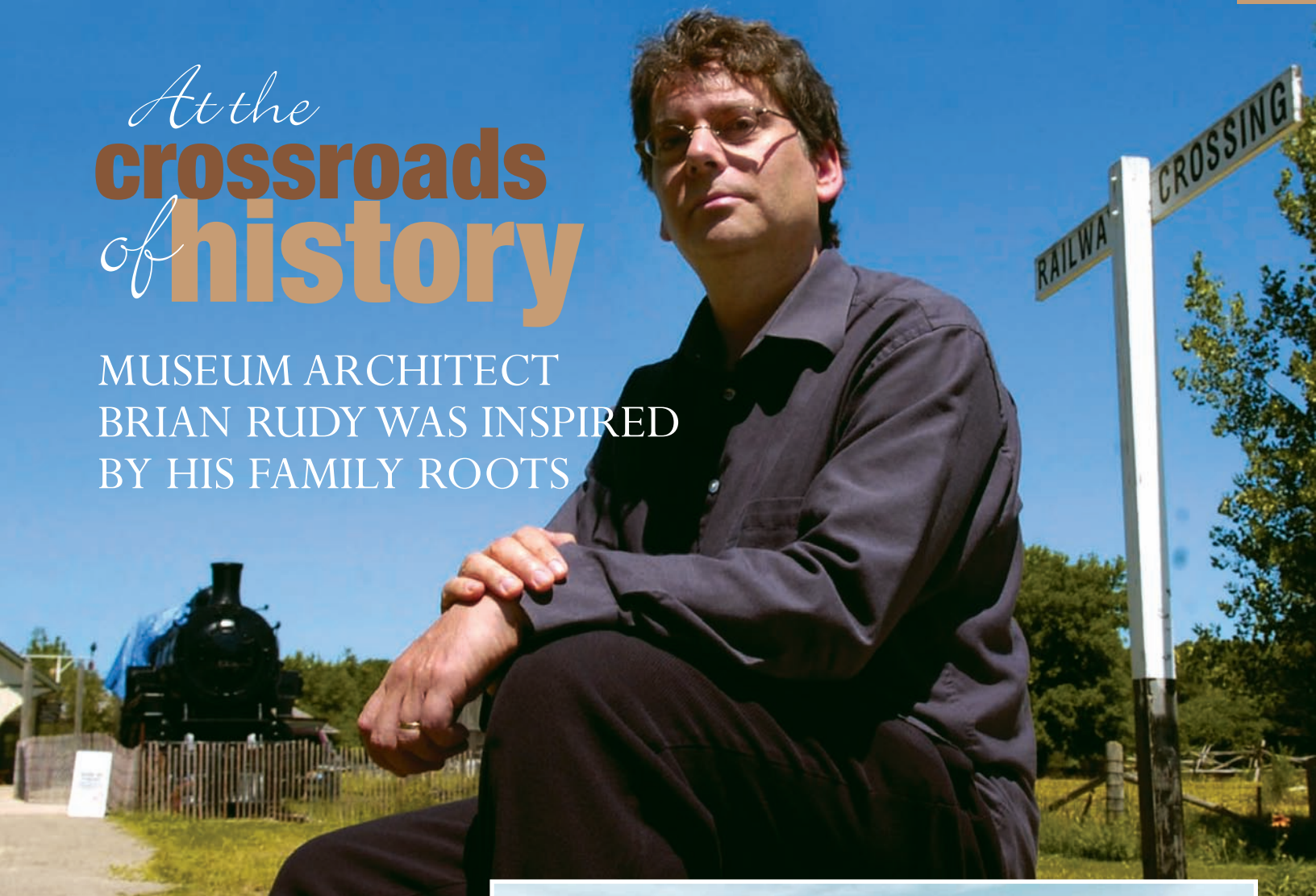




# At the crossroads of history

MUSEUM ARCHITECT  
BRIAN RUDY WAS INSPIRED  
BY HIS FAMILY ROOTS



By Beth Gallagher

**BRIAN RUDY** is at Doon Heritage Crossroads, searching bare ground for the spot that inspired him, the place where everything came together.

A noisy group of children gathers in front of him and a groundhog scampers behind, but the project architect for the new Region of Waterloo History Museum stays focused.

"It didn't strike us right away," he says to explain the planning process. "We actually tried to move away from it, but it pulled us back in. We wanted to investigate other parts of the site, we didn't necessarily want to get locked into this one location."

