

FIVE LIFE SUPPORT

“It becomes profitable to build in excessive and devastating quantity for those who can pay the most. These are generally childless people.”

Jane Jacobs - *Death and Life of Great American Cities*

Jane Jacobs was a great believer in diverse neighbourhoods — those with a broad socio-economic and demographic mix. Fifty years on, and even with the best of intentions, we still find it hard to create neighbourhoods like this.

I used to live in one of Vancouver’s inner city neighbourhoods, where heritage guidelines inadvertently reinforced the demographic focus alluded to by Jacobs. Existing homes that did not conform to the City’s aesthetic vision for the area, could be replaced by a four-unit complex that did. The prescribed form was (and still is) a ‘heritage style’ triplex with side by side townhouses built on top of a semi basement suite, with a free-standing coach house on the lane at the rear of the property.

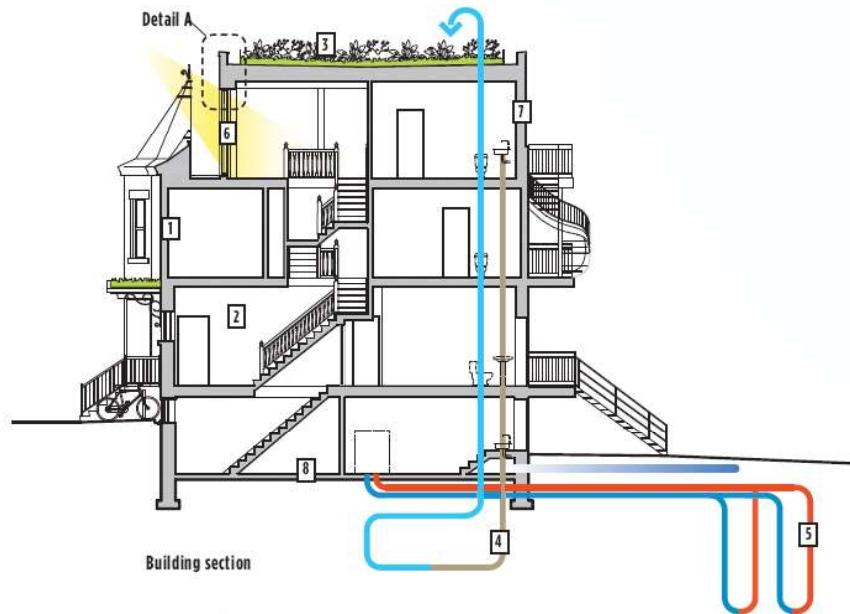
The triplex units all had front steps — up to the townhouses, down to the basement suite. Most of the units in the neighbourhood were owned by childless twenty-something or thirty-something couples, who moved out within a year of having children: the townhouses had too many stairs and not enough floor area on any one level; the basement suite and



coach house had only one bedroom. The stairs were a deterrent for older people, and the coach houses, even though access was on grade, were a hard sell because of their relatively isolated position on the lane; seniors felt vulnerable in such a location. Like everyone else, I moved out when my twins were less than a year old.

I believe it is important to feel at home in a neighbourhood, and equally important that those neighbour-

hoods should be able to accommodate our changing needs. Such an ambition may not be consistent with development pro-formas aimed solely at maximum profit. Even if rezoning does not dramatically change the scale and grain of a neighbourhood (which it most often does) the replacement (or even rehabilitation) of all the older buildings generally results in renters and low income earners being displaced, altering the character of the area and breaking the social continuity.



Building section

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|---|--|---|--|
| 1 | Upgraded energy-efficient envelope, R30 | 5 | Geothermal system |
| 2 | Radiant floor and wall heating | 6 | Passive solar wall: fully glazed on south facade |
| 3 | Rooftop garden for food and flowers | 7 | New storey extension |
| 4 | Schematic representation of the greywater system | 8 | New concrete slab, R10 |

F5.2

The heritage designation of the neighbourhood required the restoration of traditional finishes and details such as the slate roof, decorative ironwork and a turret removed during a previous renovation. With the contemporary rooftop addition and the opening up of interior spaces, Ecohabitation has added a new layer to the already rich character of the neighbourhood. More importantly, its ability to respond to the changing needs of its occupants adds to the stability and continuity of the local community.

