

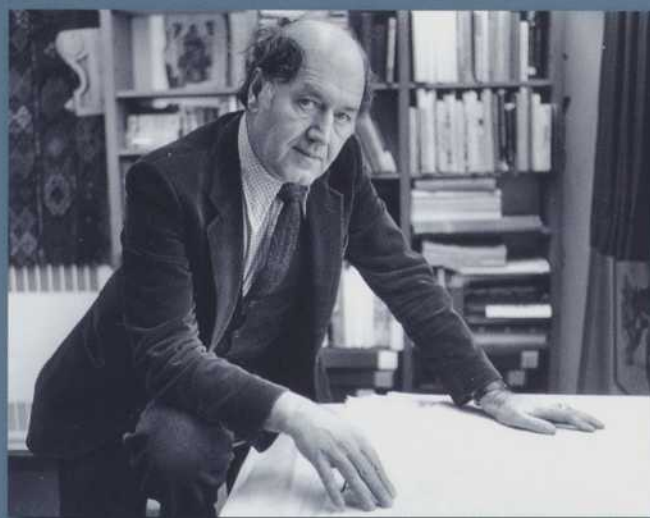
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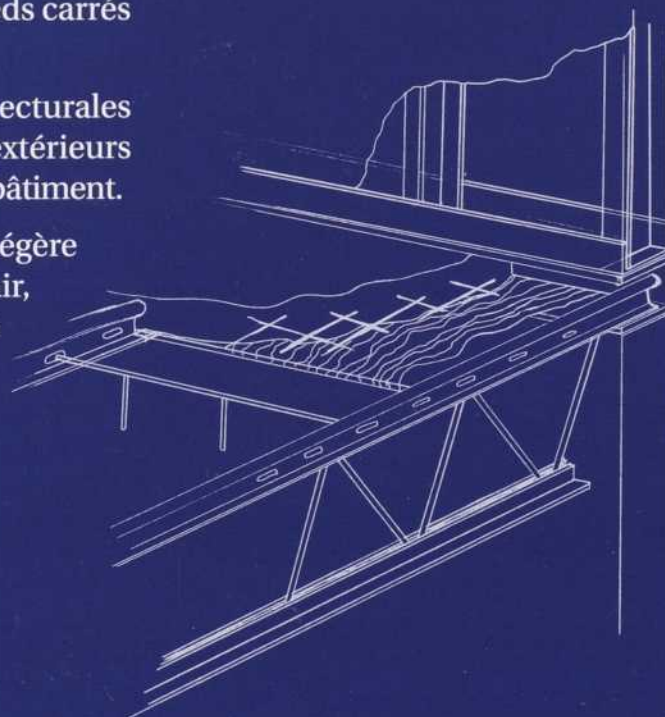
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# AN INTRODUCTION

ADRIAN SHEPPARD, DAVID THEODORE

Norbert Schoenauer was a highly principled person who repeatedly lamented the lack of morals and ethics in our world. He ardently believed that values could be taught only by example, never by moralizing. He once turned down a professional commission of the scale and importance of his work on the new town of Fermont in northern Quebec when it became clear he could not serve the client, and especially the users, according to his ideals.

The touchstone for his ethics was housing. He was concerned, famously, with the history of housing around the world, but also with a wide range of ideas about house, home, apartment, city block, urban design and architectural design: the forms and customs that constitute the humble place of the individual in the community, and the community in the world. In Schoenauer's hands, housing was a subject connected not just to history or design, but to ecology, politics, morality and pleasure.

This special issue of ARQ both praises and appraises the life and work of this remarkable architect and planner. He combined teaching and practice, public life and private friendships with a degree of ease and success that is becoming rare in our current relentless drive towards specialization. These articles on his discipline, passions, quirks and leadership encompass reflections from professional and academic colleagues, former employers and former students, and above all friends. Indeed, support for this endeavour came from a broad range of family, friends and colleagues. We would especially like to thank Astrid Schoenauer, André Hoffmann, and David Covo. We must also acknowledge the patience of Pierre Boyer-Mercier, who generously agreed to provide for this special issue.

As the authors in this issue attest, Schoenauer was above all a modest man. He sought simple things: camaraderie, good books, nature. Because possessions were a burden to him, he amassed few material things. He loved history—architectural, political, cultural, and art history. But though he was keenly interested in the past, he was in no way sentimental about it. He was neither pessimistic nor optimistic about the future. He loved the here-and-now, the everyday, the things he could experience directly: people, buildings, a chestnut, the sky. He liked to call himself an urban animal, one who cherished the

complex layering of the city and who abhorred the simplified homogeneity and order of suburbia. He took pleasure in Montreal's mix of high and low culture, of history and ethnicity, from its mélange of building types and public spaces, and from its social heterogeneity. Had he not been such a dedicated professional and teacher, Schoenauer would no doubt have become a *boulevardier*, a modern-day Oscar Wilde, spending his time in the company of the slightly hedonistic, very verbose and spirited crowd that daily packed Montreal's emigrant cafés and bars.

In short, it is no accident that the contributors to this issue had personal contact with Schoenauer. He was one of those rare people who change the lives of those around them. As Annmarie Adams recounts, even the record of his publications shows a great concern with communicating his ideas to those in his immediate sphere, and less worry (but immense delight) in spreading the word to a broad but remote audience. Adams begins here the crucial process of evaluating Schoenauer's scholarship now that his eloquent, authoritative and often stubborn presence is no longer there to bolster the thinking behind the text and drawings.

The recollections and appraisals compiled here describe and assess Schoenauer's influence as a teacher, as a colleague, and as a professional. As Pieter Sijpkes explains, because of his generosity and welcoming demeanour, Schoenauer was adept at making transitions between such categories. For instance, in trying to explain Schoenauer's extraordinary popularity and commitment as a teacher (recognized by two major teaching awards), Nadia Meratla relates how Schoenauer's open-door policy turned many humble and intimidated students into admirers and friends.

Even in articles that assess particular facets of Schoenauer's professional relationships, writers return again and again to Schoenauer's in culture as revealed in the broad intersections between architectural and social forms. As his longtime academic colleague Vikram Bhatt relates, this willingness to immerse himself in new architectural and cultural experiences made him a great traveler. At the same time, as his longtime professional partner Maurice Desnoyers recalls, it also made him an especially exigent ideologue.

Norbert was a professional. Jeanne Wolfe explores the result of Schoenauer's principles in his largest undertaking as a professional planner, the new town of Fermont. Here Norbert was able to convince corporate clients of the soundness and value of his unusual ideas. As Gary Hack points out, Schoenauer was less successful when dealing with politicians. Schoenauer's unrealized plans for the new community of Woodroffe near Ottawa, along with those for the Angus Yards in east end Montreal, are perhaps the greatest disappointments of his professional career. The gap between his designs and the banality of what has been built on those sites underscores not so much the quality of Schoenauer's vision, but the resourcefulness needed to bring good design to life.

As David Covo relates in a short biographical essay, Schoenauer was a child of war, of World War II. He often referred to the difficult period of his youth, vowing never to inflict on others the injustices he had endured. He treated all as equals. He had simply no prejudices about others. He loved telling colourful jokes, but never one that denigrated others.

Still, despite such all-too-human characteristics, in practice as in life, Schoenauer was a man of reason. He disliked the arbitrary, the impulsive, the subjective. To him, architecture was an exercise of the mind. Every move, every detail, had to have a demonstrable *raison d'être*. Thus he shunned formalism, clever games and unnecessary complications. For example, he objected to this very contemporary infatuation with making recondite architectural jokes inexplicable to the general community. This reasoned attitude is described by Witold Rybczynski, who places Schoenauer's professional interests within the history of the postwar (Danish) concern with modernist, rationalist housing.

While the tone of the issue is often eulogistic—Schoenauer touched our lives and has left a void in our world—the issue is motivated by a sense of assessment as well. Schoenauer believed in the modern notion that nothing is ever completed or immutable. He preferred the term "organism" to "composition" when discussing his work. This preference was a tacit acknowledgement that the design of a finite product was a lifeless act—that life goes on. In 1995, when he was awarded the *Ordre d'architecture du Québec's Médaille de Mérite* for his lifetime achievements, he spoke softly of his great concern with the state of the modern world and contemporary architecture. His message—his hope—was that his life's commitment and his convictions would now become our own.

A. Sheppard is a Professor of Architecture at the School of Architecture, McGill University and a former associate of N. Schoenauer. D. Theodore is a Research Associate at the School of Architecture, McGill University.



1. Schoenauer's garden, Prospect St. house, 1965.
2. Schoenauer's greenhouse, penthouse apartment, 1984.
3. Astrid and Norbert Schoenauer in their living room, Prospect Street, Westmount, 1965.

# NORBERT SCHOENAUER, 1923-2001

DAVID COVO

Norbert Schoenauer was born in Transylvania, then part of Hungary, on January 2, 1923. He lost his father while still a student at the Lyceum in Beszterce. His uncle, an architect, became his surrogate father and oversaw his education during his formative years. He studied architecture at the Technical University of Budapest, but the upheavals of war and Hungary's political turmoil led him to flee his native land to Denmark as a political refugee. He lived in Copenhagen, earning a Certificate in Architecture from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in 1950. Here he also met Astrid, who was to become his wife in 1952. In 1951 he emigrated to Canada, intending to settle in Toronto. It did not take him long to recognize that, by temperament and culture, he was not suited for that city. And so after barely a few weeks he moved to Montreal, his home for the next fifty years.

Once properly settled in his adopted city, and immersed in learning a new language (English—his sixth), he entered the graduate program at the School of Architecture at McGill University. He obtained a Master of Architecture degree in 1959. The following year he joined the faculty of the School, was appointed Assistant Professor in 1961, Associate Professor a few later, and served as Director of the School in the early 1970s. Except for a sabbatical year devoted to the design of the Town of Fermont and a two-year leave of absence (1975-77) when he served as Executive Director, Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, in Ottawa, he taught at the School of Architecture without interruption until his death in 2001.

Schoenauer's involvement in practice, as both an architect and planner, was recognized with numerous awards. Projects carried out in association with the well-known firm of Afflek, Desbarats, Dimakopoulos, Lebensold, Michaud and Sise included the Chomedey Civic Centre and the Confederation Memorial Building in Charlottetown, both of which won first prize in national competitions in the early 1960s. In 1964, his work with the firm Desnoyers Brodeur Mercure Leziy included an honourable mention in the competition for the Quebec pavilion for Expo '67. He was responsible for the master plan and housing design for a number of prominent projects in Quebec and Ontario, including the master plan for Nuns' Island. He was especially proud of the work he did with his long-time partners Desnoyers Mercure Leziy Gagnon and Sheppard on the planning and the design of most of the buildings for Fermont.

Schoenauer was a Fellow of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada and an Academician of the Royal Canadian Academy. His professional memberships included the Order of Architects of Quebec,

the *Corporation professionnelle des urbanistes du Québec*, and the Canadian Institute of Planners. He was also at one time a member of the Ontario Association of Architects. He lectured widely in Canada, the USA, Europe and South America. He held part-time appointments at the Université de Montréal, University of Calgary, Carleton University, and the Technical University of Nova Scotia. In addition to his two-year term as Executive Director of CMHC, he served the Corporation as Senior Advisor on Planning and Design and represented Canada on numerous missions for the United Nations and other international organisations in Europe, the Middle East, and South America.

At McGill, Schoenauer was known as an outstanding teacher, an innovative and accomplished researcher, an imaginative administrator, and a tireless and fearless advocate for responsible planning and design. His courses at the School were legendary, particularly "History of Housing," one of the faculty's largest courses with an enrolment close to 200 students. His lectures were insightful and meticulously planned and presented a magical combination of scholarship and personal observations, making the subject both accessible and entertaining to generations of students from the School and across the University. When Schoenauer received the Faculty of Engineering Class of '51 Award for Outstanding Teaching in 1988, his students cited his creativity and the unique capacity of his course to inspire re-interpretation. He was a particularly strong ally of international graduate students who come to McGill to obtain advanced degrees in housing. They found him to be a virtual fount of information, an interested ear, and a steady friend. Many of these graduates have gone on to affect housing policy in the world's developing nations.

Schoenauer was appointed Macdonald Professor of Architecture in 1982 and retained the title until his retirement from full-time teaching in 1988, at which time the University appointed him Emeritus Professor. He celebrated his retirement in characteristically unconventional ways: with his continuous presence and active participation in the academic and social life of the School; with the uninterrupted teaching of his specialized courses in housing and housing theory; with sustained and even increased participation in public consultation and debate on important urban issues such as the plans for the proposed McGill University Health Centre superhospital; and with the publication of a host of articles and no fewer than

four more books on housing. Throughout his career he contributed to academic journals (*The Journal of Architectural Education*), trade journals (*The Canadian Architect*), and to newspapers (*The Gazette*). He encouraged and contributed to *The Fifth Column*, a national student publication founded in 1980 at McGill. He was especially proud of his three-volume *6000 Years of Housing*, published in 1981, which was updated and republished by Norton in 2000.

Schoenauer had great affection for Canada, partly because Montreal allowed him to remain a cosmopolitan European. A *bon vivant* by nature, he loved the diversity of entertainment places, restaurants and watering holes in Montreal, especially the plethora of Hungarian establishments that sprang up after the Hungarian Revolution: the Pam-Pam, the Rose-Marie, the Coffee Mill, the Riviera, Carmen, the Mozart. All attracted a wide range of people, from taxi drivers and salespersons to professionals, artists and writers, business people, dilettantes and poor students. For him (and other emigrants) these places soon became a-home-away-from-home. They were modest and *gemutlich*, serving home-made food, and vibrating with life until late at night, reminding him of the Budapest of his student days. There he would wallow in the pleasures of traditional Hungarian dishes: *rakot krumppli*, chicken paprika, beef noodle or cherry soup, stuffed pepper, chopped liver, Gerbau cakes or Sacher torte, and, most of all, espresso *alongé*. Schoenauer was totally at ease in this poly-lingual café society. It embodied a sophisticated, urbane social world he tried to nourish and understand in his professional work.

In 1995 the Order of Architects of Quebec honoured Schoenauer with the Médaille de Mérite. Then in March of 1999 the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture bestowed him with a Distinguished Professor Award. Just months before his death, he learned that his alma mater, the Technical University of Budapest, intended to recognise him with an honorary Doctorate (Artes Liberales), which was to be conferred in 2002.

D. Covo is the Director of the School of Architecture, McGill University. This article (p. 3) was written in collaboration with A. Adams, D. Drummond, A. Sheppard and D. Theodore.



4. Schoenauer's home in Reghin, Hungary. Schoenauer spent his entire youth and teens in this house, which was built by his father, Hugo. The house has been converted to a kindergarten.



# NORBERT SCHOENAUER: PLANNER

JEANNE M. WOLFE



1. Fermont, view looking south towards lake.
2. Fermont, aerial photo looking towards windscreen building in summer.
3. Fermont, town map.
4. Fermont, site layout plan, roof view.
5. Fermont, katabatic winds and the windscreen building, plan diagram.



Norbert Schoenauer was an urban planner of extraordinary renown. He was an inquisitive researcher, an innovative designer and a generous humanist. He trained in planning at McGill with Harold Spence Sales, graduating in 1959. His thesis, on the morphology of the villages along the Richelieu valley reflects his profound interest in landscape, natural systems and the built environment.<sup>1</sup> The appreciation of physical geography, the shape of landforms, natural drainage patterns and vegetation was impressed upon us students of Spence Sales by his sensuous love of landscape and its interpretation, long before influential writings such as McHarg's "Design with Nature" were published.

After graduation, Schoenauer worked for a while in the Spence Sales office on site planning for the Place Victoria complex. Later, he worked with Victor Prus and Stan Seeman on the preliminary plans for Nuns Island, liberated for urban development by the building of the Champlain Bridge.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately this plan was never adopted.

But it was the planning of Fermont, a new mining settlement in the Quebec iron ore region close to the Labrador border, that broke new ground in the conception and design of isolated resource towns. Fermont, at 53° north, is an experiment in innovation, based on intensive research, and recognized around the world.

Fermont demonstrates many of Schoenauer's often articulated beliefs about the urban environment. He believed that planning and urban development should embrace, not destroy, natural landscapes, and that climatic, topographical and biophysical conditions were opportunities for better planning, not constraints on creativity. For instance, compactness: he frequently noted that the whole of old Dubrovnik occupied only the same amount of space as the McGill campus. Or intensity of social life: he claimed that he was unable to stay in Vancouver because no place he could live was near enough to a coffee shop. High rise apartments he considered completely unnecessary; high densities, livability and variety could be achieved by other means through careful design. He must be the only person in the world who has designed a polyvalent building, almost a kilometer long, which looks like a beaded string of domestic-scale houses.

The Quebec-Labrador trough began to be exploited for iron ore by the Iron Ore Company of Canada in the fifties. Schefferville was opened in 1954 with the building of the Quebec-North Shore Railway from Sept Iles. This was followed by Labrador City (1961) and Wabush (1965). By 1960 the Quebec-Cartier Mining Company (QCM) had built railway from Port Cartier to Gagnon (1960), and a

concentrator at Lac Jeannine, to process ore from Mount Reed, and later Fire Lake. By the beginning seventies the QCM had decided to exploit Mount Wright, over 200 kilometers further north and thus extended the railway, and began planning for a new town.

