

# A TALE OF A SITTING DUCK AND OF A WHITE ELEPHANT<sup>1</sup>

Adrian Sheppard, OAQ, RAIC, AAPPQ  
Professor Emeritus  
McGill University, Montreal  
School of Architecture

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## ABSTRACT

The paper describes two case studies in Montreal dealing with architectural conservation: Jardins Prince-Arthur and Cours Le Royer. Both projects were executed by the author's former office of Desnoyers Mercure Leziy Gagnon Sheppard, Architects<sup>2</sup> (DMGS). Jardins Prince-Arthur (JPA) dates from 1972, and is primarily a **rehabilitation** project of five 19<sup>th</sup> century patrician houses located in the city's centre directly across the campus of McGill University. Cours Le Royer is a **recycling** project comprising three large historic warehouses built at the epicentre of Montreal's historic precinct. The project involved a major renovation of the buildings as well as the creation of a new outdoor public space. It was completed in 1975. DMGS initiated, designed, built, marketed, and managed the two projects. Jardins Prince-Arthur must be seen as a financial and architectural alternative to modern inner-city housing developments, while Cours Le Royer illustrates how a series of historic buildings threatened with functional redundancy were made productive once more by converting them to new uses.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Orthodox modern architecture, in its eagerness to attain functional and technically efficient solutions to the problems the physical environment, placed itself in direct opposition to its immediate past and to architectural traditions of any kind. This position of ideological and historical isolation resulted in a particular attitude about contemporary society, about old buildings, neighbourhoods, and cities. Concerns for contextual relationships, scale, historical continuity, and social equilibrium, were all forfeited in the name of growth, need for change, mobility, and economic efficiency.

Ever since the early 70's, the doctrinaire basis of modern planning and design began to change by becoming less dogmatic. The vision about the physical environment became

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<sup>1</sup> The essay was initially published in CONSERVATION, REHABILITATION, RECYCLAGE, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, Quebec, 1981, under the title *Rehabilitation and Recycling: Two Case Studies in Montreal*. The present version of the essay has been re-edited and updated.

<sup>2</sup> Before the completion of these projects, the office was renamed DESNOYERS MERCURE GAGNON SHEPPARD, Architects (DMGS)

less heroic, more comprehensive, and more understanding to the complexities and contradictions of life. In its new modesty, Modernism came to accept a less than an ideal world and a willingness to conjugate modernity with the past. Concurrently, its ecological orientation translated itself into a conservative force that made the connection between contemporary design and previous architecture easier to accept. The conservation movement began with a romantic or antiquarian view of history and slowly changed to a new rational and a modern-day framework for urban development.



**1. Jardins Prince-Arthur**  
*View from University Street*



**2. Cours Le Royer**  
*The public gardens*

Life and social patterns are forever shifting but buildings remains fixed in time and place. A building is conceived in response to specific values and functions, but once it becomes redundant or dysfunctional, its useful life tends to end. When this happens, the building is threatened with demolition or decay. Sadly, our cities are full of these sitting ducks awaiting either extinction or annihilation. The positive alternative is to grant these buildings a new lease on life by way of converting to a new use.

Conservation and adaptive re-use are not new concepts, as buildings outlive their initial functions. In the past, when society was not endowed with the affluence and the technological advantages of today, replacement (or demolition) of the man-made environment happened less frequently. Society was less conditioned by an obsession for newness and modernity. By maintaining and re-using most of the existing building stock, succeeding generations were assured a higher degree of continuity within their tangible environment. Happily, the psychological need to connect with the past is once again being recognized as an important condition of healthy urban living and of good city building. In the same way that one has come to appreciate the value of a rich mix of uses in the city, one has become aware of a need for a similar rich mix of history.

