

Reference Document: Art and Architecture

The Palais: An Expression of Montréal

Open and light-hearted, yet grounded and self-affirming.

Decidedly contemporary, yet linked with its heritage.

Artistic and festive in nature, yet efficient and functional.

The Palais is quite simply an expression of Montréal.

Montréal has found a choice ambassador in its Palais. One look at this stunning architecture provides insight into the character of a unique North American city. Exuding charm and creativity, the Palais, like Montréal, offers a perfect blend of gracious elegance and the playful avant-garde.

An architecture inspired by light, transparency...

The idea was to create a Palais that is open to the world, its city and its people. The concept for expansion therefore focused on the aspect of transparency afforded by the use of glass and resulting play of light. Using three times more glassed surface area, designers created the impression that at any given time, the Palais and its city were one. From the interior, one sees the constant pulse of a vibrant city. From the exterior, passers-by might catch a glimpse of a meeting in progress or other activities in this center for exchange and communication. The desired transparency is provided by the building's immense facade of colored glass panels, creating an interplay of color and light, much like a stained glass window, producing an iridescent effect both inside and outside the building. During the day it is the array of colors that predominates while the dark of night brings out its transparency. From Place Jean-Paul Riopelle, the many facets of the Palais' character are revealed, changing with the whims of the sun.

... and color

The effect is electric. The glass facade consists of a delicious palate of colors, displayed in two series of five repeating hues. Entering the Palais at 1001 Place Jean-Paul Riopelle is like diving into a kaleidoscope. Unlike other major convention centers in North America, the Palais offers a warm, friendly and festive atmosphere. It is what sets it apart from its competitors and what

distinguishes Montréal from other North American cities. The vibrant and modern architecture of the Palais aptly articulates Montréal's contemporary character.

Integrated with the city

As the center of the urban renewal and development project of the Quartier international de Montréal, Montréal's international district, the Palais reunites certain elements of the urban fabric that were lost in the construction of the Ville-Marie Expressway. By enclosing the expressway, coherence and communication are restored to an entire city sector. Moreover, by building its multicolored facade on the west side, facing the CDP Capital Centre and diagonally across from Montréal's World Trade Centre, the Palais becomes a key component in the creation of a new public square which features *La Joute*, a major sculptural installation by world-renown Québec artist, Jean-Paul Riopelle. More than most North American cities, Montréal has exploited the benefits of public squares, largely a European concept. Under the kaleidoscope of the stained glass, Place Jean-Paul Riopelle becomes a festive focal point, reflecting Montréal's diverse character as a city of history, business and commerce and preferred site for international meetings.

***La Joute* by Riopelle**

Of all the sculptural works produced by Jean-Paul Riopelle, *La Joute* (*The Joust*, created for the 1976 Montréal Olympic Games) is by far the most important and prodigious, noted for its diversity of thematic elements and sculptural pieces. This bronze sculpture-fountain is actually an installation composed of 30 elements: in the center is *La Tour de la Vie* (*The Tower of Life*), surrounded by three figures (*Le Hibou* (*The Owl*), *La Chouette* (*The Tawny Owl*) and *Le Poisson* (*The Fish*)), 16 pieces in bas-relief encircling the base, an arrangement of four other figures (*L'Indien* (*The Indian*), *L'Ours* (*The Bear*), *Le Poteau* (*The Pole*) and *Le Hibou* (*The Owl*) in the fountain basin, as well as four other elements presented in high relief. Slightly removed from this grouping is *Le Chien* (*The Dog*) along with the plaque bearing the title of the work with an appropriate inclusion of the Olympic rings. In keeping with the artist's original vision, the central sculpture now incorporates a ring of fire and mist blowers installed underground throughout the square to create a fog effect.

The four faces of the Palais

The chief focus of the Palais design was to act as a hub, pulling to its center various quarters of the city. Each facade of the Palais — and each corner of the



block it occupies — has its own personality designed to integrate naturally with the district it addresses. The common denominator, glass, illustrates the repeated theme of transparency.

