

**Modern *savoir-faire*: Ernest Cormier, “Architect and Engineer-Constructor,”
and architecture’s representational constructions**

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by

Aliki Economides

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Abstract

This dissertation is a historical study of the life and work of French-Canadian architect and engineer, Ernest Cormier (1885-1980), who is considered to be among the most important Canadian architects of his generation, yet about whom relatively few scholarly studies exist. In light of the range of issues raised by Cormier’s work and their degree of importance to an understanding of Canadian culture at large during the first half of the twentieth century, this dissertation argues that no other architect operating in Canada during the interwar period made a contribution that touched on so many salient issues as Cormier did.

A cosmopolitan figure who tapped into everything available to him, Cormier’s multidisciplinary practice spanned over five decades in his native city of Montréal, and reflects his synthesis of diverse influences, his role as an agent of cultural transfer, and his remarkable degree of *savoir-faire* in everything he undertook. Entrusted with important commissions at local, national and international levels, Cormier’s contribution merits further study both as a milestone in the development of architecture in Canada, and for what it reveals about the charged sociocultural dynamics of Montréal at that time, which was then the cultural and economic capital of the country.

Cormier was particularly active during the interwar period, which was an important time in the advent of cultural modernity in the province of Québec, and in the development of a national consciousness among French Canadians. Focused primarily on the close study of two

very different yet interrelated projects by Cormier that date from this period, this dissertation contends that the house he designed for himself (1930-31) and the main pavilion of the Université de Montréal (1924-43) are his most important works, both for what they reveal about his sustained commitments as well as for the innovative ways in which they address the conditions of modernity, and thus, critically illuminate the opportunities and constraints of their time and place.

Heavily reliant on the study of archival materials alongside empirical analyses of the buildings, and readings from a range of interdisciplinary sources in order to take account of the work's meaning and significance within and beyond architecture culture, a central leitmotif of this study is the theme of 'construction' construed both as a preoccupation internal to Cormier's oeuvre and as a theoretical orientation driving my analysis of his work. In the first instance, the figure of the *constructeur* [constructor] is incorporated into Cormier's professional title to better align himself with French architecture and engineering culture, particularly with the work of Auguste Perret, whom he greatly admired. As well, for Cormier, construction in the sense of building things, is inseparable from design, and finds sustained expression in his deep curiosity for how things are made, his investment in making at all scales across diverse métiers and media, and his exacting standards for all of his work to be well executed. Finally, keenly attendant to architecture's communicative function, this dissertation examines the profound representational role played by the Cormier residence and the Université de Montréal in the construction of identity at the respective scales of the individual and that of a collective.

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For Alexandros,
who radiates love and light,
and reminds me what is most important.

List of Abbreviations

ARMS	Archives and Records Management Services, United Nations Headquarters
AVM	Archives de la Ville de Montréal / City of Montréal Archives
BAnQ	Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec
CCA	Canadian Centre for Architecture / Centre Canadien d'architecture
DBC	Dominion Bridge Company
DPLG	Diplômé par le Gouvernement
EBA	École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts
FEC	Fonds Ernest Cormier
<i>JRAIC</i>	Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada
LAC	Library and Archives Canada / Bibliothèque et Archives Canada
MMFA	Montréal Museum of Fine Arts / Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal
PQAA	Province of Québec Association of Architects / Association des architectes de la province du Québec
RAC	Rockefeller Archive Center
RAIC	Royal Architectural Institute of Canada / Institut royal d'architecture du Canada
RBSC	Rare Books and Special Collections, McGill University
RIBA	Royal Institute of British Architects
UdeM	Université de Montréal
UN	United Nations

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- Figure 3.5** A photograph by Cormier of an image of a bas-relief of a ram’s head, that seems to have been the direct inspiration for the ornament on the central upper levels of the side and rear façade of the Cormier residence.
Source: P.4928, box Cormier 01-Photos-05P, FEC, CCA
- Figure 3.6** A folio plate showing examples of bas-reliefs by students of the École Boulle in Paris. Of interest is image 3, showing a sculptural relief of a ram’s head.
Source: Henri Rapin, ed., *La Sculpture décorative moderne*, 3^{ème} série (Paris: Éditeur Ch. Moreau, 1929), Pl. 5; Ernest Cormier Library, Collection, CCA.
- Figure 3.7** Front elevation and sectional elevation of the front facade, Cormier Residence (1930-31), 1418 Pine Avenue West, Montréal.
Source: Ernest Cormier, drawing #3005 – 1 (dated September 4, 1930), graphite on vellum, ARCH5977, folder 01-3005-01, box Cormier 01-3005-01M, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 3.8** Cormier’s drawing of the tall window on the front elevation of his residence bracketed by a bas-relief of three vertical floral bands above, and a planter box with four bas-reliefs of grapes below.
Source: Ernest Cormier, detail of drawing #3005 – 1 (dated September 4, 1930), ARCH5977, folder 01-3005-01, box Cormier 01-3005-01M, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 3.9** A photograph by Cormier of an image of a bas-relief of a cluster of grapes. The name, artist or source of the work is not identified on the print. With subtle modifications this seems to have been the direct inspiration for the ornament found on three sides of the planter box on the front elevation of his residence.
Source: P.4924, box Cormier 01-Photos-05P, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 3.10** A folio plate showing examples of bas-reliefs by Saupique. Of interest is image 4, which is identified as a decorative bas-relief of grapes for the Church of Minimés at Rethel, by the architect Glaize.
Source: Henri Rapin, ed., *La Sculpture décorative moderne à l’exposition des arts décoratifs de 1925*, 2^{me} série (Paris: Éditeur Ch. Moreau, 1925), Pl. 30; Ernest Cormier Library, Collection, CCA.
- Figure 3.11** Photograph of the bas-relief above front door to Cormier’s residence, photographed February 16, 2009.
Source: “Le 1418 ave. des Pins Ouest,” © Philippe du Berger, Flickr Photo Sharing, accessed October 19, 2014, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/urbexplo/4308821495>

- Figure 3.12** Photograph of the main entry to Cormier’s residence at 1418 Pine Avenue West, Montréal (1930-31), photographed February 16, 2009.
Source: “Le 1418 ave. des Pins Ouest,” © Philippe du Berger, Flickr Photo Sharing, accessed October 19, 2014, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/urbexplo/4308821301>
- Figure 3.13** Elevation and sections through the front entrance of the Cormier residence.
Source: Ernest Cormier, drawing of “Détail[s] de l’entrée principale,” c.1930-31, ARCH270908, folder 01-3005-04, box Cormier 01-3005-01M, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 3.14** A photograph of the main entry to Cormier’s residence at 1418 Pine Avenue West, Montréal (1930-31), taken c.1990. The black and white image captures the dramatic shadows cast by the wall elements under certain lighting conditions, which reinforce the perception that the logic of a bas-relief sculpture generated the design of the entire façade.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990-0138, box Szilasi II 1, Collection, CCA.
- Figure 3.15** A stylized graphic representation of the bas-relief above the front door of Cormier’s residence, derived from the logo designed by Carina Rose for the 10th international Art Deco Congress held in Montréal in 2009 and used as an icon on an online map to mark the locations of art deco buildings in Montréal.
Source: “Map of Art Deco sites in the Montréal Area,” Art Déco Montréal website, consulted October 24, 2012, <http://artdecoMontréal.com> ; and “graphics: art deco Montréal,” Carina Rose Design, consulted February 20, 2015, <http://carinarose.com/projects/3133369#1>
- Figure 3.16** Watercolor study for a stained glass window, “Vitrail pour un architecte,” [undated but c.1927 or later].
Source: Ernest Cormier, watercolorist, based on the mock-up of an original design by Charles Mauméjean, glass artist, AR1503/N, ARCH7711, box Cormier-01-Aquarelles-01M, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 3.17** A photograph of the Boiler room of the Société Provençale de constructions navales in Marseille (1917), designed by Ernest Cormier and photographed c.1918.
Source: [Unknown photographer], EC087, box Cormier 01-Photos-03P, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 3.18** A photograph of the front façade of the reinforced concrete Church of Notre-Dame-du-Raincy outside of Paris, by Auguste and Gustave Perret (1923).
Source: *L’Architecture vivante 1* (Fall-Winter 1923): Plate 2-3; Ernest Cormier Library, Collection, CCA.
- Figure 3.19** Detail of “Vitrail pour un architecte,” [undated but c.1927 or later].
Source: Ernest Cormier, AR1503/N, ARCH7711, box Cormier-01-Aquarelles-01M, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 3.20** Photo of the Université de Montréal’s central wing and tower (1924-43), photographed c.1990.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990.0040, box Archival Storage III-2 Colour, Collection, CCA.
- Figure 3.21** Detail of the bas-relief above the main door to the Maison Cormier (1930-31), photographed c.1990.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, detail of PH1990-0139, box Szilasi II 1, Collection, CCA.

- Figure 3.22** A photograph of the front facade of the Motordrome (the Montée du Zouave Garage) on Sherbrooke Street in Montréal, by Ernest Cormier (1919-20), taken c.1920.
Source: S. J. Hayward Studios, ARCH252070, Cormier SNP 3, EC 089, box 01-Photos-03P, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 3.23** A photograph of the interior of the Motordrome (the Montée du Zouave Garage) by Ernest Cormier (1919-20), taken c.1920.
Source: S. J. Hayward Studios, ARCH252071, Cormier SNP 3, EC 090, box 01-Photos-03P, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 3.24** Blueprint of the plan of the Motodrome (Garage de la montée du Zouave) and its awkward site, Montréal (1919-1920)
Source: Ernest Cormier, ARCH252067, roll 1513/Y, box 01-SNP3-02 R, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 3.25** A journal article praising Cormier’s reinforced concrete seaplane hangar at Pointe-aux-Trembles, Québec (1928-30).
Source: The Portland Cement Association, “Montréal Has First Concrete Arch Hangar Built in North America,” *Contract Record and Engineering Review* 44, no. 5 (January 29, 1930): 94; folder “01-2801 Dossier ARC258674 247/B-5,” box 001-2011-038 T, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 3.26** A photograph of the interior of the reinforced concrete seaplane hangar (1928-30), that Cormier designed for the Compagnie Aérienne Franco-Canadienne, (undated).
Source: [Unknown photographer], ARCH258693, folder 906/A-25, box 001-2011-037 T, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.1** Photograph of the Residence for T. Gillespie, Esq., located at 1420 Pine Avenue West in Montréal, designed by architects Barott and Blackader in 1925-26, photographed c1926-1930.
Source: P.7815, folder “03 #142 Gillespie Residence,” box 03-PH-03, Fonds Ernest Isbell Barott, CCA.
- Figure 4.2** Photograph (glass lantern slide) of the view from Mount Royal, 1931.
Source: [Unknown photographer], MP-0000.25.203 © McCord Museum.
- Figure 4.3** Photograph of the view of downtown Montréal from the top of slope of Cormier’s property, (undated).
Source: Ernest Cormier, nitr.S19-69(02), box 01 – Contacts – S19-1 @ 19-83 2/3, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.4** Map of houses in Montréal’s affluent Golden Square Mile neighborhood, most of them sited on the southern slope of Mount Royal. The Cormier residence is indicated in red.
Source: François Rémillard and Brian Merrett, *Mansions of the Golden Square Mile: Montréal 1850-1930*, trans. Joshua Wolfe (Montréal: Meridian Press, 1987, 1986), 66.
- Figure 4.5** Photograph of the front elevations of 1418 and 1420 Pine Avenue West in Montréal, (undated).
Source: Ernest Cormier, P.6721, box 01-EC_P.6669 à 6938, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.6** Sketch of the overall massing of the Cormier Residence on its sloped site, dated 1930 in Cormier’s hand.

Source: Ernest Cormier, ARCH264039, box 001-2011-205 T, FEC, CCA.

Figure 4.7 The pages of the *JRAIC* article showcasing Cormier's residence, published in 1932. Pages 158-159 show the 'studio' (i.e., the formal living room) seen through the room's monumental threshold, and an oblique view of the front facade giving onto Pine Avenue. Pages 160-161 show rendered plans of the house's top and second from top levels; a photograph of the roof garden and turret containing the stairs leading to the garage below, and an oblique view of the front and side facades of the house showing the stepped pathway descending from Pine Avenue to the garden. Pages 162-163 show the 'studio' and his library.

Source: [Ernest Cormier], "Residence of Ernest Cormier, Esq., Montréal, P.Q.," *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* 9, no.7 (July 1932): 158-164.

Figure 4.8 Photograph of the Pine Avenue West elevation of the Cormier Residence showing it mitoyen to the Gillespie house, photographed in 2012.

Source: "Maison Ernest-Cormier," © Alain Laforest, Ville de Montréal, Le site officiel du Mont-Royal, City of Montréal, accessed May 9, 2014, <http://www1.ville.Montreal.qc.ca/siteofficieldumontroyal/batiment-residentiel/maison-ernest-cormier>

Figure 4.9 Side elevation and roof plan of the Cormier Residence.

Source: Ernest Cormier, drawing #3005-4, dated September 4, 1930, ARCH5980, folder 01-3005-01, box Cormier 01-3005-01M, FEC, CCA.

Figure 4.10 Vestibule of the front entrance to the Cormier Residence, taken standing just inside the front door, looking towards the vestibule's interior door, showing the marble-clad walls and custom-designed bronze grillwork over the radiator, c.1931.

Source: S. J. Hayward Studios, P.6732, box 01-EC_P.6669 à 6938, FEC, CCA.

Figure 4.11 Design of bronze radiator grills, vestibule of Cormier Residence

Source: Ernest Cormier, "Grilles de radiateur en bronze naturel," folder "01-905/A-5_01Aic539d," box 01-2011-206 T, FEC, CCA.

Figure 4.12 Rendered plan of the top floor (level 5/ floor D) of the Cormier Residence showing flooring treatment and landscaping.

Source: Ernest Cormier, ARCH252706[1], folder "01 ARC 553d," box Cormier 01-3005-01M, FEC, CCA.

Figure 4.13 Photograph of the dining room with the furniture designed by Ernest Cormier, photographed c.1985.

Source: Photography by Peter Vitale in Susan Mary Alsop, "Architectural Digest Visits: Pierre Trudeau," *Architectural Digest* 43, no. 1 (Jan 1986): 112.

Figure 4.14 Photograph of the landing of the circular staircase and the studio's threshold, as seen from the studio of the Cormier residence, taken in January 1976.

Source: Photography by Denis Robert, detail of "Maison Cormier," uploaded by Colin Rose, Flickr Photo Sharing, accessed July 15, 2010, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/73416633@N00/508410117/>

Figure 4.15a Photograph of the Atelier's fireplace and symmetrically arranged furniture and artwork, as seen through the marble-columned threshold, c.1931-32.

Source: S. J. Hayward Studios, P.6749[?], box 01-EC_P.6669 à 6938, FEC, CCA.

- Figure 4.15b** Photograph of the Atelier’s fireplace and furniture designed by Cormier, as seen through the marble-columned threshold, c.1985.
Source: Photography by Peter Vitale in Susan Mary Alsop, “Architectural Digest Visits: Pierre Trudeau,” *Architectural Digest* 43, no. 1 (Jan 1986): 110.
- Figure 4.16** Photograph of the interior of the Atelier showing furniture and artwork by Cormier, looking back to the threshold towards the spiral staircase, c.1931-32.
Source: S. J. Hayward Studios, P.6684, box 01-EC_P.6669 à 6938, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.17** Photograph of the interior of the Atelier showing furniture and artwork by Cormier, looking towards the front of the house
Source: S. J. Hayward Studios, ARCH269732, P.6736, box 01-EC_P.6669 à 6938, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.18** Photograph of former Canadian Prime Minister, Pierre Elliott Trudeau (the third owner of the Cormier residence) standing in the studio with his back to the glazed access giving onto the terrace of the top floor looking onto the city, c.1985.
Source: Photography by Peter Vitale in Susan Mary Alsop, “Architectural Digest Visits: Pierre Trudeau,” *Architectural Digest* 43, no. 1 (Jan 1986): 106-107.
- Figure 4.19** Photograph taken from the Atelier on level 5 (floor D) looking through the threshold towards the circular staircase
Source: S. J. Hayward Studios, P.6940, box 01-EC_P.6669 à 6938, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.20** Photograph taken from the library on level 4 (floor C) looking through the threshold towards the circular staircase.
Source: S. J. Hayward Studios, P.6688, box 01-EC_P.6669 à 6938, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.21** Transverse section through level 5 (floor D) and level 4 (floor C) of the Cormier Residence showing the reflected ceiling plan of the atelier’s threshold, the staircase connecting these two top floors, the dominant axis bisecting the house, and the spatial relationship between the studio and the library below it.
Source: Ernest Cormier, detail of an unnumbered sheet of drawings for the Maison Cormier, dated November 1, 1930, ARCH264124, folder 01-3005-03, box Cormier 01-3005-01M, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.22** View into the library of the Cormier residence from the threshold demarcated by golden columns, c.1976.
Source: Photography by Denis Robert, “Maison Cormier,” uploaded by Colin Rose, Flickr Photo Sharing, accessed July 15, 2010,
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/73416633@N00/1863332199/>
- Figure 4.23** Photograph from interior of library looking toward golden-columned threshold and door to the staircase leading to the lower level, c.1931-32.
Source: S. J. Hayward Studios, P.6751, box 01-EC_P.6669 à 6938, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.24** Photograph of the copy of the ancient bas-relief of the Stele of Eleusis, placed above the fireplace in the library of the Cormier residence, c.1985.
Source: Photography by Peter Vitale in Susan Mary Alsop, “Architectural Digest Visits: Pierre Trudeau,” *Architectural Digest* 43, no. 1 (Jan 1986): 109.