**Conservation** in architecture is an umbrella term referring to any way or means to preserve, use, protect, and consolidate existing buildings, neighbourhoods, or urban ensembles. Conservation goes well beyond the notion of preserving functionally redundant buildings. The process can involve any of the three following methods: recycling, rehabilitation, or reconstruction. The most common one, **recycling**, is a course of action that entails converting old buildings to new uses. The practice normally involves the reorganization of the spaces within the existing building envelope. The purpose of recycling is to make an old structure viable once more and to integrate it in its environment. Recycling is not overly concerned with historical fidelity. On the other hand, **rehabilitation** is primarily a social act and refers to the practice of renovating existing buildings for the purpose of extending their life, their use, and their social role. In this instance, the original function is maintained, and if modified, it is done so only to a limited extent. Rehabilitation's primary preoccupation is the improvement of both the physical condition of the building and the wellbeing of its occupants. Since this form of conservation is rarely self-supporting financially, it requires public subsidies of one kind or another. Finally, **reconstruction** refers to the process of repairing or recreating past artefacts in a historically faithful manner. Serious reconstruction is a scientific and archaeologically correct means of replicating the past, and is usually undertaken for symbolic, sentimental, didactic, or scholarly reasons.

## 2. THE ARCHITECT AS DEVELOPER

In the traditional scenario for the construction of a building, three principal players are involved: a client, an architect, and a builder. For the most part, their involvement is sequential and distinct. Although the architect is an independent professional, it is the client who controls his tasks from start to finish. The client selects the site, formulates the program, establishes the budget, defines the means of financing the enterprise, and calls for tenders. The ultimate control of an architectural project lies in the hands of the party that generates it.

The most effective way for an architect to be in full control over a project is to be both the developer AND the architect. To do so, the architect must be willing to promote an idea, seek out the appropriate opportunities, and eventually assemble the team of participants who will be responsible for implementing the idea. To have absolute control,

the developer-architect must also assume a third role, that of the general contractor. In other words, the three traditional protagonists are rolled into one entity. In the two projects described in this paper, the architects played that triple role: that of the client-developer, of the designer and planner, and of the builder. By being client, designer, and builder the architects were able to make all the decisions and have total command. The downside of this arrangement is that the architects had to bear full responsibility for every decision, and accept to take on a larger than normal task. The reward, besides from the satisfaction of being able to do as they wished, is greater financial gain.

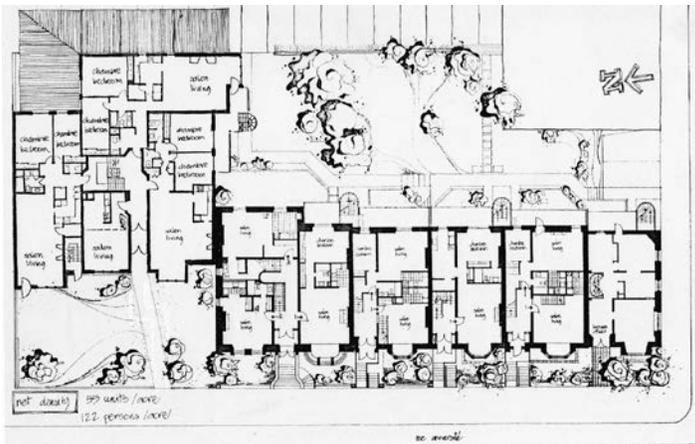
Financial gain is unquestionably one of the important incentives for becoming an architect-developer, yet the most important enticement is the desire to be in command, and thus be a more effective designer. The architect-developer can build more quickly, can make decisions as the need arises, and save money in both the design and the construction process. The great frustration for most architects comes from their dependence on narrow-thinking clients. Serge Chermayeff once famously said that architecture is the world's second oldest profession. Architects stand on the street corner and wait for the wealthy patron, and depend on the whims of this affluent patronage. In the past, because patronage was generally more enlightened, a better architecture followed. A patronage that is both enlightened and affluent is rare today, and when it does come about, middlemen, bureaucrats, consultants, and various interested third parties dilute the design role of the architect. By forging his own way, the architect-developer avoids this restraining and complex dependency.

### **3. JARDINS PRINCE-ARTHUR: A SITTING DUCK**

#### **3.1 The Background**

Jardins Prince-Arthur, for all intents and purposes, is a demonstration project illustrating how a quasi-abandoned string of town houses can be regenerated into very desirable and modern rental housing. In other words, the basic principles of design and the methods of implementation used in this project are transferable to similar sites in Montreal or in other urban centres. Such projects ensure a more even economic continuity of land-use, and allow for simpler and more effective solutions to the problems caused by the unavoidable changes to which the living city is subjected. One must lament that the development potential of such buildings is often overlooked by private enterprise.

