

# DOL OXYGEN

THE INTERNATIONAL DESIGN ART ARCHITECTURE QUARTERLY

## ARNE QUINZE

A LOOK INSIDE THE MIND OF  
BELGIUM'S STREET KID  
TURNED DESIGNER

HUSSEIN CHALAYAN  
FASHION'S NEW AVANT GARB

BEHIND THE GREAT WALL  
EDWARD BURTYNSKY PHOTOGRAPHS  
CHINA'S INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

SAUCIER & PERROTTE  
MONTREAL ARCHITECTS  
OF THE IMAGINATION

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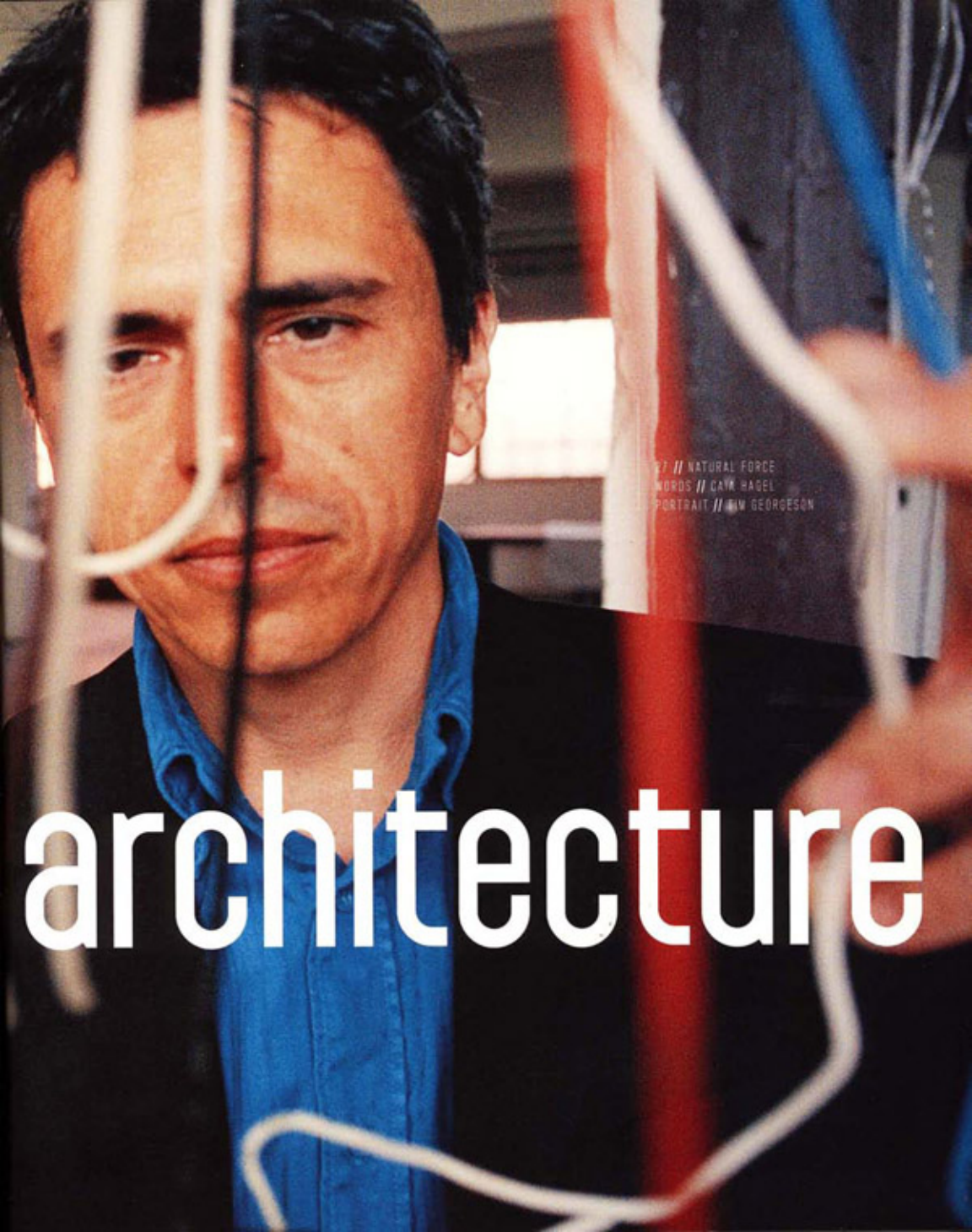




# feeling

TAKE THE SWEEP  
OF CANADIAN  
ARCHITECTURE AND  
TWO MONTREAL  
ARCHITECTS IN LOVE  
WITH THE HUMAN  
STORY, THE RESULTS  
ARE PURE MAGIC.





