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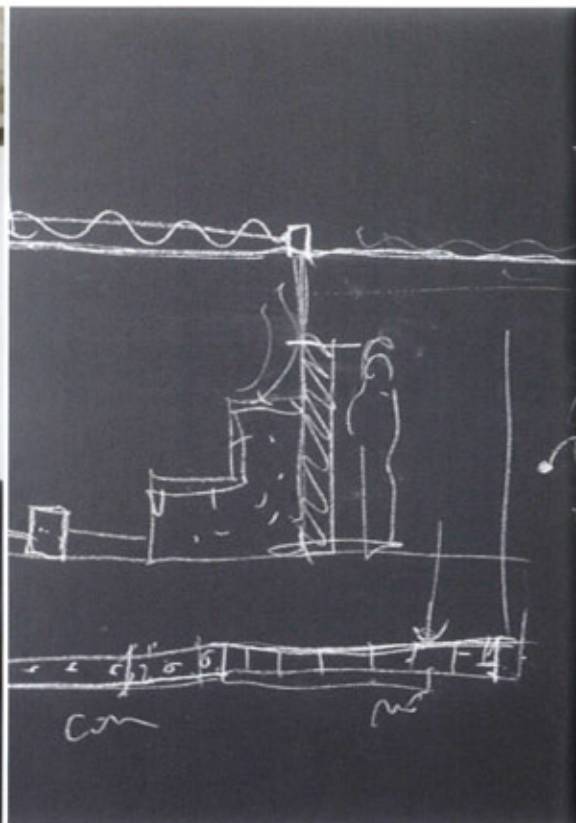
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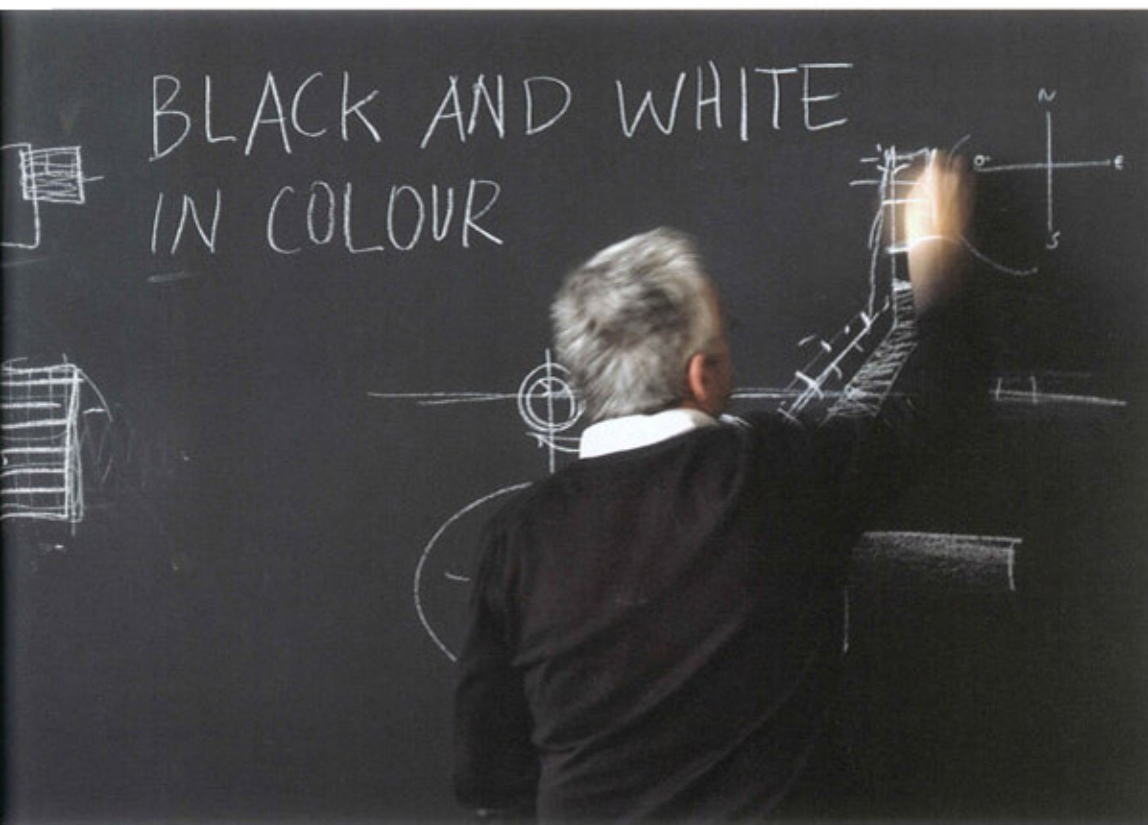
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ABOVE GILLES SAUCIER AND ANDRE PERROTTE, PRINCIPALS OF SAUCIER + PERROTTE, IN THE EX-GARMENT FACTORY IN MONTREAL THEY CARVED INTO A MULTI-USE SPACE FOR CREATING, WORKING AND LIVING. **RIGHT** A BLACKBOARD IN THE ARCHITECTURAL STUDIO HELPS MAKE THE DEVELOPMENT OF IDEAS A COMMUNAL PROJECT.



