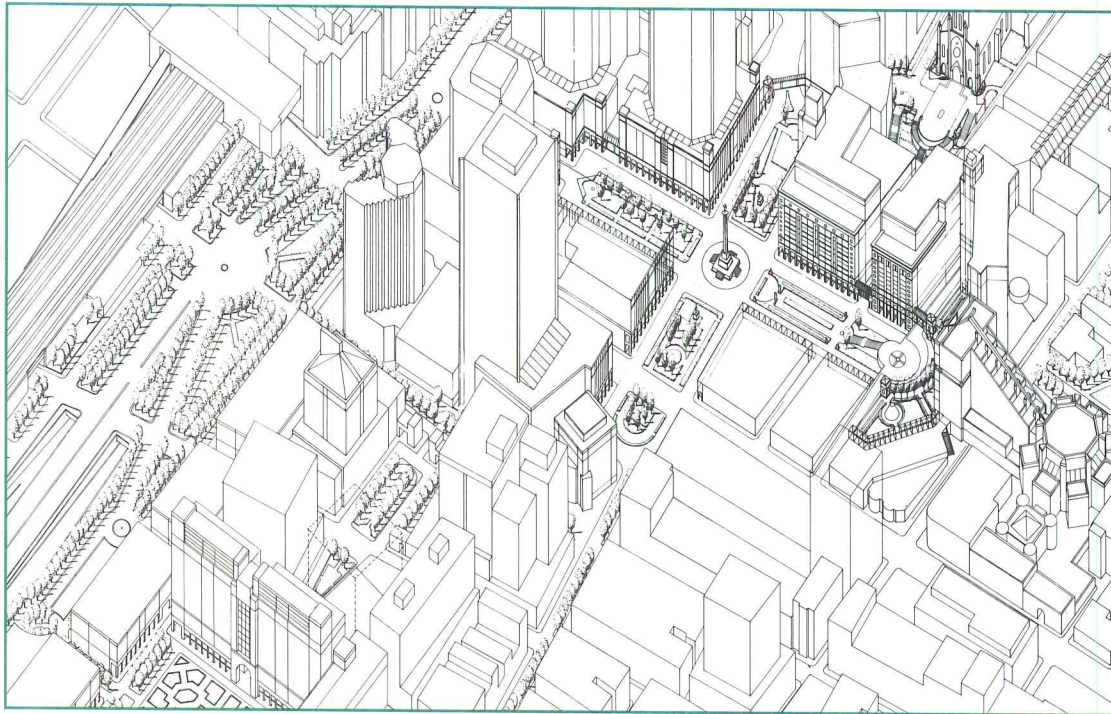
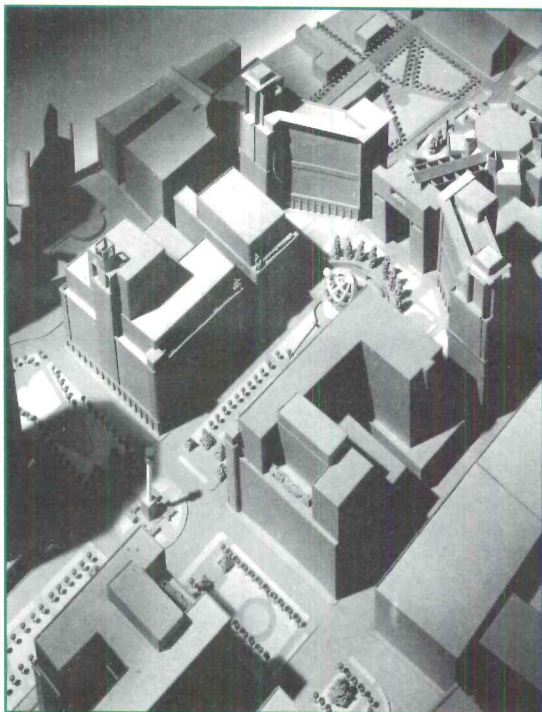


Projects: An Urbane Prospectus for Montreal

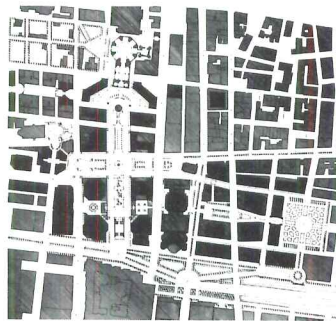
Diverse perspectives on public space emerge in three prize-winning redevelopment schemes.