In the historic Strathcona neighbourhood of Vancouver BC, Dialog also sought to address issues of community stability and continuity within the context of a multi-unit residential program. Through the renovation and conversion of a redundant 1940s schoolhouse, the project has created five modern homes for the client and his extended family (F5.3).

With its narrow lots, inconsistent building setbacks, and long history of incremental rehabilitation and restoration, Strathcona has a unique physical character which this project was able to reinforce through a combination of conservation and well considered interventions. The building was raised to maximize liveable floor area at ground level while retaining the familiar profile of the structure. Modern detailing of new elements speaks to the evolutionary process at work.

Recognizing that this process will continue, the design endeavours to anticipate the nature of future changes. Imagining a time when City policy might evolve to permit secondary commercial uses, the unit closest to the street has been designed with the necessary fire separations and wired for future installation of a fire alarm system.

In addition to identifying the increase in urban population, the 2011 national census also revealed that the makeup of Canadian households is changing: more multigenerational families; more adult children living at home; more unrelated singles sharing living space. The one size fits all approach no longer makes sense.

Among the residential projects that have come to my attention as editor of SABMag, several stand out for their efforts to address these challenges.

Located in central Montreal QC, Ecohabitation is the work of owner/builder Emmanuel Cosgrove. The project involved the renovation and conversion of a 1907 vintage single family townhouse into a contem-

porary triplex with flexible living space for a multi-generational family. By excavating the basement and adding accommodation on the roof, the floor area of the original house was almost doubled (F5.1).

Internally, the three suites can be combined to form a single dwelling, or divided to facilitate semi-independent or independent living for family members, or rental to others if desired (F5.2). With this in mind, mechanical and electrical systems are modularized and each unit is separately metered.



F5.3

Internally, the suites are also designed to accommodate future change with sliding walls to delineate tenant or office space, rolling kitchen islands to permit different cooking and entertaining arrangements, bathrooms sized for universal access, and other space planning considerations given to facilitate aging in place (F5.4).

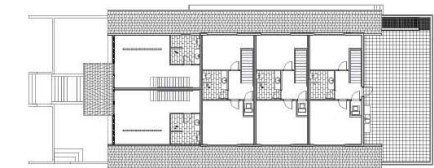
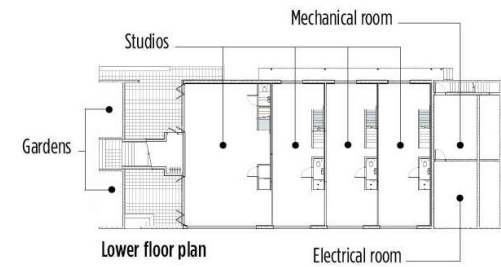
A few blocks east of the Schoolhouse, SHAPE Architecture's Georgia Green is an infill four-plex that makes a conscious attempt to break away from the formulaic approach described earlier. In a City facing significant challenges of housing affordability and choice, this project set out to offer an alternative (F5.5).

The four units are organized within a compact rectangular volume, their plans intertwined to capitalize on the highly marketable mountain views, but also to maximize the opportunities for daylight and passive ventilation. Despite this emphasis on the quality and variety of interior spaces, a high-performance building envelope ensures that Georgia Green is a highly energy efficient building (F5.6).

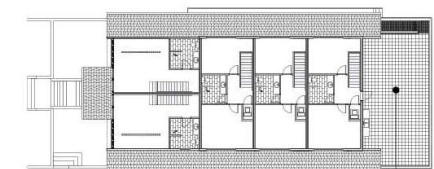
The location of the project, just a few minutes' walk from the diverse retail and cultural offerings of Commercial Drive, has a broad appeal. Accordingly, the units are sized to attract a range of potential buyers from young singles to young families to multigenerational households.

On the Prairies, 5468796 Architecture has actively engaged in the reinvention of standard housing typologies. Situated on the site of a former gas station in the River Heights neighbourhood of Winnipeg MB, Bloc 10 is a ten-unit multi-family housing project that strives to re-imagine and re-invent the market-driven condominium (F5.7). Despite this lofty goal, the developer wanted a modestly priced building designed and completed in just 12 months.

The ambition for Bloc 10 was less about demographic diversity than it was about flexibility and choice. The project follows the 'white-box' concept, in which each buyer purchases an unfinished unit with basic plumbing, heating and electrical systems. Buyers can decide which rooms they would like distributed on each level and they can personalize their finishes to their own taste and budget.