- Figure 4.25** Rendered plan of the second-from-top floor (level 4/ floor C) of the Cormier Residence showing flooring patterns.
Source: Ernest Cormier, ARCH264118, folder EC 265, box 01-3005-01M, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.26** Dressing room of the Master bedroom, Cormier Residence, with furniture designed by Cormier, c.1931.
Source: S. J. Hayward Studios, ARCH264229, contact sheet A-1025, A-N°1001 à A-N°1062, box 01-Contacts-A,B,C,D, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.27** Master bedroom, Cormier Residence, with night tables designed by Cormier, c.1931.
Source: S. J. Hayward Studios, ARCH264229, contact sheet A-1025, A-N°1001 à A-N°1062, box 01-Contacts-A,B,C,D, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.28** Plan of perimeter curtains in Master bedroom, Cormier residence, (undated).
Source: Ernest Cormier, “Detail of Bedroom hangings,” folder “01-905/A-5_01Aic534d,” box 001-2011-206 T, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.29** Photographic prints of the negatives of the presentation plans for the top floor (level 5/ floor D) and the second-from-top floor (level 4/ floor C) of the Cormier residence.
Source: Ernest Cormier, P.1542 and P.1543, box 01-EC-P.1421 à 1543, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.30** Plan of the roof garden of the Cormier residence detailing all of the plantings, c.1941.
Source: Ernest Cormier, ARCH264121, folder “Plan du Jardin,” box Cormier 01-3005-01M, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.31** Plan (working drawing) of level 3 (floor B) of the Cormier Residence.
Source: Ernest Cormier, drawing #3005-7, dated September 4, October 3 and October 7, 1930, graphite on trace paper, ARCH5983, folder 01-3005-01, box Cormier 01-3005-01M, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.32** Plan of level 3 (floor B) of the Cormier Residence, showing the staircase transformed into an orthogonal service stair, and the access to the roof garden, (undated).
Source: Ernest Cormier, folder #3005 1503/U, folder 01-ARC-081N, box Cormier 01-Aquarelles-01M, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.33** Photograph of the curving marble staircase on level 4 of the Cormier residence, as seen through the columns framing the entry to the library, c.1985.
Source: Photography by Peter Vitale in Susan Mary Alsop, “Architectural Digest Visits: Pierre Trudeau,” *Architectural Digest* 43, no. 1 (Jan 1986): 108.
- Figure 4.34** Side elevation of the Cormier Residence, 1930.
Source: Cormier, drawing # 3005 – 2 , dated September 4, 1930 and October 20, 1930, ARCH5978, folder 01-3005-01, box 01-3005-01M, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.35** Side elevation of the Cormier Residence and oblique view of the rear elevations of the Cormier and Gillespie residences, c.1931.
Source: Hayward Studios, ARCH262186, P.6729, box 01-EC P.6669 à 6938, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.36** Photograph of the living room on level 3 (floor C) of the Cormier Residence, c.1931. This is the only photo of this floor of the house that has been found in the archive.
Source: S. J. Hayward Studios, ARCH264030, P.6671, box 01-EC P.6669 à 6938, FEC, CCA.

- Figure 4.37** Detail of the plan of the property belonging to Ernest Cormier (dated September 18, 1967) with small arrows indicating the four exterior doors to the house.
Source: folder #3005 1503/U, box Cormier 01-Aquarelles-01M, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.38** Rear elevation of the Cormier Residence, 1930.
Source: Cormier, drawing # 3005 – 3, dated September 4, 1930 and October 20, 1930, ARCH5979, folder 01-3005-01, box 01-3005-01M, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.39** Looking east along Sherbrooke St. from Redpath St., Montréal, QC, c.1929.
Source: Anonymous, c.1929, MP-1985.31.81 © McCord Museum.
- Figure 4.40** Redpath Street showing the rear facades of the Gillespie and Cormier residences. The photo is undated but must have been taken in the late 1950s, given the presence of the tall apartment block beside Cormier’s residence.
Source: Cormier, P.6725, box 01-EC P.6669 à 6938, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.41** Photo taken from the parking space beside the entry to the garage in the laneway behind Cormier’s residence, (undated).
Source: Cormier, nitr.B-2085, box 01-Contacts-A,B,C,D, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.42** Photograph of roof garden with turret containing the stairs leading to the garage.
Source: [S. J. Hayward?], ARCH264036, P.6730, folder “P-6730 @ 6751,” box P-6669 à 6938, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.43** Rear elevation and roof garden of the Cormier residence, (undated).
Source: [S. J. Hayward?], nitr.A-1023, box 01-Contacts-A,B,C,D, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.44** The front elevation of the Cormier residence, photographed in October 2011.
Source: “Cormier House,” © Decopix [Randy Juster], Flickr Photo Sharing, accessed February 15, 2015,
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/55864565@N08/6497728319/in/photolist-b6t4jk-aUbyfB>
- Figure 4.45** Clorinthe Perron posing on the octagonal marble table in Cormier’s studio on St. Urbain street, c.1925.
Source: Ernest Cormier, contact sheet S19-40 (06), 001-ARC-895, box 01-Contacts-S19-1 @ S19-83 2/3, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.46** Detail of the bas-relief above the front door of the Cormier Residence as represented on Cormier’s drawing of his front elevation.
Source: Ernest Cormier, drawing #3005 – 1 (dated September 4, 1930), ARCH5977, folder 01-3005-01, box Cormier 01-3005-01M, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.47** Bas-relief above the front door of Cormier’s Residence (1930-31), Montréal, photographed c.1990.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990-0139, box Szilasi II 1, Collection CCA.
- Figure 4.48** Elevation drawing of interior wall of the Atelier of the Cormier Residence (undated)
Source: Ernest Cormier, drawing for project # 3005, folder 01-3005-03, box Cormier 01-3005-01M, FEC, CCA.

- Figure 4.49** Photo of a social gathering in the Atelier of Cormier’s residence, showing Clorinthe listening while a guest reads a text out loud, c.1930s
Source: Ernest Cormier, P.6086, folder “ADC–6,18_P.5904 à P.6155,” box 01-Cormier_P.5904 à 6479, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.50** The sculptor Henri Hébert at a social gathering in the Atelier of Cormier’s residence, hovering beside an unidentified woman, c.1930s. On the verso of this photo is written in pencil, “attention! on vous observe, ou l’Ecole du Flirt” [Careful, we’re watching you, or, the School of Flirting].
Source: Ernest Cormier, P.6111, folder “ADC–6,18_P.5904 à P.6155,” box 01-Cormier_P.5904 à 6479, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.51** Henri Hébert at a social gathering in the Atelier of Cormier’s residence, attentively tending to an unidentified woman, c.1930s. On the verso of this photo is written in pencil, “un peu de bubussi ? [...] ça fera effet... Whopee !” [A little bubbly? It will take effect.... Whoopie!!].
Source: Ernest Cormier, P.6115, folder “ADC–6,18_P.5904 à P.6155,” box 01-Cormier_P.5904 à 6479, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.52** Photo of Cormier and one of the guests at a social gathering he hosted in his Atelier, c.1930s
Source: [Photographer unknown, but likely Clorinthe Perron], P.6090, folder “ADC–6,18_P.5904 à P.6155,” box 01-Cormier_P.5904 à 6479, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.53** Photo of a formal gathering hosted by Cormier in his Atelier, after 1930.
Source: Ernest Cormier, P.6131, folder “ADC–6,18_P.5904 à P.6155,” box 01-Cormier_P.5904 à 6479, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 4.54** Photo of guests jousting in the studio of the Cormier residence, undated.
Source: Ernest Cormier, nitr.S19-3(03), box 01 – Contacts – S19-1 @ 19-83 2/3, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 5.1** A photograph of the fire damage to the Montréal branch of the Université Laval’s main building in 1922.
Source: 1Fp,05004, Fonds du Bureau de l’information (D0037), Division de la gestion de documents et des archives, UdeM.
- Figure 5.2** Detail of a map of the city of Montréal and its environs, prepared in January 1931, showing the footprint of the university’s giant main pavilion on Mount Royal. Green highlights have been added to indicate the three principal sites that were considered for the Université de Montréal’s new campus.
Source: [No cartographer credited], “Plan de la Cité de Montréal et de ses environs,” 1931, NMC 19998, LAC.
- Figure 5.3** Photograph of St. Joseph’s Oratory on Queen Mary Road, Montréal, QC, photographed October 1950.
Source: Joseph Guibord, Service du tourisme, Office provincial de publicité, E6,S7,SS1,P51085, BAnQ Vieux-Montréal.
- Figure 5.4** View of the tower of the Université de Montréal as seen through the portico of the Oratoire St-Joseph, c.1990.

Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990.0036, box Archival Storage III-2 Colour, Collection, CCA.

- Figure 5.5** A photograph of the model of the main pavilion of the Université de Montréal, [c1928]
Source: S. J. Hayward, P.1708, folder “P.1705 à 1714,” box 01-2402-01P, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 5.6** A color postcard of the Université de Montréal mailed to Cormier’s home by an unknown sender on March 15, 1947.
Source: Postcard, EC 201, folder “ARCH259631 801/A-23,” box 001-2010-213 T, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 5.7** The central portion and tower of the Université de Montréal’s main pavilion, photographed in 1990.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990.0038, Archival Storage III-2 Colour, Collection, CCA.
- Figure 5.8** Cover of the special issue of *L’Action universitaire*, published by the Association Générale des Diplômés de l’Université de Montréal, commemorating the inauguration of the main pavilion of the UdeM.
Source: *L’Action universitaire*, 9, no.1, ‘L’Inauguration de l’Université’ special issue (Sept 1942).
- Figure 5.9** A photograph of a summer course given outdoors at the Université de Montréal by Abbot Charbonneau in 1958.
Source: David Bier Studios, “Cours d’été donné par l’Abbé Charbonneau, août 1958,” 1FP,00364, Fonds du Bureau de l’information (D0037), Archives UdeM.
- Figure 5.10** An aerial photograph of the construction site of the Université de Montréal showing the rear wings and central part of the main pavilion not built, dated October 30, 1930.
Source: Compagnie Aérienne Franco Canadienne, folder “chemise sans numéro,” box 01-2402-04P, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 5.11** A photograph of the front wings of the main pavilion under construction, dated November 8, 1930.
Source: S. J. Hayward, “Vue des façades C’, B’, A’, A, I, B, J, C et vue du solarium sud de D,” P.1848, box 01-2402-01P, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 5.12** An aerial photograph of the main pavilion of the UdeM under construction on the northern side of Mount Royal with downtown Montréal and the St Lawrence River visible beyond, taken in September 1931.
Source: 1Fp,05025, Fonds du Bureau de l’information (D0037), Archives UdeM.
- Figure 5.13** Aerial view of the campus of McGill University, Montréal, QC, 1921.
Source: Anonymous, photograph, 1921, MP-0000.1877.2 © McCord Museum.
- Figure 5.14** A photograph of students climbing the 103 wooden steps leading up the mountain slope to the main pavilion of the Université de Montréal, (undated).
Source: National Archives of Canada, EC 257, #195, box 01-2402-04P, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 5.15** An illustration of the main pavilion of the Université de Montréal dominating Mount Royal.
Source: [Unknown illustrator], image for the chapter, “Montréal, Métropole du Canada,” in Raymond Tanghe, *Itinéraire canadien* (Montréal: Éditions B.-D. Simpson, 1945), 65.

- Figure 6.1** A photograph of the front façade of the Montréal Courthouse Annex photographed c.1926.
Source: Wm. Notman & Son, VIEW-6480 © McCord Museum.
- Figure 6.2** One example on an early sketch of the academic complex for the UdeM, [c.1924]
Source: Ernest Cormier, ARCH264227, folder 670/A-22, box 001-2011-175 T, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 6.3** Photostat of Ernest Cormier’s site plan for the university campus, September 1926.
Source: Ernest Cormier, Plan d’ensemble, EC 166, ARCH252467, box 02-2002-020M, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 6.4** Photograph of Ernest Cormier’s site plan for the university campus, May 1927.
Source: Photograph by S.J. Hayward of Ernest Cormier, Plan d’ensemble, EC 177, ARCH7772, box 02-2002-020M, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 6.5** A photograph of the model of the design for the main pavilion turned into a postcard stating “Université de Montréal. Ernest Cormier architecte et ingénieur” in the upper left corner, (undated).
Source: S. J. Hayward Studios, P.1705, box 01-2402-01P, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 6.6** A postcard showing an aerial view of the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center in New York City (1924-27) designed by James Gamble Rogers.
Source: Postcard enclosed in a letter sent to Cormier, dated May 5, 1944, folder “ARCH257775 410/B-4; 410 1/2,” box 01-2010-037 T, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 6.7** An aerial photograph of the main pavilion of the UdeM, taken on July 25, 1948.
Source: 1Fp,01973, Fonds D0036, Archives UdeM.
- Figure 6.8** Diagram of the wings of the main pavilion of the Université de Montréal.
Source: Ernest Cormier, legend of drawing 00008 from the series “Façades et coupes” dated 5.4.1929, 17.1.1930, folder Cormier 1513/Z, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 6.9** A presentation board explaining the teaching hospital for the Université de Montréal showing plans of the fourth and sixth floors of wing D, [undated but not earlier than 1928].
Source: Ernest Cormier, “University of Montreal.... Teaching Hospital,” folder “Cormier 270xx/E, #2402”, box 01-2002-020M, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 6.10** Plan of wing G’8 of the Chemistry department, (undated).
Source: Ernest Cormier, drawing 00170, Aile G’8, Chimie, folder “617x/A #2402,” FEC, CCA.
- Figure 6.11** Detail of the plan of wing G’10 of the Faculty of Science showing a lecture hall with adjacent spaces reserved for course materials and kitchen facilities, dated February 2, 1932 and revised on July 28, 1941.
Source: Ernest Cormier, unnumbered drawing, folder “629x/0 #2402, ARCH8000 à ARCH8002,” FEC, CCA.
- Figure 6.12** A photograph of one of the lecture halls in the Faculty of Medicine, published in a special feature in *La Presse* (June 5, 1943).

Source: ARCH259472, folder 370/A-2, box 00-EC-007, FEC, CCA.

- Figure 6.13** A photograph of the interior of a lecture hall at the Université de Montréal showing the large projection screen behind the professor's desk, (undated).
Source: [unknown photographer], P.2041, folder "P.1969 à 2042," box Cormier 01-2402-01P, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 6.14** A view of the central and west parts of the main pavilion, overlooking the residential neighborhood situated lower on the slope of Mount Royal, c.1990.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990.0037_002, Archival Storage II-2 Colour, Collection, CCA.
- Figure 6.15** Photograph showing the sculptural-ornamental treatment of the central doors of the main pavilion of the UdeM.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990.0043, Archival Storage II-2 Colour, Collection, CCA.
- Figure 6.16** Photograph of men entering the main pavilion through the door labeled 'student entrance,' below the monumental main entrance, (undated).
Source: Henri Paul, P.1571, EC 226, box 01-2402-03P, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 6.17** Photograph of the entry hall [*Vestibule d'honneur*] of the main pavilion immediately to the inside of the main doors, (undated).
Source: [unknown photographer], P.5185, EC 227, box 01-2402-04P, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 6.18** Triptych of the interior of the *Vestibule d'honneur* of the Université de Montréal, c1990.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990.0019.001, PH1990.0019.002 and PH1990.0019.003, Collection, CCA.
- Figure 6.19** Plan of level 5 of the entry hall [*Vestibule d'honneur*] showing the ceiling recesses and placement of the columns, (undated).
Source: Ernest Cormier, drawing 00183, "Aile L5, Vestibule d'honneur," folder "617x/A # 2402," FEC, CCA.
- Figure 6.20** Photograph of a corner of the *Vestibule d'honneur*, showing the layered treatment of the marble-clad wall and the faceted columns treated as pilasters, c1990.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990.0046, box Archival Storage III-2 Colour, Collection, CCA.
- Figure 6.21** Photograph of the *Vestibule d'honneur* showing a faceted column, bronze grillwork, layered treatment of the walls, and ceiling ornament, c.1990.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990.0059, box Archival Storage III-2 Colour, Collection CCA.
- Figure 6.22** Section through wings K (main auditorium) and L (entry hall), April 5, 1929 and January 17, 1930.
Source; Ernest Cormier, detail of drawing 00002, "Facades et coupes," ARCH8020, folder "1513/Z," FEC, CCA.
- Figure 6.23** Plan of the stage level of the main auditorium [*Salle de promotions*], Université de Montréal.
Source: Ernest Cormier, drawing 2402-#0361, folder "Cormier 605x/M-1, #2402", box 01-2002-020M, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 6.24** Plan of the balcony level of the main auditorium [*Salle de promotions*], Université de Montréal.

Source: Ernest Cormier, drawing 2402-#0362, folder “Cormier 605x/M-1, #2402”, box 01-2002-020M, FEC, CCA.