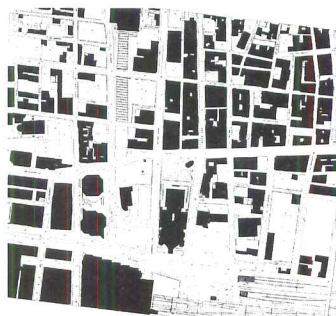
AXONOMETRIC, FIRST PLACE SCHEME FOR INTERNATIONAL CITY OF MONTREAL BY STEVEN PETERSON OF PETERSON/LITTENBERG ARCHITECTS



MODEL (CONFERENCE CENTER IN UPPER RIGHT)



SITE PLAN, PROPOSED



SITE PLAN, EXISTING N 500/150m

The City of Montreal recently held an international “ideas” competition for the design of an important but poorly developed area in its center. The first-prize winner, Steven Peterson of Peterson/Littenberg Architects in New York, submitted a proposal that takes as its departure point the public square; second-prize winners Martin Liefhebber of Toronto and Hiroshi Hara of Tokyo both took the opposite approach, with submissions dominated by powerful conglomerate structures. The contrasting approaches as well as the organization of the competition provide interesting lessons for the saving of our contemporary cities.

Over the last couple of decades, the site designated for the competition suffered badly: Montreal perpetrated sins upon its own flesh. The site, part of the city’s Financial District, forms a link between the retail core of the city and the historic waterfront district. It has a few important properties, such as the Nervi-designed Stock Exchange tower and a historic Bank of Canada building. The area is also the primary southern entrance to Montreal.

In the past the city gave developers little guidance for the area; it mandated few design controls, and allowed traffic engineers to scar it deeply. On the area’s east border, a wide asphalt surface lies open, patiently accepting the onslaught of traffic entering the city from the above-ground highways to the south. And across the middle of the site, east to west, a partially-covered underground highway has left an unattractive scar on a potentially valuable spot.

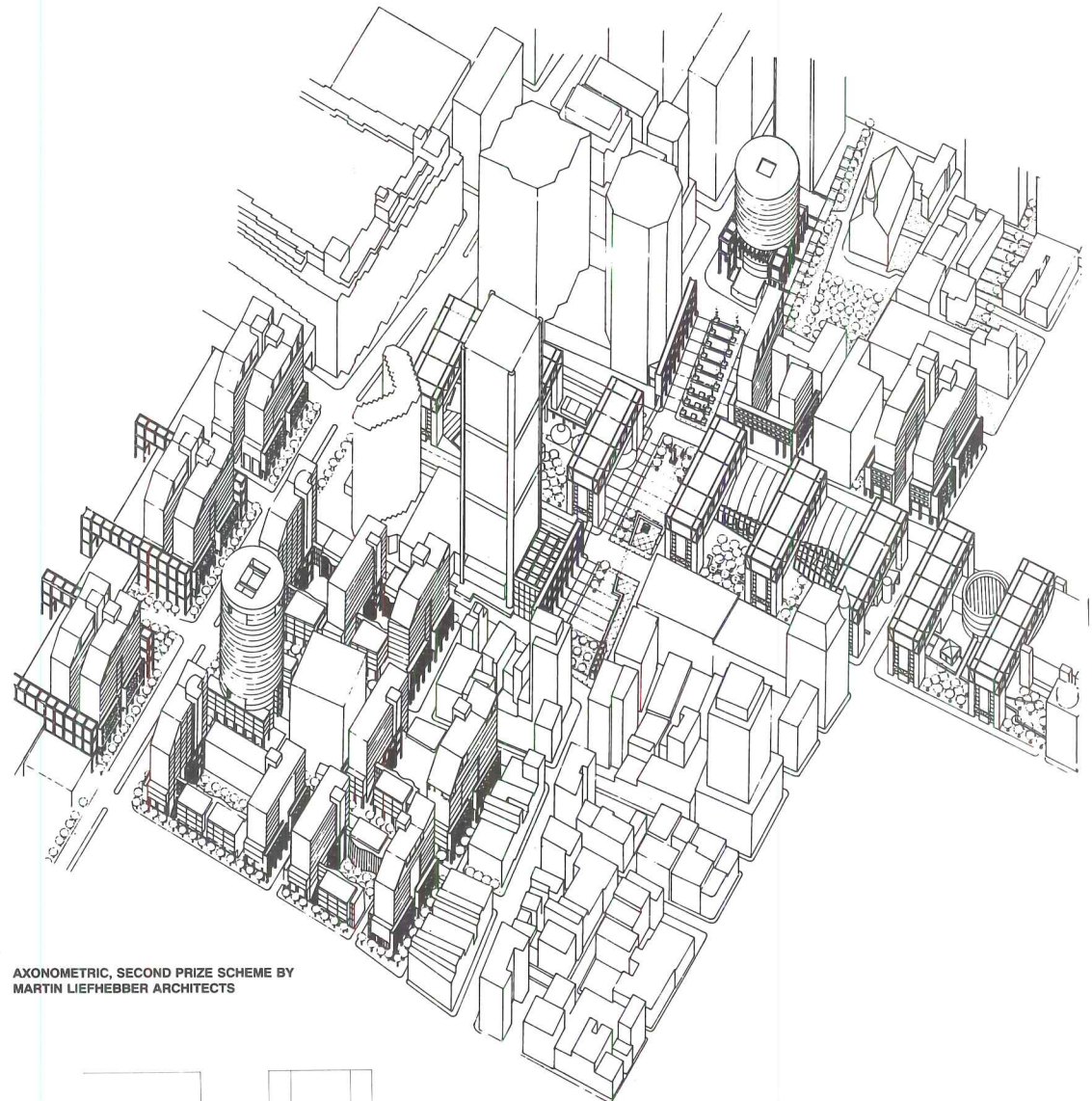
To stop the district’s erosion and to maximize its good qualities, the city decided to seek a vision before it was too late. Taking on major local develop-