SAUCIER + PERROTTE'S STUDIO IN AN EX-FACTORY DRAWS ENERGY FROM THE CREATIVE LIFE, WITH SPACE FOR AN ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE ON THE MAIN FLOOR AND A SPECTACULAR LOFT ON THE THIRD

BY ADELE WEDER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY OLIVIER BLOUIN

In a gritty Montreal neighbourhood, Gilles Saucier and André Perrotte, principals of the acclaimed architecture firm Saucier + Perrotte, found a place to call home. The 1940s brick-faced clothing factory was half obscured by foliage and ripe for transformation. Inside, the floors, tables and walls were bristling with pins and strewn with bolts of fabric – “like an art installation,” recalls Saucier. Supporting the robust structure was a grid of massive, half-metre-thick concrete posts that allowed a wide-open expanse of space. “We just saw that,” recalls Saucier, “and said to each other, ‘Oh, boy – we’ve found our place.’”

Today, four years after their first walk-through of the old factory – and after weeks spent removing pins from the floorboard crevices with magnets – the structure is now a 1,800-square-metre office-atelier-gallery-loft. The street entrance leads half a flight down to an elegantly spare space: epoxy-polished concrete floor, reception, conference room, artist’s workshop, gallery space. The newly installed central staircase, which necessitated a 27-square-metre incision in the floor, ascends to the second-floor studio and model-making area. Saucier’s private apartment is situated on the third level and extends to a fourth-floor mezzanine/terrace.



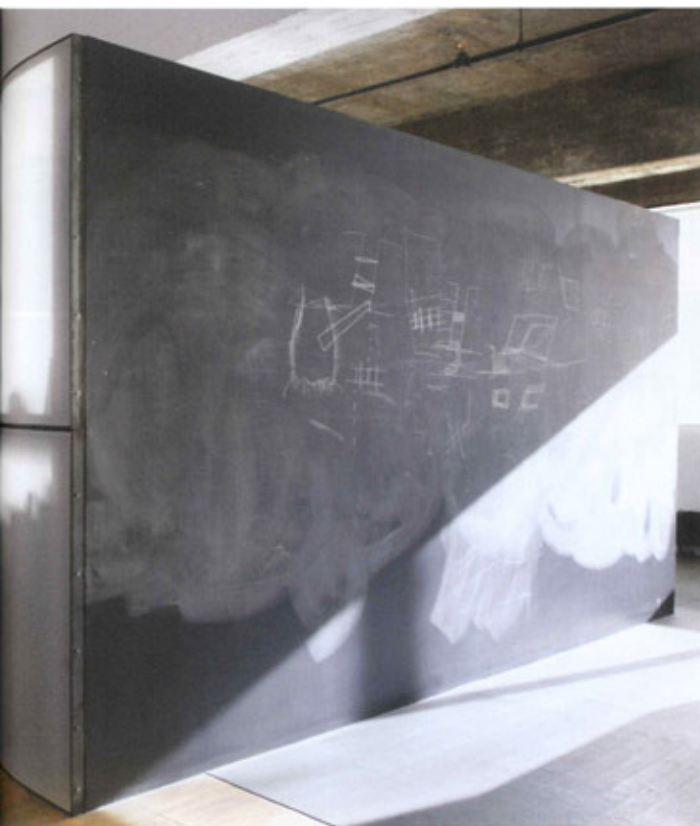
TOP AN EMPHATIC DIAGONAL STAIRCASE LEADS FROM THE GROUND-FLOOR RECEPTION AREA TO THE ARCHITECTURAL STUDIO ON THE SECOND FLOOR. **ABOVE LEFT** ADJACENT TO THE RECEPTION AREA IS A SMALL SPACE FOR DISPLAYING PHOTOS AND A MODEL OF THE FIRM'S ARCHITECTURE. WHITE WALLS AND BLACK ACCENTS LEND THE ENTIRE PROJECT THE AIR OF A SCULPTURE GALLERY. **ABOVE CENTRE AND RIGHT** THE GROUND FLOOR – ACTUALLY HALF BELOW GRADE – HOUSES A WORKSHOP AND GALLERY FOR THE ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE. SHOWN ARE WORKS BY GUY PELLERIN, RESIDENT FROM FALL 2007 UNTIL JANUARY 2008.

