

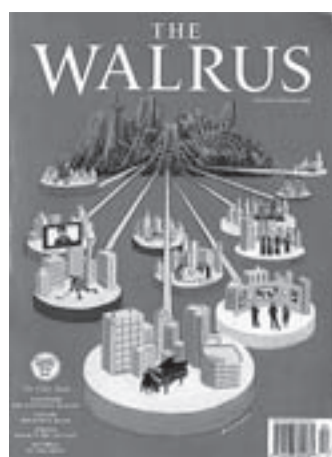
ON THE STAND » BY JAMES ADAMS » A WEEKLY ROUNDUP OF THE BEST MAGAZINE READS ON THE RACKS

THE WALRUS

January/February, 2008

As bodies, jobs and socio-economic clout continue to migrate westward, there's been a corresponding intensification of interest among national (a.k.a. Toronto-based) media in just what the heck is going on Out There. Ergo, *The Walrus's* Cities issue which, among other items, includes a droll and perceptive feature on Calgary by Don Gillmor, one of the magazine's nine contributing editors. Gillmor's a Torontonian but he was born in Winnipeg and lived in Calgary in the 1970s when the city was in the throes of its last glutinous boom.

For much of its recent history, Calgary has been a stubbornly suburban city, poorly planned, utterly beholden to the automobile, architecturally lacklustre, "almost Aryan in its homogeneity." But "in the past several years," Gillmor writes, with the city's population crashing the one-million mark, "there has been a hesitant political realization that Calgary will be judged by its urban centre



rather than its outlying suburbs ... and now downtown is on the cusp of a transformation." For Gillmor, the most tangible harbinger of this change is the Bow, a \$1-billion mixed-use project highlighted by a curved 59-storey tower designed by British starchitect Norman Foster as the HQ for oil-and-gas giant EnCana. The "city on the plain," as another British architect, Thomas Mawson, described Calgary almost a century ago, "[is threatening] to become beautiful."

OXFORD AMERICAN QUARTERLY

Music Issue, 2007

James Ridout Winchester arrived in Montreal 40 years ago, a 23-year-old Louisiana native dodging the draft that was sending tens of thousands of his contemporaries to Vietnam. Upon his arrival, he grew a beard, changed his first name to Jesse and proceeded to write and record what Canadian expatriate writer Hal Crowther calls "three of the prettiest, subtlest, most mind-adhesive songs in the country-rock canon" — *Yankee Lady*, *Biloxi* and *The Brand New Tennessee Waltz*.

A North Carolinian born in Halifax, Crowther actually was a classmate of Winchester's in the early-to-mid-1960s when they both attended Massachusetts's Williams College and Jesse was known simply as Jim. Their relationship, if one can even call it that, has been decidedly tenuous ever since. In fact, as Crowther confesses in "The Rhumba Man," "since the century turned, I've only talked to him once," and this was backstage at a bluegrass festival in Wilkesboro, N.C.



Crowther apparently would like a closer bond with Winchester but the singer-songwriter has always been low-profile, often reclusive, mysterious in his comings and goings. While he still does the occasional gig and "everyone knowledgeable knows who he is ... almost no one knows where he is." Still, Crowther strives to be philosophic: "The Rhumba Man is out there somewhere, and somewhere we'll meet again."

LITERARY REVIEW OF CANADA

December, 2007

Making up lists of the best or worst of this and that — it's always been great fun and no more so than at the end of a year when the media, in particular, concoct all sorts of retrospectives and rankings re: the previous 12 months to rouse and rile their audience.

The LRC's variation on this theme for its 2007 finale is to get 10 regular contributors to name, then demolish, a batch of so-called classics (one per contributor) they deem to have oversized reputations. Canadian Review editor Mark Proudman, for example, tears into George Grant's 1965 essay *Lament for a Nation*. Novelists Mark Jarman and Keith Oatley pooh-pooh, respectively, *The Sportswriter* by Richard Ford and Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (although Oatley admits to finding *Crime and Punishment* "totally engaging").

