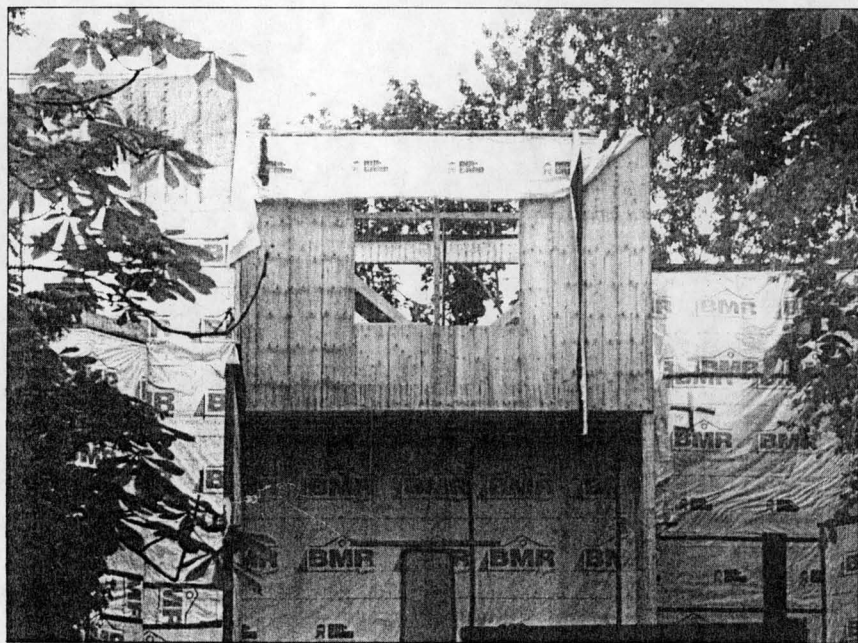


BOOKS AND ARCHITECTURE



A view of 3283 Cedar Ave. in Westmount: the Category 1 house on the site seems to have disappeared.

MARIE-FRANCE COALLIER, GAZETTE

A sad situation

How Westmount's design process failed is a mystery

ANNMARIE ADAMS
Special to The Gazette

Trying to add a window or change your porch in upper Westmount is like preventing a snowfall in January. For the past 15 years or so, a multi-layered process has policed all renovations to older homes in order to maintain and enhance Westmount's distinctive buildings and the over-all quality of its neighbourhoods.

Westmount's strict design guidelines are the envy of countless Canadian municipalities, especially those that have lost heritage buildings and settled for mediocre new design. The same sort of careful scrutiny of old and new is why places like Nantucket, Mass., and Charleston, S.C., are so lovely.

As in these American cities, the rules in Westmount are clear: Houses declared to be Category 1, the former city's most prestigious designation, are to be kept in perpetuity, restored to the highest standards. Only additions or exterior alterations that harmonize with the original building are acceptable. Demolition? Unthinkable. (The interiors are not controlled by the municipality.)

How is it, then, that the Category 1 house at 3283 Cedar Ave. seems to have disappeared? From the front and back, not one square inch of the five-bedroom Tudor-revival house, probably constructed as early as 1872, is visible amid a sea of new construction. As well, several mature trees are now missing: a 35-metre spruce and a slightly shorter weeping willow.

By all accounts, the exterior of the mansion was unremarkable and rundown, but the house retained features of its 19th-century origins. The entry and exterior cladding of the original house had been substantially altered over the years. (The 1872 house was probably clad in wood siding.) The roof was intact and the interiors were impressive. Especially grand was the dining room, featuring fine wood paneling. Visitors to the house remember the original

chandeliers, and that even the bathroom had stained-glass windows.

The new construction that swallowed up the old house was apparently pitched to Westmount's Architectural and Planning Commission as a sensitive addition to the Category 1 structure. Shatwa Al-Musawi, the owner of 3283 Cedar Ave., was granted a partial demolition permit to allow the new addition. Because of the extensive demolition, the borough of Westmount has rescinded the construction permit and the site has been boarded up since March 4.

Pools of water are collecting on the plywood floor of the new, half-finished building's exposed second storey. A pile of roof trusses sits on the ground. The nine-car garage (the old coach house ac-

And what does this episode mean for the bigger problem of endangered historic buildings in the megacity? Could the Notman house or the Royal Victoria Hospital disappear during a process of renovation, despite all our watchdogs? Westmount's is one of the best systems for managing historic architecture in Quebec.

Second, if the new construction is allowed to proceed, what incentive remains for owners of other historic houses to conserve their homes?

In cases where demolition has occurred without a permit or in excess of what is allowed by a permit, fines in Westmount run from \$5,000 to \$25,000. Even this maximum is only 2 per cent of the assessed value of the Cedar Ave. property in 1999: \$1.2 million. (Some California cities penalize those responsible for the unlawful demolition of designated historic houses as much as 10 per cent of the property's assessed value.)