The firms of Desnoyers Schoenauer and Desnoyers Mercure Leziy Gagnon were chosen as architect-planners for the project, with SNC (Surveyor, Nenninger and Chenevert) as engineers. They were involved from the very beginning, including the site selection process. Schoenauer often described how he was flown over the tumbling landscape of rocks, rivers, lakes and bogs, stunted forests, the cut of the railway line and exploration tracks, in search of the perfect site. He was looking for a south-facing slope to maximize exposure to sunshine, preferably convex in order to promote the draining of cold air away from the site, close to a lake to profit from the beauties of nature, with good views of mountains, and forested so that the trees might serve as windbreaks. He found it on the west shores of Lake Daviault, a little west of the Quebec-Labrador border.

The preliminary research engaged in two tasks. The first was to investigate the ways of ameliorating the very severe climate of this sub-arctic region. Seven months of the year it has an average temperature of below freezing; there are severe northerly winds and an accumulation of 3 to 4 metres of snow per year, with little or no melting before spring. The second was to understand the needs of northern dwellers. Canada has a long history of managing remote resource towns, and experience was to be a teacher.

His climatic investigations led Schoenauer to Scandinavia, and the work of Ralph Erskine, a cold region expert who had been responsible for several new towns in Swedish Lapland, including Svappavara.<sup>3</sup> Here a windscreen building protected the rest of the town from the furious winter winds, creating microclimates on its south side. This principle was adopted by Schoenauer, who calculated that the effect of a windscreen extended for a distance of forty times its height on the downwind side. He had this assumption experimentally tested by Professor Teakson of the University of Guelph, using a three-dimensional model, and simulating fluid mechanics and snow accumulation by sand.<sup>4</sup> While it was shown the snow accumulation would be higher in the immediate lee of the windshield (due to an over-the-roof eddy), the gross effect of such a building in diverting wind from the site and reducing velocities would be considerable. Further, street-orientations would reduce snow accumulation.

Katabatic winds caused by cold air flowing downwards after sunset, which can cool at rates of 3 degrees C per 300 metres of gradient, would be diverted to flow down the ravined stream valley to the west of the site and to Lake Daviault to the east. The roof configurations, a relatively low pitch, were judged optimum for minimizing snow load.

A second line of investigation evaluated the needs of northern residents. A group of families from nearby Gagnon who were to move to Fermont were consulted on housing and design matters. In a deliberate effort to move away from the suburban-like single-family detached housing so typical of northern towns, and yet so unsuited to the climate, it had been proposed that the mix of housing would be one third in the wind-screen building, one third in terraces and one third in single family detached or semi-detached houses. The early 1970s were the time of the first energy crisis, and clearly in a region where, for instance, all water lines and fire hydrants must be heated, higher densities would save both energy and infrastructure costs. It was interesting to discover that most people would have preferred single-family housing, citing the need to get away from the close involuntary social contact occasioned by living in a small community. Because of this, the mix ended up as 54% single family (370 detached, 214 semi-detached), 14% row housing (144), and 32% apartments (226 family, 118 single rooms) in the wind-shield building, for a total of 1072 units. By 1984 there was also a 213 unit trailer park to accommodate the overflow population.<sup>5</sup>

The consultation also included an investigation of desirable design features for the housing: the relationships of kitchens and dining rooms, day spaces and bedrooms and the like. A major innovation was the introduction of a large vestibule (or "mud-room") to provide both a good way of entering the house without losing all the heat, and plenty of space for dressing and removing the major outdoor gear needed in such an extreme climate. In all residential buildings, rooms for daytime use were positioned to face southeast, south or southwest in order to profit from both the thermal and psychological benefits of sunshine. Only bedrooms and utility rooms face north.

Three overall principals thus guided the design of the site: a compact plan to minimize distance to the community centre and costs of infrastructure construction and maintenance; a wind-shield building to combat the sub-arctic climate; and a climate controlled pedestrian way to link all community facilities.<sup>6</sup> The final design of Fermont is a roughly square 76 ha. (190 acre) townsite, bounded on its north side by a 950 metre long windshield building, link-

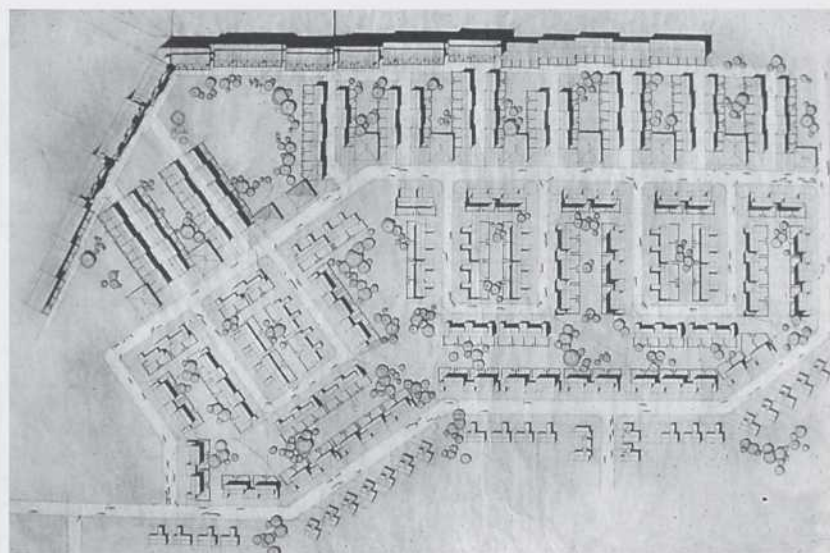
ing all the community facilities, and housing 344 apartments. South of this complex is a series of terraced houses, and south again, single family housing, the whole surrounded by carefully preserved forest. The town was opened in 1972, and received its letters patent as a municipality in 1974.

The five-storey windshield building is of particular interest. Locally known as *le mur* (the wall), the Daviault building looks less like a wall than a series of sequential houses, clad in brown-painted steel siding. It forms the main spine for all of the community activities, with an interior mall linking an education centre, municipal offices, a shopping centre, and a recreation centre. The education facilities occupy the southwestern end of the complex where the wall has a slight bend, so that from the air it looks like an ice hockey stick. This bend encloses the school children's outdoor playground, creating a sunny microclimate.

Since exposure to sunshine is not critical to their operation, the other community facilities are located on the north side of the wall. Here vehicle access and parking for both users and servicing is easily provided without impinging on the residential areas. The administrative area includes a CLSC (health centre), municipal offices and fire and police services. The shopping area contains a supermarket, a post-office and a variety of stores including a liquor store, bar, brasserie, restaurant and hotel. The recreation centre provides a hockey rink, curling rink, bowling alley, a swimming pool and various other ancillary uses.

Housing in the wall consists of both family apartments and single occupancy rooms, the latter for unmarried iron industry workers. (In most mining towns they would be housed in a *garçonnerie* [dormitory accommodation], but in Fermont it was felt that they would be happier integrated into the general society.) The apartments are served by two corridors running the length of the building, one being the ground floor public mall from which levels one and two are accessed, and the other on the fourth floor giving access to levels three to five, where the units are cleverly arranged in split level fashion. All units have natural cross-ventilation.

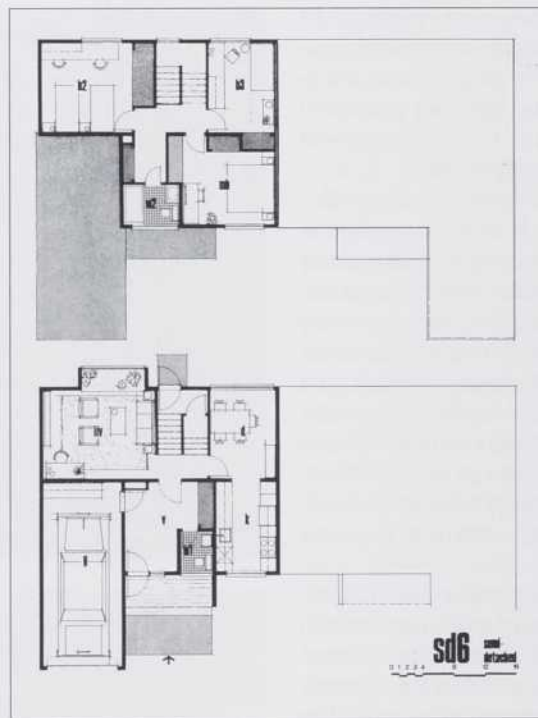
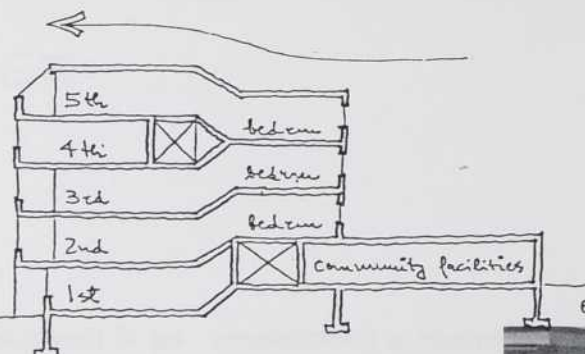
The rest of the housing, whether terraced, semi-detached or detached, is all wood construction, with a variety of dimensions, interior arrangements and number of bedrooms. In the interests of speed and efficiency they were all prefabricated by Les Habitations Desourdy at St. Jean sur Richelieu in 3.66 metre (12 ft.)-wide modules and shipped north for assembly. It was intended that the uniform red cedar cladding remain untreated to weather and fit in with the wild and forested landscape, but subsequently residents have often painted window frames and



*Katabatic winds and the windscreen building*



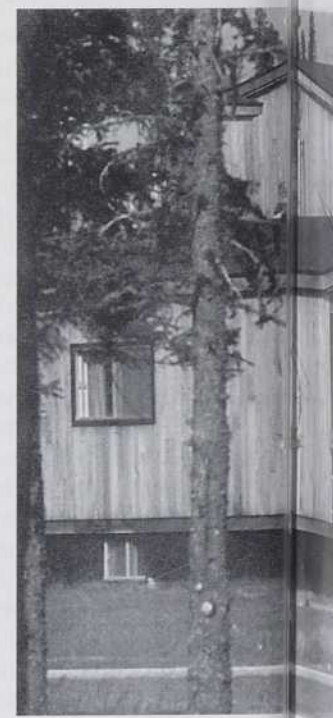
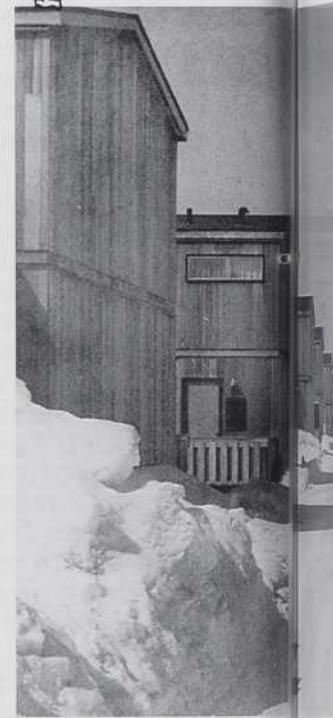
Cross section of  
windscreen  
building



#### PRIDE AT FERMONT

I think I am proud of [a] few things. The engineers proposed that all the buildings in Fermont should derive their energy from oil imported from Alberta. I could not understand why such a thing should occur when Hydro Quebec was over there—and anyway, if electricity stops, everything stops, even oil heating. I was very much against it. But the engineers proved with their own paper that it was a cheaper solution. We had a meeting; the president of the company was there and I said to them: it's true, it's cheaper, but [there are better ways to compare] how expensive or how cheap the two systems are. In my opinion, it's cheaper to do it electric. So he says: Why? Well, first of all, you don't have to buy a furnace for every house; you don't have to have an oil tank for every house; you don't have to buy a furnace to have a big central heating system for an apartment building. The [oil] heating system has to be manned 24 hours a day so you need three teams of people looking after it. And all these expenses, including chimneys for every building, you pay after taxes. The electrical bill you deduct from taxes. And he says: we go electric. You see, they understood. I don't think one could have made such a great point [simply] by saying:

I am against pollution.  
So I am very proud.



6. Fermont, cross-section of windscreen building.
7. Fermont, bungalow plan.
8. Fermont, apartment in windscreen building, plan.
9. Fermont, semi-detached housing, plan.
10. Fermont, townhouse, plan.
11. Fermont, bungalows.
12. Fermont, road leeward of windscreen building.
13. Fermont, school in winter.



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12

trim, and added fences or other embellishments or personal identification features.

Circulation patterns and parking in the town site were clearly thought out. Access from the highway is from the northwest, and gives onto the service and parking areas on the north side of the windshield building complex. The residential area was carefully planned to prevent excessive accumulation of snow on the roads, and to avoid overly long straight stretches that promote wind funnelling. North-south bands of spruce are preserved between housing clumps to break the northwesterly winds, and between the townsite and the lake to preserve the natural drainage and to prevent ecological damage to its waters from street run-off. There are no cross roads in the interests of safety. Since heavy snow accumulation blocks visibility at corners, all intersections are "T" junctions. Driveways for individual houses are minimized to save on snow removal costs. Garages are unheated to save on energy consumption. While parking for residents of the row housing was to have been underground with connecting tunnels to the windshield building, this was found to be excessively expensive, and so space is provided in unheated community garages north of each of the access lanes. Parking for apartment residents is located in lots and parking shelters north of the wall.

Pedestrian circulation was also carefully laid out. The compactness of the design means that it takes less than ten minutes to walk to the community centre from the most distant part of the town. Roads are provided with one sidewalk, usually on the more southerly side, so that ploughed snow can be deposited on the north side where it might melt faster in the sunshine in spring, while providing a break from the wind in winter. Pathways other than sidewalks are provided to give the most direct routes to the Daviault building, which has many entrances so that people can access it quickly in inclement weather. A pathway along the south side of the building provides an alternative to the interior pedestrian mall in summer, or for those just tired of being inside.

Has Fermont succeeded in its objectives? An evaluation made in 1984 suggests that it has.<sup>7</sup> In terms of the three original principles, compactness, a windscreen, and protected access to community facilities, it is much appreciated by residents. Calculations showed that in 1984, the town had a density almost double that of Gagnon, 41.9 to 22.9 persons per hectare. Average length of roads per resident was 2.5 meters compared with 4.5 for Gagnon, clearly demonstrating efficient land use and road pattern. A resident survey indicated that 82% of the respondents were convinced that the Daviault build-



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ing had an ameliorative effect on the climate, although they were not in agreement about how far that effect extends from the wall. Finally, most residents appreciated the multifunctional centre, although they were split 58% to 42% about whether they would actually like to live in it. Not surprisingly, those who like it are those that live there, along with the young singles and couples without children. Those with children and the occupants of single family housing were not attracted.

Postscript. Most single industry mining towns are built for a life span of twenty to twenty five years, then the resource runs out. Mining operations at Schefferville were closed in 1982 and at Gagnon in 1985, the latter being razed to the ground. Fears for a similar fate prompted the residents of Fermont to establish their own self-financed mining exploration fund in 1985. A workable find of graphite has been discovered near the town.

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# NORBERT SCHOENAUER MEETS POLITICS

## THE WOODROFFE NEW COMMUNITY PROJECT

GARY HACK

In the 1970s, a turning point for Canadian housing policy and programs, Norbert Schoenauer was attracted to Ottawa by the promise he could help create new models for Canadian communities.

In 1973, a youthful William Teron became President of Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), and set about transforming the plain-gray institution into an activist and innovative centre for housing and urban policy and design. Teron's reputation preceded him: a self-made developer, close friend and confidant of the Prime Minister, he had by his 40<sup>th</sup> birthday become one of the largest builders in the Ottawa region. He created the satellite new town of Kanata just beyond the Ottawa greenbelt, and a number of exemplary urban housing and commercial projects.

Over his six-year tenure, Teron remade CMHC, decentralizing many of its lending functions from Ottawa to provincial offices, and replacing the corporation's direct design and construction activities with a series of programs aimed at enticing builders and non-profit institutions into the business of providing affordable housing. He recruited a cadre of high-energy young professionals to lead the organization. To keep his hand in development, Teron greatly expanded CMHC's applied research capabilities. He created a think tank and development group reporting to him, with the ostensible purpose of inventing new forms of housing and communities, and undertaking projects to demonstrate their potential. In the space of a few short years, the team would become the Canadian government's lead development organization for federal lands, tackling waterfronts, rail yards and retired military bases in dozens of Canadian cities, often on prime urban sites. Just before his departure from CMHC he renamed the organization, the "Canada" Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

Teron was familiar with Schoenauer's work at Fermont, and took a direct hand in recruiting him as the senior advisor to CMHC's new research and demonstration program. Schoenauer was, of course, no stranger to CMHC, having been a member of a loose knit circle of housing designers that worked with Ian MacLennan, the chief architect, on public housing projects during the era when the corporation designed most public housing projects across Canada.