Saucier lives literally just steps away from the studio in which he spends half of each day, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Don't the two realms ever get hard to separate? No, he insists: "I'm mature enough that I can tell the difference between my life and my *life*." From which it might be inferred that his professional and personal lives may well be distinct, but they feed off each other voraciously.

Perrotte, by contrast, lives across the St. Lawrence River with his family, in an old house in the Saint-Lambert district. "I like to have a certain distance from work," he says. To some extent, the partners' living situations also reflect their design approach. Saucier dives right in, like a sculptor into clay – "I'm the improv guy," as he puts it. Perrotte is the detached analyst, more inclined to view the coarse reality of a situation.

The building itself is located on a wide, tree-lined street filled with a mix of simple brick housing stock and vintage industrial buildings. A few blocks away is the busy Jean-Talon Market, and a few steps from that is the city's Little Italy, on the northern stretch of Boulevard Saint-Laurent. The neighbourhood includes blue-collar workers, Italian cafés, tailors and grocers, and pockets of working artists attracted to its low rents, continental character and fusion of cultures and ethnicities.

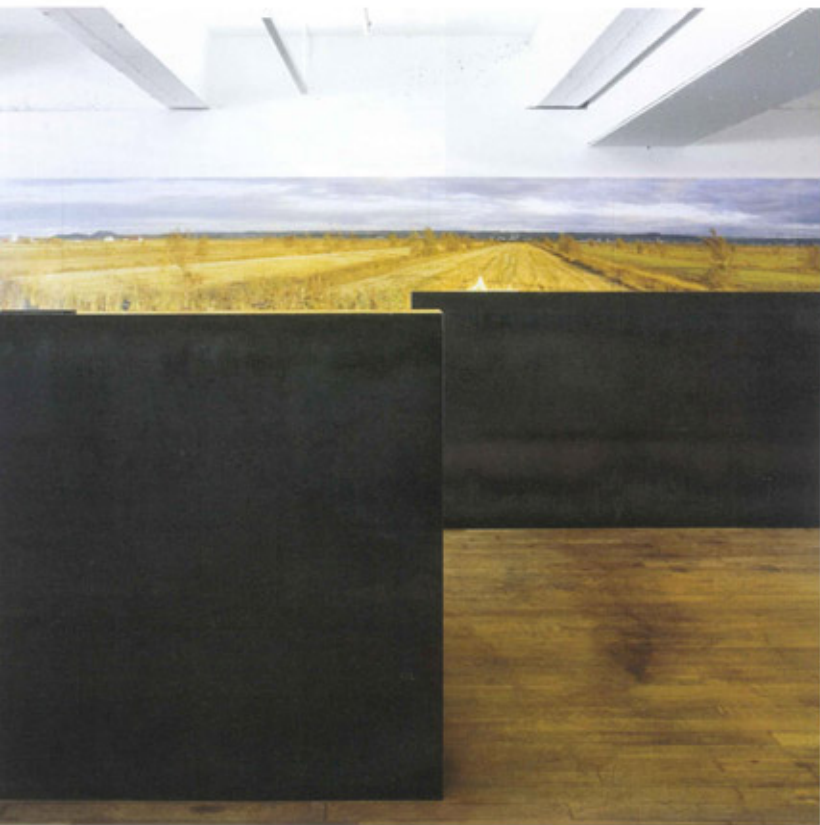
The solid concrete slab-and-beam construction and massive columns generate the aura of an oversized stage set. The dominant colour is black, a dark chiaroscuro rather than the slick, stark black