Jardins Prince-Arthur is a mid-size project comprising the comprehensive rehabilitation of five century-old houses, together with the construction of a new infill component. The site is located on University Street facing the main campus of McGill University. Four of the five existing houses were transformed into 22 dwelling units, and the fifth one was converted into an office building that was eventually occupied by the architects. The new insertion contains 11 additional units.



### 3. Jardins Prince-Arthur

*Ground floor plan showing the new module on the left*

These houses were built as private residences for large Victorian families that generally included parents, many children, and large household staff. Their spatial configuration reflects a very different social order and economic circumstances. These buildings were no longer viable as single-family homes, and in fact, all had been converted either into rooming houses for transient residents; or fraternity houses, or to temporary academic quarters for various University services. Eventually, age, neglect, and ever-increasing maintenance cost made these buildings inoperative. In its view, the University considered the buildings a lost cause and slated the lot for demolition with a view to replace them with a new income-producing development.

DMGS was invited to submit a development proposal for that site. The University's *sine qua non* condition for redevelopment was the removal of the existing houses and their replacement with a new project that would be economically sound and constitute a new and secure long-term source of income for McGill. DMGS accepted at first the premise of their mandate, and began work on the design for a new building. Simultaneously, the architects embarked on a detailed examination of the buildings' physical condition and an assessment of the site's potential. Quickly, and to a person, the partners became converted to the idea that saving and rehabilitating the 5 houses was a practicable development alternative and would not compromise the project's economic viability. The houses appeared structurally sound, the interiors were bright, and the spaces generous. The more the situation was examined, the more it became apparent that the demolition this row of Victorian houses would be an irreparable blunder.

The property had been acquired from the University on the basis of a leasehold agreement<sup>3</sup> stipulating that all existing buildings had to be demolished and replaced with a new project that would, by the end of the lease, become the property of the University. Since the new proposal to preserve the buildings contradicted the initial agreement, a new

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<sup>3</sup> Leaseholds, commonly known in Quebec as emphyteutic leases or a hypothecs, are long-term rentals in which the renter is obliged to return the IMPROVED property to the owner at no cost to the latter. In the case of the JPA project, the lease was signed for a period of 60 years.

arrangement had to be negotiated. The University, though reluctant at first, eventually accepted the idea once it had been convinced that rehabilitating these buildings would not imply a loss in the value of its real-estate portfolio.

The functional program, as formulated by the architects, called for a total of 33 dwelling units, 4,000 sf. of office space, a common garden, 12 enclosed parking stalls, 20 outdoor parking spaces, and the usual service facilities such as storage spaces, laundry rooms, and mechanical rooms. The ultimate land coverage was not to exceed 50% of the site. The brief also called for maximum variety of dwelling unit types, direct ground level access from either the street or the garden for the greatest number of dwelling units, and private outdoor extensions by means of a balcony or a garden patio for each of the dwelling units.



#### **4. Jardins Prince-Arthur**

*View of a small loft in the new module*

Since the infrastructures of the houses were in relatively good condition, salvaging them was technically a straightforward matter. Their structures were sound, the facades needed but little repair work, and much of the woodwork needed only minimal interventions. The rear yard was cleared of all sheds, garages, illegal fire escapes, and outbuildings. The land of the rear garden was re-graded to provide a more comfortable access to the lower-level units. All existing trees were retained. Outdoor parking for the occupants was provided at the rear of the garden, but screened visually by a level change in the garden. The new addition was built on the vacant side yard of the large uppermost house known as the Henry Morgan Residence. One unsightly and problematic third floor addition was removed and replaced by a mansard roof in keeping with the original appearance of the house.