Two of the most visible sites assigned by the government to CMHC were in the national capital region – the 141 hectare Woodroffe site in Nepean Township (now the City of Nepean), and the 50 hectare Le Breton Flats site immediately west of Parliament Hill in Ottawa. Both sites were announced with a flurry of publicity. They were to be developed as demonstration projects, to become new models of

urbanization, tapping the ideas of architects, planners and urban thinkers across the country. They would continue the tradition of using Ottawa as a laboratory for innovations in urban planning.

While the federal government theoretically had the ability to override local development rules and codes, Teron took pains to assure local officials that the development team would be attentive to their wishes, and would submit to normal development approval processes, working within the discipline forced on private developers. On more than one occasion he noted that development where no rules apply and cost is not a concern – such as at Montreal's Habitat 67 – is not repeatable by private developers, and has little impact. I recall that Andy Hayden, the chief elected official of Nepean was more straightforward: "If they don't play by our rules, we will simply cut off their water supply. We wish them luck in drilling their own wells."

The Woodroffe site presented a unique development opportunity. Located 10 km from central Ottawa, it was the last large parcel within the Greenbelt suitable for new housing and commercial uses. Only a few minutes from downtown via the Queensway, it was bordered by lands reserved for an extension of the Ottawa River Parkway. The federal government had purchased the land as a site for future offices, but the decision to decentralize a large fraction of government employment to other Canadian cities in the early 1970s rendered it surplus. The site was generally flat, with remnant hedgerows that had divided agricultural fields, a fine farmhouse, and a 20 ha woodlot at its southeastern edge. Many developers had lobbied to purchase the site while it was in the ownership of the National Capital Commission (NCC) prior to the decision to transfer it to CMHC.

The design and planning team selected for the site consisted of a Toronto architect and planner, and an army of financial, market, transportation, engineering, management and social development consultants. A great deal of time was spent at the outset consulting with neighbours, local agency heads, and focus groups on the ingredients of the community. Gradually, a set of objectives began to emerge: it should be a socially mixed community, with a complete range of facilities to support everyday life; it should have walkable neighbourhoods, favouring pedestrians and bicycles over automobiles; it should encourage the use of public transit for long distance travel; the layout and design of housing should be energy efficient; and it should have employment opportunities in the community, encouraging residents to live near their work. To accomplish these objectives it would need to accommodate a wide

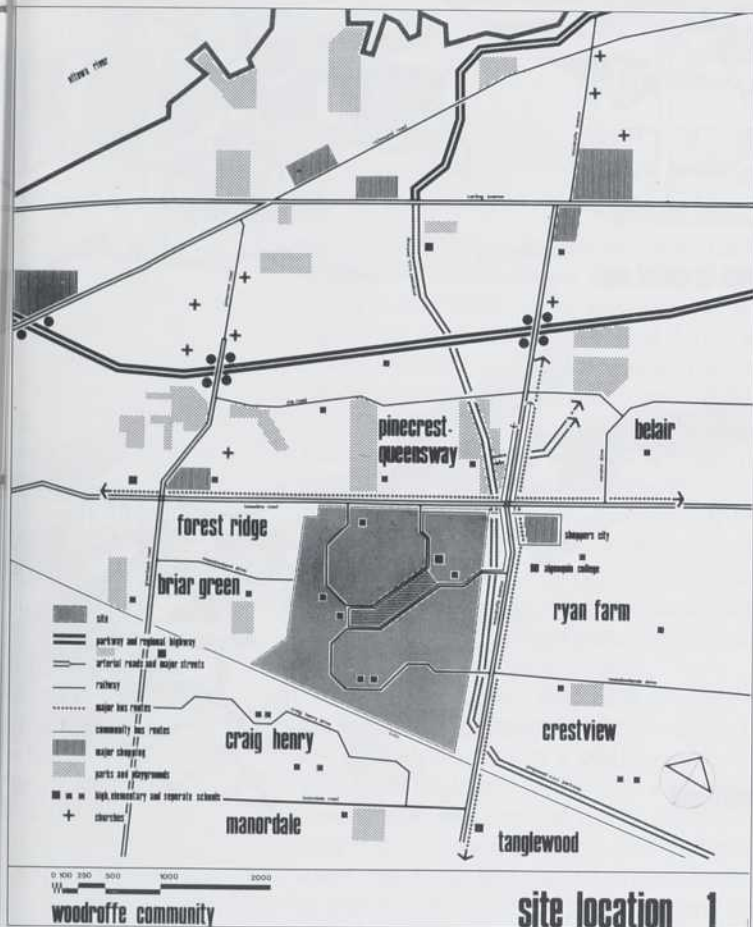
range of housing types, affordable to middle income residents, who had seen their home ownership prospects evaporate during a recent period of double-digit inflation.

These issues were debated at length at weekly meetings. What exactly was meant by a "socially mixed" population? Should there be varied ages as well as incomes, varied family types as well as life styles? Was this a good location for all types of residents, or only some sectors of the population? Would it be possible to develop an innovative community on leased land, as the NCC favored, or was it necessary to sell the Woodroffe lands? On and on, topic by topic, the debates spiralled on.

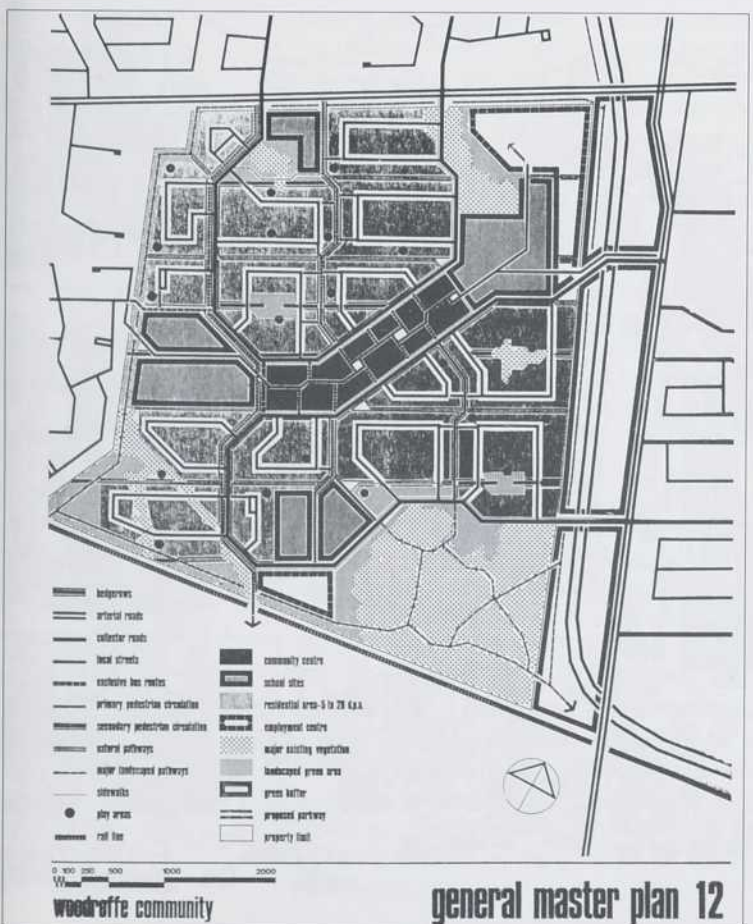
Schoenauer faithfully attended these meetings, but with growing impatience. To him, these niceties avoided the central issues of how the community would be designed. More than once he voiced the view that the population of any community inevitably varies over time, as people grow up or grow older, or decide to relocate elsewhere in the metropolitan area and are replaced by others who may or may not share their values.

As the weekly debates among consultants continued, Schoenauer could sit still no longer; he prowled the outer edges of the meeting room, stepped outside for a cigarette, and otherwise suppressed his discontent. Most of the discussion seemed irrelevant to him. The ingredients of a good community were not that complicated. Adequate densities were needed, with imaginative housing forms. Attention had to be given to orientation and winds, especially in winter months. Shopping and services should be at the centre of the community. Adequate parks and educational facilities, of course, were essential. A well-ordered hierarchy of circulation routes would make the community legible. He had in mind dozens of models for Woodroffe, drawn from European new towns and smaller Canadian experiments. Wasn't it time to get on with the design?

When the moment came to make the shift to actually design the community, politics intruded to add further complexity. Nepean Township provided its list of needs: at least four large school sites were to be provided to deal with new residents as well as the shortage of schools in surrounding areas; an additional large site was expected for a new regional vocational school; open space was to be provided at a rate of 3 acres for each 1000 residents, so that it could serve not only the site's residents but those surrounding Woodroffe. All utilities were to be placed underground, and township standards for roads and infrastructure were to be followed, ensuring suburban type rights-of-way.



**THE AMERICAN DREAM**  
*The American dream is to live in a single-family detached house, and I think over 70% of the dwelling units in the United States are of this type. Now, this type of housing was possible in North America because they have a lot of land, relatively speaking—wealthy nation—the ownership of car is not a luxury but a necessity. This type of urban sprawl runs amok, in my opinion, in North America, and is totally wasteful.*



1. Woodroffe New Community, Ottawa, 1976, site plan.
2. Woodroffe, general master plan.

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Laying these needs on the ground, the planners found that the area available for housing and community shopping had shrunk considerably, as had the latitude for innovation. But the final requirements were the most demanding: the Township insisted that no development would occur until the National Capital Commission extended the Ottawa River Parkway to the site, and that express bus service to downtown Ottawa be provided. The Township's elected officials considered the Woodroffe site to be their best chance to solve the area's mounting commuter congestion. That CMHC had little leverage over the agencies that would need to deliver transit mattered little to Nepean. They pointed out that both CMHC and NCC reported to the same minister. NCC, for its part, was also making development of the site difficult by hardening its stance that the Woodroffe site remain Crown land, to be developed on a leasehold basis.

The mindset the Toronto planners brought to the Woodroffe project was a precursor of today's "new urbanism." They suggested a routine system of residential blocks, with a mixture of housing types along them. Commercial areas would be located along Baseline Road, to attract passing traffic as well as local residents, thereby increasing the range of commercial outlets located on the site. The existing hedgerows were to be retained as natural divisions of the site, and the woodlot kept as an area open to all. The planners argued that the area would be unique in the suburbs – no curving streets or lengthy cul-de-sacs, but blocks with houses of various sizes and types modelled on fine older neighbourhoods in Canadian cities, like the Glebe in central Ottawa. And it could be developed piecemeal, as demand suggested.

Schoenauer became increasingly critical of the direction the project was taking. His models, drawn from Scandinavian new towns, and examples of older residential areas in Quebec, represented highly structured patterns of communities. He believed in a social gradient – houses, "precincts" and neighbourhoods – with distinct social and recreational opportunities available at each scale. Social patterns could be structured, and shouldn't simply be left to chance in a community. Shopping areas were the common grounds of a community and should be located at the centre of neighbourhoods, not at their edges where they merged with miles of commercial strips. Curved roadways slowed traffic, while straight ones encouraged speeding. All of these views were at odds with the consultants. About the only ideas Schoenauer could countenance in the early plans for Woodroffe were retaining the hedgerows and woodlots.

After the better part of a year of intense work, the Woodroffe project appeared to be going nowhere. No one was inspired by the emerging plans and designs; they seemed too ordinary to motivate the many groups and investors that would be needed to see Woodroffe through to reality. The approval process was deadlocked over the demand for express transit service. Financial models for the Woodroffe development indicated that the project would need large amounts of capital for infrastructure, and would do well to break even, given the land consuming demands by the Nepean Township and the amenities and facilities desired. Sensing things were off the rails and uncertain how to proceed, Teron held a series of meetings among his senior staff and advisors to make mid-course corrections.

The decision that emerged from the review of the project was to abandon the evolving design for Woodroffe, end the mandate of the consulting team, and shift the responsibility for producing a new plan to Schoenauer. Among all the participants, he had the most persuasive views of what was possible at Woodroffe. This was his opportunity to translate ideas into reality – the last best hope to get the project back on track. Schoenauer quickly tapped Adrian Sheppard, his former partner, and assembled a team of experienced housing planners and designers to work with him. After two intense months of work they had the outline of a plan.

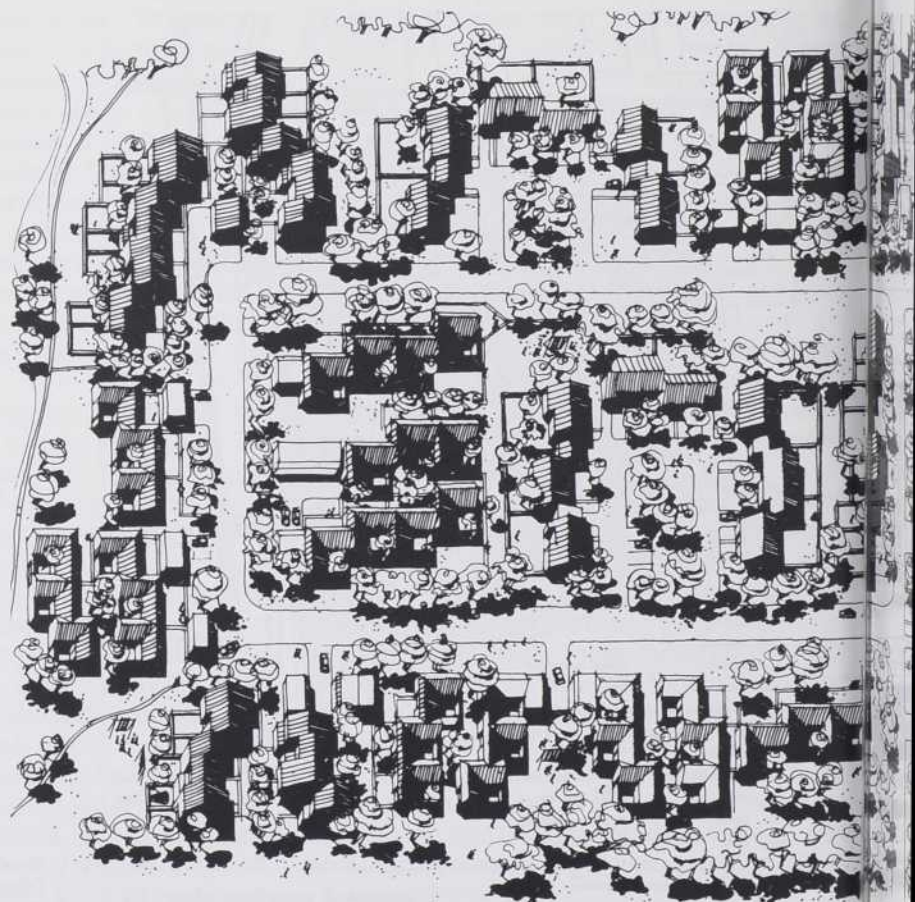
Schoenauer's design for Woodroffe was worlds apart from the earlier schemes. Two loop roads provided access to residents, from Baseline Road on the northern edge and Woodroffe Avenue on the eastern edge of the site. The two loop roads did not meet, to prevent traffic from cutting through the neighbourhood, and no housing would front on them. Continuing the hierarchy of roads, smaller residential roads provided access to seventeen housing precincts, each with a distinct density and housing form. Marvellous freehand sketches and aerial views of the development, in the style characteristic of Schoenauer's books on housing, illustrated the layout of housing, roads and open spaces. In all, 12-14,000 residents would occupy the Woodroffe site.



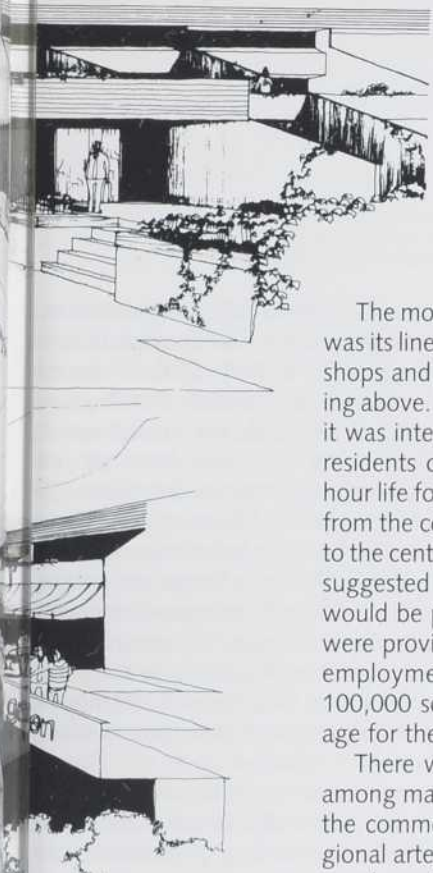
side entrance to central mall



view of central mall



3. Woodroffe, perspective views of central mall and side entrance.
4. Woodroffe, typical housing precinct study.
5. Woodroffe, court-garden house groupings.



The most striking feature of Schoenauer's scheme was its linear spine, almost 1 km in length, lined with shops and services on the ground level, with housing above. Located at the centre of the development, it was intended as the community crossroads, with residents of upper story apartments providing 24-hour life for the area. Greenways extending outward from the core would entice nearby residents to walk to the centre, rather than drive. Sketches for the core suggested that only a modest amount of parking would be provided. At its western edge, large sites were provided for a regional vocational school and employment centre, the latter to accommodate 100,000 sq m of offices, providing further patronage for the central spine.

