

Perspectives

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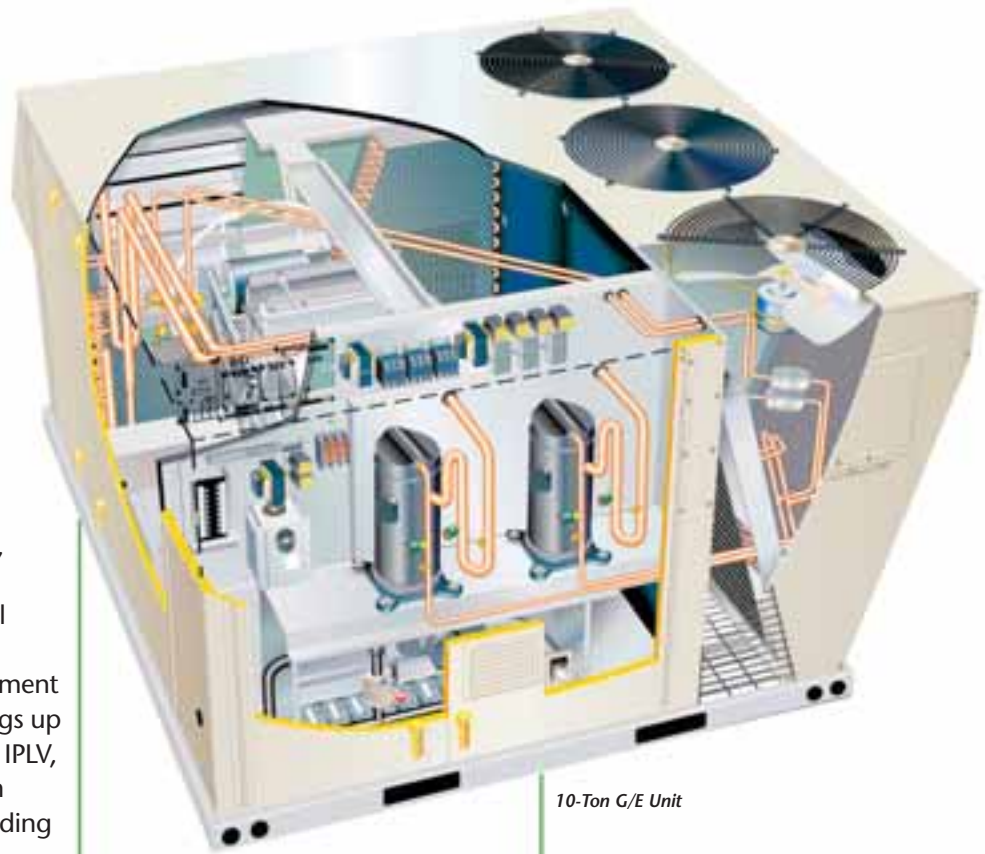
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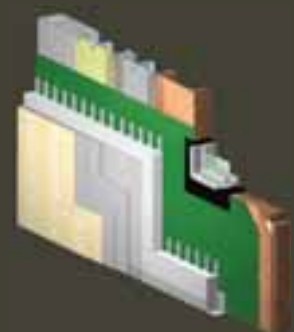


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ARCHITECTURE & FOOD

Editorial

FINALLY, NORTH AMERICANS HAVE BEGUN to appreciate what the rest of the world has known for thousands of years: everything revolves around food.

In architecture — the practice and the culture — this is reflected in the attention currently lavished on food preparation areas, restaurant environments and food-vending establishments. In many residential designs, the eat-in kitchen has replaced the hearth as the centre of the house. Even the presentation of food often assumes an architectural character.

So began our call-for-entries for this issue of *Perspectives* — Architecture and Food. It all seemed fairly straight-forward and pragmatic: some architectural projects relating to food service and consumption, a domestic kitchen design or two, a stylish restaurant interior — submissions that would represent a contemporary facet of day-to-day architectural practice. That was our plan.

The result of our search, however, was as astonishing as it was delightful. Of the dozen-and-a-half responses we received, not a single one dealt with an actual architectural commission. The incredibly strong connection between architecture and food, it turns out, has little to do with architectural practice and everything to do with architectural philosophy, sustainability, heritage, aesthetics, social interaction and even architectural doctrine. Food, it seems, is never far from an architect's mind.

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Dining (and wining) in an award-winning winery. Whether it's in steel vats, oaken casks, or glasses, wine creates an excellent dining atmosphere.

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President's Message

THIS ISSUE OF PERSPECTIVES FOCUSES on two of my favorite topics: architecture and food. The links and analogies that draw them together are many, as is demonstrated by the diverse nature of the articles presented within.

The most direct connection between architecture and food is obvious. The preparation and partaking of a meal are among the most primal and basic of cultural activities in any society. Much of social evolution has revolved around this simple event. Through the ages, many cultures have expressed their identity, at least in part, through the unique dishes that they have developed. It is an expression of the people, their society and their values. As with any activity, the surroundings in which it takes place are crucial to the event. Thus it is that architecture has been the silent partner providing the backdrop for the partaking of meals for thousands of years around the world.

Alternatively, it is important to consider the link between architecture and food in a much larger and different context. Today, the topic of sustainability is of paramount importance. We have reached a period in history where the consumption of raw materials and the waste produced by their consumption threatens the future for all of us. On the world stage, how food is produced to meet the rapidly expanding population is being questioned. That same scrutiny is being applied to buildings. How buildings are constructed, their service life, the materials from which they are made, and energy they require is also being questioned.

Over the past 40 years there has been a shift in our society to fast pre-packaged food to provide a solution to an increasingly busy lifestyle. With that, buildings that are inexpensive to construct (and remove) have developed to facilitate this lifestyle. Just as the production and packaging of fast food is not sustainable, neither are the buildings that are wasteful of materials and energy. We are at a turning point both environmentally and culturally.

This is a time for great optimism. As social pressures increase, new/old and sustainable forms of energy are being explored and developed. New materials are becoming available, creating a path to greater sustainability. The same is happening with the production of food. People are much more concerned with how and where their food is grown. They are returning to the social value of the meal they have prepared for themselves and their friends. They are returning to the roots of how their cultural dishes express ideas of where they are from and their relationship to others.

BUILDING SUSTAINABILITY IN ALL OF ITS DIVERSE FORMS HAS BECOME A PRIORITY FOR COUNCIL AND WILL BE OF INCREASING IMPORTANCE IN THE FUTURE.

All changes start with first steps. These steps are being made and the pace is quickening. Building sustainability in all of its diverse forms has become a priority for Council and will be of increasing importance in the future. As this unfolds in time, we can still appreciate the joy in the day-to-day interplay between food and architecture as so aptly described by this issue's contributors. So please, kick back with your favourite culinary delights in your favourite place and enjoy the magazine.

Bon appetit. ■



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S. O'Reilly".

SEAN O'REILLY, ARCHITECT
B.E.S., B.ARCH., OAA, MRAIC
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Response

LETTERS

How is your summer going? Things here at Solares are busy, busy which is great.

I wanted to write and congratulate you on another great issue of OAA architect's houses. The Monika Kuhn project was particularly fascinating. Will you make this a yearly feature? Architects love to read about the houses that they design for themselves/family members!

— CHRISTINE LOLLEY, TORONTO

Dear Gordon,

I have finally seen a copy of the Architecture goes to the Movies issue of *Perspectives*. It looks good and I am glad that you were able to use some of the images I sent. I particularly enjoyed your article on architects as they appear in movies and their integrity (or lack of). I still haven't seen "The Lake House," "In the Bedroom" or "Unfaithful," but they are now on my list of DVDs to rent.

Thanks to you for including me, and to Ian Ellingham for suggesting me for this issue.

— RENÉE TOBE, SHEFFIELD, UK

CORRECTIONS:

In the Spring 2008 issue of *Perspectives*, our feature was entitled "Architects' Houses". However, some individuals identified in the titles of the submissions, although they were involved in the design and execution of the projects, are not, in fact, architects. We apologize for any confusion this may have created.

By way of clarification, Mark Cuhaci is a principal of Edward J. Cuhaci and Associates, Ottawa; Arlene Hofstadter works (and shares the Lawrence Park house) with architect David Eckler; Leslie Coates works (and shares the Riverside Drive house) with Brad Skinner; Jason-Emery Groen is an intern architect. Finally, if you would like to visit the Skinner-Coates House on Riverside Drive, don't go to Kitchener, as our feature suggests. The house is located in London.