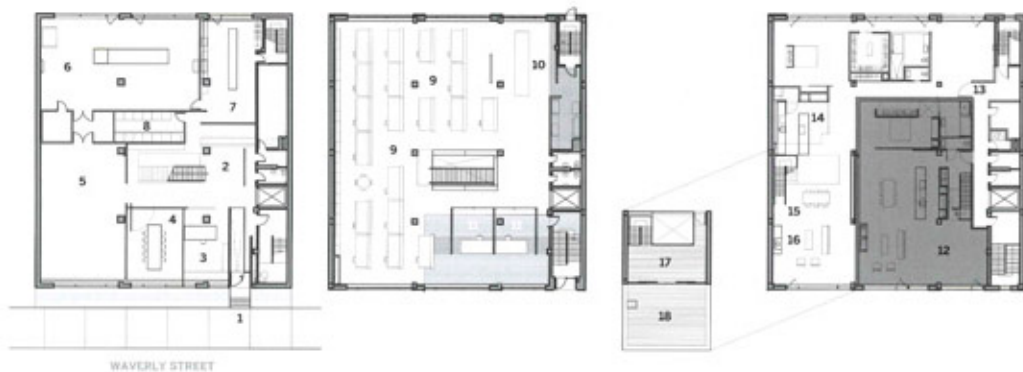
ABOVE THE TWO PRINCIPALS OCCUPY ADJOINING CUBE-SHAPED WORKSPACES, BACKED BY TRANSLUCENT BARRISOL AND BOOKENDED BY A BLACKBOARD. **TOP AND BOTTOM RIGHT** IN THE ARCHITECTURAL STUDIO, WORKSTATIONS BRACKETED WITH HOT-ROLLED STEEL KEEP CREATIVE CLUTTER AT BAY. THE EXISTING MAPLE FLOOR WAS CLEANED AND POLISHED YET RETAINS IMPRESSIONS FROM THE FORMER FACTORY WORKERS.

