

McGill School of Architecture



# Norbert Schoenauer

A Colleague and Friend

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## *Norbert Schoenauer: A Life at McGill*

Professor Emeritus Norbert Schoenauer died on the seventh of August, 2001, following a brief illness. He was a colleague and friend, and mentor to many, and his death marked the end of a distinguished career that spanned more than forty years at the McGill School of Architecture. Norbert was born in 1923, in Transylvania, and studied in Budapest and Copenhagen before obtaining his Master of Architecture degree at McGill in 1959. He joined the faculty of the School in 1960, was appointed Assistant Professor in 1961 and served as Director of the School in the early 1970s. Except for a sabbatical and a two-year leave of absence between 1975 and 1977, when he served as Executive Director of the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation in Ottawa, he taught continuously until his death this summer.

During this time, Norbert served the University and the community as an outstanding teacher, as an innovative and accomplished researcher, as an imaginative administrator, and as a tireless and fearless advocate for responsible planning and design. His courses at McGill were legendary, particularly History of Housing, one of the faculty's largest courses with an enrollment sometimes close to 200 students. His lectures were insightful and meticulously planned, and presented a magical combination of scholarship and personal observation, making the subject both accessible and entertaining to generations of students from the School of Architecture and across the university. When Norbert received the Faculty of Engineering Class of '51 Award for Outstanding Teaching in 1988, his students cited, among other qualities, his creativity and the unique capacity of his courses to inspire re-interpretation.

Norbert was appointed Macdonald Professor of Architecture from 1982 until his retirement from full-time teaching in 1988, at which time the University honoured him further, with appointment as Emeritus Professor. As Emeritus Professor, he celebrated his retirement in characteristically unconventional ways – with his continuous presence and active participation in the academic and social life of the School, with the uninterrupted teaching of his specialized courses in housing and housing theory, with sustained and even increased participation in public consultations and debate on issues such as Benny Farm and the MUHC, and with the publication of a host of articles and no fewer than four more books on housing.

Between his first book, *The Court-Garden House*, written with Stanley Seeman and published in 1962, and one of his most recent, *Cities, Suburbs, Dwellings*, which he was editing for republication just days before his death, are dozens of other books, chapters and articles that confirm his international pre-eminence in the field of housing, and his role in establishing McGill as an internationally recognized centre of research and teaching. Norbert's major publications, like those of many distinguished colleagues, were inspired by his first-rate courses. His three-volume *6000 Years of Housing*, published in 1981, is certainly his most important work, and was translated into Spanish and Japanese in the 1980s. The book was updated and republished by Norton in 2000, and is recognized as a classic.

He was a Fellow of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada and Academician of the Royal Canadian Academy, and his professional memberships included the Order of Architects of Quebec, the Ontario Association of Architects, the Corporation professionnelle des urbanistes du Québec, and the Canadian Institute of Planners. He lectured widely, in Canada, the USA, Europe and South America, and held part-time appointments at the Université de Montréal, University of Calgary, Carleton, and Technical University of Nova Scotia. In addition to his two-year term as Executive Director

of CMHC, he served CMHC as Senior Advisor on Planning and Design, and represented Canada on numerous missions for the United Nations and other international organizations in Europe and the Middle East.

His involvement in practice, as both architect and planner, was as distinguished as his teaching and was also recognized with numerous awards. Projects carried out in association with the well-known firm of Affleck, Desbarats, Dimakopoulos, Lebensold and Sise included the Chomedey Civic Centre and the Confederation Memorial Building in Charlottetown, both of which won first prize in national competitions in the early 60s. Norbert was responsible for the master plan and housing design for a number of other projects in Quebec and Ontario, and was especially proud of the work he did with long-time partner Maurice Desnoyers on the Master Plan and Housing for the new town of Fermont, Quebec, a project which received, and continues to receive, broad international recognition.

Norbert's scholarship and high standards in teaching, research and practice have always served as models for students and colleagues alike. He was a particularly strong ally of our international graduate students, many of whom moved on to important teaching and administrative positions all over the world, who found in him an unending source of knowledge, an interested ear and a steady friend. This remarkable accessibility, to students and colleagues, was in some ways his greatest contribution to the life of the School. Here, it has been suggested, one discovered the great teacher, always ready with advice and criticism, his office door never closed, the chair opposite his desk always occupied by a student, a former student, a colleague, a visitor, all benefiting from his experience and wisdom and undivided attention.

