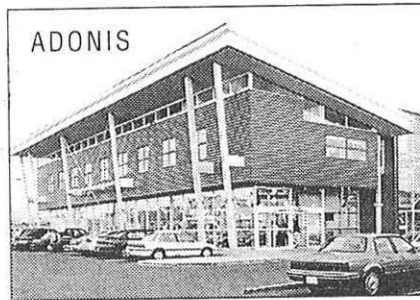


sitelines

BY STEVE COHLMAYER

Meeting of the minds

When architects and clients
find common ground,
the results are rewarding



ARCHITECTURE evolves on many fronts — in architectural schools and in educational seminars, and through the development and dissemination of technical improvements.

There is also a strong tradition of architects who theorize about architecture, who make beautiful drawings and who expand our understanding of the art and of the profession.

But although all these avenues are valuable to the world of architecture, it is only in the making of real, lived-in places that architects actually make architecture.

Of course, in order to build buildings and public environments, architects need clients. Without needs and budgets and aspirations to build, nothing gets built. It is the client who brings energy, capability and ambition to the process. Architecture requires a strong relationship between the architect and the client, and the client is as important as the architect in the realization of high-quality building.

Some clients do not want to pursue esthetic or intellectual quality, perhaps feeling that such ambitions are irrelevant to the real goals of the building project, and fearing that such quality comes at an unacceptably high cost.

Some clients want a certain level of architectural quality, and come to the project knowing what the project should be, what it should look like, and what its key architectural character and elements should be.

And some clients have no preconceptions about the design of their project, yet come to it with ambitions for architectural quality. These clients expect and demand the highest level of performance from their designers. They request that the architect solve functional, technical and budgetary requirements, and they have faith in his ability to lead the discovery of new, insightful and rich building projects.

It should be no surprise that the best architecture often results when architects work with this last type of client. But an ambitious client is no guarantee of architectural quality.

No matter how high the client's ambitions, if the budget is inadequate, it can be difficult just to keep the rain out. And if the architect's talents, abilities, experience or ambitions are not up to the task, even the most encouraging and generous client may not end up with the quality of project he or she was hoping for.

Sometimes clients begin a project with no particular architectural aspirations. Yet, through working closely with their architects and exploring alternatives, they come to realize that better architecture might be better for business, better for civic pride, or simply more enriching and rewarding.

There is an interesting example of this unfolding in Montreal. The owners of a small grocery chain called Adonis engaged a local firm, Boutros and Pratte, to develop a new store. They wanted only the basic "everyday" version, and were ready to move ahead quickly.

However, as they began to explore the wide range of planning and design issues with their architects, and to think more critically about what might be done, they changed building sites and became enthusiastic participants in the development of an unusual, and very handsome, piece of integrated urban architecture.

The first store has been such a success, and such a talked-about event, that the company has engaged Boutros and Pratte to work with them again on another store.