

FORMA

THE MAGAZINE

LET'S SHAPE THE FUTURE TOGETHER!

VOL. 07 – July 30, 2026

IN THIS ISSUE

SPECIAL GUIDE
AI and AR in Architecture
page 40



A Note from the Founder: Learning to Listen

There's a line I wrote last month that I haven't been able to put down since: architecture is moving away from structures that try to conquer their surroundings and toward spaces that listen, heal, and restore. I meant it as an observation at the time. Putting this issue together, I've come to see it as closer to an instruction — because, project after project this month, our contributors seem to be circling the same quiet question: what does it actually mean to listen before you build?

Sometimes that listening is literal. On the Saskatchewan prairie, the Muscowpetung Powwow Arbour took its circular form directly from conversations with Elders. Its clear-span timber roof gathers thousands of dancers and spectators without a single column at its centre — a building shaped by community first, engineering second. In Wentworth-North, Québec, SONO rests on its bedrock exactly as the land was found, with no blasting and no excavation, because Atelier Carle decided the site's terms mattered more than the foundation's convenience. And on a punishing slope above Lake Memphremagog, the newly honoured Counter-Slope House by YH2 doesn't dominate its hillside so much as negotiate with it, arriving as two modest volumes rather than one commanding structure.

Other times, listening means paying attention to what a street — or a city — has already said. The Russell Hill Residence rises on the exact footprint of the home it replaced, learning Forest Hill's century-old material language before writing a single new sentence into it. Bibliothèque L'Octogone in LaSalle chose that same discipline at the civic scale, adding a new floor rather than a new footprint and keeping its original eight-sided form in full view instead of erasing it. And as Montréal marks twenty years as a UNESCO City of Design this year, its story is a case study in the same idea: that good design is less a monument than a patient, ongoing conversation with the people who live inside it.

Listening, it turns out, has as much to do with the ear as the eye. Our feature on luxury acoustic design makes the case that quiet itself may be the most under-rated luxury left in the modern open-plan home — and Mona, the Port Credit residence Studio Kimi carried floor to basement, shows what it looks like when a house is designed around a family's actual, unphotographed hours rather than a single perfect frame. Even our new guide to AI and AR in Architecture lands on this same note from an unexpected angle: the tools can generate a dozen lighting scenarios before your coffee is finished, but knowing which one is actually right still belongs to the person who has trained their eye — and their instincts — to notice.

I hope you'll also enjoy discovering Du Corail Residence tucked into the Laurentian forest, Cœur d'Artichaut's new partnership with the Spanish lighting house Peralta Vidavi, and this month's open calls from Buildner and Terraviva for anyone who'd rather pick up a pencil than just read about all of it.

If June's issue was about the buildings we choose to make peace with, this one is about the quieter discipline underneath that: knowing when to stop talking and start listening. I think that's what "shaping the future together" actually asks of us.

Let's keep listening, together.

Giuseppe Gutta
Founder, Forma The Magazine

Table of CONTENTS

ISSUE 07 — JULY 30, 2026

Page 06
Muscowpetung Powwow Arbour
 Award-Winning Indigenous Architecture

Page 12
The Russell Hill Residence
 A Century-Old Street Learns to Speak in a
 New Accent



Page 16
SONO
 Bedrock honesty, hemlock warmth

Page 22
Luxury Acoustic Design
 The Architecture of Quiet

Page 23
Competitions
 by Buildner



Page **24**
Mona
A House Built for the Quiet Hours

Page **28**
Du Corail Residence
Where the Forest Never Really Ends

Page **32**
Cœur d'Artichaut
A New Light in Montréal



Page **34**
Counter-Slope House
An Award-Winning Study in Restraint,
Weather, and Wood

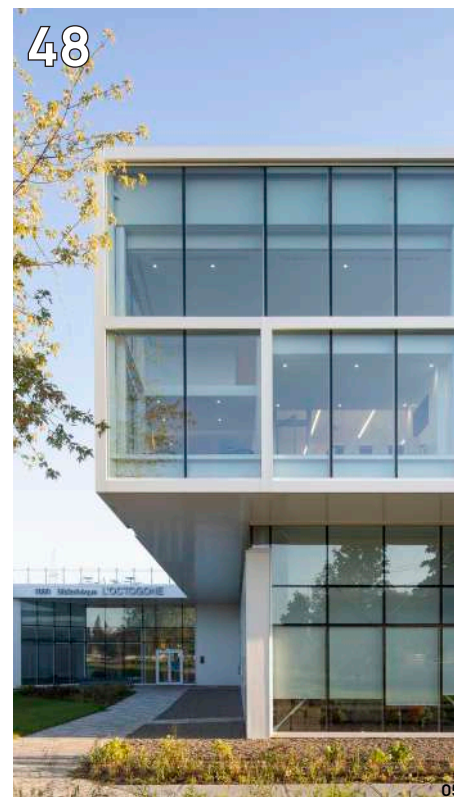
Page **40**
AI and AR in Architecture
Designing Before Building

Page **43**
Competitions
by Terraviva



Page **44**
Montréal
The City That Designed Itself

Page **48**
Bibliothèque L'Octogone
A Building That Learned to Open Its Arms



*A Circle Raised From the Prairie, Held Together by Memory.
Where Saulteaux Tradition and Structural Ambition Share the Same Roof.*



Muscowpetung Powwow Arbour
Award-Winning Indigenous Architecture

About seventy kilometres northeast of Regina, where the Qu'Appelle Valley opens onto the Saskatchewan prairie, a circular timber roof rises just above the grass. From a distance, it looks almost weightless, as though the wind alone were holding it up. This is the Muscowpetung Powwow Arbour, home to the Muscowpetung Saulteaux Nation's summer powwow season and now one of the country's most celebrated buildings.



Design by Oxbow Architecture & Richard Kroeker
Photography by Lindsay Reid



- ◉ **Location:** Muscowpetung Saulteaux Nation, Qu'Appelle Valley, Treaty 4 Territory, Saskatchewan
- ◉ **Capacity:** 2,500 spectators and 1,000 dancers across 1,222 square metres
- ◉ **Structure:** Clear-span circular roof in round timber and steel cable — no centre pole
- ◉ **Carbon:** Heavy timber cuts embodied carbon 68% versus steel; round timber saves a further 20% per member
- ◉ **Landscape:** 6.2 hectares of former farmland being restored to native prairie
- ◉ **Trajectory:** On track for full carbon neutrality by 2031
- ◉ **Honours:** 2026 Governor General's Medal in Architecture (RAIC); Architizer A+ Award, Architecture for Good
- ◉ **Lead Architects:** Oxbow Architecture (Brad Pickard) & Richard Kroeker
- ◉ **Team Members:** Richard Kroeker, Andrea Clayton, Anna Ringstrom, Ashley Graf, Brad Pickard, Jim Siemens, Jordyn Loy, Mason Loy, Megan Florizone, Meghan Taylor, Rory Picklyk, Sam Lock, Sarah Robertson, Tanis Worme
- ◉ **Structural Engineer:** Wolfrom Engineering
- ◉ **Electrical Engineer:** Ritenburg & Associates
- ◉ **Timber Structures Specialist:** Chris J. K. Williams
- ◉ **Sustainability Consultant:** Ha/f Climate Design

The Circle as First Principle

Nothing about the Arbour's shape happened by accident. Its clear-span circular form came directly out of long conversations with Elders, who steered the design back toward the traditional lodges Saulteaux communities have gathered in for generations.

In Saulteaux material culture, the circle carries deep meaning — continuity, equality, an unbroken relationship between people and land. The design team's task was not to build around that meaning, but from inside it.

Translating a circle that size into an actual roof took real engineering nerve. Close to the size of an NHL rink, the Arbour's roof spans the entire gathering space without a single column at its centre. It is held up instead by round timber paired with slender steel cable, pulled taut the way a bow bends wood into a curve, or a hide stretches tight across a drum.

The result comfortably holds 2,500 spectators and 1,000 dancers across 1,222 square metres — built so a new generation can witness, and one day inherit, ceremonies that might otherwise fade.



Building the Arbour, Building the Community

Long before the first timber post went up, this project was designed to give something back to the people who would use it.

Construction relied on local labour and regionally sourced round timber, with methods deliberately matched to skills and materials already close at hand. Every contract awarded on site, every skill passed between two pairs of hands, became part of what the building actually returned to the community.

It is an approach that echoes Mino-pimatisiwin, a Saulteaux concept often translated as "to live a good life."

That philosophy shows up in how the roof itself behaves.

Open at its very centre, the cone-shaped structure lets sunlight fall straight through to the grasses growing in the dance area below.



Architecture and landscape were never treated as two separate problems here. They were redesigned as one continuous system, each quietly shaping the other. Powwow season is only part of the Arbour's life. Year-round, it now operates as a cultural anchor for the community, hosting family wellness programming, education, and the everyday rhythm of life in Muscowpetung. Fittingly, it stands inside a landscape that mirrors its own values: acres of former farmland being coaxing, slowly, back into native prairie.



The Carbon Math of Round Timber

Saskatchewan poses a particular challenge for any architect thinking seriously about climate.

The province's electrical grid still relies heavily on fossil fuels, and buildings there can generate up to 700% more operational carbon than comparable buildings in provinces powered by hydroelectricity or nuclear energy.