- Figure 6.25** Triptych of the interior of the *Salle de promotions*, Université de Montréal, c1990.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990.0022_001-003, Collection CCA.
- Figure 6.26** Elevation and section of the entrance hall and tower of the main pavilion of the Université de Montréal, April 5, 1929 and January 17, 1930.
Source: Ernest Cormier, drawing 00001, “Façades et coupes,” ARCH8019, folder 1513/Z, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 6.27** A photograph of the Reading Room of the main library of the Université de Montréal, photographed c.1966.
Source: 1Fp,03827, Fonds D0037, Archives UdeM.
- Figure 6.28** A photograph of the Reading Room of the main library of the Université de Montréal, photographed c.1966.
Source: 1Fp,03829, Fonds D0037, Archives UdeM.
- Figure 6.29** A clipping of a rendering of the Louisiana State Capitol by Weiss, Dreyfous & Seiferth, (undated).
Source: [no source given], folder “4002/A-26,” box 00-EC-008, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 6.30** Postcard of a drawing of Paul Cret’s design for the Library Building and tower at the University of Texas at Austin, indicating in pencil that the tower is a library, stamped April 3, 1937.
Source: folder “236/C-8,” box Exposition Cormier Retirés, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 6.31** Section through the main auditorium [*Salle de promotions*] showing the mechanical equipment in the basement, April 5, 1929 and January 17, 1930.
Source: Ernest Cormier, detail of drawing 00004, Pavilion K, “Façades et coupes,” ARCH8022, folder 1513/Z, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 6.32** A photo of the construction of the reinforced concrete canopies over the main doors to the main pavilion, dated June 25, 1931.
Source: [S. J. Hayward], P.1855, “Perron principal de l’aile L. Marquises au dessus des entrées. À l’extérieur gauche partie de l’aile H⁸,” box 02-2402-01P, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 6.33** A photograph of the central zone of the main pavilion under construction, dated July 25, 1931.
Source: S. J. Hayward, P.1846, “Pose de la brique ailes D’ et E’. Perrons d’honneur aile L, étages 4, 6, 9 aile L étages 3 à 9 aile H,” box 02-2402-01P, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 6.34** A photograph of the brick cladding of the walls of the court in wing I in progress, dated September 2, 1930.
Source: S. J. Hayward, P.1949, “Vue de la cour intérieur de I et partie des ailes A & D,” box 02-2402-01P, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 6.35** Photograph of the rebars of the reinforced concrete vault above the main auditorium of the main pavilion, (undated).
Source: [unknown photographer], P.2011, box 01-2402-01P, FEC, CCA.

- Figure 6.36** A photograph showing bricklayers building up one of the hospital solarium wings, dated September 2, 1930.
Source: S. J. Hayward, P.1950, “de gauche à droite: façade latérale de B, façade de J, façade de C et façade latérale de cette aile,” box 02-2402-01P, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 6.37** A photograph wing B of the hospital connected to adjacent wings through the low single-story connectors intended to house the outpatient clinics, (undated).
Source: [unknown photographer], P.5173, EC 224, box 01-2011-04P, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 6.38** A view of the exterior wall of the main pavilion, showing the decorative expression of structure in the cladding of the reinforced concrete piers.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990.0041, Archival Storage II-2 Colour, Collection, CCA.
- Figure 6.39** A view of the western corner of the central courtyard of the UdeM, showing the decorative treatment given to the piers through the handling of the brickwork.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990.0042, Archival Storage II-2 Colour, Collection, CCA.
- Figure 6.40** An oblique view of an exterior wall of the main pavilion showing the ornamental expression of the structure.
Source: Aliko Economides, 2010.
- Figure 6.41** A view of the part of the roofline of the main pavilion’s chapel, photographed 1990.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990.0056_002, Archival Storage II-2 Colour, Collection, CCA.
- Figure 6.42** Photograph of Montréal looking north from the Southam Press Building, 1926-27, showing the large water reservoirs that were a standard feature on the roofs of large buildings at the time.
Source: Wm. Notman & Son, VIEW-24047 © McCord Museum.
- Figure 6.43** A view of the part of the main pavilion’s roofline showing the tower and water reservoirs at the tops of staircase towers, photographed 1990.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990.0056_001, Archival Storage II-2 Colour, Collection, CCA.
- Figure 6.44** Section and elevation of the circular staircase tower that terminates in a water reservoir, wing E, April 5, 1929 and January 17, 1930.
Source: Ernest Cormier, detail of drawing 00007, “Façades et coupes,” ARCH8025, folder 1513/Z, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 6.45** Photograph of the upper portion of the tower of the Université de Montréal, c.1990.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, detail of PH1990.0029_002, Collection, CCA.
- Figure 6.46** A photograph of an ornamental feature of wing J that echoes the form of the tower.
Source: Aliko Economides, detail of the main pavilion of the Université de Montréal, c.2010.
- Figure 6.47** Photograph of the ornamental treatment of a staircase banister at the Université de Montréal, c.1990.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990.0007, box Szilasi II-5, Collection, CCA.
- Figure 7.1** A photo of the interior of a Justice’s office at the Supreme Court of Canada (1938-50), Ottawa, designed by Ernest Cormier. Visible through the window is the silhouette of the neo-Gothic Parliament buildings.

Source: [Unknown photographer], #3700, EC282.2, box 01-Photos-03P, FEC, CCA.

- Figure 7.2** A detail of a page from *Architectural Forum* that published photographs of the UN Board of Design members in meetings during the Spring of 1947. The individuals are identified above.
Source: “UN plans unveiled,” in the News section of *Architectural Forum* 86, no.6 (June 1947), 14. Photographs by LIFE Photos/Frank Scherschel/Graphic House.
- Figure 7.3** Aerial view (looking south) of the UN Headquarters complex located between First Avenue and the East River, and between 42nd and 48th streets in New York.
Source: UN Photo/Lois Connor, Photo #200704, March 9, 1987.
- Figure 7.4** Plan of the Main entrance level of the United Nations Headquarters in New York, indicating (with a blue arrow at the lower far left of the plan) the public entrance to the General Assembly building.
Source: Secretary-General, United Nations, *Report to the General Assembly of the United Nations by the Secretary-General on the Permanent Headquarters of the United Nations* (Lake Success, NY: United Nations, 1947), 47.
- Figure 7.5** Photograph of the main public entrance to the General Assembly Building, showing the seven nickel-bronze doors designed by Cormier and the glass and marble wall of the north facade, photographed in 1962.
Source: UN Photo/MB, Photo #336365, October 1, 1962.
- Figure 7.6** Partial view of north end of the main public lobby of the UN Headquarters General Assembly Building, showing the information desk and the seven doors designed by Cormier, photographed in 1952.
Source: UN Photo/MB, Photo #55507, October 1, 1952.
- Figure 7.7** A photo of Cormier standing in front of a full-size mock-up of one of the doors he designed for the UN Headquarters’ General Assembly Building as Canada’s gift to the United Nations, c.1951.
Source: Associated Screen News Ltd., ARCH252642, P.6803, folder EC 286, box 01-Photos-02P, FEC, CCA.
- Figure 7.8** Photographs of the bas-reliefs of *Pax* [Peace], *Justitia* [Justice], *Veritas* [Truth] and *Fraternitas* [Fraternity] that Cormier designed for the nickel-bronze doors of the General Assembly Building of the United Nations, c.1952.
Source: S. J. Hayward Studios, box Library transfer, ARCON1992:-0006, AR1992:0002 boîte 2/6, FEC, CCA.

Introduction

In historiographic accounts of twentieth-century architecture in Canada, and particularly those originating from Quebec, Ernest Cormier (1885-1980), is typically placed as being among the most important architects of his generation.¹ A member of Montréal's francophone elite who enjoyed a privileged education and exceptional professional standing, Cormier was first trained as a civil engineer in Montréal at the turn of the century, and then obtained a diploma in architecture from the prestigious École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. The opportunity to spend 10 years studying, travelling and working in Europe, gave Cormier enriching, formative experiences that the vast majority of his colleagues in Canada could not match. The professional knowledge and cosmopolitan influences that he brought back to his then, rapidly growing but still somewhat provincial home of Montréal at the close of World War I, set him apart from his

¹ For example, see Harold D. Kalman, *A History of Canadian Architecture*, 2 vols (Toronto; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 721, 775; Jean-Claude Marsan, *Sauver Montréal: chroniques d'architecture et d'urbanisme* (Montréal: Les Éditions du Boréal, 1990), 381; Geoffrey Simmins, ed., *Documents in Canadian Architecture* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1992), 149; and France Vanlaethem, "Montreal Architects and the Challenge of Commissions," in *Montreal Metropolis, 1880-1930*, ed. Isabelle Gournay and France Vanlaethem (Montréal; Toronto: Canadian Centre for Architecture; Stoddart Publishing, 1998), 111. Studies focused on Cormier's work echo the same sentiment. See: Pierre-Richard Bisson, "Maison Ernest-Cormier," in *Les Chemins de la mémoire, vol 2: monuments et sites historiques du Québec*, ed. Commission des biens culturels du Québec (Québec: Publications du Québec, 1991), 126; Robert Fortier, "Fonds Ernest-Cormier," in *Les Chemins de la mémoire, vol. 3: Biens mobiliers du Québec*, ed. Commission des biens culturels du Québec (Québec: Publications Québec, 1999), 353; Robert Little, "Collection Ernest-Cormier," in *Les Chemins de la mémoire, vol. 3: Biens mobiliers du Québec*, ed. Commission des biens culturels du Québec, 145; and Christina Cameron, Claudine Déom, and Nicole Valois, "L'Étude des valeurs patrimoniales du campus principal de l'Université de Montréal. Projet de recherche, Chaire de recherche du Canada en patrimoine bâti" (Montréal: Université de Montréal, 2008), 19.

Phyllis Lambert refers to Cormier as "one of the most important Canadian architects of the twentieth century." Phyllis Lambert, "Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal," *Journal of Canadian Art History*, 13, no. 2 - 14, no. 1 (1990-91): 10. As Founding Director of the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) in Montréal, Lambert was responsible for the institution's acquisition of Cormier's personal and professional archive, following his death in 1980. The Fonds Ernest Cormier is in fact the first architect's archive to be acquired by the CCA, which now holds the fonds of close to 150 Canadian and international architects in addition to an extensive library, photography collection, and collection of prints and drawings.

colleagues and enabled him to quickly earn a prominent place in the local architectural scene that was highly competitive at the time. Thus, Cormier's dual professional training combined with the cultural cachet of his foreign experiences, made immediate claims on the esteem of colleagues and clients, and favorably affected his ability to secure prestigious public commissions from governmental and ecclesiastic clients.² [Figures 0.1 & 0.2] With a career that spanned over five decades, Cormier was particularly active in Montréal during the 1920s, which at the time was undergoing unprecedented growth as the metropolitan center of Canada's economy.

² The majority of Cormier's projects were in some way related to the Catholic Church. He designed two churches in Montréal (Église Sainte-Marguerite-Marie, 1923-26; and Église Saint-Ambroise, 1923-26) and two in Rhode Island (Church of St. John The Baptist, 1923-27; and Church of Notre Dame of the Sacred Heart, 1925-27). Cormier also designed four elementary schools for the French Catholic school board in Montréal (École Saint-Arsène, 1922-23; École Notre-Dame-de-la-Défense, 1924-25; École Saint-Henri, 1926-27; and École Anthelme-Verreau, 1929-30), as well as the main pavilion for the Université de Montréal (1924-43) in addition to several other campus buildings for the same institution that were not realized, whose administration and teaching staff were then largely comprised of clergy. In Toronto, he designed the private boys' high school St. Michael's College School (1948-51) as well as St. Basil's Seminary (1949) and Carr Hall (1950), the latter two part of St. Michael's College on the University of Toronto campus. On the campus of the Université Laval in Quebec City, Cormier designed the Grand Séminaire du Québec (1940-72) which has since been substantially renovated to house one branch of the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec in much of what used to be the Seminary's basilica, and to accommodate faculty offices in some of the former seminarians' quarters.

During his long career Cormier also secured governmental commissions at different levels of government, notably, his collaboration with Louis-Auguste Amos and Charles Jewett Saxe on the Montréal Courthouse Annex (1920-26), as well as his solo designs for the Supreme Court of Canada in Ottawa (1938-50) and the National Printing Bureau in what is now Gatineau, Québec (1950-59). See Figure 1.1 for a map indicating the North American cities in which Cormier's projects stand, and Figure 1.2 showing his buildings in Montréal, all of which were constructed between 1919 and 1943.

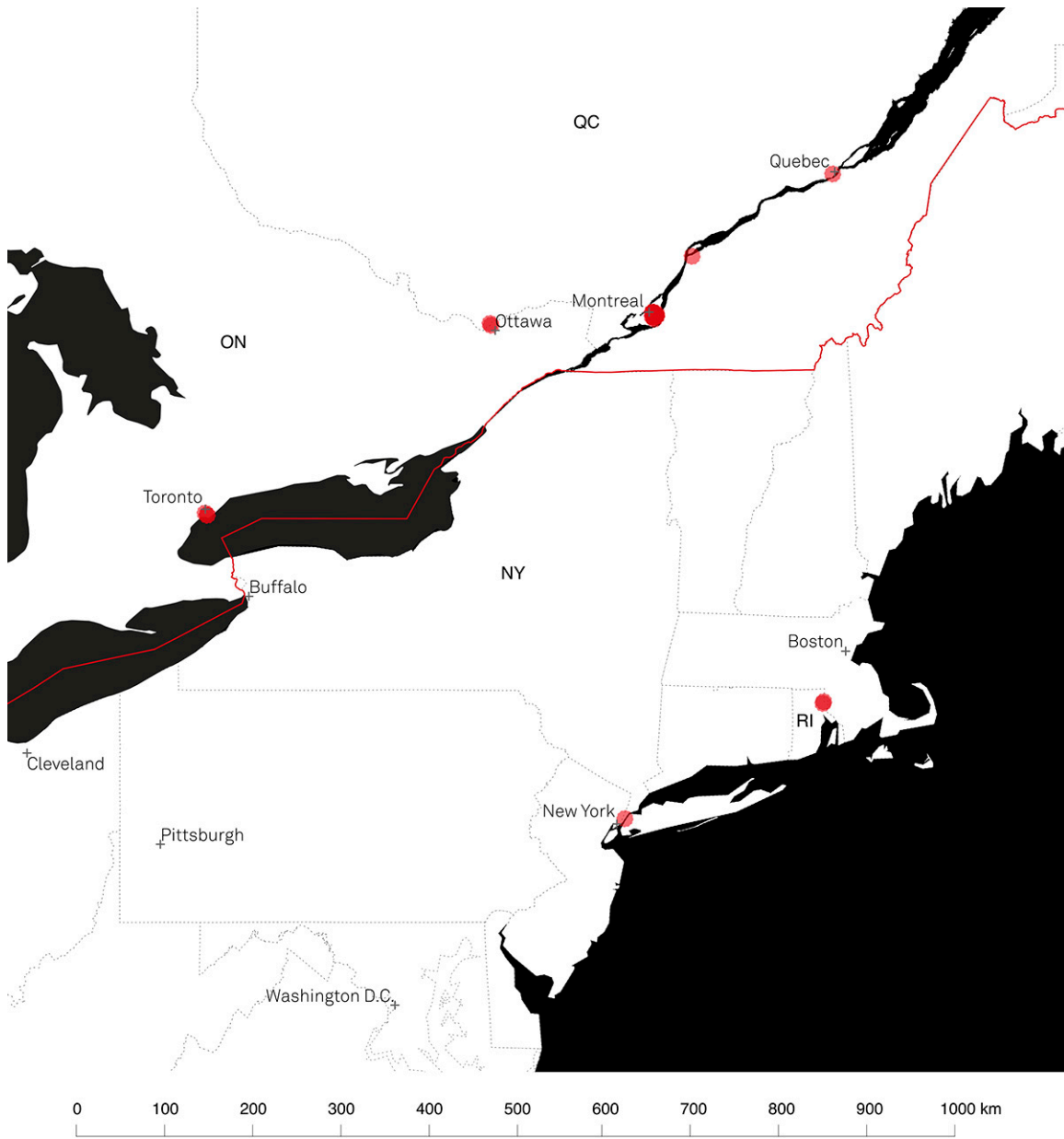
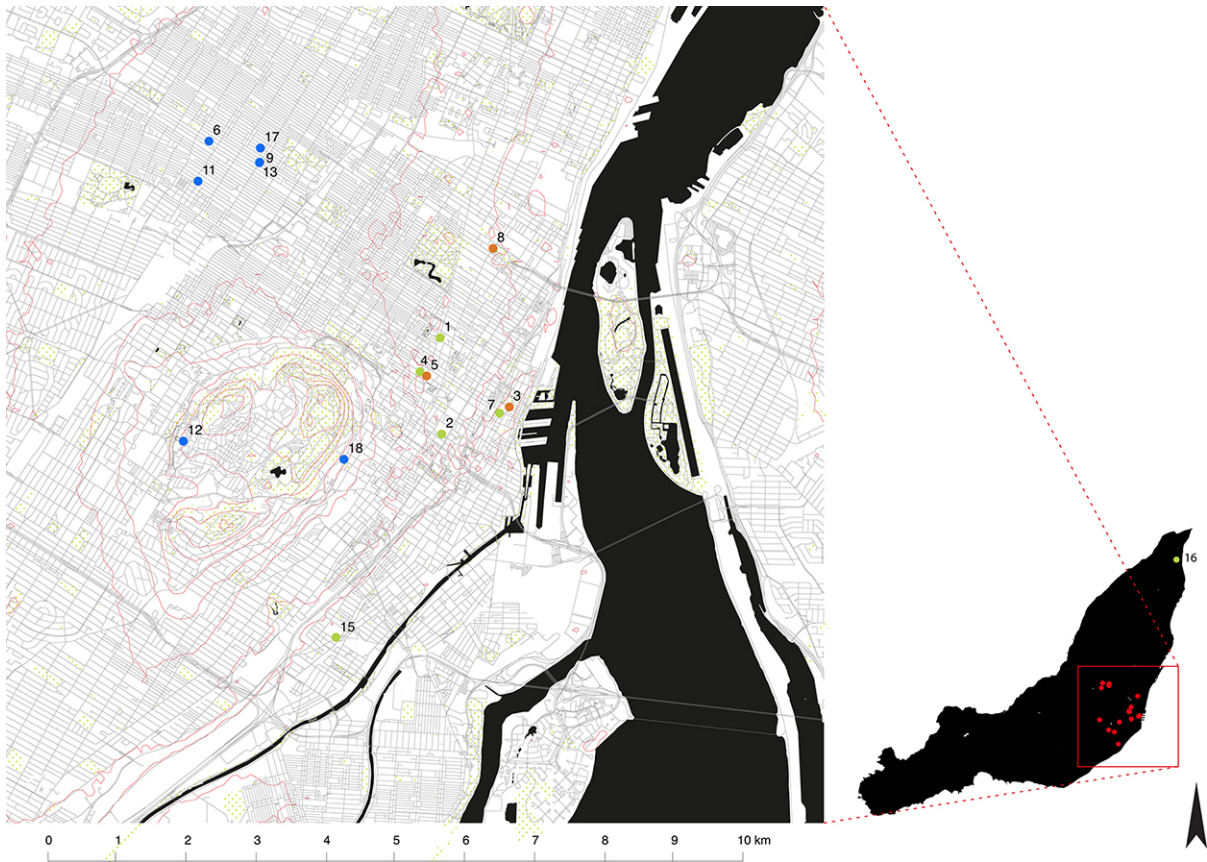


Figure 0.1 A map showing the North American cities in which Cormier's projects exist. Source: Map data © [OpenStreetMap](#) elaborated by Alvis Pagnacco with Alik Economides.



