

# KIWANIS CLUB OF CASA LOMA

## *CASA LOMA DAY –VISITOR EXPERIENCE CONCEPT Executive Summary*



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Lord Cultural Resources is a global professional practice dedicated to creating cultural capital worldwide. We assist people, communities and organizations to realize and enhance cultural meaning and expression.

We distinguish ourselves through a comprehensive and integrated full-service offering built on a foundation of key competencies: visioning, planning, design, preservation and implementation.

We value and believe in cultural expression as essential for all people. We conduct ourselves with respect for collaboration, local adaptation and cultural diversity, embodying the highest standards of integrity, ethics and professional practice.

We help clients clarify their goals; we provide them with the tools to achieve those goals; and we leave a legacy as a result of training and collaboration.



# Casa Loma Day-Visitor Experience Concept

## Executive Summary

Casa Loma is one of the top-ranked attractions in the City, widely recognized as an icon for the City, attracting over 350,000 day visitors a year. This success is the result of the dedicated commitment of the Kiwanis Club of Casa Loma (KCCL), who stepped forward in 1937 to save Casa Loma by operating it as a heritage attraction in a unique, mutually beneficial partnership between the Kiwanis and the City of Toronto. By virtue of a renewable license agreement, KCCL operates the site as a profitable heritage attraction and hospitality venue, and the City receives a financial benefit in license fees and property taxes, currently amounting to over \$1 million /year. KCCL typically nets about \$200,000 /year, which is used to fund its charitable activities in Toronto. KCCL operates the site on a self-sufficient business model, funding interior improvements, general maintenance, and operations expenses primarily from earned revenues, partnerships and the occasional grant. The City, responsible for the exterior historic fabric of the buildings, has embarked on a \$20 million restoration project to be completed by 2012.

Wishing to respond to the recommendations made by the City-convened Casa Loma Advisory Committee, KCCL initiated the development of a renewed Vision for Casa Loma and engaged Lord Cultural Resources to develop the concept for a revitalized day-visitor experience at Casa Loma, which builds on Casa Loma's iconic status and numerous assets, broadens its appeal to local audiences and remains consistent with Casa Loma's very successful business model.

***Casa Loma can play a role in the City's cultural renaissance as a Creative City.*** The City's Culture Division recognizes the essential role of Toronto's diverse cultural and heritage assets in building, sustaining and celebrating a socially and economically healthy and diverse urban community, which engage visitors and residents in cultural activities. Both the 2003 *Culture Plan for the Creative City*<sup>1</sup> and the 2006 *Strategies for a Creative City*<sup>2</sup> identify the need to strengthen the connections between Toronto's cultural institutions and the community, including representing diverse groups and engaging youth, as a means of developing a sustainable future for culture in Toronto. There is an opportunity for KCCL, through developing relevant links to the strategies identified by the City and community leadership and responding to the needs described in these reports to be become a partner in the renaissance of the City.

***Casa Loma's market appeal is very high.*** Casa Loma receives about 350,000 day visitors annually, and is one of the top-ranked tourist attractions in Toronto. Seasonal programming and special events attract local residents, primarily families. Casa Loma is well positioned to maintain its tourist attendance, despite the decline in visitors from the United States, by appealing to international and domestic tourists. Re-branding the visitor experience, promotion, packaging, and programming partnerships and collaborations will be effective in increasing new and repeat visits from residents.

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<sup>1</sup> *Culture Plan for the Creative City*, Toronto Culture, City of Toronto, 2003

<sup>2</sup> *Strategies for Creative Cities*, 2006

***The Day-Visitor Concept is based on a thorough assessment of Casa Loma's strengths and weaknesses of the building, site and neighbourhood; heritage assets (historical record, built form, objects, archival and related materials), and the current visitor experience and interpretation.***

- The buildings and site are the core assets – unique, iconic, opulent – designed by a renowned architect. The current exterior restoration project is much needed (while being disruptive to visitors), interior refurbishment is needed, and other buildings require capital improvements to improve usability and accessibility. With capital improvements to the Hunting Lodge, Stables, Garage, Potting Sheds, Conservatory, and public access to surrounding estate grounds, the interpretation can be expanded and new programming initiatives be accommodated.
- Casa Loma's core heritage assets are both the buildings and the lifestyle of the Pellatts. The design, decoration and furnishings encode the values and meanings of Victorian society as well as the early 20<sup>th</sup> C society's interest in Romanticism and medieval times. Casa Loma is therefore a window into the world of 20<sup>th</sup> C Canada. The creativity, innovation and imagination of the period are realized here, which provides an exciting foundation for interpretation and programming.
- The architecture, setting, grand vistas, interior spaces and intriguing features, and key interpretive elements – excellent audio guide, period rooms, and strong narrative storyline create a compelling visitor experience. However, aspects of the experience are underdeveloped and stronger connections are needed among physical elements and the story.

***The proposed vision for Casa Loma's day-visitor experience*** is to be based on the three main goals:

1. Place the site and story into a broad and coherent Interpretive Framework.
2. Expand Casa Loma's brand and icon status by expanding on the broader social meanings of Sir Henry Mill Pellatt's life and story and embrace the "Creative City" strategy.
3. Brand and locate Casa Loma as a district – specifically, the Casa Loma Estate District.