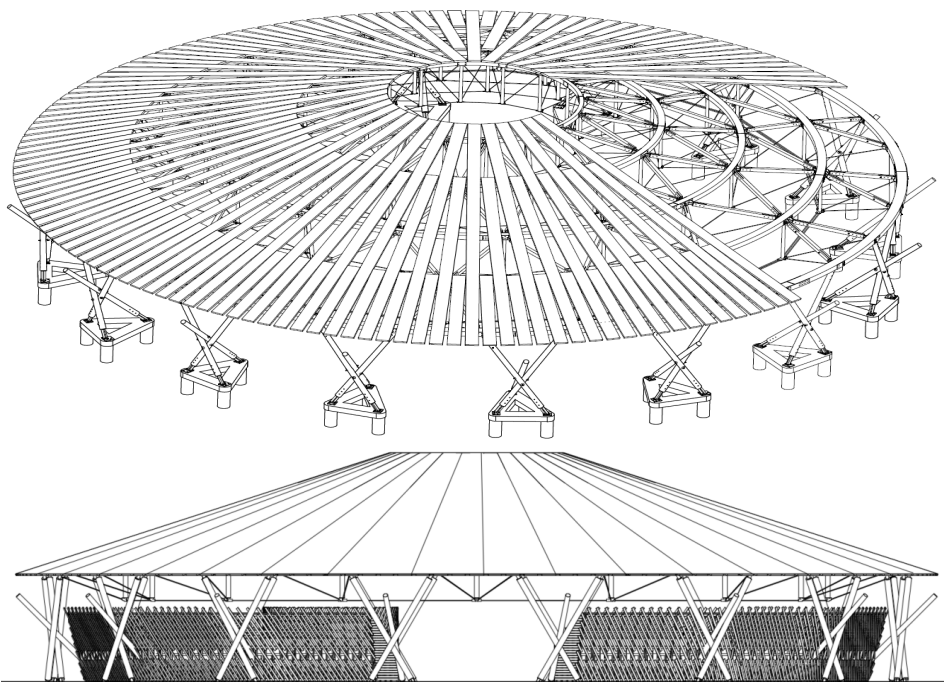
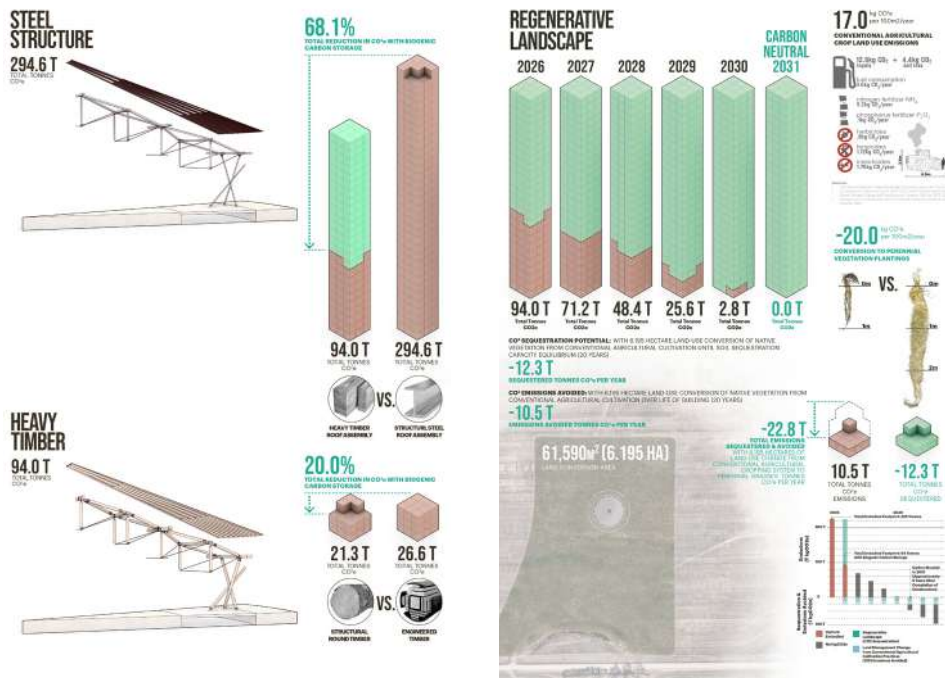
Rather than fighting that reality with furnaces and air conditioners, the design team chose to sidestep it almost entirely. The Arbour has no mechanical heating or cooling — nothing standing between visitors and the prairie air. Passive design alone carries the space comfortably through spring, summer, and fall, the seasons when land-based cultural life actually happens.

With energy use largely designed out of the equation, the real work went into two other places: the carbon locked in the building's materials and the land's capacity to pull carbon back out of the sky.

A rigorous life-cycle assessment shaped nearly every structural decision that followed. Choosing heavy timber over structural steel cut the building's carbon footprint by 68 percent, since wood continues to store the carbon it absorbed while it was still growing. Builders went further, choosing minimally processed round timber over milled, manufactured beams — trimming embodied carbon by another 20% per structural member and shortening the supply chain considerably along the way.

Even the columns carry that logic in their geometry. Arranged in tripods, they let the roof stand securely on smaller-diameter timber, so no old-growth tree ever had to be cut down to hold it up.

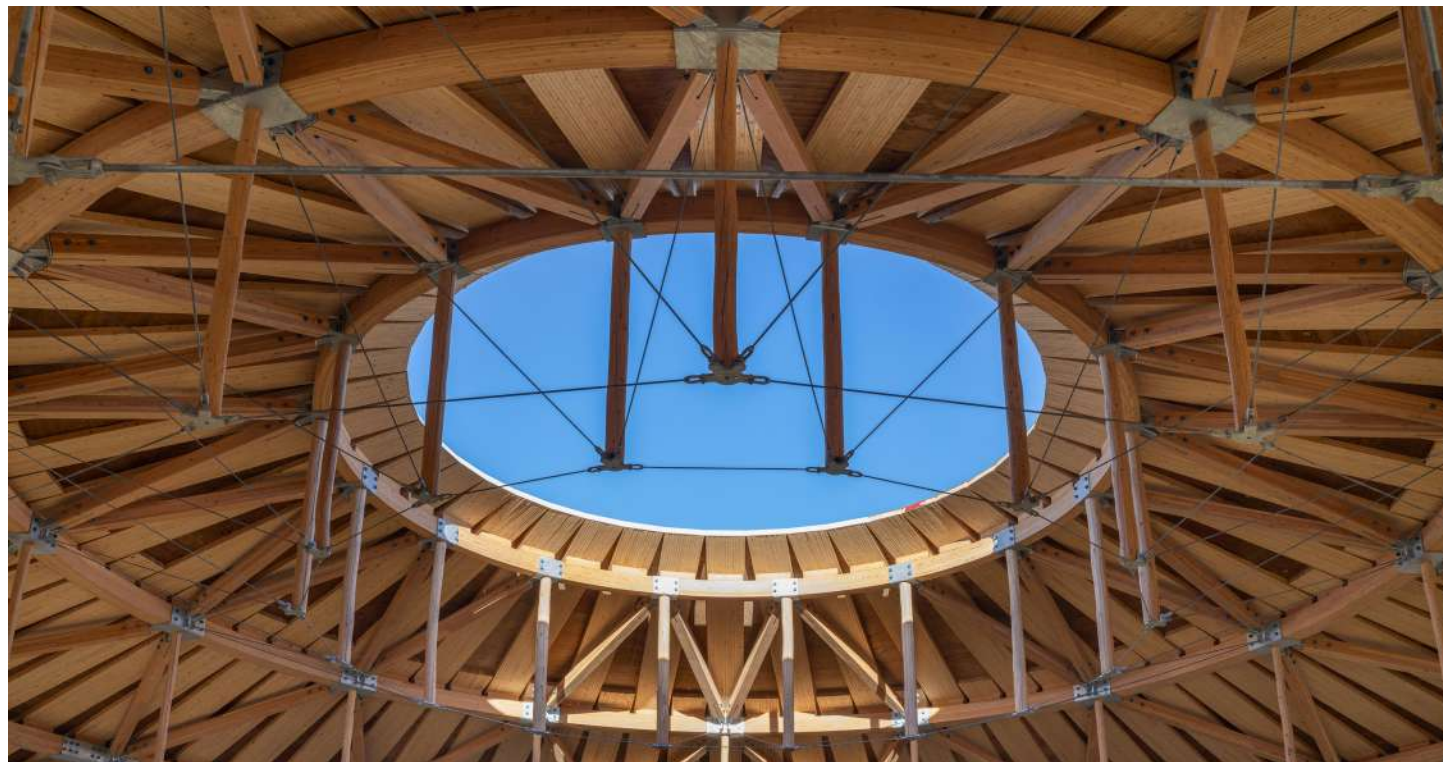
Outside, 6.2 hectares of former farmland are being returned to native prairie — expected to draw roughly 12.3 tonnes of CO2 equivalent from the air every year, while avoiding another 10.5 tonnes simply by no longer being farmed. Together, these measures put the Arbour on track for full carbon neutrality by 2031.



A Growing List of Honours: The Muscowpetung Powwow Arbour now joins a run of recognition dating back to 2023, when it first drew attention from the Holcim Foundation and the World Architecture Festival.

This year brought its biggest stage yet: the Architizer A+ Award in the Architecture for Good category and the 2026 Governor General's Medal in Architecture, presented by the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada and the Canada Council for the Arts.

Yet, as Oxbow Architecture, and collaborating architect Richard Kroeker — inducted as a Member of the Order of Canada in 2025 — are quick to point out, the recognition belongs first to Muscowpetung Saulteaux Nation and to the guidance of knowledge keepers Myke Agecutay and Jeff Cappo.



A Circle That Keeps Its Word

The greater achievement may be the one no medal can capture. Over its lifetime, the Arbour is expected to sequester more carbon than was emitted during its construction — a rare, measurable case of traditional knowledge translating directly into climate results.

But for the Muscowpetung Saulteaux Nation, success will likely be measured elsewhere: in the dancers gathering beneath an open roof each summer, and in the moment an Elder leans down to pass something on to a child, under a circle that has, once again, given the community a place to belong.

The Russell Hill Residence

A Century-Old Street Learns to Speak in a New Accent

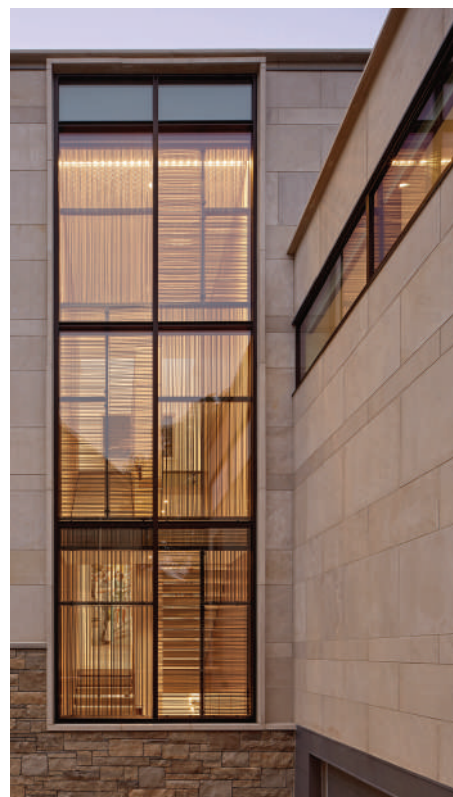
*A subtle, assured enhancement
to a streetscape designed for
durability for the next hundred years.*



Design by Michael Taylor Architecture + Design & Cecconi Simone
Photography by Ben Rahn / A-Frame Inc.