Norbert was recently honoured by the Order of Architects of Quebec with La Médaille du Mérite for 1995, and by the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture with a Distinguished Professor Award in March 1999. Just months before his death, he

learned that his alma mater, the Technical University of Budapest, intended to recognize him with an honorary Doctorate (Artes Liberales), which was to be conferred next year.

Friends and family who had the good fortune to spend some time with him in the last few weeks of his life will always remember the extraordinary grace and courage with which he faced this difficult time; his great dignity, his zest for life and wonderful sense of humour, and his lifelong passion for architecture – qualities that served him all his life – never deserted him. Norbert will be remembered in many different ways, through his built work and his books, in the memories of long conversations in his office and in the corridors of the university, and in the hearts and minds of the hundreds, even thousands, of students whose lives he touched.❖

*Resolution on the death of Professor Emeritus Norbert Schoenauer 1923-2001*  
*Text by Annmarie Adams, David Covo, Derek Drummond and Pieter Sijpkens*  
*Presented by David Covo to the Faculty of Engineering on behalf of the staff and students of the School of Architecture, September 11, 2001.*

## *Norbert Schoenauer 1923-2001: Tributes*

**M**any persons responded to the notice of Norbert's death with short but eloquent tributes to him and his teaching. These simple texts varied in length from a few words to a paragraph or two, and combine to form an elegant verbal portrait of the man.

I was extremely lucky to have him as a teacher in his last teaching session. He was one of the most profoundly human teachers I've ever had. His way of teaching was simple but the thoughts he transmitted to us, his students, were so much inspired by general well being. He made obvious the simple fact that what's good for ourselves is good for everybody and that is the way to build for others. Wonderful teacher, wonderful man, he shared so much wisdom and life experience with younger generations that the least we can do is to say "thank you", and hope to keep same grateful attitude towards the life that he was showing to us even in his last moments. *Yulia Nedecheva*



You are legendary, notorious, and a testament to proud architecture. I treasure your influence. With my entire admiration, *Nadia Meratla*



Norbert was a great man, architect, teacher and scholar. His history of housing work is particularly monumental. *Graham Livesey*



I remember Norbert as the truly passionate man that he was. In first year (1981), he was having trouble getting through to our class. I remember him expressing how we only cared about our marks – and there I was in his office trying to discuss my grade, and although my goal was to change his mind, I walked out of his office with a renewed appreciation of communication problems between distant generations.

Norbert showed me passion; something that I have always respected, and still today try to emulate.

A second more difficult vignette was when Mark and I invited Norbert to give a conference (about the benefits of 3 storey existing walk-ups at Benny Farm) to the veterans of Benny Farm back in 1992. We warned Norbert that not all the veterans would be able to listen objectively. When Norbert was five minutes into his presentation, veterans started hollering and rudely trying to interrupt him. After another five minutes we had to stop the lecture, and force the complainers to leave. The whole evening was disastrous, but also quite a bonding experience. Norbert and I continued to talk about the event for the last 9 years (along with more positive updates), but what was still astounding to me was that he was still honestly concerned for the outcome even after being humiliated. *Danny Pearl*



Norbert restera toujours pour moi un modèle à suivre. *André Casault*



I am very sorry to hear about Prof. Schoenauer. I will always remember the lecture of the first history class that he taught us which started with the story of Pompeii given in his deep voice. It was captivating. *Mary Leslie*



I never studied directly under Norbert but certainly felt his presence around the School when I was there and used his books in residential design. I think his insistence on the dignity we owe to housing those of modest means carries on today in the traditions and teaching of the School. *Duncan Harvie*



Il m'avait fait l'honneur de partager avec lui quelques plaisirs dangereux : parler d'architecture, rêver de Budapest, fumer des cigarettes françaises, apprécier la sociabilité des habitués des cafés, se passionner pour le rôle social de l'architecte, croire dans la jeunesse.

