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JULY/AUGUST 2010

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Respect for culture and place oversees award-winning international architect



Upcoming events,
expos & design
shows on p. 98

GROUP2 ARCHITECTURE ENGINEERING

Collaborative design firm works closely with clients and strives to forge partnerships with competitors

BY JENNI SPINNER

AT A GLANCE

HEAD OFFICE:
RED DEER, AB

BRANCH OFFICES:
EDMONTON AND
CALGARY, AB

FOUNDED:
1985

EMPLOYEES:
75

AREAS OF SPECIALTY:
ARCHITECTURE AND
DESIGN

BARRY JOHNS IS CREATIVE BY NATURE, WHICH IS why he founded Barry Johns (Architecture) Ltd. in 1981. Though the firm succeeded in attracting a healthy amount of business, he spent a great deal of time and energy on the day-to-day governance of the firm and less on the design work about which he is passionate. When his firm was acquired by Group2 Architecture Engineering in 2007, the move freed him and his staff to focus on the areas where their talents lie.

"I was able to release my team to become integrated into a larger environment across three cities, increase their opportunities for advancement and personal growth, and create a larger, more effective design-oriented practice," Johns says. "This enabled me to be removed from governance procedures and focus my energies [on] mentoring younger designers and breed independence as executive director of design."

With a new position and title, Johns fit in well at Group2, which already had spent two decades as a full-service architecture/engineering firm. The company provides creative, comprehensive support to a range of clients across multiple industries. The company's pursuit of excellence begins with a focus on developing its staff and working to ensure that members support each other as well as their clients.

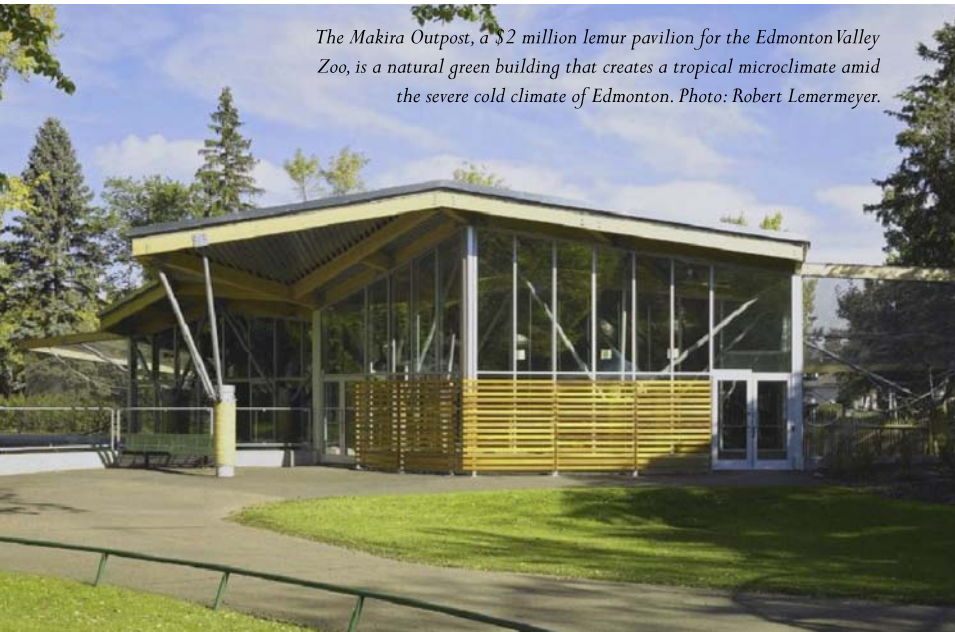
"The average age of our design staff is 36, which means that we have a lot of fresh, young ideas to offer our clients," says Craig Webber, a Group2 architect. "This is balanced [by] a group with extensive experience to mentor our staff. They are passionate about providing a supportive, healthy community and work environment."

By placing emphasis on listening to clients and meeting their needs, Group2 has grown a reputation for excellence that has helped it secure a number of large-scale projects. Recent work includes several institutional and educational designs, such as a \$65 million addition to Red Deer College and work on the Triffo Hall Centre for Advanced Studies at the University of Alberta. Coming up is an \$88 million city-hall redevelopment in Red Deer.