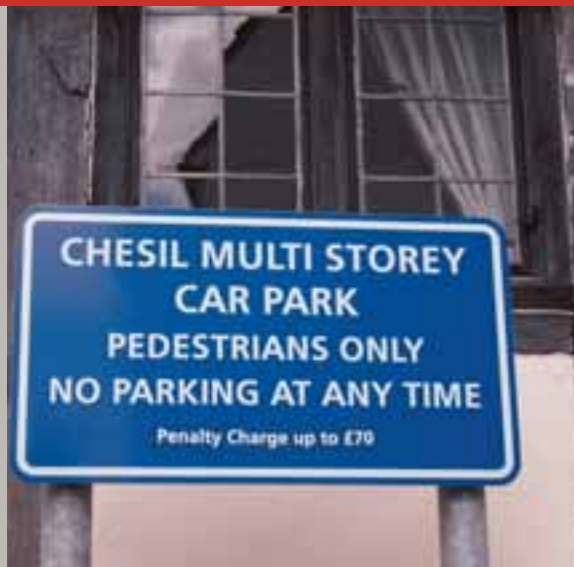
In the Summer 2008 issue, on page 29, Son Van Huynh's name was unfortunately misspelled.

YOU ARE HERE

Helpful information is where you find it — often it is staring you right in the face, in the form of signage, designed to guide you on life's journey. Slippery When Wet, Slow Down for Children, Wait to be Seated — these are words to live by. In fact many of us take this advice completely for granted. We yield when we are advised to; we merge when it is permitted and at a four-way stop sign, we stop as many ways as we can.

As architects, we try to be observant. It is up to us to make sense of our built environment. With this in mind, *Perspectives* has initiated a periodic item that will examine way-finding devices. Unavoidable in our fast-paced, multi-cultural world, but too frequently ill-considered, signs meant to direct us often confuse us or offer us no helpful information at all — way-losing or way-barring might better describe them.

Readers are invited to submit examples from their own travels, near and far. On the right is the first in our series.



Winchester, England

PERSPECTIVES

ARCHITECTURE & FOOD

INTRODUCTION

BY GORDON S. GRICE OAA, FRAIC

FOOD AND SHELTER HAVE LONG BEEN CONSIDERED TWO OF THE MOST BASIC HUMAN NECESSITIES. IN PRIMITIVE SOCIETIES, MUCH EFFORT IS EXPENDED ENSURING THAT THESE TWO NEEDS ARE MET. IT IS A MEASURE OF HOW FAR MOST OF US HAVE COME THAT WE HARDLY CONCERN OURSELVES WITH THESE TWO THINGS AT ALL ANYMORE. OR, SO WE BELIEVE.

low roughly similar paths from design to preparation to consumption. Both spring from the earth and return to the earth. Both have had parallel histories and follow similar fashion trends. Food sometimes looks like architecture and architecture often resembles food.

But it's the deeper connections that keep these topics on the front pages of our newspapers and in the forefront of our consciousness. If it's our common need for food and shelter that helps to unite humankind, it is also true that nothing serves more to define the distinctions between us. Architecture and food are

at the heart of many of our current concerns.

SHORTAGE

The world Food Crisis is upon us. With energy prices rising, temperatures and rainfall fluctuating and the population growing, dire predictions of food shortage occupy the headlines. To make matters worse, in the Third World, masses of people displaced by war and oppression crowd into tiny temporary shelters that become permanent. Even in our affluent societies, homes are lost to natural disasters and financial mismanagement, even as the use of food banks continues to increase.

THE TRUTH IS THAT FOOD and shelter are never far from our consciousness and frequently command our immediate attention. They form our daily news, our entertainment, our occupations, our hobbies, even our obsessions. A colossal number of periodicals, websites and entire television channels are given over to food and shelter.

On the surface, food and architecture share some obvious similarities. Both appeal to the senses. Both fol-

IF IT'S OUR COMMON NEED FOR FOOD AND SHELTER THAT HELPS TO UNITE HUMANKIND, IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT NOTHING SERVES MORE TO DEFINE THE DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN US.



IAN ELLINGHAM

EXCESS

For many of us, it isn't the lack of food and shelter that torments us. It's the possibility that our consumption is not sufficiently conspicuous. We are addicted to food and shelter magazines and food and shelter TV. We crave ostentatious, iconic buildings and spacious lofts. We don't worry so much about the shortage of staple foods; our concern is that the greengrocer may run short of arugula, or that the newest fashionable diet isn't working. In developing countries, meager homes and bodies reflect scarcity, while in the monster-house Western World, obesity has reached epidemic proportions.

ECOLOGY

The sustainability of the earth depends on the care we take of our environment. This includes the production, distribution and preparation of our food, just as it includes the design, construction and maintenance of our built environment.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Finally, we have begun to respect the proper role of architectural preservation as the repository of our cultural history and traditions. Food has taken on a similar role. Where over-restriction of crop varieties has started to threaten our food supply, indigenous local crops are starting to be re-established. Old crops and old ways of cultivation are being reintroduced. City folk have started farming again.

We live in one world, but the important distinctions among our many cultures have never been more important. In the following essays, our contributors have examined the architecture-food connection from every possible angle, but one fact is clear: food and architecture share the spotlight in our daily drama. ■

Gordon Grice is editor of Perspectives.

Assembling a Molecular Architecture

BY ADRIAN BLACKWELL, BArch, MUD



LUKE STERN

THE MOUNT DENNIS MOBILE COMMUNITY kitchen was a collaboration between Master of Architecture students at University of Toronto's Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Design¹ and a group of residents in Toronto's Mount Dennis neighbourhood who make food for one another on Friday evenings.²

The class started with four simple objectives that collectively challenged the structure of most architectural design studios: to build something full scale; to collaborate with a community group in a mature suburban neighbourhood where fractured urban form exacerbates social and economic isolation; to focus on an essential and urgent program with the potential for pleasure and sociality (the production, distribution and consumption of food, e.g.); and finally to think about architecture as a social and political assemblage rather than the unified product of individual subjectivity.³

The students' primary challenge was to design and build architecture in complex, non-hierarchical, social groups. This question of collaboration operated at a set of scales: within the class itself, between the class and the community kitchen and between the class/community composition and a network of other Mount Dennis residents, organizations and institutions that were partners in the project. This wider network included: the Mount Dennis Action for Neighbourhood Change, which instigated the community kitchen itself; Evergreen, which initiated the community garden and barbecues from which the community kitchen grew; the Mount Dennis Community Association, which provided a larger local context, and involved suppliers and fabricators who supported the project, such as Punchclock metal shop and the Community Bicycle Network.

Launch of the
Mobile Community
Kitchen in
Eglinton Flats

THE PROJECT AS A WHOLE IS AN ATTEMPT TO RETHINK THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ARCHITECTURE, SOCIETY AND ECOLOGY, WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY AND THROUGH COMMUNITY DESIGN.



LUKE STERN



JESSE JACKSON

LEFT. Late night construction.
RIGHT. The eating and distributing cart.

The students met with the community every Friday evening. Every second week they cooked and ate meals with residents and, in the week between, they presented an evolving set of ideas about the Mobile Community Kitchen. Over the course of the design collaboration, proposals were made for a fixed outdoor kitchen and dining area, dispersed garden infrastructures, and a combined kitchen and outdoor stage. Each time the residents focused the problem back on the immediate concerns of cooking and eating together, while insisting on the need for a mobile structure, or structures, which could animate different local sites and events. Students collaborated in rotating groups of different sizes, producing diverse proposals, eventually converging on specific themes such as the simple modularity of parts, or the singularity of complementary elements, and on incremental approvals such as “three structures of different sizes,” or

“three standard bicycle wheels as the basic structural module.”

The final design for the mobile community kitchen consisted of three bike trailers, each with a complementary function: a cart for transporting and collecting, and accommodating three large garbage cans; a cart for preparing and cooking, with a large barbeque and a sink that unpacks to double its area, creating a kitchen surface and a prep counter; and an eating and distributing cart that can be used as a very large table or as a market surface. The three carts assemble differently at each site and event, beneath a colourful tarpaulin that protects them from sun and rain. Resident users can create different urban and architectural compositions in relation to Mount Dennis’ different locations: urban areas, train tracks, Black Creek and Eglinton Flats.

The project as a whole is an attempt to rethink the relationship between architecture, society and ecology, within the university and through

community design. Throughout the project the university was reconsidered as a space of collective, rather than individual, knowledge production, while the community was seen not as a good in itself, but rather as a diverse social milieu in which power relations are constantly at play. The studio explored the idea that architecture is always an assemblage of heterogeneous elements. A meal creates a composition with the body that eats it; the architecture of the community kitchen creates diverse compositions with each site in which it is used; while the people who use it create continuously changing compositions with one another. ■

Adrian Blackwell is an artist, designer, urbanist and professor. Adrian Blackwell Urban Projects is designing public furnishings for the revitalization of Nathan Phillips Square, and his recent writing on contemporary Chinese urbanism appeared in the book Networked Cultures published by NAI.

NOTES:

1. University of Toronto Faculty: Adrian Blackwell; Students: Pamela Choo, Nicholas Elliott, Jesse Jackson, Scott Keyes, James Lennox, Larry Mac, Giampaolo C. Mancuso, Eugene Mastrangeli, Cara McKibbin, Graham McNally, Luke Stern, Hui Teng, Pamela Tung.
2. Mount Dennis Community Kitchen: Noni, Antoinette, Rebekka, Dave, Jean, Felecia, Caitlin, Dwan, Keith, Keli, Judy, Jim, Carl, Cathy, Iko, Lin, Richard, Josie and many others; Mount Dennis Action for Neighbourhood Change: Jean-Marie Boutot, Evergreen: Rebekka Hutton
3. The class read Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*.