LEGEND

- Designed by Cormier
- Designed by Cormier in collaboration with others
- Building by Cormier now substantially renovated or demolished (which may or may not have been designed in collaboration with others)

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 Motordrome (1919-20) | 9 Church of Saint-Ambroise (1923-26) |
| 2 Dubrule Building (1919-21) | 11 Notre-Dame-de-la-Défense School (1924-25) |
| 3 Courthouse Annex (1920-26) | 12 Main pavilion, Université de Montréal (1924-43) |
| 4 Cormier Studio and garden (1921-28) | 13 Saint-Ambroise Presbytery (1924-27) |
| 5 École des Beaux-Arts (1922-23) | 15 Saint-Henri School (1926-27; <i>demolished 1970</i>) |
| 6 Saint-Arsène School (1922-23) | 16 Seaplane Hangar (1928-30; <i>demolished 1987</i>) |
| 7 Chamber of Commerce (1923-26; <i>demolished 1964</i>) | 17 Anthelme-Verreault School (1929-31) |
| 8 Church of Sainte-Marguerite-Marie (1923-26) | 18 Cormier Residence (1930-31) |

Figure 0.2 A map of Cormier's projects in Montréal.

Source: Map data © [OpenStreetMap](https://www.openstreetmap.org/) elaborated by Alvis Pagnacco with Alik Economides.

During his lifetime Cormier became a public figure. His largest public commissions received substantial journalistic coverage.³ Yet despite his prominence and exceptionality, there are relatively few scholarly studies on his work.⁴ A variety of factors that may have contributed to this, among them, the fact that until 2010, when efforts were renewed to continue the still incomplete project of processing the contents of the large fonds Cormier, access to his personal and professional archive was limited. Yet other considerations have likely played a significant role in Cormier's relative neglect.⁵ For instance, although he read widely and traveled often, and

³ In the popular press during his lifetime, the most important profiles on Cormier as a personality are the following, listed in chronological order: Jean Chauvin, "Ernest Cormier: Architecte, peintre, sculpteur," *La Revue populaire - histoire, littérature, sciences* 20, no. 6 (June 1927): 7-11; "Ernest Cormier, architecte et ingénieur," *Architecture-Bâtiment-Construction* 2, no. 10 (January 1947): [5], 12-28; Betty Sigler, "Plans by Cormier," *Canadian Business* 24, no. 2 (July 1951): 26-27; 34; 36-37; Arthur Prévost, "La Personnalité de la semaine," *Le Canada* 50ième année, no.106 (August 9, 1952); J. W. Bacque, "If It's Big, I'll Take It." *Saturday Night* 69, no. 47 (August 28, 1954): 25; and Willie Chevalier, "Entretien avec Ernest Cormier," *Vie des Arts (Canada)* 20, no. 81 (Winter 1975-76): 14-19; 87-89. See the dissertation's Bibliography for newspaper and magazine articles about Cormier's built work, particularly the coverage of the Université de Montréal, which is the project that received the most substantial media attention.

⁴ Prior to the possibility of conducting archival research in the Fonds Cormier, which was acquired by the CCA over six years following Cormier's death in 1980, a few short texts were published that provide some useful insights and information on Cormier's contribution. These are listed in the "Published texts on Cormier" section of the Bibliography.

In 1975 Cormier sold the house he had designed for himself to Jacobus Beyderwellen and Denis Robert, who in turn, sold it to former Prime Minister of Canada, Pierre-Elliott Trudeau, five years later. Beyderwellen and Robert, who had remained in contact with Cormier until his death in 1980, and who seem to have possessed copies of some of the historic photographs of the building that are now conserved at the CCA, were a willing resource for enthusiasts wanting to learn more about the house.

⁵ It is a telling tribute to Cormier's significance, however, that the Montréal Courthouse Annex, on whose design he collaborated with Amos and Saxe in the 1920s, was renamed the Édifice Ernest-Cormier in 2004. Situated in the historic district of Old Montréal, this monumental building has changed its vocation several times since it was inaugurated in 1926. Currently it houses the Québec Court of Appeal, which is the highest judicial court in the province. See Ministère de la culture et des communications, Direction générale du secrétariat et des communications, *L'Édifice Ernest-Cormier: Siège de la Cour d'appel du Québec à Montréal* (Québec: Ministère de la Culture et des communications; Les publications du Québec, 2005).

Similarly, as one of its 14 prizes awarded annually to individuals who have made the most laudatory cultural and scientific contributions to Quebec society, the Government of Quebec inaugurated the Prix Ernest-Cormier in 2014 as the highest distinction awarded in the Province for remarkable achievements in the domains of architecture and design. The first Ernest Cormier Prize was awarded to Gilles Saucier and André Perrotte of Saucier + Perrotte Architectes in November 2014. See "Les Prix du Québec," Gouvernement du Québec, accessed on November 10, 2014, <http://www.prixduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/index.php>.

was very up to date on the current architectural discourses and trends in Europe and in North America, Cormier refrained from participating in these debates, maintaining “that he ha[d] no theories except the one arbitrary theory that we should not have any.”⁶ Cormier published very little, and even when his descriptions of certain projects did appear in architectural journals or elsewhere, he was not always clearly designated as author, which added a measure of obscurity to his already very modest textual output.⁷ Additionally, while the 1920s marked Cormier’s most

⁶ For this translation see: “A Description of Ernest Cormier,” in *Documents in Canadian Architecture*, ed. Geoffrey Simmins, 161. The original was first published in 1927 in Chauvin, “Ernest Cormier: Architecte, peintre, sculpteur,” 7, and reprinted in Jean Chauvin, *Ateliers: Études sur vingt-deux peintres et sculpteurs canadiens: illustrées de reproductions d'oeuvres* (Montréal; New York: Louis Carrier & cie, 1928), 29. Jacques Guillerme remarks that it was wise of Cormier to utter few doctrinal opinions. See Jacques Guillerme, “Une hybridation exemplaire: notes sur la sagacité de Cormier,” *ARQ: Architecture-Québec* 53 (Feb 1990): 9-11.

⁷ In effect, Cormier published only two texts – one describing his private residence and the other, his design for the Université de Montréal – whose combined length totals less than 2,000 words. These are: the unsigned description of his house, published as: [Ernest Cormier], “Residence of Ernest Cormier, Esq., Montréal, P.Q.,” *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* 9, no.7 (July 1932): 158-164; and his concise description of the design of the Université de Montréal. His article on the UdeM was reproduced at least eight times between 1931 and 1947, in whole or in part and with subtle variations, but it was not always published in a way that would directly attribute authorship to Cormier. Beginning with its publication in 1931 in English in the *JRAIC*, a longer version in French (which in fact, is the longest of all the published versions of this text) appeared in the university’s 1933 *Album-souvenir de l’Université de Montréal* without specifying an author. A few years later, the university’s annual report for the academic year 1935-36, published the speech delivered by the new Rector of the university, Monsignor Olivier Maurault, to the Chambre de Commerce des jeunes in Montréal on December 5, 1934 (which incidentally, was Cormier’s 49th birthday), which contained a few selected paragraphs of the description of the building on pages 205-206, without giving direct credit to Cormier for their authorship. Also in 1936, a version of Cormier’s text (this time signed by Cormier) that was half the length of its first publication in French in the 1933 *Album-souvenir*, appeared in an issue of the French journal, *L’Architecture d’aujourd’hui*, within a special issue on university campuses edited by Alexandre Persitz, that cited mostly European and North American examples. In 1942, 1943 and 1947, versions of this text that were either identical to that of the 1933 *Album-souvenir*, or so close to it for the differences to be negligible, reappeared in local French-language publications and were credited to Cormier. Finally, for their *Documentaire sur l’Université de Montréal* published in 1943, the university’s students’ association, produced portions of Cormier’s text without giving him credit as author.

See: Ernest Cormier, “New Buildings for University of Montréal,” *JRAIC* 8, no. 6 (June 1931): 248-249; “Explication des plans de la nouvelle université,” in *Album-souvenir de l’Université de Montréal*, (Montréal: Beaugrand-Champagne, 1933), 43-46; Mgr Olivier Maurault, “Histoire de l’Université,” in *Annuaire général de l’Université de Montréal, 1935-36* (Montréal: Université de Montréal, 1936), 196-207; Ernest Cormier, “Université de Montréal,” *L’Architecture d’aujourd’hui* 7th year, no. 6 (June 1936): 21; Ernest Cormier, “Notes sur les plans de l’Université,” *L’Action universitaire* 9, no. 1 (Sept 1942): 65-67; Ernest Cormier, “Notes sur les plans de l’Université,” in *Université de Montréal: gala d’inauguration, 3 juin*

prolific years, numerous projects that he designed for institutional clients either took a very long time to be completed, or in the end were not realized. The number of his built works reflects but roughly half of the projects he actually designed.⁸ Research on Modern architecture in Montréal and in the province in Quebec, tends moreover to focus on the second half of the twentieth century where there is a concentration of prominent modernist work, notably the heroic Expo 67. Cormier, for his part did not build anything substantial in Montréal after the early 1940s, and by the 1960s and 1970s, he was receiving very few commissions. Therefore, with the notable exceptions of his design for the National Printing Bureau (1947-67) and his involvement on the Board of Design for the United Nations Headquarters in New York (1948-52), Cormier did not make substantial contributions to, or have a decisive influence on, Modern architecture during the postwar era.⁹ Finally, another plausible factor bearing on his current relative obscurity is that Cormier neither taught nor mentored the next generation of practitioners. He did teach a general course on the history and theory of architecture but to civil engineering students. His office was small, comprised of a restricted loyal circle of architects and engineers who devoted their entire careers to working for him. The result is that he did not found a ‘school’ that would have

1943 (Montréal: Therrien Frères, 1943), 37, 39, 41, 43, 45, 47; Roland G. Lefrançois and Association générale des étudiants, *Documentaire sur l'Université de Montréal* (Montréal: Édition “Le Quartier latin”, 1943), 4; and Ernest Cormier, “Les Plans de l'Université de Montréal,” in *Architecture-Bâtiment-Construction* 2, no. 10 (Jan 1947): 29-30.

⁸ Among the examples of Cormier’s public commissions that did not get built, his projects for the stadium (c.1925), the arena (c.1925), the Maison des Étudiants [Students’ Residence] (c.1925-38), the Institut de radium [Radium Institute] (c.1930-44), the Maison des animaux [Animal facility] (1939-1948), and the Institut d’Études Médiévales [Institute of Medieval Studies] (1942-1944), all designed for the UdeM campus, provide a striking list.

Geoffrey Simmins remarks, “He worked alone, wrote little, never had more than ten employees and certainly had no disciples. His major works dragged on for years [...]. [He] built relatively little because he specialized in public buildings, and designing for institutional clients is a thankless task at any time.” See Geoffrey Simmins, “Ernest Cormier,” *City and Country Home* 6, no. 10 (Dec 1987): 50, 52.

⁹ After the early 1940s, Cormier obtained commissions elsewhere in the province of Quebec (in Quebec city, Hull [now Gatineau] and Sorel) and in the province of Ontario (in Ottawa and Toronto).

fostered the development of a subsequent generation of disciples whose combined output, would likely have contributed to generating more scholarly interest in Cormier's work. And thus, not the founder of any movement, Cormier remains for the most part, an isolated case.¹⁰

To date the only book that has been written on Cormier is the monograph, *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal* edited by Isabelle Gournay that accompanied the eponymous exhibition held at the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) in Montréal in 1990.¹¹ This

¹⁰ France Vanlaethem has contributed an insightful study on the culture of Cormier's practice and his lack of a following. See France Vanlaethem, "Ernest Cormier, un grand professionnel," *Journal of Canadian Art History - Annales d'histoire de l'art canadien* 13, no. 2 - 14, no. 1 (1990-91): 44-68. For Cormier's comments concerning his interest in training only those who will spend most of their lives working in his office, and how he never tried to teach anyone to take his place, see Sigler, "Plans by Cormier," 37.

For a discussion of reasons why Cormier lacked disciples, see the unpublished paper by Jacques Dalibard, written in 1964 after interviewing Cormier: Jacques Dalibard, "Ernest Cormier, architect and engineer," student paper prepared for John Bland's "History of Architecture in Canada" course, McGill University School of Architecture, March 1963, Rare Books and Special Collections (RBSC), McGill University.

¹¹ Isabelle Gournay, ed., *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal* (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture; The MIT Press, 1990). The catalogue was simultaneously published in French as, *Ernest Cormier et l'Université de Montréal*. The exhibition was on display at the CCA from May 2 to October 28, 1990 and included a display of commissioned photographs of the main pavilion taken by Gabor Szilasi, with an accompanying exhibition pamphlet: Gabor Szilasi and the Canadian Centre for Architecture, *Sighting the Université de Montréal, Photographs by Gabor Szilasi, 2 May – 28 October, 1990* (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1990).

Preceding the publication of the exhibition catalog, curator Isabelle Gournay published an article that drew parallels between the evolution of Cormier's design for the main pavilion and the graphic media he used to represent the scheme. Noting the design's evolution from a traditional campus plan comprised of multiple pavilions, to that of one megaproject, Gournay identifies a parallel shift towards 'modernization' in the chosen modes of architectural representation, namely Cormier's transition from traditional watercolor renderings to photographs of a model used as a promotional medium. This article is a logical compliment to Gournay's close study of the main stages of the development of the main pavilion published in the exhibition catalog, and therefore I consider it as an integral part of the important contribution she made with the exhibition and its catalog. Isabelle Gournay, "Graphisme et praxis chez Ernest Cormier, 'Architecte et Ingénieur-Constructeur': le 'Pavillon Principal' de l'Université de Montréal," *RACAR: Revue d'art canadienne/Canadian Art Review* 16, no. 2 (1989): 161-164, 273-287.

It is worth noting that on three occasions prior to this major exhibition on the UdeM, and prior to the opening of the CCA's building and garden in 1989, a modest sampling of Cormier's work was included in a few much smaller exhibitions. The first exhibition to draw from the Fonds Cormier was entitled, "The Preservation and Conservation of Ernest Cormier's Prints and Drawings," that took place from August to October 1982. The main purpose of this exhibition was "to demonstrate some of the special problems related to the conservation of the drawings of architects" and it used 11 of Cormier's graphic works to showcase these issues. See the typescript document: Diana Archibald, "Exhibition of the Preservation and Conservation of Ernest Cormier's Prints and Drawings: August-October 1982" (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1982). Following this, and in conjunction with Archifête, a

multidisciplinary publication focuses on the architectural development and political realization of the main pavilion Cormier designed for the Université de Montréal (1924-43), complimented by invited scholarly contributions that provide important contextual insights into Cormier's life, and analyses of his dual professional training, his early work, and the culture of architectural practice in 1920s Montréal. As such, this exhibition catalog is an authoritative source for obtaining a solid grounding in the subject, and a valuable resource for enabling further research on Cormier. This exhibition and publication stimulated scholarly interest in 1990 that has since tapered off. In conjunction with this exhibition, the CCA hosted the symposium "Ernest Cormier and Issues of Modernity," the texts from which were published in the themed issue of the *Journal of Canadian Art History* (1990-91) devoted to Cormier.¹² These articles provide valuable, learned contributions that address the nature of Cormier's professionalism and the design practice he established in Montréal, the influence of seventeenth and eighteenth-century architecture and theory on his work, an analysis of the residence Cormier designed for himself, and the architecture of university teaching hospitals. Additionally in 1990, the special issue of *ARQ*, the

series of events celebrating architecture that took place from May 21-18, 1983, the CCA mounted the exhibition, "Trois Architectes / Trois Quartiers," that drew from its archives of the Montréal-based architects Ludger Lemieux (1872-1953), Ernest Isbell Barott (1884-1966) and Ernest Cormier (1885-1980), each of whose significant works were taken to be representative of a particular area of the city. The bilingual 15-page publication comprised a checklist describing each project with images as well as a brief discussion of conservation challenges, and included a foldout to compliment the bus tour that showcased many of the buildings presented in the exhibition. See Centre canadien d'architecture, *Trois Architectes-Trois Quartiers: Ludger Lemieux, St-Henri; Ernest Cormier, Cité Universitaire; Ernest Isbell Barott, St-Antoine* (Montréal: Centre canadien d'architecture, 1983). Finally, the exhibition "The Villas of Pliny and Classical Architecture in Montréal," held at the Montréal Museum of Fine Arts from October 14 to December 11, 1983, curated by Pierre du Prey, featured, among other materials drawn from the CCA collection, the drawings and watercolor paintings of the Villa Madama that Cormier had prepared during his two-year fellowship at the British School in Rome from 1914-16. Pierre du Prey's sustained research on the Italian villa was published almost one decade later as *The Villas of Pliny from Antiquity to Posterity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) within which, Cormier's documentation and graphic reconstruction of the Villa Madama are discussed on pages 68-71 and 73.