In Forest Hill, nothing new is welcomed without question. Toronto's most storied enclave holds its limestone facades and tree-canopied streets like a family holds onto heirlooms — passed down carefully, rarely reset. So when a home rises here, it inherits more than a lot; it inherits a conversation already a century deep.

The Russell Hill Residence enters that conversation without raising its voice. Designed by Michael Taylor Architecture + Design in collaboration with Cecconi Simone and completed in 2018, the 5,700-square-foot home learns the neighbourhood's dialect fluently — then finds something entirely its own to say.



Building On What Was Already There

The house did not choose a blank lot. It rose on the exact footprint of the home that preceded it — a decision that reads less like convenience and more like intention. Michael Taylor Architecture + Design treated the project as a continuation rather than a clean break: one chapter closing so another, written in the same hand, could begin. That restraint sets the tone for everything that follows — a home confident enough to build forward without erasing what stood there first.

Great slabs of Indiana limestone rise above a base of split-faced Algonquin stone, a pairing lifted straight from Forest Hill's own vocabulary. It reads as a nod to the neighbours rather than a rebuttal — the same materials, spoken a little differently. The effect is a house that settles into its block rather than standing apart from it, at ease among a century of stone-fronted neighbours.

Glance once, and the facade reads calm and composed. Look again, and the contemporary hand becomes obvious. Limestone frames wrap the windows and rooflines with crispness that catches the day's changing light, breaking what could have been a flat wall into something alive with shadow. It's a familiar Forest Hill detail, sharpened into a more modern line — proof that the house isn't just fitting in; **it's paying attention.**

The story doesn't end at the front door. That same rugged Algonquin stone reappears on the garden walls, while a smoother, sandblasted version becomes the front steps and the paving underfoot. Around back, it resurfaces once more, cladding the wall behind the pool — so the entire property reads as one uninterrupted material thought, from curb to backyard.



A House Designed Around Daylight

Step inside, and the architecture's real subject reveals itself: light, and how far it can travel through a room. A long skylight runs the length of the dining room, washing the space in a steady overhead glow that shifts with the hour. Pivoting doors let the room fold open into the kitchen, turning two spaces into one long gathering table — big enough, in fact, to seat thirty.

At the rear of the house, the ceiling lifts to sixteen feet, and the living room suddenly seems to breathe differently than the rest of the home. Clerestory windows catch light from three directions a standard room would never see, while a full wall of glass dissolves the boundary between inside and out. Beyond it, a deep overhang shades the patio, and a pool stretches the length of the terrace — one continuous space, indoors quietly becoming outdoors.

If the architecture sets the framework, Cecconi Simone's interiors are what make the house feel lived-in rather than simply admired. Bronze privacy screens, rich wood panelling, and custom millwork run through nearly every room, adding grain and warmth to the home's cooler stone bones.





One Continuous Conversation

Nothing here feels like it happened in two separate stages — architecture first, decoration after. The two disciplines worked from the same set of instincts, in the same room.

The result is a home that feels less like a single grand gesture and more like an ongoing collaboration — one still quietly shaping how a family moves through these rooms every day.

The Russell Hill Residence doesn't ask Forest Hill to choose between its past and its future. By speaking the neighbourhood's material language while writing its own sentences within it, Michael Taylor Architecture + Design and Cecconi Simone have built a home that belongs to both — a quiet, confident new voice on a street built to keep listening for another hundred years.



*On Laurentian granite, a house
that listens before it speaks.
An architecture built for two lives
– together and entirely their own.*



SONO
Bedrock honesty, hemlock warmth



North of Montréal, where the boreal forest gives way to sheets of granite bedrock, Atelier Carle has built a house that refuses to perform.

They call it **SONO** — not a cottage dressed in rustic costume, not another glass box built for the feed, but something rarer: a home that grew from its own ground. Commissioned by two friends who wanted to share a life without surrendering their separate ones, SONO asks a question most retreat architecture has stopped asking. What does it actually mean to live somewhere?

- **Location:** Wentworth-North, Québec, Canada
- **Design Studio:** Atelier Carle
 - Alain Carle / Founding architect
 - Isaniel Lévesque / Associate architect
 - Baptiste Balbrick / M.Arch
 - James Jabbour / M.Arch
 - Starr Wang / M.Arch
 - Sarah Mei Mousseau / Architectural technologist
- **General contractor:** Metric Construction Inc.
- **Structural engineer:** VCMA Engineering consultants
- **Geotechnical engineer:** Ingénat Engineering consultants
- **Reclaimed wood:** Taylor Lukian
- **Windows:** Shalwin
- **Millwork:** Xavier Collection



Design by Atelier Carle
Photography by Félix Michaud

A Home for Two, Built on Restraint

Before you even reach the door, Atelier Carle has already begun telling the story.

Three concrete walls rise from the earth at different heights, scaled not for a single visitor but for the sweep of forest around them. They don't announce the house so much as prepare you for it — a slow procession toward one narrow gap, barely wide enough to admit a person. The walls are built for permanence, marking the site rather than simply sitting on it, yet the opening between them is almost shy in what it reveals. It is a threshold in the oldest sense: the precise point where one world ends and another begins.



Cross that threshold, and the architecture changes its mind entirely. The concrete grammar of arrival gives way to something warmer — a loose, timber-framed sequence of rooms that unfolds rather than announces itself. Sightlines are carefully calibrated so that privacy is never a matter of closed doors. From the outset, this was a house for two friends who wanted closeness without losing the parts of themselves that need to be alone. The plan holds both desires at once, letting togetherness and solitude share a roof without ever competing for it.



Atelier Carle set aside the usual regional shorthand — no borrowed vernacular, no rustic gestures for their own sake — in favour of something harder to fake: how a room actually feels.

The questions guiding the design were almost sensory. What does this space feel like at dawn? Where does the afternoon light land? Where does sound go once it enters a room? The house steps down the site's natural slope in a series of terraces, each opening onto a different angle of the forest beyond. Rooms are oriented north, so the light arrives soft and indirect rather than in a flood.

It doesn't overwhelm a room so much as slowly reveal it, giving the interiors a rhythm that shifts with the hours rather than staying fixed.



If concrete gives SONO its gravity, hemlock gives it its pulse. The wood was sourced from a site immediately adjacent to the project, then milled and installed by a local carpenter who worked alongside the architects from the outset. It appears wherever it matters: the exposed structure, the columns on the north façade, the fascias, and the cladding that wraps the exterior. Its pale, narrow grain reads more like skin than a surface, especially set against the resolve of the concrete around it. Moving through the house begins to feel like moving from earth into shelter — stone first, then wood, then warmth.

Perhaps the most radical decision at SONO is one most visitors will never notice: the house rests directly on the existing bedrock. No blasting. No significant excavation. The ground was left exactly as it was found. It is a small refusal with large consequences — an insistence that the site's ecology mattered more than the convenience of a flatter foundation. The building, in the end, learned the land's terms rather than asking the land to learn its own.

A NEW MODEL OF MAKING

SONO's story isn't only about the finished house — it's about how houses like this get made at all. Atelier Carle found that the standard fixed-price contract, with its rigid sequence and single decision-maker, couldn't accommodate what this project needed. What replaced it was closer to a web of trust — between architect and client, between architect and craftspeople, and between the drawing and the material reality of building on solid rock. Consequence and craft had to be negotiated in real time, room by room, decision by decision.



The Kitchen, Where Everything Meets

Every house like this needs a room that explains its philosophy without a word. At SONO, that room is the kitchen.

It is the one space that opens fully to the landscape — not a window's worth of view, but full, unguarded communion with the trees outside.

As the social anchor of the home, it's where the two residents meet in the day-to-day: over food, over conversation, over the particular quality of light that keeps shifting beyond the glass.

Kitchen, forest, and the two people who live between them — all three converge in the same room.



What SONO ultimately offers its residents isn't square footage, though it has plenty, or a view, though that too. It offers a rarer kind of luxury: a home that lets two people be entirely together and entirely themselves, often in the same afternoon. Long after the concrete has weathered and the hemlock has silvered in the northern light, that will still be the real achievement here — not a house built on the land, but one that finally learned how to listen to it.





Luxury Acoustic Design The Architecture of Quiet

For years, luxury was mostly about visual appeal — polished marble, flowing light, and carefully chosen colours. However, in the best homes and hotels today, there's an often unnoticed quality: a remarkable sense of quiet. As open-plan layouts reshape modern living, top designers are focusing on a sense long neglected. It seems that hearing, more than sight, might now be the ultimate luxury.

We have fallen in love with open space — sweeping lobbies, sunlit kitchens that spill into living rooms, and single rooms built to hold work, rest, and everything in between. But openness carries a cost the eye never sees coming. Sound has nowhere left to hide. The whirl of an espresso machine, a burst of laughter, the click of heels on stone — in a vast, unbroken room, every sound multiplies. What should feel serene can just as easily turn chaotic. For decades, the fix was blunt: solid walls, floor -to-ceiling. But rigid drywall does more than block sound. It blocks light. It blocks flow. It turns a fluid home into a maze of closed doors. The challenge for today's designers is far more delicate — how do you keep a room open to the eye while keeping it closed to the noise?

ACOUSTICS
OF
ART
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The answer arrived with a name: acoustic zoning. Rather than building walls, architects are now shaping something more subtle — invisible boundaries of sound. Within a single open room, they carve out micro-environments, each with its own acoustic mood. The trick lies in disguise. Sound-absorbing materials are dressed as beautiful, purposeful decor, so a space can feel unbroken to the eye while quietly managing exactly where its noise begins and ends.

The freestanding screen has become one of design's quiet heroes. At first glance, it is simply elegant — a sculptural room divider that breaks up a vast space with rhythm and shadow. Look closer, and there is more at work. Built with sound-dampening cores, these screens carve out pockets of hush within an open plan: a corner for reading, a nook for a private conversation, a moment of retreat without ever leaving the room.

Few materials define contemporary luxury quite like fluted wood panelling. Its ridged, sculptural lines have become shorthand for warmth and craftsmanship in homes and hotels alike. But behind those beautiful wooden strips lies a quieter kind of engineering. An acoustic felt backing, hidden from view, absorbs echoes and softens a room's sound before it ever reaches the ear. It is a material with two jobs — one for the eye, one for the ear — and it performs both without ever looking like it's working.