Ces rencontres furtives, comme des éclairs de pensée, des aphorismes viennois, suivies de lectures pleines d'admiration pour ses inventaires historiques d'édifices

prouvant qu'il fut toujours possible de rendre ce monde habitable, tout cela continuera à m'inspirer. Merci Norbert. *Georges Adamczyk*



Norbert was a quiet (and how!) gentleman, with a deep sense of the importance of our living environment. He was sensual. He was textural – remember the tweed and corduroy suits? He taught us of the importance of light, of integration of space, environment and material. He was a great proponent of cooperative living, and of course, his preoccupation was housing in all its forms. Those of us who had the good fortune to have been his students, learning how to stack the plumbing, zone the quiet spaces and maximize density on an impossible site, can look back on a rich and valuable experience with him. Let us celebrate a great teacher and human-being. *Bruce Allan*



Je suis naturellement triste d'apprendre la nouvelle de son décès, car c'était un professeur qui comptait beaucoup pour moi; d'ailleurs, j'ai souvent parlé de lui à Judith ainsi qu'à d'autres personnes. Encore aujourd'hui, je pense souvent à son *History of Housing* que j'ai ici dans ma bibliothèque, et je me réjouis chaque fois que je vois des exemples européens qu'il avait mentionnés dans ses livres. Le thème du logement est toujours d'une grande actualité pour nous tous. *Franco Maccarone*



He always had a smile for me, and in my own strange way I will miss him at McGill. *Luci Mastropasqua*



On reste toujours un peu distant du maître qui a donné un sens à notre apprentissage. On devine à mi-mot et surtout entre les lignes dessinées son extraordinaire expérience de la vie et de cet art et métier qu'il partageait avec chaque nouvelle génération d'étudiant. Je retiens sa passion raisonnée – ou était-ce une raison passionnée – de nous faire comprendre nos maisons comme nos villes. L'humanité des humbles et la vanité des grands devenaient les enjeux de notre future pratique en donnant un sens aux formes du monde. Ailleurs et ici. Me voilà maintenant qui poursuit ce chemin, merci Norbert. *François Dufaux*



Dear Astrid, it is with great affection for you and Norbert that I want you to know that Norbert enriched us all. Intellect, realist, humanist and advisor, Norbert's persona and legacy will never fade. I offer profound respect for what both you and he, individually and together, offered to so many. *Michael Fieldman*



The last time I met Norbert, he was under palliative care, and all treatment had been stopped at his request. As I got up to leave and bid him what would be my last goodbye, he shook my hand firmly as usual, and then, pointing his finger at the window, remarked, "This is a much better room: I can look at the sky from here." An architect to the last breath! *Vikram Bhatt*



Norbert was very important to me in my time at McGill and his influence had a great impact on me and my work. *Felice Mendell*



Norbert taught me in fourth year in his famous housing studio. His great patience and depth of knowledge of housing had enormous impact on me. As a teacher of architecture myself, I can only aspire to his humility, wisdom and generosity. It was Norbert who told me that, at 30, I was still too young to go to graduate school. He was right, but I went anyway. He knew that a great appreciation of continued learning would only come to me in middle age, and he was right again.

But, Norbert, if I knew then what I know now, I might be dancing with Cirque de Soleil and not continuing your legacy in architectural education. I know he understands this. *Frances Bronet*



Norbert's soft spoken passion seemed so appropriate to the everyday buildings he valued. A simple eloquence. A note of congratulations penned by him is still pinned on my office wall. I am sure many of us have received the same "best wishes" – evidence of his continuing awareness of all he taught. *Ted Cavanagh*



Norbert, you taught that to be able to design a good dwelling was the first essential step to any good architecture. The means and methods we learned from you have served me well for 27 years, whether in designing a back yard artist's studio or a community college, and everything in between. Thank you, Norbert. *Brian Palmquist*



In addition to the great interest and enthusiasm in housing that Norbert communicated to everyone, there was his passion for his Porsche. He was very proud of having acquired it in the mid-seventies and told a group of us one Friday night, that it represented a particular milestone in his life. I remember seeing him speed along Sherbrooke street, the wet pavement seeming to amplify his joy... *Carole Scheffer*



I write regarding the recent loss of our dear old friend Norbert. I have mentioned the news to various people and the response has always been the same: "He was one of my favourite professors."