Slow Food/Slow Architecture

BY CATHY NASMITH OAA, TSA, FRAIC, CAHP

I LIKE TO COOK, AND I like to work on old buildings.

In Kensington market where I live, there is a fantastic grocery store. Its official name is “4 Life” but everyone who shops there knows it by the proprietor’s name: Potts — short for Potsdam. Potts does run a business, and assures me he is making a living at it, but seems to spend most of his time exchanging stories with his customers, me among them. He always has a recipe to share.

What makes this shop so special is not just the charm of the owner, but the way he has chosen to make his business fit his values. He is a committed environmentalist. One farmer at a time, one customer at a time, Potts is changing the way food is grown and distributed in our neighbourhood at least.

When you go in, you are often introduced to one of the farmers who supplies fresh eggs or amazing organic produce. The bins are a mix of imported organics and local. Every year there are more names of more farmers on the bins. Organic and locally-produced are his goals.

Potts dreams of starting a co-op farming operation that we can all buy shares in. You can buy organic meats, or organic dairy products in returnable glass bottles. He has recently stopped supplying plastic bags, instead offering returnable cotton bags that you can buy, and he will return the money if you bring them back.

Talking to him over the counter, I have been struck by just how much the heritage preservation movement has in common with the slow food movement. Older buildings were built using local materials. The construction methods evolved over centuries and reflect the collective experience gleaned by generations of masons and carpenters. They were built eco-

nomically, and built to last. As preservation architects, our goal is to conserve these buildings so they can continue in the way that those who built them intended.

Generally it costs about the same to rehabilitate an older building as it does to build a new one. But the costs are in labour, not material. A rough statistic is that it takes twice as much labour to restore a building as to build new. But labour is an abundant material.

New construction relies on factory-produced materials, which are often shipped long distances. Instead of relying on thermal mass and cross ventilation, new construction relies on all kinds of expensive equipment and oil-based products to keep the elements out and the occupants comfortable. I don’t know how many professional seminars I have attended over the years about this year’s theory on where to put the piece of plastic in the wall, and what contortions we have to put construction workers through to make sure all the plastic bits connect. Such technology yields buildings with a very short life expectancy — sometimes as little as 30 years. LEED gives points for making a building to last 50.

Old buildings don’t rely on plastic and caulking. They took a long time to build. It was expected that they would receive regular maintenance and be there for centuries.

They were built with material at hand, or at least as close by as could be moved by ship, train and horse and wagon. Toronto’s red brick is from local clays. Nothing was wasted. I heard from a descendant of the builder of Casa Loma that they went through a huge number of horseshoes hauling material up the hill by horse and wagon. The worn shoes were placed in the stonework as reinforcing.

Every time we restore an older building we are keeping it out of landfill, and preventing the drain on the world’s resources involved in building its replacement.

Architect Phillip Carter has an interesting explanation of the benefits of repairing historic wood windows. In describing vinyl or aluminum replacement windows, Carter says “The reason they are called no-maintenance is you can’t maintain them; every 20 years they have to be dumped and replaced.” Given the high energy costs to produce these materials, what possible energy savings can they yield if we look at the full cycle of production and consumption? Old windows need just a little sandpaper, putty and, yes, elbow grease to last more-or-less indefinitely.

EVERY TIME WE RESTORE AN OLDER BUILDING WE ARE KEEPING IT OUT OF LANDFILL, AND PREVENTING THE DRAIN ON THE WORLD’S RESOURCES INVOLVED IN BUILDING ITS REPLACEMENT.

In preserving older buildings we are also preserving these simple yet sophisticated technologies that we may want to turn to again when the oil runs out.

The slow food movement is about celebrating the local, spending time in preparing and sharing food that is good for the body and the soul. When we prepare ancestral family recipes we pay homage to family traditions and our ancestors. Restoring an old building also pays homage to those who slowly and carefully built it so we could continue to enjoy it long after they are gone. ■

Cathy Nasmith practices architecture and heritage planning in Toronto’s Kensington Market. She is the current president of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario.

The Architectural Dinners of Salvador Dali

BY LUCIAN NAN, BArch

LA BEAUTÉ SERA COMESTIBLE
OU NE SERA PAS.

— SALVADOR DALI

THE FOLLOWING PARAGRAPHS ARE MY attempt to enter, for a brief moment, the imaginary world of Salvador Dali and propose an interpretation for a very particular aspect of it — a place where the boundaries between architecture and taste, buildings and food, are ostentatiously dismantled; a place where architectural reality and impossible gastronomy are forced to coexist; a place where architectural elements and food ingredients are mixed together.

By means of a sophisticated arsenal of surrealist methods, Dali uses buildings and food as the symbolic materials to construct his personal vision in his art. His architectural references are often transformed into stage sets for an idealistic and imaginary childhood world or religious ecstasy. The relationship between architecture and food in Dali's work is linked to Freudian theories of incorporating the outside world in oneself, eating the desired object and by this, returning to a narcissistic state of childhood.

about each of them, connecting different foods with symbols, memories, feelings and mixing them into a very personal mythology.

Dali combines in some of his works the symbolic meaning of food with the concrete image of it. The result is unexpected compositional forms in strange architectural structures. Some of the best examples of this peculiar compositional method are the illustrations that Dali created for his book *The Dinners of Gala*¹. Dali designed the entire book, relating rich illustrated pages to flamboyant commentaries on exotic dishes resulting in the presentation of gastronomy dedicated to the experiences of taste. In the compositions based on architectural elements, Dali creates an inversion that destroys the idea of the monumentality of traditional architecture, and with it the expression of world order. The inversion consists of body and food elements magnified to a monumental scale, in contrast to monuments symbolizing eternity, which

human corpses and cooked lobsters pile up in anthropomorphic monuments and baroque fountains become display trays for seafood dishes. This forced relationship between architecture and food is one of the ingredients that form Dali's complex and extravagant theories, which we define in this particular case as "Romanism of Dalinian Gastro Aesthetics."

For Dali, food and building materials can be in a direct relationship or perceived in the same way. In another book that he wrote and illustrated, *The Wines of Gala*, Dali recommends tasting earth as a means of discerning the difference between it and concrete or asphalt. "Earth," he says, "is acid, kind, emotive or tasteless."² Dali frequently uses prehistoric structures in compositions relating to the dream world of childhood, but it is difficult to tell what these structures are made of. By means of soft surface and colour their material can be interpreted as belonging to the earth or, even better, a peculiar kind of earth. In these cases, Dali's statement about the characteristics of earth quoted above can be related to the material of these soft structures. Are we also to understand that Dali's peculiar prehistoric architecture has edible characteristics?

I mentioned in the beginning of this essay the importance of symbolism in Dali's work. Although this subject continues beyond my scope here, one example illustrates the degree of its complexity. Boiled beans appear very frequently in Dali's work (at times difficult to recognize as such because of the sketchy depiction or deformed shape). According to old Catalan customs such beans are eaten during Lent

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ARCHITECTURE AND FOOD IN DALI'S WORK IS LINKED TO FREUDIAN THEORIES OF INCORPORATING THE OUTSIDE WORLD IN ONESELF, EATING THE DESIRED OBJECT AND BY THIS, RETURNING TO A NARCISSISTIC STATE OF CHILDHOOD.

"I know what I eat, I do not know what I do" are the words with which Dali begins his intriguing autobiography *The Secret Life of Salvador Dali*. He is referring not only to the taste and texture of food but also to the symbolic meaning of each ingredient. In his flamboyant style, Dali writes

are reduced to the ordinary scale of food. Dali also uses the fragile and perishable character of the edible in opposition to the permanent quality of architecture typified by stone buildings. In Dali's vision the Colosseum becomes the image of a huge belly digesting a heap of vegetables;



(fig.1) «Soft Construction with Boiled Beans (Premonition of Civil War)» 1936, by Salvador Dali, Philadelphia Museum of Art: The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection.

to symbolize death from starvation and war. Dali makes a direct reference to this in one of his most important paintings, "Soft Construction with Boiled Beans (Premonition of Civil War)" (fig.1). Here the relationship between architecture and food is not immediately apparent but it can be traced in the anthropomorphic structure as well as the symbolism of the boiled beans and the cannibalistic connotations.

The most explicit statement of a direct link between architecture and food is to be found in Dali's comments on art nouveau, a subject on which he holds strong views. He freely expresses these views in his article "On the Terrifying and Edible Beauty of Modern Style Architecture,"³ where analogies between architecture and food are abundant. For Dali art nouveau reflects the architecture-food linkage

in the most obvious way. He refers to the works of Gaudí and Guimard to illustrate his theory on the style's potential in a metaphorical transformation into a soft or liquid state. Art nouveau forms are moulded into Dali's imaginary world. They are forms of desires and dreams, thus acquiring specific texture and taste and becoming edible. An art nouveau building is described as an "exhibitionist and ornamental cake-biscuit."⁴ Based on

these characteristics Dali qualifies this style as an ideal architecture.

