

At home in the Hills

REAL ESTATE & MORE

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 Stephane Charette, was given a sub-contract by Ed Brunet in July 2016 to refurbish a dilapidated

building within the grounds of Rideau Hall. Built in 1895 and used as a storage room, the dairy-building had been derelict since the 1970s but the National Capital Commission put it on the list for a revamp. Set for a new home next to the Rideau Hall skating rink, the building has been converted into a room for skaters to lace up their blades and warm up. Although no rookie when it comes to carpentry – he has 20

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.

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



Wakefielder Stephane Charette's company Bala Structures was the 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 flimber was in good condition, but not all.

At home in the Hills

REAL ESTATE & MORE

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."

