

# café WEST

Toward an Architecture Policy for Canada

## CANADIAN ARCHITECTURE FORUMS ON EDUCATION FORUMS CANADIENS D'ARCHITECTURE SUR L'ÉDUCATION

# NEWS

March 20, 2020



“ We are all in this together. ”

– Madyson McKay  
Architect with the City of Calgary

### CAFÉ West Place and Circumstance

On Thursday, March 12, 2020 – a day before social distancing and cancelled events became the norm due to the coronavirus – keen participants from four provinces gathered at the University of Calgary's downtown research hub to join the last in a series of Canadian Architecture Forums on Education. The unusual circumstances served only to strengthen collective concern for public health, community well-being, and the quality of Canada's social infrastructure.

Participants met on land adjacent to where the Bow River meets the Elbow River, on traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta, home to: the Blackfoot Confederacy, comprising the Siksika, Piikani and Kainai First Nations; the Tsuut'ina First Nation; the Stoney Nakoda, including the Chiniki, Bearspaw and Wesley First Nations; and the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 3.

CAFÉ West took place across from City Hall in Calgary's former public library, a site for seeking and sharing knowledge for over a half-century. Recast as City Building Design Lab (CBDLab), the building now serves as a satellite event centre for the University of Calgary's School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape (SAPL). Alongside CAFÉ West, the CBDLab hosted an array of parallel activities: a press conference with the Mayor

of Calgary, Neheed Nenshi, to launch the "9 Block initiative," a collaboration between the city and SAPL to address vibrancy, safety and social inclusion in the downtown core; two Design Matters public lectures; an exhibition; and multiple "block week" courses with guest instructors, including an Arch Agency course taught by CAFÉ project lead **Lisa Landrum** and **Kris Kelly-Frère**, social innovation designer and manager of the Vivo Play Project. Arch Agency students engaged a week of experimental play, ethnographic adventure, videography and performative storytelling, while exploring their own sense of agency in fostering human thriving. As part of the Arch Agency course, students produced multimedia masks and manifestos, and acted as creative protagonists and table captains at CAFÉ West, leading discussions on Canada's architectural future.

### Words and Works

CAFÉ West began with a welcome and rally from **John Brown**, Dean of the University of Calgary's School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, and President of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada. Reminding participants of a variety of pressing societal concerns intersecting design professions, Dean Brown emphasized the timeliness of the CAFÉ conversation and the collaborative nature of its endeavor, involving schools, provincial associations, and a national advocacy body. **Lisa Landrum**, CAFÉ Project Lead and Associate Dean Research at the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Architecture, provided context and background to the initiative, while also acknowledging SAPL support from Associate Dean (Architecture) **Jason Johnson**, Professor **Catherine Hamel** and a team of event organizers.

Following the introductions, a series of short presentations by students, professors, and regional professionals set the tone and topics for open discussion. **Zach Ward**, a Master of Architecture student at the University of Calgary, shared perspectives of SAPL students. Focusing on the formative internship process, he suggested how the profession can better support graduates in realizing career goals through diversified experience, enhanced mentorship, interdisciplinary opportunities and research development. Augmented by student drawings and designs, Zach presented varied voices and visions for an architecture policy, including priorities of environmental stewardship and public engagement, and the need for any policy to evolve over time. **Kate Allen**, principal and founding partner of FRANK Architecture & Interiors, described a series of ways in which architecture positively impacts people by fostering social connections; humanizing neglected 'in between' spaces; encouraging curiosity; and inspiring communities. As Kate emphasized – with exquisite examples of FRANK's built works – good food, comfort and storytelling are key agents in creating social bonds, a common sense of dignity and architectural meaning. **David Down**, senior architect and chief urban designer with the City of Calgary, tackled the difficulty of defining good design. With a presentation entitled, "Quantifying Quality," David shared the recent Calgary Municipal Development Plan and Quality Design Project, relaying specific strategies to understand design expectations, perceptions and performance. **Jean-Pierre Chupin**, Professor of Architecture at the Université de Montréal and Canada Research Chair in Architecture, Competitions and Mediations of Excellence, expanded on the challenge



“ I anticipate a career in which environmental stewardship inhabits a primary role in every design decision. ”