In my memories of McGill, he is undoubtedly among the brightest and the best, as much for his rumpled old-world charm, stinky cigarettes, and the way he used to bang on the desk, as for his incredible knowledge of both housing and history. I remember too his perennial exasperation with the opposite end of the spectrum, the paper architecture of the Pied Pipers.

One weekend morning in first year, as I headed over the bridge into the Frank Dawson Adams Building, I met Norbert coming out. I offered him an Italian cigarette, a Nazionali, and told him it was my birthday. He asked my age. "Twenty-seven", I replied. "It's a good age", he offered; a generous birthday present to one made to feel so old by his classmates. "I am sixty-three", he said, and nodded slowly, looking out bemusedly from under a soft cotton hat. I felt even younger.

I remember too, most clearly, that lecture on the fall of Rome, when the so-called Barbarians swept down from the north. In Norbert's dry words (which he might not wish to be remembered in print), and in his thick accent, he recounted: "So here were these guys, standing around with fancy hairdos and eating the nightingales tongues, and of course the Barbarians slaughtered them all."

I hope that his indomitable spirit of humanism and compassion live on in us, and the vernacular torch of insight will, through our experience of Norbert, inspire the younger generations to a more sensible and holistic architecture. May his informed, drole voice live on in a depraved world. *Nick Holman*



The passing of Norbert Schoenauer is a tragic loss to McGill University's School of Architecture, and to the architectural community as a whole. It is a tribute to his memory that his pivotal work as a practitioner and a historian will endure well beyond one human lifetime, but what was truly remarkable about this man was his ability to make his mark, one-to-one, on those of us who had the privilege to know him. Norbert's enthusiasm in the classroom, for example, was matched by his commitment to his students. I can remember him bringing an orange and a penknife to his architectural history lecture on Hagia Sophia: cutting it up in front of us was a dramatic and very effective way to demonstrate the functions of squinches and pendentives. In Norbert's hands Banister Fletcher's text, that cumbersome, formal tome, gained its much-needed vitality and immediacy. As a colleague, Norbert was the supportive mentor, whether that entailed volunteering the use of his formidable slide collection, or offering support and praise to a new faculty member. Add to this many other charming layers of Norbert the person – the wonderful drawings in his History of Housing volumes; the plants he lovingly tended in his office; the pleasure he took from a good meal. The composite image is of a man of many dimensions, many qualities, and many achievements. And that is how we will remember him. *Rhona Richman Kenneally*



I first met Norbert Schoenauer as a teacher, taking his fifth-year studio in 1964. I don't think that he had been long at McGill, but my classmates and I considered it *the* studio, such was his reputation. Some years ago, Moshe Safdie, Gary Hack, and I were talking about the influence of the CMHC Traveling Scholarship, in which we had all participated, on our careers. The scholarship was given out after fifth year, and I am sure that in the case of Safdie and myself, our interest in housing was a direct result of Norbert's class (Hack, a Winnipeg graduate, later worked with Norbert at CMHC). My

second relationship to Norbert was as an employee – I worked for him on two different occasions, a housing study for Toronto, and a residential project in Quebec City and the new town of Fermont. I remember both experiences fondly – he was a thoughtful designer and, of course, a wonderful draftsman. Finally, for many years, Norbert was a colleague and friend at the School, knowledgeable, far-reaching in his interests, and always supportive. His seasoned scholarship and balanced view of architecture have long stayed with me, and will. *Witold Rybczynski*



I remember Norbert apologising for his shaking hand as he prepared his *trademark* freehand drawings for me to scan for his books. I laughed, for me the wavier they where, the more authentic. I could see an accentuation from when we assembled *History of Housing*, through *Cities, Suburbs, Dwellings* and finally with *Arts + Crafts and Art Nouveau Dwellings* where he had me type out titles to drawings that were previously freehand.

