

# Standing out from the crowd

*BROAD STROKES OF COLOUR  
LIVEN UP THE LANDSCAPE*

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Calgary's suburban communities have often been criticized by urbanists as brown, beige and boring. The same could be said for most of Calgary's early city centre condo towers. Westmount Place (1979), the Estate (1980) and Eau Claire 500 (1983) immediately come to mind.

It is true the preponderance of dull and dreary brown and beige buildings makes for a very depressing urban landscape, especially during Calgary's winter when the grass is brown, the streets are covered with gravel and the leafless trees are a brownish grey. Thank goodness for Calgary's deep blue winter skies!

Fortunately at the turn of the 21st century, Calgary architects and developers began to experiment, integrating coloured glass and panels into their exterior designs.

## Pop of Colour

Battistella Development's Orange Lofts (2003), designed by Kasian Kennedy of Vancouver, used a bright orange-red, ladder-like element on the exterior of the building creating an eye-catching industrial look that began the rebirth of East Village. Colours (2008) employs a two-storey, stained glass-like "art wall" that encloses and attractively disguises the building's above-ground

parkade. Pixel (2014) not only sports bright yellow squares randomly wrapping around a few balconies but also has a very cool and colourful entrance that looks like a hip New York nightclub.

Not to be outdone, Knightsbridge Homes and Metropia engaged Calgary's GEC architects to design University City, a collection of four big, bold and colourful condos at the Brentwood LRT station from 2010 to 2014. Each tower is distinguished by a brightly coloured angular plane that thrusts itself out of the middle of the building. The inspiration for the chosen colours (red, yellow, green and orange) come from native prairie grasses, bushes and flowers.

The I.D. Inglewood condo by Sarina Homes, completed in 2016 at the east end of 9th Avenue S.E., features three-storey high red balcony boxes that recall the red ladder of the Orange Lofts and perhaps the Alberta Children's Hospital windows.

Marda Loop's GLAS condo (2017) designed by Calgary's Sturges Architecture recently won an honourable mention at the Mayor's 2017 Urban Design Awards. Its design is dominated by the two-storey high salmon-coloured window boxes that definitely recall the fun oversized windows of the Alberta Children's Hospital.

All these examples use pops of bold colour to create a more visually interesting exterior. However, that is not always the case.



**Battistella  
Development's  
Ink**





**I.D. Inglewood, by Sarina Homes**



**University City, by Knightsbridge Homes and Metropia**

## Colour Gone Wild?

Built in 1999, the Point on the Bow condo in Eau Claire is a case in point. It was Calgary's first condo to embrace the new coloured glass curtain wall technology that would become architects "go to" technology in the 21st century. The architects at Gibbs Gage covered almost the entire facade with emerald green glass that some thought harmonized nicely with the green hues of the Bow River at certain times of the year. Others think it was a case of "colour gone wild."

And then there is Attainable Homes' Mount Pleasant 1740 condo designed by Calgary's Sturges Architecture and completed in 2016. The facade is dominated by glowing (some say gaudy) neon greenish yellow panels that may have residents across the street wearing sunglasses. There is certainly nothing drab or boring in its design.

## Dare To Be Different

All the above examples employ the use of bold colours. However, Qualex-Landmark's Mark on 10th (corner of 10th Avenue and 8th Street S.W.) dares to be different. Designed by Vancouver's Raffi architects, it incorporates panels of pastel blue, yellow and green hues randomly inserted into the opaque panels, creating a softer, more feminine facade. The uniqueness of the building is reinforced with the cantilevered yellow box at the top and the two-storey yellow glass greenhouse space with its bamboo tree growing at the 10th Avenue entrance. The design is bold yet subtle.

## Last Word

Incorporating colour and architecture is not as easy as one thinks. If not done right, it can quickly make a building tacky, gaudy and often becomes quickly dated. I have even heard a couple of times from different sources that "architects are afraid of colour." Perhaps that is why most timeless architecture has little colour.



**Battistella's Pixel in Hillhurst**



**Glas, by Avalon Master Builder**



**Mark on 10th, by Qualex-Landmark**