand industry, which seeks marketing strategies responsive to the mercurial tastes of high-end consumers. "Often in luxury," Maldonado explains, "no one's looking for anything specific. You get a sudden inspiration. No one wakes up saying they need a pair of green Bottega Veneta mules for \$800."

Schulich School of Business supply chain expert Isik Bicer's research on luxury fashion illuminates the industry landscape in which Maldonado's AI operates. Bicer has studied the paradoxical nature of this sector, where traditional economic principles often yield to marketing strategies centred on exclusivity. "In the luxury industry," he explains, "companies often introduce products in limited editions, which means that the marketing department sets the order quantities. If the product sells out, it is celebrated as a success story."

While Maldonado's PSYKHE AI aims to personalize the shopping experience, Bicer's insights reveal why such an approach is both innovative and challenging in luxury fashion. The industry's focus on scarcity and exclusivity, sometimes taken to extremes like destroying unsold merchandise, creates a complex environment where data-driven personalization must navigate carefully curated brand images and deliberately limited product availability.

Schulich marketing Professor Eileen Fischer, co-author of a 2022 paper on the sometimes contradictory forces driving luxury fashion, explains why a market for the 0.1 per cent warrants scholarly attention. "We can learn lessons about other slices of the world by studying this particular one," Fischer says, adding that there's a wealth of informa-

AI-driven digital marketing is just one facet of innovation in the luxury space



tion about the luxury sector. "It is a convenient context in which we can develop insights that are transferable to other contexts that aren't quite so visible or well-documented."

Fischer's recent works explore how digital landscapes affect luxury brands. Her research also examines how haute couture trends quickly find their way into mass-market merchandising. "What is on the runway one week is being emulated and re-articulated the next week," she explains. "It may be in fast-fashion places like H&M or Zara, but it also may be goods that Etsy artisans see and decide to emulate or copy."

As traditional fashion media gives way to influencers, social media and livestream shopping platforms, luxury retailers are increasingly incorporating interactive technology and personalized services to enhance customers' shopping experiences. Maldonado's core objective with PSYKHE AI is to recreate online the exclusivity that luxury shoppers have long demanded from bricks-and-mortar retailers. "Those really good salespeople used to be on the shop floor," she explains. "But those are all disappearing, right? We're trying to build that intelligence into a system that can show that emotional relevance."

AI-driven digital marketing is just one facet of innovation in the luxury space; others involve more traditional approaches to developing novel products for discerning customers. Fischer highlights the growing interest in upcycling, "which involves taking high-end fashion goods and remaking them." This trend poses intriguing challenges for luxury brands, as they may risk losing control of their narratives and missing out on potential revenue streams.



While upcycling presents potential challenges, it does align with the changing preferences of consumers. Bicer observes that younger luxury shoppers are increasingly interested in sustainability – "justifying their luxury spending by finding sustainable luxury goods." To address this demand, new provenance regulations in the EU will require luxury firms to provide detailed sustainability information about material origins through "digital product passports." Additionally, a coalition of luxury brands has begun embedding scannable chips in their goods that link to a blockchain ledger containing this data.

As scrutiny intensifies on the environmental records of mass-market clothing industries, Fischer notes that luxury powerhouses such as LVMH have taken proactive steps. These companies are now highlighting their performance in areas such as emissions, water consumption and packaging through public filings, demonstrating a commitment to transparency and sustainability.