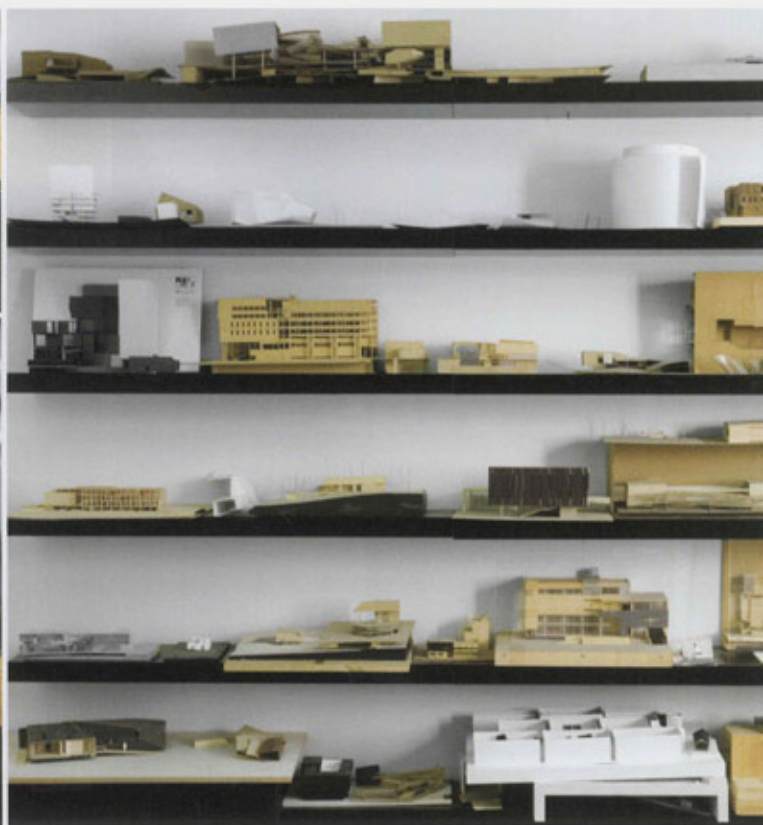
of S + P's earlier work. In Montreal in general, and at S + P in particular, black is always the new black. It's subtly textured, not quite pitch or jet black, but some indefinite hue that reflects the relative purity of a particular brand of modernism – the chalkboard and matte black rubber floor demarcating the two principals' working quarters, for example. "The black we're using now is more charged with experience," says Saucier. "We do colourful black." (In a life-imitates-art moment, Perrotte steps out from an accounting meeting to greet a visitor, his black hair artfully streaked with lines of white.)

Quebec designers in general, and S + P in particular, have always shown more influence from continental Europe than their counterparts elsewhere in Canada. The European influence does not simply manifest itself in a particular form or shade of black, but rather in a general approach to creation, which involves drawing on all the arts to inform it. The mandate of the S + P architecture studio is to be a creative laboratory for the 20-odd employees, mostly architects. To this end, the principals have established an artist-in-residence program, supplying a visual artist with a temporary atelier/workshop, as well as a gallery on the ground floor to exhibit the finished project or research at the end of his or her sojourn. The workshop and gallery may occasionally be used for performing arts, but, notably, the space is not earmarked for visiting architects. At S + P, these spaces function as labs for the firm's broader architectural research. "The real nourishment of architecture is art, not other architecture," insists Saucier.



ABOVE THE VISUAL LANDSCAPE CREATED BY THE SCULPTURAL WORKSTATIONS IS HEIGHTENED BY A VIVID PHOTOGRAPHIC MURAL BY MARC CBAMER. **TOP AND BOTTOM RIGHT** MODEL-MAKING IS INTEGRAL TO S + P'S ARCHITECTURAL PROCESS.





ABOVE THE FIRM'S EVOLUTION IS EMBODIED IN THE MODELS OF BUILT WORK AND COMPETITION ENTRIES ON DISPLAY IN THE STUDIO.

- 1 ENTRANCE
- 2 RECEPTION
- 3 ADMINISTRATION
- 4 CONFERENCE ROOM
- 5 GALLERY
- 6 WORKSHOP
- 7 KITCHEN
- 8 ARCHIVES
- 9 ARCHITECTURAL STUDIO
- 10 WORK TABLE
- 11 OFFICE
- 12 CONDOMINIUM SUITE
- 13 LOFT ENTRANCE
- 14 LOFT KITCHEN
- 15 DINING AREA
- 16 LIVING AREA
- 17 MEZZANINE
- 18 PATIO

To be sure, the architectural field has not always been kind or fair to the firm. In competitions, S + P has a history of being the jury's pick, but then seeing the commissions evaporate as those decisions are overruled. An international jury recommended S + P for the Canadian Embassy in Berlin in a competition in the late 1990s, but their recommendation was ignored by the foreign affairs minister of the day, to the shock and dismay of many in Canada's design community. Later, S + P won the juried competition to design the Institute of Modern and Contemporary Art in Calgary, but was dropped in favour of an architect chosen by the project's lead donor. The competition process has helped establish the firm's reputation and provided it with fertile ground for developing and showing off its creativity – but has not feathered its bed. Only recently has it enjoyed big-league success outside of its hometown, representing Canada at the 2004 Venice Biennale of Architecture, and with major projects such as the Perimeter Institute in Waterloo, Ontario, and the \$35-million National Mountain Centre in Canmore, Alberta, now under way.