There was a great deal of skepticism, however, among marketing experts over the ability to sustain the commercial area in a location remote from regional arterial roads. Schoenauer explained with his usual passion that people would gladly drive to the area if it was good enough, and that the government might consider distributing offices to this area to give it a greater range of activities and people. His models were the centres of Scandinavian new towns ringing urban areas, albeit here at a smaller scale. He believed that if CMHC were to take the risk of building the centre, people and shops would be attracted to it. But nobody could point to an example of a small successful suburban community core in a Canadian city.

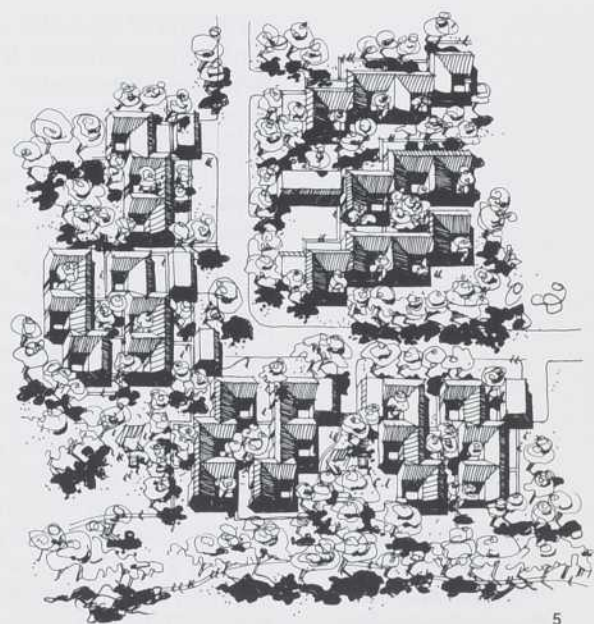
Even with these doubts, the project began its long march in quest of plan approvals from Nepean Township, the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton, two school boards, the Ontario Government, and the NCC. New issues surfaced in the process. While the Nepean Planning Board insisted that streets in the Woodroffe area be linked to those in the adjacent Briargreen subdivision, residents of the area rose up in opposition, fearing traffic and the prospect of attracting less desirable neighbours into their area.

Neighbourhood groups also insisted upon costly improvements to the arterial road system before any development occurred on the Woodroffe site. And none of the earlier issues – express mass transit service to the site, leasehold development, and the viability of the commercial areas – had gone away. The negotiations dragged on, and required direct intervention by Teron on several occasions. On December 1977, almost precisely two years after the plan for Woodroffe was published, agreement was reached in principle between CMHC and the local governments to allow the development to move forward. Agreement by the province on the secondary plan would take many more months.

Compared to other projects, two years is not a lengthy period to obtain approval of a project of the complexity of Woodroffe. But it represented a loss of momentum during a critical time. During the intervening months, attention began to wane. Many of the staff, including Schoenauer, shifted their energies to other projects including the planning of Le Breton Flats and the Vieux Port in Montreal. More importantly, politicians and senior officials no longer spoke in glowing terms about the project. A new leadership team at the NCC replaced the earlier group that had shared authorship for the project, and expressed skepticism about it. And larger events intervened: the troubled Ministry of State for Urban Affairs (MSUA) was downsized 1976, in deference to provincial wishes, and handed to Teron to manage in addition to his CMHC responsibilities. Suddenly he was an actor in national negotiations over urban issues, and projects across the country such as Harbourfront in Toronto, begun by MSUA, required his attention and his staff's time. Woodroffe was now one among many projects, and there was little political advantage to be gained by pouring more resources into the national capital region.

While ultimately approved by all bodies, the Woodroffe New Community project died through neglect and for lack of a champion willing to persuade the national government to make the investments in infrastructure and assume the risks necessary to build the new community. In 1979, Teron returned to the private sector, taking with him several of the members of the demonstration group to pursue development projects in Toronto and other cities. Schoenauer returned to his teaching position at McGill, and other members of the CMHC development group left for their own pursuits. Not long after Bill Teron's departure, the new leadership of CMHC requested a change in the approved plans for Woodroffe to ease the marketing of the site to private developers. The new plan removed the commercial spine, and showed collector roads more in line with prevailing suburban development practices. Ultimately, Woodroffe was developed by suburban Ottawa builders, and shows few traces of the ambitions that Schoenauer and his CMHC colleagues once voiced.

The demise of the Woodroffe new community project was a deep personal disappointment to Schoenauer. It would have been a magnificent capstone for his lifelong pursuit of understanding and designing housing; instead it remained only a dream. It would be easy to lay the fault at the doorstep of weak-willed bureaucrats and public officials, as I suspect Schoenauer did. But the explanation is not that



simple, and the story highlights sharply the transition in Canada and abroad from an era of government sponsored housing and new communities, to negotiated development dominated by private sector organizations.

The seemingly endless approval processes that ultimately spelled the slow death of the Woodroffe project have become routine, and with them, developers are discouraged from pursuing large dreams. Today, few developers entertain thoughts of deliberately shaping the social life of communities, or inventing wholly new forms of housing, and are given little encouragement by governments to do so. Projects are scaled down to minimize public opposition, tried-and-true housing forms have become the norm. More importantly, the expectation that governments might lead by example, as CMHC did over the first 35 years of its history, seems long forgotten. The responsibility falls to architects and designers to educate the public on possibilities, as Norbert Schoenauer did through his long and distinguished career.

Garry Hack is Dean of the Graduate School of Fine Arts at the University of Pennsylvania. Educated as an architect and planner in Canada and the US, he was general manager of CMHC's demonstration program during the period Norbert Schoenauer headed the development group. He has planned waterfronts, downtowns, mixed use projects and residential communities in Canada, the US and abroad.

# UNE COLLABORATION PROFESSIONNELLE

MAURICE DESNOYERS

Ma première rencontre avec Norbert Schoenauer remonte au tout début de 1964. Le groupe Molson Development de Toronto m'avait mandaté pour préparer un plan directeur de développement pour la rive sud à Longueuil, partant du pont Jacques Cartier en allant vers l'est sur une distance d'un mile environ. Devant l'ampleur de la tâche j'ai fait appel à l'architecte Victor Prus avec qui j'avais déjà collaboré sur plusieurs projets, dont l'école James Lyng à Montréal et l'Autostade à Expo 67. Prus m'a proposé d'impliquer Norbert qui avait dirigé pour lui la préparation du plan directeur pour l'ensemble de l'Île des Soeurs. Ce fut le début de notre longue collaboration professionnelle. Par la suite je faisais directement appel à ses services pour tout ce qui avait trait à l'urbanisme et le design urbain dans mes projets. Ensemble nous avons participé au concours provincial d'architecture pour le Pavillon du Québec à l'occasion d'Expo 67 (et pour lequel nous nous sommes placés en troisième position) et nous avons entrepris le mandat du plan directeur du campus scolaire de l'école régionale de St-Hyacinthe.

Norbert était devenu mon maître à penser et j'étais convaincu qu'il était dans notre intérêt réciproque d'établir un lien permanent à nos activités professionnelles. Pour formaliser notre association j'ai pris le prétexte d'une invitation à participer à une équipe multidisciplinaire pour laquelle j'avais besoin de sa collaboration. L'équipe avait été mise en place par la SCHL, et devait être dirigée par les Conseillers en Projets Communautaires Ltée de Toronto. Ceux-ci avaient en plus la charge d'établir le programme de développement pour La Cité de Havre, incluant la jetée Mackay, le secteur de l'Autostade et l'auto-parc Victoria. Il n'était pas dans la nature de Schoenauer d'accepter facilement une association mais, devant l'importance du mandat et surtout à cause des atomes crochus qui existaient entre nous, nous nous sommes donnés la main. L'association Desnoyers-Schoenauer était née.

Norbert rejetait spontanément la notion de concept fermé : pour lui la création d'un produit fini et complet allait contre l'idée d'une évolution dans la vie. Son grand principe en planning était basé sur la notion du schéma ouvert, qu'il appelait *open-ended planning*. Un projet ne constituait pour lui qu'une première étape qui devait demeurer ouvert à des développements ultérieurs successifs et former à chaque étape un plus grand tout complet en soi et supérieur en qualité.

Le Village de l'Anse, un projet résidentiel de 391 unités de logements dans le quartier St-Roch sur la Rivière St-Charles à Québec, fut le premier projet où il a pu appliquer ce principe en région urbaine. Sa forme linéaire en redent lui donna la possibilité de

répartir les unités sur un maximum de 6 étages dont la hauteur, comme il aimait à répéter, ne dépassait pas celle d'un arbre adulte. Cette morphologie a aussi permis de doter 75 % des unités d'habitation d'une ventilation transversale, et d'aménager des jardins terrasses au niveau du sol pour 20% des unités. La Villa Major et le Bourg Ste-Adèle à Ste-Adèle, les Résidences Hillside à Westmount, les projets Wentworth à Côte-St-Luc et celui des usines Angus pour le compte de la société Immobilière Marathon, les plans directeur de Windmill Point à l'Île Perrot, et celui de Brampton pour le compte de Goldfan Holding de Toronto, ainsi que le projet pour la nouvelle ville de Woodroffe près d'Ottawa pour le compte de la Société Canadienne d'Hypothèque et de logement, et le plan de développement et de design urbain pour le compte du Vieux Port de Montréal sont autant de projets résidentiels à densité moyenne qui ont été réalisés suivant ces principes de planification.

Norbert talonnait un autre grand principe dans son travail : l'adhérence à une philosophie et une méthodologie qui consiste à maintenir dans le processus de planification une flexibilité constante, démarche qu'il surnommait *action-planning approach*, et qui représentait une déviation par rapport à la pratique professionnelle conventionnelle. Les objectifs étaient donc d'éviter de se laisser prendre par un système qui a tendance à figer au départ toutes les variables, d'admettre l'interdépendance des différents stades du processus de planning, et de permettre d'incorporer en tout temps toutes nouvelles informations (*feedback*). Pour Norbert, l'idéal était de réunir dans une personne toutes les disciplines impliquées dans le processus qui devenait ainsi architecte, promoteur, développeur, entrepreneur et agent immobilier. Cette façon d'opérer admettait de réajuster les priorités à chaque étape, de respecter les objectifs ultimes et les budgets établis, et surtout de répondre aux innombrables problèmes imprévus au début sans mettre en danger le produit final. Ces directives ont permis à notre bureau de devenir pionnier dans le recyclage de bâtiments anciens et a rendu possible la réalisation des projets Les Jardins Prince-Arthur (qui s'est mérité en 1974 la médaille Vincent Massey pour l'amélioration de l'environnement urbain), Le Cours le Royer (qui s'est mérité le prix d'Honneur National pour la conservation du patrimoine), ainsi que Le cours St-Pierre et Habitat Place-Royale dans le Vieux-Montréal.

Enfin vint la grande aventure de Fermont, la réalisation complète d'une ville de 6,000 habitants dans une zone subarctique. Norbert avait l'habitude de dire : « C'est bien de savoir faire une chose mais c'est plus important d'avoir l'opportunité de la réaliser. » Dans le cas de Fermont c'est le hasard qui a créé

l'occasion. Un jour un ancien collègue de classe au primaire devenu ingénieur en chef du département de métallurgie auprès de la firme SNC m'informe qu'une ville nouvelle va être construite dans le grand nord du Québec et me demande si je suis intéressé à en être l'architecte, et si oui, de lui écrire sur une seule page comment je vois la conception d'une ville dans un tel contexte. Norbert Schoenauer élabore donc un court texte. Dans un premier temps notre agence est retenue par SNC pour former une équipe, laquelle est invitée par la suite en compétition avec deux autres grandes entreprises de construction. Norbert, ne voulant être impliqué que dans la partie urbanisme, nous formons deux sociétés : Desnoyers Schoenauer pour l'urbanisme et Desnoyers Mercure Leziy Gagnon pour l'architecture.

Les trois grandes sociétés de construction sont convoquées devant le Conseil d'administration de la compagnie Québec Cartier Mining. Le président nous demande quelle était notre expérience dans la planification de villes nordiques. Tout le monde se tourne alors vers Norbert qui s'empresse de dire que nous n'avons effectivement jamais été mêlés à la réalisation d'une telle ville, mais que c'était justement là notre grand avantage n'ayant aucune idée préconçue. La compagnie minière, par contre, en était à la troisième réalisation de ville au Québec et avait accumulé beaucoup d'expérience. Norbert Schoenauer affirme avec beaucoup d'assurance que riche des expériences déjà vécues par la compagnie dans les quatre formes d'établissements humains déjà réalisés, nous étions en position de faire progresser le concept de cette nouvelle ville vers une cinquième génération en exploitant la notion de création de microclimats favorables et en utilisant l'énergie solaire pour le plus grand confort des futurs habitants. Jean-Paul Gourdeau, président de SNC nous informait quelque jours plus tard de la grande nouvelle : notre groupe avait été choisi pour réaliser la nouvelle ville.

À la suite de l'expérience de Fermont, une opportunité d'agir comme architecte pour la réalisation d'une autre ville nordique nous a été présentée. J'étais évidemment très heureux de cette nouvelle chance. C'était sans compter sur l'honnêteté intellectuelle de Norbert pour qui accepter un tel mandat où le concept était déjà pré-établi représentait un retour en arrière comparativement au progrès social réalisé à Fermont. C'était aussi dans la nature de Norbert de me laisser agir seul comme architecte. J'ai finalement refusé le mandat. Même si j'en ai perdu quelques nuits de sommeil, j'étais heureux d'être resté fidèle à la philosophie de ce grand homme qui a tellement marqué ma vie.

Maurice Desnoyers est un associé de la firme Desnoyers Mercure et Associés, Architectes et ancien associé de N. Schoenauer.

## PRACTICE AND TEACHING

I was very fortunate that I also was able to practice architecture because I realized that you couldn't really teach in total abstraction. You have to know what is going on, and you have to practice, and you have to demonstrate.



Comparison of land use between the old city of Dubrovnik and a typical highway cloverleaf intersection.

## TEACHER, COLLEAGUE AND FRIEND

PIETER SIJPKES

As a freshly minted undergraduate student at McGill University in 1970, I took Norbert Schoenauer's course "History of Housing" because the grapevine in the School of Architecture had informed me that it was "pretty broadly based." After a few lectures by the soft-spoken, but spellbinding Prof. Schoenauer, it became clear that the course was not just "broadly based"—it reached all corners of the Universe. Here was a philosopher looking at the larger picture through the lens of housing history. Talking mostly without notes, he made the weekly two hours of class sometimes seem like a space trip. Even though the course was structured quite logically, using the format of a series of slide pairs which allowed for no variation after the slides were put in the trays, every lecture was unique. Schoenauer would tangentially drift off, linking the specific course material to some larger issue such as pollution, financial policies of the day, world hunger, or the need for rational deployment of world resources.

His crusade against urban sprawl was a recurrent, passionate theme. In his lovely Hungarian accent he would pronounce: "The suburbs are based on a wonderful dream of fresh air and greenery. But if you multiply that dream by a hundred thousand, you have created a nightmare." As distinctively rich as his voice was, as spare were the equally distinctive sketches that he made by the hundreds to illustrate his lectures and his writings. The single most potent image I remember was the comparison of the plan of Dubrovnik to the plan of a typical North American cloverleaf interchange. Schoenauer would put the images on the screen and then start intoning a litany of what existed within the walls of Dubrovnik: so many churches, a hospital, so many inhabitants, so many tourists... Meanwhile the emptiness of the cloverleaf became increasingly evident. The course really impressed me, and I decided to keep an eye on this friendly, erudite European.

I became Schoenauer's student again three years later when he directed my final year project. (The term "thesis" was not banded about as it is now). My project was a mixed-use commercial-housing project on the site in downtown Montreal where Concordia University's R. Howard Webster library now stands. As a design aid I was given a dog-eared, much Xeroxed copy of a little booklet entitled "Towards Optimum Standards" written by Schoenauer in 1967. One of the more difficult tasks for any student is to create domestic spaces with dimensions that allow users to furnish those spaces in an efficient way. Here was a booklet that did not say a living room or a bathroom should be this size or that: instead it showed furnishing and fixture layouts for a range of room sizes. Completely written and sketched in his own hand, I have

always admired this little publication. To this day it is copied and recopied, every copy a gift from Schoenauer.

The early 70s were the final days of "doctrinaire Modernism." Robert Venturi's book *Complexity and Contradiction in Modern Architecture* was hotly debated, but the cracks that the book had put in the dogma of Rational Modernism had not yet fully reached the design studio. And Schoenauer, having spent a lifetime in the Modernist church was very resistant to any questioning of the tenets of strict rational decision-making and complete absence of any ornament in design. He later admitted to me that he had been slow in appreciating the impact of Venturi's book, and that studio teaching had become more and more difficult as time went on and Post-Modernism became the new doctrine.

In my final year I had been appointed student Assistant to Derek Drummond. Schoenauer was Director of the School during that period, and once caught me in the corridor asking why I was not at the staff meeting that morning. I mumbled that I thought that I was not invited. He said, "Of course you are invited, and what's more, the opinions of young staff are very important; after all you guys represent the future."