- Caleb Hildenbrandt & Zach Ward  
M.Arch Students, University of Calgary



of quantifying quality by sharing steps taken toward creating an Atlas of Research on Excellence in Architecture (AREA). Building on his recent work in establishing a Canadian Competitions Catalogue – and now in partnership with dozens of universities, cultural institutions and professional associations – Dr. Chupin described a new research initiative to aggregate collective wisdom and support architecture policies with reliable data and analyses of criteria for architectural excellence. Next up, Carleton University students **Kim Langat** and **Vedad Haghghi** described life and learning at the Azrieli School of Architecture and Urbanism. Highlights included student publications, awards programs, directed study abroad adventures, diverse research labs and robust public forums. Significantly, these students emphasized that the socially-supportive and structurally-expressive architecture building is itself an influential agent in their education. **Alkarim Devani**, President at RNDSSQR (Round Square), began his presentation with a bold question: *Is great architecture alone enough?* As a business graduate, now leading an award-winning place-making practice, Alkarim argued that creating thriving communities requires a holistic vision not just for buildings but for their management, socialization, neighborhood development and long-term adaptability. He advocated for a design policy that views the well-being of people, place and urban settings as intertwined, and engages tenants, owners, managers, and local merchants as entities in a mutually-supportive ecosystem. **Logan Armstrong**, an intern at Works of Architecture, outlined architecture’s effect on cognitive experience. Bridging neuroscience, psychology and architecture, he described how aesthetic experience impacts health and well-being. Such research could help

designers understand the personal effects of challenges like mass urbanization and social isolation. **Shawna Cochrane** and **Madyson McKay**, architects with the City of Calgary, shared their collective wisdom from extensive outreach and project management experience on numerous municipal projects. Shawna highlighted the role of the city as a building owner, and thus a key shaper of public infrastructure. Calgary owns over 800 buildings: from recreation facilities and emergency service centres, to parks and pump stations. She also emphasized the role policy plays in establishing a common language for the desired outcomes and impacts of civic projects. Madyson described recent affordable housing initiatives and stressed the links between quality housing and healthy citizens. Finally, **Michael Plummer** and **Stephanie Steriotis**, M.Arch students at Ryerson University, who recently led CAFÉ Ontario, shared examples of work and insights from studying on a dense urban campus. Drawing lessons from Ryerson’s masterplan – which prioritizes intensification, pedestrianization and design excellence – they suggested municipal and national policies might be modeled on such forward-looking campus plans, which also mix everyday urbanism with academic research and edifying play.

#### Dialogue and Debate

Inspired by presentations and provocations, participants turned to focus on conversations in small groups led by Arch Agency students and delegates from visiting schools. As with each CAFÉ, these fluid exchanges – aided by doodling devices and word cards – generated memorable experiences and meaningful take-aways. For instance, reporting on a discussion of architecture’s Potential, SAPL student **Inioluwa Adedapo**

emphasized the need to design the *right* thing, before designing the thing right – that is, to ensure from the start that projects are oriented in the best direction via broad community input. M.Arch student **James Luca Pinel**, from Université de Montréal, summarized his group’s reflections on Place with a diagram of interconnection between creativity and complexity, listening and trust. And SAPL student **Daniel Howard** distilled broad conversations about design’s impact on People, as an “architecture of empathy” – involving continual dialogue between designers and citizens.

#### Decolonization

After a refreshing interlude, CAFÉ West culminated with a special presentation by the Design Matters Somerville Lecturer **Chris Cornelius**, member of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, founding principal of *studio:indigenous*, and architecture professor at the University of Wisconsin. With imagistic words, animistic works and palimpsestic drawings, Chris demonstrated the power of engaging design as ceremony via storytelling and participation in a world of tricky reciprocities. His talk ended with a message that resonated with CAFÉ Prairie’s opening premise: to make architecture indigenous again – not through applied styles but with open-minded and open-hearted involvement with others, the land and histories of place.

#### Café Culmination

Thank you to the nearly 1000 students, faculty and professionals who participated directly in these five CAFÉ events over the last six months. The Call for Manifestos and online survey remain open until May 15th. A final report will be prepared and posted in summer 2020. Follow announcements on Instagram [@archcanadacafe](https://www.instagram.com/archcanadacafe).