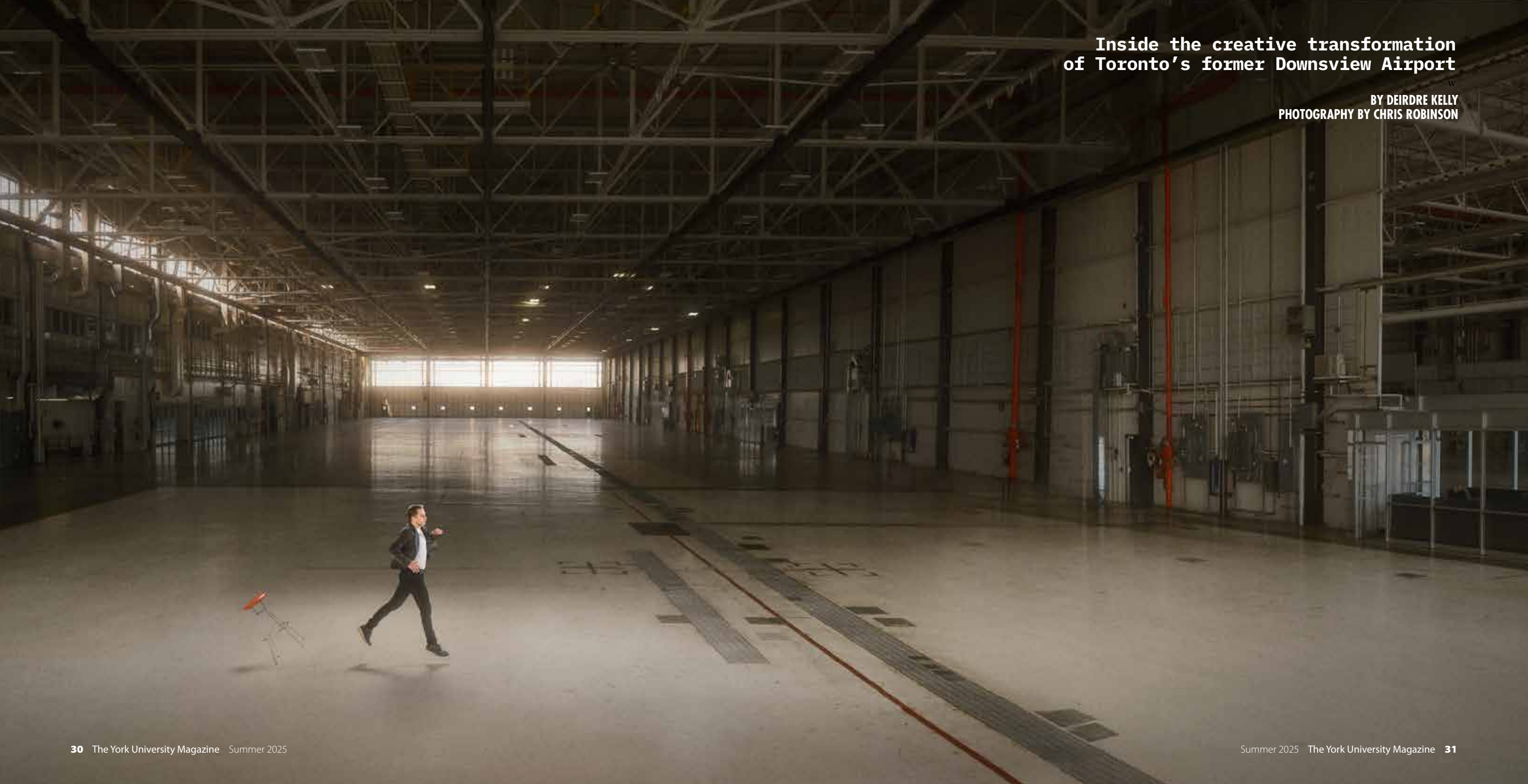
Despite progress in some areas, Fischer points out a significant shortcoming in the industry: diversity, equity and inclusion. "There's so much talent out there; there are so many people of diverse genders, races and body sizes who want to work in fashion and are desperate for their chance to grab that golden ring. Why aren't the brands doing it?"

Maldonado's approach offers a different perspective on disrupting the luxury sector, focusing on AI's nuanced techniques. In the vast online marketplace, Maldonado believes her firm's psychographic technology is uniquely positioned to meet the current needs of luxury buyers. As she puts it, "It's just so much deeper than anything else." ●

SONIC BOOM

Inside the creative transformation
of Toronto's former Downsview Airport

BY DEIRDRE KELLY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS ROBINSON





Mitchell Marcus outside and inside a former Downsview Airport hangar



THIS SUMMER, the north end of Toronto is set for a transformation few could have imagined just a few years ago. On the vast grounds of the former Downsview Airport, Rogers Stadium – a 50,000-seat outdoor venue – will debut with a lineup that includes Stray Kids, Coldplay and Blackpink. But the concerts are only the beginning.

The 150-hectare Downsview lands, recently rebranded as YZD – a nod to its airport code – are being reimagined as a place where culture, community and new ideas converge. The new neighbourhood is not far from York University’s Keele Campus. Over the next three decades, the former airfield will be transformed with new parks, cultural venues, public spaces and residential areas – including condos and other housing – creating an entirely new district for Toronto.

At the centre of this reinvention is Mitchell Marcus (BA ’04), executive director of site activation and programming at Northcrest Developments. His mandate: turn a closed, industrial landscape near York into a living, breathing part of Toronto’s future.