One of those great drawings in three parts is simply called *Bad, Better and Best* and illustrates a building section with related exterior spaces. In that one drawing I understood what was *wrong* with some buildings and how I could propose improvement. Quite comforting for a student, the idea that complex concepts could be explained in a few lines. I was quite proud to apply the concept to a recently completed building, as I think Norbert was when I showed him the photos just a few weeks ago. Thank you Norbert for thousands of wavy lines... and the ideas behind them. *David Morin*



Not many months ago, in late spring or early summer, a chance encounter with Norbert outside the School led to one of those impromptu and casual discussions that were always such a stimulating pleasure. I don't recall how the topic arose, but we spoke of the MUHC plans, of the prospect of closing many existing hospitals to build a single, centralized complex. Norbert shook his head slowly as he wondered at the logic that would place a new health centre on polluted land in a hollow formed by train tracks

and an expressway interchange. He spoke of the original rationale underlying the location of so many hospitals up on or bordering the Mountain: the fresh air, the views, the salubrious environment. He then listed the hospitals, pausing after each name in the catalogue to let me picture them and their locations: the Vic, the General, Ste. Justine, the Jewish. The moment was vintage Norbert. He expressed his opinions clearly and persuasively in a manner that always clarified the issue and put the details into a context informed by vast experience, delivered with a pacing guaranteed to ensure easy comprehension. *David Krawitz*



Please add my words of respect and admiration for his work as a beloved teacher, insightful observer of architectural history and wonderful colleague. *Alberto Pérez-Gómez*



Norbert's passing is a tremendous loss not only for our School, but for the architectural community at large. He constantly reminded us, and will continue to do by his significant books and numerous articles, of the importance of a humane quality in the physical environment.

Endowed with encyclopedic knowledge, Norbert was an inexhaustible source of information for his colleagues and students. His beliefs were unshakeable and he was always ready to communicate them with absolute conviction. This unique example of intellectual courage was inspiring and can hardly be replaced. We'll miss you Norbert! *Rad Zuk*



Norbert was my first housing teacher. He provided me with a unique way of seeing homes. I continued to learn from him when I later invited him to participate in the housing studio of the Affordable Homes program. His observations of how people use spaces was outstanding. He brought a European flavour to North American housing that we never had before. I thoroughly miss him. *Avi Friedman*



I find it difficult to put words to the loss of a friend and a friendship that goes back forty years. In an inscription he wrote into his lovely book *Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau Dwellings*, he wrote "To Joe, my comrade in arms fighting city halls". Indeed we were comrades; as neighbours we were thrust into first-hand personal experience of Urban Renewal and over the years we continued to share many concerns and principles regarding the nature of the city. It was my good fortune that his measured and thoughtful insights often served to inform my less than temperate disposition. I will deeply miss this comrade as will my family for which he had such gentle affection.

*Joe Baker*



As a new member of the faculty in 1990, I remember my initial shock at discovering that my most senior colleague was so accessible (since in my admittedly limited experience, this was not often the case). Indeed, Norbert's door was always open and he was always willing to read a draft, to lend a slide, to stay an extra minute. This made a tremendous difference to me as a beginning faculty member struggling to organize new courses, understand a new curriculum, and settle in a new city.

Working with Norbert for the last eleven years has been one of the great privileges of my life. Indeed, knowing him has served as a continuation of my formal architectural education in many ways. And I will never forget the special way he said my name or the sparkle in his eyes when he talked about his favourite subject, housing. I miss him very much. *Annmari Adams*



I will always remember Norbert's unfailing 'hello' to each secretary whenever he arrived at the School. His style of humour, story telling and, most of all, presence will be missed. *Marcia King*



I studied with Norbert when I was a graduate student in the School of Architecture. I remember that in his lectures he had the remarkable ability to get close to his subject, purposely slowing down the pace of his delivery to polish small gems of wisdom and

experience. His lectures could have been about any subject, and we would have listened. For Norbert, imparting knowledge was secondary to instilling dedication and values.

*Robert Mellin*



Norbert's departure has touched many people's lives. It has certainly changed mine.

*John Schreiber*



It is difficult to express one's feelings at the loss of one's closest friend. Norbert and I met at McGill 41 years ago as disciples of Professor Harold Spence-Sales, who helped us to think as planners while not forgetting that we were new Canadians.