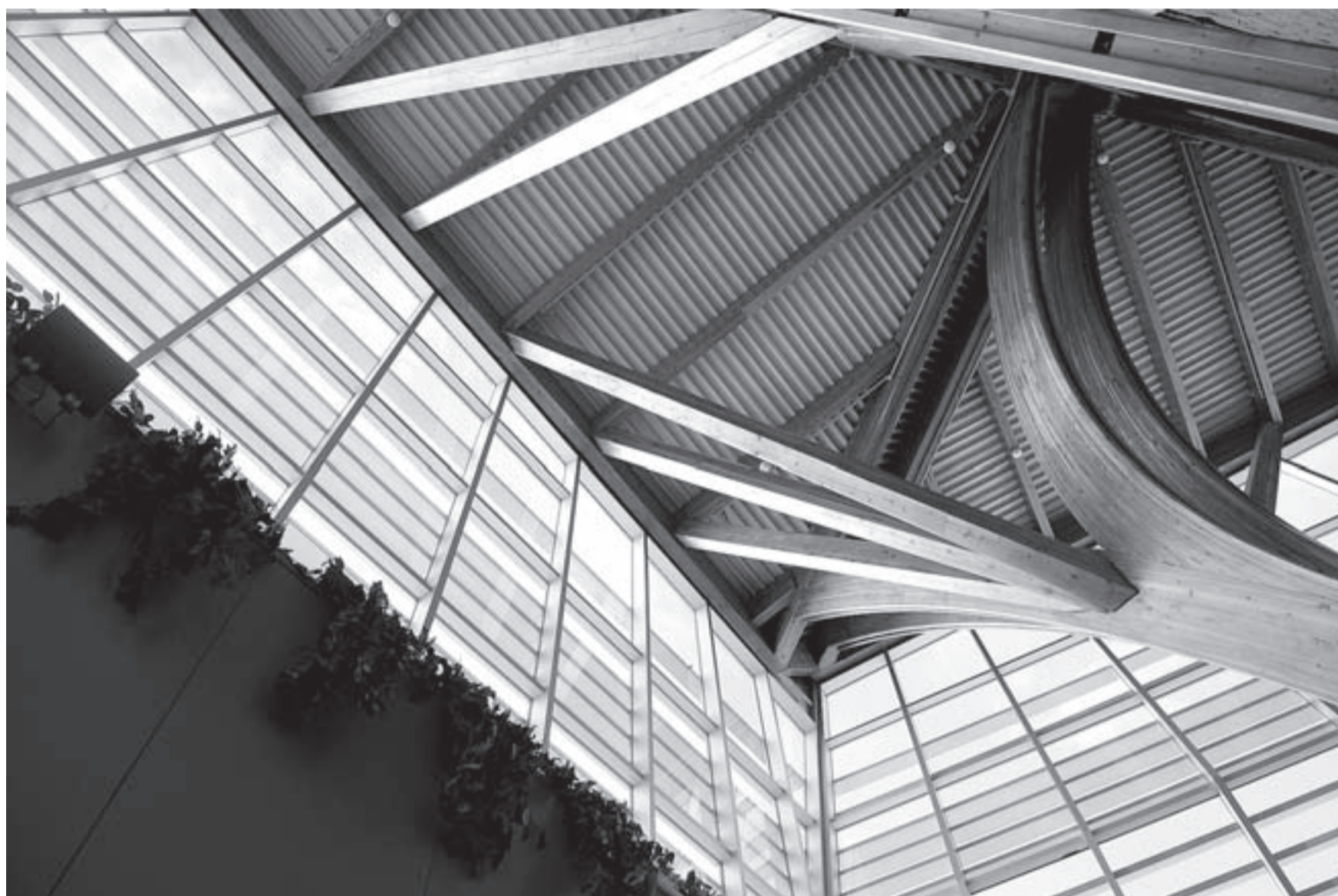
Predictably perhaps, *Globe and Mail* columnist/CBC pundit Rex Murphy tears several strips off — no, not *Harry Potter and the Pris-*

ARE YOU IN THE MORMON BOLODEX?



oner of *Azkanan*, but James Joyce's *Ulysses*. I say "predictably" because, based on Murphy's own rather plummy, antiquarian prose, one intuits his own tastes incline to Shakespeare, Boswell and Dickens. For all its "marvels of mime and tone," *Ulysses*, finally, is a failure, Murphy writes, because "it lacks the compelling artistic energy of managed suspense, which — even in the most artful of modernist fiction — is still the one pre-condition of the un-willed pleasure that inheres in any truly joyful reading."