“We’re honouring the legacy of this place as a gathering ground, but we’re also building momentum for its future as a series of neighbourhood destinations,” Marcus says. “The new Rogers Stadium is more than just a concert venue, it’s the first step in reconnecting Toronto to this former airport.”

The scale of the project is matched by the ambition behind its programming. Every Saturday this summer, the site will host a new farmers’ market, the playful art installation Runway Rivers, and the return of Play on the Runway, which opens the old airstrip to bikes, scooters and families. There’s also a street art and skateboard festival, an Indigenous learning garden and weekly free events designed to welcome everyone from local residents to first-time visitors.

For Marcus, the key is to make YZD accessible and relevant from the outset, even as construction and development continue in the background. “We have the rare opportunity to establish the soul of the place before the buildings go up,” he says. “That means testing ideas, listening to the community and making sure our programs reflect the diversity and creativity of Toronto’s north end.”

they’re invitations to innovate and adapt. “Sometimes, the limitations force us to come up with more inventive solutions,” he says. That willingness to adapt, he believes, is what allows true community to take root.

It’s a philosophy shaped by his time at York University, where an arts management course challenged him to turn creative ideas into real-world plans – a skill he’s carried from founding The Musical Stage Company (now one of Canada’s leading not-for-profit musical theatre organizations) to reimagining Downsview Airport. “York gave me the foundation to turn artistic ideas into lasting community impact,” he says. “The work at YZD has been a most extraordinary canvas to put those ideas into practice.”

The transformation is personal for Marcus, and its impact on York University will be tangible. Once the \$30-billion redevelopment is complete, YZD will be just four subway stops from York’s Keele Campus, bringing the University closer to the heart of Toronto than ever before.

That spirit of connection is echoed in the next generation of York students now helping to shape the site. Among them is Moath Ahmed,

an honours film production major and site ambassador, who has witnessed first-hand how YZD’s approach is fostering a sense of belonging. “In a world where we feel ever more isolated, YZD’s community-led approach lets visitors feel the welcoming breath the site generates,” he says. “The attention to detail – like engaging local artists for murals and installations – makes it feel like a place that belongs to everyone.”

As the summer unfolds, the vision for YZD is clear: a once-inaccessible stretch of runway, now open to possibility. “I want people to arrive unencumbered and inspired,” Marcus says. “And I want everyone to leave knowing they’ve left their thumbprint on this place, by seeding fun, creativity and joy into its evolving story.” ●

One example stands out. When YZD launched Hangar Skate, a winter skating program, the expectation was that children would be the main audience. Instead, many adult newcomers to Canada showed up to try skating for the first time. “It was a real surprise,” Marcus says. “It showed us there are gaps in public services we can help fill.”

Accessibility is a guiding principle. While some events require tickets, there’s always a slate of free programming – everything from DJ skate nights for teens to STEM workshops for kids. “Curating our own events lets us respond quickly to what the community wants and needs,” he says.

But making it all happen is no small feat. Much of the site is still a former runway, with limited power and water. Programming must adapt to shifting construction schedules and the realities of a space not built for public gatherings. For Marcus, these constraints are more than logistical hurdles,

Alumni

Making Space

Pam Shainhouse on turning challenge into change

BY DEIRDRE KELLY



PAM SHAINHOUSE (BA '91) doesn't tell her story in tidy soundbites. She doesn't call herself a survivor, a trailblazer or a philanthropist – though she is all of those things. Instead, she speaks with the matter-of-factness of someone who has lived through enough upheaval to know that life rarely fits into neat categories. "I've never been afraid to start over," she says. "Sometimes you don't have a choice."

That refusal to flinch in the face of reinvention has defined Shainhouse's life. In her early 30s, newly separated and raising three young children on her own, she decided it was time to reclaim her independence. "I needed to do something for myself," she says, a sentiment that underscored her decision to enrol at York University, after dropping out of Western University years earlier. The experience offered her more than just an education – it gave her respect and a sense of purpose during a tumultuous time. "You walked in and weren't lectured," she recalls. "At York, you had a conversation. I found it empowering." She completed an undergraduate degree in health and society and business sociology in just two years, often studying late into the night after putting her kids to bed. "It was a tough time," she says. "But I loved every minute."

Her graduation in 1991 was marked by an unforgettable moment: receiving her degree from jazz legend Oscar Peterson, who was serving as York University's chancellor at the time. "I broke protocol," she laughs, recalling how she reached out to shake his million-dollar hands despite being told not to at the start of the formalities. "But I couldn't help myself."