- The stained glass panels of the west facade form the gracious main entrance articulated by large marquee. Integrated with this facade at the corner of Viger Avenue and Place Jean-Paul-Riopelle is the main panel of *Translucide*, the provocative art installation selected at the Concours national d'intégration des arts à l'architecture (National Competition Integrating Arts and Architecture) held as part of the Palais expansion. This ingenious piece is visible from both the interior and exterior of the building. The corner of Place Jean-Paul Riopelle and Saint-Antoine Street hosts a smaller marquee signifying its role as a secondary entrance.
- The Saint-Antoine facade provides the interface with the city's historic quarter. Its design borrows from the architectural tradition of Old Montreal, with the predominant use of Québec greystone to contrast with the glass. It is this facade that incorporates three heritage buildings (the facades of the Rogers and King building, Fire Station n° 20 and the Tramways building) and is designed to respect the human scale of the past while meeting the functional requirements of Palais including the entry and exit of trucks, buses and cars as well as access to pedestrian links and adjacent shops.
- The Saint-Urbain facade is the work of noted architect, Victor Prus, who designed the original Palais. It is home to the new fire station and an art installation entitled *Éolienne V* (see page 8). With the redesign of the Saint-Urbain and Saint-Antoine corner, the view of the hill leading to Place d'Armes, the heart of Old Montréal, is unobstructed. The north end of this facade, now transformed into green space, houses the metro station. It is at this juncture where the old and new architectures of the Palais intertwine.
- The Viger facade, accentuated by the use of color and glass, is really the point at which the original building intersects with the new Palais. Facing Jeanne-Mance Street, a series of yellow glass panels extends the length of the original building, forming the subtle connection between past and present and old and new buildings. At street level, passers-by discover the interior garden of *Nature Légère/Lipstick Forest* and the second piece of the diptych, *Translucide...* an inviting lure to enter the Place Riopelle Hall.

Still linked with the past

While ultra-modern in approach, the Palais is also linked with Montréal's glorious past. The project draws upon three centuries of Montréal heritage through the integration of historic buildings, while addressing the city's more contemporary history.

- Built in 1885, the Rogers and King building has a brick and stone facade. As a model of late Victorian architecture, its distinct facade is elaborate and ornate, owing to the mixed use of brick and the inclusion of cast iron. Few industrial or commercial buildings in Montreal offer such aesthetic composition with the use of brick and cast iron for their entire upper floors. The Rogers and King company was famous for the Daisy boiler, a prototype of the hot water central heating system. Once a foundry, the building was converted in the 1940s into offices space with boutiques on the main floor.
- Fire Station n° 20 was constructed in 1908 by Louis-Roch Montbriand. With its clay brick and limestone facade, it is a fine example of the new architecture adopted for fire stations in the early XXth century, where function took precedence over decor.
- The Tramways building has been preserved in its entirety and integrated with the expansion project. Built in 1928, the art deco building formerly housed the head office of the Montréal Urban Community Transit Commission (MUCTC). It is the work of architects Ross & MacDonald, regarded as one of Canada's leading architectural firms at the time. Among their most noted Montréal projects are the Gleneagles Apartments, the Dominion Square and Hermes buildings and the Eaton and Holt Renfrew stores. The exterior walls are made of brick and stone.
- Typical of late 1970s architecture, the original building of the Palais is the work of Victor Prus, one of the most distinguished architects of his time. The decision to accentuate rather than obscure its cement facade, aligning the old building with the Saint-Antoine facade, indicates its importance to the expansion project.

Creativity in the service of function

The Palais des congrès is a study in contrasts: between glass and stone, the playful and sedate, the subtle and audacious. On each floor, function determines character.



- The Place Riopelle Hall: bathed in natural light, this main entrance hall also serves as a link to the métro. Glass is omnipresent providing a window to a busy commercial mall. Adding to this open environment is the mirrored reflection of stainless steel panels that cover the funnel air exhaust from the expressway, creating a sculptural element. Tiled in granite of varying textures, the Place Riopelle Hall offers a somewhat sober character contrasting sharply with the pink trees in its interior garden entitled *Nature Légère / Lipstick Forest*. Through an indoor pedestrian corridor, the Place Riopelle Hall is directly linked to the CDP Capital Centre and World Trade Centre. Featured in this corridor is an extra-muros exhibit sponsored by the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA). The exhibit is actually a workshop for artists and architects to create temporary installations on themes related to the evolving nature of Montréal.
- The Exhibition level is articulated by a minimalist decor that combines wood walls, blue terrazzo floors and a perforated metallic ceiling. The multipurpose room (210) benefits from the natural light afforded by the facade of the Rogers and King building. Plenary rooms also reveal a minimalist treatment, but the burnt orange walls warm the atmosphere, giving the area a sunny disposition.
- The Convention level is awash in red and blue, the traditional colors of the Palais. The wider, main corridors are blue and more sedate, while cross-corridors are draped in red. In this bold statement of traditional colors and bright contrasts, the Palais affirms its identity.
- The Panoramic level offers an exceptional view of downtown Montréal. Its terrace opens on to an intriguing art installation on the Palais roof entitled *La poussée vers le haut* by Francine Larrivée.

