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An Uplifting "Diving" Experience - Designing the PAC Dive Tower

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Image Credit: Kris Vassilev
Architectural Credit: NORR Limited Architects and Engineers (Project Architect)

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As part of NORR's team I had the opportunity and the privilege to develop the final design of the Dive Tower at the Pan Am Aquatics Centre and Field House. The Tower is the focal point of the entire complex and its importance was specifically underlined in the Output Specifications - it was "required to be designed such that it becomes a memorable sculptural expression of the program". This was a very helpful component of the requirements for planning and design - not because without it we as designers wouldn't understand its importance; it was helpful because we used this written requirement as a tool to achieve our goals during the design, consultation and approval process. I believe everyone who has worked on P3 / AFP projects understands it. (The AFP process and the architect's role in it is a topic for a larger discussion which we as a guild must have).

The Dive Tower design is based on the inspiring idea of "mountain rising from the water" defined by David Clusiau, the architectural design principal of NORR. This idea, along with the program requirements were the guiding principles in my work of "sculpturing" the Tower's mass. Although there were certain limitations of the chosen construction method - precast architectural concrete on metal structure, I believe we were able to achieve a memorable and iconic image of the Tower.

It is, of course, much more than a sculpture - it is a functioning engineering facility that complies with various requirements, some of them very stringent. To mention just one - the maximum vibration allowed at the platforms' front edge is 1 mm; credits to the structural engineer Halsall Associates for achieving it. And of course, the success wouldn't be possible without the collaboration of the contractor - PCL Constructors Canada. As always, there are real people behind these large firms and in the case of PCL it was Chad Logan, the Project Manager, who embraced our final design, despite the fact that it was much more complex and multidimensional than initially anticipated.

My "diving" experience continued during the Games' diving competition and it was the most rewarding one. 6000 cheering and fully engaged spectators, Canadian gold, the national anthem. And people from all around the world taking images of themselves in front of the Tower, which became one of the symbols of the Pan Am Games. And this is the best recognition an architect can hope for.

**Before joining NORR in 2012 for the Pan Am Aquatics Centre project, Kris worked for a number of years with Diamond Schmitt Architects. In 2013 he founded MULTIARCHITECTURE specializing in community, sports and recreation facilities. www.krisvassilev.com*

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