By 37, Shainhouse had already established herself as a capable leader when she became the youngest chair of the Hadassah Bazaar, a cornerstone of Toronto's Jewish community and one of the largest one-day fundraising events in the world. The bazaar, organized by Canadian Hadassah-WIZO (CHW), raised millions over its decades-long run to support causes such as health care, education and women's welfare in Canada and Israel. It was a massive undertaking, requiring meticulous planning and coordination among hundreds of volunteers.

Shainhouse approached the challenge with determination and resourcefulness. "We didn't know what we were doing," she says with a laugh, describing how she and her team learned fundraising on the fly.

Her success at the bazaar left an impression on others, including one hospital president who later remarked, "If you can do that, you can do anything." It was validation of her ability to manage large-scale projects and inspire those around her – a skill she would carry into her later fundraising efforts for institutions including Etobicoke General Hospital and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra.

But it was a tragedy that reshaped everything. In 2006, Shainhouse's daughter Alli died of Hodgkin lymphoma at just 26 years old. The loss was devastating, but became a turning point in Shainhouse's life. "Mom," Alli had told her before passing, "you have a job to do – you have to be out there helping people with cancer." Those words stayed with her. "I wasn't allowed to give up."

In Alli's memory, Shainhouse founded Alli's Journey, a charity supporting young adults with cancer through initiatives such as "comfort bags," designed for patients undergoing treatment. These bags are tailored for individuals who often find themselves in an uncomfortable limbo: too old for pediatric care at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children, yet navigating a health-care system and support networks that are often not fully equipped to address the unique needs of adolescents and young adults facing cancer treatment.

That same year, Shainhouse also launched Allistyle, a fashion brand inspired by Alli's struggles with body image during treatment. But Allistyle wasn't just about inclusivity – it was also about sustainability. The brand used eco-friendly fabrics such as bamboo viscose to create stylish clothing for curvy women while reducing its environmental footprint.

In 2012, Allistyle debuted at Toronto Fashion Week with Canada's first size-inclusive runway show, marking a significant shift in the industry's approach to size inclusivity and sustainable fashion. "We weren't trying to make a statement," Shainhouse says. "We were just filling a gap."

Now in her 70s and living with exostosis – a rare hereditary bone disease that has required more than 20 surgeries – Shainhouse continues to advocate for accessibility and inclusion through her consulting firm, the Shainhouse Group. Her lived experience has shaped her perspective, giving her both insight and determination to push for meaningful change.

"When you are a woman with a disability," she says firmly, "you know how to advocate for accessibility." ●

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LAUREN HOWE

Classes

1972

HAIRE, SUSAN
(BA '72, MATHEMATICS)
Susan's time travel romance *The Viking Who Fell Through Time*, written under the pen name Maureen Castell, was announced as winner of the 2024 Diamond Heart Award for speculative fiction by the Romance Writers of America. The book was published in 2022, followed by *The Viking's Shadow Lady* in 2023 and *A Viking in Atlantis* in 2024. The fourth and final book in the series, tentatively titled *The Viking Who Saved the Future*, is expected later this year.

was released in January. The book is based on her own film production experiences and serves as a guide for production managers and co-ordinators. She currently lives with her family in the Vancouver area and continues to work in the film industry.

1988

PACE, VINCENT
(BA '88, MUSIC)
Vincent is currently serving as the director of music at Hudson College, a private JK-12 school in Toronto.

1998

TOPPERMAN, CAROLINE
(BFA '98, FILM & VIDEO)
Caroline's recently published book, *Your Roots Cast a Shadow*, explores the human need for connection and belonging. In the book, she shares her family's experiences of displacement,

persecution and a constant struggle to belong in pre-war Poland and Afghanistan, as well as her own journey of navigating a new culture.

2001

SINGH, SUKHBIR
(BA '00, SOCIOLOGY, BSW '01, SOCIAL WORK)
Sukhbir is the director of Likeminded Positive Connections, an organization that connects thousands of individuals on a personal, social and professional level, coaching and mentoring businesses and women entrepreneurs. She received the Woman of Impact Award from the Canada Business Forum and Brampton Mayor Patrick Brown in March.

2002

BENSOUSSAN, RACHELLE (NÉE BLUM)
(BFA '02, THEATRE)
Rachelle recently released *Human(e): A Radical Reimagining of Grief, Loss and Learning to Live Without*. The book takes a radically non-pathology-based approach to grief and loss, examining the inadequacy of the idea that grief is normal.