ers as partners – who were only too happy to conform to imposed limits if they would enhance property values – the city came up with a marketable theme for the area and organized a design competition to give it shape. Montreal designated the site “The International City.” To attract additional users to a region with the lowest birth rate in the Western world, the leaders decided to promote the city as a seat for international organizations. As part of the design, the 94 entrants were expected to use the air rights over the expressway to reconstitute the urban fabric. They were to preserve specified landmark buildings and to integrate with them an International Conference Center to provide offices and meeting facilities for international organizations.

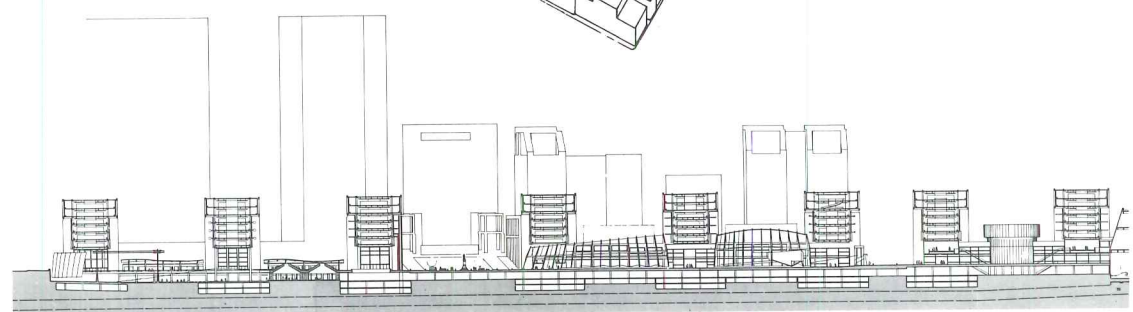
The Premiated Schemes

Peterson/Littenberg Architects, one of five winners in the 1980 Les Halles site competition, and designers of other large urban projects, (including New York’s Clinton Community Master Plan, P/A Award, Jan. 1990, p. 110) proposed a scheme that carves out formal parks, squares, and boulevards at key locations throughout the district. They maintain historic buildings while retaining or increasing the buildable potential of every developer’s property.

The two second-prize winners took a less holistic approach to the redesign of the site and its relationships with the surrounding city. Liefhebber and Hara prescribed large buildings and Modernist plazas to be built over the painful scar – the expressway – at the center. The megastructure designed by Hara is especially beautiful, and would provide, graphically, a striking marketing tool for the city. But instead of mending the urban parts, it would provide yet another wall to divide it. The Liefhebber scheme has similar problems, and obscures the respective responsibilities of the public and private domains. Both schemes fail to take into account the realities of diverse real estate ownership, the need for incremental development, and the local demand for buildings with moderately-sized floorplates.