Part of what sets Group2 apart from the competition, Johns says, is its focus on collaboration, sharing knowledge both inside the firm and with other architecture professionals.

"We teach, lecture, and serve on boards of social services and professional agencies, and we are very active in architectural education," Johns says. "We regularly associate with other firms to collaborate on significant projects and have developed enduring liaisons with other architectural practices. We work in a collaborative environment, and this has paid significant dividends." According to Webber, the company is committed to giving back locally and internationally. Group2 currently is funding and designing schools and bridges in Kenya and has donated more than \$500,000 to local causes. Employees also are encouraged to donate their time and energy to other compelling projects. This work further solidifies Group2's reputation in the community.

The Makira Outpost, a \$2 million lemur pavilion for the Edmonton Valley Zoo, is a natural green building that creates a tropical microclimate amid the severe cold climate of Edmonton. Photo: Robert Lemermeier.



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—Barry Johns, Executive Director of Design

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Giving back includes giving to future generations. The firm offers extensive knowledge and experience in sustainable design. According to Johns, Group2's commitment to furthering eco-friendly design principles goes beyond a desire to attract business from green-minded clients. "Our role as professionals in shaping our environment is significant, and, more than ever, our responsibility extends to ensuring that we educate our clients and ourselves in everything that we do—architecturally and in our own personal lives—to tread lightly on the planet," he says.

Though the firm has stayed strong in the rough economy, competition has grown—but, according to Webber, so has opportunity. "Recently, the competitive environment has become more of a challenge, as firms nationwide are looking to Alberta and its strong economy for work," he says. "We can look at this as an opportunity, if we see it as a chance to form alliances with firms from across Canada and the US. We believe that with technology providing the opportunity to work remotely, we will be able to collaborate with partners and clients from a distance. We trust that through succession, our core purpose and values will be maintained, and that the success that Group2 Architecture has enjoyed over the past 25 years will continue." CBO

A MESSAGE FROM HEMISPHERE ENGINEERING

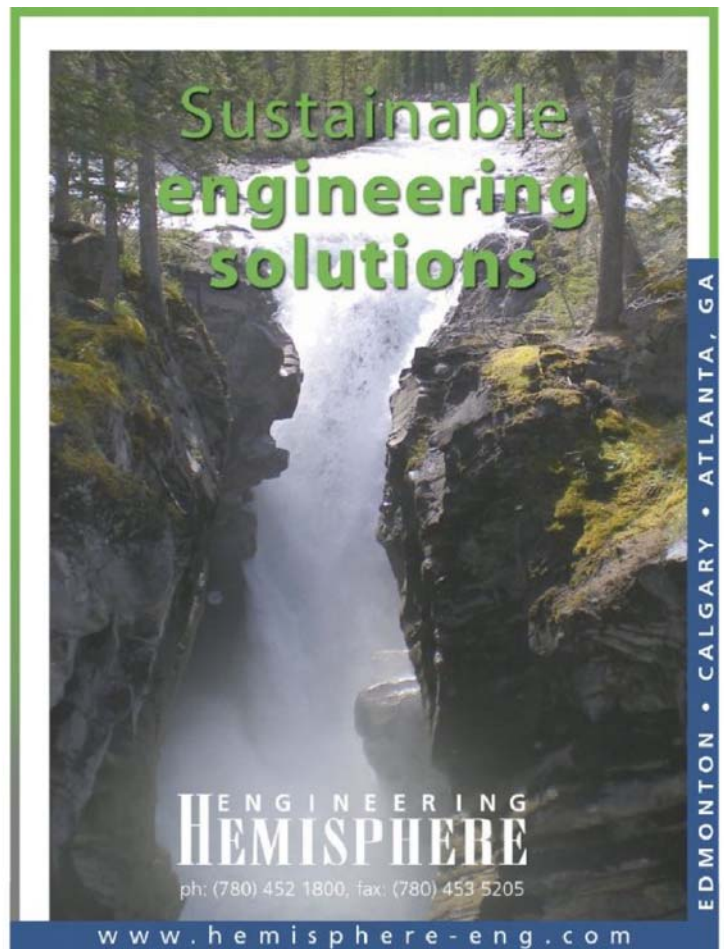
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