Recent art works

The Palais is a showcase for several works of art including a diptych on the large and small panels of the glass facade and a unique treatment of land art on the Palais roof. These pieces join other existing works on display in the Palais' original building.

- **Translucide**, an installation by Jean-François Cantin, Michel Lemieux and Victor Pilon in collaboration with Martin Leblanc of N.O.M.A.D.E. architectural studio, is a diptych illustrating the vocation of the Palais as a place where people and ideas converge, a nexus for human exchange and interaction. Integrated with the main glass facade is the evocative image of a hand and face rendered in pixels, symbolic of how thought is engaged through the senses. Located in the Passage du Palais is the other piece of the diptych: a filmstrip



with human silhouettes symbolizing the need for meetings and exchange. *Translucide* was another work selected at the Concours national d'intégration des arts à l'architecture (National Competition Integrating Arts and Architecture) held as part of the expansion project of the Palais des congrès de Montréal.

- ***La Poussée vers le haut*** is the work of Francine Larrivée which depicts a symbolic encounter on the roof of the Palais, where sky and water meet to become one. The artist creates a unique environment on a roof of about 45,000 square feet (4,180 square meters) in this demonstration of land art, which calls to mind the fact that the Palais built on what once was a river. Her work was selected at the national competition sponsored by the ministère de la Culture et des Communications du Québec (Québec Department of Culture and Communications) as part of the expansion project.

Sculpted scapes make a bold statement

The interior garden of the Place Riopelle Hall and the new landscape design of the Esplanade are the creations of landscape architect Claude Cormier. Of particular appeal to lovers of art and nature, these designs lend a sense of vitality and the avant-garde to the new Palais.

- The ***Nature Légère / Lipstick Forest*** garden in the Place Riopelle Hall is comprised of 52 tree trunks kissed in electric pink. These concrete reproductions are inspired by actual trees on Montreal's avenue du parc/Park Avenue. In this unique forest, as in nature, no two trees are alike. Designed to be surreal in character, the trees were produced by sculptors from the Aquanov Group, renowned for their artificial "lifelike" environments, such as Montréal's Biodôme.

- **The Esplanade** is a colorful landscape where crabapple trees have been planted in 31 mounds of earth linked by stone pathways, so typical of Montreal's urban design. The crabapple is Montréal's official tree that blooms in May in an explosion of fragrant pink and fuchsia, symbolizing the friendship between Montréal and China. Conference delegates who want to take some air between work sessions can wander out Viger Hall for a relaxing change of scene.



The original works

Despite the modernization of the Palais, there was no need to update the many impressive art works in its original collection, which includes:

- ***Ailes couleur de temps, nuage de soleil***, by Micheline Beauchemin, has been a fixture of the ceiling of Viger Hall since 1984. Suspended from a trapeze of synthetic cables, this poetic installation is composed of 7,000 polished rods, extending in height from 4 feet to 20 feet and measuring 38 feet long.
- ***Éolienne V***, by Charles Deaudelin, was created in 1983 to integrate with the architecture of the Palais and revitalize the exterior corner of Saint-Antoine and Saint-Urbain streets. Movement of this steel mobile is determined by the wind, acting as a wind turbine. It is composed of pivoting stainless steel rods that are 20 feet long (six meters) and positioned on pivot absorbers.
- ***Horloge solaire***, is a laser installation by André Mongeau, located at the 201 Viger Avenue entrance. As a metaphor for the sundial, it is made of an acrylic support with 336 optical fibers and 500 cables. On the exterior, a laser beam makes the color of the fibers change according to the sun's intensity.
- ***Aurore boréale***, by Louise Panneton, adorns the Viger Foyer wall, east of room 517. Made of 23 tapestry modules of various heights mounted on a semi-circle of soft wood, this composition of wood, aluminum, wool and silver wire creates the sense of vibration, like the movement of the aurora borealis or northern lights.
- ***Au gré des vents***, by Marielle Rousseau-Vermette created in 1997, is a play of orange, red and blue hues. Mounted on aluminum tubing, it is located on the wall above the interior door of room 710.
- ***Lophophore : oiseaux des Indes au plumage coloré (bright plumage of birds from India)*** is made of wool, wood and linen. Created by Denise Philippon in 1983, this textile piece is located in the Viger Foyer, west of room 517.
- ***La sculpture-horloge*** on the Esplanade since 1983 is the work of Olga Zeldakova in collaboration with Denis Matte.