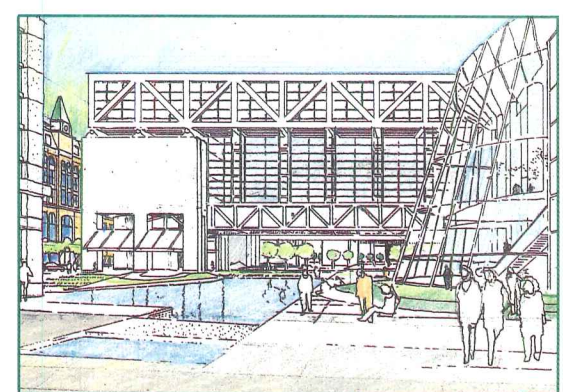


AXONOMETRIC, SECOND PRIZE SCHEME BY MARTIN LIEFHEBBER ARCHITECTS

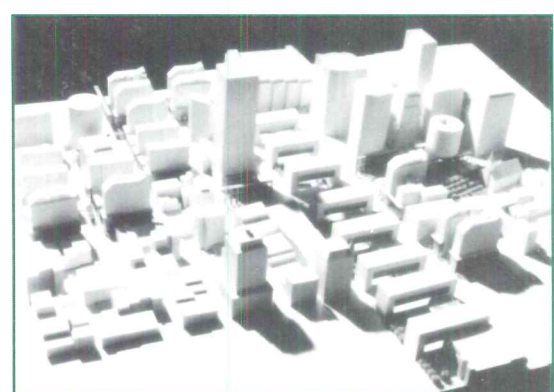


SECTION THROUGH INTERNATIONAL AXIS WITH CONFERENCE CENTER

100/30m



PERSPECTIVE ALONG INTERNATIONAL AXIS



MODEL (CONFERENCE CENTER PROPOSED OVER HIGHWAY)

Martin Liefhebber Architects

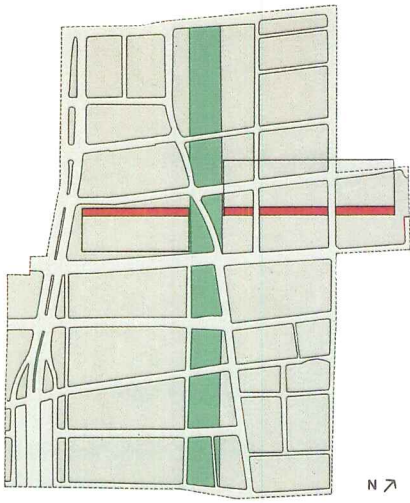
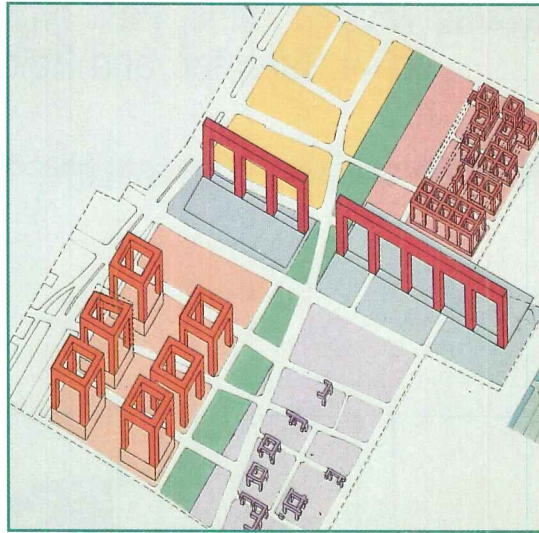