In such cases, Westmount officials also have the right to order that an improperly demolished structure be rebuilt at the owner's expense. In this particular case, even if it were found that the demolition was unlawful, it would make no sense to rebuild the much-altered house. The exquisite interiors can never be replaced, but their senseless loss could be acknowledged by demanding the design-review process begin anew, including full public hearings.

An obvious third lesson is that so-called partial-demolition permits should be monitored more carefully.

Exactly why or when Westmount's seemingly foolproof design process failed in this instance is a mystery. The details should become clearer as the legal battle takes shape. What's important now is to acknowledge that public confidence in our best preservation planning is history.

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A history of political Islam

If it's true that Islamism is in decline, chances are it won't go quietly

Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam
By Gilles Kepel
Harvard University Press,
454 pages, \$49.95

TOD HOFFMAN
Special to The Gazette

The massive terrorist assault of Sept. 11 was not, Gilles Kepel argues, a show of strength, but the dying paroxysm of a movement in decline and disarray. Islamism is a spent political force, he writes in *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*. While some fanatics associated with the movement are still willing to kill and die in the cause of what they see as a holy war, the ideology they seek to advance has been exposed as "a political blueprint that is now faded and unworkable."

Political Islam — or Islamism — emerged from the failure of the first generation of post-colonial nationalist leaders to satisfy the rising aspirations of newly educated, urbanized (but poor and growing) populations. At a time of rapid change and uncertainty about where Muslims fit into a world dominated by the alien ideologies of the Soviet Union and United States, Islamism was presented as an opportunity for Muslims to assert their own culture throughout the dar al-Islam, the land inhabited by Islam, and to live under the sharia, the law according to the holy texts.

In order to succeed — by which Kepel means, consolidate political power — Islamists appealed to two particular constituencies: the young urban poor and the devout middle class. However, these groups have radically different objectives. The young urban poor seek a social-revolutionary alternative to the status quo. The devout middle class want a share of power within the existing social order. From this cleavage, Kepel contends, flows the corrosive elements that have eroded Islamism's influence.

Islamism reached its apogee in 1979 when the Ayatollah Khomeini ousted the shah of Iran and established his Islamic republic. Its descent came a decade later with the fatwa Khomeini issued condemning British author Salman Rushdie to death for insulting Islam in his novel *The Satanic Verses*, followed soon after by Khomeini's death. All of this happened on the heels of the bloody and futile Iran-Iraq war that exacerbated the Shiite-Sunni animosity that divides the Muslim world. Indeed, this division is at the heart of the competition between Iran, on the one hand, and Saudi Arabia, on the other, to dominate the movement. Furthermore, the fatwa marked the extension of Islamism beyond the territory where Muslims make up the majority, and into western Europe.

Over the course of the mullahs' reign, the Iranian people have been "fed a steady diet of symbols as a substitute for real gains in their standard of living." And such gains, writes Kepel, are what Muslims really desire. He makes it seem as if political Islam is simply a pragmatic alternative pursued by people whose social and political aspirations have gone unmet. On one level, this might be true, but Is-

lamism also represents a profound unique worldview based on a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam.

As well, political Islam has been steeped in blood, exploiting and glorifying violence, as manifested in the terrorist-supporting regimes in Sudan and Iran, the violent Islamist revolts in Egypt and Algeria a decade ago, and culminating at the World Trade Centre. Which is not to say that it must necessarily be so.

Indeed, Kepel argues that the terrorism committed in political Islam is a symptom of its bankruptcy. Those veterans of the Afghan war against the Soviets who are largely responsible for perpetrating terrorism, he writes, "cut off from any social movement and manipulated by 'secure forces.' The violence that has been spawned through the 1990s, culminating on Sept. 11, "was above all reflection of the movement's structural weakness, not its growing strength."

A professor of Middle Eastern studies at the Institut d'Études Politiques in Paris, the author spent five years conducting research and traveling the breadth of the Muslim world for *Jihad*. His recounting of the history of the rise of political Islam over the past

Kepel argues that the terrorism committed in political Islam's name is a symptom of its bankruptcy.

years makes for fascinating reading despite being presented in the effortless prose of academia that have you going over some of the denser paragraphs a couple of times.

However, the conclusions Kepel draws from his study stretch credulity. His contention that the support for terrorism by so much of the Islamic movement has only served to alienate much of its constituency simply is borne out. Frustrations run deep in Arab world, extending well beyond Israeli-Palestinian conflict to discontent with conservative monarchy, the Gulf and the presence of foreign protectors in Muslim lands. Many Muslims continue to turn to Islamism in response. And Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda to strike major blows in New York, Washington, D.C., and the subsequent bombings in Israel demonstrate that violence has yet to lose its allure for many in the Islamist movement.

While it may fail to produce good results across the Muslim world, political Islam's continuing association with violence and its capacity to wreak havoc will compel secular regimes to make concessions to its adherents' favour. Herein lies its potential to have an enduring social and political impact.

If it's true that political Islam is in decline, we can expect it not to go with a whimper, but in a deadly likelihood prolonged — uproar.

◆ Tod Hoffman is a former intelligence officer. His latest book is *Le Ciel Landscape*.

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