One of the first things that struck me when I worked more or less regular days at McGill was Norbert's open door and welcoming demeanor. This hospitality became particularly clear when the School of Architecture moved from the McConnell building in to renovated digs in Macdonald-Harrington Building, where his office faced onto the same lobby as mine. I would see him sitting in the morning sunlight, surrounded by his books and objects from countries that he had visited. A large leafy plant that he scrupulously tended to gave a natural accent. He would always have time for a question or just a simple chat. This was so well known by students and colleagues alike that many times you had to wait in line. I still see him hunched over, smoking Gitanes, looking at some student's drawings sprawled over his desk, the smoke wafting into the sunlit air. When time became more plentiful for him after he retired at 65, he became an always-present consultant to all and sundry. In the same spirit he distributed freely his handwritten booklet on "Optimum Standards," he relished giving away his time and expertise.

Another example of this generosity was his offer to help me guide a study trip to Europe as part of the Shaver Traveling Scholarship. Norbert suggested that studying the architecture and setting of historic public baths from the town of Bath in England to the town of Spa in Belgium and on to Hungary, Romania and Turkey would be a fruitful theme for a study tour. He offered to accompany the group of

ten students and myself "as far as the Romanian border." The deprivations he suffered during the Second World War made him wary of tangling with authorities, be they Quebec separatists threatening to sever the province from Canada or officials of his home country Romania (who had robbed him of his statehood during the war). After a very successful week of traveling together, the whole group urged him to come along for the part of the trip that went through Romania. Even though he clearly longed for a visit of his homeland, he refused. He said "Pieter bring some food with you; there maybe nothing to eat in that country." I remember buying a huge Hungarian sausage at the border, just in case. The proof of how wrong he was on this point was there right at the Hungarian-Romanian border: an air-conditioned new bus was waiting for us with an excellent guide. Good food and comfortable shelter were available throughout Romania.

About five years ago, Norbert asked me whether I would be interesting in teaching his History of Housing course. I was taken aback. I knew that he loved developing and giving that course. In it he had wrapped up all the experiences of his professional life and his view on the world in general. How could I possibly take that over? He said, "Think about it, and remember, when I started to teach this course many years ago I was shaking in my boots." I offered to sit in on his course for a term and video tape it for posterity. Twenty-four hours of lectures later I was not encouraged. But he persisted, and finally I agreed that when he wanted to stop, I would take over.

One of his great gifts was that of a unique raconteur. And like a true European, he enjoyed sitting in a café with a cappuccino or a glass of wine, holding forth for hours. His opinions were ideologically to right of mine; still, when he opened up with "Pieter, you may not agree with me on this..." I knew that he probably was right. Again, his years of hardship during the war and the lessons learned from having to rely on his wits gave him a tough approach to issues such as welfare, taxes and the treatment of criminals. But he would listen attentively to other opinions, and indeed, once in awhile, even change his mind.

Norbert was my teacher, my colleague and my friend. These aspects of our relationship were like the elements of one of those Russian dolls that are self-similar in form but different in absolute size. As a student the outer doll was Norbert as a teacher; the next size doll he was my colleague and the final and biggest doll is Norbert as my friend. That is the way he appears on the shelf of my memory.

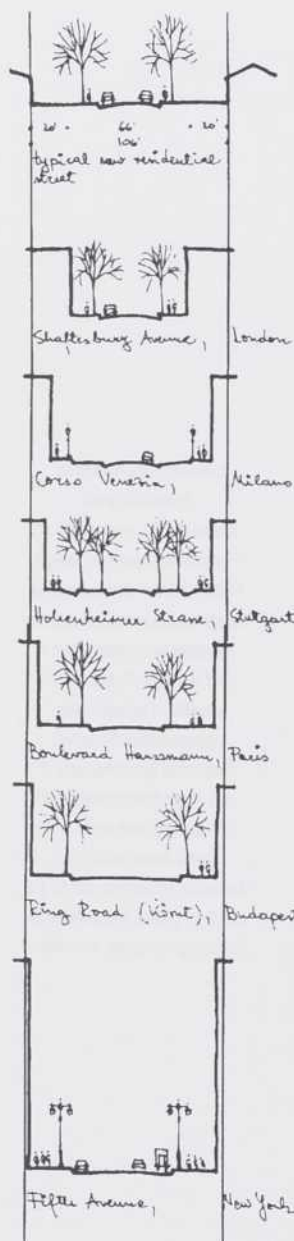
Pieter Sijpkens is an Associate Professor at the School of Architecture, McGill University

### GRADUATE SCHOOL OF HOUSING

*There was a colleague of mine who taught—I taught fifth year, he was teaching fourth year—the two of us, we went to see John Bland and said, well maybe we could start another graduate school in housing. He said well, if you have the energy and time I don't object. And that's how we did it. Actually, it turned out to be the first graduate school in housing in North America.*

# THE TEACHER, AN APPRECIATION

NADIA MERATLA



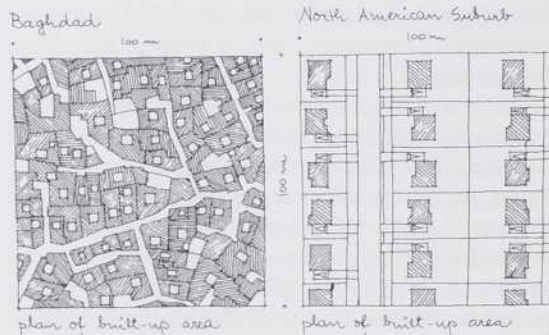
1. Comparison of street width and setbacks between a typical suburb and famous urban boulevards.
2. Comparison of land use in Baghdad and a North American suburb.
3. Portrait of Schoenauer sketched by N. Meratla during a "History of Housing" lecture.

When I was a student at the McGill University School of Architecture, Professor Schoenauer's famous courses were considered a mandatory rite of passage in the "natural" formation of an architect. He drilled his lectures with the vigour of gospel, making his enthusiasm for housing and urbanism unforgettable.

In the course "Housing Theory," for example, he elaborated a philosophy of housing and urban theory that had a logic similar to that of Jane Jacobs. In both thinkers, there is no doubting the rigour and depth of the manifesto. And the ideas are presented so rationally that not only are they comprehensible, but one can readily see how to apply them in specific design scenarios.

It is true, his door really was always open. It was only a matter of time before students discovered that Schoenauer kept a can of Danish cookies on his bookshelf and that we were at liberty to help ourselves. Every time we did he would invite us to sit down and chat. He would recount architectural tales in his lyrical, anecdotal style, and attack vehemently the particular architectural dilemma *du jour*. He always had an opinion, and, ever the teacher, he was more than willing to give it.

In his lectures for "Housing Theory," Schoenauer was particularly adept at portraying the ludicrousness of suburban ideals. Schoenauer would show one particular drawing, the perfect urban greeting card, which illustrated explicitly the complete absurdity of the lavish suburban streets and setbacks that typically exceed the dimensions of major urban arteries such as Paris' Hausmann Boulevard and New York's Fifth Avenue. Students would frown and nod in uniform accord. Then he would describe a familiar syndrome whereby if Mr. and Mrs. Average won the lottery, the first thing they would do is buy a bungalow (the archetypal outward-looking house) in the suburbs. The bungalow would be followed by the imperative purchase of an SUV to park in the driveway in order to announce what he described as "conspicuous consumption"—or the immediate symbol of "what you're worth." He portrayed the indulgence of such suburban values through vibrant descriptions of lavish plots and monotonous homes that had immaculate front lawns and backyards full of junk, all connected to extravagant infrastructures by colossal service-umbilical cords. He contrasted this farce with the sensitivity and efficiency of medium-density, mixed-use, urban housing. He recognized aesthetics as one of the fundamentals of good design, but emphasized that beauty is "inconceivable without ethics."



I remember one particular class in which he spun an especially animated tale of the Milton-Park saga in Montreal, whereby beautiful triplex housing was demolished to make way for a high-rise housing, hotel, and commercial development known as La Cité. The intensity of his lecture had him clutching the front desk, leaning over until finally the momentum of his enthusiasm made him literally slam the desk with both hands. He injected a distinct tinge of profanity into the words "La Cité." Although stunned initially by the drama of his harangue, our class broke out into applause.

The crime and malaise associated with housing projects that concentrated low-income families in high-rise towers were presented as a direct consequence of the homogeneity (rather than social diversity) and design of the towers. He believed these problems rose in direct proportion to the scale of the projects. And as an advocate of building heights that reference the limits of vegetation (i.e. habitable rooms should be no higher than the tops of mature trees) or the reach of fire department ladders, he would characteristically respond to point-tower projects in bewilderment: "Well, what do you expect?!"

In the coveted course "History of Housing," there was a depth and intrigue to his unique global perspective, conveyed once again with that fantastic conviction that architecture indeed had the capacity to change the world. The course illuminated the sophistication of early housing types which made a concerted effort to maintain an ecological equilibrium. "Today we do *not* have a balance with nature," he argued, "But know all the facts as to why we should." For Schoenauer this ecological balance was fundamental to housing doctrines. He would reiterate the architect's reciprocal obligation towards the natural world: "If we are kind to nature, it will be kind to us."

With particular high-esteem for courtyard, "inward-looking" housing, Schoenauer advocated models from ancient civilizations, and had only contempt for contemporary housing that embraces the stratification of society and the outward flaunting of so-



cial status. These inward houses presented nondescript façades to the street, yet often had opulent, climatically conscious interiors. He also vaunted inward-looking housing because it had a distinct but gradual and hierarchical order of spaces that acknowledged the broader context of the lane and the street, marking a progressive transition from inside to out that parallels poetically the progressive exploration of the world by the children in these areas. If only such intangible elements were mandatory in current housing developments! Another of his evocative examples, equally ethereal as a program component, is the relative success of high-rise public housing in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong plans strategically obligate the tenant to finish and personalize the interiors of the units. Thus built in to the process of building the housing is a sense of individual respect and ownership for the result. Finally, his emphasis on heterogeneity surfaced persistently in a range of international housing paradigms. For example, he praised the Parisian apartment for successfully integrating a demographic cross-section in contrast to the pronounced failure of zoned homogeneity ubiquitous in the housing projects of the Modern movement.

I was fortunate to be in the last "History of Housing" class Schoenauer taught. I recall sheer humility in the voices of students who asked questions. To the end he advocated learning from the centuries of acquired wisdom about architectural expression and housing forms, rather than looking to more recent housing models that defied traditional standards. For Schoenauer, these older models of housing, and the societies that they reflect, articulated an approach to architectural design that challenges the potential of the architect. In the academic milieu of mystical architectural theory that occasionally approaches a foreign language, Schoenauer's courses were thus a refreshing alternative. Through these courses and their companion texts, he inculcated a sensitive architectural approach that provided both fundamentals and inspiration. And for all that they were based in history and on traditional models, his ideas and ideals remain valuable to all his students because he communicated so well his belief that these convictions should be the basis of contemporary design issues.

Nadia Meratla is a graduate of the McGill School of Architecture and is currently working at Saia et Barbarese architectes in Montreal.

# THE HOUSING ARCHITECT

WITOLD RYBCZYNSKI

Norbert Schoenauer belonged to a post-CIAM generation of architects for whom the epitome of architecture and planning was housing. Urbanism had been at the top of the early modernists' agenda, but in the aftermath of the public's rejection of wholesale urban re-planning—or destruction, depending on your point of view—architects were obliged to scale back their ambitions. Their strategy was pragmatic. The postwar period had seen the founding of new capitals such as Islamabad and Brasilia, as well as the construction of British New Towns but, on the whole, brand new cities were few and far between. On the other hand, after World War Two there was everywhere a need for housing. So, housing became the chief preoccupation of progressive architectural groups such as Team Ten, whose members included the Smithsons in Britain, Georges Candilis and Shadrach Woods in France, and Giancarlo de Carlo in Italy. That was in the fifties and sixties, but even in the following decade, younger architects as dissimilar as the Archigram group, John Habraken, and John F. C. Turner, continued to give pride of place to housing. Even Martin Pawley's 1971 classic, *Architecture versus Housing*, a powerful indictment of the failure of modern architects to come to grips with the economic and social realities of housing, was predicated on the assumption that architecture and housing were—or should be—indivisible.

Although there was no formal Canadian equivalent to Team Ten and Archigram, in the 1960s there was an informal network of what could be called "housing architects." They included Irving Grossman, Jack Klein, and Henry Fliess in Toronto, Sandy and Blanche van Ginkel in Montreal, and most definitely Norbert Schoenauer. The work of the housing architects had a distinctive character. There were no huge federally-funded public housing projects in Canada, as in the United States, nor were there government-commissioned housing estates for the middle class, as in Europe. What distinguished the Canadian housing architects from their counterparts elsewhere was that they worked largely in the private sector. The commercial nature of Canadian housing was both a constraint and a blessing. Public housing in the United States—and almost all housing in Europe—was medium and high-rise multi-family housing, whose architectural complexity gave greater scope to designers; Canadian housing consisted largely of single-family dwellings. Thus, Canadian architects rarely achieved the radical design innovations of their international colleagues. (Moshe Safdie's Habitat was a notable exception to this rule, but it was a publicly-funded world's fair exhibition.) On the other hand, neither did they perpetrate the blunders that

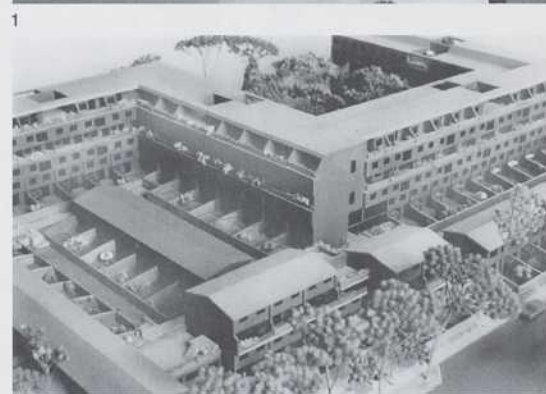
so often characterized architecturally innovative housing abroad. There were no Canadian Ronan Points, no soul-demeaning HLMs, no Pruitt Igoes—although it would not be difficult to compile a list of CMHC-sponsored public housing projects of the fifties and sixties that deserve demolition.

Norbert Schoenauer's engagement with housing took many forms. To begin with, he was a dedicated teacher. He started a graduate program in housing at McGill in the late 1950s, and the McGill School of Architecture's involvement in housing research has persisted to the present day as demonstrated by the Minimum Cost Housing, Domestic Environments, and Affordable Homes post-professional programs. In the 1960s, Schoenauer's fifth-year studio was considered by students to be the most intellectually challenging in the school. His influence can be seen in the later careers of many McGill students, most famously Safdie, but also Eric Dluhosch, Philip Bobrow, Bruce Anderson, Jean-Louis Robillard, Andrejs Skaburskis—and the author. Later, his long-running lecture courses introduced hundreds more to the subject. Thanks to his presence, housing became part of the architectural culture of the McGill School of Architecture, even after 1980 when housing had largely disappeared from the architectural mainstream.

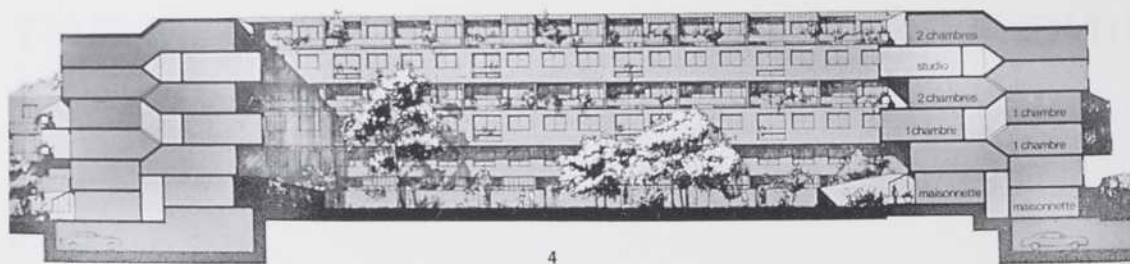
Schoenauer wrote numerous articles about housing, and starting with *The Court-Garden House* (written with Stanley Seeman in 1962) he published—at regular intervals—a series of books: *Housing in Canada* (written with John Bland in 1966), *Introduction to Contemporary Indigenous Housing* (1973), his three-volume *6000 Years of Housing* (1981), *Cities, Suburbs, Dwellings* (1994), and *Arts + Crafts, Art Nouveau* (1996). *The Court-Garden House* was a polemical book—Schoenauer fell in love with the patio house in his early days in Denmark, though he was unable to convince Canadian homebuilders of its advantages. His other books were historic in content. Following in the footsteps of Bernard Rudofsky and Amos Rapoport, he traced the evolution of housing from its vernacular and folk roots. Illustrated with his own drawings, these books reinforce the notion that housing has a rich and varied history. If Schoenauer had a blind spot it was his European orientation. He rarely acknowledged the bountiful American tradition of suburban housing, as exemplified in the work of Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., John Nolen, and Grovesnor Atterbury. The Los Angeles bungalow court and the Manhattan apartment building passed him by, and he never warmed to the new urbanism movement, the current reincarnation of housing-as-architecture. On the other hand, in his

## HOUSING IS NOT ARCHITECTURE

Forty years ago, architecture historians were really not interested in housing. I remember a colleague of mine who used to teach history. He used to say, Norbert, housing is not architecture. And I would argue with him: well, architecture without housing would never have architecture because like the megaron, the Greek ancient house, was the basis, the model for the classical Greek temples.