Our friendship became stronger with time not only because of common professional interests but also because of cultural and social affinities, notably the strong emotional ties that we both felt for our common place of birth, Transylvania – the land beyond the forest. We hankered after its Saxon villages and towns, its music and its food. Our weekly Hungarian lunches satisfied this last craving and, while the lunch group's political discussions had a Canadian perspective, the jokes remained very much Hungarian.

I translate the description of Norbert by his sister, Jutta Pallos, which I recently received from Karlsruhe, Germany: "He was a very special, out of the ordinary person, very sensitive, easily hurt, modest but demanding, both of himself and of the world at large. One could always rely on him due to his basic honesty and tenacity."

I could only add to this that he was witty, he had a clear and enquiring mind and he searched for beauty in everything. I shall miss him more than a brother.

*Andrew Hoffmann*



Norbert was one of the first professors who introduced himself to me during my bewildering first week in the School of Architecture. I thought him solemn and wise, and I was properly intimidated. As time went on, I discovered that, although he *could* be solemn and he *was* wise, he was many other things as well. He was courteous to a fault – always rising when I entered his office, no matter how trivial my reason for

being there. He knew how to capture an audience with a story – and boy, did he have stories!. He was a creature of habit: On his daily journey past my office en route to his own, he would never fail to stop and say “Hello Helen, how are you?” and he’d respond to my own inquiries about his health with a characteristic “Thanks, fine.” He was, of course, an undeniably funky dresser with his own inimitable sense of style. He was a devoted teacher, a generous colleague, and, well, so much more to so many of us. I’m proud to have known him. *Helen Dyer*



Sauntering through the old A9 lobby in September of 1968, draped in heavy tweed, followed by Gitanes smoke, Professor Schoenauer was my first serious exposure to continental cool. Looking back, I think of Bucky asking us, “how heavy is your building?” I wish I’d asked Norbert, “man, how heavy is your clothing?” He later introduced me to housing and cultural anthropology in a way that made me permanently addicted. I greatly admired his respect for the housing of indigenous peoples, and his amusing stories; the Three Dog Night story, for instance. Norbert’s nobility and generosity of spirit helped give me an affinity for my chosen field which has not yet worn off. I will miss most our long talks in his lovely office aerie in recent years. He was a Real Cool Cat – the Genuine Article. *Julian Jacobs*



From afar, I join the McGill community in mourning Norbert Schoenauer. I first met Norbert and Astrid forty-one years ago while apprenticing at the office of Harold Spence-Sales. Norbert was my superior, nourishing, encouraging, always sharing what he knew and what he thought. As the years went by we evolved to share many values, the passion for housing, for the lessons of the vernacular, but also for love of life and a taste for refined things. From him I learned the quality of quiet wisdom.

His presence at McGill for many decades has enriched the lives of many students and architects today. And, as one of them, I join you and Astrid in celebrating and mourning Norbert. *Moshe Safdie*



I had the good fortune to live on the same street as Norbert and I always looked forward to meeting him and taking the bus together or walking with him on our travels to and from home. This was the ideal opportunity to talk about all kinds of themes, architecture, of course, in the foreground. These were magical moments. Norbert always made me felt comfortable, as if I had always known him. I enjoyed his critical commentaries, which were incisive, showed an extraordinary common sense, and yes, were to the point. Ricardo... he would always start, with his grave, Transylvanian tone, to continue and finish with a sharp remark, no matter what the theme was. It was always magical to feel his patriarchal presence and I always felt that he was more than just a colleague. He was a dear friend who will always be... here. *Ricardo L. Castro*



I unfortunately did not have the chance to know Norbert very well but, in the few briefs meetings that I had with him, I was quickly struck by his ability to reconcile rich and complex feelings with a sense of purpose leading to action. At once reflective and engaged, one sensed immediately that he was a man of great resolution. He was particularly eloquent in his welcoming when I first arrived at McGill last January; I will miss that rare elegance in dealing with human affairs. *Martin Bressani*



Perhaps Norbert's greatest contribution has been the time he has always shared with colleagues and students – time to offer advice and criticism on an individual basis. Here one discovered the great teacher. The chair across from him at his book-covered desk seemed always to be occupied by a colleague, a graduate student or an undergraduate with a roll of drawings of yet another housing project. All benefited from his wisdom, experience and undivided attention. It was this way for forty years. *Derek Drummond*



