

# The world takes notice of a makeover done right

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**ROYSON JAMES**



As gateways go, the newly renovated platform of the Museum subway station is a welcomed icon pointing the way to what a leading travel magazine says is "one of the seven new wonders of the world."

Maybe it doesn't meet the standards of the public space experts and it provides a makeover to a station that didn't need one as badly as, say, Dundas (or insert your nominee here) – but the Museum stop on the subway map is now worthy of its name.

And not a moment too soon. The station could be receiving a caravan of new visitors soon.

The April edition of *Condé Nast Traveler*, an upscale magazine for the discerning world traveller, named the Michael Lee Chin Crystal one of the "seven new wonders of the world."

The Crystal, designed to exhibit and display artefacts in a stunning new addition to the Royal Ontario Museum, is frowned upon by Toronto purists and traditionalists. Some say it brutalized the old classic of a building. But the ROM visionaries and architect Daniel Libeskind have been proven correct.

The ROM is gaining international kudos, and with it, attention for Toronto and the cultural renaissance spanning the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Ontario College of Art and Design. In addition to praising the ROM, the magazine says the Crystal is not the only "compelling piece of architecture" to be found in Toronto.

*Condé Nast Traveler*, with the tag line Truth in Travel, is an independent voice that rates such things as attractions, hotels, airports, restaurants and all the things a business traveller cares about. So when it chooses a building from staid and quiet Toronto to line up with London's Wembley Stadium, the world's tallest building in Dubai, the tiered and off-kilter New Museum in Lower Manhattan, and offerings from China, Denmark and a Smithsonian addition in Washington, Toronto is in select company.

And when visitors come to see what the magazine describes as the "exuberantly bevelled" extension to the ROM, they'll step off the subway onto a platform that gallantly hints of what is to come.

Patrons of the University subway line are now taking in the transformation – some started getting off there Tuesday to pose for pictures in front of the functional steel support pillars that have been wrapped and transformed into First Nation house posts, Osiris pilasters, Greek Doric columns, Toltec warriors and columns from China's Forbidden City.

Formerly a mundane, nondescript, forgettable stop, Museum is now an underground landmark that proudly foreshadows the glories of the exhibits above, both at the ROM and the Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art across the street.

The Budd Sugarman Foundation gave \$1 million to the project and 15 other donors added their coins for a total private-sector contribution of \$2 million. The province matched that contribution and the TTC chipped in \$1 million. And the Diamond and Schmitt architects did the authentic renderings.

The Toronto Community Foundation, through its Arts on Track initiative, spearheaded the project and Rahul Bhardwaj, president and CEO, is now challenging other donors to fund similar transformations to the St. Patrick (Art Gallery of Ontario) and Osgoode (opera house) stations. "We are talking to a host of people. We'll know in the next few months," he says.

Museum is a marketable "Exhibit A." But with no naming rights, no commercial branding attached, Bhardwaj is seeking special donors.

Toronto can do mediocre architecture and the world will walk by without stopping – like they do to the opera house, as wonderful as it is inside – or philanthropists can fund the bold and innovative and smile with the city as the world takes notice.

*Royson James usually appears Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.*