In concluding this brief incursion into Dali's world of architecture and food, I leave the last words to Salvador Dali himself. In one of the photographs illustrating his article on Art Nouveau, he comments:

"The soft base of this column seems to tell us: eat me!"⁵ ■

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NOTES

1. *Les dîners de Gala*, New York: Felicie Inc. Publishers, 1973,
2. "Mettez un morceau d'argile dans votre bouche./ ensuite un morceau de craie/ et vous verrez qu'ils n'ont pas le même gout!/ Ceux de l'asphalte, ceux de béton/ pensent que la terre est seulement légère ou basse/ mais la terre elle est acide, aimable, émotive ou fade, . . ." Dali, *Les vins de Gala*, Paris: Draeger, 1977, p.98
3. "De la beauté terrifiante et comestible de l'architecture Modern' Style", *Minotaure*, No: 3-4, 1933
4. "... assimiler une maison modern' style à un gâteau, a une tarte exhibitionniste et ornamental ede « confiseur ». *ibid.*, p. 72
5. "La base molle de cette colonne semble nous dire: mange-moi!", *ibid.*, p. 72

Sustenance

BY BARBARA ROSS OAA, MRAIC

SUSTENANCE

As eaters or designers, we face similar challenges. We need food that is delicious and nutritious; yet, we are surrounded with food-like substances, which are making us ill. We want architecture that is meaningful and enduring; yet, architecture-like substances abound — as pre-engineered as a bacon double-cheeseburger — equally placeless and nearly as unsustaining. As eaters, we are overfed and undernourished; as designers, too often, we make places that are more wasteful and less wonderful than we would wish. Tragically, even within the “green building movement,” many hollow gestures are made.

I wonder how real sustenance is created. We are in the midst of a palpable sea change in the general public interest in all things “green.” Within this environmental zeitgeist rides the possibility that twenty-first-century design might both express — and really affect — a new balance between humankind and the eco-systems that we inhabit. As eating and building are both political acts, it is natural and important to discuss how they are to be pursued. Might an approach that works in the kitchen also work in the design studio?

In his most recent book, *In Defense of Food*¹, Michael Pollan contrasts an eco-cultural approach with the “nutritionist” approach that has been so prevalent. This spectrum has a parallel in architecture. At one end is the idea that a project is the sum of its parts (the “building blocks of nutrition” approach) — if architects would only select the “right” parts and strictly avoid using the “wrong” ones, then a perfect state called “sustainability” would result. But we know this is only a piece of the puzzle. At the other end is the eco-cultural approach, within which three ideas

are at work. First, there is the prospect of consuming less while enjoying more. Second, there is the sustaining power of care and imagination. And third, there is the idea of preferring ingredients that are of local origin.

OVER-CONSUMPTION AND THE RISE OF “DISEASES OF EXCESS”

While North American buildings contribute more than their share to climate change, our diet is making us chronically sick. And today, worldwide, more people are overfed than underfed. In their 2005 book *Hungry Planet – What the World Eats*², photographer Peter Menzel and journalist Faith d’Aluisio profile 30 families in 24 countries, showing what each eats during a typical week. It’s no surprise that the budgets span a huge range, from \$500 (U.S. equivalent) per week in rich countries, to \$25 per week elsewhere. In the First World, there is a clear link between over-consumption (and the amount of processed food) and diabetes, heart disease, and other chronic ailments. And, as countries like China and Kuwait advance, they adopt an American-style eating regime. Right away, the “diseases of excess” begin to skyrocket. Meanwhile, in Okinawa, those who follow the traditional maxim *hara hachi bu* — eat until only 80 percent full — lead the world in both longevity and healthiness in old age.

Likewise, in Ontario, our buildings are overfed — in this case with fossil-fuel-derived energy. They are significant polluters, contributing every day to the atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases, and the widespread damage that results. After examining the data, I am awestruck at the scale of our waste. And disturbingly, many of today’s so-called “green” buildings still draw on unnecessarily large quantities of fuel. Perhaps an Ontario

architect ought to aim further than an Okinawan eater, stopping when we are more like 50 percent full.

GESTURES AND PASSING FADS

North American eaters have proven themselves particularly inclined to invest their faith in fad diets. Year after year, a different food takes its turn: there was the All-Banana Diet in the 1970s, the oat bran phase of the 1980s, the high-carbohydrate phase, and then the no-carbohydrate phase. Right now, “pro-biotic cultures” are having their day. As obesity continues to rise, it is obvious that re-establishing a healthy balance requires more than the simple application of one so-called “magic bullet” ingredient or another.

The late twentieth-century fashion for “fusion” cuisine (a.k.a. “chaos on a plate”) is currently giving way to regimes such as Slow Food, Real Food, Raw Food, and the 100-Mile Diet. Which of these will prove itself worthy of the word “sustenance”? The last one is a response to reports that food in the US travels an average of 1,300 miles from farm to supermarket (think cardboard tomatoes). But the 100-Mile Diet may not really reduce environmental impacts at all, and there is little to suggest that it improves one’s health. After just a few seasons, the “100 Mile” concept has been declared passé.

To our detriment, architects may follow a similar course. As “environmental design” throws off its scratchy old clothes and puts on a business suit, one “green” product after another arrives on our doorstep. Specify some bike racks and bamboo flooring, and suddenly you may be perceived as doing “the right thing”. (You may even think you are.) However, depending on the context, certain tactics may not reduce the “ecologi-

cal footprint" of a design, even one little bit. As "100 Mile" joins the All-Banana Diet as yet another passing fad, I wonder: will it be long before regimes such as LEED go this way as well? The "right parts" approach — to eating or to design — does not create sustenance, and quickly devolves into a series of hollow gestures.

THE DESIGN CHALLENGE OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: HOW SHALL WE CONSUME LESS AND ENJOY MORE?

Without a doubt, it is easier to follow a conserving and delicious diet in a temperate zone. In a very cold climate — say, up the Rideau River on a -30°C February afternoon — it takes a little extra imagination to equate the Delicious Revolution with the prospect of gnawing on the last home-grown turnip from down in the cellar. Turn on the radio, and the nearest *Franchise du Poulet* beckons.

But this is only a design problem. The "consumer" choice is wasteful and polluting — and it enslaves rather than liberates. It deprives the cook (and the eater) of a whole range of sensory experiences. My cellar turnip has colour, flavour and texture that, with imagination, may be interpreted in many different ways. As I prepare it, I will think of the last crisp fall day that I worked in the garden. It might become part of a sweet and hearty vegetable stew. Or, over a few days, it might be turned into tart sauerkraut. We could roast it slowly, or steam it, or slice it into matchsticks and turn it into crispy, salty *frites*.

Likewise, it is more challenging to realize a conserving and delightful architecture in the cool-humid climates around the Great Lakes Basin than it is in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. But several recent projects show what is possible. Many run on one-fifth of the amount consumed by the average Canadian office building (60-80 kWhr/m² vs. 420 kWhr/m²/year). And these buildings are not the dimly-lit, narrow-windowed, "sick buildings" of the 1970s, in which all

meaning was engineered away. They are comfortable, carefully tailored to their contexts, bathed in natural light, and adorned with art and handcraft. Their designers have displayed a deft handling of high-quality materials, an unflinching pursuit of energy-use performance, and a deep understanding of climate and place.

FLAVOUR, COLOUR, TEXTURE AND HAPPINESS – THROUGH CARE AND IMAGINATION

A really great meal shows that natural systems provide us with everything we need. One Ontario cottage classic is an example: golden steamy sweet corn-on-the-cob, a big red slice of tomato, and a fillet of lake trout. The corn is picked by the farmer up the road, the tomato is warm from the sunshine in the garden and the fish is pan-fried in butter. And then there is pie. This meal might occur around a table, or on a log in the yard. It is prepared with our own hands, and while we work together, there are stories and laughter and sometimes a song. This meal is artful in its simplicity and steadfast in its re-enactment of tradition, yet the experience is a little different every time. The "sustenance" in the cottage meal comes through the food, through the old familiar scene, and through the kinship of those who don't forget to "put the love in".

In design practice, we talk about "duty of care", but how about the "sustaining power of our care"? Architect Sarah Susanka writes about the nurturing qualities of thoughtful design in the *Not So Big House*³ series. Regardless of style, in the houses she features, the application of the designer's craft (imagination and sensitivity) has created places that are a joy to inhabit. I suspect they rest more lightly on the land than their super-sized neighbours.

MEANINGFUL, RELEVANT AND BEAUTIFUL – THE QUALITIES OF LOCAL INGREDIENTS

So, is the possibility that we might lower the greenhouse gas emissions

of our dessert the only reason to choose local, seasonal food? What a joyless vision that is. Our ancestors ate locally and seasonally, because that was their only choice. Now that we have a choice, we may choose local, out of a variety of impulses. Some act according to their values, as "environmentalists". Others like to keep step with cultural traditions. Some find it tastes better. And some are returning to the old idea that it is both delightful and strengthening for our health to take in the food of the season, eating lightly during high summer, and more heartily during the deep cold of winter.