He steps a bit to the right. Then stops suddenly and says, "The museum will be



The design for the \$26-million history museum to be built at Doon Heritage Crossroads includes a pool of water symbolizing the Grand River which flows nearby. The museum is scheduled to open in 2012.

standing right here."

Rudy then moves slightly to the left. "Actually, right where we are standing now. This is the intersection," he says in a terra firma sort of way. "The crossroads."

The 41-year-old architect from the Toronto

firm Moriyama & Teshima has become known around town as a patient, soft-spoken guy who likes to get things right.

Exactly right.

So, it's not surprising that he shuffles a bit here and there to land precisely on the ►



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► spot where two historic settlement routes in the old Waterloo County converge at Doon Heritage Crossroads in Kitchener.

Part of the reason Rudy wants to get it right is that, in expressing the history of this region through architecture, he is also telling his own story.

"A lot of the crossroads idea is really Brian's inspiration," says Diarmuid Nash, a Moriyama & Teshima partner on the project. "The fact that Brian grew up in the area, and his family goes back in the region for so many years, has made him sort of our touchstone.

"He has an understanding of the history and a real feel for the community. It's always been a very special project for him."

Rudy was inspired by the fact that the crossroads is more than a metaphor in the region's history. It's the actual spot where the old Huron Road intersects a rail line that connected what is now Kitchener to Cambridge.

The old Huron Road, once an important route used by early pioneers to settle Waterloo County, crosses the rail line at Doon Heritage Crossroads on Huron Road.

The crossroads theme is deeply enmeshed in the design of the \$26-million museum. The intersection will be the point at which visitors enter the main lobby and see the historic village beyond.

The Region of Waterloo already operates a curatorial centre and the living history museum on the 60-acre property. Construction of the new, 47,000-square-foot museum begins this fall, with exhibits to be completed by late fall of 2011. It is slated to open in 2012.

If Rudy were to head east from where he is standing and cross the Grand River, he would eventually arrive at a Mennonite homestead near Kitchener's Pioneer Tower. It's here that his grandmother, Cora Groh, grew up. ("I have some photos of her and her siblings in front of that house," says Rudy.) Mennonite pioneer David Schoerg built the brick farmhouse where Cora grew up.

David was the son of Joseph Schoerg,

one of the first two pioneers to settle the area after arriving in the spring of 1800. Joseph was Rudy's great-great-great grandfather.

"Obviously, it gave everything a very personal spin for me," says Rudy, who grew up in Kitchener and attended the University of Waterloo's School of Architecture. "I kind of feel like I've been part of the culture ... I think that makes a difference. Honestly, it makes a big difference.

"You can get architecture or art that is sort of out of place sometimes ... and that has its place — where a building is very jarring or disjointed from its surroundings. But I think a regional museum by its very definition has to fit with the surroundings and speak about the culture."

Rudy says working in his hometown has been like "working with a bunch of old friends." It's a change from the pace of work in Toronto, which can be "a little disquieting" for an architect who approaches his job with a creative flair that requires time and reflection.

He has also appreciated the practical way decisions are made in Waterloo Region. Rudy was part of the team that designed the controversial National War Museum in Ottawa, for which Moriyama & Teshima received the prestigious Governor General's Medal for Architecture earlier this year.

"In Kitchener there's this sort of attitude that things need to make sense, which I resonate with because I'm a very practical guy .... There's also a practical relationship to the land and the community that is quite strong and, I think, powerful because it's not, shall we say, mired in politics."

Rudy points to his Mennonite roots as a possible source of his pragmatism, and the design of the regional museum reflects this practicality, says Tom Reitz, curator at Doon Heritage Crossroads. "If you look at Moriyama & Teshima and their architectural style, they do design contemporary buildings that have simple lines, clean lines. We knew that when he hired them."

While the design contains echoes of the past, which may include the use of local historical materials — perhaps even



Doon Heritage Crossroads curator Tom Reitz campaigned for many years for better storage and display of artifacts.

building materials from Rudy's ancestral homestead — Reitz points out the new history museum will be "a building of its time."

Moriyama & Teshima is working on the museum with the Walter Fedy Partnership, a local firm that has been in the region since 1951.

Roger Farwell, a Walter Fedy principal on the museum project, says while both firms enjoy a collaborative culture, Rudy is the driving force behind the design.

"Although his manner is quiet, his presence is strong," says Farwell. "His leadership is not bold, it's sincere ... which is pretty consistent with the cultural values

here."

