

Expansion of the Palais des Congrès de Montréal

Client : Palais des Congrès de Montréal

Realisation : Les architectes Tétrault, Dubuc, Saia et associés

Hal Ingberg architecte (Independent architectural consultant and co-designer)

Budget : \$240,000,000

Completion : 2003

Competition laureate: 1999

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Concept

Hovering above the gash created by an urban expressway, the original Palais des Congrès de Montréal constituted an important psychological barrier separating Old Montreal from the modern city. This project repairs the damaged urban tissue by filling in the absent ground level and by creating urgently required spaces of *connection*, that is: public and commercial activity and numerous major pedestrian links. A generously dimensioned, wedge shaped pedestrian mall runs the entire 300m northern length of the building. Bathed in both natural light and a luminous stretch fabric ceiling, this space links rue Saint-Urbain on the east with a spectacular public room, the new *Hall Bleury*, on the west.

Within the "L" shape formed by the pedestrian mall and the *Hall Bleury*, the scheme is further divided into 3 conceptual "*rings*" that structures and organizes the planning of the interior space. The outer layer of each ring houses mostly commercial activity so as to programmatically animate pedestrian movement, while the "*holes*" within hide a series of loading docks, truck ramps, bus stations, etc. In between each ring, two pedestrian passageways re-establish the north-south urban link previously severed by the expressway, in effect relinking Old Montréal to the modern city.

The inflected geometries of the grade level passageways create fluid and direct paths of pedestrian movement through the programmatic bulges and morphological particularities of the site. This reconciliation of "back of house" function with pedestrian movement establishes dynamic movement patterns of forced perspectives and expanding vistas.

Morphology and Materiality

The *Hall Bleury* extends the entire length of rue de Bleury and is the urban focal point of the project. It is a grand, yet spatially languid urban room, whose casual sectional arrangement of floor and void is revealed on the stepped main facade of multicoloured glass. Urbanistically, it does so, in order that it may powerfully express its public function and iconic aspiration. Spatially, the Hall Bleury is a receptacle for an extraordinary play of cast coloured light.

From rue de Bleury, one enters the room from beneath a gravity-defying translucent glass canopy. In the evening, this canopy is artificially lit from within, giving the impression of a theatrically floating lantern.

The rue Viger elevation hovers faithfully along the sidewalk-road edge, and above a recessed street level pedestrian passageway. Above the passageway, a curtain wall of horizontally expressed mullions emerges seamlessly from those of the existing building's "nose". At the meeting of the new and existing buildings, a 30m x 13m rectangle of transparent chartreuse coloured glass, works in concert with a transparent, orange glass secondary entrance as well as with the nose of the existing building. The intention is to establish a powerful urban marker visible from the north.

The rue Saint-Antoine elevation features a transparent base of glazed commercial space, supporting a middle of lintel-like slabs of multi-toned grey, limestone. Use of this stone establishes a material link to Old Montréal, while its elongated dimensions, tonalities and detailing clearly distinguish it as a non bearing, contemporary construction. Finally, a long band of translucent clerestory glazing that lights the elevated loading dock surmounts the stone.

Chameleon

As a general rule, the building grafts itself onto the four pre-existing buildings on its site, in such a way as to always retain an equivalence of height with respect to this context. Therefore, in spite of its many spectacular characteristics, the surface profile of the new Palais des Congrès is highly contextual, and oddly enough, almost chameleon-like.