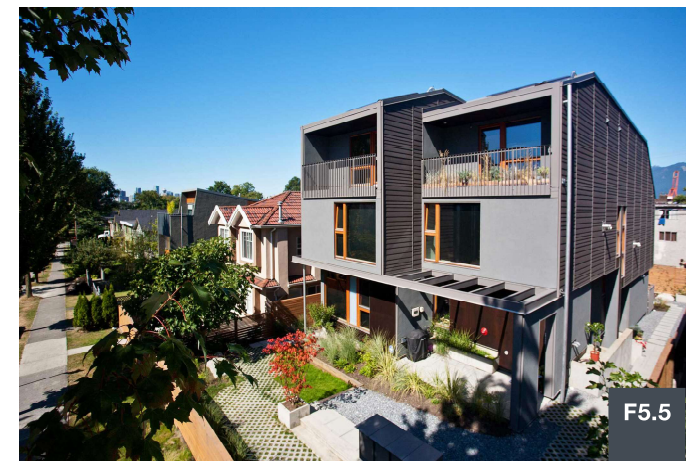
First level floor plan



Second level floor plan

Shared roof top patio

F5.4



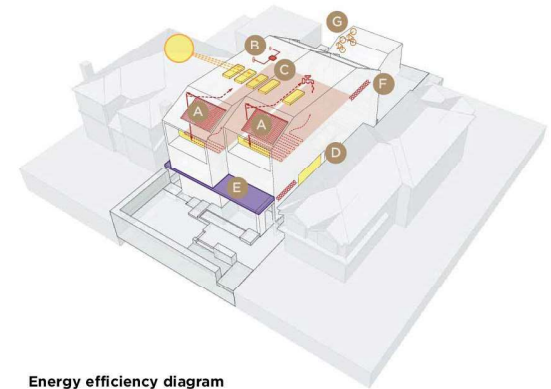
F5.5

All of the units, sized between 85 and 120m², rise over three levels and most have two balconies. As the apartments ascend, they cross from one side of the building to the other, resulting in 10 unique, interlocking layouts that feel like a hybrid between a condominium and a house (F5.8). This arrangement provides views to the north and the south, and eight of the 10 apartments have views in three directions.

To take advantage of the maximum allowable mass for the development, cantilevered projections expand rooms, create balconies and provide support for the wooden, vertical-slat privacy screen that wraps the building's exterior. The screen serves multiple purposes. It provides each homeowner with privacy and shade and yet at the same time it offers glimpses of neighbours, so fostering a sense of community.

These projects, together with MONAD (page 49) and the Ritchie Courtyard Residences (page 88), are an encouraging sign that some architects and developers are prepared to leave the old typologies behind, and create projects that explore new paradigms.

That most are small in scale is no surprise. On such projects, designers can develop a personal connection with their clients and better understand the needs of the communities in which they are engaged. The hope of course is that their success will attract the attention of planners, politicians and the big industry players, initiating what Nick Sully of SHAPE Architecture refers to as 'the trickle up effect'.



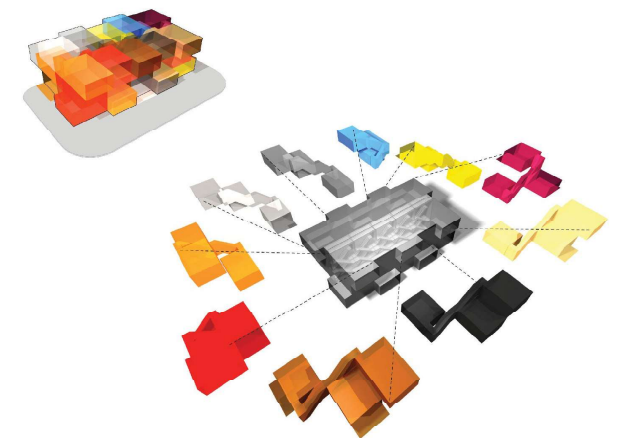
Energy efficiency diagram

- A** Two 4m² solar hot water panels supply radiant heating and domestic hot water
- B** Heat recovery ventilator
- C** Skylights for natural daylighting
- D** Triple-glazed windows R-7
- E** South side solar shading
- F** Super-insulated walls R24 walls, R38 roof, R13 foundation
- G** Bicycle storage

F5.6



F5.7



F5.8