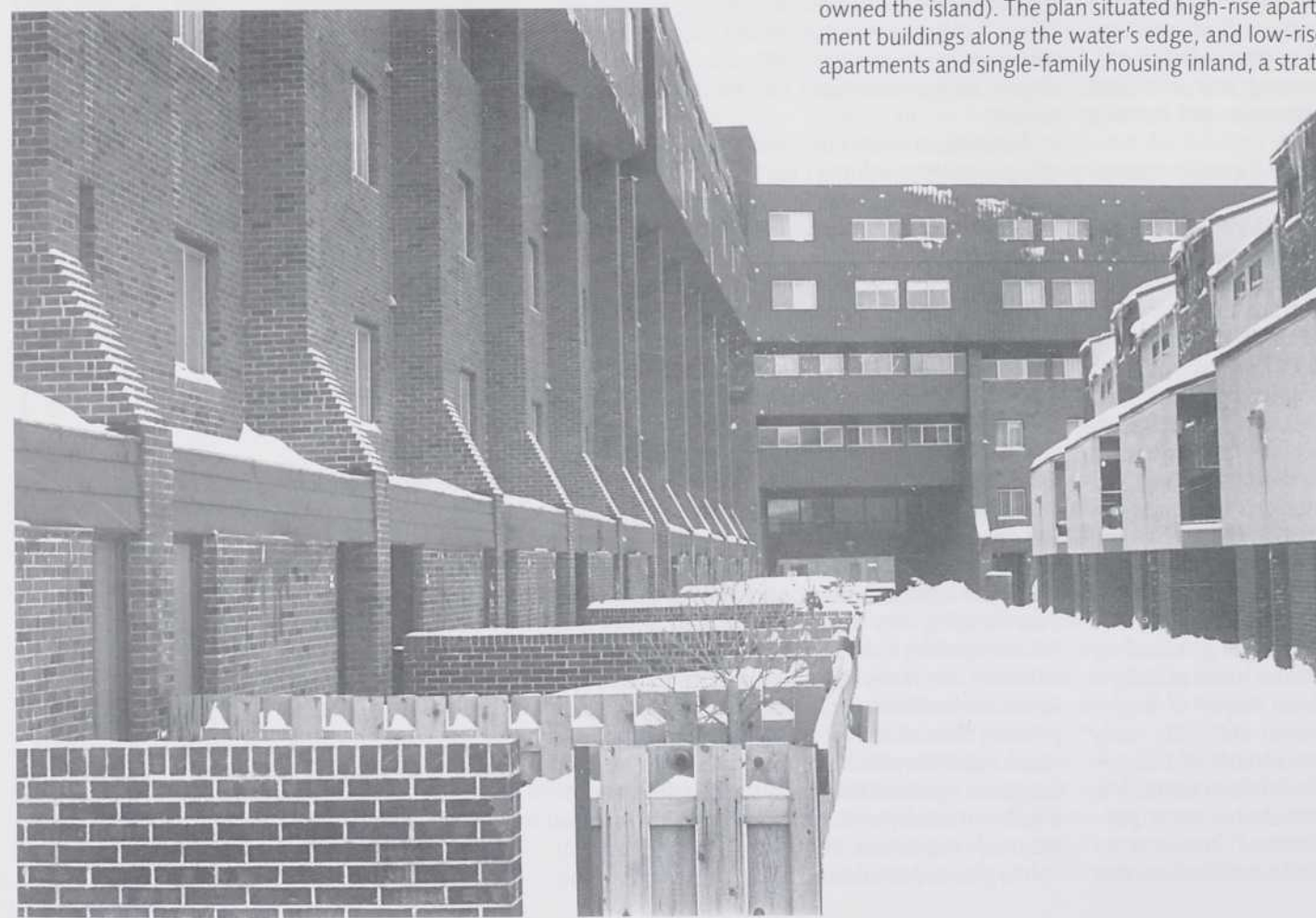
1. Project for Angus Yards, Montreal, view of model showing mixed housing scales.
2. Project for Angus Yards, Montreal, view of model.
3. Cover of Schoenauer's first book on housing (co-authored with S. Seeman), *The Court-Garden House*.



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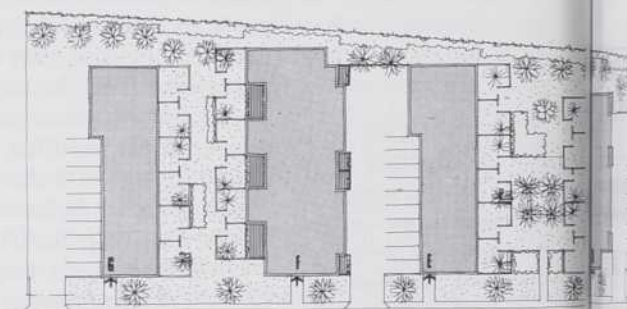
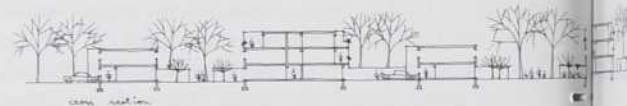
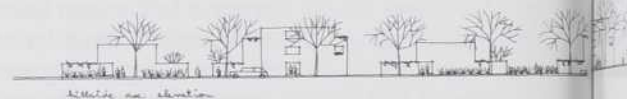


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last book, *Arts + Crafts, Art Nouveau*, he included an interesting discussion of the often-ignored Arts and Crafts tradition in Montreal domestic architecture.

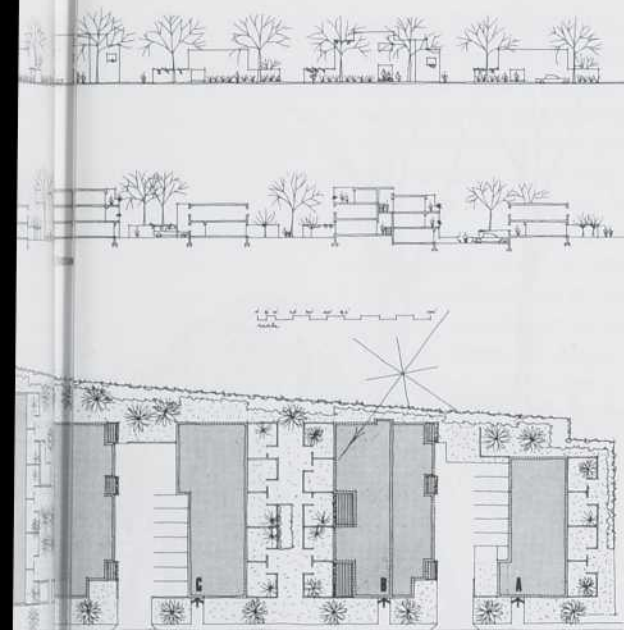
Schoenauer's first love was not teaching or writing, however, but designing. He was an expert draughtsman and particularly able in quickly interpreting programmatic demands, skills that earned him a second-place award (with William M. Schacter) in the 1961 Smyth Road national housing competition. Their plan combined a variety of housing types—low point-blocks, walk-up apartments, rowhouses, and detached houses—and demonstrated the characteristic Schoenauer touch: blending innovation with familiarity. The low-key architectural style is recognizably modern, but eminently suited to Canadian building techniques and tastes.

In 1963, Schoenauer collaborated with Seeman and Victor Prus on the master plan for one of Montreal's most successful housing developments: Nun's Island, on the outskirts of Verdun. The client was the Quebec Home and Mortgage Corporation (which owned the island). The plan situated high-rise apartment buildings along the water's edge, and low-rise apartments and single-family housing inland, a strat-



egy that was followed in the subsequent development. One planning feature that was not adopted at Nun's Island was a Cumbernauld-like retail spine in the center of the plan; instead a more conventional strip shopping center was built. Schoenauer later worked with a number of commercial real estate developers with whom he proposed large-scale housing projects (unbuilt) for the Angus Yards and the post-Expo Cité du Havre site in Montreal. His two largest housing designs were the suburban planned community of Woodroff, outside Ottawa, and the housing of the new town of Fermont, in northern Quebec (both described elsewhere in this magazine).

Two projects built in the mid-1970s exemplify Schoenauer's approach to urban housing. Village de l'Anse (designed with Maurice Desnoyers) in Quebec City, consists of 391 dwelling units at a relatively high density of 193 units/hectare. This density is achieved with a complicated mix of housing types that ingeniously avoids the oppressive feeling of density and creates a comfortable scale. The bulk of the housing is contained in a linear building that angles across the site, taking advantage of views to the neighboring St. Charles River. This building is six floors on one side and seven on the other. While not opposed to high-rise buildings, Schoenauer was an advocate of what he termed the mid-rise. He believed that about sixty feet represented an important cut-off for multi-story buildings. Below this



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Despite his encyclopedic knowledge of vernacular housing Schoenauer was always a modernist, albeit a Scandinavian modernist, which is not exactly the same thing. His philosophy of housing was a combination of idealism and pragmatism, tempered by a common-sense humanism. He believed in rationalization and standardization, and his housing lexicon included modernist prototypes such as point-blocks, gallery housing, and stacked rowhouses. His designs avoided traditional domestic styles and features such as dormers and porches, and even in the heyday of postmodernism he never incorporated regional motifs or decorative elements in his work, though he did use pitched roofs, brick, and wood siding. Developers liked working with him because he was prepared to respond to their practical demands, and he recognized that his—largely European—architectural ideals had to be adapted to the Canadian marketplace. At the same time he did not compromise his integrity as an architect and a planner.

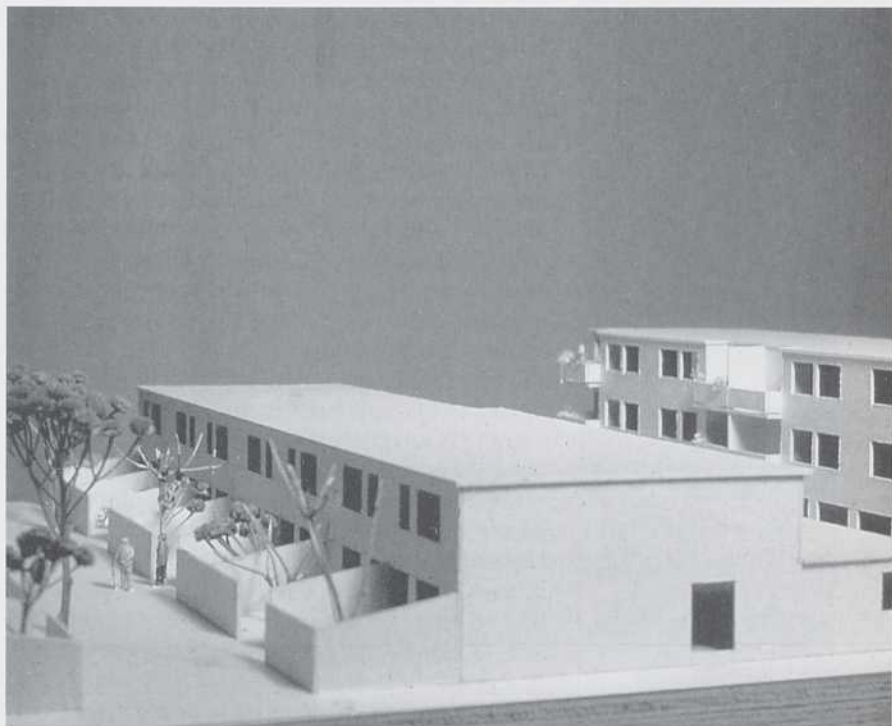
The Canadian housing architects occupy a particular position in the modern history of architecture. Their goal was to introduce modern planning into commercial housing. Their success, in this regard, must be counted mixed. At the level of planning, many of their ideas—the housing cluster, a hierarchy of roads, cul-de-sacs—did enter the mainstream. On the other hand, homebuyers largely resisted modern design in the house itself, and showed a decided preference for traditional domestic styles and features. The current interest in so-called traditional neighborhood development, which is probably greater in Canada than elsewhere, is to a great extent a repudiation of modernist housing ideals. It ignores the teachings of CIAM and Team Ten and takes its lessons from the North American garden suburbs of the early twentieth century. At the same time, in a curious way, this revival is a vindication of the earlier work of the housing architects—a continuation of the conviction that housing is a worthy subject for architectural study. Which is what Norbert Schoenauer firmly believed and practiced.

Witold Rybczynski is the Martin and Margy Meyerson Professor of Urbanism, University of Pennsylvania.

4. Project for Angus Yards, section through 6-storey block showing split-level plans.
5. Village de l'Anse, Ville de Québec, 1972, plan.
6. Village de l'Anse.
7. Hillside Housing, Westmount, 1974, plan, section, elevation.
8. Hillside Housing, view of model.
9. Hillside Housing.

height—roughly the height of mature trees—apartment dwellers had an intimate relationship to the ground; above, they were literally “in the sky.” The cross-section of the linear building consists of two-story maisonettes (with gardens), surmounted by a mix of two-bedroom and studio apartments, accessed by a skip-stop elevator system (another favorite Schoenauer device) that permits through-units with two views and cross-ventilation. The lower buildings, which line the street and a pedestrian walk, provide a comfortable transition of scale to the surrounding neighborhood, are four stories high—stacked two-story maisonettes. The brick and metal panel architecture is unremarkable, neither modern nor traditional; unlike his contemporary, Ralph Erskine (an Englishman who lived in Sweden and had belonged to Team Ten), Schoenauer did not always explore architectural innovations in his housing designs.

At Hillside municipal housing in Westmount, Schoenauer took a narrow and difficult site next to railway tracks and provided 64 units of various sizes in two and three story buildings, at a density of 79 units/hectare. About half of the units have private gardens, the rest have ample balconies and rooftop terraces. Landscaped pedestrian areas alternate with parking courts. The architecture here recalls the simple brick housing designed by Alvar Aalto in the 1930s: thoughtful, unassuming yet managing a robust architectural presence.



9

# THE ARCHITECT AS AUTHOR

## THE BOOKS OF NORBERT SCHOENAUER

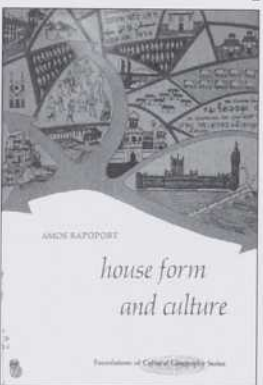
ANMARIE ADAMS



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3

1. Cover of the Spanish edition of *6,000 Years of Housing*.
2. Cover of the Japanese edition of *6,000 Years of Housing*.
3. Copy of Schoenauer's copy of Amos Rapoport, *House Form and Culture*.
4. Sketch of Kung bushmen skerm.
5. Sketch of Percy Nobbs house, Westmount.
6. Section of Fermont windscreen building indicating prevailing winds and split-level plans.
7. Section of *Habitat '67*.

Of his one dozen or so books on housing, Norbert Schoenauer was perhaps proudest of the revised and expanded edition of *6,000 Years of Housing*, published by New York's W.W. Norton & Company just a year before his death. This large-format, generously illustrated tome, unhampered by fashionable academic theories and political correctness, is a rather old-fashioned book of information. It synthesizes a lifetime of teaching, travelling, reading, and thinking about housing. And as in all his books, each illustration in his *magnum opus* was lovingly drawn in freehand by its author.

The implicit argument of *6,000 Years of Housing*, as well as his earlier books, is that the evolution of housing is an important subject of study for architects. While many academics move through a series of well-defined topics in their careers, probing each deeply and moving on to the next (like a series of closed mine shafts), the key dimension of Schoenauer's research interests was its sheer breadth (like an open gravel pit). He embraced a huge subject—housing—and worked and re-worked his views on its entirety in books for nearly forty years.

The evolutionary model is important to the book. Schoenauer employs a six-part classification system—from ephemeral to permanent dwellings—to explain what he calls pre-urban housing, followed by lengthy sections on eastern and western urban dwellings. From the grass skerm of African Kung Bushmen to the trendy New Urbanism of Seaside, Florida, Schoenauer treats every house type with the same respectful attention, relating major design decisions to human needs. Plans, perspectives, sections, elevations, and even maps supplement the text. There is not a single photograph in the book. And a dearth of footnotes is offset by the careful credits to other scholars in the caption of every illustration—he drew most of the illustrations in his university office, from other books—and the lengthy bibliography.

During the twelve years I knew Norbert Schoenauer, he frequently reminded me (with a characteristic twinkle in his eye) that although he studied architecture of the past, he was *not* an architectural historian. He was an architect. To him, I think, most architectural historians were figures like his late colleague Peter Collins (1920-81), who studied treatises in faraway archives and explored the intersections of intellectual history and architecture. Schoenauer's approach to his subject, instead, was daily-life-as-research. He read everything that touched housing, from women's decorating manuals to Sigmund Freud. He travelled widely and recorded what he saw in thousands of 35 mm slides, carefully organized in binders on his office shelves. And he fervently believed that architects who un-

derstood the evolution of housing would design better homes.