Then there is wood-wool — raw, textural, almost sculptural in its imperfection. Woven from natural fibres and often suspended from ceilings or mounted as wall art, it brings a piece of the outdoors into the most refined interiors. Its beauty is only half the story. Wood-wool behaves like an invisible sponge, soaking up harsh frequencies before they can bounce and build. A material chosen for how it looks is, quietly, doing the work of silence.

THE NEW MEASURE OF LUXURY

For years, the finest interiors competed on what could be seen. Now, the most forward-thinking spaces are measured by something quieter — how they sound and how they make us feel by controlling what we hear. As the boundaries between living, working, and relaxing continue to dissolve, the ultimate luxury may not be a room at all. It may be the silence around it.

The best-designed spaces evoke feelings, like hush behind a wooden screen or calm in an open room.

Architecture Competition

RE:FORM

New Life for Old Spaces
EDITION #3

Registration Deadline: September 10, 2026
architecturecompetitions.com/reform3

For decades, the default solution to spatial challenges has been to build from scratch. What if the most sustainable, innovative solutions aren't found in new construction, but in reimagining what already exists?

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Mona

A House Built for the Quiet Hours



Design by Studio Kimi Interior Inc.
Photography by Studio Kimi Interior Inc.

*One Studio's Vision, Carried Without
Interruption From the Foundation
to the Basement Floor*



Some houses are built for a camera. This one was built for a life. Mona rises just off the Lake Ontario shoreline in Port Credit, a 6,000-square-foot residence shaped around how a family actually moves through an ordinary day, not how a single room might photograph. Studio Kimi Interior Inc. designed, built, and finished the house in full, and that single hand shows everywhere: the same warmth, the same restraint, and the same close attention follow you from the front door to the basement floor.

The Room That Sets The Tone

Walk through the front door, and the ceiling simply keeps going. The main floor opens into a double-height living room anchored by a linear fireplace wrapped in dramatic white marble, drawing the eye upward the moment you step inside.

Underfoot, white oak runs the full floor in a herringbone chevron, its geometry adding a quiet rhythm without ever demanding attention. Beside the fireplace, custom millwork glows from within, lit like architecture rather than storage. The effect lands closer to sanctuary than showroom — a room built equally for long evenings and quiet mornings.



A Kitchen in Two Acts

Most homes ask a single kitchen to do everything: the quiet weekday breakfast and the loud, fragrant work of a big dinner.

Mona doesn't.

Its main kitchen is surfaced almost entirely in Taj Mahal quartzite, a creamy, veined stone that carries the room's everydaylife—coffee, homework, conversation.

Behind it, out of view, a fully equipped spice kitchen absorbs the heavier cooking and the busiest entertaining, so the visible kitchen never has to look like a working one. It's restraint by design, not by accident.



A Retreat Within the Retreat

Upstairs, the house makes a quiet case for personal space. Each of the four bedrooms has its own ensuite and walk-in closet — no shared bathrooms, no morning queue. It's a small decision with an outsized effect: a family can share a roof without ever feeling like they're sharing a room. A crafting area tucked off the main hall adds another note of everyday practicality — the kind of space that rarely shows up in a rendering but changes how a home is actually lived in.

The primary bedroom maintains its own quiet register. A fireplace occupies one wall, a circular brushed-brass chandelier warms the ceiling, and custom built-ins wrap the room in the same white oak and cream palette found throughout the house. It reads as three rooms folded into one — a place to sleep, to read, and to dress — without ever feeling divided.

In short, it is a room built to begin and end the day well.



Most basements downshift — carpet tiles, pot lights, a lower-effort echo of the floors above. Mona's does the opposite.

Studio Kimi carried the same material language downstairs in full: walnut cabinetry, marble fireplace walls, and the same unhurried attention to light and proportion that defines the rest of the house.

The result is less a finished basement than a complete second home — a bar, a home theatre, a gym, a spa, two guest bedrooms, and three bathrooms, all connected in a single fluid sequence designed for hosting without crowding the family upstairs.

Beyond the walls, the sense of considered abundance doesn't stop at the back door. A pool and a private basketball court extend the same ease into the landscape, rounding out a property built as much for a Saturday afternoon as for a quiet weekday evening.

One Vision Across Every Room

What makes Mona memorable isn't any single room. It's the way none of them waver — the same warm white oak, the same quartzite, and the same custom millwork built specifically for its space, carried without interruption from the ground floor to the basement. That kind of consistency is rare in custom residential work and nearly impossible without a single studio controlling every decision along the way.



Mona doesn't reach for grand gestures. It offers something quieter: a house where every material, every proportion, and every room sequence aligns with the others, so a family can move through their days with less friction and more ease. Its residents get more than square footage on the Lake Ontario shoreline — they get a home that already understood how they live, long before they ever walked through the door.

Du Corail Residence

Where the Forest Never Really Ends

*It is a home built the only way
that truly lasts: gently, and
entirely for the people inside it.*

Rather than
dominating the
landscape, the
house settles
into it gently.

Long before a single wall went up, years were spent simply paying attention. The architects traced the slope of the land, the path of the light, and the particular hush that settles over this stretch of forest — and then they listened just as closely to the family who would eventually call it home. What emerged wasn't a house dropped onto a site. It was a house that seems to have negotiated its own shape with the land, yielding where the land asked it to, opening where the trees invited it to.

Design by Entre Quatre Murs
Photography by Maxime Brouillet



At the centre of the home stands a staircase that seems to defy its own weight. Encased in a railing of clear glass, it rises through all three levels like something caught mid-breath, drawing daylight from the highest window down to the lowest floor.

To climb it is to feel less like moving between rooms and more like moving through weather — the light shifting overhead, the forest sliding past the glass with every step.



Each level of the Du Corail Residence has its own temperament.

At the very top, the mezzanine is a hushed room — a private retreat where the owners wake to views that reach straight into the treetops.

On the main floor, the house opens its arms wide. The living room, kitchen, and dining table share one uninterrupted space, held together by windows so generous that the forest outside all but becomes part of the room's furniture.

Below, where the land begins its natural slope, the lower level catches far more light than a basement has any right to. Teenagers' bedrooms and guest quarters live here, finished to the same exacting standard as the floors above — proof that no space in this house was treated as an afterthought.

Three Floors, Three Moods



Every material in this home was chosen as a kind of translation, not decoration. Natural stone begins outdoors and simply continues, carrying the site's rocky character straight through the front door and into the living spaces. Wood, meanwhile, is everywhere — in ceilings, floors, and custom cabinetry — warm, grained, and unmistakably kin to the trees just beyond the glass. Beyond their beauty, these choices do real work: the home is oriented to draw on the sun's warmth and the forest's natural breezes, an old kind of wisdom dressed in contemporary architecture.

The kitchen took shape through close conversation with the family who would cook in it: pale grey cabinetry, warm wood tones, and black accents, all set beneath countertops of quartz so smooth it seems polished by the light itself. But the room's true showpiece sits at its edge — a glass wine cellar tucked into the corner where the kitchen meets the dining room. Rather than hiding the bottles away, it puts them on display like a small, glowing library, proof that even storage can be granted the dignity of art.

That same attentiveness runs through every room in the house. Walk-in closets, built-in furniture, bathroom vanities — each was shaped to the family's daily rhythms, not to some generic idea of what a household needs. Even the lighting was designed to shift its mood throughout the day, quietly adjusting as morning turns to evening. In this house, nothing was left on a default setting.



A Home for the Long Run

In the end, the Du Corail Residence asks for very little attention. It simply holds a family — in the slant of afternoon light on the staircase, in the murmur of the kitchen at dinner, in the deep quiet of the mezzanine at night — and lets the forest keep doing, just beyond the glass, what it has always done. It is a home built the only way that truly lasts: gently, and entirely for the people inside it.

Cœur d'Artichaut

A New Light in Montréal



Light shapes how a room is remembered — the hour it's used, the conversations it shelters, the mood it leaves behind. With Peralta Vidavi now within reach, Montréal's homes, hotels, and restaurants gain more than fixtures. They gain a slower, more considered glow: handmade an ocean away and finished, at last, close to home.

In a sun-drenched workshop somewhere in Spain, artisans have spent forty years coaxing warmth from metal, fabric, and flame. That warmth has now reached Montréal. Cœur d'Artichaut, the city's go-to address for furniture and objects with a point of view, has formed an exclusive Canadian partnership with Peralta Vidavi, the storied Spanish lighting house. For the first time, its hand-finished fixtures and lampshades are available here by special order, bridging the distance between European ateliers and Québécois interiors.

Peralta Vidavi does not manufacture lighting so much as compose it. For more than forty years, the house has safeguarded a distinctly Spanish tradition of craftsmanship, built on patience rather than production lines. Modern innovation is welcomed, but never at the expense of the hand: heritage and invention share the same worktable.

Nothing here is standard issue. Each piece begins as a study in material — rich textiles, considered metals, and textures chosen for how they hold and release light. The result is a fixture that does more than illuminate a room; it sets its mood, its temperature, and its personality.



Every Fixture A Work of Art

Peralta Vidavi has stayed close to the source. Every fixture is made entirely by hand in Spain, in close collaboration with local suppliers who share the house's commitment to ethical, sustainable making. The payoff is twofold: a piece built to outlast trends and a process flexible enough to adapt to exactly what a room requires.

Off-the-shelf was never really the point. Dimension, texture, colour — nearly everything about a Peralta Vidavi piece can be adapted to the room it is meant for. With expert creative direction guiding each decision, a familiar silhouette becomes something closer to a collector's piece: singular, considered, unrepeatable.

