



TWENTY + CHANGE

EMERGING CANADIAN DESIGN PRACTICES

02

edited by
Heather Dubbeldam
Lola Sheppard

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Twenty + Change 02

Editors: Heather Dubbeldam, Lola Sheppard
Production: Heather Dubbeldam, Farid Noufaily, Lola Sheppard, Rufina Wu
Design: Farid Noufaily, Rufina Wu
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Publication & Coordination Committee:
Heather Dubbeldam, Cathy Garrido, Meg Graham, Trevor
Mclvor, Cindy Rendely, Lola Sheppard, Scott Sørli

Special thanks to:
Joost Bakker, Johanna Bollozos, Ian Chodikoff, Anne Cormier, Andrew DiRosa,
Vanathy Ganesharajah, Lynden Giles, Leslie Jen, Naomi Kriss, Bindya Lad,
Heather MacMullin, Christine Macy, Kevin McIntosh, Thomas Nemeskeri,
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Preface

It was with great excitement that this year’s curatorial committee learned of the broadening of Twenty + Change’s mandate, an exhibition program created to showcase emerging architects, landscape architects and urban designers in Canada. Launched in 2007, Twenty + Change focused on emerging Toronto-area practices. The inauguration of this exhibition program generated considerable discussion amongst the Toronto design community that had been waiting for several years to witness a new generation of designers move the discourse of contemporary architecture forward. With Twenty + Change 02, we hope that the momentum behind the 2007 exhibition will continue as it supports emerging practitioners from coast to coast. In future iterations, we anticipate that all regions of the country will actively engage in the architectural discourse that Twenty + Change wishes to disseminate.

There was a general belief amongst this year’s curatorial committee that it was difficult to select a vanguard group of twenty emerging designers who are currently leading the profession into the future—and one of “change.” Our committee understood the meaning of the word “change” to be associated with “leadership” or “innovation.” And while there are examples of firms that continue to evolve and mature their practices, we felt that many of today’s emerging designers are producing derivative work where the aesthetic is heavily influenced by established and well-known Canadian firms. There are several reasons why this phenomenon exists. One explanation can be attributed to the fact that many of Canada’s emerging designers worked in Canada’s leading firms prior to establishing their own practices. Another reason is simply that it takes a seasoned practitioner to evolve away from dominant design trends of a particular region in this country. Notwithstanding the derivative tendencies, a deep appreciation for the landscape and a genuine concern for macro issues such as the environment were evidenced in many of the projects. These concerns will hopefully continue to be expressed by emerging practices as they explore and engage the public realm in meaningful ways.

The curatorial committee also observed that opportunities in Canada for new firms to test their ideas in practice are often lacking. For example, we noted the general lack of architecture competitions in Canada and relatively few opportunities for commissions involving a high level of custom-made, innovative work for young firms. Despite these constraints, these emerging practices exhibited an extraordinary level of entrepreneurship, many even going so far as initiating their own client group or seeking out innovative ways to fund their own projects. It appears that the traditional career trajectory of designing single-family dwellings for many years before being given the opportunity to take on larger public commissions is beginning to change as emerging practices are finding new opportunities in today’s new market realities.

Amongst the firms selected for Twenty + Change 02, some were clearly more representative of the operative word “change” than others. Many of these firms convincingly recognized the importance of self-initiated commissions that live up to the curatorial committee’s hopeful attitude towards future directions in the profession. For example, Urban Republic’s Peeroj Thakre in Vancouver makes it a priority to extend the public’s expectations of an architect’s potential to impact and enhance public space. One of Urban Republic’s notable projects includes a temporary drive-in theatre set atop a parking garage in Vancouver’s Gastown. Also from Vancouver, mcfarlane | green | biggar ARCHITECTURE + DESIGN INC., has nurtured a successful business model since its inception in 2003 that relies on developing a niche in small regional airports—a formula that has also contributed to its rapid growth. Recognizing the importance of undertaking research and design in practice—specifically in the arena of strategic low-cost infill housing—has given the two-year-old Winnipeg firm of 5468796 Architecture Inc., a perceived edge in the marketplace. spmb, another Winnipeg-based firm, is focused on producing evocative installation art, such as its Table of Contents or its Plage installation. Toronto’s Lapointe Architects’ environmentally sustainable cheese factory in Prince Edward County offers a convincing example of the firm’s ideals regarding sustainable design—a practice methodology that is perhaps its most valuable asset. Also from Toronto is Lateral Office. Founded in 2002 by Lola Sheppard and Mason White, Lateral Office’s design work is highly engaged with the public realm. This is not surprising, given the two partners’ academic commitments. Montreal’s _naturehumaine presented some delightful interior projects expressing a conscious display of design rigour and intelligence. The other Quebec firm, Montreal’s NIPpaysage, has quickly gained praise for its architecture and landscape projects in Montreal. Based in Saint John, New Brunswick, another inspirational practice is The Acre Collective who has produced several small-scale projects that display a rare sense of “delight”.

The more successful firms in the exhibition are able to push the expectations of architecture, while encouraging their clients to expand their definition and scope of a meaningful architectural commission. The curatorial committee acknowledges the importance of Twenty + Change as an exhibition series that can raise the public’s awareness of the quality of architecture being produced across the country.

Congratulations to all those selected and to other designers across Canada who continue to define and broaden the reach of architecture today.