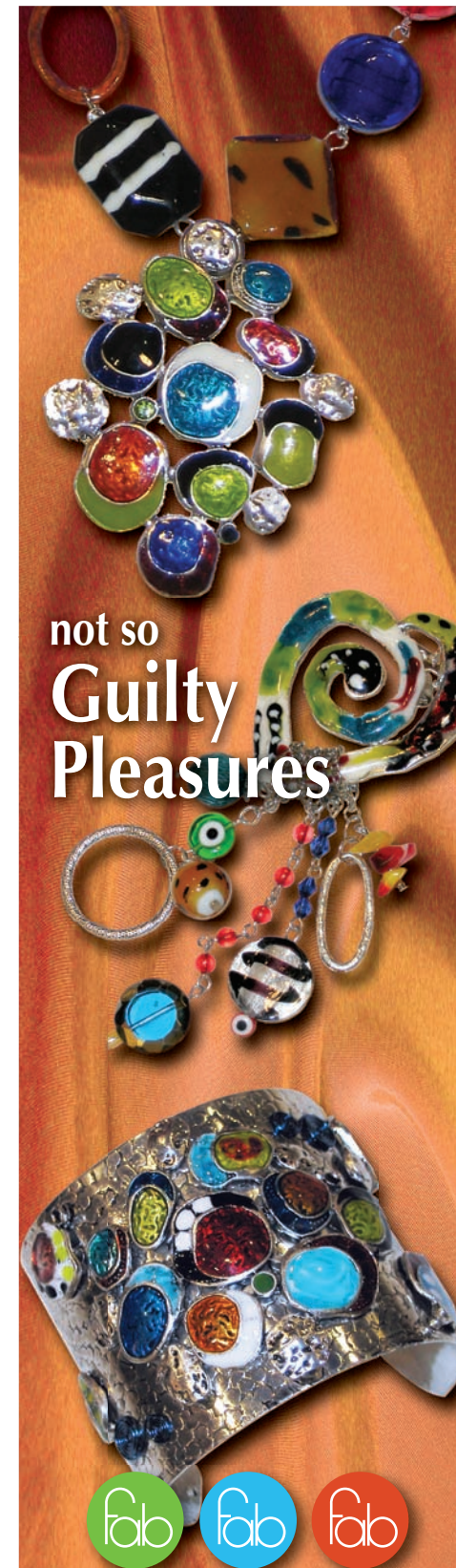
Both Nash and Reitz say Rudy is notable for the long hours he puts in on the project.

"I get e-mails from Brian at 2 in the morning," jokes Nash. "Brian is an extraordinarily hard-working person; very dedicated to his craft as an architect."

Interestingly, Rudy's path to the crossroads at Doon was not as straight as one might expect, despite his family's deep roots in Waterloo Region.

He was born to Glen and Elizabeth Rudy in North Bay. His father was a high school music teacher there until he died of cancer at the age of 37, when Rudy was still a baby. ►

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► Elizabeth Rudy eventually settled in the Rockway area of Kitchener with her two young sons, Tim and Brian, and supported the family by teaching piano.

Growing up in a house filled with music, it was not surprising that Brian Rudy eventually began to play the guitar. The left-handed Rudy taught himself the chords by flipping a right-hand guitar upside down.

It was not long before he was also noticed for his gifts in the visual arts. While he was at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate, the art teacher called his mother to talk about Brian's whimsical, unusual drawings.

Elizabeth Rudy takes little credit for her son's talent, pointing to the uncanny resemblance Brian has to his father. "Brian grew up without a father, but he is in many ways just like his father," she says.

Her late husband loved to build things and was known as an all-around handyman. Glen Rudy was also left-handed, but he could pick up just about any instrument and play it.

Brian has some of Glen's mannerisms, which poignantly reminds people of his late father.

"These gifts that Brian has did not come from copying his father," says Elizabeth Rudy. "They seem to be expressed through his genes and I think that's really something."

After graduating from Rockway, Rudy was accepted into what is now the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD) and UW's architecture program.

His high school art teacher, Art Klassen, recalls being "secretly disappointed" that Rudy didn't pursue a career in the visual arts. "For me, the main thing I recall is Brian had so many cool ideas ... he did this odd design with cows, and every time I looked at it, it made me laugh."

But the decision to pursue architecture was a fairly easy decision. "Maybe it finally dawned on me that being a creative artist would be a tough row to hoe," Rudy says now.