Toronto-area Professor Nina-Marie Lister describes the social and economic reasons to choose local and seasonal food. In her essay "Placing Food"⁴, she indicates that, in 1960, most of Toronto's food came from within a 350-km. radius. Now, at least 60 percent of our fresh produce is imported from the US — one third of it arriving during Ontario's growing season. Our local economy is diminished as a result. Also, there is the issue of preserving diversity — in seeds, in patterns of land-use, and in ways of life. A city devoid of its market gardens and gardeners — or nearby farms and farmers — is less interesting and much less vibrant for the loss.

The most satisfying architecture, likewise, is rooted in place. Success depends on the interpretation of local tradition, and this does not preclude the use of a contemporary architectural language. Recently I visited the Wind NRG office building in the hills near Burlington, Vermont. Its architect, William MacLay, knows how to balance environmental concerns with human goals. The building uses a fraction of the energy of a typical Ontario office building, and you can feel the sustaining power of the designer's care in every detail. When it is really cold outside, the building runs on wood chips, a byproduct from a nearby mill. By design, the local economy is supported, both during construction,

and in the way in which the building operates. Just as important, the design speaks — to its occupants and visitors alike — of local culture and local values.

REAL SUSTENANCE

I'm not promoting wood chips and a Vermont vernacular as the "answer to all our prayers". I am suggesting that an eco-cultural approach — to design or to dinner — is the route to real sustenance. The essence of a great meal and a great building is similar. Where the meal (or the building) is, and where it came from, matter a great deal. To rest lightly on the land while enjoying your meal (or your building) requires careful thought and imagination, and may require stopping before we feel full. The physical elements of a "more-sustainable" building (or meal) would vary, from time to time, and place to place, but the approach would be similar: preferring local ways and means, having faith in the sustaining power of the designer's care, and consuming less while enjoying more. As Marco Francisci states, in his essay "Architectural Maccheroni", "to build and to cook are a necessity, but to build and to cook intelligently is the chief obligation of architecture and cuisine." ■

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2. Menzel, Peter and Faith D'Aluisio, *Hungry Planet: What the World Eats*, Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 2005.
3. Susanka, Sarah. *The Not So Big House, Tenth Anniversary Edition*, Newtown CT: Taunton Press, 2008; and *Creating the Not So Big House*, Newtown CT: Taunton Press, 2000.
4. Lister, Nina-Marie, "Placing Food" in Knechtel, John, ed. *Food*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008.
5. www.inmamaskitchen.com/FOOD_IS_ART/archcook.html

Designing the carrot city – Food security and the design of a sustainable Toronto

BY MARK GORGOLEWSKI, BSc, MSc, PhD, DIP Arch, LEED AP; JUNE KOMISAR, PhD, AIA, MRAIC; AND JOE NASR, PhD

INTRODUCTION

... architects and designers should pay attention to the city's multiple functions as a dining room, market and farm

— KAREN FRANCK, *FOOD AND THE CITY*

Food is a key element in most cultures and has contributed to and inspired many creative aspects of our lives from local cuisine to urban form. Food is also among the most basic primary needs of mankind. Over the millennia, the activity of satisfying this basic requirement has been one of the essential ingredients in the formation and evolution of human settlements and cultures. At the same time it is at the heart of current problems regarding the misuse of the natural environment, and is the topic of debate over the value of natural processes. Similarly, cities and urban developments are key aspects of human civilization. They now embrace half of all humanity and this ratio is increasing. Cities are also central to humanity's relationship with the natural world: they are major polluters and damage the natural landscape, while, on the other hand offering perhaps the least injurious patterns of land use for the continued survival of the huge human populations that now exist on the earth.

Over recent years a consensus has grown that sustainability within an urban context should mean a more densely populated environment. This implies moving away from suburban development and intensifying land use to accommodate more people, reduce transport and build multifunctional and well-integrated

communities. At the same time, food security is becoming a central concern. Long-distance transport may no longer be possible due to diminishing oil supplies and the impact of climate change. There is also an increasing awareness of the health benefits of local fruits and vegetables that do not require artificial methods for preservation and ripening and the desire for more natural methods of food production.

In the more distant past, when transport options were limited and the technology for preserving food was less developed, there existed a very close link between the forms and patterns of cities and towns and their food supply systems, which were largely regional.

The symbiotic relationship between a productive landscape and the human settlement system is as old as civilization. During the past 200 years, that millennium-old positive relationship deteriorated into a further and further separation of town and landscape. (Viljoen 2005)

However, since the industrial revolution, the practice of growing fruit and vegetables within, or close to, urban areas has been largely eroded, particularly in western nations. A trip to the urban grocery store will produce a feast of vegetables, fruits and meats from thousands of miles away, made affordable by heavily-subsidized transport and often underpaid labour in developing countries. Large-scale industrialized agriculture has become a specialized rural activity, and the distances to market have become



ANDY GUIRY

long and reliant on cheap transport and preservation techniques.

URBAN FOOD PRODUCTION

Growing food within an urban or peri-urban, rather than exclusively rural, environment can reduce the need for industrialized production, packaging and transportation of food-stuffs to the consumers who dwell in the city. It can also act as a focus for urban community participation and engagement in a practical as well as cultural activity. Movements such as community agriculture, farmers' markets, the 100-mile diet¹ and Slow Food² put local food supply at the heart of urban sustainability. They encourage us to consider ourselves co-producers, not consumers and, in this way, to engage in the many aspects of the food supply process. Reconnecting cities to their food systems is now emerging as one of the

the implications of food production within the city? How will the integration of food production into the city affect our buildings and urban spaces? How are we to reconcile increased urban populations and densities with land use for food production? How can we integrate food production into dense urban areas?

TORONTO PROJECTS

The impact of food on city design is an expanding area of interest among students of architecture. A few examples in a series of speculative design proposals for Toronto by Ryerson University architecture students are described below, to illustrate the potential for food production within the city. Toronto, with a population of 2.5 million, has an ecological footprint about 200 times its actual land surface area, and almost a third of this is due to the food supply to the

the potential to create a billion-dollar industry.

The use of undervalued or waste spaces in the city provides a fruitful area of research for community food production. The Gardiner Expressway, a highway that slices through Toronto, separating the city from Lake Ontario, includes considerable waste-land beside and beneath. A raised section of the Gardiner provides the location for a project by Andy Guiry that investigates the possibility of situating productive uses to land alongside and beneath the highway.

Raised highways are often condemned as urban blights that lead to localized social and economic poverty. This project supposes that this need not be the case, and the community can realize an asset by generating functional and symbolic relationships between the highway and the surrounding landscapes. The project

FIGURE 1: The Gardner Expressway project

FIGURE 2: Niagara Neighbourhood Community Food Centre

A GREATER SOPHISTICATION IN THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE MEANING OF SUSTAINABILITY AND THE SCALE OF THE IMPACT THAT ISSUES SUCH AS CLIMATE CHANGE AND PEAK OIL WILL HAVE ON FOOD SUPPLY ARE BEGINNING TO DEMAND ATTENTION.

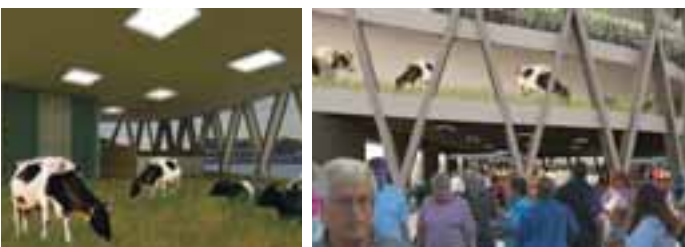
core components of more sustainable urban settlements.

As the meaning of sustainability widens to embrace net-zero-impact living, the question of net-zero-impact food-supply chains for urban residents becomes directly relevant to the way we design and plan our built environment. These pressures are likely to lead to a need for more locally produced food, including production within cities. So, what are

city, often from distant suppliers all over the world. Yet it has been estimated that about 22 percent of the land area (about 15,000 hectares) of the city could be used for food production (Wilcox et al 2007). This land area consists of vacant sites, under-used waste-land, rooftops and yards, and includes Toronto's ravines, which also offer possible agricultural land. This land could be used to feed over half of the city population, and has



JORDAN EDMONDS



PHOTOS: BRAD AUGUSTINE

FIGURE 3:
High-Rise Farm

aims to knit social, economic and ecological processes together with essential urban infrastructure, in order to design new ways of generating potential for wasted urban space around the production of food.

The project features greenhouse spaces below the raised section of the highway, utilizing the south-facing side to capture sunlight and the heavy structure of the highway for thermal mass to regulate temperature inside the building (Figure 1).

NIAGARA NEIGHBOURHOOD COMMUNITY FOOD CENTRE

A second project, looking at under-used land and waste-material reuse, concentrates on the means for focusing community development on food issues. Jordan Edmonds's project not only acts as a transitional bridge between housing and park space, but also features reused structures and includes a farmers' market, community gathering spaces, bicycle paths, greenhouse structures for food production, and a community garden. (Figure 2).