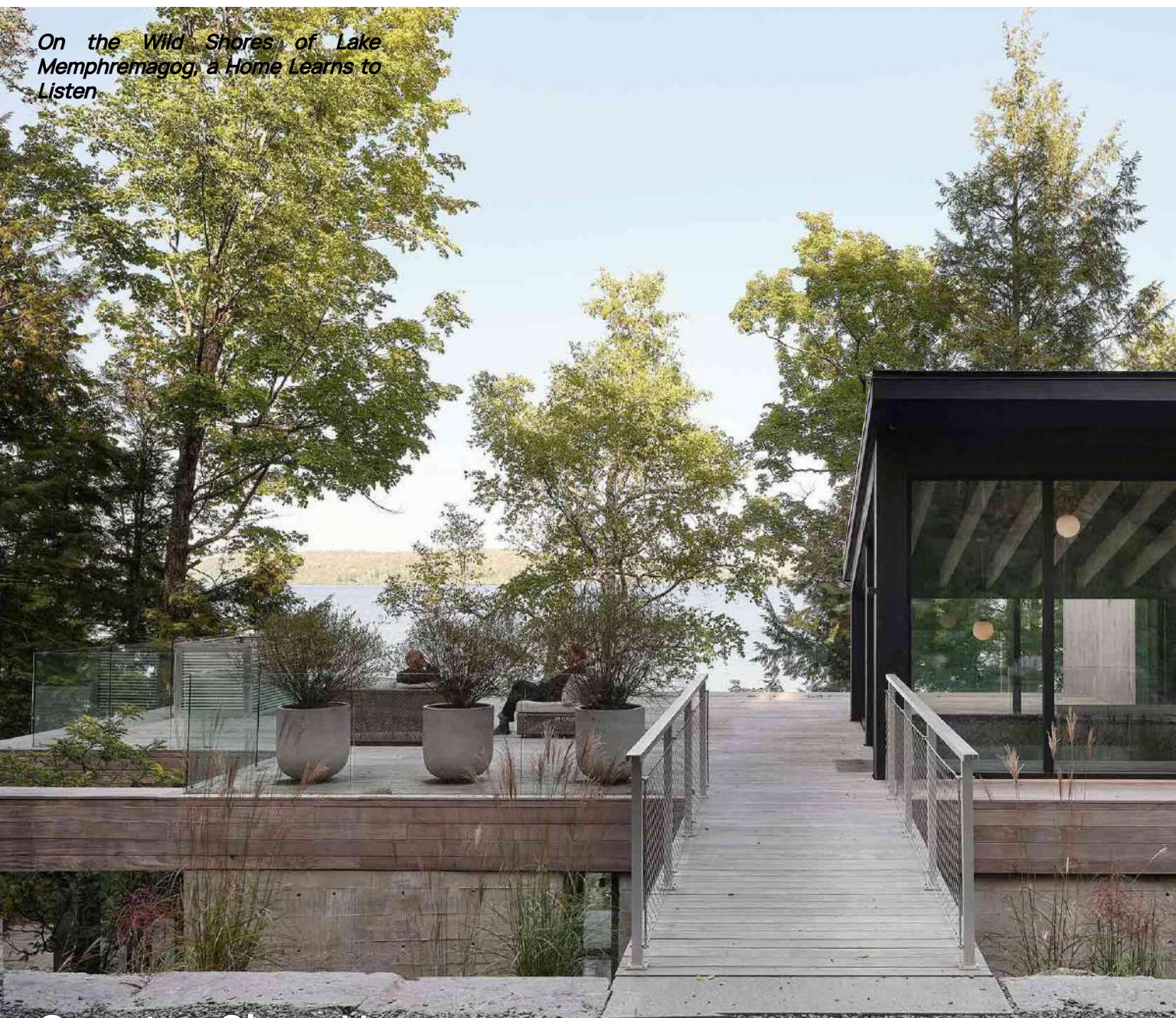


A Peralta Vidavi fixture rarely goes unnoticed, which is exactly the point. In a private residence, it can shift a room's entire emotional register — softening a dining nook, anchoring a stairwell, and giving an evening its glow. In hotels, restaurants, and offices, the same fixtures become part of the architecture itself: a visual identity, suspended from the ceiling. For Cœur d'Artichaut's president, Elisheva San Nicolas, the partnership is less about the product than about possibility. It's a shared vision of how light shapes a space.



A New Chapter for Montréal Design: Cœur d'Artichaut has long positioned itself as more than a showroom — a translator, of sorts, between exceptional craftsmanship and everyday living. This partnership extends that mission across an ocean, giving Montréal's design community direct access to a Spanish workshop most would otherwise never reach. It is, in the truest sense, heritage put to work in the present tense.

*On the Wild Shores of Lake
Memphremagog, a Home Learns to
Listen*



Counter-Slope House

An Award-Winning Study in Restraint, Weather, and Wood



Design by YH2 architecture
Photography by Maxime Brouillet

In the Eastern Townships of Québec, where the land drops steeply toward Lake Memphremagog, sunlight has to work to reach the ground. It filters down through old stands of trees, arriving late in the morning and slipping away early in the afternoon, settling over a shoreline that has never made life easy for the people who build along it. It's here, on a slope steep enough to feel more like a cliff than a lot, that the Counter-Slope House has taken shape — a residence that recently earned the Ordre des Architectes du Québec's 2026 Award of Excellence, not by dominating its site, but by learning to defer to it.

Architecture as the Art of Listening



Two Volumes in Quiet

Some sites invite a house. This one negotiates for it.

The land here doesn't slope toward the water so much as plunge — a steep, forested drop toward a narrow strip of shoreline. Everything about the setting feels elemental: old trees, hard-won light, a lake that seems to hold its own private weather. Rather than forcing that terrain into submission, the design team let it lead.

Instead of a single commanding structure, the house arrives as two.

A pair of distinct volumes rise from the hillside, each topped with a dual-pitched roof — a slope paired with a counter-slope — that echoes the angles of the surrounding land. Rather than being fused into a single mass, the forms feel less constructed than grown, as if they simply emerged from the ground on their own terms.

That fractured roofline does real work. It keeps the building modest in scale, so the surrounding trees and rock faces remain the tallest things in the room.

Conversation



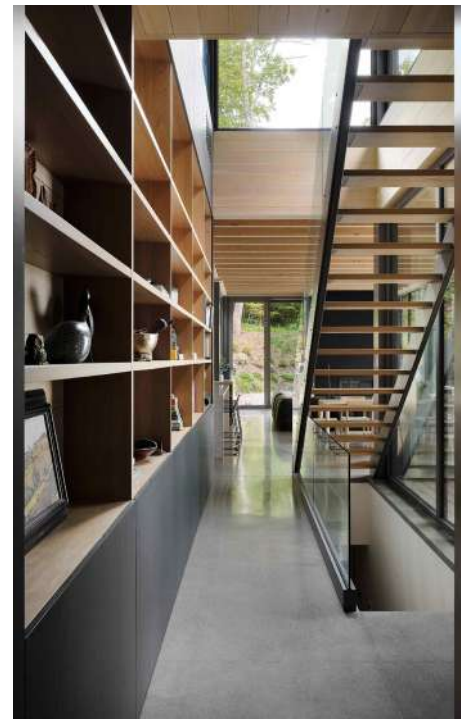


A Skin Built to Weather

Where the house meets stone, it does so plainly. Cast-in-place concrete anchors the building at its base, meeting the hillside's natural rock with an honesty that makes no attempt to disguise the contact between architecture and earth. Above that line, untreated cedar takes over the exterior — left raw on purpose so that years of sun, rain and snow will slowly turn it silver-grey until it all but dissolves into the surrounding forest.

Step through the door, and the mood shifts entirely.

This isn't a house designed to look finished on day one. It's a house designed to keep changing long after the ribbon is cut.



Most houses welcome you at ground level. This one asks you to descend first. Visitors enter from above, moving down through the building toward the lake rather than up into it — a reversal that shapes how the house feels underfoot. At the top, the roof of the main volume becomes a terrace: a lookout, a threshold, a rare flat plane on a site otherwise defined by slope. On a hillside this steep, that single horizontal gesture feels almost like a held breath.



The two upper volumes turn their backs to one another by design — one facing the lake, the other the mountain — tucking the bedrooms directly into the tree canopy. From inside, the forest doesn't sit politely outside the window; it fills it, a living backdrop that shifts with the hour and the season. These aren't rooms with a nice view. They are rooms that feel as if they belong to the trees themselves.

Sleeping Inside the Canopy



Floors extend into balconies. Walls give way to glass. The boundary between inside and outside, so carefully guarded in most homes, is treated here as negotiable. The architects call it perceptual continuity — the idea that a threshold needn't announce itself. The terrace doesn't read as the end of the house. It reads as one more room, simply one with weather in it.