Whatever the reason, his choice of aca-

*“In Kitchener, there's this sort of attitude that things need to make sense, which I resonate with because I'm a very practical guy.”*

Brian Rudy

demics, then working for another Mennonite architect who designed housing for senior citizens, would place Rudy at a crossroads of his own later in his career.

However, the longer he did designs for developers, the more he began to realize the work was not fulfilling his creative impulses.

In the late 1990s, with a young family of his own, Rudy decided to leave architecture and devote time to a musical career. His debut CD, *Divided Man*, billed as a mix of folk and rock, was released in 1999 to critical acclaim. It was widely played on campus radio stations, internationally, and nationally on CBC.

*Divided Man* was a reflection of his own conflicted identity. "I was divided between architecture and music," Rudy recalls. "At that time, I wasn't getting any creative fulfilment from architecture, so I was torn between the two worlds."

On a deeper level, *Divided Man* chronicled the tension between his practical, logical side and a desire to express his creativity.

Eventually, an opportunity to work at Moriyama & Teshima allowed him to integrate his practical and creative approaches, and he left a promising musical career behind.

The Toronto firm encourages collaboration in a studio environment that supports Rudy's rich imagination. In fact, Diarmuid Nash believes Rudy's musical experience enlivens his architectural designs. "I think he brings a musician's approach to assembling his buildings; it's similar to the way he assembles his songs and compositions. He has this sensitive approach to making something, to crafting something. It's an

approach that musicians have."

The firm's interest in projects like the National War Museum, the Waterloo Region Museum of History and other public buildings permits Rudy to design buildings that support community well-being. Community stewardship, says Rudy, was a prominent theme at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate.

Pacifism was also a large part of Rudy's Mennonite education and remains with him today. That outlook shaped the work he did on the National War Museum.

"Everyone on the (design) team was very much in synch that this was not to be a glorifying building ... The message was all about honesty and the horror of war and the impact of war. The war museum is quite raw. It's not pretty."

Doon curator Reitz points out that way back when a search committee was deciding which architectural firm to hire, there was an audible "Oh" around the table when Rudy revealed his deep Mennonite roots.

Reitz jokes that there were no points for family history, and it was actually Moriyama & Teshima's modern esthetic that made the firm the favourite among committee members.

"We didn't want a building that was expensive to operate," says Reitz. "Things like using finishes that are easy to keep clean may seem small, but they're important. Brian understands our concerns and works with us."

However, as the design phase neared its end last spring, Rudy's creative side began to emerge from the clean, practical lines of the building. While nobody can remember how the idea was born, the architects, together with Moriyama & Teshima designer Ronen Bauer, came up with the idea of creating a colourful glass facade on the side of the museum that faces Homer Watson Boulevard.

While it isn't meant to resemble a glass quilt, its genesis can be traced to the architects' discussions about the region's strong quilting tradition.

"We were all thinking of quilts and we

have seen the archival collection of quilts. My mother is a quilter," says Rudy. "I think the idea came from wanting colour ... We were looking for a way to ground the colour with some sort of meaning."

Nash says the facade reflects the region's past, but if one considers that looms used in textile mills were Waterloo County's first computers, it also brings the museum to the present day and beyond.

"We started to think that maybe if we start to take some of these colours and pixelate them a bit to reflect the region's contemporary computer industry, it might work."


Waterloo author and historian Ken McLaughlin, who is working with Moriyama & Teshima on the project, says the architects managed to express the past and the future in their designs.

Rudy works with an "unrelenting intensity, day and night," McLaughlin says, and the glass facade is just one of the ways different stories converge in a single design feature.

A water feature outside the museum is another way Rudy and the design team will remind visitors of the region's history, says McLaughlin. The pool is a symbol for the Grand River, which connects each community in the region.

For a population that has historically seen itself as divided between Kitchener and Waterloo, or Hespeler, Preston and Galt, the Grand is a symbol of the region's unity, McLaughlin adds.

Divided identity has a familiar ring for Rudy who, mid-point in his career, has come home for a while. The early career struggles to integrate his practical and creative energies are gone now as he tells the story of his hometown with a building that, despite its clean lines, is punctuated with the whimsy of coloured glass.

As Rudy comes to the end of his walkabout at Doon on a warm afternoon, he reflects on his good fortune: "When I started working on projects like this, suddenly everything made sense," he says. "I didn't have to feel divided anymore." 

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