A second viewpoint that differentiated Schoenauer from traditional architectural historians was his insistence that housing is architecture. The architect calls attention to this problem in the Preface to *6,000 Years of Housing* and it was also a favorite topic of conversation for him. Rather than argue for the expansion of the canon beyond great monuments, however, he suggested that housing served as a source for monumental building types, like churches. "There is documented evidence that in the distant past, houses of worship were modelled on human dwellings," he asserts, probably thinking of the famous house of Dura Europos, in Salhiyeh, Syria, converted to serve as a church in 231 AD. For Schoenauer, the so-called vernacular and high-style architectural camps had no boundaries; the worlds of the bicycle shed and Lincoln cathedral were a single, continuous realm, with plenty of lessons to offer young designers.

This all-inclusive view of architecture is what differentiates Schoenauer's book from the three publications which most closely resemble it, Paul Oliver's *Dwellings: The House across the World* (1987), Bernard Rudofsky's *Architecture without Architects* (1964), and Amos Rapoport's *House Form and Culture* (1969). Oliver's book focuses on indigenous housing, mostly in the developing world, and is intended for general readers, rather than architects. Like Schoenauer, though, he derides architects for their contemptuous attitudes towards housing, particularly in the suburbs. But Oliver's is a more romantic work. Its stunning photographs—à la *National Geographic*—are reminiscent of Bernard Rudofsky's famous *Architecture without Architects* of 1964. Although I never asked him, I imagine Rudofsky's rather snobbish subtitle, "A Short Introduction to Non-Pedigreed Architecture," would not please Schoenauer, who disdained arrogance. All architecture was "pedigreed" to him.

Schoenauer's work was unimportant to these other housing scholars. The dust jacket of Oliver's *Dwellings* claims it to be "the first book to examine in depth the principles that have shaped the world's informal domestic architecture." And only his *Introduction to Contemporary Indigenous Housing* (1973) is cited in Oliver's bibliography. Sadly, this omission of Schoenauer's publications by other authors is quite common, probably because he opted to publish serially, and with local and in-house presses. For example, *Introduction to Contemporary Indigenous Housing* (1973) was the first publication of Part I of *6,000 Years of Housing* (2000). And between these two versions it appeared as Volume 1 of three in the



Bushmen



series *6,000 Years of Housing*, published by Garland in 1981. A third iteration was as the first third of an in-house limited edition, *History of Housing* (1992), which served as a textbook in Schoenauer's popular course of the same name at McGill University. *Cities, Suburbs, Dwellings in the Postwar Era* (1994) and *Arts + Crafts Art Nouveau Dwellings* (1996), Schoenauer's major publications of the mid-1990s, were both issued as handsome, square-format, in-house publications of the School of Architecture at McGill, and thus may have been difficult to obtain outside Montreal. My sense is that Schoenauer liked the speed and design control with which he could produce these books and the ease with which his own students could obtain copies. There is also considerable overlap among the books, which may not have been tolerated by an academic press. To him, accessibility is what mattered.

Rapoport's classic *House Form and Culture* shares with Schoenauer's *6,000 Years of Housing* its focus on accessibility. It, too, was intended as a textbook and it presents an essentially *social* analysis of dwellings. But that's where the similarities end. While Schoenauer's approach is encyclopedic, Rapoport's is a slim book that argues for the cultural, rather than physical determinants of housing. After vigorously refuting climate, materials, and available technologies as shapers of form, Rapoport proposes a more complex socio-cultural model that permits environmental influences only *after* religious needs, family and clan structure, and social relations. "What finally decides the form of a dwelling, and moulds the spaces and their relationships, is the vision that people have of the ideal life," he asserts. Schoenauer embraced Rapoport's late 1960s view of the house as a container shaped by its inhabitants, evident in his mode of describing a house type through the type of life it accommodated.

Less interesting to Schoenauer was the "other" school of housing research, in which highly specialized scholars tested academic theories through a close inspection of domestic architecture. This was mostly accomplished through comprehensive fieldwork, inspired by the field of cultural geography. The epitome of this work is Henry Glassie's *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia* (1975), in which the folklorist explores 338 eighteenth-century houses of Goochland and Louisa counties, Virginia, within the linguistic theories of Claude Lévi-Strauss' and Noam Chomsky's Structuralism. Exquisitely drawn plans and details accompany Glassie's compelling unravelling of a transformational grammar of architecture. The revolutionary argument of Glassie's work is his suggestion that housing becomes more "formal" (symmetrical, less connected to its environment) as the politi-

cal environment becomes less stable, an idea he subsequently tested in a ground-breaking book on Ireland.

Schoenauer's method of fieldwork was decidedly less rigorous. Although his books were illustrated exclusively with drawings of his own, these were often drawn from other researchers' drawings or photos in his office, rather than in the field. He also kept his distance from the burgeoning academic interest in all things vernacular in the 1980s, inspired by the work of Glassie, geographer Fred Kniffen (1900-93), historical archaeologist James Deetz (1930-2000), architectural historian Dell Upton, and others. Schoenauer never joined the Vernacular Architecture Forum (founded 1980), an academic association which would have valued and perhaps even nurtured his research. I can only surmise that significant books on domestic architecture, such as Deetz' *In Small Things Forgotten* or Upton's co-edited collection, *Common Places*, were either too removed from contemporary architectural issues, focused as they were on method and argument, or too U.S.-focused for Schoenauer's tastes. His steady production of housing books, instead, seems to have been inspired more by his McGill colleagues who consciously identified themselves as architect-authors, especially Collins and John Bland. Like Collins, he also may have seen his chosen location in Canada as a relatively neutral place from which to study places outside North America.

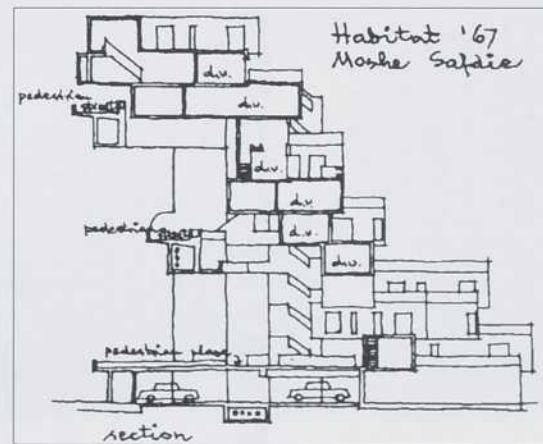
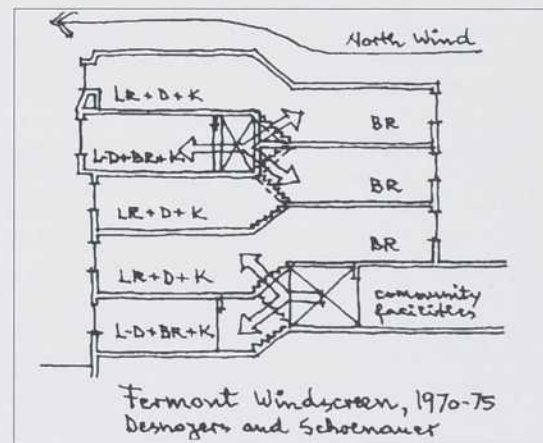
To Schoenauer, our continent's main problem was the automobile. In *Cities, Suburbs, Dwellings in the postwar era*, he blames the pollution, wastefulness and disconnection for many of the social problems which beset the postwar North American city. High-rise towers he saw as equally problematic, due to social, environmental, and economic shortcomings. To Schoenauer, the midrise (4-8 storeys) was the only acceptable housing form for late twentieth-century urban life. And practice, teaching, and his personal experience fed directly into the pro-midrise position of the books, albeit with local examples. In Chapter 10 of *Cities, Suburbs, Dwellings in the postwar era*, he uses his own designs for Fermont (with Maurice Desnoyers 1970-75), which featured a split-level unit plan and north-facing bedrooms to offset the affect of arctic winds. Moshe Safdie's Habitat at Expo '67, described in the book as "a dramatic and well-articulated building," began as Safdie's McGill thesis. And he was a longtime admirer of courtyard planning.

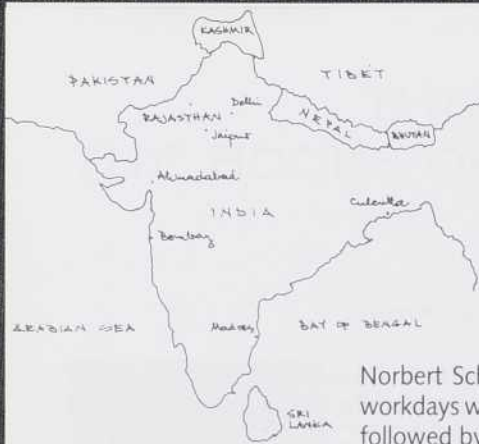
Still, Schoenauer's last book *Arts + Crafts Art Nouveau Dwellings*, is the only one since *Housing in Canada* (1966), co-authored with John Bland, to really include Montreal architecture. It is no coinci-

dence that the book was published during the same year the School of Architecture at McGill celebrated its centennial, for *Arts + Crafts Art Nouveau Dwellings* is a heartfelt tribute to the school's early Scottish-born faculty members, Stewart Henbest Capper, Percy Nobbs and Ramsay Traquair, whom Schoenauer much admired. Paradoxically, as the most "local" of all his subjects, one of Schoenauer's most-cited publications is the so-called "Green Book," a history of the McGill University School of Architecture, to which he contributed a highly informative essay on the history of the institution.

Books, to Norbert Schoenauer, were ways of starting conversations, a venue for teaching outside the university classroom. Perhaps he was proudest of the Norton edition of *6,000 Years of Housing* because its scope and its distribution were so broad. And as such it promised a wise and experienced architect, teacher, and writer the large following he truly deserves.

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1

Norbert Schoenauer was a gypsy at heart. His full workdays were punctuated by a long bohemian lunch followed by an espresso and *Gitanes*. Norbert and I often dined together at the celebrated Hungarian hangouts such as the Coffee Mill and the Pam Pam. On our walks back to the McGill School of Architecture, where Norbert and I had adjoining offices, I appreciated Norbert's sensibility and comments about the human behavior and the built environment. His deep knowledge and curiosity about nature, his love of kilims and khakis, and his keen eyes for details impressed me. The hardship that he had endured as a young man could not distort his worldview; he appreciated life and enjoyed it. I believe the seeds of our future travels together were planted on those walks, particularly since we enjoyed each other's company.

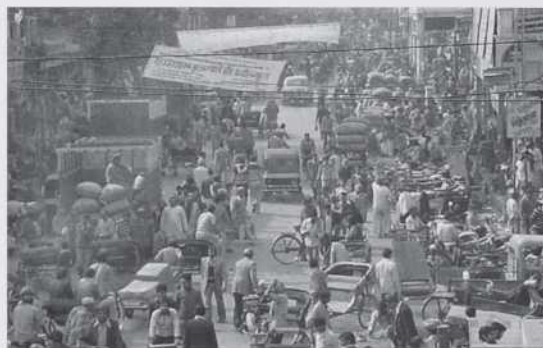
His amazing knowledge and interest about places made him a great travel companion, and we went overseas together on several occasions. Initially, we visited Montreal and its vicinity. On sunny weekends we drove out in his red convertible to visit places around Montreal: old British fortifications, villages of the Eastern Township and churches of the Richelieu River Valley, the latter a subject he had researched as a graduate student.

Our first long trip was to India. The idea emerged as we were eating and discussing traditional courtyard housing. Norbert remembered the essay I had written as a student on the vernacular architecture of Ahmedabad, a city in western India. It was early November; looking at the snow and sleet I mentioned that December would be a perfect time of the year to visit India. Norbert agreed instantly, though he would have to get his wife Astrid's OK. I managed to find inexpensive tickets despite the Christmas travel rush. The following week, consulting our maps and books, we chalked out an itinerary. We would explore northwest India – Gujarat and Rajasthan – one the most colorful and exotic parts of India, and being the assumed ancestral home of all gypsies.



2

**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**  
A couple of years ago they arranged a seminar here at McGill University. The theme was sustainable development. And I said I would like to speak. And I did go. And I said to them that I found a book that was printed in 1837 in Paris. It showed in it a building that was designed by an architect at the corner of Place de la Madeleine. When I went to Paris, I said to myself: I want to see if that building still exists. I went there, and the building was still there. I said to the audience: this is over 150 years; if this is not sustainable development, then I don't know what you're talking about.



Norbert was a keen traveler who did his homework before leaving. The end of the term with its heavy workload was fast approaching, yet he found time to do research and collect valuable information on our destination. Consulting books from the library he even prepared a short booklet on Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan State.

On the day of departure, I was already impressed! Norbert came to the School with his luggage: on one shoulder hung a small carry-on leather bag; on the other shoulder, he had a vital bag containing camera and travel documents. He used a medium format SLR camera with a zoom lens to keep the volume of his photographic equipment to a minimum. His dictate: one shall carry half as many belongings as one may consider necessary, but twice as much money as one may require.

We reached New Delhi very late at night without a hotel reservation. The taxi driver took us to an inexpensive hotel near Connaught Place. From his research Norbert knew Connaught Place as the upscale shopping area built by the British, and assumed that it might be a decent place to stay. With a reasonable amount of marble on the floor, the hotel lobby looked clean. The room was on the first floor, off a narrow corridor, lit with a row of fluorescent lights concealed behind a wall plate above the headboard. Not impressive! But we did not care to go hotel hopping at this late hour. A few minutes later, we heard noise in the corridor. Suddenly our door swung open to reveal a young couple standing there. It seems the hotel rented rooms on hourly basis. In the dim light of the corridor we looked at each other and decided to leave, insisting that the clerk find us a better hotel. As if to balance the score, he found a room at a newly opened five-star hotel. At about four in the morning we walked into an imposing lobby filled with fragrant flower arrangements. Considering our late arrival, our first night would be free. Now, this we could handle! At breakfast, on a sunny garden terrace, Norbert and I concurred that the rest of our stay in India would be in better hotels.

## A GYPSY AT HEART

VIKRAM BHATT

Norbert was a resourceful yet prudent traveler. For health reasons, I had advised him to remain vegetarian during the trip. A gourmet who enjoyed goulash and chicken paprika, he did not much appreciate *dals* (lentil soups) or vegetable curries. He discovered "vegetable sizzlers," a dish of parboiled vegetables baked on a heavy metal skillet at a very high temperature, and therefore bacteria free. As it made its way from the kitchen to our table making appropriate sizzling noises, other clients would stare at us. Usually a shy person, Norbert enjoyed that attention. The tap water in India is unsafe to drink, and bottled water was almost nonexistent, so we drank beer and lime sodas. Norbert quickly figured out a way to brush our teeth. Every morning and night he ordered very mild tea to the room; this is how we escaped getting the infamous "Delhi Belly."

The trip began well. Norbert enjoyed the intensity of Old Delhi. He liked the dizzying crowds and bustling markets, particularly the main *Chandnichowk* bazaar, the clothing market, and the jewelry market, all dating back to the Mogul era. In the quarters around the *Jami-Mosque*, the main Friday Mosque, we observed the daily life of the community woven tightly with the fabric of the traditional city. Although many run-down *havelis* (merchants' mansions) are currently used as warehouses and therefore neglected, Norbert could easily penetrate the surface in order to visualize their former splendor, discern their spatial organization, and appreciate their intrinsic beauty. Once in the crowded old city we encountered a traffic jam so intense that it turned in to a pedestrian jam. We could not walk, usually an unnerving experience for a foreigner. Yet Norbert remained undeterred.

The high Mogul architecture of Agra, Delhi and Fatehpur Sikri, pleased Norbert, especially the courtyards, the relationship of outdoor and indoor spaces, the well-proportioned colonnades, and the fine stone craftsmanship. For him colonial New Delhi was a let-down, because of its unusually vast scale and the fact that it had not been planned for pedestrians.

In contrast, Norbert truly felt content in the pink city of Jaipur because its urban design and city planning embodied what he believed in most. King Jaisingh and his architect Vidhyadhar founded this formally planned walled city in 1727. Several main boulevards delineate its nine sectors. The buildings facing these 108 foot-wide roads or the bazaar streets combine arcaded commerce on the ground floor with housing above and behind. Here was a live example of mixed land-use, which Norbert always strived for in his professional work. At main intersections, building lines were set back to create large *chaupars*, or public

## TRAVELING WITH NORBERT

squares. While the boulevards are subject to regulations that prescribe spatial organization and the aesthetic treatment of the buildings, on the inside, the sectors are allowed to grow less formally - organically. Norbert respected the genius of Jaipur's designers who managed to balance the role of formal and informal sectors.

One late night, in Jaipur, we received shocking news. Norbert's mother, who lived in Romania, had passed away. Those were heart-wrenching days for him, but he never lost his composure. He could not reach Romania promptly from India, so he stayed with us for several more days before returning to Canada earlier than planned.