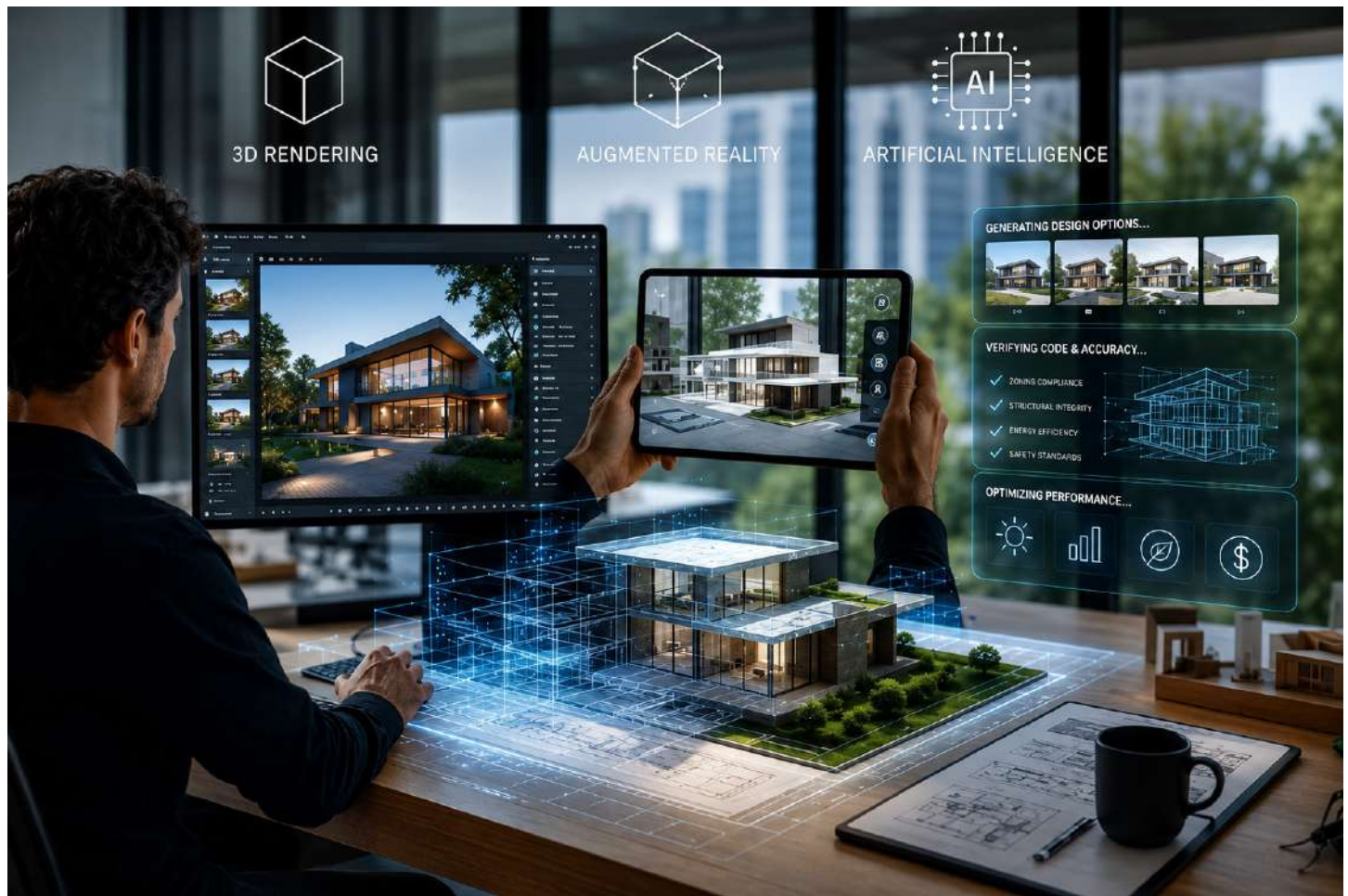
Where the House Forgets Its Edges

It would be easy to file the Counter-Slope House under “biophilic design” and move on. But that label undersells what is actually happening here. This is a house built on subtraction rather than addition — one that earns its place on a difficult site not by overpowering it, but through sustained, patient attention. At a moment when so much residential architecture still asks nature to accommodate it, this project asks the opposite question: how does a house fit itself into a place that was never meant to be built on in the first place?



An Architecture of Restraint

Award or not, the real measure of the Counter-Slope House will always be quieter than any accolade: the moment a resident steps onto that rooftop terrace, looks down through the pines toward Lake Memphremagog, and feels, if only for a second, like a guest in the forest rather than its owner. That, more than any material or angle, is the achievement here — a house that never asks the landscape to make room but simply, patiently, makes itself at home in it.



AI and AR in Architecture Designing Before Building

The way we explore a space has quietly changed. Not long ago, design lived on paper — a portfolio of flat, frozen images and the hope that the viewer could imagine the rest. A designer built a model, rendered it into a single perfect frame, and waited to see if it landed. It usually worked. But it asked a lot of the person on the other side of the desk. They had to picture themselves in a room they'd never stood in — guess how a chair might fit, how the afternoon light might fall, and whether a floor plan would suit the rhythm of their days.

That guesswork is disappearing. Today, a client can walk through a home before its foundation is poured, place a sofa in a living room it hasn't entered yet, or watch a facade change from timber to copper in the time it takes to ask the question. This is the story of how artificial intelligence and augmented reality got the design world talking about feeling a space, not just looking at one — and why the professionals doing it best have made verification, not automation, the real skill of the moment.

The End of the Flat Image

For decades, architectural visualization meant one thing: a beautiful still rendering. A designer built a 3D model, waited hours for it to render, and presented the result as a kind of promise.

The viewer's job was to imagine the rest — the weight of a doorway, the reach of a countertop, the way morning light might move across a floor they'd never stood on.

That promise no longer has to be taken on faith. A design can now be walked through, tested, and questioned before a single wall goes up.

The portfolio hasn't just gotten prettier. It has come alive — and clients have noticed. They no longer want to see a space. They want to experience it.

Picture a client meeting mid-conversation: "What if we used copper instead of timber for the facade?" A few years ago, that question meant a trip back to the computer, a long render, and a follow-up email days later.

Now, the change can appear while the question is still hanging in the air — sometimes in seconds. The conversation never loses momentum, and a designer can walk through a dozen directions before choosing one.

AI has also quietly taken on the tasks that always had to happen but never needed a trained eye: adjusting light across the hours of the day, testing colour after colour, populating a scene with the small human details of a lived-in room, and smoothing out the noise in a render.

None of it demands artistic judgment. All of it takes time. Removing it from a designer's plate simply returns that time to the decisions that actually deserve it — and industry reporting increasingly points to real hours saved, not just faster pictures.

The Discipline of Seeing Clearly

Speed is not the same as truth, and the sharpest professionals working with AI today have developed a second instinct alongside their creative one: verification.

It starts with the fundamentals — does a doorway sit lower than the wall around it, do the sightlines feel honest, do the materials belong in the same room, or is something quietly off?

From there, the image has to meet the real world. Measurements, structural placement, building codes, zoning, and the actual flow of people through a space — none of it is negotiable, however lovely the picture.

Then comes the test of practicality: could this actually be built, in real materials, at a real cost, without becoming a maintenance headache in five years?

And finally, the room is opened to other eyes — colleagues, clients, and the people who will actually live with the decision. Their instincts catch what a screen never will.

This is where human judgment remains impossible to automate. AI can widen the field of possibilities faster than anyone before it. Knowing which one is actually wise still belongs to the person who has spent a career learning what a building owes the people inside it.

Augmented reality is what happens when a design idea stops living only on a screen and starts standing in your actual room.

Instead of imagining a new sofa in the corner by the window, you hold up a phone and watch it appear there — to scale, in your light, exactly where you're thinking of putting it.

Instead of wondering whether a proposed building will sit comfortably beside its neighbours, you see the overlay settle onto the real street, in the real skyline, today.

Beneath the ease, the technology is doing something genuinely careful: scanning the physical room, mapping its surfaces, reading its scale, and adjusting for its light, so the digital object stops looking like a guest and starts looking like it belongs.



Choosing Your Creative Companions

With so many platforms competing for a studio's attention, the decision usually comes down to five honest questions. What problem are you actually solving — fast variation, real-world placement, or remote collaboration — because the answer points to a different kind of tool. Will your team adopt it in a week or fight it for a quarter? Good documentation and a gentle learning curve matter more than a flashy demo.

Is the output good enough to show a paying client, and can you shape its colour, material, and light to your own eye rather than its defaults? Does it slot into the software your studio already trusts, and can you get a usable file out the other end? And finally — is the cost honest, with no rendering fees or storage surprises waiting a few months down the road? The best tool, in the end, is simply the one your team will still be opening a year from now.

Here is the part worth saying plainly: none of this is about automation. It's about augmentation. AI can generate a dozen lighting scenarios before you've finished your coffee, but it has no sense of the feeling you're trying to create in a room. AR can place a chair with perfect precision, but it cannot tell you whether that layout will actually serve how a family moves through their evenings. A gorgeous AI-built render can quietly violate a building code that a trained eye would catch at a glance.

The professionals getting the most from these tools aren't the ones who've handed over their judgment. They're the ones using AI and AR to move faster toward a decision they still make themselves — verifying what the tools produce, trusting the instinct that says something feels wrong, and treating every generated image as a starting point rather than a finished thought. And the pace isn't slowing. Real-time rendering is making the old wait obsolete. Teams are designing together, from opposite sides of the world, in the same file at the same time. The next generation of AI tools is arriving with code, sustainability targets, and industry constraints already built in. But the deeper truth won't change with any of it: the value was never in the software. It was always in the decision it helped someone make, faster and with clearer eyes.

The Anatomy of a Beautiful Illusion

Not every AR experience earns its place in a real workflow, and the difference usually comes down to three quiet questions.

Does it hold its scale honestly — does a chair stay chair-sized no matter the angle you view it from, and does it respond to the light already in the room rather than importing its own? Does it ask anything of the person using it — special hardware, a steep learning curve, a manual — or does it simply work on the phone already in their pocket? And does it live inside the rest of the process, easy to save, share, and return to, rather than existing as a one-time party trick?

The tools that pass all three tend to disappear into the background, which is precisely what makes them powerful. The ones that don't may impress for a moment and then never get opened again.

In furniture and interiors, AI-generated 3D models paired with AR placement are quietly changing how people shop — a sofa can be tested against a real wall, a real light, and a real colour scheme long before it's purchased, and returns are dropping as a result.

In planning and approvals, architects are overlaying proposed buildings onto drone footage and street-level photography, letting clients and planning committees see shadows, sightlines, and neighbourhood fit with total transparency — a shortcut to trust that used to take months of renderings to earn.

In real estate, developers are letting prospective buyers walk through apartments and offices that don't yet exist, which has meaningfully quickened how fast a space sells or leases.

And in training, medical students are studying anatomy in three dimensions instead of two, while factory floors are guiding new workers through assembly with instructions layered directly onto the equipment in front of them. In every case, the lesson gets faster, more visual, and more likely to stick.

The Decision Is Still Yours

The tools will keep changing. Rendering will keep getting faster, overlays more seamless, and AI more fluent in the language of code, constraints, and light. None of that changes the question at the centre of the work.

It was never really "What can we build?" It was always "How will it feel to stand inside this on an ordinary Tuesday, years from now?"

That question still belongs to the person with the trained eye — the one who knows when a render is lying, when a layout won't survive real life, and when a client's instinct is worth more than a beautiful image.

The technology hasn't replaced that person. It has simply given them a faster, clearer way to show their thinking and more time for the parts of the work that were always the point.

You're still the one making the decisions.

You're just doing it now with the lights on.



At La Albufera Natural Park, architecture's most powerful statement is a whisper. Nidos de Agua challenges designers to create a microarchitecture pavilion that bridges the gap between human perception and an incredibly fragile Mediterranean wetland ecosystem.



Registration Deadline
11 September 2026



Prize Fund
€ 8,000



Design is rarely about a single object; it is about the conversation between elements. The Situér Milano Design Challenge invites designers to move beyond the standalone piece and conceptualize a coordinated mini-collection speaking one sophisticated language.



Registration Deadline
02 October 2026



Prize Fund
€ 7,000



Imagine a village with no land—just the rhythmic pulse of tides beneath wooden planks. This is Torosiaje, an Indonesian Bajau settlement. The Call of the Sea competition seeks not a luxury resort, but a profound bridge between two distinct worlds.



Registration Deadline
09 October 2026



Prize Fund
€ 9,000



Designers must create a new visitor centre and subtle landscape interventions at Argentina's Sacred City of Quilmes. The primary goal is to respectfully blend modern architecture, natural terrain, and ancient Diaguita-Calchaquí heritage.



Registration Deadline
16 October 2026



Prize Fund
€ 9,000



Designers are asked to transform a historic Italian estate in Bedizzole into a vibrant modern retirement community. The project blends heritage preservation with contemporary accessibility to create an ecosystem of private, social, and healing wellness spaces.