COMMUNITY FOOD EDUCATION CENTRE

A project by Brad Augustine examines conceptually the impact of the food production industry on major urban centers. The resulting project is a completely internalized restaurant having no imported produce or livestock. By internalizing the growth and production of livestock and produce, Augustine examines the theoretical food plane required to support our consuming needs. This process of discovery is made tangible to the patrons by having them make their way through the resulting high-rise farm to the penthouse restaurant in a glazed elevator, viewing the multiple floors of livestock and varied crops — cows, chickens, grain, vegetables, fruit trees, etc. — and into an eating space where herbs are grown and the cooking is completely visible. (Figure 3).

CONCLUSIONS

The education of architects, planners and other professionals who have an impact on the design of cities has long failed to address the implications of food supply on city design. As we begin to grapple with the issues of building a more sustainable way of living, food security is becoming a central concern. Food is part of the daily life of every person in the world, and it is at the core of humanity's functional relationship with natural systems. Agriculture stands at the

heart of current problems regarding the misuse of the natural environment and is the topic of growing discussion about finding new relationships with natural processes.

A greater sophistication in the understanding of the meaning of sustainability and the scale of the impact that issues such as climate change and peak oil will have on food supply are beginning to demand attention. Questions about net-zero-impact food supply chains for urban residents are directly relevant to the way we design and plan our built environment and, therefore, how we educate the designers of the future.

The projects initiated by Ryerson University architecture students show the concern amongst young designers about food issues. They illustrate the serious and diverse nature of possible responses to food supply issues in the city and the potential impact of these issues on the design of the city and its buildings. They start to shed some light on the types of networks of food services that are needed in the city and generate ideas for the reintegration of values of community food production. These projects also illustrate how providing for a basic human need — food — may be possible in an urban context in a way that is socially, economically, and ecologically sound.³ ■

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NOTES:

1. See: 100milediet.org
2. Slow Food is a non-profit, eco-gastronomic member-supported organization that was founded in 1989 to counteract fast food and fast life, the disappearance of local food traditions and people's dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from, how it tastes and how our food choices affect the rest of the world. — www.slowfood.com
3. The projects also suggest a need to consider a green infrastructure for Toronto (Benedict, 2006). Green infrastructure is essentially a connected network of landscapes within an urban context that provides for the needs of the people living in that environment. The specifics of how this network functions is dependant on the places that it serves, varying with size and shape of the spaces that are available, as well as the climate, topography, soils, and the needs of the community.

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Food for Thought

BY VINCENT HUI, BES, MArch, CUT, MBA, MRAIC, AIA

“SO IS THIS WHAT ARCHITECTS learn in university?” asked my Little Brother as he carefully squeezed the frosting on our Christmas gingerbread house, “Wait a sec, isn’t this what you teach?”

Before instinctively saying “No”, I realized that fundamentally he was right. Beyond the gumdrops and frosting (and lot setback variance applications), there were many similarities between the courses I taught and the tacky dessert we were assembling. This revelation struck me several years ago with great force. It has since cascaded into many classes that I have taught and presentations I have made across North America.

Architecture is an all-encompassing profession, requiring mastery of a large volume of complex and diverse material, making it even more overwhelming to a student entering the profession. Over the past few years of teaching at the University of Waterloo, School of Architecture (UWSA), I have found that using food to demonstrate architectural concepts and properties not only clarifies course material for students, but also helps them to understand professional practice through analogy.

Together, architecture and cuisine serve as the significant defining characteristics of many societies. Both have evolved beyond the glossy, stylized imagery of magazines and books to the “extreme” television shows (also called “food and shelter porn”). As an instructor I find it invaluable to connect with students by using examples and concepts that resonate with their fundamental knowledge base. Food is an excellent resource. One only needs to recall the teaching of fractions to a child by using slices of pie. In fact, many examples in our early education centre on food. And since popular culture is now saturated with basic references to both architecture and food, teaching fundamental archi-

tectural concepts using food certainly has merit.

In my first year Building Construction course, I have used food to illustrate material behavior and properties as well as construction practices. To demonstrate the production and properties of glass, I create a makeshift “glass” pane by boiling a simple syrup mixture and cooling it down to a solid caramel state. To explain the structural qualities of concrete with steel reinforcement, I present the fundamental ingredients of concrete (large aggregate, small aggregate, Portland cement, and water) using a cereal square beam made of corresponding food ingredients (chocolate chips, cereal, marshmallows, and butter respectively). By creating one beam without reinforcement and another with a pair of licorice ropes “cast” within the cereal beam, students are able to understand the structural improvements made possible through steel-reinforced concrete.

Where many architecture students perform calculations by rote in the Strength of Materials curriculum, I have tried to ensure students understand the meaning behind the calculations. Whether using salt water taffy to explain Hooke’s law on a Stress-Strain curve and material necking, treating Jell-O to demonstrate centre of gravity and moment of inertia, or employing various meat products or carrot cake to illustrate the differences in loading conditions, food is an excellent tool to articulate many architectural concepts students often find confusing. Such tactile and familiar teaching aids are more memorable than diagrams.

Even within design courses, I have employed food to ensure that students understand the various considerations and points of view that architects must consider with each nuance of their designs. In an introductory exercise, students are instructed to form groups knowing that the proj-

ect pertains to baking, which quickly introduces them to resource acquisition and competitive advantages. The groups are then given a set budget of \$20 (plus a variable expense based on the group size) to purchase the food supplies required to prepare a special cake for a specific client; however, they are not informed of the client’s identity nor specific demands until shortly before the exercise commences. Subsequently, teams gain sensitivities to proper strategy and resource allocation in the hope of addressing the client’s needs — not unlike their real-world professional counterparts. In the most recent iteration of this project, the class was fortunately able to leverage the relationship with another UWSA-led project, the Grand House Co-Op, as the client. Teams were evaluated on the presentation, taste, timeliness and edibility of the food prepared. From this project students understood the fundamental operations of design and the architecture industry with an astute awareness of proper resource allocation, timeliness, and the preferences of multiple groups.

Architects seem to like metaphors and analogies. Sometimes they are clear, and often they are complex. Food is an everyday consumable with a variety that most students understand well. Just as food has been elevated to cuisine in today’s pop culture, shelter has evolved into architecture. Students have an innate ability to make the connections between what they are already familiar with and what the profession mandates they must know. How architects, educators, interns, and students are able to facilitate this remains food for thought. ■

Vincent Hui currently teaches at Ryerson University, Department of Architectural Science and formerly taught at the University of Waterloo in the Schools of Planning and Architecture.



TOP: Students are introduced to costing and budgeting by making architectural cakes.
BOTTOM: Students begin to understand beam deflection under different loading conditions.

"Dinner is Served"



PHOTOS: AZRIELI SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM, CARLETON UNIVERSITY

TOP: Conversation

BOTTOM:

Dinner is served

INTRODUCTION

BY THOMAS MICAL,
BDesign [Hons], MArch,
MS, PhD.

The first project of Studio 4 is an opportunity to engage in a group-based design-build-performance-cooking project. It functions as a festive introduction to issues that will be addressed throughout the term. Of primary concern is the importance of recognizing that the poetics of architecture are completely intertwined with the materials selected and the way these are put together to create a whole. Working at full scale provides the opportunity to experience and master this correspondence first hand. This project covers a wide range of architectural design considerations, from the smallest item of use to the complete environment of activity. It is equally important to remember and draw inspiration from the fact that the events that make up our everyday lives are full of meaning; we do not have to invent meanings for them. The challenge is to understand and reveal, through the architecture as material fact, the meaning that exists but is often taken for granted.

A meal can be thought of as a ritual and a work of art, with limits laid down, desires aroused and fulfilled, enticements, variety, patterning, and plot. As in a work of art, not only the overall form but also the details matter intensely.

— MARCEL PROUST, REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

A PROJECT

BY PRZEMYSŁAW
MYSZKOWSKI

TEAM MEMBERS: Kristen Tuttle, Dave Reeves, Przemysław Myszowski, Brynn Macek, Mina Hanna, Adi Gerrits, Farida Abu-Bakare

The project called for a temporary pavilion that could host a dinner for the students and their guests. Choosing the appropriate context was crucial in order to establish a dialogue between the ritual of dining, the pavilion and, most important, the food. We chose a site underneath the OC Transpo commuter train bridge that spans the Rideau River. An uneasy atmosphere is created by the amplifying and diminishing sounds of the echoes of the train noises produced by the water below but enhanced by views

along the river. The bridge's massive concrete pier — with its graffiti tags, enormous wood and steel tracks on an early twentieth-century industrial steel structure and piping — provides a scarce palette of materials inspiring an unconventional juxtaposition of materiality and architectural folly.

The main conflict between the user and the site is the punctual commuter train that rattles overhead and interrupts any conversation. Instead of struggling against the noise we chose a dish that can be prepared and consumed in 15-minute increments complementing the overhead train schedule: shish kebabs. The guests can skewer any of the diverse tidbits in a series that creates their own sequenced flavour, complemented by selected sauces and a bed of steamed rice on sautéed sesame seed dusted asparagus rafts, all cooked in a linear fashion over a hot coal fire.

