



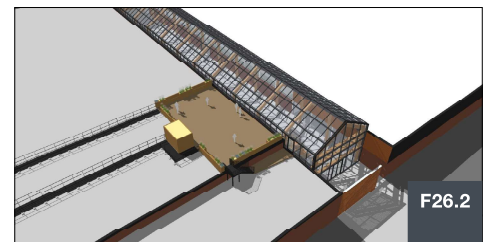
GROUPE DYNAMITE ATRIUM

MONTRÉAL, QC

Client: Ciro M. Falluh
Architect: Aedifica

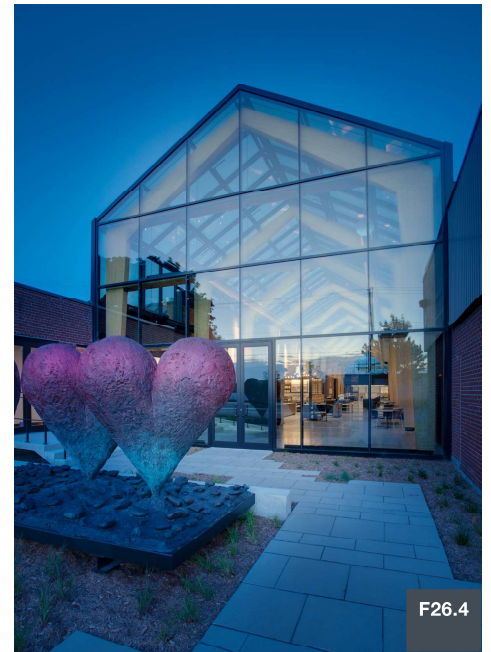
For the very reasons of its modest size and holistic approach to design, this addition to a manufacturing facility in the Montreal district of Mount Royal underscores the shortcomings of the grand town planning ideologies of the 20th century, and at the same time, the dispiriting industrial architecture that they inadvertently spawned (F26.1 and F26.2).

The Model City of Mount Royal was designated a national historic site in 2008, for reasons of its “remarkable synthesis of urban renewal movements of the early 20th century, reflecting the influence of the City Beautiful, Garden City and Garden Suburb movements” (W26.1 WPG). These movements were a response to the chaotic living conditions that had arisen in cities as a consequence of rapid industrialization. Characterized by geometric plans, grand Neoclassical monuments, the separation of functions into single use zones with generous green spaces between them, their priority was visual harmony rather than social interaction.





F26.3



F26.4

The original town of Mount Royal was laid out according to these principles in 1912, to a design by planner Frederick Todd. Todd's plan provided a framework for future development through the 1970s: a grid of streets in the town centre intersected by two diagonal boulevards and circumscribed by concentric grand avenues, along which industrial and other less desirable uses would be situated. It is off one of these avenues that the Groupe Dynamite Headquarters is located.

Groupe Dynamite is a Canadian success story, a local company that operates more than 380 women's clothing stores throughout North America and overseas. Its Mount royal operation includes design workshops, the marketing department and distribution centre, all housed in deep plan warehouse spaces with little access to natural light.

According to Thomas Schweizer of Aedifica, the design objectives for the new space included 'programmatic flexibility to support a variety of collaborative activities; abundant natural light through all seasons; the maximum use of wood for its environmental attributes, and the minimum use of finishes.' As built, this interior oasis takes the form of a fully glazed linear atrium occupying a previously unused exterior space sandwiched between two of the warehouses (F26.3).

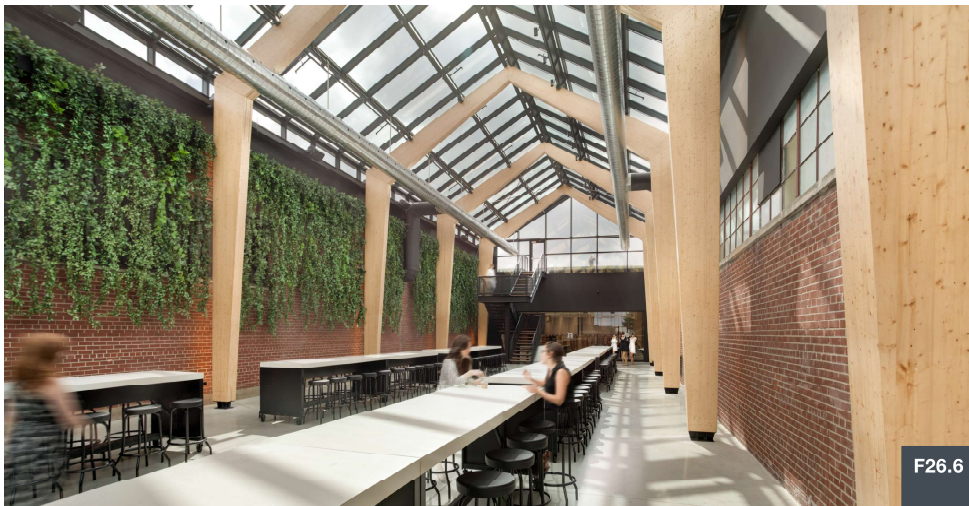
To improve working conditions for its 400 employees, the company sought to create a bright and inviting central space to serve as an interior oasis and gathering place for the Groupe Dynamite community.



F26.5

In a gesture appropriate for a clothing retailer, the atrium acts like a zipper, discreetly unifying the two existing buildings. A transparent skin of high performance, low-emissivity double glazing covers a wooden skeleton and reveals the life inside the building to the outside world (F26.4). The glass roof floods the Atrium with natural light, creating a bright, open and transparent space. The bricks of the existing walls have been left unfinished, and this industrial expression is further reinforced by the exposed steel connections of the glulam structure. The result is an interior space with much the same formal and material character as a typical Montreal alley (F26.5).

From an environmental perspective, the high-performance glazing prevents overheating in the summer and reduces heat loss in the winter. The tall narrow volume encourages the stack effect and natural ventilation can be supplemented by mechanical means via two ducts that run longitudinally at roof level. During the winter, the heat escaping from the adjacent buildings is sufficient to keep the atrium at a comfortable temperature.



F26.6

The space has been enthusiastically appropriated by Groupe Dynamite employees for both formal and informal activities. Many take lunch in the cafeteria (F26.6), no longer having to travel several kilometres off site to find somewhere congenial to eat. The new facility has also encouraged employees to initiate and participate in group activities before during and after work, and is occasionally used in the evening for community fashion shows.

Affirming the power of small interventions to humanize the effects of grand ideologies, the atrium simultaneously addresses issues of community, human comfort and wellbeing, material efficiency and building life cycle. In so doing it offers a holistic vision of sustainability that carefully weaves new strands into the existing fabric of the city.