¹² See the *Journal of Canadian Art History – Annales de l'histoire de l'art canadien* 13, no. 2 - 14, no. 1 'Ernest Cormier' (1990-91). The bilingual symposium entitled, "Ernest Cormier et les problématiques de la modernité / Ernest Cormier and Issues of Modernity" took place at the CCA on September 28, 1990.

journal of the members of the Ordre des Architectes du Québec (OAQ), featured a special issue containing short but thoughtful texts of several projects and aspects of Cormier's practice, namely, his professional hybridity and his complicated relationship to his former colleague Jean-Omer Marchand, as well as focused studies of his projects for the Université de Montréal (1924-43), St-Ambroise Church (1923-26), the Seaplane Hangar at Point-aux-Trembles (1928-30), and the Supreme Court of Canada (1935-50).¹³ In addition to the pioneering scholarship on Cormier contained in this book and the two themed journal issues published 25 years ago – to which my dissertation is particularly indebted, especially for being the first studies to open up and begin to take stock of Cormier's archive – there also exist a few other isolated studies of some of Cormier's work, many of which were written as historic reports for Government publications promoting the preservation of built cultural heritage, some of them unpublished.¹⁴ Lastly, mentions of Cormier's work have also appeared in other exhibition

¹³ See *ARQ: Architecture/Québec* 53 'Ernest Cormier' (Feb 1990), edited by France Vanlaethem. In addition to the article topics mentioned, the journal issue also featured an one-page exposé on the filmmaker François Girard and his cinematographic use of Cormier's buildings, as well as a concise biography and list of Cormier's projects.

¹⁴ Texts on Cormier's archive and on some of his projects have, for the most part, appeared in Government publications on the cultural heritage of Quebec and Canada. See Michel Lalonde, "Le Fonds Ernest Cormier," *Archives* 16, no. 2 (Sept 1984): 35-56; within the three-volume publication on the built heritage of the province of Quebec, entitled, *Les Chemins de la mémoire*, see Pierre-Richard Bisson, "Maison Ernest-Cormier," 126-128, Robert Fortier, "Fonds Ernest-Cormier," 353-357, and Robert Little, "Collection Ernest-Cormier," 145-149; Isabelle Gournay and France Vanlaethem, "The Supreme Court Building," in *The Supreme Court of Canada and Its Justices, 1875-2000: A Commemorative Book* (Toronto: Published by Dundurn Group and the Supreme Court of Canada in Cooperation with Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2000), 195-211; France Vanlaethem and Isabelle Gournay, "La construction de l'immeuble," in *L'Édifice Ernest-Cormier: Siège de la Cour d'appel du Québec à Montréal* (Québec: Ministère de la Culture et des communications; Les publications du Québec, 2005), 15-28; and Christina Cameron, Claudine Déom, and Nicole Valois, *Le Campus: Le Patrimoine architectural et paysager de l'Université de Montréal = The Architectural and Landscape Heritage* (Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2010). References to some of Cormier's buildings also appear in the multi-volume reference, *Répertoire d'architecture traditionnelle sur le territoire de la Communauté urbaine de Montréal*, 12 vols (Montréal: Communauté urbaine de Montréal, Service de la planification du territoire, 1980-1990).

Two unpublished historic reports that I was fortunate to be given photocopies of by kindly staff are: Béatrice Hajjar, Monique Côté, and Emmanuel Décarie, "Le Jardin disparu du Studio Cormier, Rapport de recherche pour sa reconstruction" 2 vols (Montréal: Ministère de la Culture. Direction générale de Montréal, Direction du patrimoine, 1993); and Shannon Ricketts, "National Printing Bureau and Heating

catalogs and in publications directed primarily to a general audience.¹⁵

Reading Cormier

The first observation that is typically made about Cormier is that he was trained as both an architect *and* an engineer, and that he alternated between engineering and architectural pursuits with fluidity and ease: he neither confused the two professions, nor perceived a conflict between them but rather believed that a natural and vital complementarity existed between the two.¹⁶ This lack of conflict is unusual for Cormier's time, given the marked historic split dating from the eighteenth century within French culture, when, for reasons deemed to be of mutual benefit, the professions of architecture and engineering underwent a process of mutual isolation.¹⁷ In Montréal during the interwar period, possessing these dual qualifications was

Plant, 45 Sacré-Coeur Blvd., Hull, Quebec" (Ottawa: Historical Services Branch, Federal Heritage Buildings Review Office, 1993).

¹⁵ Mentions of Cormier can be found in a few exhibition catalogues, namely: Isabelle Gournay and France Vanlaethem, eds., *Montréal Metropolis, 1880-1930* (Montréal; Toronto: Canadian Centre for Architecture; Stoddart Publishing, 1998); Janet Brooke, *Henri Hébert, 1884-1950: un sculpteur moderne*. (Québec: Musée du Québec, 2000); and Emmanuel Bréon and Philippe Rivoirard, eds, *1925: Quand L'art déco séduit le monde* (Paris: Cité du patrimoine et de l'architecture, 2013).

As well, Cormier's projects have received attention in several books focusing largely on domestic architecture and/or on art deco design that are primarily addressed to a general public interested in architecture. These include: François Rémillard and Brian Merrett, *Mansions of the Golden Square Mile: Montréal, 1850-1930*, trans. Joshua Wolfe (Montréal: Meridian, 1987; 1986); Jean-Claude Marsan, "Le Studio Ernest-Cormier" [*Le Devoir*, February 21, 1986] in *Sauver Montréal: chroniques d'architecture et d'urbanisme* (Montréal: Les Éditions du Boréal, 1990), 379-382; Adele Freedman, *Sight Lines: Looking at Architecture and Design in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1990); Sandra Cohen-Rose, *Northern Deco: Art Deco Architecture in Montréal* (Montréal: Corona Pub., 1996); and Adrian Tinniswood, *The Art Deco House: Avant-Garde Houses of the 1920s and 1930s* (New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 2002).

¹⁶ Yves Deschamps, "They Both Build: Notes on the Training of Ernest Cormier, Architect and Engineer-Builder," in *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal*, ed. Isabelle Gournay (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1990), 125, 127. For a discussion of Cormier's especially successful hybridization of the two cultures see also Guillerme, "Une hybridation exemplaire," 11.

¹⁷ For two different interpretations of the competing cultures of architecture and engineering in eighteenth century French culture and their respective value systems see Alberto Pérez Gómez, *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992. 1983) and Antoine Picon, *French Architects and Engineers in the Age of Enlightenment [Architectes et ingénieurs au siècle des Lumières]*, trans. Martin Thom (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

unusual and the professional title Cormier devised for himself when he opened his practice in Montréal in 1918 – *Architecte et ingénieur-constructeur* [Architect and Engineer-Constructor] – had the clear intention of highlighting his range of expertise and its prestige. Cormier’s exceptional status equipped him with the skills to manage the range of requirements of any design project to a masterful degree, and he did not fail to impress upon clients the cost-savings advantages of having the same design professional attend to the complex range of aesthetic and technical dimensions of the project.¹⁸

Cormier’s professional exceptionality has also been discussed in terms of the astoundingly small size of his office, even during his most prolific years, and his involvement at every stage of the design process.¹⁹ Maintaining an office culture with a clear hierarchical organization that placed him at the top of a small, stable team of skilled draftsmen who executed his instructions, Cormier was a tireless and rigorous worker who reserved for himself the development of the *parti*, most of the design process (including the interior decoration and

¹⁸ Gournay notes that Cormier’s capacity to superbly master the technical demands of a project set him apart from most architects in Montréal at that time, and that when trying to obtain commissions, he would highlight his technical competence as much as his hard-earned diploma from the École des Beaux-Arts. Isabelle Gournay, “Introduction,” in *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal*, ed. Isabelle Gournay (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1990), 12; Gournay, “Graphisme et praxis chez Ernest Cormier,” 162. Phyllis Lambert asserts that Cormier distinguished himself from his Montréal colleagues through the thoroughness of his research, the range of his involvement in design, and the rigor of his training and practice as an engineer, which enabled him to work at the cutting edge of technology. Phyllis Lambert, “Architecture where cultures meet,” in *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal*, ed. Isabelle Gournay (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1990), 23; Phyllis Lambert, “Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal,” *Journal of Canadian art history* 13, no. 2 - 14, no. 1 (1990-91): 10.

¹⁹ Vanlaethem has studied Cormier’s employee timesheets and notes that in 1925 his staff totaled seven, including the secretary. Vanlaethem, “Ernest Cormier, un grand professionnel,” 49. That year Cormier was working on the Montréal Courthouse Annex, the Montréal Chamber of Commerce, four churches (two of them located in Rhode Island), one presbytery, one elementary school, and the design of the UdeM campus. In parallel, during that year he renovated a house located at 175 Mansfield Street (no longer extant) to accommodate his new office and began teaching at the École Polytechnique.

furniture design) and all presentation drawings.²⁰ Extending beyond his formal training as a civil engineer, Cormier at times would go beyond structural calculations to take on the task of mechanical and electrical engineering. What emerges therefore, is that his professional practice, which has come down to us through his built record and archive, is not the fruit of a group of collaborators who were encouraged to contribute their own ideas, but rather reveals Cormier's incessantly active mind at work.²¹

Commentators before me have also observed how having been first trained in the quantitative art of the engineer, and subsequently pursuing an arduous course of competition-based study in architecture at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris, left an indelible mark on Cormier's working method. Analyses of Cormier's projects tend to pay close attention to how his approach to design –characterized in large measure by his attachment to working from the plan to generate the composition, combined with his tendency toward symmetry, monumentality, clear hierarchical organization, and an inherently classicizing aesthetic – is textbook *Beaux-Arts*. Related to this, is Cormier's conviction that the architect needs to be a master of all the arts, and accounts of Cormier's life and work invariably make a point of the fact that he mastered an impressive range of artistic media and won awards for his graphic work.²²

²⁰ In the mid-1950s, Cormier was quoted as saying, "My sculpture, my drawings – all my work – I make as truthful and strong as possible, and I always execute my own plans myself." Bacque, "If it's big, I'll take it," 25. Also see: Gournay, Introduction," 12; Gournay, "Graphisme et praxis chez Ernest Cormier," 162-163; Vanlaethem, "Ernest Cormier, un grand professionnel," 56.

²¹ In a letter to journalist Arthur Prévost dated June 17, 1975, Cormier states: "Pour ce qui trait à ma carrière elle-même, à mon apport personnel, j'ai toujours fait le travail de création moi-même; comme je faisais toute la composition, j'ai toujours pu me limiter à une équipe d'au plus dix employés, des dessinateurs et ingénieurs." In folder ARCH259594 809/A-4, box 001-2010-213 T, Fonds Ernest Cormier, Canadian Centre for Architecture. All references to archival materials refer to the Fonds Cormier conserved at the CCA, unless indicated otherwise. Also see: Lalonde, "Le Fonds Ernest Cormier," 41; Lambert, "Architecture where cultures meet," 17-18.

²² Chauvin, "Interviews d'artistes," 7; Prévost, "La Personnalité de la semaine;" Chevalier, "Entretien avec Ernest Cormier," 18, 89; Lambert, "Architecture where cultures meet," 19.

Cormier's mastery of the arts was reflected not only in his formal study of watercolor painting, sculpture and decorative art while a student at the École des Beaux-Arts, but most tellingly in his lifelong commitment to self-directed activities in painting, sculpture, photography, bookbinding, furniture design, and the design of interior and exterior decorative elements that contributed to, and drew from, his practice as an architect and engineer in important ways. Within western architecture culture at large during the early twentieth-century, Cormier is not unique in his undertaking of the design of the building and everything for it, yet in light of the context in which he practiced, his sustained engagement with these aspects of design went well beyond that of his colleagues in Canada, and reflects the marked influence that the French decorative arts movement had on him.

In sum, the existing literature on Cormier tends to characterize him as operating between two cultures, with the paired terms that are mobilized to define his contribution being multiple and interconnected. For instance, he is seen as a bridging the professions of architecture and engineering, or more broadly, engaged equally in 'art' and in 'science.' He is also understood to be drawing together influences from Europe and North America to develop his personal vocabulary, and thus negotiates the offerings and values of the Old World and that of the New. The combination of these characterizations is to frame Cormier's contribution as representing an adept synthesis of 'tradition' and 'modernism'. It is my position that this identification of the various cultures, influences and values that Cormier bridged and harmonized, is well-founded and supported by the historical evidence. The scholarly research done to date points out the dominant themes and orientations bearing on Cormier's life and work, through which a constellation of forces emerges, and several scholars have aptly noted that his work resists easy classification. Yet, while being a very productive start to mapping out the main lines and dominant issues, and synthesizing many of the most important dimensions of Cormier's oeuvre,

the tendency to consistently frame him within pairs of terms and concepts that are implicitly understood to be contrasting, and possibly at times, antagonistic, may ultimately risk imposing limits to our attention to, and deeper understanding of, the untidy complexities of the person, his work, and his time and place. One hypothesis that drives this dissertation is that binary thinking may encourage unexamined assumptions about an even weighing of the parts in the work under study, which in turn, could set up expectations for clear categories and neat symmetries. Such an epistemological framework would have difficulty taking account of all that cannot be accommodated within the dynamics of “either-or,” thereby hiding the complex nature of Cormier’s synthesis. The nuanced approach that this dissertation seeks to effect is to analyze the work from a position of “both-and,” such that Cormier’s work and Cormier the person, can be better understood as adding up to much more than the sum of their individual parts.²³ My contribution, therefore, is not a piece of revisionism, but rather gratefully acknowledges the preceding work and wishes to build on it by extending its findings.

Cormier’s work is considered to be a milestone in the development of architecture in Canada,²⁴ and it is a central ambition of this dissertation to elaborate in what Cormier’s ‘modernity’ consists. From Isabelle Gournay’s study I take as particularly valuable her assertion that his work points out “a third course between historicism and modernism.”²⁵ This is an

²³ I take this paradigm from Venturi’s now famous “gentle manifesto for a nonstraightforward architecture,” whose postmodern critique of modern architecture is not related to my project in theme or intention, but which nevertheless, offers a useful theorization of how to conduct a reading that is attentive to, and tolerant of, the inherent complexities and contradictions contained within a work. See Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York; Boston: Museum of Modern Art; Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, 1977, 1966).

²⁴ Gérard Morisset, *L’architecture en Nouvelle-France: ouvrage orné de 160 gravures* (Québec: Éditions du Pélican, 1980; 1949), 117; Gournay, “Introduction,” *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal*, 11; France Vanlaethem, “Le Patrimoine de la modernité,” *Continuité: le patrimoine en perspective* 53 (Spring 1992): 20.

²⁵ Gournay, “Introduction,” 11. Beyond making this astute claim, she does not theorize it further.

important insight that merits elaboration, and one that lends itself to an interpretation of Cormier from an inclusive “both-and” perspective. How Cormier’s personal synthesis of his diverse range of interests, involvements and influences manifests a “third way” is a productive angle from which to better probe the nature and significance of his contribution, and its deeper implications for the context in which he operated. In this regard, my study seeks to better understand what shaped Cormier’s imagination, priorities and choices, and building upon close readings of his work, to probe both the paradoxes revealed by his inconsistencies and inner contradictions within his techniques of thought that lurk behind his own belief in the straightforwardness of his pragmatic problem-solving methods, and the intentional and accidental representational force of his projects. Through this approach, the dissertation better complicates the picture in productive ways by identifying the constant and varied reciprocity of when he is being innovative within semblances of convention-boundedness, and when convention and context impose limitations on his innovations. In part by being attentive to the fertile gap between what Cormier says about his projects and what a close study of the work itself reveals, this dissertation exposes what is transpiring on and beneath surface appearances, and analyses what his work illuminates about the broader context it is responding to.

Like scholars before me, I have been struck by the range of Cormier’s activities and the skill with which he tackled them. His vast professional and personal archive conserves abundant historical evidence attesting to his voracious curiosity, the capacious arc of his activities, and his high level of competence in the multidisciplinary range of endeavors he undertook. From the outset of my archival research, my first intuition, which has since been continually reinforced, is that Cormier was first and foremost *a maker*, and that it is ‘making’ that unified his seemingly

As well, Lambert’s assessment that Cormier’s archive reveals no significant divisions between his various activities, lends itself to an analysis of Cormier’s work that is attendant to its category-crossing multiplicity. Lambert, “Architecture where cultures meet,” 18.

disparate pursuits and areas of interest and expertise; the common ground from which all of Cormier's activities spring and return to. Insisting that Cormier is a figure who is more-than-dual, this dissertation interprets the striking range of his involvement – which, for example, is vividly illustrated by placing his handcrafted leather book bindings and his award-winning watercolor paintings²⁶ alongside the rigorously detailed structural cue cards he prepared that bring together charts, graphs and equations, largely to do with reinforced concrete construction²⁷ – as all partaking of his keen interest in, and rigorous attention to, how things are made. In this way, Cormier's deeply hands-on artisanal craft work and his sophisticated, abstract mathematical calculations are not construed as opposing poles but as complimentary dimensions of his understanding of designing and making – i.e., of composition and construction – as being crucial aspects of one unified process.

Given the recent literature that attends to the current interest in maker culture, an important clarification of my characterization of Cormier as a 'maker' bears mentioning. For example, anthropologist Tim Ingold offers a compelling exploration of making as a deeply material-bound experience that privileges the process over the final product, thus defining an art of inquiry that “continually answers to the fluxes of flows of the materials with which we work.”²⁸ In this model of making, the materials shape the designer's self-discovery as much as the practitioner acts on the materials, thus describing a process of knowing from the inside; one that allows things to grow in us, by thinking through observation as opposed to thinking after

²⁶ See Figures 2.8, 2.14, 2.15, 2.17, 2.20 and 2.22 in Chapter 2.