Since the Palais opened its doors in 1983, **the doors** of room 517 have been a showcase for art installations created by several Québec artists. To ensure their preservation, several of these works have been moved.



- The piece by Lucie Laporte and Joseph Marcil (untitled) originally on the doors of room 517D is now located on the exterior wall of room 524A.
- The piece by Carroll Grenon, entitled *Mouvements ondulatoires*, displayed on the doors of room 517C, has been relocated to Viger Hall, next to the AP-2 elevator.
- The piece by Jean-Pierre Legros, entitled *Portes-Forteresses*, installed on the doors of room 517B, is now located on the wall of the corridor on the fourth floor, east sector.
- The piece by Armand Vaillancourt, situated on the doors of room 517A, remains in place pending a meeting with the artist.

The Who's Who of the Expansion Project

Built by the Gespro-BFC-Divco consortium, with oversight and management provided by the Société immobilière du Québec, the expansion and modernization of the Palais des congrès de Montréal began in the spring of 2000. A daunting and highly complex project, the expansion required an investment of \$240 million, completely financed by the Québec government. After two years of construction work, the Palais inaugurated its new facilities on December 5, 2002.

Project architects

Responsible for the architectural concept of the expanded Palais is **Mario Saia**, member of the team of architects representing Tétreault, Parent, Languedoc et associés, Saia et Barbarese Architectes as well as Dupuis, Dubuc et associés (Ædifica). A native Montrealer, Mr. Saia founded his firm in 1968 after pursuing his education at the Montréal School of Architecture and at the University of Edinburgh. A recipient of the American Standard Award bestowed upon the best student at the Montréal School of Architecture in 1963, Mr. Saia has achieved a number of distinctions throughout his career as well as several awards in architecture as partner in charge and senior architect of his firm. In 1999 and 2002, Mr. Saia was awarded the Governor General's Award presented by the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada and the Canada Council respectively for the Sports Center in Montréal's Little Burgundy and Benny Farm.

Senior partner of the firm Les Architectes Tétreault, Parent, Languedoc et associés since 1975, **Michel Languedoc** has acquired considerable expertise in the execution of phased, turnkey construction projects. As a result of this experience, he has headed, as senior partner, several prestigious and complex



projects such as the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull, the Biodôme of Montréal, the new sports and residential complex for students of the Université du Québec à Montréal and the expansion of the Palais des congrès de Montréal. After obtaining a Bachelor of Arts from Assumption College in 1966 and a B.A. in Architecture from the Faculty of Design at the Université de Montréal in 1971, Michel Languedoc pursued more specialized studies in information technology from 1983 to 1984 in El Paso, Texas, which made him a pioneer in the digitization of the practice in Canada. His dynamism and desire to promote the advancement of the field earned him an induction to the College of Fellows at the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada in 1993.

The landscape architect

A graduate of the University of Guelph in Agronomy (agricultural sciences), of the University of Toronto in Architecture and of Harvard University in History and Design Theory, Claude Cormier is the author of landscapes that speak volumes, whose earthy, sensual and playful qualities seek mainly to elicit emotions...landscapes that while drawing their references from nature itself, carry the signature of the artist behind them. His most recent works have brought him to Shanghai, China, Métis in the Gaspé and to Montréal. Head of the firm Claude Cormier Architectes Paysagistes inc., which offers the talents of like-minded artists, also lovers of nature and artifice, Claude Cormier has received several awards, including the Frederick Todd Award from the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects in 2001 in recognition of his collection of work. In 2003, the Institute of Design Montréal awarded him first prize in the Landscape Architecture category for *Nature Légère / Lipstick Forest*.