Norbert could easily strike up a conversation and make strangers feel at ease. It was a fine gift, and an asset for a traveler. Upon arrival at Jodhpur airport, while I was confirming our bookings, I noticed Norbert and our friends from Alberta, who had joined us on this trip, speaking with an elegant-looking Indian woman. We later found out that she was the sister-in-law of the former king of Jodhpur. Although we were headed towards Jaisalmer that evening, we accepted an invitation to her small palace, a true living museum. We dined in the elegant palace courtyard in the company of our hostess, her sister and the French ambassador. Light poured out of the stone grills surrounding the fountain courtyard; oil lamps and large earthen vessels filled with water and flowers decorated the space. It was an unforgettable moment. Norbert, by virtue of his culture and background was in his element. His fine manners and many travel anecdotes drew attention from all quarters.

After an overnight train journey through the desert, we watched the sun rise over the magnificent medieval city of Jaisalmer, which dates back to the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century. The effect of the golden sunrays striking the sandstone citadel with the Thar Desert as a backdrop was magical; Norbert immediately fell in love with it. The tight streets and the compact urban fabric of the city form a stark contrast to the wide-open desert, creating a safe-haven that shelters people from the hot sun and hostile sandstorms. Wondering through the city, with its over hanging *jarokhas*, or balconies, *chatries*, or covered seats, and stylized-screened porches, he succumbed to the beauty of its intricately carved homes and *hevelies*. Happily, the architectural wonder of Jaisalmer became like a magic healer for Norbert who had suffered important loss. After a full day of sightseeing, we sat atop the city fort in our hotel balcony to watch the sunset over the wide desert horizons. In a dramatic gesture, from his small leather bag Norbert pulled out a bottle of wine he had been hiding. What a sense of timing and occasion!

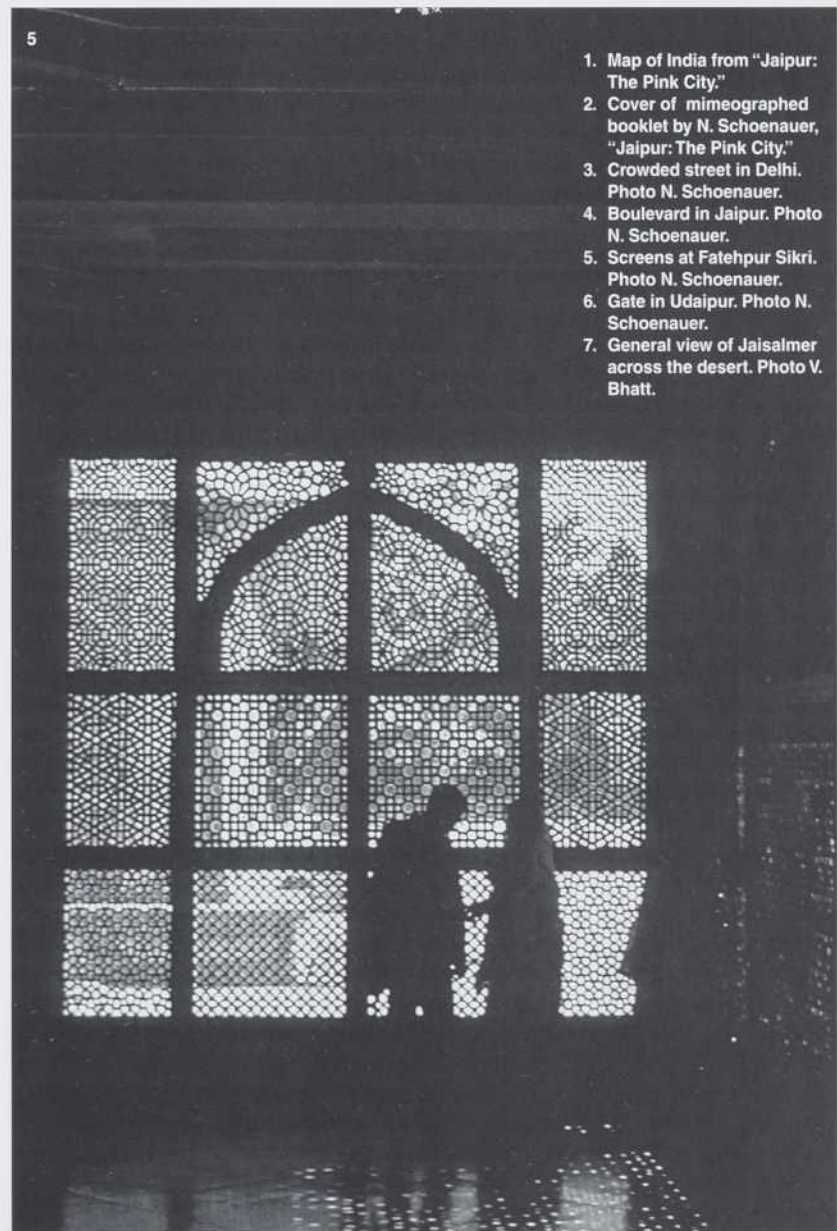
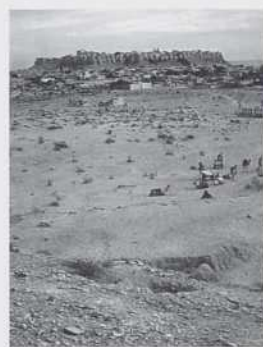
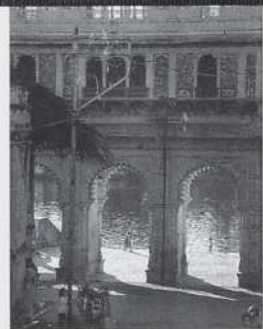


Norbert loved to share with others the experiences from his expeditions. He sketched and took photographs. Following our India journey, we enjoyed setting up a show of our photographs at the School of Architecture. Fortified by the India trip, Norbert and I decided to spend two weeks during one spring break in Andalusia in southern Spain. It is a fine time of the year to visit, because the almond trees start to bloom, the *Paradores* are empty and few tourists crowd the Moorish palaces. Norbert also convinced me to do a show of my Spanish photographs.

Our last overseas trip was to Austria and Hungary. In India I was the guide, now it was his turn. I felt privileged to visit his native Budapest with him. He knew the city and its hangouts expertly. We visited monuments and markets, stopped at renowned restaurants, relaxed in the afternoons at the spas and drank espresso at the famous *Gerbaud* coffeehouse. Norbert seldom took taxis or public transport; he preferred walking to see places. One morning, we walked over to see the famous Budapest opera house, a remarkable neoclassical edifice that could easily stand its ground against the Paris Opera. After showing me the empty building in daytime, he insisted that we take in an evening performance to fully enjoy the place. Puccini's "La Bohème" was playing, but the performance was sold out. My colleague decided to check again at the ticket window; a middle-aged woman was minding it. Norbert approached her, removed his Borsalino, and addressed her with the formal Hungarian greeting, "*Kezít csokolom,*" meaning, "Dear lady, may I kiss your hand?" It is an old Germanic expression adopted in Hungary— certainly not favored during the Communists regime, but never truly abandoned. Then, he requested tickets for himself and me, a visitor from abroad. As if by magic, a few minutes later we had two tickets in our hands. During the performance I realized with pleasure that we were seated in the royal box next to Kenneth Branagh and his entourage.

Was it by coincidence that we had passed through the lands of gypsies on our voyages? Norbert was himself a talented musician, and his eyes would turn misty when listening to the haunting Hungarian folk melodies played by gypsies on violins and xylophones. Like the *romas* he also loved to travel and felt at home in so many places. I do not have my friend's current whereabouts, but from my travels with him I am confident that wherever he is, he and those with him are having a wonderful time.

Vikram Bhatt is a Professor of Architecture at the School of Architecture, McGill University.



1. Map of India from "Jaipur: The Pink City."
2. Cover of mimeographed booklet by N. Schoenauer, "Jaipur: The Pink City."
3. Crowded street in Delhi. Photo N. Schoenauer.
4. Boulevard in Jaipur. Photo N. Schoenauer.
5. Screens at Fatehpur Sikri. Photo N. Schoenauer.
6. Gate in Udaipur. Photo N. Schoenauer.
7. General view of Jaisalmer across the desert. Photo V. Bhatt.

# NORBERT SCHOENAUER

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DAVID THEODORE

The following selected bibliography, based on the publications Schoenauer himself believed were the most significant, is an introduction for those who wish to start looking into his work. It does not cover book reviews he wrote or reviews of his books. Please note that Schoenauer's personal library of books on architecture and planning is now available for consultation in the Blackader-Lauterman Norbert Schoenauer Architecture Collection at McGill University.

REJUVENATING  
MONTREAL  
I think the Plateau  
Mont-Royal itself, it  
warms my heart that  
the most urban area of  
Montreal has  
rejuvenated. And it  
makes me very happy.  
Because it shows that  
people didn't forget  
that the city is still as  
exciting if not more  
than the suburbs. And  
it is unique. There is no  
other city in Canada  
which can take pride in  
itself like that.

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#### SUNLIGHT

*Nobody speaks about the real costs of high-rise building. I am speaking about a shadow. I want to be reasonable, but can you answer me this question. If I cut the main for the cable TV to your apartment you would sue me and you would win, correct? But if I cut away the sunlight from you, you have no recourse. But the sunlight is the TV cable. The sun is a life-giving force. How come you are allowed to put me in permanent shade?*

# IMAGES D'ARCHITECTURE URBAINE

LA DEUXIÈME PARTIE D'UNE RÉFLEXION PAR JEAN OUELLET

## LES MODES DE COMMUNICATION À ENVISAGER

Le discours sur l'architecture doit dépasser le cadre des publications professionnelles, s'inscrire dans les présentations de journaux, publications populaires, télévisuelles... au delà de quelques événements occasionnels. Récemment (14 sept. 02, *La Presse* posait la question: «le Québec est-il laid ?») Il faut aller plus loin, plus intensément. Les revues spécialisées d'architecture, de design, d'aménagement, ont par vocation une tâche complémentaire distincte d'amorcer la démarche, en accordant une place convenable aux oeuvres de caractère modeste mais exemplaire, de même qu'au soin qu'y apportent les professionnels, architectes et aménagistes du domaine.

Au delà du service professionnel, le public est concerné dans l'orientation même de l'architecture, pour une intégration véritable, comme il en est des autres domaines de l'art. L'architecture a encore à conquérir ce domaine de la production modeste, encore trop souvent unique affaire de marché. Traiter d'architecture sous ses formes multiples du dedans, de la structure, et dans un esprit d'architecture urbaine, paysagère. Également, se situer au delà de tendances de marché, du genre de résidences pseudo-traditionnelles, reflet d'une aisance banlieusarde, hautement véhiculaire (ex: «Mon toit», *La Presse*).

Pour un contact public bien établi, l'apport des journaux est essentiel, l'attention pour les autres media peut en résulter. Notons quelques exemples d'intérêt de récentes éditions de journaux. *La Presse*, 14 sept. **Le Québec est-il laid ?** (mentionné plus haut); le 5 oct. **Logements sur mesure... dans une ancienne usine.** Mon toit, *Le Devoir*, essor récent; (\*) les 4, 5, 6 oct. **Patrimoine - La mémoire des images. Vitalité des villes, viabilité de la culture. Le Rallye de l'histoire. Habitation - Soutien de familles, place aux enfants.**

Des présentations qu'il s'agirait de diversifier et de multiplier davantage, à l'égal des autres domaines de l'art, du sport, pour couvrir la question du milieu de vie sous ses aspects les plus divers: l'architecture dans ses rapports essentiels à l'humain et à l'urbain. Autres liens avec le public: concours, prix, expositions...

Excellent stimulant de créativité, le concours d'architecture tend vers la recherche de l'oeuvre exceptionnelle. Il importe toutefois de surmonter certaines faiblesses, dont j'ai déjà fait état: présence du spectaculaire, ou de la personnalisation du concepteur sur la destination de l'oeuvre; processus trop exclusif à l'architecte, à la fois participant (concurrent) et juge (jury)... en l'absence du destinataire, maître de l'ouvrage.

ARQ témoigne beaucoup d'intérêt pour les concours. **La Grande bibliothèque du Québec**, (ARQ, 112); **la bibliothèque Châteauguay**, d'échelle plus modeste, (ARQ, 118), un essai courageux dans le monde des concours. Un jury comprenant le maître d'ouvrage et

des experts du domaine, au même titre que les architectes. La formule est-elle significative? a-t-elle présenté des problèmes? peut-elle varier selon la nature de l'oeuvre? Voilà sûrement un essai louable d'ouvrir le jugement de l'oeuvre à ses destinataires, à un public, à la fois concerné et participant. «L'architecture, valeur de société, n'appartient pas qu'à l'architecte».

Notons le succès particulier de ce concours, avec la participation en première étape de 60 équipes d'architecture, grande manifestation d'intérêt, valeur appréciable d'investissement de ces équipes, dans un effort enthousiaste de créativité. Quelle appréciation peut en tirer l'Ordre? À mon point de vue, un premier essai positif, mes félicitations! Et plus récemment (#120), **le Théâtre du Vieux-Terrebonne**. Un jury de huit membres, présidé par le représentant du maître d'ouvrage et trois autres participants non architectes: autre bel exemple d'ouverture au public, dans un projet d'échelle modeste et souci particulier pour l'environnement, selon les présentations!

La formule de concours tend naturellement vers la recherche d'oeuvres exceptionnelles. Les exemples publiés ici sont de caractère public. Philippe Drolet y cherche une façon d'atteindre le grand public (#118): «... un moyen d'assurer... que les attentes d'une population critique et motivée par l'érection d'une telle infrastructure soient remplies».

Ces concours de portée publique doivent être publiés et soumis à l'appréciation populaire. Les projets plus modestes méritent tout autant d'être abordés, évalués, présentés. Enfin, il en est de même de ces créateurs à qui sont décernés des prix en divers travaux d'aménagement: études, recherches, conceptions d'ensembles, impact urbain, avec commentaires appropriés. Tout pour éveiller l'intérêt!

## À TITRE DE CONCLUSION

Mon survol des récentes éditions d'ARQ m'a conduit dans des réflexions d'une portée au delà de ce que j'avais anticipé. Par son caractère, la publication elle-même conservera naturellement sa préférence pour les oeuvres exceptionnelles. Une attention particulière toutefois peut être accordée aux oeuvres modestes, du moins dans leur portée exemplaire. En ce sens, il y a lieu de sensibiliser les architectes lecteurs, de susciter leur intérêt, de stimuler leur souci de création en ce domaine.

Pour ces réflexions, qui n'ont pas encore une portée de propositions, il reste à en discerner le niveau de réalisme ou d'utopie, ou encore de dépassement s'il y a, afin de mieux juger des modes d'action éventuels. Il reste à imaginer les orientations propres à rétablir l'intérêt de la collectivité pour l'architecture dans sa portée urbaine.

## ANNEXE

Réflexions de Jean Pierre Chupin, édition ARQ #118 *J'ai déjà traité de la question des concours, en particulier ce concours de la bibliothèque de Châteauguay qui me semble un essai intéressant d'ouverture aux destinataires comme participants du jury. Le public y devient concerné, participant, en réaction à son isolement croissant du monde actuel de l'architecture.*

Discours très engageant, mais parfois distant de mes propres réflexions. Ambiance de «cyber espace», l'architecture se présente comme un art de construire un peu distant de la destination de l'oeuvre, sa raison d'être. J'ai soulevé cette absence d'un souci d'architecture pour ces réalisations de caractère modeste, habitation populaire et service. Le paysage urbain serait ponctué ici et là, par quelques oeuvres de marque, créations originales d'artistes exceptionnels, en contraste avec l'image dominante. Comme si la danse n'avait de raison d'être qu'en acrobatie.

Le projet d'architecture est présenté comme «le véhicule du changement social et des mutations culturelles». Précéder ce qui déjà est en état de transformation profonde? Ça me semble au delà du rôle historique de l'architecture, comme réponse aux aspirations de cette société dans son évolution. La collectivité fait bouger le «véhicule», non l'inverse. Autrefois, l'architecture était bien une valeur patrimoniale, possession même de la société, l'architecte en étant l'interprète. Comme je l'ai mentionné, l'ordre dorique était déjà propriété de la Grèce, bien avant le Parthénon. Les classicismes sont expressions de sociétés, pour interprétation dans le bâti.

L'architecte d'autrefois est un acteur de profils divers: immixtion (ou traduction) en: art, ingénierie, construction, métier, et parfois même, destinataire. Le modernisme y a apporté une notion de spécificité: Créations vers 1850 des ordres professionnels, corporations, instituts d'architectes, (1890 au Québec). L'architecte est formé dans un profil de «concepteur» du construit. L'Ordre y assure la compétence, et invoque une promesse d'architecture pour la société. Ce n'est toutefois que par incidence, et sur une base plutôt éthique que légale pour le concepteur.

En marge des réflexions dans lesquelles je suis engagé, «Le sens de l'architecture», le présent texte concerne l'instruction. Je note son intérêt et le lien tout a fait conséquent entre: «construire, instruire, traduire». Image de structure quasi radicaire. Mais, je vois ici un certain rapport avec ce que j'identifiais comme faiblesse des concours: l'absence du destinataire du processus. En tout cela il reste de bons points à élucider, comme échange entre nous et pour une meilleure compréhension.

(La première partie de cette réflexion paraissait dans le précédent numéro de ARQ)

*Création champêtre*  
*Une fenestration*  
*à la mesure de*  
*votre imagination.*



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