

A detail of the Acre Architects competition submission: The model reimagines Saint John's waterfront, reintegrating it with the city and incorporating bold colour drawn from the often-fogbound city's roofscape.



WHO IS ARCHITECTURE FOR?

At this year's Venice Biennale, young Canadian designers will tackle anew a favourite national theme—migration.

It's been called the Olympics of architecture. Every second year, architects from around the world gather in Italy toward the end of the summer for the three-month-long exhibition of their work known as the Venice Biennale of Architecture. It's an opportunity for architects to show their colours, presenting conceptual answers or explorations on a predetermined theme. This year's theme: "Common Ground." Representing Canada in 2012 are 18 groups of younger architects who competed in a national competition to win a place on the team. This past spring they gathered in Winnipeg for the final winnowing of entries to decide who would head to Venice in August.

One of the chosen is a group from Acre Architects, the firm that is currently putting the finishing touches on the dream home in Saint John, N.B., whose progress *IA&D* has been following for the past year-and-a-half. (See *IA&D*, Winter 2012, for the most recent update on the house.) The organizing committee's brief asked entrants how "specific cultural memory" might be used and incorporated in the designs of contemporary architects. Put another way, the question is this: How can an architect or architectural team go beyond the style or architectural language imposed broadly, and globally, to design in a way that is a specific

response to both context and surroundings?

The Acre team—Stephen Kopp, Monica Adair, John Leroux, Jessie Croll and Alicia Halas—responded by posing their own question, one that had often been asked, in puzzlement, of Acre co-founder Stephen Kopp, who moved five years ago from Manitoba to Saint John: *Why New Brunswick?* For the project entry, Kopp and the other team members envisioned a fresh articulation of the identity of Saint John, focusing on a reconfiguration of its waterfront, long cut off from the heart of the city by a highway, as a vital and enticing mixed-use public space. The end goal: to revitalize the province as a destination point for tourists and new generations of migrants.

We'll be exploring the work of Acre Architects and the entire Canadian team in a future issue of *IA&D*. And if you're in Venice this fall, stop by the pavilion and see the work of Canada's up-and-coming generation of architects.

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The Venice Biennale of Architecture runs from August 29 to November 25, 2012.

URBAN EXPLORER

For over 125 years, Vancouverites have proudly raved about their city's natural beauty. Ask them about the architecture, however, and that civic pride tends to wither.

Residents and visitors alike may develop a deeper appreciation of the storied design history of this seaside metropolis through *Exploring Vancouver*—a new book of architectural walking tours through Downtown, Gastown, East Van, the West Side, UBC and more.

Divided into chapters by neighbourhood, the guide contains dozens of noteworthy stops, from the Dominion Building in Gastown—once the tallest commercial building in the British Empire—to the ambitious Woodward's redevelopment, and from Arthur Erickson's majestic Museum of Anthropology to Chinatown's tiny Sam Kee Building.

With stops at laneway homes, the Olympic Village, the new VanDusen Botanical Garden Visitor Centre and several other groundbreaking green buildings, *Exploring Vancouver* also traces the city's obsession with sustainable design and livable density.

Refreshingly, it doesn't shy away from architectural missteps and head-scratchers, such as the Wall Centre, a high-rise that became a monument to bureaucratic absurdity when city officials stopped work on the tower's tinted glass and ordered the top third of the glass to be clear; and the ubiquitous Vancouver Special, the 1970s

mass-market homes that were long on function but short on visual appeal.

With some entries focusing more on social history than design, *Exploring Vancouver* at times feels more like a historical handbook than an architectural one, and its photographs aren't always the most flattering. Still, it's an informative guide for visitors, newcomers and armchair architecture watchers—and it just might convince



Vancouverites that their uneven architectural past, and more promising present, are nothing to walk away from. *Exploring Vancouver*, by Harold Kalman and Robin Ward, Douglas & McIntyre
 —Jennifer Van Evra