ARCHITECTURE » HEALING POWERS



The Credit Valley Hospital in Mississauga, Ont., is a rare example of a design that shows hospitals are ultimately about the people inside them. TIBOR KOLLEY/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

The profession as a whole is being treated as less than a service industry. Treated very badly, exploited very badly. Some of us have more work than we can handle, so we can afford to be courageous.

Architect Moshe Safdie

Why is hospital design so *unhealthy*?

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Moshe Safdie stood up for the profession of architecture the other day, and, for having the guts, he needs to be thanked. He did what too many architects fear, or can't afford to do: He quit. He quit working on the master plan of the \$1.6-billion McGill University Health Centre, a once-in-a-lifetime commission that would have returned the prodigal son to his hometown. Who could blame him? He was being treated like an ordinary schm.

"When I was invited to come into this, there was a lot of bravado about ways to think about the hospital for the 21st century — five hospitals merged into one building," says Safdie, over the telephone during a stopover in Jerusalem. "That really excited me."

But engaging architects capable of the kind of clarity that Safdie recently displayed as design architect of the new Terminal 1 at Toronto's Pearson International Airport is becoming a rare reflex these days. Instead, architects are being asked to work as foot soldiers to major developer consortiums whose interest is turning an offshore profit, not inspiring human-based design.

Forget about capturing magical light, or weaving an interesting rhythm of built form along the street. Under the newly imposed regimes now taking Canada by storm, an architect's role is reduced to compiling binders full of bubble diagrams and measured distances between a nursing station and a patient's room.

The stupidity is such that even Safdie was being asked to compile output specifications — not design.

Last year, 2.8 million Canadians were admitted to hospitals for an average of one week. What they experienced, for the most part, were factories built to contain the ill. A hospital that helps to heal through a gentle, meaningful design? Don't hold your breath — it's bad for you.

True, there are some exceptions, such as Credit Valley Hospital in Mississauga, Ont., by Toronto-based Farrow Partnership, which welcomes visitors into a life-giving atrium of massive Douglas fir columns and beams that grow and spread through the space like a dense forest. Light wells are dropped through the space to help orient visitors and staff. And a discreet side entrance into the Carlo Fidani Peel Regional Cancer Centre allows patients to enter into the warm, spa-like radiation-treatment wing, or climb an elegant spiral staircase to the naturally lit chemotherapy floor.

Two small innovations speak volumes about the integrity of the design process when architects have the support of a trusting client: Rather than adopting a sprinkler system that uses ozone-depleting chemical agents, Farrow researched the light misting system used on cruise ships and, satisfying fire-code requirements, was able to install the HI-FOG misters into the hospital atrium. Another kind gesture has to do with wanting to eliminate the heavy steel doors that typically separate the radiation-treatment rooms — and the patient — from the rest of the world. Research revealed that radiation dissipates after a certain distance, so the architects designed an extra-long, wood-lined hall to allow the patient to travel seamlessly from the reassuring warmth of

a spa-like waiting area into a treatment room.

There are important lessons here for all those government officials hungry for more private-consortium build-outs. Hospitals are, after all, about the people inside them. And the Credit Valley board understood that inherently. "Collectively, the citizens on the board were uniform in their decision to have a building that mattered," says Bart Wassmansdorf, chair of Credit Valley's building committee. He tells me this while sitting on a bench underneath the monumental curves of the wooden structural trees. Somebody with the waxy skin of a cancer patient is playing a glorious medley on the grand piano nearby. "We have a responsibility," says Wassmansdorf, "to treat public buildings as more than a big box."

