

# Taking past designs into the future



## Local Architecture Firm Moves into Fourth Decade, Takes on New Challenges

### Article Courtesy of the Cambridge Times

Ray Martin, Times Staff | Aug 20, 2012

Taking past designs into the future Local architecture firm moves into fourth decade, takes on new challenges A local company that has built its reputation on preserving the past is passing a milestone of its own this year. +VG Architects – The Ventin Group turns 40 this year.

The firm, which was founded by W.M. Smale in 1952, became Ventin Architects in 1972 and later changed its name again to The Ventin Group Architects. The firm became +VG Architects several years ago, when some of the company's architects bought out Carlos Ventin, who retired after having built a reputation for restoring or repurposing buildings in southern Ontario.

The firm employs 50 people across its five offices and partner Paul Sapounzi, in charge of design, finance and pursuits, believes it is one of the few independent architectural firms to survive for 40 years. The Ventin Group's portfolio includes small local projects like the Cambridge Arts Theatre, salvaging the old stone Water Street building once dubbed The Purple Pool Hall, along with schools, theatres, libraries, and municipal building across the province.

Some of its larger projects include Toronto's Old City Hall, Queen's Park and St. Michael's Cathedral. The company is currently working on transforming the Old Don Jail into the Bridgeport Hospital. Sapounzi says the company is constantly evolving to keep up with technology and meet new challenges.

The firm also does work outside Canada including several school projects in Bermuda, where it's now working on the Warwick Academy, established in 1662. It is the oldest school



Interior view of atrium entrance



Moffat Creek - Cambridge's Newest Elementary School

in Bermuda and is one of the oldest in the western hemisphere. "Most of our work is now heritage, cultural or institutional in nature," said Sapounzi. The Ventin Group has five offices across Ontario in Brantford, Toronto, London, Belleville and Kitchener.

"We moved from Cambridge two years ago after operating an office here for almost 20 years," Sapounzi said. "Cambridge will always be very important to us. We are currently working on the new Moffat Creek school and many of our people live in Cambridge."

Sapounzi said the school was fraught with challenges. It had to be built into a hillside slope because part of the property sits on a wetland with a creek running through it. "I think we have been able to meet those challenges and turn them into opportunities for environmental learning," he said.

While the new school sits on high ground, its sports fields and playground are on the other side of the creek. To connect the two portions of the property, a bridge has been built that is also big enough to function as an outdoor classroom.

Many of the school's larger windows overlook the wetlands and sportsfield. The library exterior, which cantilevers out from the back of the building, is clad in copper sheets that will weather over time and turn green, which ties in with the school's environmental theme.

Sapounzi said the company moved its offices to the Tannery in Kitchener to take full advantage of its technology. "It's really a regional resource," Sapounzi said, noting that the Ventin Group is the first architectural firm to become a member at Communitech's digital media centre.

"The Reality Cave is absolutely amazing. It provides a phenomenal 3D experience for people," he said. "We're using it as a design tool." Architects from the company recently brought a group of Mississauga librarians to the Reality Cave to show them designs for a new library.

The librarians were able to walk through the 3D digital design and see how space in the new library will work and make any changes as necessary. "It's a lot easier for people to visualize the design with a tool like this," he said. In renaming the company +VG Architects, the partners are planning for the future of the firm. Nurturing young talent is the future and partners are trying to create a work environment

that supports individual effort. "We trying to break down any barriers within the office so people can do their best work and have the company support them. That's why we came up with the name +VG Architects," Sapounzi said.

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**+VG Architects** is a full-service architectural firm offering new design, expansions and heritage restorations for cultural, educational, municipal, justice, healthcare, residential and recreational facilities. Our staff of +50 operates in five offices in Ontario, in Brantford, Kitchener, Toronto, London and Belleville. See [www.plusvg.com](http://www.plusvg.com) for more information



Paul Sapounzi - Partner-in-Charge of Design, Finance and Pursuits.