Norbert, or Nobbs, as students called him when he was still a new teacher, was a friend for more than 40 years. We began our “McGill life” at about the same time, so most of the memories I have of the School of Architecture are shared with him. These memories involve a vivid panorama of school events and people, but there were also the discussions over coffee or lunch, when he would pronounce on topics ranging from world events to Hollywood peccadillos. He was a wonderful raconteur, and his stories were often physical as well as verbal – his portrayal of the pilot of a less-than-world-class airline is one that still makes me smile. I know he loved teaching, and his research in housing was an ardent pursuit. He enjoyed life. He loved Montreal. And he loved McGill.

Along with all his colleagues and all the students he taught, I shall miss him.

*Maureen Anderson*



Norbert was a colleague and friend, and mentor to many, and his death marks the end of a distinguished career that spanned more than forty years at the School of Architecture. Friends and family who had the good fortune to spend some time with him in his last few weeks will remember the extraordinary grace and courage with which he faced this difficult time; his tremendous dignity, his zest for life and wonderful sense of humour, and his lifelong passion for architecture – qualities that served him all his life – never deserted him.

Norbert will be remembered in many different ways, through his built work and his books and memories of long conversations in his office and in the halls, and in the hearts and minds of the hundreds, even thousands, of students whose lives he touched.

*David Covo*



## *Norbert Schoenauer: A Passion for Housing*

**N**orbert Schoenauer built buildings, designed cities, was an adviser to governments, wrote books and taught for more than 40 years at McGill University's School of Architecture. An emeritus professor of architecture, he died on Tuesday, August 7, 2001, at the age of 78.

The focal point of his spectrum of activity was the study and design of housing. For an architect to concentrate on housing as single-mindedly as Professor Schoenauer did is unusual. The profession has always been ambivalent toward housing, and some practitioners even deny it is legitimate architecture. Professor Schoenauer would ask them: "Is it because women in many cultures were the first builders and owners of houses that you hold the field in such low esteem?" And: "Isn't the architecture of housing the basis for all ecclesiastical architecture, in which the lowly house of man is elevated into the glorious house of God?"

His passion for housing was all-encompassing; it went from the humble nomad's hut to opulent mansions. This broad interest may have been rooted in his privileged upbringing, which was followed by hardship. Raised in the Transylvania region of Romania, he went to Budapest to study architecture while World War II raged in Europe. Caught up in the turmoil near the war's end, he suffered many privations before reaching a Danish refugee camp. He arrived in Canada in 1950 and soon married his Danish-born wife, Astrid.

To Professor Schoenauer, housing and neighbourhoods were the birthplace and the cradle of social life. His view was that a house, any house, is important not only as an architectural construct but as a social, cultural and economic incubator as well.

The influence he exerted on his contemporaries, students and colleagues, while substantial, will be overshadowed by his books. Keenly aware of the power of the printed word, he admonished: "Be careful what you put in print, it may haunt you decades later." And so he laboured to make sure that his ideas would outlive him in the best way. His favourite book, *6,000 Years of Housing*, has gone through four editions, beginning in 1973 and most recently last year in an expanded version published by the U.S. publisher W.W. Norton. Last week, as Professor Schoenauer lay ill, his spirits were lifted by word that another of his books, *Cities, Suburbs, Dwellings*, will also be issued in a Norton edition.

In his architectural practice, Professor Schoenauer was most proud of the master plan and housing design for the town of Fermont in northern Quebec, which he designed with his partner, Maurice Desnoyers, between 1972 and 1978. It was an opportunity, on a grand scale, to incorporate many of his ideas about housing and communities, working out details that ranged from the town's location to the choice between bay windows and porches.

Wandering through Professor Schoenauer's house yesterday, I noticed how many of the suggestions for good housing he had applied to his own house, where he lived with Astrid for many years. The simple flat on the fifth floor of an unremarkable building on the flank of Mount Royal is endowed with lots of sunlight, a sheltered bit of outdoor space, a passive solar porch filled with plants, cross-ventilation, a bus in front of the door and a sense of simple serenity.

A lifetime summed up in one house.❖

*Pieter Sijpkes*  
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McGill