

ADRIAN SHEPPARD IN CONVERSATION WITH JIM DONALDSON

Montreal, July 1999

The first thing we would be interested in hearing is why you became an architect, and why McGill?

The reason was very simple. My father was both an architect and a civil engineer, and I wanted to follow in his footsteps. He was passionate about his professions, and, with time, his passion generated a definite curiosity in me which eventually led me to study and practice of architecture. It began early in life. I found a letter my father wrote when I was ten or eleven years old in which he states that I always wanted to be an architect. Thus, the idea of becoming an architect was already implanted in my mind at age eleven. The process of selecting a professional course was easy and made without hesitation. I did vacillate for a while, however, between civil engineering and architecture, but this was due to my imperfect knowledge of the two professions. I thought they were similar since both disciplines dealt the making of buildings. Little did I know of the profound cultural differences that separated the two; they complement one another, but they are poles apart in terms of practice, traditions, culture, and social concerns. I recognize today that I would have been an unhappy engineer, and the corollary is true: I have always enjoyed the discipline and practice of my *métier* immensely.

Why McGill? I lived in

construction. He gave were simple projects, for the obvious reasons that he wanted us to focus work on construction. By the end of the third, I had learned much and became more confident about architecture.

Before you leave Stuart, were there any women in your class? Any woman architects?

Initially, we had only one female student in our year, Gail Turner, who later became Gail Lamb when she married another classmate, Wolf Lamb. In 1956 or 1957, when I attended my fifth year, four Hungarians architectural students joined our class, two of them women. These students were Hungarian refugees who had left during the Revolution. These newcomers changed the physiognomy of the class to some extent: they were more mature, came with a different cultural baggage, had all been final-year students in Budapest, and they brought a new feminine presence to the class. The addition of the two women students represented a three hundred percent increases in female presence. Their i

Peter joined the School when I was in my fourth or fifth year, and since he taught history at that time to the lower years, I never had him as a history

He was pugnacious, enjoyed shocking us, and lectured with an intensity we had never encountered. His vision of architecture and teaching was diametrically different from Ray's. Years later Sandy and I became professional colleagues on the Place Victoria Project.

I would define Sandy as a likeable enfant terrible. He used foul language when he lost his temper or when he disagreed with our views. He was a bit like Stuart Wilson in terms of temperament, but above all, was a breath of fresh year in the School. In the single semester he taught here, he manifestly changed our studio. Because he was so forthright with everyone, including his colleagues, he had a falling out with John and his appointment was not renewed. It was unfortunate for us, his students, and for the School. We had all learned much from him and he turned many of us around, and for the better. The School preached the Miesian orthodoxy based on the authority of the program and the structure as the principal design instruments. Buildings were to be clear, elegant, and functional. Most of the work in our School was competent, even good, but lacked lyrical dimension. Sandy challenged the Miesian tenets. Because he had a speculative mind, and was most daring, he made us explore "un-miesian" ideas. The social dimension of Architecture mattered as much to him as Modern Art, modern music, and modern culture.

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Let me recount an anecdote that illustrates Sandy's concerns and teaching well. Before he left, Ray, his predecessor, had given us a project the design a small office building. He had arranged for a curtain wall manufacturer to send their catalogues. Ray believed that the ideal solution for envelope of the modern office building was the curtain wall. When Sandy walked into the design studio for the first time and saw these curtain wall catalogues, he went into a mini rage. Systemic curtain walls have nothing to do with architecture, he yelled. He threw the pile of catalogues on the floor and shouted "We're going to do architecture. We are not going to use catalogues in this studio!"

never apply these disciplines. Surveying is another case in point. The need for knowledge of surveying for architects is a 19th century notion of the nature of the profession. I have practiced architecture for many years and not once did I use any of that knowledge in any way.

[21:57:22]

How about Calculus?

Calculus was the required pre-requisite for all the technical courses. We simply had to take it, and understood the reason for it. But we survived.

George Jolly was much maligned. He left McGill and went on to Loyola

judgment and decide who was right, and what to take from each one of them.

[26:19:17]

What year did you graduate in?

1959.

Can you speak a bit about some of your classmates?

I had interesting classmates. A few stand out in a special way. I can think of Oscar Newman who became somewhat of a celebrity when he published *Defensible Space*. He was a talented designer but abandoned traditional practice to focus on the sociology of architecture and planning. He was articulate and blessed with an acerbic sense of humor. Philippe Delesalle was my closest comrade-in-arms. He was a great romantic, a mountain climber, an extreme sportsman, and altogether an amazing person. He moved to Calgary (partially to be near the Rocky Mountains) and founded with two partners one of the largest practices in the nation. Melvin Charney, who was a year ahead of me and was known as our resident provocateur, but he was the most serious thinker amongst the students. Moshe Safdie was in School at the same time as me but I did not know him well. I remember fondly the Hungarian students because they were older than us and came with a very different training. David Farley, who later became the head of the School of Urban Planning, was much older. We also became close friends during our studies, and often did our engineering assignments together. We suffered together, but we had fun. He came with an Art degree from the Ontario College of Art and was already a mature painter. He was articulate, kind and funny. Overall, we were a very cohesive group.

[28:46:24]

Was that on McTavish Street?

No, the School was located on University Street at the corner of Milton Street and was relocated to an old Greystone mansion on McTavish Street. I studied in our new (and temporary) quarters during my last year. The old School was demolished to make way for the McConnell Engineering Building.

But who were my other classmates? There were Jim Donaldson, Derek Drummond and Lloyd Sankey who eventually opened an office together. Lloyd was the member of the trio I knew best. Michael Fish was ever-present and later in life became the great conservation guru in Montreal.

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Robert Stern, who became the Dean lately, has made the restoration of the A&A building a priority. It is an important building that must be restored. It had an impact on an entire generation of architects.

Good.

Coming back to my professional background, after Yale I came back to Montreal and worked with Victor Prus. Subsequently I joined the office of Gerry Miller and Édouard Fiset. Fiset had been the chief architect of Expo 67, and I hoped that his office was destined to achieve great things, but it was not to happen. When Norbert Schoenauer invited me to join the office of Desnoyers, Mercure, Lezyi, Gagnon, in

It's nice and fortunate for you to have a wife who enjoys it. But when you have a daughter or son who appreciates it and see things through two different sets of eyes, you can talk about it. It's all in the same genetic background.

You're right. My wife does enjoy looking at architecture as much as me. But seeing architecture through the eyes of my daughter is different. She is of another generation and her references are