

INTERVIEW The new executive director of ArtsNB Akoulina Connell S2

THEATRE Inside the actors studio with Saint John actress Suzy Kimball S3

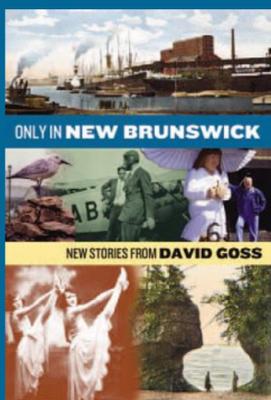
salon



The road to Majumder Manor

Saint John's Acre Architects aims to revitalize comedian/actor Shaun Majumder's hometown along with the prestige of East Coast architecture with a big dreams in a tiny outport town. Story by Mike Landry

INSIDE: STATE OF THE ART S2 / COLIN SMITH S2 / NEW BRUNSWICK'S READING S6 / NYT CROSSWORD S7 / SIGHTINGS S8 / THE ETIQUETTE GUY S8



From Grand Falls and Pocologan to Miramichi and Hartland, popular storyteller David Goss has travelled his home province collecting over 45 stories of offbeat New Brunswick history and lore.

LAUNCH EVENT
Thursday, May 5
7:00-8:30 p.m.
West Branch Library
Saint John, NB

OTHER UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, May 7
Sharla Books
10:30-12:00
Oromocto, NB

Fredericton Chapters
1:00-2:30 p.m.

Friday, May 13
Sussex Library
10:00 a.m.

Moncton Chapters
2:00-3:30 p.m.

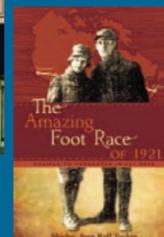
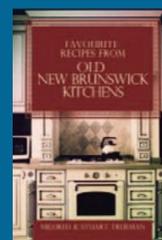
Saturday, May 14
Bathurst Book Gallery
10:30 a.m.

Books Inn
2:00 p.m.
Miramichi, NB

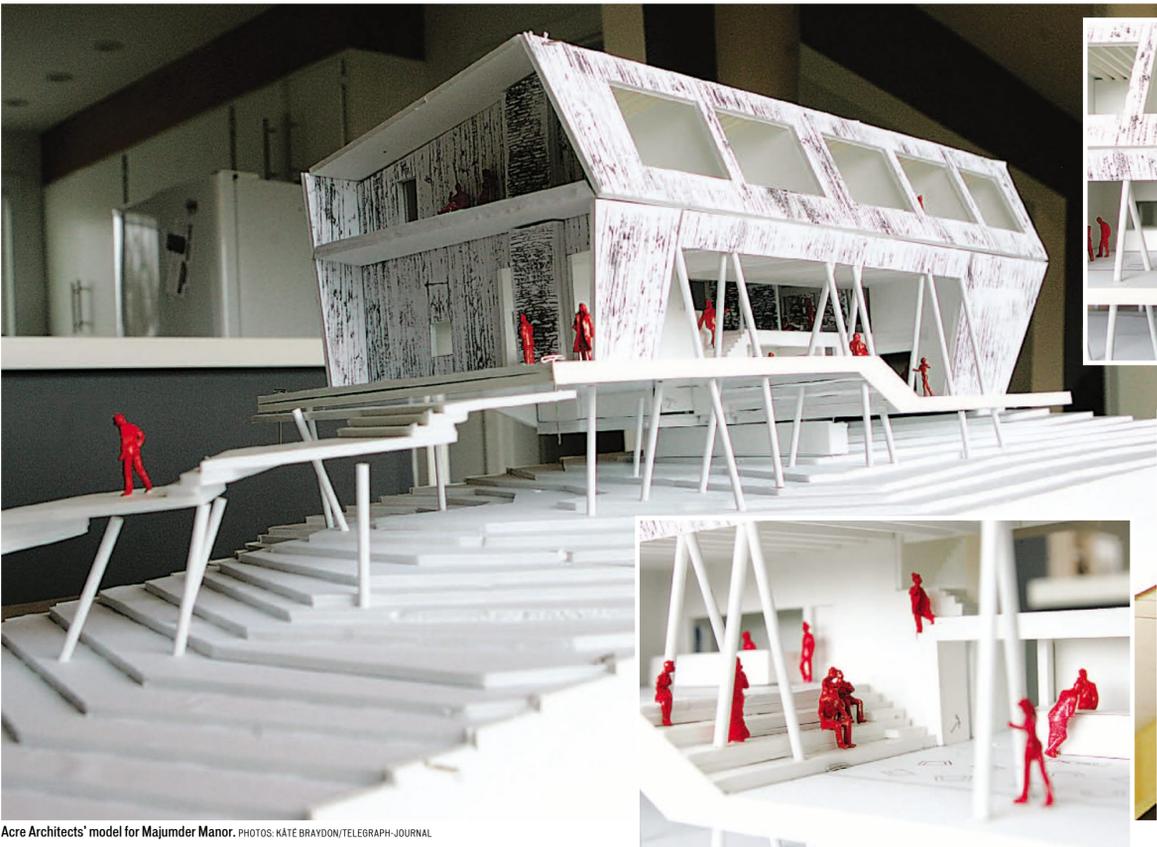
Friday, June 3
St. Croix Public Library
2:00 p.m.
St. Stephen, NB

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Majumder, left, and Kopp examine dory models in Burlington with project manager Peter Blackie.