Ian Chodikoff
April 2009

2009 Curatorial Committee

Anne Cormier	graduated from the McGill School of Architecture and holds a C.E.A.A. Architecture urbaine from the Ecole d'architecture Paris-Villemin. She is a co-founder of Atelier Big City, a Montréal-based firm that has received numerous awards including three Governor General's awards, the Grand Prix for Order of Architects in Québec in 1994, and the Canada Council Prix de Rome in Architecture in 2006. Through her work at Atelier Big City, Anne has been involved with many landscape, urban design and architectural projects and competitions in Canada and internationally. Anne has taught in Canada and abroad, and is currently Director of the School of Architecture at the University of Montréal.
Christine Macy	is the Dean of the Faculty of Architecture and Planning at Dalhousie University. Educated at UC Berkeley and MIT, she practiced architecture in New York and San Francisco before establishing her partnership, Filum, with Sarah Bonnemaïson in 1990, specializing in lightweight structures and public space design for festivals. Before joining the faculty at Dalhousie, Christine taught at UC Berkeley and the University of British Columbia. Her research areas include the representation of cultural identity in architecture, public spaces, civic infrastructure, temporary urbanism, and festival architecture.
Chris Pommer	is a founding partner in Toronto-based PLANT Architect Inc. PLANT is an interdisciplinary firm that branches into the domains of architecture, landscape, ecology, furniture, art, and graphic design. Synthesizing the insights and expertise of related disciplines, the practice responds to and embraces the increasing complexity of the world and the ambiguity of where landscape, built form, and design intersect. PLANT's integrated approach fosters a collaborative spirit, a multi-layered design solution and enriches each project with a fine grain of detail.
Joost Bakker	is a principal of Hotson Bakker Boniface Haden architects + urbanistes in Vancouver. He studied economics and architecture at the University of Toronto and subsequently worked for George Baird who influenced Joost's interest in urban issues and the public realm. Through more than 30 years of professional practice, Joost has focused on innovative mixed-use, residential, institutional and cultural projects. He is co-author of many significant urban design and planning projects, including a landscape/public art commission for the Vancouver Olympics. Joost is active in the arts and civic politics in Vancouver and has mentored at the UBC School of Architecture.
Ian Chodikoff	is an architect and the editor of Canadian Architect magazine. His professional interests focus on enabling mechanisms for social change at the urban scale, which include aspects of landscape and the public realm to new forms of commercial and residential development. His research focus includes the links between multiculturalism in the suburbs of Canadian cities, as well as transnational migration and its effects on urban development. Ian has lectured in various schools and cities across North America, served on numerous juries and has written in a variety of magazines and journals on issues ranging from planning to sustainability.

Introduction

Why is it that we hear more about young design firms from around the world than we do about rising firms in Canada? Perhaps it is the vastness of our country, or lack of venues dedicated to disseminating the work of emerging practices. Perhaps despite all the discussion of architecture in a globalized age, it is that, in Canada, our profession remains highly local. Whatever the reason, young Canadian practices are operating in local design contexts and there is little opportunity for understanding the diversity of work being produced across the country.

Twenty + Change began in 2007, with a focus on emerging Toronto firms in the disciplines of architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design. Based on the success of the exhibition and a recognition of the significance of this forum, a group of practices discussed the evolution of Twenty + Change. We quickly agreed to expand the scope Canada-wide, and to produce a publication that would serve as a record of the work, issues and approaches of this burgeoning generation of designers.

While Canada has its laurel for young architects in the form of the *Prix de Rome*, there is no venue – in the form of exhibition or publication - for disseminating the work of designers beyond the local or regional. Holland’s *Maaskant Prize* is associated with a publication, the United State’s *Young Architects Forum* (in which Canadians have been included for the past three out of five years) produces a publication, as does France’s prestigious *Albums des Jeunes Architectes*.

In a sense, Twenty + Change’s self-proclaimed mandate is to take on the role of disseminator, with both a degree of criticality and a spirit of inclusion. More mixed-tape than album, the intention of Twenty + Change is not to produce a publication of the three or five “best” firms in the country—indeed how would one define that—but rather, to give a sampling of the range of concerns and approaches, taking place across the nation.

The response to the Twenty + Change 02 “Call for Projects” was impressive—101 projects were submitted from firms in thirteen cities in eight provinces. The work submitted was a cross-section of projects of varying scales, theoretical and built, and exploring a range of ideas and common challenges facing us today. The curatorial committee, comprised of noted authors, educators and professionals, selected a group of twenty-one firms that they felt were producing work that addressed significant contemporary issues and opportunities: questions of how we produce and occupy the urban realm, new models for collective living addressing urban density and renewal, innovations in sustainability and material affect, the future direction

of self-initiated commissions, the extension of an designer’s potential to impact and enhance public space, and new models of practice, amongst others.

Twenty + Change 02 features these projects as a collection of emerging firms’ work and includes texts written by each firm that describe their practice and the project(s) selected. Many of the contributing authors noted the significance of positioning one’s work as an emerging designer. Architecture is a profession regulated by provincial bodies and legal codes, but its primary role is to act as a cultural and social agent, to question how we occupy our environments, whether urban or rural, domestic or public. The work included in Twenty + Change 02 takes on these questions with varying methodologies and intensity. We look forward to continue expanding the scope of Twenty + Change—both in its geographic reach and its design ambitions.

Heather Dubbeldam
Lola Sheppard