

# Age Appropriate: Heritage Care at the Base of the Massey Tower

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Across Yonge Street from the Eaton Centre, one of Downtown Toronto's most modern condo skyscrapers, [The Massey Tower](#), is now rising. The slender 60-storey building from [MOD Developments](#) has an alternately curving or angular look, depending on the viewpoint you catch the building from. The design by [Hariri Pontarini Architects](#) puts undulating balconies on the west, south, and east sides, while the north wall presents a more chiseled face towards Yonge Dundas Square.



Looking north to The Massey Tower on August 26, image by UT Forum contributor Benito

Not everything about the building, however, reflects contemporary Toronto; some of it looks back to our past, the Massey Tower's base incorporating one of two side-by-side heritage bank buildings on Yonge. Back in 1905, a complementary pair of grand bank branches were built on Toronto's main north-south street, two slender buildings separating them: at 199 was the Canadian Bank of Commerce designed by Darling and Pearson, at 205 was the Bank of Toronto designed by EJ Lennox. Legendary Jazz venue the Colonial Tavern eventually replaced the buildings between the two banks, but it too was torn down in the 1970s. In January 2012, MOD Developments purchased the former site of the Colonial Tavern and the long-shuttered Canadian Bank of Commerce building.



Looking southeast to the heritage banks on March 16, image by UT Forum contributor skycandy



Work to build the Massey Tower condos on its very tight site has been progressing for over three years now. Since the image above was taken in March, the Commerce bank building has been hidden behind scaffold and screens, and Tucker HiRise has taken the new tower 27 storeys into the air. It's some recent shots of behind-the-screens work by [Clifford Restoration](#)—following preservation plans drawn up by heritage specialist [ERA Architects](#)—that have triggered this update. Posted to the UrbanToronto forum in recent days are a number of images by Gary Switzer, CEO of MOD Developments, documenting progress on the restoration of the 112-year-old limestone-clad Classical Revival structure.



Stonework being restored at the Massey Tower, image by Gary Switzer

Switzer told us a bit about his visit to the worksite. "For me, going up the scaffolding and looking up close at the carved stonework in the capitals, pediment and window trims, was as exciting as uncovering [the mosaic floor](#) when we first bought the building five years ago; it occurred to me that no one has seen this extraordinary work this close since the building was completed in 1905."



Restored stonework at the Massey Tower, image by Gary Switzer



A heritage impact study done by ERA Architects of the bank building revealed many details of the building's history. Switzer continues, "The Canadian Bank of Commerce sign—carved out of limestone and still retaining some of the original gilt finish—has been covered up since 1961, when the Bank of Commerce amalgamated with the Imperial Bank to become CIBC."



A little gilt remains on the stone, image by Gary Switer

How pristine will the building look when the work is complete? Switzer answers, "The work that Clifford Restoration is undertaking combines stabilization, repair and cleaning. We are not trying to make the building look brand new. Philosophically, we believe that the quality of the patina is important, similar to the way Clifford has restored St. Michael's Cathedral, which still maintains an aged quality to its brick. It's a very delicate balance."



Details of carved stonework at the Massey Tower, image by Gary Switzer

Overall, the experience of getting up close to the carved stone left more of an impression on Switzer than he, even with great anticipation, was expecting. "I'm overwhelmed not only by the quality of the Darling & Pearson design, but by the skill of the stone masons who carved these objects out of solid limestone."

There are many renderings of what Massey Tower will look like upon completion in our database file for the thread, linked below, and several more of Switzer's photographs of detailed stonework from his recent visit [in our associated thread](#) for The Massey Tower. You can get in on the conversation in that thread, or leave a comment in the space provided on this page.

Tags: [massey tower](#)

[Cecconi Simone](#), [ERA Architects](#), [Hariri Pontarini Architects](#), [Janet Rosenberg + Studio](#), [MarketVision Real Estate](#), [MOD Developments Inc.](#), [RJC Engineers](#), [Tucker HiRise Construction](#)