Acre Architects' model for Majumder Manor. PHOTOS: KATE BRAYDON/TELEGRAPH JOURNAL



Above: a conceptual mock-up images for Majumder Manor. Right: Kopp, left, with Adair, Majumder and Shelby Fenner. PHOTOS: SUBMITTED

THE PROJECT ISN'T JUST MAJUMDER MANOR FOR HIM. THE PROJECT IS BURLINGTON. THE PROJECT IS NEWFOUNDLAND.
MONICA ADAIR



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Like no place you've ever been

Saint John's Acre Architects takes its inspiration from historical East Coast architecture and culture for Majumder Manor – its first big project in Atlantic Canada with a sustainable vision. Story by Mike Landry

The cameras are in their faces and everyone is asking Stephen Kopp and Monica Adair what they think. It's the Saint John architects' first time visiting the tiny town of Burlington, Newfoundland, on the North-Western Baie-Verte peninsula. It's shockingly small, and all they've seen are a couple houses with vinyl siding. But in less than a day, they've fallen under the spell of the landscape's rugged natural beauty and its gregarious and generous inhabitants. Burlington is a 4-wheeler, Ski-Doo kind of town. An old outpost, many of its 350-some residents now leave to work in far-away places like Fort McMurray, Alberta – or, in Shaun Majumder's case, Los Angeles. The former *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* comedian and *Detroit 1-8-7* star, Majumder has brought Kopp and Adair to his hometown on this frozen mid-January day not only to see what they think of the town, but what they think Burlington can become. Majumder has hired Kopp and Adair to design Majumder Manor – an eco-luxury inn. Kopp and Adair are the brains behind Acre Architects, which was included in the prestigious 2010 and '11 *Twenty + Change* biennial exhibition and publication dedicated to promoting Canada's top emerging designers.

"The project isn't just Majumder Manor for him," Adair says over veggie eggs Benedict in uptown Saint John. "The project is Burlington. The project is Newfoundland. That's what we like about it, too." It takes an hour and a half to drive from the Deer Lake airport to Burlington. Majumder rolls down his window despite the January cold to say hello and shout "What's shakin' bacon?!" to everyone. Spotting the mayor he shouts, "Hey, George! We need a meeting! Get everyone together. Get all the councilors. 7 o'clock!" And, sure enough, the next evening there's 100 sandwiches waiting in the town hall kitchen and half of Burlington is waiting to hear the next step of Majumder's vision. After the meeting, when Kopp raises a questioning

eyebrow at the idea of bottled moose meat, it doesn't take 10 minutes for an attendee to run home to grab Kopp a bottle. This is Burlington – where folks in Ski-Doo suits at shed parties burst into song to fellow Burlingtoner Rex Goudie's guitar in between sips of homemade raspberry wine and Budweiser. Kopp and Adair, who have been married since 2008, spend the night in one of Majumder's father's bedrooms. Until Majumder Manor is built, staying at someone's house is the only option when visiting. The Acre's drawn from all of this for Majumder Manor. Its a "Newfoundland organic" approach. "I know there's the desire for the ski lodge," Adair says. "But, in a way, (Majumder Manor) is kind of a Newfoundland vernacular."

"Newfoundland building has been honest and straightforward," Kopp adds. "Back in the day they used wood clapboard with piers to set it on, but now they go down to Home Hardware or Home Depot and vinyl siding is available. So the town looks like that. What we're trying to do is think about when tourists come to towns – What do they take pictures of? It's not the vinyl-sided house. They go to the old fishing stages that are tilted and weathered. We're not trying to imitate, but say, other than what Home Depot sells, what is it that makes this town proud?" The project is proceeding fast, and the goal is to break ground this August. Just last week, Kopp and Adair were in Newfoundland again meeting with contractors and Majumder. A concept design has been presented to the town, but schematics are just being finished. Meanwhile, Majumder's solicited his best friend Peter Estevez to document the whole saga for a documentary series for the W Network. Majumder has also set out on his *This Tour Has 22 Cities ... The Road to Majumder Manor* comedy tour across Canada. He'll perform Frederickton Tuesday and Moncton on Wednesday. It would seem unreal if the project hadn't been like this from the very start. The Acre received the request for proposal in November, and weren't sure if it was a joke or not. The subject in the email was an obscure "Your name came up" and the request contained none of the usual tedious, detailed specifics. Instead, there was just a picture of Majumder and an essay about his town that began with "I'm a dreamer" and ended with the question "Can you build a building here?" "Basically, if you could put a bunch of colours and feelings together, it was that," Adair says. "It was really crazy. But the thing is we love clients like that. We love clients that are visionaries. A good client is a good project. It's not the budget. It's nothing like that. So, we said we've got to give it a go, like a total shot in the dark, right?" Talking on the phone from just outside Lewisporte Junction on the road to St. John's, Majumder jokes all he needs to stay focused on the project is a steady diet of bananas, bamboo root, Red Bull with caffeine-infused Excedrin and, turning serious in tone, his complete trust in the sensibility of The Acre. "We went through all these different people, but Monica and Stephen, in just one document, had the heart and soul of the project," Majumder says. The heart and soul of Majumder Manor can be summed up in one word – authenticity. Even though there's plenty of laughter and jokes when Majumder is around – Adair laughed so much during their first meeting the muscles in her neck hurt – sincerity is structuring Majumder Manor. The Acre prioritizes the process and it "never has enough time to be inauthentic," Adair says. For Majumder, authenticity is the core of his career. "It all starts from – What's your intention? My intention is to be authentic, to do the right thing and to make sure I'm not motivated by something that's material, greedy or fame- or ego-driven. If that drives