Registration Deadline
23 October 2026



Prize Fund
€ 10,000

Looking for a design challenge?

The clock is ticking! Every month, we round up exciting TERRAVIVA COMPETITIONS with approaching deadlines.

What are you waiting for?

Grab your sketchbook and register before time runs out!

Think you've seen it all?
Scan to unlock the full lineup.





Montréal The City That Designed Itself

*Twenty years ago, a city bet its future on beauty with a purpose.
Today, that bet is written into its libraries,
its laneways, its light.*

Montréal does not simply commission good design — it practices it, quietly and structurally, in decisions most visitors never see. In June 2006, this bilingual metropolis on the St. Lawrence became the first city in North America, and only the third in the world, to join UNESCO's Creative Cities Network for design. Twenty years later, as Montréal marks the anniversary throughout 2026, that title has proven to be far more than an honour. It has become the philosophical spine of an entire city.

The story does not begin in 2006. It begins in 1991, fifteen years earlier, when Montréal did something few city administrations had tried before: it opened a design office inside City Hall. The city's first Design Commissioner, Marie-Josée Lacroix, was given a job with no blueprint and no precedent. Her task was not to decorate the city. It was to convince the city that it wanted to be designed well in the first place.

That single act of institutional faith — hiring for a job that did not yet exist — is the root from which everything else in this story grows.

Fifteen years later, UNESCO made it official. Montréal's 2006 designation as a City of Design arrived like a spotlight, but the city had already been rehearsing for the role. What followed was not a victory lap. The Bureau du design was founded the same year as the working engine behind the title — the office that would turn a piece of international recognition into an actual policy instrument. Its influence did not stay local. Today, roughly fifty other cities sit alongside Montréal in the Cities of Design subnetwork, many of them shaped, in some way, by lessons the Bureau du design first worked out at home.

Here is where Montréal's design philosophy gets its teeth. The city pioneered a practice that still sounds radical in North American procurement: judging public design and architecture contracts on the strength of an idea, not simply the lowest bid.

Before It Was Official, It Was Already True

In a culture built on rigid tendering rules, sustaining that shift required real political courage. It meant trusting juries, trusting architects, and trusting that better questions lead to better buildings.

More than sixty competitions later, the wager has paid off. Montréal is now recognized as one of the continent's genuine centres of expertise in design-led public commissions — proof that asking what the best idea is can be just as rigorous as asking what the lowest price is.

"Montréal's designation as a UNESCO City of Design is a key lever for outreach and development. More than ever, our city is focused on innovation to meet urban challenges, be they economic, social or environmental. The expertise of our designers and the actions of the Bureau du design continue to reinforce Montréal's international leadership when it comes to innovation by design."

Soraya Martinez Ferrada, Mayor of Montréal

As a participant in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network and the Davos Baukultur Alliance, Montréal is on the front lines of dialogue around international best practices. The city is now positioned as a genuine testing ground for circular-economy principles applied to the built environment."

Patrick Marmen, Chief of Staff and Design Commissioner, Bureau du Design

"This role didn't really exist anywhere, so we had to build it from the ground up. We not only had to prove its worth, but also persuade the City itself to become an exemplary client with regard to design and architecture."

Marie-Josée Lacroix, Montréal's first Design Commissioner



*Du Bois Library (2013)
Photography by Doublespace photography*



*Metamorphosis of the Montréal Insectarium (2022)
Photography by James Brittain*

Design in Montréal was never meant to stay within government walls. In the early 2000s, as the city sought new engines of economic growth, it placed a deliberate bet on design and architecture as industries with real futures. That bet built an ecosystem. Greater Montréal is now home to nearly twenty thousand design professionals, supported by a web of programs designed to nurture talent and raise everyday design literacy.

The Commerce Design Montréal awards taught local merchants that a thoughtfully designed storefront is not an indulgence — it is a competitive edge. The lesson proved so effective that it has since been licensed to fourteen cities, from New York to Marseille. The Design Montréal Open House invited thousands of citizens behind studio doors most people never get to see. The CODE Souvenir Montréal program celebrated locally made objects as carriers of place and memory. And the Phyllis Lambert Grant opened a door for the next generation of practitioners who might otherwise have struggled to walk through it.

Underneath it all lies the same conviction: design belongs to everyone, not only to specialists.

That democratising instinct proved to be Montréal's most exportable idea. Adapted programs and shared governance frameworks now stretch from Geelong to Dundee, from Luxembourg to Kaunas — cities that looked at Montréal's model and asked how to build something similar at home. None of it required Montréal to hand over a finished product. It required something rarer: a willingness to share a way of thinking and the trust to let other cities make it their own.

Twenty years later, Montréal is not resting on its UNESCO title. The Bureau du design's current focus is the ecological transition — what it means to build in an era of resource scarcity and climate urgency.

The city is now working with industry partners to map circular-economy and adaptive-reuse pathways across the construction sector, identifying where innovation is stalling and where the real opportunities lie.

Building for What Comes Next

This is not rhetoric without a roadmap. The 2019 Montréal Agenda for Quality and Exemplarity in Design and Architecture laid the framework, and the newly published 2050 Land-Use and Mobility Plan turns those principles into long-range planning. In early 2026, that leadership earned Montréal a place among six cities selected for “Pioneering Places,” an initiative of the Davos Baukultur Alliance backed by the World Economic Forum.

None of this stays abstract for long. It shows up in daily life, in ways residents can feel before they can explain. Since the Maisonneuve Library opened, annual visits across the Mercier–Hochelaga-Maisonneuve borough have climbed by 91 percent. Visitor numbers at the Space for Life complex have surged since the transformation of the Biodôme and Insectarium. Since 2019, nearly fifty awards of excellence have recognized some thirty municipal architecture and urban design projects — Place des Montréalaises, the Théâtre de Verdure, and the Sanaaq Centre among them.

These are not abstract metrics on a report. They are the measure of how a city treats the spaces its people actually live in.



Luminothérapie in the Quartier des Spectacles – Iceberg (2012)
Photography by Martine Doyon



Montréal's first Water Squares (2021)
Photography by Steve Montpetit



Place des Montréalaises (2026)
Photography by Vincent Brillant



Métamorphose de l'Insectarium de Montréal (2022)
Photography by James Brittain



Rio Tinto Alcan Planetarium (2013)
Photography by Stéphane Brügger



Winter Station Le jardin de l'espoir (2020)
Photography by Mélanie Dusseault



Esplanade Tranquille (2023)
Photography by Steve Montpetit



Prenez place! – COVID-19 design lab (2020)
Photography by Raphaël Thibodeau

Design as Responsibility, Not a Trophy Case. Ask Montréal's design leadership what twenty years have shown, and the answer is not about awards. It is about structure — the idea that design only becomes powerful when it is embedded in policy, budgets, procurement, and long-range planning, rather than added at the end as a finishing touch. Testing ground, not trophy case. That phrase captures a city that has never been content to simply celebrate what it has already done.



*Redesign La Fontaine Park's Iconic Théâtre de Verdure (2023)
Photography by Adrien Williams*



*Water Intake of the Aqueduct Canal (2021)
Photography by David Boyer*



*Revitalization of Three Montréal Nature Parks (2019)
Photography by City of Montréal*



*Sanaaq Center (2025)
Photography by James Brittain*



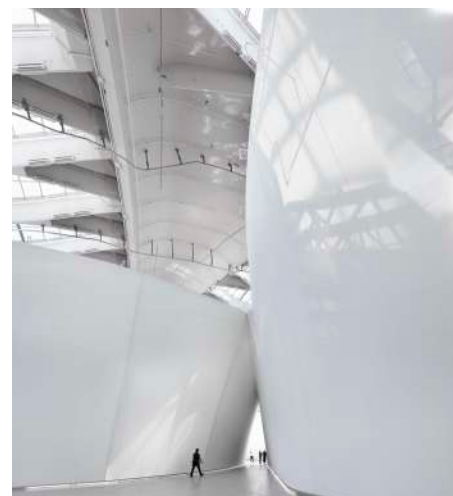
*Montréal Soccer Stadium (2016)
Photography by Olivier Blouin*



*Renaissance of Montréal's Biodôme (2021)
Photography by Marc Cramer*



*Maisonneuve Library – Restoration and Expansion (2023)
Photography by Adrien Williams*



*Renaissance of Montréal's Biodôme (2021)
Photography by Marc Cramer*

Twenty Years by the Numbers

- **2006** — First city in North America and only the third in the world to be named a UNESCO City of Design
- **1991** — The year Montréal opened a Design Commissioner's office, fifteen years before the UNESCO title
- **20,000** — Design professionals now at work across Greater Montréal
- **60+** — Public design and architecture competitions awarded based on ideas, not the lowest bid
- **50** — Cities worldwide now part of Montréal's Cities of Design subnetwork
- **91%** — Increase in library visits in Mercier–Hochelaga–Maisonneuve since the Maisonneuve Library opened
- **2026** — Selected for "Pioneering Places," a six-city cohort of the Davos Baukultur Alliance

Twenty years after Montréal first raised its hand to join a global network of design cities, the real proof is not the plaque or the anniversary logo. It is a library a little fuller than it used to be. A plaza where a couple can still linger with their dog after sunset. A building that treats heritage and innovation as partners, not rivals. For the people who live here, the UNESCO title was never really the point — it is what the title asks of the city next, every single year, that keeps Montréal designing itself anew.



Bibliothèque L'Octogone
A Building That Learned to Open Its Arms

Bibliothèque L'Octogone no longer asks people to simply pass through – it invites them to linger, from a sunlit belvedere in the morning to a quiet hour in Dans ma bulle at dusk.



Design by Anne Carrier Architectes & Les Architectes Labonté Marcil
Photography by Adrien Williams

For more than four decades, one address has anchored daily life in LaSalle, the Montréal borough best known for the diversity of families who call it home. Bibliothèque L'Octogone has long been the busiest, best-loved public space in the borough — yet the building itself told a more complicated story, closed off from the very park and streets it was meant to serve. A design competition, years of listening to the people who use it, and a patient act of architectural restraint have now given it a second chapter: bigger, brighter, and finally open to the community that never stopped showing up.

Nothing else in LaSalle has drawn people through its doors quite like this library since it opened in 1984. The trouble was never a lack of affection. It was geography — a building turned inward, holding its community close while keeping the park and streets around it at arm's length.



