

BOOK REVIEWS

NOTRE-DAME DE QUÉBEC

Luc Noppen
Editions du Pélican, \$13.95

MONTRÉAL EN ÉVOLUTION

Jean-Claude Marsan
Boréal Express, Fides, Montreal \$12.95

Writing on architecture in Canada is just beginning to move out of the primary stage of general chronicles of form and type into the second period of more detailed and individual study. Major monographs such as those by Harold Kalman and Franklin Toker have broken new ground in more specific studies. The two books reviewed here: *Notre-Dame de Québec* by Luc Noppen and *Montréal en Évolution* by Jean-Claude Marsan are especially welcome for, in a very real sense, their insights open tantalizing opportunities for further scholarship in Canadian architecture.

Noppen and Marsan each approach their subjects with a full awareness of the complex architectural and historical character that must be analyzed and ordered if *Notre-Dame de Québec* is to be understood as more than an urban cathedral and if *Montréal* is to be understood as more than simply a complex and very enjoyable city.

Luc Noppen's treatment of *Notre-Dame de Québec* is oriented toward an historical explanation of its architectural form and an exploration of the cathedral's influence on religious architecture in the Province of Québec. To this end he has drawn on extensive files of drawings, prints and documents in the Archives nationales de Québec, the parish of *Notre-Dame* and the Séminaire de Québec. It is thus possible to follow the evolution of the form of the cathedral from its beginnings under Mgr de Laval through the alterations by Gaspar Chaussegros de Léry in 1744, the recon-

struction after the Conquest and the rebuilding in 1843. It is only in his account of the restoration of 1922 and the rebuilding after a disastrous fire in 1922-1924, that the historical treatment is weak. But throughout the book Noppen has approached the Cathedral as if it existed solely on paper or as an abstract architect's project. He does relate the building and its style to the religious architecture of the Province of Québec, but he does this with a cold sense of motif-mongering — pursuing stylistic and formal relationships between the Cathedral and other churches and only rarely the associated social relationships. In almost every instance his treatment of the symbolic meaning of the building has fallen far behind the more purely documentary account. This becomes especially apparent when one considers the very few instances when contemporary accounts and descriptions are quoted or even mentioned. The result is a general lack of atmosphere and the reader gets little impression of what it must have been like to stand in the nave of the Cathedral at any stage in its development. There is something to be said for a three dimensional, visual approach to architectural writing.

It is in the treatment of the 1922 restoration program and the 1922-1924 rebuilding that Noppen fails to appreciate the extent of the importance of the work and the forces that guided its form. In a book of nearly three hundred pages, it is truly amazing that only two pages of text are devoted to the rebuilding. The opulent Beaux Arts projects submitted by the French architect Maxime Roisin are as much statements of a belief in the value and importance of French Canadian culture as they are architectural statements. The major project, for a complete rebuilding, enshrines *Patria* in a magnificent top-lit altar recess. Her presence in the form and garb of *Athena Parthenos* is perhaps inappropriate for a normal church, but not

for a national cathedral which had come to be a patent cultural symbol. Roisin's project would have made the Cathedral a sumptuous reliquary. The actual restoration pursued the same goals but with different means and Notre-Dame as rebuilt is an elaborated recreation of the old building. All of this is important for an understanding of the relation of tradition to French Canadian nationalism in the first half of this century. But Noppen has either failed to see any importance in the work or has judged it basically irrelevant. Judgements of this type affect the value of his work and actually prevent a complete understanding of Notre-Dame.

Marsan, for his part, faced a task in many ways more difficult than Noppen's. For if much of Montréal's history survives, still more has been destroyed without thought and without record. Even for what remains there is often a frustrating lack of information. These are the problems that face anyone who would make coherent sense out of the history of a great and ever-changing city. *Montréal en Évolution* is significant and important not just in terms of its treatment of architecture but also as a work of history and sociology. Marsan's work has made Montréal's development comprehensible without ignoring the individual and unique elements. For Montréal is really three cities: the colonial semi-frontier city that was harnessed to and bent on harnessing the St. Lawrence hinterland; the haphazard but compellingly interesting Victorian city; and the enormous metropolitan sprawl.