²⁷ See Figures 2.10, 2.11 and 2.12 in Chapter 2.

²⁸ Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (Milton Park, UK: Routledge, 2013), 6. Others who speak of making in ways that I have not found evidence to warrant applying to a reading of Cormier, include: G. Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft* (Oxford: Berg, 2007) and Janet Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

it.²⁹ By contrast, Cormier did not leave memoirs, diaries or even many process sketches from which we might discern his relationship to the materials and how the process of making might have transformed him. Rather, Cormier's form of making seems to be less about an open-ended process of thinking through an engagement with materials that is receptive to surprises, but rather, follows a more controlled inverse process of making through thinking, that Ingold characterizes as the paradigm of academia, and one that privileges the adherence to refined and well-researched techniques. Making vis-à-vis Cormier then, is more about taking on a range of pursuits that all contribute to different but interrelated aspects of design, through a method that does not seem to have valued the process as an end in itself, but rather saw it as the means to obtain a final, polished result.

Inseparable from Cormier's deep curiosity for how things are made, are his exacting standards for the quality of the execution of his work and a deep concern for his work to be both in step with its time and to be an enduring monument that anticipates future needs and therefore is not quickly outmoded.³⁰ Although very well-read, well-traveled and up to date on contemporary trends and discourses – which directed his ambitions for the timely relevance of his designs and informed his comparison of himself to those whom he considered his peers – Cormier was much more inclined to involve himself with the production of work than in any theorizing about it. Rather than participating in theoretical debates, he confined himself to

²⁹ Ingold, *Making*, 11.

³⁰ In 1954 Cormier was quoted as saying, "I want my buildings to look substantial. [...] I don't want them to look cheap or effeminate. It would be true to say that very often they are blunt and bulky. But I make sure they are always well designed." Bacque, "If it's big, I'll take it," 25. See also: Sigler, "Plans by Cormier," 27.

In an unpublished student paper prepared for Professor John Bland's "History of Architecture in Canada" class at McGill University's School of Architecture, Michel Lacroix interviewed Cormier who is said to have shared his concern to produce enduring monuments. See Michel Lacroix, "A Report on the Université de Montréal Building," student paper (March 1963), RBSC, McGill University.

matters of direct practical applicability, as demonstrated by his numerous committee involvements that attended to problem-solving architectural and urban challenges of the day, particularly the role he played within the Province of Quebec Association of Architects in the regulation of practice, during a period when measures were taken to protect local architects from the encroachments of foreign practitioners.³¹

Cormier's practice was deeply rooted to the local conditions of Montréal, yet as someone who was foreign trained and successful in obtaining public commissions at national and international levels, he was also world-class. He was particularly active in Montréal during the interwar period, which was a decisive time in the province of Quebec in terms of the development of intellectual and scientific activities, and the related phenomenon of the development of a national consciousness among French Canadians.³² At the end of the nineteenth century, Montréal had become the nation's economic and cultural capital, and as a rapidly expanding industrial and urban center, experienced intense transformations that had significant consequences for architecture, urbanism and the social body at large. Situated at the geographically advantageous confluence of important land and water trade routes in North America, Montréal during the interwar period had become a metropolis through which people, ideas and capital flowed in abundance.³³ Like the city, which was a dynamic node of exchange

³¹ Lambert notes that in general, Cormier was “engaged by the actuality, the current solutions to a problem rather than its history; by the practical and applied aspects of the arts rather than aesthetics.” Lambert, “Architecture where cultures meet,” 19.

³² Marcel Fournier, *L'entrée dans la modernité: science, culture et société au Québec* (Montréal: Editions Saint-Martin, 1986), 11-13; Marcel Fournier, “Tradition and Modernism: The Construction of the Université de Montréal,” in *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal*, ed. Isabelle Gournay (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1990), 44. See also Jonathan Fournier, “Les économistes canadiens-français pendant l'entre-deux-guerres: entre la science et l'engagement,” M.A., Université de Sherbrooke (Canada), 2002.

³³ Raymond Tanghe, *Géographie humaine de Montréal* (Montréal: Action canadienne-française, 1928), 123-124; Raymond Tanghe, *Itinéraire Canadien* (Montréal: Éditions B.-D. Simpson, 1945), 69-70; Marsan, *Sauver Montréal: chroniques d'architecture et d'urbanisme*, 17-18.

that gathered, assimilated and redistributed a constant flow of forces, this study characterizes Cormier as a kind of hinge figure too: one who acted as a critical agent of cultural transfer and translation between local, national and international influences, working within and against the mood and conditions of possibility of the place to produce something new. Departing from the bias that an informed discussion of the relevance of Cormier's work cannot be separated from either his life or from the urban context in which he operated, this dissertation argues that Cormier's contribution ought to be considered as both a barometer and catalyst of cultural change; an illuminating lens through which to understand the culture(s) of Montréal and the pressures and opportunities for architecture in the city at that time. While the constellation of salient issues that a study of Cormier's work involves us in, could be explored through other means, this dissertation argues that no other architect operating in Canada during the 1920s, 30s and 40s made a contribution to the built environment in Montréal and to Canadian culture at large, that brings together so many key issues at so many scales, and is of as great a consequence as that of Cormier.

This dissertation is heavily dependent on archives and draws from the historical resources available in 20 fonds, conserved within 11 repositories, located in Canada, the United States and France.³⁴ The most important source for this project has been Cormier's extensive personal and professional archive, conserved at the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) in Montréal.³⁵ Since the archive's acquisition, efforts have been made at various times to catalog its

³⁴ These refer only to the archives that I have visited in person. For the full list of archives I have consulted, including institutions that make their collections of maps, images and other documents available to the public on-line, see the Bibliography.

³⁵ Cormier's personal and professional archive, including much of his extensive library was acquired by the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) in several stages over a few years following Cormier's death in 1980. Although the first architect's archive to be acquired by the CCA, the processing of the Fonds Ernest Cormier (FEC) remains incomplete, and only since 2011 has there existed online a partial finding aid to facilitate research. The admirable efforts of Tania Franco during her short contract as archivist

contents, but the processing of the fonds remains incomplete, and while the information made available in the past four years in the CCA's Collection online is very helpful, to date there does not exist a complete finding aid. This has meant that up until recently, access to the Cormier archive has been limited, and that even now that more material has been made accessible, the undertaking of an *oeuvre complète* would not be possible to realize by a solitary researcher within the timeframe that is deemed reasonable for a PhD. However, the situation also suggests that the archive contains never-before studied materials and therefore, that the Fonds Cormier has additional potential. My own project has been made possible through the kind permission granted to me to conduct extensive research in that fonds, and through the generous efforts of staff to suggest and locate materials that I would not have been able to search for on my own.³⁶

A piece with this project's reliance on archives is an attempt to resist imposing a predetermined theoretical framework onto the archival material, in a top-down fashion, but

spanning from the Fall of 2010 until the Spring of 2011, did much to organize and make more accessible, a portion of the Fonds. I am grateful to her for sharing information concerning the organization of the archive and for alerting me to items of potential interest as she processed boxes. For descriptions of the contents of the Cormier archive see the CCA's Collection online as well as: Lalonde, "Le fonds Ernest-Cormier," 35-56; Fortier, "Fonds Ernest-Cormier," 353-357; and Lambert, "Architecture where Cultures Meet," 17-29.

From among the materials acquired by the CCA from Cormier's widow, the best organized and the most easily accessible are Cormier's books. The 2372 volumes attributed to the Ernest Cormier Library, represent a large portion of what had been his extensive personal and professional library, and include most of the book bindings attributed to Cormier. These publications were acquired in several phases during the early 1980s and the librarians responsible for the transfer paid careful attention to noting the placement of the books as Cormier had organized them on the various bookcases in his home and office at 3675 chemin de la Côte-des-Neiges, where he lived during the last five years of his life. See the three boxes ID90-A392, CORM 25, 1; ID90-A392, CORM 25, 2 and 6; and ID90-A392, CORM 25, 3 in the CCA's Library collection, which contain the inventory cards of the Ernest Cormier library. When his collection of periodicals was acquired with his books, they were absorbed into the general library collection. However, two lists available for download in PDF format from the CCA's library catalog mention which of the CCA library's periodical holdings originally belonged to Cormier. See [w3.cca.qc.ca/biblio/Horizon/findingaids/CormierPerList.html](http://www3.cca.qc.ca/biblio/Horizon/findingaids/CormierPerList.html) and <http://www3.cca.qc.ca/biblio/Horizon/findingaids/CormierNonPertinentPerList.htm>

³⁶ I am grateful to Robert Desaulniers, Head of Archives, for granting me permission to conduct extensive research in the Fonds Ernest Cormier. While all of the collections team at the CCA has been helpful and supportive of this undertaking, I feel particularly indebted to Tania Franco, Marie Gouret and Renata Gutman for their generously conscientious efforts to facilitate my archival research.

rather to strive to be attentive to the clues for interpretation available for historiographic illumination that emerge from the material traces that Cormier has left. Giving priority to an intensive study of portions of the archive, my research has also necessarily entailed empirical studies of Cormier's buildings and their socio-urban context, as well as readings from an interdisciplinary range of texts to help contextualize my findings. From this research, what has emerged as a recurrent theme, and subsequently, was taken up as a productive lens through which to theorize the meaning and significance of Cormier's work, is the theme of 'construction,' variously construed. In the first instance, arguing that Cormier's investment in making – whose spectrum cuts across diverse scales, programs, materials and métiers – is key to understanding his core concerns, I contend that the issue of construction encapsulates the crux of Cormier's epistemological commitments and the related varieties of his applied research. Moreover, construction in its cognate, personal form, 'constructor' [*constructeur*], also emerges as tremendously significant to Cormier for the way it condenses a complex array of nuances and associations of French architecture and engineering culture that Cormier wished to align himself with. Finally, in analyzing what Cormier's work discloses about his personal preoccupations as well as what it reveals about the cultural context within and for which the work was produced, my dissertation takes a keen interest in architecture's representational power, and the ways that its meaning(s) can stem from and simultaneously evade the intentions of its author. As a public and central mode of cultural representation, architecture communicates, and in this regard, this dissertation mobilizes 'construction' specifically in terms of how architecture participates actively in the construction of identity.

In this dissertation I use the terms "self-construction," "self-fashioning" and the "construction of identity" more or less interchangeably to probe illuminating instances in which particular modes of representation and their motivations (be they at the scale of the individual or

mobilized for the aims of a collective) are cultivated in architecture culture, and to analyze the significant *savoir-faire* that is required for their enactment. As a deeply social activity, identity construction always transpires in response to the dynamics of the actors' particular context and through interactions with others. In this way, any act of self-construction or identity formation is shaped by the desired projected image of the individual actor or group, and by the context in which the actor or group is embedded, that simultaneously inspires and constrains those desires. The actor's situation is one that is impossible to leave behind and therefore, is a crucial co-determinant of both the self and of those who self-identify as a collective group. My thinking about identity construction draws in part from the work of specific authors as well as from less precisely traceable notions about identity and self-representation that have been developed in studies of culture across a range of disciplinary fields. In the latter case, these discursive concepts have been broadly disseminated and have gained currency as part of a collective theoretical-epistemological toolkit that colors my vocabulary and inspires my questions of the material under study.³⁷ The dissertation probes two primary instances of identity construction that play

³⁷ For instance, from Teodros Kiros who defends the thesis that individuals have the potential to construct truths, I have benefitted from his position that truths can be developed "(a) by the emulation of models, (b) by imitation, (c) by self-construction." He argues that "[s]elf-constructed truth is the most powerful way of producing enduring values and norms precisely because in constructing values, for example, the individual not only knows (a) how enviable models do things and (b) how repeated imitation produces certain habit(s), but also (c) fundamentally masters the inner architectonic along with the detailed logics of the values themselves." Teodros Kiros, *Self-Construction and the Formation of Human Values: Truth, Language, and Desire* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998), 124. As well, the writings of the highly influential sociologist Erving Goffman (which are dated but in some ways evergreen vis-à-vis the insights his model offers about identity formation) have been useful in my thinking about the performative or dramaturgical dimension of the (re)presentation of self through social interaction. Goffman writes, "When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be." See Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959), 17, as well as Erving Goffman, *Encounters: Two Studies in the Sociology of Interaction* (New York; London: Macmillan; Collier Macmillan, 1985). For a recent review of the main literature and a discussion that foregrounds the centrality of the notion of difference in the various factors that mark cultural identity, see Simon Clarke,

out at very different yet interconnected scales, through the intended and accidental representational agency of architecture.

A house, a palace

This study focuses on the house Cormier designed for himself in Montréal in 1930 and the commission he received to design the new campus of the Université de Montréal, of which only the gigantic main pavilion (1924-43) was realized. Within the existing literature on Cormier's oeuvre, these two projects have received the most attention, and rightfully as they are his most accomplished works.³⁸ I take the position that the house and main pavilion for the

"Culture and Identity," in *The SAGE Handbook of Cultural Analysis*, ed. Tony Bennett and John Frow (London: SAGE Publications, 2008), 510-529.

Among the ideas "in the air" that have undoubtedly influenced my thought and vocabulary, is the concept of "self-fashioning" that Stephen Greenblatt mobilized in his analysis of the artful construction of identity on the part of selected sixteenth-century English writers, which since has had wider application in studies of culture within and beyond literary criticism. See Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. 1980). Useful to my study is the way Greenblatt theorizes "self-fashioning" as a deliberate effort to cultivate a public persona in accordance with the established standards that are deemed socially acceptable for the time and place in which the historical actor is operating. His starting point is that "[t]here are always selves – a sense of personal order, a characteristic mode of address to the world, a structure of bounded desires – and always some elements of deliberate shaping in the formation and expression of identity." In this regard, the act of composing oneself or crafting one's identity is a matter of design: "the fashioning of human identity is a manipulable, artful process." Also useful to my interests, is the interpretive practice he advances that examines three interconnected ways in which he sees literature functioning, which I see as applying equally to architecture and its representational power, namely: "as a manifestation of the concrete behavior of its particular author, as itself the expression of the codes by which behavior is shaped, and as a reflection upon those codes." See Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 1, 2, 4.

³⁸ This is not to suggest that these two buildings are his *only* important works. Throughout his career, journalists and Cormier himself, would highlight the Université de Montréal, as well as his work on the Montréal Courthouse Annex (1920-26) and the Supreme Court of Canada (1938-50). These all constitute large and prestigious public commissions that represent well his design talent and mastery of all aspects of the project. Yet I insist that of all his public commissions, the Université de Montréal is by far the most important contribution to he made to the built environment in Canada. As well, his private house – which journalists would not have commented on because few would have ever seen it, and moreover, which Cormier himself would not call attention to when enumerating his CV highlights, because its program and scale are less impressive than institutional projects of national significance – is of central importance in understanding his deepest concerns. Thus these two projects are advanced as his most important contributions for the far-reaching issues they broach and for what they expose vis-à-vis cultural and architectural modernity during the interwar period in Canada.

university merit further scholarly study, not only due to their caliber but most importantly, because of the salient sociocultural and architectural issues they address and represent. I contend that within architecture culture in Montréal during the interwar period, these are the buildings that best illuminate the advent of cultural and architectural modernity in Quebec. Motivated and shaped by different ambitions, pressures and limitations but in their respective ways, speaking eloquently about the conditions of that historical moment in that particular place, these projects and the issues they open up, are best understood when studied together, which my dissertation is the first to do.

Taking a private house that was designed to have the dignity of a palace, and a public ‘palace’ that was conceived as the intellectual home and spiritual hearth of the French-Canadian people, this dissertation reveals important, and at times unexpected, connections between the two projects, despite their contrasting scales and their distinct programs.³⁹ Moreover, in addition to deepening our understanding of Cormier’s oeuvre, this dissertation analyzes these case studies as compelling instances of architecture’s intended and at times accidental, representational capacity vis-à-vis the construction of identity, revealing the extent to which these case studies are inscribed within, and conditioned by, the city. By probing how these works facilitate and reflect the construction of an individual’s identity, and that of a collective struggling to ensure a viable future for itself as a minority group, respectively, Cormier’s work vividly illuminates the

³⁹ This pairing of the small residence for the individual with the big institution serving a collective is inspired in part by the charged reciprocity between the house and the palace that Le Corbusier famously elaborated to frame his propagandistic statement of disgruntlement over losing the competition for the League of Nations in Geneva in the 1920s. See Le Corbusier, *Une maison - un palais. “À la recherche d’une unité architecturale”* (Paris: G. Crès et cie, 1928).

particular conditions of the time and place, which broadens the historical importance of his contribution. No study before mine has treated these projects together in this way.⁴⁰

Both of these buildings are representative of a high point in Cormier's career and reflect his alignment with the French *moderne* decorative arts movement that had widespread influence during the interwar period. Moreover, both projects were conceived during the last decade of Montréal's 50-year period of intensified growth, and in different ways, tap into and expose the culture of the city and the constraints and possibilities for architecture in Montréal during the 1920s and 30s, revealing how Cormier artfully navigated a middle path that entailed simultaneously aligning himself with, and discretely resisting, those conditions.