2003

READ, JAMIE
(BA '03, CREATIVE WRITING, COMMUNICATION STUDIES)
After 20 years building award-winning integrated marketing teams and campaigns in Canada, the Middle



East and Asia, Jamie founded the BriteBirch Collective, an integrated global network of experienced creative consultants. Jamie recently launched a new initiative called BriteStart, a community designed to promote the future of work and support the growing wave of freelance professionals in Canada.

2008

CAIRNS, JAMES
(PHD '08, COMMUNICATION & CULTURE)
James has an upcoming book titled *In Crisis, On Crisis: Essays in Troubled Times*, to be released in June. The book draws on social research, pop culture and literature, as well as on James's experience as an activist, father and teacher. He explores the ecological crisis, Donald Trump's return to power amid the so-called crisis of democracy, and his own struggle with addiction.



2014

SALIH, KAZIWA
(BA '12, COMMUNICATION STUDIES, MA '14, HUMANITIES)
Kaziwa has been actively engaged in academic research, with her work appearing in leading international journals such as *Genocide Studies International*, *Journal of Political Ecology*, *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal*, *State Crime Journal*, *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* and *Anthropology Journal*. Her latest book, *Genocide Culture: Cultural Habitus, Ethnic Engineering, and Religious Doxa*, was published by Routledge in 2024.

2017

KHAN, FARZIA
(BA '17, COMPUTER SCIENCE)
This year, Farzia proudly launched her debut children's book, *Cyber-Heroes: The Adventures of Mayra and Filora in Techville*. The story follows two young protagonists as they learn to navigate online threats with the help of a wise robot named Cypher, covering topics such as strong passwords, phishing and social media safety. The launch of the book also ties closely to Farzia's broader initiative, NextGen Digital Defender, a platform she created to spark early interest in cybersecurity.

2018

BABU, JOHN
(BSC '13, MSC '18, BIOLOGY)
Currently working in health care, John has a passion for filmmaking that stems from his time at York when he founded the Movies at York club, which was active from 2010 to 2016, with over 1,000 members. He recently won the Best Sci-Fi Short award at the 2024 Markham International Film Festival for his film *Optillus*.



2022

GAUTAM, AVISHEK
(BA '22, FINANCIAL & BUSINESS ECONOMICS)
Avishek served as a York Young Alumni Ambassador from 2022 to 2024. In 2022, Avishek founded Qberom Inc., a financial services company based in Toronto, with a strong presence in India and the United Arab Emirates.

IN MEMORIAM

SORBARA, JOSEPH
(LLB '68, LLD '10)
Longtime friend and volunteer for York University Joseph Sorbara passed away on Feb. 17, at the age of 82. He was appointed to the York University Board of Governors in 1988, and served in the role for 12 years. Joseph would later be named an honorary governor in 2000. He was recognized in 2004 with a Bruce Bryden Alumni Award (now known as the York U Alumni Awards) in the Contribution Category, which is given to York alumni who have brought honour to themselves and the University.



Want to be in Classes?

Send us your photos and news.
Email us at magnotes@yorku.ca



Left to right: Allen Kaeja, Selma Odom, Mary-Jane Warner, David Earle and Marc Richard (BEd '88)

Flashback

Have a great photo from your days at York?

Email us at magnotes@yorku.ca

IN 2006, after 16 years of choreography, teaching and film directing as co-artistic director of Kaeja d'Dance with my wife Karen, I decided to pursue a master's degree at York University. My thesis focused on dance for camera, and, as part of the program, I led a course called Issues in Dance Heritage Studies under Professor Mary Jane Warner.

It centred on reconstructing David Earle's *Ray Charles Suite*. Earle, a Canadian modern dance legend and co-founder of Toronto Dance Theatre (TDT), shaped generations of Canadian choreographers with his emotionally charged works.

During filming, we explored camera angles,

movement dynamics and editing techniques. A highlight was interviewing Earle about the origins of the piece and his influences.

I couldn't help but laugh as we then reminisced about my infamous 1983 solo improvisation during *Ray Charles Suite*, which led to my expulsion from the School of Toronto Dance Theatre for stripping onstage – a story I recount in my new book, *I Found My Dance In a Bomb Shelter: Anecdotes of Gratitude from A Life in Dance*.

I graduated in 2009 with beautiful memories – and some stories that still deserve a stage of their own.

— Allen (né Norris) Kaeja (MA '09)



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