New roofs and flashings were installed on the 5 houses, all windows were replaced, new fire escapes were installed at the rear of the houses, and mansards were either repaired or replaced. The interiors of the buildings were gutted and rebuilt in order to create self-contained dwelling units with all the necessary contemporary service facilities. The plumbing, electrical and heating systems were replaced. Wherever possible, interesting architectural vestiges or ornamental elements on ceilings, walls, and doors were retained. The heavy structural timber elements of the attics were left exposed. Two thirds of the dwelling units were provided with functioning wood-burning fireplaces. The original interior window shutters and the panelled wood doors and doorframes were cleaned, repaired, and re-installed. Where the ceiling height permitted it, a small mezzanine floor accessible by means of ship a ladder was constructed. Patio door were installed at the rear of the units providing easy access to



**5. Jardins Prince-Arthur**

*The common garden at the rear of the houses*

balconies and patios. Skylights were added to the upper floor apartments making the hallways, stairwells and other ancillary spaces bright and luminous.

### **3.2 The Narrative of the Development**

McGill University had acquired these houses many years earlier as investment properties but had occupied some of the spaces provisionally for its own academic use. Age, poor economic performance, lack of security, and awkward spatial configuration made them unprofitable and unsuitable for their need. These buildings had reached the end of their productive life, or so they thought. Demolition and redevelopment appeared to be the only alternative for McGill. In keeping with their long-range investment and development policies, the University put the land up for rent on the basis of an emphyteutic lease. As in all such leases, the property would revert entirely to the original owner at the termination of the “rental”. McGill would be the beneficiary of all the improvements.

In practical terms, it meant that the property was paid for in the form of rent rather than a lump sum. It must be noted that at the time of the transaction, it was not possible to

obtain a mortgage for a project built on a leasehold land, independently of the duration of the lease. The only way to finance such a project would be through a regular bank loan. The computation of the rent of the property was based uniquely on the value of the land<sup>4</sup>, since the buildings themselves were slated for demolition and had no monetary value. On the contrary, the existing buildings constituted a liability, thus further reducing the market value of the property.

Zoning allowed for four floors for residential use or ten floors for office occupancy but mixed land use was prohibited. The architects' initial proposal called for a single-use occupancy consisting of 80 dwelling units. The economic pro-forma proved the project to be viable and the proposal was submitted to Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation<sup>5</sup> (CMHC) for financial backing, either through a mortgage or a guaranteed loan. The location and the project were considered to be in conformity with the requirements of the National Housing Act, making the proposal eligible for CMHC financing.

Once the decision was reached to revisit the premise of the initial project and investigate alternative solutions to demolition and replacement of the existing houses, the economic viability of the project had to be tested. Issues such as cost estimates, design and construction schedules, technical considerations, legal status, and anticipated revenues were carefully assessed. The results were positive and demonstrated that rehabilitation alternative was competitive with the redevelopment option. Furthermore, when taking value rather than cost as the absolute economic criteria, the advantages of the conservation alternative outweighed those of the redevelopment option. The great unknown, till the end, remained the project's marketing potential. There were no precedents one could examine to confirm the accuracy of the project's marketing potential.

### **3.3 The Financing Saga**

Once it was decided to pursue the rehabilitation alternative, CMHC was asked to consider financing the project. The site had already been approved, the economic pro-forma was positive, and the proposal was socially more relevant and made more sense from an urban point of view. The Corporation expressed interest, even sympathy, but it refused to support the project on the basis that no precedent existed, and no justification could be made for the financing of such a project<sup>6</sup>. The National Housing Act did not deal with rehabilitation projects of that kind, and the Act could not be contravened. Consequently, a similar request was made to the Banque canadienne nationale (BCN), an institution known for its banking flexibility and its pioneering attitudes. Their scepticism was equally strong. The Bank believed that the project's proximity to the Campus of McGill University would have no bearing on the marketing success. It questioned DMGS' cost estimates, it was sceptical about their ability to control construction costs, and it remained unconvinced by the very premise of the project.

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<sup>4</sup> The market value of the land in 1970 was \$8.00 per square foot.

<sup>5</sup> Since then, the Corporation has been renamed the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation

<sup>6</sup> Until the advent of JPA, no project built on "rented" land had received a mortgage from CMHC.

