At home in the Hills

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From dilapidated storage room to elegant

By Ben Bulmer

It’s probably the fanciest skating shelter in the whole country and the 121-year-old building’s refurbishment owes a lot of its splendour to a Hills contractor.

Bala Structures, owned and operated by Wakefielder Stéphane Charette, was given a sub-contractor on the project to turn a 121-year-old derelict dairy-building at Rideau Hall into a warm and cozy area where skaters can lace up. Left: The new winter pavilion completely refurbished. Top: Crew workers dismantled the structure piece by piece. Above: A lot of the timber was in good condition, but not all.

The 30-feet wide octagonal building is built largely from pine and features a 24-foot ceiling at its highest point in the cupola. A steel band holds the whole structure together. It’s a type of construction not seen today, said Charette, due to the expense.

Charette said every piece of wood had to be removed, labelled, and transferred back to his Wakefield shop. From there, the pieces were assessed to determine if they could be reused. The pieces that survived the cull were stripped, sanded, and sent for refinishing. “Everything we could reuse, we had to reuse,” said Charette. If a piece was rotten, an exact replica had to be produced. During the entire process, every component had to be meticulously recorded so it could all go back in its original place.

The refurbished and new pieces were then delivered to Rideau Hall. The main contractor had laid a new concrete base for the building on a different site within the grounds – this is the third time the building has been moved over the course of its lifetime. From there, the stress really set in, said Charette. Unlike a regular project, where if a piece of timber is years of experience under his belt – Charette said this type of reconstruction is far more complex compared to regular building. “It’s two different worlds,” he said.

The first step was to painstakingly take the structure down. It’s something Charette said normally takes less than a day when on building a site, but this time around, it took about two weeks.

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winter pavilion piece by piece by piece

too long or too short it’s either trimmed or replaced, the need to fit every piece in its original position meant there was simply no room for error.

“You do all the calculations but there’s always a bit of fear,” said Charette. Luckily, the contractor’s attention to detail paid off and the building fit back together perfectly.

Charette worked with over half a dozen tradespeople on the project that took around two and half months to finish – a long time for a 1,400 square foot building – but Charette said he and everyone else who worked on the reconstruction is proud of the attention to detail and craftsmanship that went into it. “I like a challenge,” he said. “It’s a once-in-a-lifetime project.”