And they did exactly that: building something that helps to heal from the moment you step inside, that returns you possibly to an optimistic state of mind, all accomplished for \$10-million under budget, and on time. This year, Farrow's Credit Valley has won three major awards from health agencies in the United States, the United Kingdom and Sweden. That's not surprising, but Canada should be producing plenty more of these stellar hospital designs.

Sadly, for the most part, inspired hospital design is wishful thinking. And with public-private partnerships — P3s — being heavily endorsed in Quebec, British Columbia and Ontario, the design of hospitals will become particularly unhealthy. Only cash-rich Alberta has rejected the private-consortium formula in favour of the construction-management way of getting infrastructure built. Maybe this is where the architects serious about designing healing hospitals will begin to flock.

It was at a fancy party at the National Gallery of Canada that David Culver, chairman of the McGill University Health Centre board, first approached Safdie. Within one year, the heady cocktail chatter had translated into a public announcement. The McGill group trumpeted Safdie as the world-renowned architect who shot to fame with the iconic design of Habitat '67: "His return home to Montreal represents a wonderful opportunity to celebrate and assure the city's appointment as a UNESCO City of Design," gushed a 2006 media release issued by the MUHC.

Together with four other Montreal firms, Boston-based Safdie was originally charged with innovating a hospital master plan for the 21st century, one, he says, that might have provided a gracious flow of traffic — cars, subway arrivals, patients and hospital staff — much like a beautifully designed airport. (The old Royal Victoria Hospital, among several other teaching hospitals throughout Montreal, will be demolished or retrofitted and the lands converted into new uses, such as condominiums.)

Naturally, for a complex of its scale, there are implications to

consider beyond the walls of the hospital. The reinvention of the rail lands for the Glen campus of the McGill complex has the potential to revitalize several adjoining neighbourhoods. The commission is one of urban architecture: how to heal community both within and outside of the hospital.

But by the summer of 2007, the Charest government, like many provincial governments determined to remove hospital capital costs from their ledgers, backed away from paying directly for the new mega-hospital complex. Instead, a P3 was imposed on the McGill group. In this arrangement, one of two bidding private consortia will be selected to finance, build and own the new mega-hospital complex on the 43-acre (17.4-hectare) brownfield site in the city's west end. The government will then lease back the complex during a 25-year period.

Once selected, the consortium will hire its own architects to actually construct what's in the binders. And this is where myriad problems with the building can go wrong. To save on costs, a window might be made smaller, even though it blocks the view for a patient sitting in a wheelchair. An atrium



Credit Valley's main lobby welcomes visitors with beams that spread through the space like a dense forest. TIBOR KOLLEY/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

um might lose its interesting wooden timbers in favour of a dumb box. A recycling system of grey water might simply be skipped over. Whether or not the developer architects comply with the recommendations of the client's designer is a moot point — unlike Britain, there are few agencies in Canada that review the design of major civic buildings.

During the 1960s, Toronto architect Eberhard Zeidler was commissioned to develop a design for a highly flexible, intelligent building system. Unlike so much of the work available to architects these days, Zeidler was allowed to author a pure vision. That vision translated (to great acclaim) into McMaster University's Health Sciences Centre. Similarly, Ron Thom was given the authority by his progressive academic bosses to create a new, remarkable environment for learning. Trusted, allowed to fly with the commission, Thom created the magnificent Trent University.

How times have changed. Today, only a handful of superstar architects are being left to the task of true design. "There's the star architects, and they have extra leverage and authority and even admiration and respect," says Safdie. "Even when developers hire them, they treat them with a great deal of regard because they're actually using them for the branding and marketing."

"And, in parallel, the profession as a whole is being treated as less than a service industry. Treated very badly, exploited very badly."

"Some of us have more work than we can handle, so we can afford to be courageous."

Thank you for quitting, Moshe Safdie. For refusing to call bubble diagrams architecture. So now you have been told. Beware the consequences of the P3. Safdie deserves the last word: "This is a tough moment for the profession."