A Landmark Too Loved to Lose

Growing Upward, Not Outward

In 2017, LaSalle sought a fix the way Québec so often does for its most important civic buildings: through an open design competition. The brief called for something ambitious — a library built for the century ahead, welcoming, sustainable, adaptable, and unmistakably shaped by the people who'd actually use it.

Anne Carrier Architectes, working alongside Labonté Marcil architectes, won the commission. Years of public consultation followed before construction began.

Instead of clearing the site and starting fresh, the architects chose to build on what was already there. The library's original eight-sided form remains intact — no longer buried, but brought into full view and lifted higher by an entirely new floor overhead. That single move let the building nearly double in size without ever encroaching on the park beside it.

The new design takes its cues from LaSalle's geography — the unhurried curve of the Lachine Canal and the old silhouette of the Fleming Windmill.

Walk in from Dollard Avenue, and the city falls away first. A soaring central hall meets every visitor, the hinge point where street noise softens into something closer to calm. From there, the building lets go of its edges entirely, opening into reading rooms, workshop spaces, rooftop terraces, and gardens that blur the line between the library and the park.



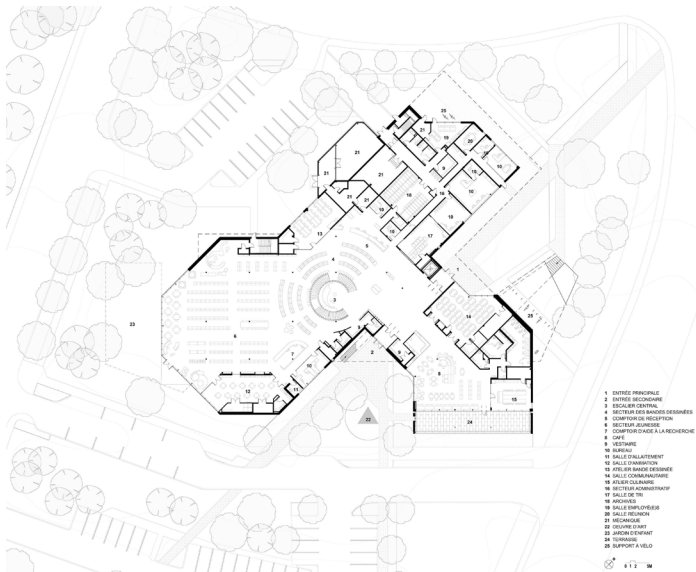
Three Lanterns, One Story

Three glass volumes — the architects call them “lanterns” — give the building both its shape and its personality. At the northeast corner, the Urban Lantern rises above the library's administrative core, its glass face framed by windows arranged in comic-strip panels. To the southwest, the Pastoral Lantern leans toward Félix-Leclerc Park and the Aqueduct Canal, folding sunlit reading rooms and a wide outdoor terrace around the octagon's original silhouette. At the southeast corner, the Community Lantern carries the building's loudest, most social energy — a café, a news lounge, and a Fab Lab that spill onto shared terraces and into a newly reshaped stretch of urban park.



Where Comic Books Become Architecture

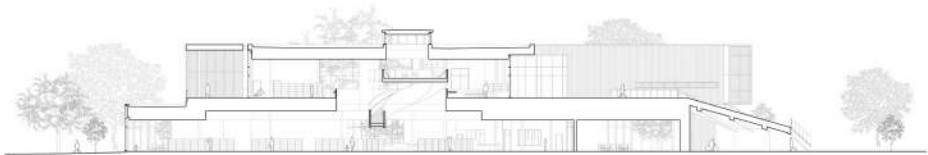
Long before its transformation, this library was known for one thing above all: its comic book collection. That history now runs through the building itself. Room layouts, custom furniture, and even the signage that guides people from floor to floor echo the visual rhythm of graphic storytelling. Nowhere is that clearer than in the sculptural staircase, which reads less like a structural necessity and more like a single panel lifted off the page – turning a routine visit into something closer to flipping through a story.



Ground Floor Plan. Drawing by Anne Carrier Architectes



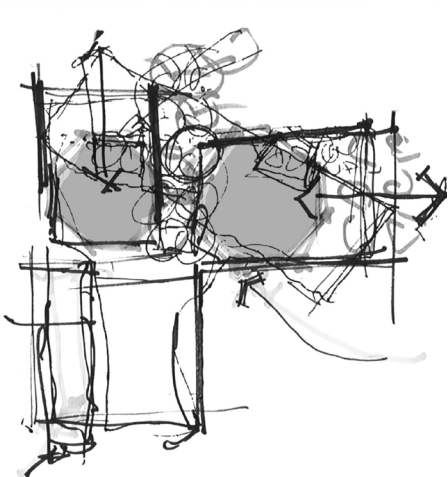
Second Floor Plan. Drawing by Anne Carrier Architectes



Cross Section. Drawing by Anne Carrier Architectes



Southeast Elevation. Drawing by Anne Carrier Architectes

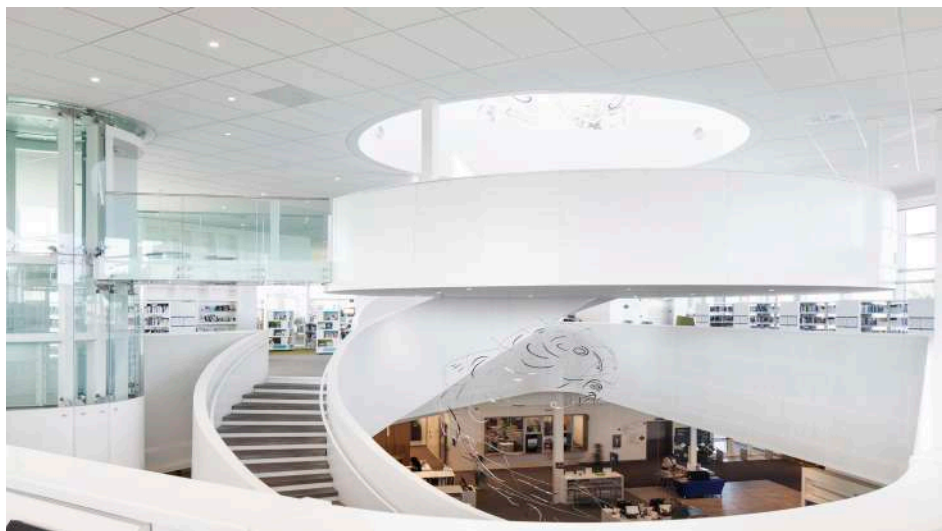
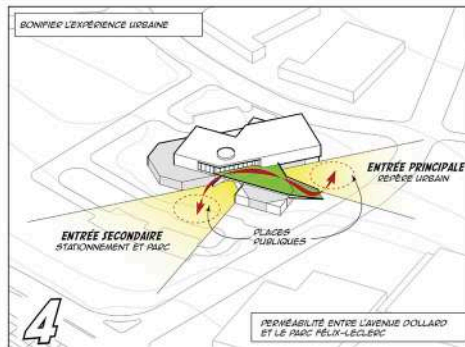
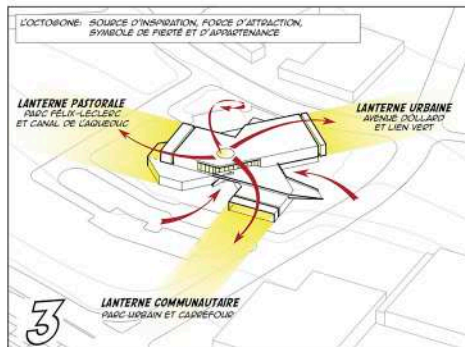
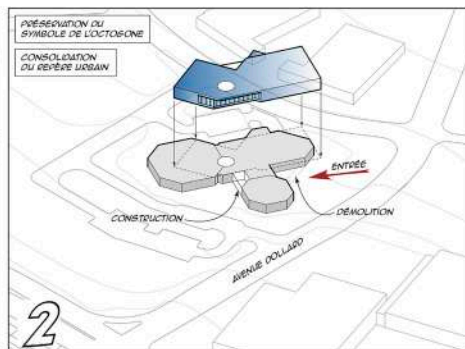
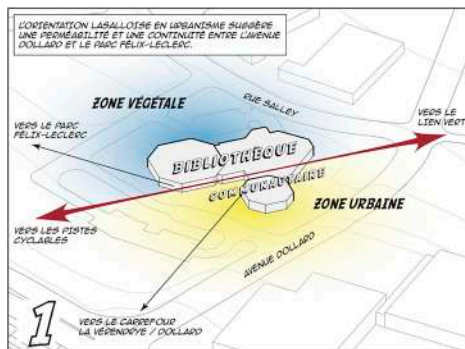


Concept Sketch by Anne Carrier Architectes

Scattered throughout the building, elevated nooks called belvederes open to wide views across the library and up toward the open sky, keeping every visitor loosely tethered to the seasons outside. Art does its share of storytelling here. A living wall inspired by Hokusai's The Great Wave off Kanagawa ripples across one corner of the building, while a helical staircase lifts En circulation, a suspended sculpture by artist Karilee Fuglem, toward a hushed reading nook the architects named Dans ma bulle — "in my bubble." It's a fitting name for a library that has always understood the value of a little privacy.



Light, Art, and Quiet Corners



Recognition has come quickly since the reopening — a Public Choice Award from the Ordre des architectes du Québec, several honours at the Grands Prix du Design, and a finalist nod at the Architizer A+ Awards, among others. But the real achievement isn't sitting on a shelf. Anne Carrier Architectes and Labonté Maril architectes have made the case that a cherished public building doesn't have to be erased to be improved — it only needs room to grow into what its neighbours actually need from it.

- **2026** Winner, Ordre des architectes du Québec Excellence Awards, Public Choice Award
- **2026** Finalist, Architizer A+ Awards, Library Category
- **2025** Winner, Grands Prix du Design, multiple categories
 - ⊗ Architecture + Landscape: Gold Certification
 - ⊗ Public / Cultural Building: Gold Certification
 - ⊗ Architecture + Art: Grand Prize Winner
 - ⊗ Architecture + Staircase: Gold Certification
- **2024** Finalist, Denis-Vaugeois Award
- **2018** Winner, National Architecture Competition



A Blueprint for What Comes Next

LaSalle's favourite gathering place has found a new home: part library, part park, part town square, all its own. Choosing renewal over rebuilding, its architects left a lesson worth carrying beyond Québec's borders — the boldest way forward sometimes starts with knowing what's worth keeping.



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