We used this same skewering principle to develop a system of details for an enclosure of the pavilion made of common ABS piping and recycled conventional lumber. The sequential nature of the rail cars was the inspiration for the sliding wood diner plates (that reveal the sauces when slightly shifted in one direction) and the seating placements on structural steel rails imbedded in the table. Both table and seating span from the pavilion wall to the concrete pier, 3.5 metres away, complementing the existing rail bridge foundations. The table is divided by a central hot coal barbecue grill along its entire length. Toppings on either side are arranged in three linear furrows.

The night of "Dinner is Served" was a complete sensory experience filled with food and architecture, while the guests, Dr. Marco Frascari and Dr. Greg Andonian provided us with great diner conversation. ■

Thomas Mical is Associate Professor of Architecture at Carleton University.




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RECOLLECTIONS of a Floating Life

BY VIVIAN LO, BSc, MArch, OAA, MRAIC

PHOTOS: TERENCE SO



HONG KONG ALWAYS FASCINATES VISITORS, as a land where East meets West and old meets new. The Jumbo Floating Restaurant in Aberdeen is a good example. Located close to Hong Kong's shrinking traditional fishing community and surrounded by a concrete jungle, the restaurant takes its architectural style from the region's historic fishing culture. The restaurant actually consists of two separate restaurants, each occupying its own gigantic boat, making it one of the largest floating restaurants in the world. The whole floating complex can accommodate up to 2,300 people. Recently, in order to improve the restaurant's tourist appeal, more than HK\$30 million was spent to re-decorate in the style of an ancient Chinese imperial palace.

The memory of my first visit to the Jumbo Floating Restaurant has faded from my mind — not only because it occurred when I was a child, but also because I was a “local” then and I just walked through the place without taking any notice. But my second visit to the restaurant, two decades later, when I was no longer a Hong Konger, has become one of my fondest memories.

The Floating Restaurant is located among clusters of junks, sampans, and fishing boats along the seashore of the Aberdeen Harbour. A small ferry transports people back and forth constantly between the restaurant and the pier. During this five-minute free ride, you can glimpse the life of boat-dwellers, whose living depends entirely on fishing. Sampans shuttle in all directions.

AN ANCIENT CHINESE SAYING, “BE PARTICULAR ABOUT THE FOOD ONE EATS ACCORDING TO SEASONAL CHANGES” NOT ONLY EMPHASIZES THE FRESHNESS OF FOOD IN CHINESE CUISINE, BUT ALSO REFLECTS THE ANCIENT WISDOM OF CHOOSING FOOD, CONSIDERING ABUNDANCE AND OPTIMAL NUTRITION WITH RESPECT TO CHANGES IN THE ENVIRONMENT.



TERENCE SO

The word “Jumbo” means “precious gem” or “treasure” in Chinese; but the western meaning fits just as well because of the restaurant’s physical size. The vertical and horizontal signs of the “Jumbo Seafood Boat” in Chinese and English grow larger as the ferry approaches the gigantic palace-like complex on the sea.

Staff stand by the entrance to provide directions. But the “real” greeters are the dazzlingly and richly-coloured

artifacts that cover the exterior and interior. Vicious golden dragons glare with red light-bulb eyes from the bright red columns. A cluster of golden bats stare down from the trusses. (Bats flying over-head are believed to be signs of prosperity and good fortune.) Elaborate architectural decorations — herds of ancient Chinese mythological creatures — are everywhere, like those found in Chinese imperial palaces, intended to attract good fortune and to

keep evil spirits away. While the design of a Chinese palace emphasizes power and authority, the Jumbo highlights hospitality. The decorative features are intended only to reflect traditional Chinese culture and values.

Dragons and phoenixes — signifying fortune and prosperity — are frequent decorations in Chinese restaurants. In ancient times, Chinese royalty had exclusive use of this legendary pair. The phoenix represents the heavenly power sent to the Empress, and is also used as a symbol of high virtue and grace. The presence of the dragon-phoenix pair in Chinese restaurants indicates the delivery of special blessings to the host families. The dominant colours throughout the complex are gold and red, the colours of celebration.

Other Chinese legendary creatures, such as *piyao* (貔貅) and *qilin* (麒麟), can be found in the entrance lobby of the restaurant. Small *piyaos*, together with “flying” carp, line the railings, welcoming visitors as they walk up the grand staircase. The *Piyao* belongs to the dragon family and is believed to be able to expel evil spirits and attract wealth in *feng shui* settings. Fish is considered a wealth symbol, too. The pronunciation of the words “fish” and “carp” in Chinese mimics that of “profit.” It is believed that a carp can be turned into the king dragon of the sea when it hops from the water and flies through the dragon’s gate into heaven. *Qilins*, with the head of a dragon, the antlers of a deer, and the scales of a fish, are often seen “standing guard” outside many Chinese dining halls. The creature symbolizes serenity, and ranks second only to the dragon and phoenix which have the highest rank in Chinese legends. In another lobby, a flock of cranes “flies” among branches of pines (symbol of long life). The crane is considered an auspicious creature in Chinese culture — a symbol of longevity and the messenger of wisdom.

A few of these symbolic decorations also signify the floating restaurant’s water theme. For instance, the *Qilin* is often portrayed with flames covering its body and walking on water. The dragon not only represents the most

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powerful and divine creature, but is also believed to be the controller of water. Dragons can induce or terminate rain and storms, explaining their particular spiritual significance in the fishing community. Dragons of all sizes and colours can be seen throughout the Floating Restaurant — eternal guardians of the boat complex.

I was directed to a dining hall that could accommodate more than 200 people. The space was filled with the smell of *dim sum* and the endless clinking of ceramic utensils.

In the dining hall, the material textures and decorations are less overpowering than those in the lobby, perhaps so that the focus can switch to the food. Yet, small and intricate decorations can be found everywhere. The ceiling motif is a traditional Chinese pattern known as “lucky cloud” — a design that can be found on ancient Chinese ceremonial robes and more recently, on the 2008 Olympic torch. At the rear of the hall is an imitation of a Chinese imperial throne so that visitors can enjoy role-playing as kings and queens.

An ancient Chinese saying, “Be particular about the food one eats according to seasonal changes” not only emphasizes the freshness of food in Chinese cuisine, but also reflects the ancient wisdom of choosing food, considering abundance and optimal nutrition with respect to changes in the environment. Like most restaurants in Hong Kong, the Jumbo Floating Restaurant has tanks of live seafood that can be cooked right away when ordered. Visitors can choose their favourite dishes from the on-board holding tanks, which accommodate more than 60 kinds of seasonal seafood.

For my meal, I chose a few seafood *dim sum* — steamed squid, shrimp dumplings plus an order of assorted seafood with noodles — popular choices for locals on ordinary occasions. The steam further brought out the aroma of the seafood. The ingredients were fresh without heavy seasonings and thick gluey sauces, a fact that enabled me to appreciate the true taste of wholesome seafood in

a light meal. The food was good, but expensive.

I spent many more hours at Jumbo photographing from all the angles I could think of. This time, I almost felt that I was preserving a piece of Hong Kong history. When I looked back at the restaurant on my return ride on the shuttle ferry, the Floating Restaurant was brightly lit by decorative lights, making Jumbo a very real gem reflected on the water at night.

The Jumbo Floating Restaurant may not serve the best Chinese food in Hong Kong. But, the experience provides a unique voyage into Chinese art, culture and history — well worth the cost. ■

Vivian Lo is an intern architect with the Ontario Ministry of Health and a member of the Perspectives Editorial Committee.

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The Profession

The Ontario Association for Applied Architectural Sciences – OAAAS

BY GARRY NEIL

PARAPROFESSIONALS IN ARCHITECTURE CAN OBTAIN a significant professional designation as a result of a new OAAAS program launched in March 2008. As OAA members consider the future of the architectural profession (the theme of this year's Annual Conference) the program should generate significant interest. For building design professionals whose opportunities are limited because they are not licensed as architects by the OAA, the program offers new career potential.

"This new program is a significant opportunity for senior technicians and technologists to achieve recognized professional standing and to join the OAA," said Ted Shepherd, BArch, OAA, FRAIC, whose term as OAAAS President ended recently. Shepherd is a distinguished architect of many years standing and was one of four members appointed by the OAA to serve on the OAAAS Board of Directors. "It's also a watershed moment for those of us who have been working hard for years to find the appropriate way to acknowledge the skill of our paraprofessional colleagues."

Beginning March 1, 2008, and continuing for a three-year period, building design professionals with the necessary combination of academic study and extensive work experience have a chance to become a Licensed Technologist OAA. Successful candidates have greater scope in their work and join the ranks of the Association, which has represented the interests of Ontario's architects for more than 115 years. With a Certificate of Practice and liability insurance from the OAA, a Licensed Technologist OAA has the right to provide certain architectural services to the public.