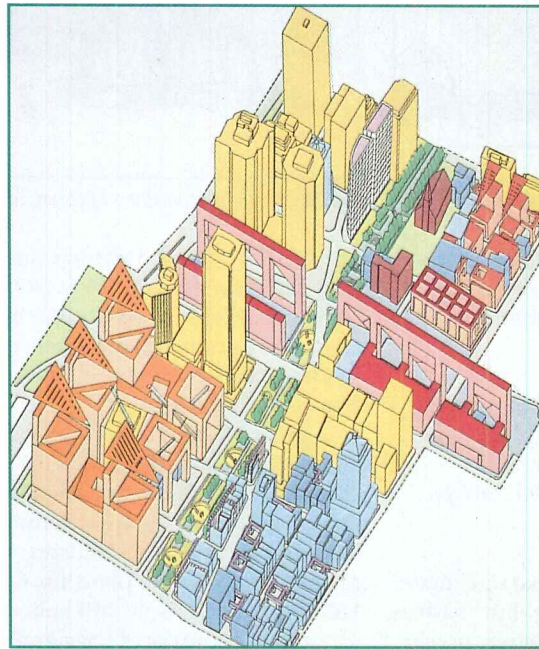
DIAGRAM OF URBAN COORDINATES, SECOND PRIZE SCHEME BY HIROSHI HARA



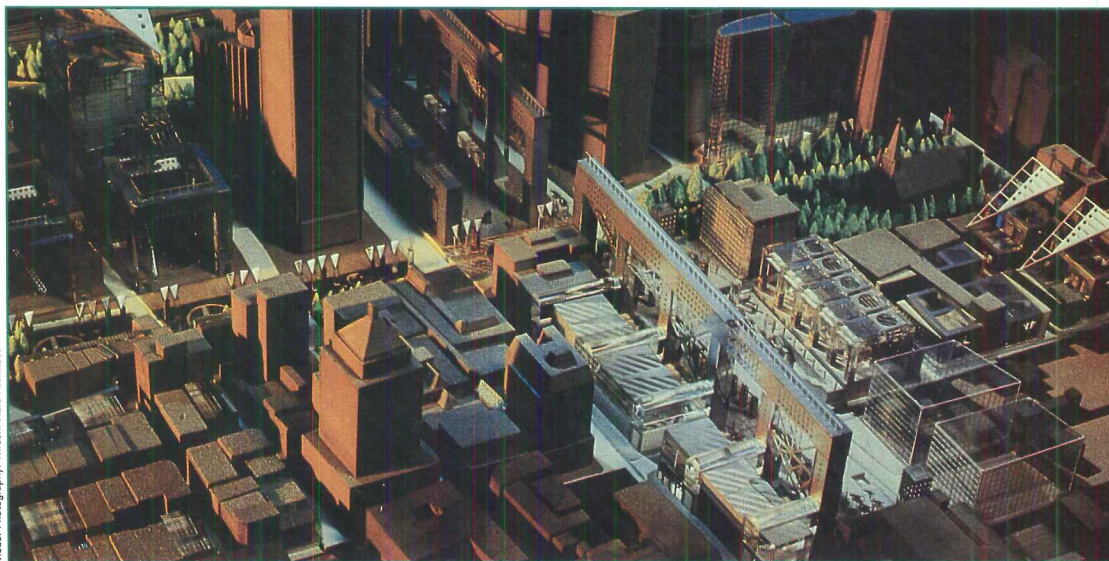
AXONOMETRIC DIAGRAM, URBAN STRUCTURE



MODEL (CONFERENCE CENTER PROPOSED OVER HIGHWAY)



AXONOMETRIC (OFFICE BUILDINGS TO LOWER LEFT)



MODEL (CONFERENCE CENTER WITH ENCLOSED MALL IN FOREGROUND)

Model Photography: Hiroshi Hara Architect

Architecturally, the first-place scheme is not as strong as Hara's second-place design: Peterson's buildings are unexciting, and his strategy of surrounding existing towers with low masses to provide a street wall (shown in the axonometric of the cruciform "Place du Canada") will be difficult to accomplish gracefully. Still, Peterson demonstrates an important point: that new buildings can – indeed should – be built over time by different architects, as long as height and materials guidelines are respected.

Peterson's concept of the city bespeaks his acquaintance with Colin Rowe at Cornell as well as his own 20 years of experience. Peterson believes that the role of the public garden is dominant in the city. But his garden is different from Olmsted's: It is garden-as-structure, a public room around which buildings can be assembled over time. At the west edge of the site, the major entrance to the city, Peterson sets off a new formal park with a wall of buildings. Here he proposes broader setbacks for new construction and a taller building-height limit, thereby defining a bolder city façade. To give form to the gardens in his plan, Peterson collages examples from famous architects and cities – the Spanish Steps of Rome, Parisian squares, and pieces from Serlio – adapted to Montreal: His urban gardens link residential and commercial districts that surround the site.

The City of Montreal has signed a contract with Peterson/Littenberg to develop these ideas further. Certain details – bridging over a major street and the location of the International Conference Center – may be problematic, but the basic design rings a positive note as a method to remake the city.

Susan Doubilet

The author, a former Senior Editor of P/A, works as a freelance journalist and architect in New Jersey. She is a native of Montreal and a graduate of McGill University's School of Architecture.