An alternative means of financing was needed for the project to be realized. The solution was to invite a medium-size general contractor who shared the architects' interest in the project, and offer the person an equal partnership in the venture. To minimize the risks, it was agreed that the initial capital outlay would be kept at a minimum and the interim financing reduced as much as possible. Fortunately, two conditions played in favour of the project: the leasehold agreement with the University assured a low initial outlay<sup>7</sup>, and the possibility of phasing the project on a house-by-house basis allowed for minimal interim financing possible.

The public response to the project was a favourable from the moment it was put on the market. The units were rented barely days after they were completed, and some even pre-rented. Because of the rapid rentals, the houses became financially self-supporting within months. Construction phasing progressed in a similar way: from house to house until the 5 houses were rehabilitated and rented. This sequential method of construction reduced the developer's financial burden, and allowed for periodic adjustment to the design. What could have been recurring errors in the project was avoided because of this trial-and-error approach. Adjustments were made periodically to respond to design error and to marketing feedback.

Ironically, the moment the project was completed, and the units all rented, thus proving the enterprise to be financially viable, the BCN, in a change of heart, offered the architects long-term financing for the project. The offer was accepted and the subsequent release of committed capital allowed buying back the 50% equity owned by the general contractor. Once again, the architects became the sole owners of the project. The cycle was completed.

### **3.4 A Contemporary Intervention**

The final phase of the JPA project was the construction of the infill module, which was started about a year after completion of the restoration phase. The new building contains 11 dwelling units, a communal facility, and an indoor garage. Most of the units have two bedrooms, a living-dining area, a kitchen, one large and one small bathroom, a wood-burning fireplace, and a large balcony at the rear. Some units are provided with a bay window overlooking University Street. All have exposed timber ceilings structures. The construction system is identical to that of the existing houses: light timber framing with masonry veneer. The composition of the façade, though modern, was inspired by the design of the neighbouring houses. The traditional language of mansard roofs, vertical fenestration, bay windows, grey coloured masonry, and rough textures were used to continue the contextual conditions.

Financing the infill project was an uncomplicated matter. The NBC was quick to provide the architect-developers with a mortgage, since the building was new and because was an integral part of what was by now a financially successful venture. The rental of the new

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<sup>7</sup> Had the property been acquired as a freehold, the acquisition of the land would have required a much larger disbursement, either in the form of a direct payment or by means of some financing formula. In either case, it would have been more costly. In leaseholds, the required amount of money is limited to the yearly "rent".

units was very rapid, but the financial image was somewhat marred by substantial cost overruns. Ironically, the budget estimates for the new infill project were less accurate than that of the rehabilitation phase. As luck would have it, there were more unforeseen problems in construction of the new module than in the restoration of the existing houses.



**6. Jardins Prince-Arthur**  
*The modern infill module*

### **3.5 The Lesson from les Jardins Prince-Arthur**

The success of Jardins Prince-Arthur demonstrated that the private sector could realize a medium-size rehabilitation development without resorting to special legislation, without the need to amend existing bylaws, without contravening building codes and city ordinances, without subsidies, and without preferential financing. Equally important, JPA demonstrated that the private sector could do so profitably and competitively. What it cannot produce is similar-quality housing at low cost. The total cost of the JPA project is slightly higher than that of new construction, and thus cannot address the problems of low-cost housing in the city. JPA remains an example of medium-cost housing. Yet cost per square meter or cost per cubic meter is not the most reliable economic criteria. Value, rather than cost, should be considered as an equally important criterion by which such a project must be judged.

## **4. COURS LE ROYER: A PROTECTED WHITE ELEPHANT**

### **4.1 The Background**

With the gradual departure of commerce from the area, many of the century-old buildings in the historic precinct had become empty or semi-empty shells. Years earlier, Old

Montreal had been classified by the Quebec Ministry of Cultural Affairs as an area of significant patrimonial value. Hence, no buildings within the historic zone could be demolished or even modified without permission of the Ministry. Today, the fundamental quandary of Old Montreal is not one of saving the existing building stock, but of finding suitable occupancies for them.

