

# Last Look WINTERGARDEN

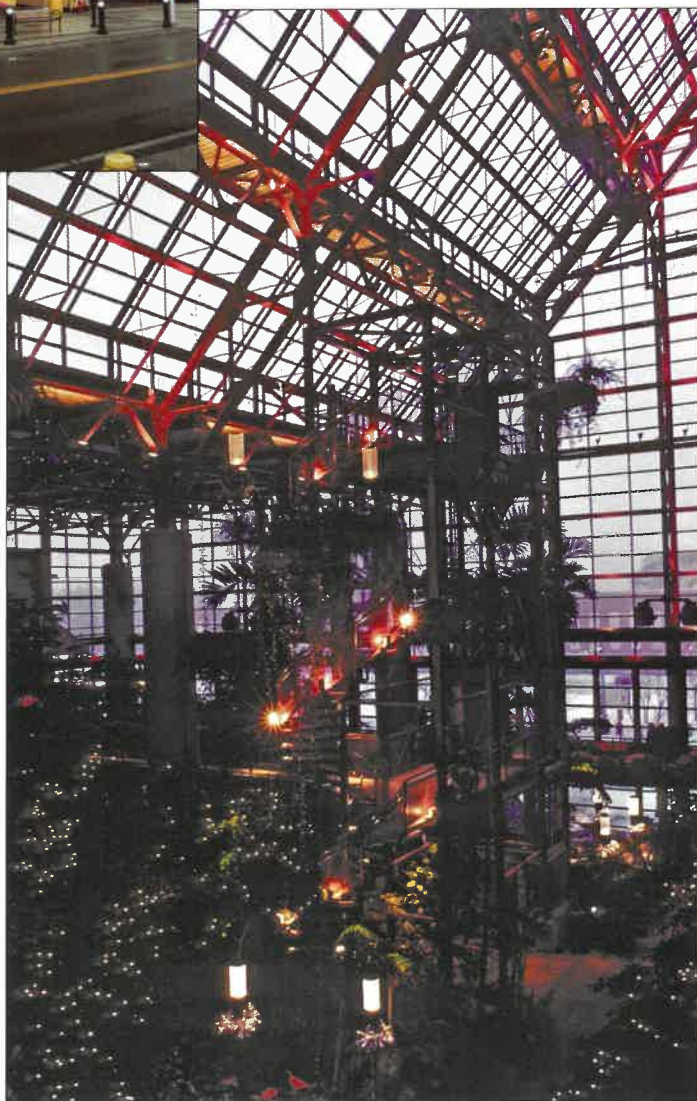
By John H. Conlin



The Niagara Falls Wintergarden located at the intersection of Rainbow Blvd. and Old Falls Street. WNY HERITAGE PHOTO, 2008

**T**he Wintergarden is not structurally flawed, nor is it less of an architectural wonder than it was when it opened 30 years ago. However, the building is now, sadly, on a fast track for demolition. How can this be possible?

The Niagara Falls Wintergarden that opened in 1977 was built as an architectural cornerstone to a revitalized downtown. A world-renowned master of modernism, architect Cesar Pelli, designed the 110 foot high glass enclosure. It was conceived as a year round attraction, a tropical paradise and place of tranquility.




Interior view of the tropical park in winter. PATRICK A. MAHONEY PHOTO, 1982.

The interior was a multi-level botanical park with ponds, a waterfall and 7,000 trees. The contrast between winter outside and the tropical inside made the building a stunning “tour de force.” It was architectural poetry.

The Wintergarden was never intended as a moneymaking enterprise. It was a gratuitously offered public amenity. It was a welcoming city gate opening onto Old Falls Street and the 1973 Philip Johnson Convention Center, which has become the Seneca Niagara Casino. In 2003 the Wintergarden was sold for \$1 million to a private enterprise. A garden no more, it became Smokin’ Joe Anderson’s Family Fun Center. In November 2007 the building was closed.

At the time the Wintergarden was built, the City of Niagara Falls, NY, was staking its future on modern architecture. It already had the Earl W. Brydges Public Library designed by Paul Rudolph that opened in 1974. The Turtle Museum incorporated a Buckminster Fuller geodesic dome. The Carborundum Building was a 1973 Skidmore, Owings, Merrill contribution. Another glass enclosure, the Cannon Associates designed Hooker or “Oxy cube” building, became one of the first double-skinned, environmentally controlled buildings in North America in 1980. All of these examples of modern architecture and engineering have survived in use except for the Turtle and the Wintergarden. There is still hope for the Turtle. To save the Wintergarden, leadership, vision and force will be required. But that is the challenge. The building should be reclaimed for the public domain. It should be restored as a civic amenity.

In 1988 Cesar Pelli designed another wintergarden for New York City. It was the giant, glass barrel vault that was severely damaged in the 9/11 destruction of the World Trade Towers. Today the NYC Wintergarden has been rebuilt and restored for its still-viable original purpose – housing a tropical botanical park. 





View of the stepped upper levels of the now-closed Wintergarden.  
WNY HERITAGE PHOTO, 2008



The Turtle is now owned by the Niagara Falls Redevelopment LLC.  
WNY HERITAGE PHOTO, 2008



The giant glass cube building built for Hooker/Occidental is now a tourist welcome building called One Niagara.  
WNY HERITAGE PHOTO, 2008



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