In his approach to Montréal, Marsan has balanced a detailed treatment of the architecture and planning with a concentrated study of the aims and character of those who commissioned, designed and controlled the architectural form of the city. He examines in detail the architectural form and social character of the two and three storey

apartment houses, which, with their open front stairs and rather somber brick or stone facades, dominate so much of modern Montréal. Similarly he examines Louis de Baude, comte de Frontenac, a man well-known in historical terms, in the light of his influence on architecture. Such study of patronage in Canada has been generally lacking. However, it is disappointing that a scholar of Marsan's abilities should be led by his sensitivity to the French-English dichotomy in Québec to give short shrift to the positive and interesting aspects of the houses commissioned by the English-speaking Establishment during the later Victorian period. These he dismisses as being for the most part derivative and colonial. But the architectural forms even if influenced by foreign sources are distinctively Montréal in character. A quick comparison with the houses built for Toronto's Four Hundred will prove that. Moreover, these houses remain part of the heritage of all Montréal and all Canada. Architectural appreciation confined along narrowly nationalistic lines can only lead to more destruction; it has already helped to destroy the Van Horne House.

But on the whole Marsan has approached Montréal with the love of a man for his city and all its contradictions. His work places the city not only in a Canadian but also in an international context; for Montreal and its architecture, can without any provincial strutting and puffing be placed within such a framework. The approach can best be summed up in one quotation:

. . . si l'église Notre-Dame de Montréal possède son pendant dans la cathédrale St-Patrick de New York, si la Banque de Montreal a le sien dans la Banque de Philadelphie . . . , ces monuments montréalais acquièrent cependant une

identité propre, grâce à la place d'Armes, qui les mets en présence l'un de l'autre. De même, on peut soutenir que la gare Windsor n'a rien d'unique, puisqu'elle s'inspire de l'oeuvre du grand architecte américain Richardson. Greffé cependant sur le square Dominion, voisinant, par l'intermédiaire de ce tampon de verdure, l'église Saint-George, la cathédrale Marie-Reine-du-Monde et l'édifice romantique de la Sun Life, cet ensemble victorien est absolument unique.

There is an example here to follow in the study of all Canadian cities.

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EXPLORING VANCOUVER

Harold Kalman and John Roaf
University of British Columbia Press
\$5.95

Urban geographers, ethnologists, social historians, industrial archaeologists, and even gastronomes — as well as architectural historians — will find something of interest in the Kalman and Roaf book, *Exploring Vancouver*. A compendium of facts and figures generously illustrated, the book is a tribute to the catholic interests of Dr. Harold Kalman and the photographic skills of John Roaf. Those who have struggled with Pevsner's *London* only to have the binding disintegrate in a swirl of Chelsea fog or who failed to locate a crucial cross-reference in the *Michelin Guide to Paris*, will appreciate the physical package. The 264 page 4½" x 10" format does fit in the pocket. The graphics and overall design facilitate quick reference and easy reading. The arrangement of points-of-interest into six walking tours and four driving tours follows not only logical geographical divisions but also the chronological sequence of Vancouver's development. Each tour is prefaced by a brief historical profile which establishes the general economic and cultural setting. The subjects of each discussion are illustrated on the following pages. Included in the package are a glossary of terms and two invaluable indices: one of architects, and the other a general reference, mainly of places. The overall quality of the book, in particular the saddle stitched binding (now alas becoming rare in a paperback) justifies the price of \$5.95.

Dr. Kalman states that "the book is intended primarily as a field guide for active participation." But "used instead as an armchair guide, the book becomes an illustrated historical record of the city and its buildings." The author quite rightly points out that architecture constitutes only a part of the