In the early post-War days, Old Montreal was considered a run-down vestige of the city that had no longer a *raison d'être* in a modern metropolis. Today, the opposite view prevails. The preservation of the city's historic precinct is no longer a matter of contention by the citizens or by the various levels of government. The political and ideological support for the preservation and rehabilitation of the district is solid. The conservation battle has been won, but the advent of the heritage movement has made architectural and planning interventions in the area more difficult, slower, and more costly. The number of administrative agencies, directly or indirectly, involved in the conservation of Old Montreal is impressive. For a start, the Quebec **Ministry of Cultural Affairs** (MAC)<sup>8</sup> has the last word regarding any intervention within the precinct; the **City of Montreal** issues the building permits and has direct control over all interventions, including construction, occupancy and safety; the **Jacques-Viger Commission**<sup>9</sup> is mandated to examine all proposals and make recommendation to the City's Planning Department regarding any change to the area. The **Fire Marshal** is given special powers to review all safety measures on account of the constraints of the surrounding streets. Finally, various pressure groups, local merchants associations, conservation lobbies, and politicians of all colours defend what they all see as their near-sacred turf.

Attitudes and policies about rehabilitation are forever changing and opinions are clearly divided. On the one hand, are the proponents in the heritage movement who believe that the private sector is best suited to undertake the pivotal role in the conservation and rehabilitation of the precinct. They are of the opinion that the private sector can proceed rapidly and effectively and should be given the subsidies and the incentives to take on the task. The private sector is the most natural, healthy, and accountable body to respond to the needs and aspirations of society. Private enterprise, so they feel, is more creative and is best able to insure the natural economic wellbeing of the urban development. On the opposite side are those who believe that the public sector is in a better position to take on the assignment of saving and rehabilitating Old Montreal. Because of its great symbolic and social significance it should not be left to the private sector whose primary motivation is financial profit. Since the principal concern of the state is the public good and not profit, they support strong government intervention and control as the best solution. The answer must lie somewhere between the two positions.

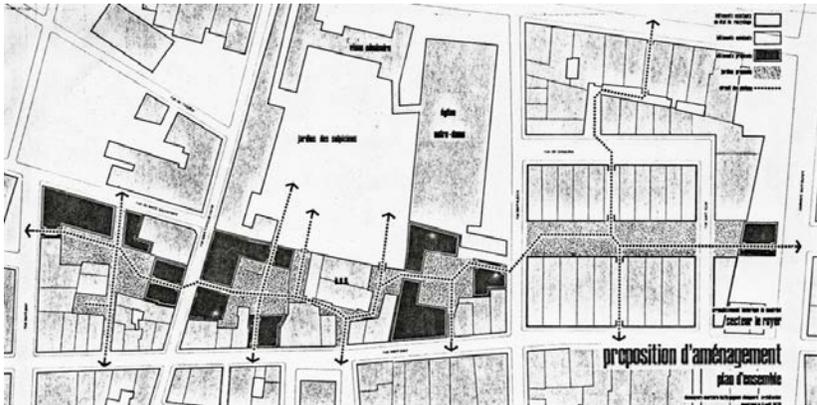
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<sup>8</sup> The Ministry of Cultural Affairs has recently been renamed *Ministère des affaires culturelles, des communications, et de la condition féminine* (MACCCF)

<sup>9</sup> At the time of the Cours Le Royer project, the mandate of the Jacques-Viger Commission was limited to the city's historic precinct. Today, the Commission is adjudicating projects within the entire Island of Montreal

## 4.2 A Privileged Site

The morphology of Old Montreal is defined by its small buildings, narrow streets, and low-to medium height greystone facades. The relatively high density provided the area with its charm, but results in an environment that lacks light and view. By chance, Cours le Royer is situated at the intersections of rue Saint-Dizier and rue Le Royer, which is one of the widest and brightest streets in the area. The two larger buildings are surrounded on all four sides by public streets, and the smaller one has a three-way exposure. Consequently all the buildings are provided with ample windows on all sides. The three buildings are more-or-less of equal height, built with the same care, and with identical stone.



### 7. Cours Le Royer

*Site plan of the surrounding area showing the two large warehouses are on the right*

Since the proportion of fenestration is considerable, the buildings are endowed with ample natural light, a rare advantage in the historic precinct.