Contemporaneous and located in reasonably close proximity to one another within the city, these two works are brought together in the first instance, by Cormier himself, through the self-

⁴⁰ While I am not the first to remark on these projects' representational agency, no one else has studied the work from the theoretical angle of identity construction in as sustained, synthetic a way as this dissertation attempts to do. Noting the compartmentalized program of the Maison Cormier that largely determined its *parti*, Robert Little has cautiously asserted that, "[o]ne could conjecture [...] that the residence [...] was an expression in architectural terms of Ernest Cormier himself." This is an astute insight (and the article, among the most useful secondary sources to my study of the house) but he does not develop it further, beyond discerning Cormier's adaptation of some elements from Pierre Patout's Pavillon du Collectionneur in the design of the house, and speculating that this may have been an attempt on Cormier's part to appropriate for himself the role of the sophisticated connoisseur. For the most part Little focuses on likely precedents for the house, including its commonalities with the typology of the traditional late eighteenth-century townhouse, and discusses Cormier's furniture designs. Little, "1418, Avenue des Pins," 109. Similarly with the UdeM, scholars before me have made valid but passing mention of the pavilion's symbolic import, but have not elaborated on these observations or made this issue the focus of a sustained analysis. The symbolic power of the UdeM has been noted in general terms as: having played a role during the important period of development of the university system in Quebec; as reflecting the leap forward taken by Quebec society into the twentieth century and the modern era; and as an aesthetic and sociological "return to order." Its symbolic power has also been attributed to its placement on Mount Royal, and through this siting, how it acts as an entry to the city from the north. Additionally, the pavilion has been described as: reflecting the intellectual dynamism of French Canada; as embodying some of the functional and symbolic ideals of modern architecture; and as symbolic of a new state of mind that is open to modernism. It has also been pointed out that the tower's symbolic force has made it the emblem of the university. By extension, Cormier the person has been cast as a symbol of the renewal of Quebecois culture between the wars. For these remarks see the following articles published in the exhibition catalog *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal* edited by Isabelle Gournay: Marcel Fournier, "Tradition and Modernism," 43, 47, 55; Gournay, "Introduction," 11; Isabelle Gournay, "The Work of Ernest Cormier at the University de Montréal," 64, 69, 73, 76, 80; and Lambert, "Architecture where cultures meet," 17, 27.

referential ornamental device he placed above the formal entrance to his residence. This bas-relief of an elegant female figure holding a miniature tower that is generally assumed to represent that of the university, serves as the figurative and literal entry to my dissertation, for the ways in which it simultaneously indexes Cormier's two key projects, and more generally, condenses the most salient aspects of his life and work. Notwithstanding the occasional expressions of ambivalence or refutation that Cormier articulated vis-à-vis ornament, this dissertation argues and demonstrates that in these projects, it is his handling of ornament that expresses most clearly what is truly going on in the work.

It is my position that any deep understanding of Cormier's work must take account of the house he designed for himself for there we find the most dynamic expression of Cormier's manifold *savoir-faire* and a multilayered register of what "constructing" meant to him. In contrast to his somewhat prosaic and deliberately incomplete published description of his design, a close reading of the residence itself reveals it to be an essay on the elaboration of a radically modern lifestyle within a very conservative cultural milieu. Given the interplay between the house's siting, its organization and social life, and its elaborate decorative program alongside its collection and display of the widest spectrum and highest concentration of Cormier's acts of making, the house emerges as both the primary site of, and key actor in, the architect and engineer-constructor's self-construction. As such, the Cormier residence is highly revealing of its author and the context in which he was adeptly fitting into while remaining true to his personal choices.

Also highly loaded, albeit in very different ways, is Cormier's design for the main pavilion of the Université de Montréal, which came to be invested with meanings that he did not intend, nor seem to see as his role to address. Having outgrown the existing facilities, the Catholic university authorities sought to expand their institution of French-language higher

learning on a new campus, with the mission to provide future generations of French Canadians with the education necessary to occupy professional positions that with few exceptions had been hitherto inaccessible to them. Fulfilling the pedagogical-political and architectural ambitions of the university was a tall order, as the project came to be invested with the representational status of “the face of French Canada”: a national monument symbolizing the empowerment of Quebec’s francophones to form an intellectual, scientific elite equipped to self-govern and thrive in the modern world.⁴¹ Although Cormier was even more discrete about his political opinions than he was about architectural theory, and thus, did not partake of the ideologically loaded discourse surrounding his design, the sheer scale and political significance of this institutional commission, inadvertently made Cormier for a time, the architect of Quebec and his contribution, an important element in the galvanization of a political cause and in the construction of national identity at a key moment in its development. Reflecting the general increase in scale in architecture and urbanism in Canada’s cultural metropolis during the 1920s, the main pavilion is both a product of the changes in modern society during the early decades of the twentieth century, and a herald of Quebecois society’s entry into cultural and architectural modernity. As historian Gérard Morisset proclaimed, modern architecture arrived in Quebec through the triumphal path of the Université de Montréal.⁴² Subsequent scholars have concurred that Cormier’s design for the main pavilion constitutes the first truly ‘modern’ institutional building in Quebec, owing in large measure to the fact that it is the first instance of institutional architecture in Canada to be designed free of historicism.⁴³

⁴¹ Edouard Montpetit, “Notre Avenir,” *Revue Trimestrielle Canadienne* 2ième année, no. 8 (Feb 1917): 305-321; Roland G. Lefrançois and Association générale des étudiants. *Documentaire sur l’Université de Montréal* (Montréal: Édition “Le Quartier latin”, 1943), i.

⁴² Gérard Morisset, *L’architecture en Nouvelle-France*, 117.

⁴³ Gournay, “Introduction,” 11; Lambert, “Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal,” 10-11.

The composition and contributions of the dissertation

Organized into three thematic parts of two chapters each that are bracketed by an Introduction and an Epilogue, Part One provides a portrait of Montréal during the first half of the twentieth century, and a biographical portrait of Cormier. Following these contextual chapters on Cormier's life and the character of the urban context in which he practiced, Part Two analyses Cormier private residence (1930-31) and Part Three centers on his design for the main pavilion of the Université de Montréal (1924-43). To broach the relevance of Cormier's contribution beyond his native city, the Epilogue extends the temporal and geographic focus of my study to examine the issue of architecture's representational agency in the context of international postwar modernism, specifically, through Cormier's participation in the design of the United Nations Headquarters in the late 1940s, which expanded the consulting designer's mandate to include the roles of national representative and political ambassador on an international team of consultants.

Chapter 1 opens with Cormier's bas-relief, which inscribes his masterwork for the university into the front façade of his private home. Attending to these projects' fortuitous siting on Mount Royal, and the ways in which this central topographic feature registers many of the city's tensions and triumphs that Cormier's work was responding to, this chapter analyzes the mountain as a major urban landmark and *topos* within the collective urban imaginary whose mythic status has always exceeded its relatively modest physical proportions. As such, the mountain affords a window onto the building of Montréal from the interconnected perspectives of its sociocultural particularities and its architecture culture during the first decades of the twentieth century, when the city's economic prosperity and construction activity were at their peak. At that time, the relatively young profession of architecture was establishing itself through

formal education and through the organization of its professional association geared at regulating practice and protecting the interests of local practitioners from foreign competition.

As a complement to this urban portrait, Chapter 2 provides an analytical biographical overview of Cormier's formal training in engineering and architecture, his formative experiences and key influences abroad, and his professional and personal activities back home that reveal his abiding commitments, epistemological biases and the range and caliber of his various creative pursuits. Attentive to his *savoir-faire*, and his professional and personal networks, this chapter discusses the opportunities and constraints that Cormier worked within, and shows how the studio he designed for himself in the early 1920s, which he used until 1931, is an important predecessor to his house (which was his only other built residential project), through its use as an atelier for creative production and as an important gathering space in the cultural and intellectual life of Montréal during the 1920s.

The next two chapters focus on the ways in which the house Cormier designed for himself is the primary architectural support for his self-construction, and argue that this residence is a complex autobiographical portrait in built form of its designer. In order to begin to unpack the fuller meaning and significance of his residence, Chapter 3 explores the revealing connections that bind Cormier's seemingly idiosyncratic professional title, *Architecte et ingénieur-constructeur* [Architect and Engineer-Constructor], to the polyvalent density of the term *constructeur*, and to Cormier's admiration for, and alignment with, the French architect Auguste Perret, who rose to prominence during the first decades of the twentieth century through his use of reinforced concrete as an expressive medium. This chapter demonstrates how the main ornamental feature of the house's front entrance is about much more than the Université de Montréal, through the way in which it condenses and imports to Canada, Cormier's deep

attachment to these aspects of French architecture and engineering culture, and contributes to his self-perception and his self-fashioning as a ‘constructor’.

While Chapter 3 examines one key element placed prominently on the residence’s exterior to reveal how this ornament distills important aspects of the cultural transfer that Cormier sought to effect between Paris and his native Montréal, Chapter 4 undertakes a close analysis of the entire house, and the particular ways it responds to the social and topographic conditions of the city. Analyzing the house through a thick description of the carefully choreographed circulation through it, this chapter discusses Cormier’s complex negotiation of the mandates of decorum (i.e., his evident concern for respectability and social appropriateness) and the will to décor (i.e., his elaborate ornamental program that treated the design as a Total Work of Art). Studying the careful orchestration and representation of Cormier’s public persona through the form and social function of the house, and the measures he took to safeguard his privacy, this chapter exposes the degree to which Cormier’s residence is deeply autobiographical and reflects his most avant-garde position vis-à-vis modern life.

The following two chapters address the political and architectural realization of the main pavilion of the Université de Montréal, which was the first and main building to be erected on the university’s new campus on the northern slope of Mount Royal, and was fraught with innumerable challenges, including a 10-year hiatus to the construction due to dire financial constraints. Chapter 5 examines the project’s discursive construction as the crucial figurative and literal concretization of the pedagogico-political undertaking to assure the future of French Canadians, analyzing how the fate of the nationalist cause became inseparable from the fate of the building, and how the project’s supporters and detractors viewed this conflation. What was understood to hang in the balance of the gigantic building’s completion (or not) was nothing less dramatic than the “survival of the French Canadian race” and thus the drawn out saga of the

pavilion's construction can be seen to have poignantly mirrored the bumpy beginnings of a collective that felt marginalized, coming into its own in the modern world.

As a necessary compliment to this discussion of the pavilion's participation in the construction of a national identity, Chapter 6 focuses on the composition and construction of the building itself. As with the design of his house, many of Cormier's innovations for the university pavilion are not visible on the surface, and are not reflected in what he says about his work. A close reading of Cormier's design that is attentive to what he prioritized and deemed most significant in meeting the needs of the program and of the age, this chapter probes the range of elements and dimensions that make this building a work of modern architecture and argues that the result of his careful synthesis produced something new for the university, for Montréal, and for Canada at large.

While the preceding case studies have examined ways in which Cormier can be seen to have brought the world to his native city in Canada, the Epilogue showcases a moment in a mature phase of Cormier's career, when he was called upon to bring Canada to the world. In 1947, Cormier received the prestigious appointment to represent his country as one of 10 international consultants serving on the Board of Design for the United Nations Headquarters in New York, a collaborative undertaking that was intended to emulate the very spirit of international cooperation that the United Nations was created to facilitate. This appointment is not only relevant for what it says of the high esteem in which Cormier was held by his peers in the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada and the Federal government who nominated him, but it affords both a window onto Canada's new-found position as a middle power in the postwar world, and how the architecture and engineering consultant was called upon to represent himself and his country on the world stage, in a manner that fuses the priorities of design and diplomacy. The seven doors featuring allegories in bas-relief of Peace, Justice, Truth

and Fraternity, that grace the General Assembly Building were designed by Cormier and were offered as Canada's gift to the U.N.

As the first single-authored monograph on Cormier, this dissertation seeks to make an overdue contribution to the historiography of architecture in Canada. This study of two key projects within Cormier's oeuvre critically examined for the first time through the theoretical lens of identity construction, productively complicates our understanding of modernism in architecture during the interwar period in Canada and the significance of Cormier's contribution, by analyzing the ways his work addressed and expressed the conditions of modernity through and beyond its formal attributes. This investigation of how architecture relates to its time and place through its representational value and communicative function, raises questions that were as relevant to the architecture culture of the 1920s-40s as they are today. This study of Cormier, then, seeks to reveal a world that exposes ramifications for questions that we are still asking, or have begun asking again.

Like the scholarly work done before me, this study is motivated in part by the conviction that Cormier's work is of pioneering import in the development of architecture in Canada and deserves to be better known by a wider audience. The most obvious audience for this research is those interested in Cormier's oeuvre and/or in architecture in Canada at large. Yet since Cormier's work opens a window onto a dynamic urban context during a period of transition, and therefore speaks to issues that productively extend far beyond Cormier himself, this dissertation also hopes to appeal to those interested in architecture culture during the first half of the twentieth century in general, in the repercussions for design in industrial cities that grew into metropolises, and in the complex sociocultural factors bearing on architecture and urbanism in strikingly multilingual cities.

Additionally, while the existing literature invariably mentions Cormier's selection to collaborate on the design of the United Nations Headquarters because it serves to reinforce the claim that he was an important figure despite the fact that he is now relatively unknown outside of (and even within) Canada, no other study to date has examined the "behind the scenes" story of his nomination as Canada's representative to the Board of Design, or contextualized this prestigious appointment within a discussion of Canada's emergence as a middle power in the postwar world.

Finally, my dissertation hopes to stimulate further research on the subject, particularly given the untapped potential that the Fonds Cormier has for further exploration. It is my hope that my efforts to share many of my findings in my rather fulsome footnotes will facilitate other scholars' navigation of the richness of this sizeable archive.

Chapter 1 The Muse, the Mountain and the making of Montréal

“Montreal is a city of contrasts. In it the old and new world meet, as well as this one and the next. [...] Three-quarters of its population are of French extraction, and maintain the slightest possible contact with the remaining quarter, which is Scotch. It has slums and modern high buildings touching one another. It has Trappist monks in brown habits and sandals threading streets noisy with street cars and bright with the best-dressed women outside New York or Paris.”

– C. H. Reilly, “Some Impressions of Canadian Towns” (1924)¹



Figure 1.1 Photograph of the bas-relief above the front door of the Cormier Residence (1930-31), taken in 2009.

Source: “Maison Cormier, Montréal,” © David Thompson, Art Deco Buildings blog, accessed October 19, 2012, <http://artdecobuildings.blogspot.com/2009/09/maison-cormier-Montréal.html>

¹ Charles H. Reilly, “Some Impressions of Canadian Towns - I. Montréal,” *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* 1, no. 2 (Apr-June 1924): 55.

Two projects in relief

The muse claims our attention twice. **[Figure 1.1]** She directs our focus first onto the private residence above whose front door she stands, and simultaneously refers allegorically to a prominent, large-scale public commission by the same author **[Figures 1.2 and 1.3]**. Elevated on a pedestal, this bas-relief of an elegant, curvaceous, female figure who is directing her gaze at the miniature tower that she is holding, encapsulates key issues bearing on both the life and work of the architect and engineer Ernest Cormier (1885-1980), and important dimensions of the cultural context of the city of Montréal during the first half of the twentieth century. Placed above the formal entrance to the house that Cormier designed for himself in 1930 on Pine Avenue West, which winds its way across the southeastern slope of Mount Royal in Montréal's upscale Golden Square Mile neighborhood, the sculpted, stylized figure wearing a long, clinging gown is supporting on her open palm, what is recognizable as a model-sized, abstracted version of the tower of the main pavilion of the Université de Montréal (1924-43).² **[Figure 1.4]** As a prominent feature of the first and largest building to be erected on the university's new campus, the tower was designed to house library stacks for books and was crowned by the domed roof of what was intended to be an astronomical observatory.³ Significantly, the tower soon acquired

² The form of the tower as represented in the bas-relief differs somewhat from the tower as it was built, but given its placement above the door canopy, no visitor to the house (and even less, a passerby on the sidewalk) would likely register the differences, particularly since the sculpted representation is close enough to its referent for the connection to be made. The differences between the tower as built at the Université de Montréal and its representation in this bas-relief, as well as the reasons for the disparity between the two despite the fact that the design of the tower had been completed by the time the house was built, are analyzed in Chapter 3.

³ In this regard, parallels to Cormier's design can be made to the reinforced concrete Boekentoren (Book Tower) that Henry Van de Velde designed in the 1930s for the Ghent University Library. Inaugurated in 1942 and standing 210' (64m) tall on the highest ground in the city of Ghent, Van de Velde's tower for the university is a landmark that is visible from a distance. See *Een Toren voor boeken, 1935-1985* (Ghent: RUG-Centrale Bibliotheek, 1985); "De Boekentoren, University Library Ghent," Universiteits Bibliotheek Gent, accessed October 29, 2014, <http://www.boekentoren.be>. Similarly, the Università di Bologna's Facoltà di Ingegneria (1931-35) designed by Giuseppe Vaccaro, features a prominent book tower. See Giuliano Gresleri, "Giuseppe Vaccaro e Bologna," *Giornale, DO.CO.MO.MO Italia* 18 (Oct



Figure 1.2 Photograph of the front elevation of the Cormier Residence (1930-31) in Montréal, taken in October 2011. Source: “Cormier House,” © Decopix [Randy Juster], Flickr Photo Sharing, accessed February 15, 2015, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/55864565@N08/6497728319/in/photolist-b6t4jk-aUbyfB>

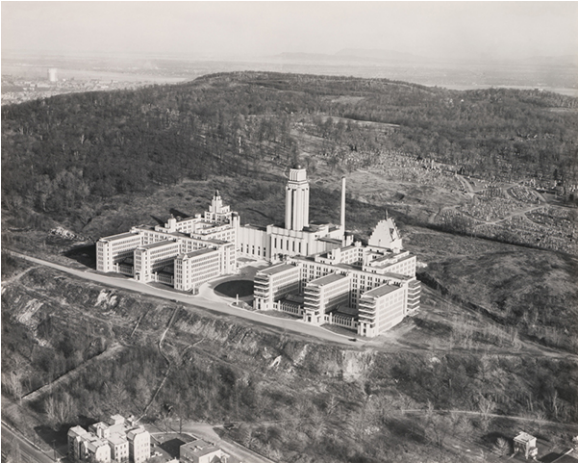


Figure 1.3 Aerial photograph of the main pavilion of the Université de Montréal, c.1945. Source: Photographic Surveys (Quebec) Limited, no. 04210 (November 11, 1945), P.2031, ARCH253133, folder “P.1969 à 2042,” box Cormier 01-2402-01P, Fonds Ernest Cormier (FEC), CCA.