The raw inspiration for S + P's architectural form often derives from the etherality of the visual arts. "The integration of art is something that comes naturally to us," says Saucier. "It's integral to our work. The studio residency helps the artists, but it's also the perfect tool for what we do as architects." For Saucier, the design team is influenced by osmosis. "It's not a zoo, as in 'Let's watch the artist at



TOP IN GILLES SAUCIER'S THIRD-FLOOR LOFT, A 25-SQUARE-METRE SECTION OF THE ROOF SLAB WAS REMOVED TO CREATE A DOUBLE-HEIGHT SPACE AND A FOURTH-FLOOR MEZZA-NINE AND PATIO, CONNECTED VIA A RUSSIAN BIRCH PLYWOOD STAIRCASE. **RIGHT** DESIGNED BY SAUCIER, THE LOFT REFLECTS THE FIRM'S TRADEMARK PALETTE OF BLACK, WHITE AND GREY. SIMPLE WHITE CABINETS ARE USED IN THE KITCHEN, AND THE FLOORING IS THE ORIGINAL DISTRESSED MAPLE.

work.' It's more about the inspiration he provides," he says. Perrotte is more prosaically specific: the artist has a morning coffee or a midday encounter with the architects, giving them a chance to ask something about colour or form, or anything else they might want input on.

The aura of a sculpture gallery persists in areas for administration and meetings on the ground floor. And the drama created by the emphatic charcoal black diagonal of the main staircase is reinforced on the second floor by the rows of hot-rolled metal bracketing the studio workstations ("like a Richard Serra installation," observes Saucier). There, the original wide-plank maple floor retains the traces of factory workers. S + P chose not to sand the floors, maintaining the original patina to embody the memory of the workers who once animated the space. More history is contained in the army green metal boxes and long wooden tables, formerly used for cutting fabric and retained by S + P for model making. Counterbalanced by all those dark, solid elements is the heart-stopping backdrop on the rear wall: a huge photographic mural called *Kamouraska*, by Marc Cramer, filled with fields of ochre grasses. "We tried as much as possible to react to what we found," rather than intervene to erase it, says Perrotte. "Like an artist's studio of the 19th century, it's more about how the creators inhabit the space, more about things like indirect lighting than luxurious finishes."



ABOVE IN THE DINING AREA, A TABLE DESIGNED BY SAUCIER IS COMBINED WITH EAMES CHAIRS AND AN ARTEMIDE SUSPENSION FIXTURE. **LEFT** THE ORIGINAL RADIATORS, STRIPPED OF COVERS, BECOME INDUSTRIAL ARTIFACTS. WITH MODIFICATIONS KEPT TO A MINIMUM, THE SPACE ITSELF BECOMES THE LUXURY.

Upstairs on the third floor, in the private realm of Saucier's own apartment, a portion of the upper slab was removed to create a fourth-floor mezzanine and patio. The apartment unfurls in a linear narrative, bending around a condominium suite in an L-shaped plan that culminates in the double-height living/dining area. Here, a strong, sculptural element was needed to imbue the space with intimacy and personality. "You cannot just put a couch in the middle of a huge area and say, 'Oh, this is the living area'," says Saucier. "You need a reference" – hence the uniquely shaped Russian birch plywood staircase. Close cropped to the underside of the risers and runners, it evokes an upside-down M.C. Escher drawing, or the menacing edge of a serrated knife.

That third-floor enclave, Saucier's own design, transmits the firm's esthetic code and vision for the building: the use of space rather than surface to create an aura, a narrow range of colours, and above all a sense of height and openness on every floor. The openness is reinforced by the huge aperture for the dramatic central staircase, which beckons a visitor upstairs to the main action.

Four floors and extracurricular programs notwithstanding, the overall effect is one of unity. "This may sound strange, but I see it as a humble project," says Perrotte. "We have simple goals, and in a way tried to do as little as possible to it. It's the space itself that's precious." **A2**