47 // NATURAL FORCE  
WORDS // CARY HAGEL  
PORTRAIT // TIM GEORGESON

# architecture

IN A BIG, AIRY WAREHOUSE OF MILD  
GREY AND BLACK INTERIORS,  
GILLES SAUCIER AND ANDRÉ PERROTTE  
- OTHERWISE KNOWN AS SAUCIER+PERROTTE -  
SIT SIDE BY SIDE AT A LONG TABLE,  
SERENE AMID THE INDUSTRIAL CHAOS  
OF NORTH MONTREAL OUTSIDE.

They are surrounded by inspired artefacts – abstract photographs, models, deconstructions of models, stones – that are like random and prized sculpture-friends. Saucier is animated, pacing the room as he relates the story of a Cambridge physician who once asked him to define space.

"I drew a line," Saucier grins at Perrotte. "The physician was intrigued, so I told him our theory: 'The line comes from the darkness of emptiness and gives it two sides, duality, a horizon. How do we link them? With openings. How do we activate them? By looking into the holes so that depth and space appear. How do we give that

depth, those spaces meaning? By translating them into a building.' The act of building spaces, I told him, finally, is the act of taking certain intimate control of the horizon, non?"

"Oui", Perrotte agrees, nodding his head. He remains seated, smiling, with his hands folded in his lap, content to leave the talking to his associate.

Saucier concedes such poetic concepts are rarely used when defining architecture, that most pragmatic of disciplines. "Our ideals keep us bent over the existential question: can we trust bringing landscape into very urban settings?" says Perrotte. Kurt W. Forster, a director of the 2004 Venice Biennale, which featured an exhibit by Saucier+Perrotte entitled *Found Objects*, pondered this question too. In their work he recognised the lingering effects of the vast and subtle landscapes where they grew up. Forster pre-empted any critics who may have been confronted by the unusual sensuality of the duo's work by asking: "Can you trust Kamouraska? [the rural area in Quebec, Canada, where

**FACING PAGE** Rendering of the Canadian Museum of Human Rights, competition finalist 2004. Designed as an articulation of the Canadian environment, the transparent, translucent, white and mirrored glasses are evocative of snow and ice. "The memory of spirit travels through this enclosure and is manifested by the Core, which stretches and extends ... to form the Grand Hall and the Walk of Shame, and ultimately, the Space of Hope ... necessary after the intense content of the Museum."







Saucier's young mind was formed]. When something different surfaces in architecture, the question of its nature always entails a quest for its origins."

#### NATURAL ORIGINS

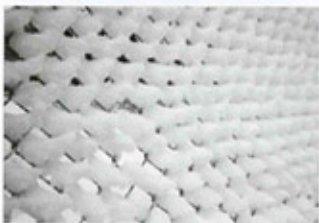
Saucier's place of origin, Trois Pistoles, is a small French Canadian town more remarkable for its isolation than anything else. He remembers being captivated by ancient rockscapes and long stretches of soft fields. "If you're a contemplative young boy, you just stand there and look around," he says. "I was very interested in plants and graphic lines and subtle anecdotes in the landscape, to the point that I began my studies in biology, before switching to architecture." Perrotte's provenance, the suburbs of Quebec City, was equally monumental in instilling ideas in the grown man. "It wasn't dense," he says. "We weren't exposed to urbanity. It was a quiet, community-based life in which nature played a large part. I was shocked when I discovered how important urbanity was in architecture."

When they met at Laval University's architecture program in the late 1970's, Saucier and Perrotte agreed on an aesthetic right away. "We both worked in other Montreal firms after our graduation in 1982, still thinking about a lot of what we had discussed while studying together, mostly about simplifying structures, and using sensitivity in the approach," remembers Saucier. "Then the funniest thing happened. We were hired by the same firm, Saia [which is no longer], and I was fighting with one of the bosses. While gesticulating with my arms and hands, I saw André through the window, and I signed to him 'What should I do?' André made a motion of cutting his throat with his hand, so I told the boss I was leaving. I went to André later and told him I'd done it. 'Done what?' he asked. 'Quit, like you told me to,' I said. 'But I meant stop fighting, not quit working!' André replied. So André suggested that we start our own firm, and that was the beginning, in 1988."

"I'm the one that talks all the time, going off on tangents, racing around with my camera. I take pictures of things that inspire me – a Finnish draft table, blue shadows reflecting off snow in my backyard, an oil pipe running through Russia, the dip in a rock, a small lamp – it can be anything. André is the strategist."

«GILLES SAUCIER»

**FACING PAGE** First Nations Garden, Montreal, 2001. Celebrating the indigenous inhabitants of North America, the pavilion is a sinuous construct winding through Montreal's botanic gardens. Minimising impact on the landscape, museum workspaces and storage facilities are below ground, while public spaces are grouped in two small blocks at either end of the canopy. **BELOW:** "I take pictures of things that inspire me," Saucier takes inspiration from the environment, a source of captivation since his youth in Kamouraska.