## 4.3 The Project

Just as was the case for Jardins Prince-Arthur, Cours Le Royer was conceived by the author's former office that designed, built, marketed, and managed the project's initial phase. Architect Claude Gagnon, a former partner of DMGS, was responsible for the subsequent phases. His mandate came from two different real estate development firms that had acquired the remaining buildings. But unlike the Jardins Princes-Arthur development, which is a classic rehabilitation project, Cours Le Royer is a prototypical recycling undertaking.

Cours Le Royer was the first large-scale residential development to be re-introduced in the historic precinct. DMGS was fully aware that only with a large-scale project could the City accomplish its mission of bringing residents back in the district and change the course of development in the historic city. Without a critical mass of new housing, it would be unfeasible to develop a viable social and urbanistic unit. Very rapidly, Cours Le Royer became a catalyst for future rejuvenation of the area, and the start of a new neighbourhood.

The design brief called for a total of 250 dwelling units of various sizes and typologies, office and commercial spaces, underground parking for a minimum of 120 cars, and a

public green space. All dwelling units were to be above grade and the commercial facilities either on the ground floor or in the semi-basement levels.

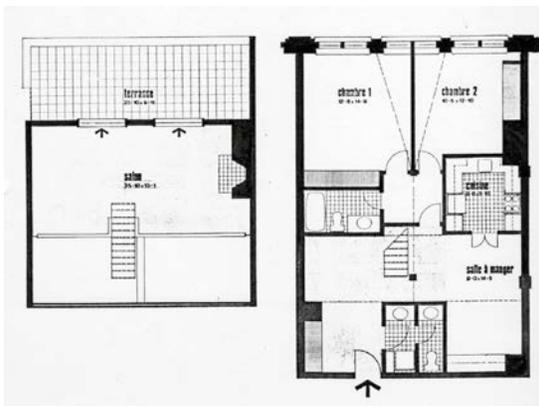
The recycling process began with the quasi-total gutting of the interiors and the removal of the windows. The curettage included the removal of all stairs, elevators, dumb waiters, partitions, washrooms, doors, mechanical services, hung ceilings, and floor and wall finishes. Only the outer masonry shell, the bearing masonry mitoyen walls, the floors, the columns and beams, and the roof were retained. All visible structural elements were repaired or replaced and eventually sandblasted. The new dwelling units were built within the emptied but cleaned building shell. The existing brick supporting walls became the common walls separating the dwelling units.

The types of dwelling units vary according to size and location within the buildings. The small units occupy a single 1,200 s.f. module while the larger ones spread over two adjacent or superimposed bays. A number of the upper floor units have atriums open to the sky. The existing floor construction, although made of timber, has a bearing capacity of 200 lbs/sf, which is about 4 times that required for residential use. This made it possible to pour a new concrete slab on top of the existing timber floor and thereby improved the acoustic performance of the floor enormously as well as increased the fire safety of the building.



### 8. Cours Le Royer

*The raw space after the curettage*



### 9. Cours Le Royer

*A typical two-level dwelling unit with a roof terrace*

## 4.2 The Buildings

Cours Le Royer is an ensemble of historically significant warehouses that are situated in the very heart of the city's historic precinct. The rehabilitation project was begun in 1975 and completed 6 years later. Two of the warehouses are amongst the largest buildings in Vieux Montreal, while the third unit is a much smaller and typical building for the area. The large warehouses are rectangular in shape and are positioned face to face along rue Le Royer. Their structural system is a hybrid of parallel masonry bearing



**10. Cours Le Royer**

*View of a typical dwelling unit*

walls and post and beams construction. The structural bays are 8 meters wide, and these in turn these are subdivided into two smaller structural bays by a row of cast iron or timber columns<sup>10</sup>. The smaller building is constructed with conventional skeletal frame. The depth of the larger warehouses is 27 and 34 meters, respectively, which is deeper than needed for housing requirements<sup>11</sup>. As is common in 19<sup>th</sup> century architecture, the floor-to-floor height diminishes as the building rises, with the corresponding reduction in the size of the windows. The floor plate of the two large warehouses measure 2,800 and 3,400 square meters, while the smaller one measures 280 square meters. The building heights vary from 4 to 7 stories.