Architects in many parts of the world have come to rely on colleagues with expertise in certain aspects of their complex work — from the draughtsmen of previous eras, to today's CAD technicians. While positive working relationships between architects and their work colleagues are the norm, in Ontario the relationship between the associations representing the different crafts and professions has been less cordial. That began to change in 2003, when the OAA and the Ontario Association of Certified Engineering Technicians and Technologists (OACETT) created the Ontario Association for Applied Architectural Sciences (OAAAS) as a bridge for qualified technologists to become members of the OAA as Licensed Technologists OAA. OAAAS is a forum for establishing the education, experience and examination requirements for three categories of building designers, the final level of which is the Licensed Technologist OAA. While the program is now fully operational, to date only 12 individuals have achieved the top classification, which requires documenting 7,200 hours of work in 15 different experience categories, appropriate education, writing a detailed examination and attending the OAA Admission Course.

OAAAS and its founders understood that paraprofessionals have been working with Ontario architects for decades and realized that a good percentage of the roughly two thousand working today may already meet all or most of the requirements to become a Licensed Technologist OAA. What was missing was a suitable process to assess and give credit for prior experience and education. The OAAAS has developed such a method and this has been approved by both founders. The OAA recently put in place the detailed administrative procedures that are needed to implement this program.

The new program establishes a 12-year experience rule. A candidate without a university or college diploma must demonstrate 12 years of comprehensive architectural experience. The experience requirement is reduced to nine years for candidates with a three-year diploma and to eight years for those with a four-year degree. Candidates are required to submit a detailed résumé and portfolio of work. They are also required to attend a personal interview with a committee of architects who will assess and evaluate the candidate's experience and scope of work. Some candidates may be required to fulfill additional requirements before they can be issued a licence by the OAA. Those who are ready must still write the examination and attend the OAA Admission Course.

"The process isn't easy; candidates have to show they have a broad range of skills and experience, and have worked closely with an architect on many different building types. But, that's appropriate," said Shepherd. "Since the OAA has a legal obligation to regulate the profession in the public interest, it has to make sure that anyone who achieves recognition has the necessary expertise, knowledge and capability to maintain the high standards that are required of the profession."

Shepherd also pointed out that the Advanced Standing Policy may be of interest to others beyond technicians and technologists. "Some students in the RAIC Syllabus Program who already have many years of practical experience may see this recognition as an important stepping stone on their way through the long process of becoming architects. Intern Architects who long ago gave up their quest for full membership in the profession may also see recognition as a Licensed Technologist OAA to be a useful final step. As I see it, with this new program, we are adding significantly to the breadth of the architectural profession in Ontario," concluded Shepherd.

More information about the OAAAS program is found on the website available through www.oaa.on.ca. ■

Garry Neil is Executive Director of the Ontario Association for Applied Architectural Sciences.

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The dining space was much smaller and more intimate than our previous venues. I suspect that the room was never really intended for sit-down dinners, but the candle-light and the view across the darkening fields made it just right.

Glenn and the chef began to explain the importance of “pairings” — a particular food matched to a particular wine. Just snobbery, I would have thought earlier, but it was beginning to make sense. Evidently, it isn’t just white with fish and red with beef.

“Delaine,” we learned, is short for Don and Elaine (Mr. and Mrs. Triggs). When Elaine was questioned as to why Don got only one letter and she got her whole name, she explained that it could have been worse: The wine could have been called “Elained.” Such was Glenn’s wisdom regarding the entertainment of large groups of wining diners that she knew we would find this story funny at this point in the evening.

THE TASTING GALLERY — SECOND COURSE

FOOD GOOD EARTH GARDEN VEGETABLE LASAGNA.

DRINK 2006 JACKSON-TRIGGS PROPRIETORS’ RESERVE CABERNET FRANC ROSÉ.

Not that we weren’t capable of ambulation, but we stayed seated for the next course. Even the Italian couple seated next to us agreed that the lasagna was exquisite. And the rosé was equally memorable. (Current count: about seven half-glasses).

THE BARREL CELLAR

FOOD GRILLED LEG OF LAMB; BABY EGGPLANT AND FINGERLING POTATOES; MINT AND BASIL YOGURT.

DRINK 2002 JACKSON TRIGGS DELAINE VINEYARD MERLOT. Possibly the closest thing to a dining hall, in the Cellar, long tables, are surrounded by ranks of oak barrels filled with wine. For this course, the food was exceptional. I have never eaten lamb (Ontario, by the way) as succulent. And the Merlot was probably the best wine I’ve ever tasted. Or was this the merlot talking for

me? We were told that the Merlot would be best laid down for another decade, but I knew I could never wait that long.

OBSERVATION 1: My wine history — “the best wine I’ve ever tasted” is faint praise since I’ve probably never (intentionally) paid more than \$30 for a bottle of wine (scotch is a very different story), and usually select according to name and label design.

OBSERVATION 2: Wine always tastes better at the winery.

Our new neighbours were TV fans. We compared notes about the “Sopranos” and I learned about reality shows that I was unaware of (“Cheaters”) (current count maybe 10 half-glasses).

Barrels, we learned, can cost a thousand dollars each and last for five years. French barrels are the best and most expensive, American second, Canadian third. Coincidentally, oak barrels make a wonderfully warm and mellow interior finish, especially for a dining space if they happen also to be filled with wine.

THE ESTATE LOUNGE

FOOD CHERRY TREE-0 DESSERT.

DRINK 2004 JACKSON-TRIGGS PROPRIETORS’ GRANDE RESERVE CABERNET FRANC ICEWINE.

Coffee and dessert were served along with a tiny glass of icewine. Unfortunately, I don’t really get icewine — saccharine alcoholic beverages aren’t to my taste. If JT had presented me with a fine old cognac (alas, not in the inventory), I would have considered the evening perfect. But the lounge was a good place to finish the night. Another crackling fire was laid on — not inappropriate, since it was getting chilly.

FINAL REFLECTIONS: All things considered, it was a great meal and a great way to spend a summer evening. The food and the wine were spectacular. So really, nothing more needs to be said about it. But we all know that a first-rate eating experience doesn’t start and stop with the comestibles. Ambience is all. And, in a winery, there is of course, the wine. ■

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THE JACKSON TRIGGS WINERY WAS designed as both a production facility and a marketing centre. As one of the first contemporary wineries in Canada, it has gained international acclaim. In 2002, the Toronto firm KPMB won an OAA Award of Excellence for its exceptional design. The jury confirmed: "The winery breaks away from traditional precedents to create an authentic, innovative response to the Ontario agricultural landscape."

Last July 14, my wife Fanny and I decided to indulge in the "Savour the Sights" wine-and-dine experience to find out if this award-winning winery could also work as a restaurant.

THE GREAT HALL

FOOD CHEF'S SELECTION OF PASSED HORS D'OEUVRES.

DRINK 2002 JACKSON-TRIGGS PROPRIETORS' GRANDE RESERVE MÉTHODE CLASSIQUE ("CHAMPAGNE").

We began our sight-and-taste tour in the main reception area, a convivial space, but not very intimate, despite a crackling fireplace and a calming view across the vineyard. We found ourselves surrounded by perhaps 30 or 40 strangers.

Our tour guide was Glenn, an ex-school principal and inexhaustible carafe of knowledge, ably assisted by Josh,

custodian of a bottomless bottle. In a very short time, strangers became friends. Don't ever doubt that champagne can make a party.

As we proceeded up the ramp toward the upper floor, we were treated to quite a lot of oenological information, both useful and useless, accompanied, naturally, by more wine.

THE ATRIUM

FOOD SWEET ONION TARTE TATIN.

DRINK 2006 JACKSON-TRIGGS PROPRIETORS' RESERVE DRY RIESLING.

Upstairs, we were surrounded by enormous gleaming stainless steel vats. The floor was nothing more than a catwalk of reinforced steel grating. Not especially conducive to relaxed dining, you might have thought, but quite the contrary, the space was awe-inspiring — like standing inside a pipe-organ — and being surrounded by immense quantities of wine only enhanced the experience of imbibing it. We met the chef, who described our *tarte* to us, and Michael, a young oenologist who told us more than we probably needed to know or could possibly remember about white wines. But the more wine we drank (by now I was on maybe my fourth small glass), the more interesting it all started to be. The *tarte* and the Riesling were both very good.

THE TASTING GALLERY — FIRST COURSE

FOOD SHRIMP AND CRAB; FRESH GARDEN HERB SALAD; GRILLED HOMEMADE FOCACCIA.

DRINK 2006 JACKSON TRIGGS DELAINE VINEYARD SAUVIGNON BLANC.

At last, a sit-down. Standing was becoming increasingly tedious and precarious. We were seated at large tables in a small café-style room on the main floor. Glenn had recommended that we busy ourselves by asking our dining neighbours what occasion they were celebrating. (As it happens, my wife and I were celebrating both our birthdays — hers was on that very day). It might have been slightly awkward to ask such a personal question were it not for the influence of the Sauvignon Blanc. Our neighbours were celebrating a birthday and a wedding anniversary. Everything was tasty. The vinaigrette was especially memorable. (*Vinaigre*, of course, means "bitter wine.")

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