



Reevaluating Religious Heritage in Toronto

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Religious to Domestic

Toronto's architectural history illustrates its growth from a small garrison town at the time of its foundation in 1793 to its present state as Canada's most populous city. In the recent past, the city has seen a decline in its practicing Christian population and consequently many of the city's churches are no longer in use. Given the scarcity of available land for development in the downtown core, the most common treatment for these churches is conversion to residential needs.



Former College Street Baptist Church, 506 College Street

The former College Street Baptist Church was designed by the Toronto firm of Langley and Burke in 1888. A heritage building, this former church and adjoining Sunday school are in the process of being redeveloped into four luxury multi-level freehold homes.



**The Church Lofts
701 Dovercourt Road**

Built as the Centennial Methodist Church in 1906, this neo-Gothic heritage-designated church underwent residential redevelopment in 2010. Under the development firm of Dovenco and Bernard Watt Architect, 28 condominiums and a central atrium were fashioned from the church that once accommodated 400 worshippers.



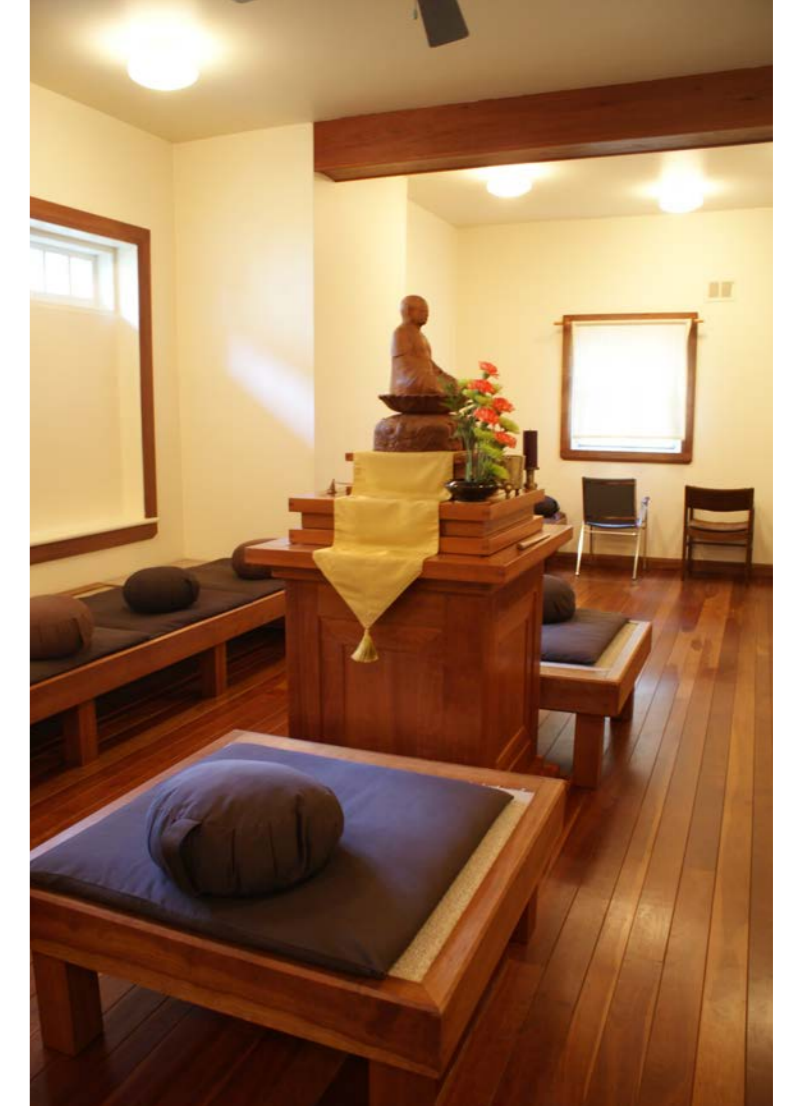
Domestic to Religious

Conversely, many non-Christian populations are experiencing growth and are in need of spaces to use for religious purposes. Rather than building anew in an already congested city or appropriating vacant former church spaces, these communities are beginning to occupy residential buildings and adapting them to suit their needs.



**Toronto Zen Buddhist Centre
33 High Park Gardens**

This former private residence has been a centre of Zen Buddhism since 1985. Located in a wealthy Toronto neighborhood, this former Arts & Crafts house is well-suited to the needs of a Buddhist community. The large, open spaces are used for meditation halls and to house shrines, while the upper-level bedrooms act as dormitories.



Guru Ram Das Ashram, 348 Palmerston Boulevard

This former private residence is now home to a Sikh community. Built in the early 19th century and located in an upper-middle class neighbourhood, this former house provides Toronto's downtown Sikh community with Kundalini Yoga studio space and accommodations for residents and guests.

The future of religious heritage in Toronto

Given Canada's colonial origins, it is not surprising that our conception of what constitutes religious heritage is based on a Euro-Christian model. Now that our demographic is changing, a new vision of the built environment and the designation of religious heritage must be reassessed. Canadian heritage agencies often recognize former church buildings as still having expository value as religious heritage sites, while houses adapted for religious purposes remain largely ignored in this regard. We must now consider broadening our definition of what defines architectural heritage to include a broader spectrum of places of worship.

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