In his book *MONTREAL EN EVOLUTION*, Jean-Claude Marsan accurately describes the buildings in the following way:

*Il est à remarquer que ces façades à ossature de pierre furent employées également dans le cas de vastes structures autonomes tels, par exemple, les entrepôts des Sœurs Hospitalières de Saint-Joseph (1866) établis sur les îlots urbains délimités par les rues St Sulpice et St-Dizier, de Brésoles, Le Royer et St-Paul [...] Le traitement architectural de leurs façades s'avère, pour l'époque, tout à fait remarquable. Les rez-de-chaussée se signalent par la répétition d'arcades vigoureuses, tandis que les élévations sont rythmées à toutes les trois baies, par de puissants piliers maçonnés, qui recoupent les horizontales des planchers. Dans ces édifices, se trouvent déjà résumés pour l'essentiel les*

<sup>10</sup> The columns on the lower two floors are made of cast iron, while those on the upper floors are in timber

<sup>11</sup> The normal depth of a housing block planned with a double-loaded corridor is about 21 meters

*principes architectoniques qui, a la fin du siècle, feront l'originalité et la force de l'Ecole de Chicago.*<sup>12</sup>

#### **4.4 The Making of Place le Royer**

The French term *cours* refers to a linear tree-lined public space. Cours Le Royer, as the name implied, in an ensemble of buildings held together by such a linear public park. From the very start, it was envisaged that rue Le Royer would be transformed into a



#### **11. Cours Le Royer**

*View of the garden*

significant outdoor park or public square to serve both the residents and the public at large. To be practicable and economically viable, the project could not survive without an enclosed garage for the residents. Street parking in the Old City is nearly impossible. The only possible location for a garage was under the street, which happened to be just wide enough for a double-loaded parking aisle. Without the garage, the project would never have seen the light of day.

Since there are virtually no green spaces in Old Montreal, Place Le Royer became an instant success, as a social space and as a visual relief from the omnipresent greystone environment of the area. Place Le Royer was the first public square in old Montreal to be made in 25 years.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Changes in our cities take place at an accelerating pace, and the number of buildings threatened with redundancy increases proportionally. Not all old buildings are good, and

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<sup>12</sup> Jean-Claude Marsan, MONTREAL EN EVOLUTION, Les Editions Fides, Montréal, 1974

not all old buildings need to be saved. Yet we have learned that even mediocre buildings can be salvaged and participate in the making of a good neighbourhood. The answer to the question of unneeded or outmoded buildings in our cities rests in the application of intelligent and sensitive adaptive re-use. Both Jardins Prince-Arthur and Cours Le Royer illustrate a way to deal with buildings that were deemed to have reached the end of their natural life. Either through transformation or rehabilitation old buildings can be saved and turned into productive and economically viable entities. These projects confirmed once again the fallacy of the Modernist premise that form follows function, or the corollary, that there is an ideal building form for a particular activity. There are certainly enough examples by now which prove the opposite: that a school can be converted into housing, a railroad station into a market place, a church into a theatre, or warehouse into a library.

The optimistic view in North America is that we are at a new beginning in architectural conservation and city building. Modern environmental exigencies demand that we conserve and regenerate what we have built in the past. Conservancy has become a genuine and welcomed force of development. The relevance of past vernacular architecture is slowly being acknowledged, even celebrated. There is a surge of sympathy for the rehabilitation of old buildings. The economic viability of recycling is being proven over and over again.



In our tumultuous age of shining new buildings where form and appearance govern clearly over function, and history and social relevance are dropped with wild abandon, the need for the preservation and conservation of our architectural tradition becomes more important than ever. Our architectural heritage is the counterpoint to the spectacle buildings of today. The unbridled faith in the new, the mania for the *dernier cri*, and the obsession with originality cannot be sustained forever. The art of good city building depends as much on the on the preservation of the old as on the creation of the new.

*Although all the partners in the firm of Desnoyers Mercure Gagnon Sheppard, Architects participated in various ways in all the phases of design and construction of the two projects, most of the credit should be given to Claude Gagnon who devoted six long and arduous years to bring the partner's separate and collective ideas to fruition. He played the key role in all the aspects of the project; he was the locomotive that drove the project, he was the spirit of the enterprise, he was the true leader.*