and motivates me I'll find limitations more quickly." To be built on the site of Majumder's old school house, Majumder Manor is inspired by both Burlington's landscape and people. It is to be built on piers, rather into the rock, and features a variety of entrances in homage to the exploring Majumder so loved to do as a kid. The five rooms will have uniform views. And to make the community welcome, the building is open. Stairs and various levels are used instead of walls. The kitchen is open with a large dining area and a room to hold 'shed party' events. Majumder loves how the design emphasizes the unique interaction between people in Burlington. "You can have (5-Star luxury) anywhere, but you can't have this experience everywhere, and we need to build a structure that acknowledges and in fact embraces that. (The Acre) have done a great job with us to build a structure to facilitate that." The project is meant to be a lynchpin to inspire other locals to rethink and capitalize on what makes their town special. So, as much as Majumder Manor is a project of love with his fiancée Shelby Fenner – Majumder envisions finishing the project by getting married at the inn – and an homage to his deceased native Burlington mom, his main motivation is something else. "We were down on the property where I was raised yesterday. I was just standing there and it took me back immediately to 'Wow, this is where it all started, so it makes perfect sense to put this building back into the town where it all started for me as a kid.' It was really powerful and beautiful. It makes sense and mom would definitely be proud." As if the pressure of fulfilling someone's dream wasn't enough, Majumder Manor is also The Acre's first big project in Atlantic Canada with a sustainable vision. But Adair says that pressure exists all the time in architecture. And Kopp says more important than their own taxed work schedules is the opportunity to give an Atlantic Canadian architecture a voice on a national and international scale. The Acre earned the opportunity on the strength of its concept of the inn being "Burlington's kitchen." The closest restaurant is more than an hour away, so there was an immediate niche to fill. "It's one thing to be interested in remote places ... (but) what makes something luxurious for us was the idea of food, conversation and people." Majumder was also won over by The Acre's sustainability concerns. Rather than focus on green technology, The Acre is designing passive elements – reducing the ecological footprint through smart design. They're trying to use as much daylight as possible, orienting the building east-west for the most solar gain, using heavy mass flooring to absorb and retain heat, looking at geothermal energy possibilities, using local mills for the wood source, building a root cellar to preserve foods and aiming to harvest wind for energy. The building has an ambitious target of Net-Zero Energy. "The big thing was that sustainability goes beyond the environment. If you're going to build something in a community, you can't be like the Olympics – just building something and then abandon it. It must be sustainable also for the economy and the people." It's an untraditional approach, something highlighted when Majumder spoke about the project on CBC Radio's Q. Host Jian Ghomeshi had trouble comprehending how a luxury inn could be a charitable venture. But, then again, Majumder is a dreamer. "It's interesting because you find a balance of yes everything is possible but," Majumder says, "this is project is only possible because of a very careful slowly moving forward thoughtful process of bringing the right people together." In all, Majumder's dream team includes his fiancée, food and beverage consultant Sarah Evans, Peter Estevez and his crew, The Acre, project manager Peter

Blackie and many more. The Acre will enlist help, too, from John Leroux and its larger collective of designers. "Rural communities with infrastructure are definitely a huge part of where culture is born. It is where music, dance and storytelling were all born. That's an important thing to remember. Urban centres are swallowing up these beautiful, beautiful human experiences." "And that's what it is, human connection: people looking at each other in the eye, opening their doors, protecting each other, taking care of each other, feeding each other." And this learning, Adair says, is the heart of The Acre. "Our projects are about learning about people, learning about ourselves and our clients," she says. "I want to be a little bit more like Shaun. His ego doesn't seem to get in the way much. Comedy puts you at such a risky place and this point of failure all the time and you put yourself out there." "It's a great skill he has – to be able to bring out that same approach in people." S



Adair and Kopp discuss Majumder Manor at Acre Architects' Saint John offices, with clipboards to organize projects. PHOTO: KATE BRAYDON/TELEGRAPH JOURNAL



Monica Adair, left, Stephen Kopp and Shaun Majumder stand on precarious scaffolding to see the potential second floor view of Majumder Manor. PHOTO: SUBMITTED