

Aberdeen Centre

Suburban shopping centers are not a building type that we have ever had much interest in. Many in the office hate those found in most cities because they're designed to get you lost. They're like mazes, and you can't find your way out. Ironically, our ambivalence toward shopping centers was actually considered an advantage by our client, who wanted us to reinvent the suburban mall. As a result, our design was an extension of the city streets, where you can always find your way out. At the same time, the interior environment has enough excitement with light and people moving through the space that you want to stay inside.

The city of Richmond is a typical suburb built on farmland. Since the 1960s, it has been all about traditional suburban shopping centers, with shops and anchor stores typically surrounded by a sea of surface parking. But we had confidence that this Vancouver suburb with its principally Asian population was maturing. We wanted to give people a new urban center. The client wanted a globalized shopping mall, free of North American chain stores. While we designed the building, he literally shopped the world for specialty stores.

In Aberdeen, we broke all the conventions of suburban shopping mall design. We turned it inside out, providing the same amount of parking in an aboveground structure cocooned *inside* the shopping center. That's how we were able to bring Aberdeen's new facade right up against the street. The form of the building then took its inspiration from the major curve of that street. Inside, we created a lively series of curving "streets" and courtyards that are anchored by restaurants and

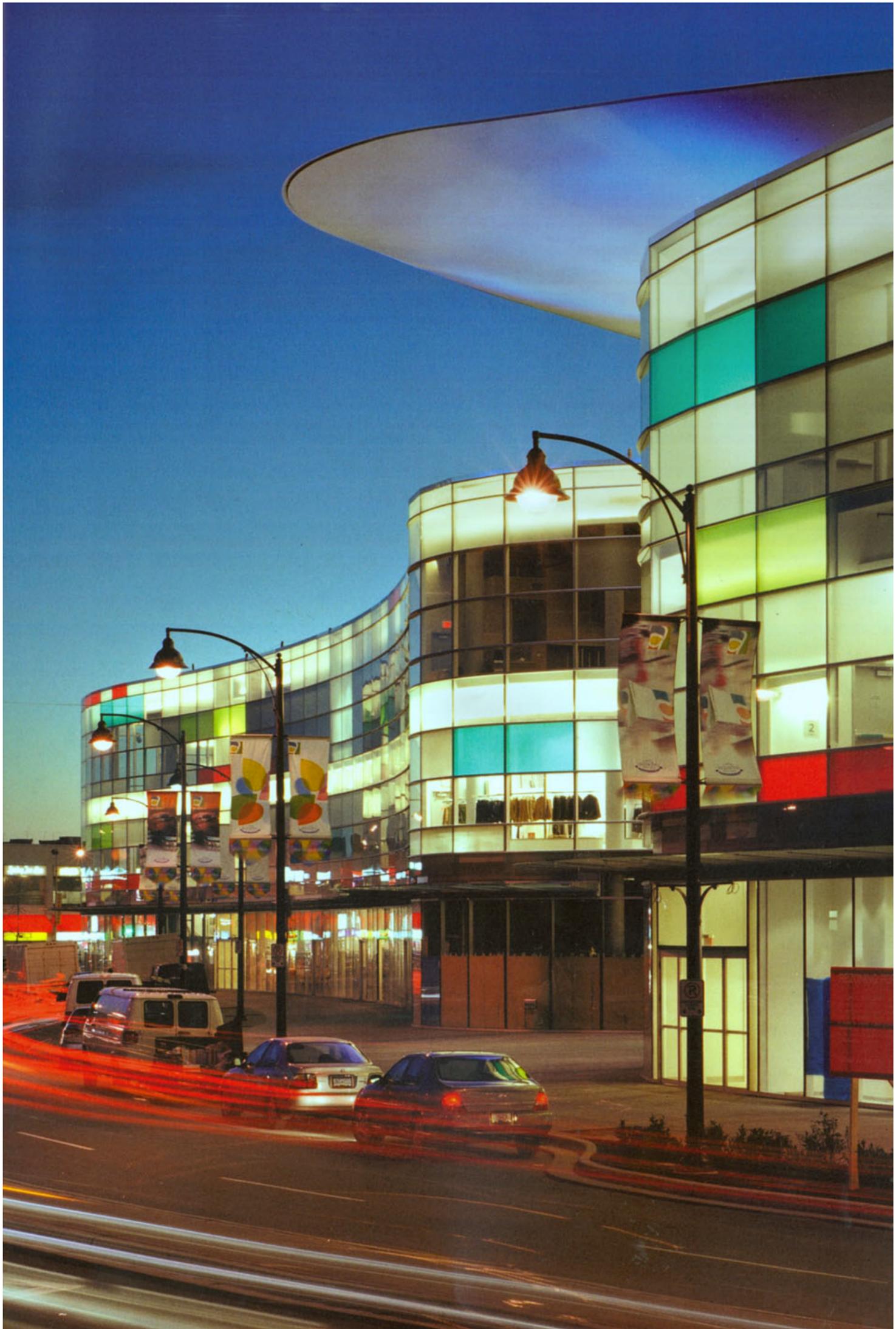


food courts, rather than the traditional department stores found in most malls. To bring daylight in, we punctuated the ceiling with beautiful, deep cones, specifically angled so that they bring in natural light without allowing the sun to directly shine on and damage merchandise.

Where most shopping malls are blank boxes, we designed the building like a playful glass lantern, so Aberdeen Centre would light up at night—the kind of lantern that painter Piet Mondrian would have appreciated, we like to think. After all, his colorful, geometric *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (1943) was one of our inspirations. In the daytime, especially on rainy, gray winter days, the colors of Aberdeen's luminous wall cladding are equally as eye-catching as they are inviting.

Because the city of Richmond agreed that we could put the mandatory public art budget toward the innovative building cladding—something it had never done before—we were able to experiment with a local glazing company to create a new technique that imbeds translucent film into the glass. That's what gives Aberdeen's unique street front its *joie de vivre*. The whole shopping center has become public art.







Site plan



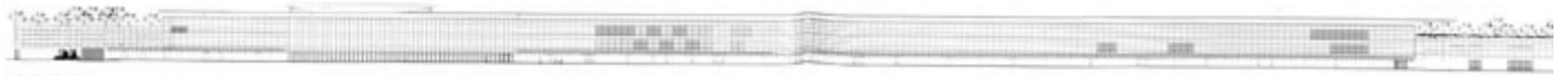
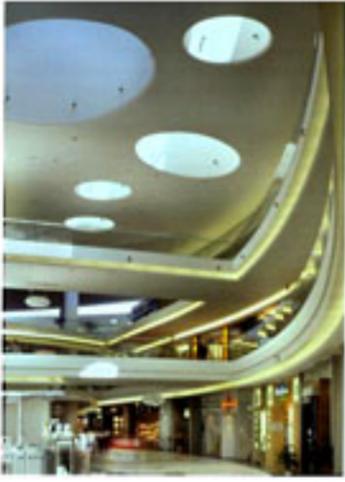
Ground-level plan

- 1 Shopping center (phase 1)
- 2 Fountain
- 3 Parking garage
- 4 Condominiums lobby (phase 2)
- 5 Aberdeen Station Lands shopping center (phase 3)
- 6 Rapid transit station

131 Aberdeen Centre







108 Bing Thom Architects

109 Aberdeen Centre

