

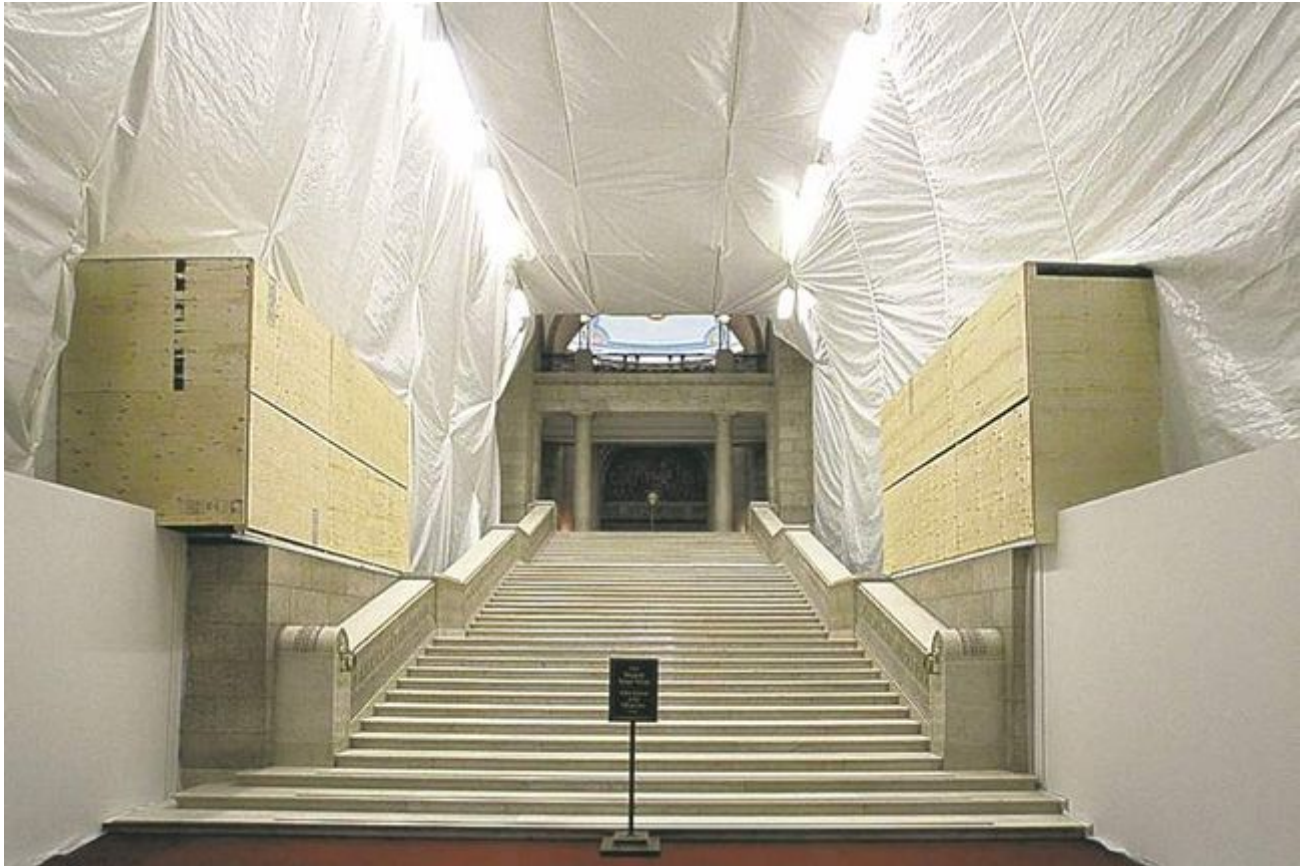
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# Fixing Manitoba's largest leaky roof

## Legislature's skylight restoration underway

By: **Bruce Owen**

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MIKE DEAL / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS [Enlarge Image](#)

*MIKE DEAL / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS The legislature's distinctive bison statues take cover under plywood.*

In a corner of this sweltering, makeshift 16-metre-high workspace, held up by silver scaffolding, timber and plywood, Nicole Matchette quietly works away.

She, much like an archaeologist searching for the missing link, patiently scrapes tiny flakes of paint off

the ceiling above the grand staircase of the Manitoba Legislative Building.



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*Photos by MIKE DEAL / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS Medusa's head observes the restoration. (MIKE DEAL / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS)*

The province called in the Philadelphia resident to see if she and her employer, Materials Conservation Collaborative, can accurately match the ceiling's colour scheme as it was first painted during the building's construction between 1913 and 1920.

Matchette said her detective work involves first removing an outer layer of paint that was brushed on when the ceiling was first redone in 1962, to see and collect what was first applied.

Back in 1962, painters determined the original colour was a muddy off-white containing traces of green. The "new" colour scheme, which has been on the ceiling since Duff Roblin was premier, was devised by Prof. Donald Dunklee of the University of Manitoba's interior design department.

One of painters in 1962 was J. Macklis -- he scribbled his name on Dec. 5 of that year near where Matchette is working.

Matchette said once she's collected her paint samples, it's off to a lab where a cross-section of each sample will go under the microscope. The trick is matching what she finds to what's available today.

"It will be more accurate under microscope," she said. "We're able to determine when each layer of paint was applied."

A decision will then be made on how to paint the ceiling so it not only reflects its original colours and the vision of primary architect Frank Simon, but it lasts for decades to come.

"The public deserves to walk into a building that reflects their history," said Chris Hauch, assistant deputy minister of accommodation services in the Infrastructure and Transportation department.

The repainting of the foyer's ceiling is part of a \$1.5-million project to replace the entire skylight system above the grand staircase, said building manager Todd Mclash, who with Finance Minister Stan Struthers escorted the Free Press on a recent tour of the project and an area of the legislative building few Manitobans will experience.

It's an area where you can reach out and touch the head of Medusa and the eight cattle skulls that ring the ceiling.

The skylight, which has been in place for almost 100 years, is leaking and damaging these symbols and the ceiling's plaster.

Over the next few weeks, the ornate black metal frame holding the interior decorative glass will be sandblasted and replaced.

A large metal structure on the building's roof -- it looks like a greenhouse -- which protects the interior skylight will also be replaced.

Mclash said this original skylight structure is full of lead and beyond repair. Caulking won't do the trick anymore.

As a precautionary measure, the two bison on the staircase have been entombed in plywood in case

anything drops from the work high above.

Neil Einarson, manager of heritage buildings for the province, said all the work is first run through his office so what's planned is in keeping with the unique, historical nature of the building, and it continues to protect it and its symbols in the years to come.

"We don't want to do this again for a while," Miclash said -- at some point soon the dome of the rotunda, under which the Golden Boy stands, will have to be repainted. It was last painted in 1982, but there are small sections where its light blue paint is noticeably peeling.

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