That one instance has proven to be the exception to the rule, as the two have not had a misunderstanding since. For 17 years, they have discussed their projects and ideas over lunch every day. "We've evolved a system that works between us," says Saucier. "I'm the one that talks all the time, going off on tangents, racing around with my camera. I take pictures of things that inspire me – a Finnish draft table, blue shadows reflecting off snow in my backyard, an oil pipe running through Russia, the dip in a rock, a small lamp – it can be anything. André is the strategist. He's much better at implementing the logistics involved in our work than I am."

#### CONNECTING PEOPLE AND ENVIRONMENT

Among the most well known of their works are the First Nations Pavilion (Botanical Gardens, Montreal, 2001) and Montreal Pavilion (Shanghai, 2000). Perrotte comments, "Our buildings tend to be a collection of souvenirs of a quiet relationship between people and their environment". The First Nations Pavilion, for example, celebrates the indigenous inhabitants of North America. It is a sinuous construct that originated from a drawing

inspired by walking through the woods. "It's a path that runs through the midpoint between a coniferous and a deciduous forest, then suspended 10 feet," says Saucier. "By representing the midpoint – between earth and sky, inside and outside, old artefacts and new forms, one tree genus and another – it becomes an appropriate space in which to celebrate a crossroads of cultures [the permanent Native art collection]."

The Montreal Pavilion was inspired by the scale and power of the Canadian landscape. Its transparent pavilion creates a dialogue between the building, the people and the park, another example of Saucier+Perrotte's achievement in animating the sentient aspects of natural environments within the urban arena. The Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics (Waterloo, Canada, 2004, see *POL Oxygen* Issue 13) is a steel and glass structure with an asymmetrical, windowed facade which recalls the 'holes through the horizon' theory, and underlines its occupants' investigations into the mystery of natural forces. "It's an organism, a microcosm of discrete elements," the pair explain. Taking the idea still further will be The Cirque du Soleil Chapiteau, a

"[Their work] celebrates simplicity and the grace of natural patterns. There's poetry to it, there is something Latin in the work, something definably French, rather than Anglo Canadian."

»PHYLIS LAMBERT, CANADIAN CENTRE FOR ARCHITECTURE«







**THIS PAGE AND FACING PAGE** Faculty of Music, McGill University, 2005. The west facade is composed of matt and polished aluminum, reflecting the Strathcona building adjacent to the new structure. Punched windows, reminiscent of old-time mechanical piano rolls, allow light to infuse the smaller spaces inside.







OPPOSITE New College Residence, University of Toronto, 2004. Seven floors of residence create a home for students, and co-ed communal areas allow for social interaction. Two hanging gardens connect the residence to the natural environment.  
 ABOVE Culture, Communication and Information Technology Building, University of Toronto, 2004. Poised on the edge of the campus, the new building acts as a filter between the natural forest, and the tamed and controlled gardens.

2,300-seat theatre in Tokyo, due for completion in 2008. "I can't say much about it," Saucier comments, beaming. "But I will tell you that it explores the nomadic tradition and the idea of being temporarily somewhere but within a fixed space."

"The work of Saucier+Perrotte has a strong sensibility to location and materiality," says Phyllis Lambert from the Canadian Centre for Architecture. "[Their work] celebrates simplicity [painted steel, the colours black and white, glass, the absence of joints] and the grace of natural patterns. There's poetry to it, there is something Latin in the work, something definably French, rather than Anglo Canadian," she says. Agreeing with Lambert's remarks, Saucier adds, "I hate this idea of over-precision. There's no life in it."

Representing Canada at the 2004 Venice Biennale, Saucier+Perrotte decided to bring their working tenets to life in three dimensions. By juxtaposing photographs, video and sculpture, spectators could follow the exploration of "the constantly renewed reading and reconstruction of memory landscapes". Forster said of the exhibition and their work, "By transposing the appearance of geological features from youthful knowledge of the land into buildings conceived in maturity, they have discovered their 'Madeleine'.

They make architecture that takes shape as a collective image extracted from – and re-embedded in – the land of which it has become a part." Saucier recalls, "A critic in London wrote that our work was a vehicle for understanding how to *feel* architecture, versus the usual viewing of plans, which are intellectual. He was right, our approach was about emotions. Instead of looking for the soul in a building, you *make* the building soul. That's our belief. I think that by presenting our research the way we did, people participated in the creative process, it rang a bell for them on different levels. I think it's disturbing if work is only appreciated in one dimension."

In the office, the ambient effects of Saucier and Perrotte's architectural values are palpable, and the answer to the existential question about trusting their earthy vision seems to be 'yes'. It is a space that, even while filled with light, feels more cave-like and evocative of the meditative muteness of rocks and placid panoramas than its reality as a busy office in downtown Montreal. "To us, a building is about feelings. It's the impressions you get while inside it that you remember," says Saucier. "Yes," Perrotte adds. "Post-modernism is very observant, it involves standing outside. We bring people back inside. We like warmth; we like the human story."