Six planning principles underpin the concept plan:

1. Authenticity
2. More effective use of the spaces
3. Integrates the entire site
4. Answers "why is Casa Loma here and what does it mean?"
5. States a Mission for the interpretation
6. Enhances Casa Loma's brand identity, to appeal to both tourist and resident markets.

***Overarching Interpretive Theme for Exhibits, Shows and Programs*** - In order for Casa Loma to function as a successful contemporary heritage attraction, it is important that all exhibits, shows, and public programs be governed by an overarching interpretive theme. The recommended theme, Casa Loma: The History of Toronto's Imagination, provides a dynamic framework for crafting a popular and authentic visitor experience. Appropriate sub-themes to be integrated may include: Romanticism, Victorianism, King and Country, Service, Culture and Comfort, Encouraging Correct Consumption Habits and Culture of Creativity. Each of these sub-themes evoke exotic, innovative or nostalgic sentiments, representing both how people worked, relaxed and celebrated in a by-gone era, and how these experiences are directly connected to life in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Toronto.

**Visitor Experience Defined** - The recommended visitor experience for Casa Loma is as a *Living Heritage Estate dedicated to the Exploration and Celebration of the History of Toronto's Imagination*. Living heritage estates allow for the integration of historical elements (architecture, gardens, period rooms and collections) with live performance spaces, multimedia and audio tours. Ideally, the total experience as a Living Heritage Estate is synergistic, creating a total resource that is greater than the sum of its component parts.

**Recommendations to upgrade and revitalize core components of the day-visitor experience:**

- **Main Building** – Themed approach to exhibits and interpretation on each floor: first floor themed as *pageantry and romanticism*, the second floor as *culture and comfort*, the third *service in society*, tower – *overview of the City*, basement level as *invention and creativity*, stables, garage, potting shed and rebuilt conservatory *tied into culture and comfort, habits of consumption and culture of creativity*.

Experience elements in the Main Building could include:

- Outdoor interpretive signage; developing a sense of a *'Great Arrival'*.
  - Orientation Centre and destination show/presentation at the Great Hall.
  - Integration of a variety of interpretive media, such as ghost viewers, podcasts and cellular downloads for audio and video shows, sound and light dramatizations, and moving heritage drama to enliven the period rooms and vary the thematic messages. Modern interpretive media would allow the rooms to remain flexible for multipurpose uses.
  - Social History Galleries on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, identifying the connections between social history and the castle, would be upgraded and placed into the overall thematic context of *service and sacrifice*. The experience of the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor would be more coherent and would transition visitors from the period rooms, to make a more effective use of the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor spaces.
  - Tower and the Grand View: displays to describe the history of each part of the City as seen from all directions.
- **Tunnel to the Stables** to become a Time Tunnel depicting the correlation of Casa Loma's history to important events in local, national and world history.
  - **Carriage Room, Stables, Courtyard, Garage, Potting Shed and Rebuilt Conservatory Complex** would be more strongly integrated into the experience. Each would be refurbished for year-round programming, including theatrical events in the Carriage Room, and enhanced with interpretation. Each of these buildings provides excellent opportunities to explore several of the sub-themes, strongly communicated by such techniques as the introduction of sounds and smells, graphic displays in the Stables and Potting Shed; antique cars from local collectors and museums in the Garage and more robust interpretation of the Mechanic's Office; and ongoing staff interpretation in the Potting Shed, accompanied by period displays and programs. The Conservatory and Tea Room attached to the Potting Shed would be reconstructed as period rooms, which would allow staffed and/or multimedia interpretation of Lady Pellatt's relationship with the Chief Gardener.
  - **Hunting Lodge and Grounds** would be refurbished for small events, rentals, and programming, which could include small, special topic exhibits or "little theatre" one-person shows.
  - **Additional outdoor interpretation** could include tours of the Gardens, farmers' markets, or specially themed events located in temporary performance pavilions. A grand Sound and Light Show, presenting a grand historical saga displayed on the exterior wall, might also be considered.

***Programming and Partnerships*** - Re-invigoration of interpretation can be envisioned with an expanded menu of (revenue-generating) public programming aimed at various market segments to be emphasized during the “shoulder” seasons and wintertime when tourism is at its lowest.

To keep the costs of program development and delivery low and to enhance profitability, partnerships are encouraged. Wherever possible, Casa Loma should provide a shell space for partner groups to hold theme-related public events at low cost. Sponsorships should also be sought for high-profile or “signature” events.

Changing programs, high entertainment events and repeatable experiences are all primary motivations for residents to visit local attractions. The theme of *imagination and creativity*, therefore, offers the opportunity for a broader menu of programming and the opportunity to engage youth and diverse community groups. Programming may include:

- “Goth” festivals for teenagers, drawing on mythical figures such as Dracula or Frankenstein popular in Romantic folk tales;
- Programs focused on Victorian whimsical and macabre themes, such as the works of “Lemony Snicket”;
- Art programs fostering creativity and expression in youth;
- Art festivals and events in partnership with artistic groups in the community;
- Special events fostering whimsical creativity, such as a Rube Goldberg Machine Contest;
- Family programming, including the continuation of Casa Loma’s current family programming such as Cinderella’s Castle, Knights and Knaves and Peter Pan.