Figure 1.4 View of the tower of the main pavilion of the Université de Montréal, photographed from the back of the building, c.1990. Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990:0012, box Gabor Szilasi, Univ. de Mtl/couleur, Collection, CCA.

2005): 1-4; Maristella Casciato and Giuliano Gresleri, eds., *Giuseppe Vaccaro: architetture per Bologna* (Bologna: Editrice Compositori, 2006). I am grateful to Veronique Patteeuw and Maristella Casciato respectively, for alerting me to these parallels.

iconic status as “the beacon of higher learning” for French Canada and therefore, became loaded with much more than books. Beyond the pedagogical ambition to provide its faculty and students with adequate facilities, Cormier’s design for the main pavilion came to be construed by the client and the public as emblematic of the university’s broader ideological nationalist mission to ensure that French Canadians could attain positions of professional leadership through the vehicle of higher education. As a result, the realization of the university’s building soon became inseparable from the nationalist cause.

Cormier was awarded the commission to design the university campus in 1924, and the construction of the immense main pavilion on the mountain’s northwest slope began in 1928, two years before he undertook the design of his house. Therefore, these projects conceived by the same architect-engineer are situated spatially in diagonal relationship to one another on opposite sides of the mountain from which the city takes its name⁴ [Figure 1.5], and are also related temporally, both emerging during and out of, the particular socio-cultural circumstances of the final years of the economic boom that Montréal had enjoyed for half a century, which had made the city the industrial and financial center of Canada.⁵ Crowning the central axis of the Cormier residence’s carefully framed formal entrance, the bas-relief stands as a suggestive signature announcing the occupant’s identity and presenting the house as a showpiece for Cormier’s professional self-promotion, while alluding to his prestigious contemporaneous accomplishment with all of its political import. And yet, this permanent announcement of the

⁴ Their spatial relationship is not something that can be directly experienced across the large, uneven surface of the mountain that has become increasingly populated with buildings over the course of the twentieth century. Rather, it is a connection that is better understood cartographically. See Figure 0.2 in the Introduction. Concerning the connection between the city’s name and the mountain, see footnote 10.

⁵ From 1880 to 1930, Montréal came to be the metropolis of the nation. During this period of rapid transformation there were several cycles of intense construction, which created opportunities for architects. See Isabelle Gournay and France Vanlaethem, eds. *Montréal Metropolis, 1880-1930* (Toronto: Canadian Centre for Architecture; Stoddart Publishing, 1998).

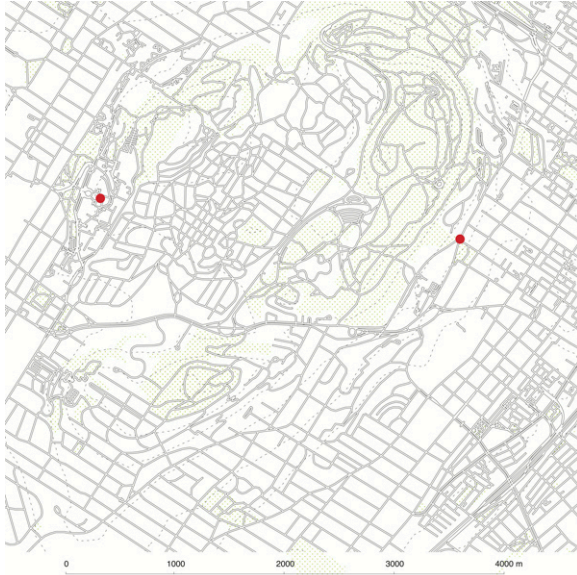


Figure 1.5 A map of the central region of Montréal showing the siting of the Université de Montréal and Cormier’s residence on opposite slopes of Mount Royal.
Source: Map data © [OpenStreetMap](https://www.openstreetmap.org/) elaborated by Alvisse Pagnacco with Aliko Economides.



Figure 1.6 A photo of the construction site of the Université de Montréal, taken on March 28, 1931, showing the incomplete state of the pavilion, particularly its central zone. The chimney in the center is that of the temporary powerhouse at the rear of the site.
Source: S. J. Hayward Photographic Studios, ARCH264436, P.1874, box Cormier 01-2402-01P-#2402, FEC, CCA.

connection between the author-inhabitant of the private house, and the designer of the high profile institutional mega-project was precariously premature. For although construction on the university began in the late 1920s, by 1931, the difficult conditions of the economic Depression had greatly aggravated the institution’s chronic financial difficulties, and imposed what was to be a 10-year hiatus to the construction, with near-dire consequences.⁶ Menaced by a host of grave,

⁶ In early July 1931, the contractor, Damien Boileau, was instructed to stop work on the interior of the building, and on September 23, 1931, the Building Committee unanimously decided to suspend all construction due to the university’s grim financial situation. Work did not fully resume until July 1941, and by then, many parts of the building had suffered damages. See: “Chronology: III. Construction of the Université de Montréal,” in *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal*, ed. Isabelle Gournay (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture; The MIT Press, 1990), 175-176; and Marcel Fournier, “Tradition and

interrelated problems, the project's eventual completion seemed very uncertain. At one point, even the possibility of entirely abandoning the partially built hulk on the mountain to stop the financial hemorrhaging was taken into consideration.⁷ Therefore, when Cormier's house was completed in 1931 and the sensual, stylized ornamentation above its formal entrance publicly announced the house's relation to a prominent and now controversial institutional building in the city that was receiving substantial attention in the press, construction of the tower had not yet commenced [Figure 1.6], and the pavilion itself would not be inaugurated for another twelve years. During the institution's long and difficult struggle to realize the construction of its major edifice on its new campus on Mount Royal, university authorities and supporters of the undertaking emphasized that once completed, theirs would be the best-situated university in America. Removed from the noise and bustle of downtown and therefore, conducive to serious study, inspiring a love of the homeland, and overlooking an immense horizon, it was felt that the mountain slope was "a predestined place," in all ways elevating the soul.⁸

Modernism: The Construction of the Université de Montréal," in *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal*, 51; 53.

⁷ This proposition to abandon the mega-project on the mountain with a view to constructing the university one smaller building at a time on a different site in the future, was advanced during the 1936 electoral campaign by Dr. Albin Paquette, the new provincial secretary and Minister of Education. It reinforced the status of the project for the university as a political issue plaguing the entire province rather than being merely a municipal problem, and aroused strong emotions among those who were advocating for, as well as those critical of, the pavilion's completion. Fournier, "Tradition and Modernism: The Construction of the Université de Montréal," 52-53.

⁸ Msgr Olivier Maurault, "Histoire de l'Université," *Annuaire général de l'Université de Montréal 1935-36* 15e année (1936): 202-203. The UdeM Rector's poetic description of the mountain site reads as follows: "Du terrain de l'Université vous embrassez une immense horizon: à vos pieds, à droite la ville, à gauche déjà la campagne maraichère; plus loin les champs fertiles qui se baignent dans la rivière des Prairies. À l'ouest, le miroir du lac St-Louis, puis la ligne arrondie des Deux-Montagnes; au nord, la longue et sinueuse chaîne des Laurentides. Au-dessus, un ciel immense; autour de vous, l'air pur, le vent d'ouest, le vent qui apporte le beau temps. N'était-ce point là un lieu prédestiné, un de ces lieux qui inspirent l'amour de la patrie, portent au travail de la pensée, de toutes manières élèvent l'âme?... Tous ceux qui virent à cette époque ce champ désert et cette futaie, qui étaient notre bien, nous dirent spontanément: 'C'est là qu'il faut construire; vous aurez l'Université la mieux située de l'Amérique'."

Mount Royal as actor and host

The island-city of Montréal grew around and took its current name from Mount Royal, a modest hill-like formation measuring approximately 1.86 miles (3km) in diameter, that geologists term an “igneous intrusion.”⁹ Yet since 1535, when French explorers named it *mont Royal*, the mound has been dignified with the title and aura of a ‘mountain.’¹⁰ The only hilly zone in the city, at the highest of the three peaks that constitute its core mass, Mount Royal measures 764’ (233m) above mean sea level, which is approximately 426’ (130m) taller than most areas of the city that spread out in all directions around it.¹¹ However, this difference in elevation between

⁹ I am grateful to Jessica van Horssen for pointing out that geologists do not consider Mount Royal to be a veritable mountain. For a long time, and particularly during the period under study, Mount Royal was presumed to be the result of a volcanic eruption that elevated a portion of the mostly flat surface of the island. For example, see Raymond Tanghe, *Géographie humaine de Montréal* (Montréal: Action canadienne-française, 1928), 52-53. Geologists today identify it as one of the “epizonal intrusions of Cretaceous age” that constitute a series of monadnocks named the Monteregian hills, which rise from the city of Montréal eastward on the St. Lawrence lowlands and the western foothills of the Appalachians. Tomas Feininger and Alan Goodacre, “The eight classical Monteregian hills at depth and the mechanism of their intrusion,” *Canadian Journal of Earth Sciences* 32, no.9 (Sept 1995): 1350. See also “5.4 - Les Collines Montérégiennes au Crétacé,” Université Laval, accessed October 22, 2014, <http://www2.ggl.ulaval.ca/personnel/bourque/s5/5.4.monteregiennes.html>.

¹⁰ Jacques Cartier, sent by King Francis I in the sixteenth century to find a waterway to the orient, was the first European to scale the mountain, and in 1535 named it Mont-Royal in patronage to the king. It was not until the eighteenth century however, that the island-city would take on the name “Montréal,” a toponym derived from Mont-Royal. Prior to this, when Jacques Cartier arrived by boat, what he encountered on the island was the Iroquoian settlement of “Hochelaga” lying close to the mountain. A century later, at the foundation ceremony held on May 18, 1642, Paul de Chomedey, sieur de Maisonneuve, named the village “Ville-Marie” as he planted a wooden cross on the mountain. And it was not until the 1720s that the place name “Ville de Montréal” definitively supplanted that of “Ville-Marie.” Commission de toponymie du Québec, “Montréal,” Gouvernement du Québec, accessed November 3, 2014, http://www.toponymie.gouv.qc.ca/ct/ToposWeb/fiche.aspx?no_seq=42164. Montréal therefore, is a place that has several founding moments and is rich in myths of its origins. For an extended discussion of this see: Ginette Michaud, “De la « Primitive Ville » à la Place Ville-Marie: lectures de quelques récits de fondation de Montréal,” in *Montréal Imaginaire: ville et littérature*, eds. Pierre Nepveu and Gilles Marcotte (St-Laurent, QC: Fides, 1992), 13-95.

¹¹ Maps showing the various elevations within Montréal indicate that the majority of the island’s surface offers little relief, lying between approximately 164’ (50m) and 328’ (100m) above seal level, with the elevation dropping closer to 98’ (30m) at the St. Lawrence River and the Rivière des Prairies. “Montréal, Canada Elevation Map,” Base map © OpenStreetMap contributors, accessed November 2, 2014, <http://www.floodmap.net/Elevation/ElevationMap/?gi=6077243>

the mountain's tallest mound, and the surrounding urban landscape is difficult to appreciate fully owing to the fact that for the most part, its slopes rise gradually over a long distance instead of projecting abruptly as a steep monolith protruding from flat land, which also makes the precise contours of the mountain's perimeter challenging to define.¹² [Figures 1.7 & 1.8]



Figure 1.7 An aerial photograph of the central part of the island of Montréal as it exists today, showing Mount Royal. Source: “Le Site officiel du Mont-Royal: Le site patrimonial du Mont-Royal,” City of Montréal website © Air Imex, accessed June 19, 2014, <http://www1.ville.Montréal.qc.ca/siteofficieldumontroyal/sitepatrimonial-mont-royal>.



Figure 1.8 A photograph of Montréal as seen from across the St. Lawrence River c.1870, showing Mount Royal beyond the urban development concentrated at the water's edge. Source: Alexander Henderson, “St. Lawrence River in spring, Montréal, QC, about 1870,” MP-0000.1452.56 © McCord Museum.

And yet, this lumpy mound of urbanized nature that provides a contrasting verdant backdrop to the surrounding built environment, is not only a highly visible landmark, but has

The other two peaks that constitute the land mass that is Mount Royal, namely the Outremont Summit (alternately named Mount Murray) and the Westmount Summit, measure 715' (218m) and 659' (201m), respectively. Laurent Comtois, “Une montagne urbanisée,” in *La Montagne en Question*, vol 1 (Montréal: Groupe d'intervention urbaine de Montréal, 1988), 43.

¹² Comtois, “Une montagne urbanisée,” 43.

come to acquire immense significance in the collective urban imaginary; a significance that extends beyond, and to a certain extent entails overlooking, its relatively humble physical scale. A natural monument that hosts public parks, cemeteries, secular institutions, religious establishments (including a very large, illuminated cross)¹³ and private residences of the wealthy, as well as being the chosen site of large popular gatherings for cultural and religious events, Mount Royal has acquired the lofty status of symbol of the city.¹⁴ In addition to its intensive use, the mountain's omnipresence as a point of reference is not only reflected in the name of the city, but also in several of the city's neighborhoods and roadways that derive their place names from it.¹⁵ Commentators invariably note the sustained fascination that Mount Royal exercises on the population at large and the attachment that generations of citizens have felt toward their mountain. Some authors, waxing poetic in their descriptions of the mountain's significance to varying degrees of hyperbole, at times have ascribed to Mount Royal an almost sacred character operating at the same level as the more substantial rocky outcroppings that characterize the cities

¹³ In December of 1924 (which was the same year that Cormier received the commission to design the new campus for the university), the Saint-Jean-Baptiste Society installed the first illuminated cross on Mount Royal's tallest summit, to evoke the cross raised by de Maisonneuve in 1642 and through this, marking anew the deliverance of the city to French Canadians. Peter Jacobs, "La Montagne magique," *La Montagne en Question*, vol 1 (Montréal: Groupe d'intervention urbaine de Montréal, 1988), 11; Marsan, *Sauver Montréal*, 112.

¹⁴ Commentators tend to be unanimous on this point. See for example, Jacobs, "La Montagne magique," 11; Comtois, "Une montagne urbanisée," 49; Jean-Claude Marsan, *Sauver Montréal: chroniques d'architecture et d'urbanisme* (Montréal: Les Éditions du Boréal, 1990): 17; Ville de Montréal, and Ministère de la Culture, des Communications et de la Condition féminine, *Atlas du Paysage du Mont Royal: Caractérisation du paysage à l'échelle de la montagne* (Montréal: Ville de Montréal, 2014; 2012), 6.

¹⁵ Consider for instance, the place names given to the well-to-do suburbs of Westmount and Outremont that occupy the southwestern and northeastern slopes of Mount Royal, respectively, as well as the Plateau-Mont-Royal neighborhood which clearly designates the flat plain lying below the mountain. Similarly, many street names are derived from their position on, or proximity to, the mountain, or because of the views they afford onto it. Some examples are: rue de la Montagne, Mount Royal Avenue, Mountain Sights Avenue, le chemin Summit, l'avenue Ridgewood. Joanne Burgess and Claire Poitras, "Étude de Caractérisation de l'arrondissement historique et naturel du Mont-Royal" (Québec: Commission des biens culturels du Québec, 2005) 26.

of Athens, Edinburgh and Rio de Janeiro.¹⁶ A more critical view advances that the mountain's sacred character stems from the work of exclusion effected by the domination of elites and the consequent exclusion of other social groups.¹⁷ What is consistent however, is the disparity between the modest, measurable topographic categorization of this geological protuberance in the city and the expansive dimensions of the cultural importance of this site as a *topos* within the social imaginary. Both narratives having equal validity albeit in different ways, this sizeable gap between quantifiable 'reality' and qualitative 'myth' points to the ways in which meaning and memory are collectively constructed and kept alive.

When Frederick Law Olmsted was commissioned to design Mount Royal Park in 1874, one of his over-riding design ambitions was to make the "mountain more mountain-like."¹⁸

[Figures 1.9 & 1.10] Addressing the park commissioners, Olmsted commented on the existing landscape conditions and the opportunities he saw to compensate for Mount Royal's diminutive stature. He wrote,

"You have chosen to take a mountain for your park, but, in truth, a mountain barely worthy of the name. You would call it a hill if it stood a few miles further away from the broad, flat, river valley. Its scenery, that is to say, is but relatively mountainous. Yet, whatever of special adaptation it has to your purpose lies in

¹⁶ Marsan, *Sauver Montréal*, 16.

¹⁷ Michèle Dagenais, "Entre tradition et modernité: espaces et temps de loisirs à Montréal et Toronto au XXe siècle," *Canadian Historical Review* 82, no. 2 (June 2001): 312.

¹⁸ Frederick Law Olmsted, *Mount Royal, Montréal* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1881), 44. His strategy to accomplish this included: planting distinct types of trees on different parts of the slope and leaving visible outcroppings of rock; emulating the way trees grow up the sides of tall, snowcapped mountain peaks; and designing a meandering carriage road to the top that would curve to give the impression of a steep climb, even if the topography didn't demand it, all to cultivate the illusion that Mount Royal was more majestic and imposing than in actual fact. Justin Martin, *Genius of Place: The Life of Frederick Law Olmsted* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2011), 324. Work on the park began in 1875, but was undertaken hastily, without remaining faithful to certain details of Olmsted's design and without consulting him about the changes. Martin, *Genius of Place*, 325-326.

that *relative* quality. [...] Small as your mountain is, it presents in different parts no little variety of mountain form and feature.”¹⁹

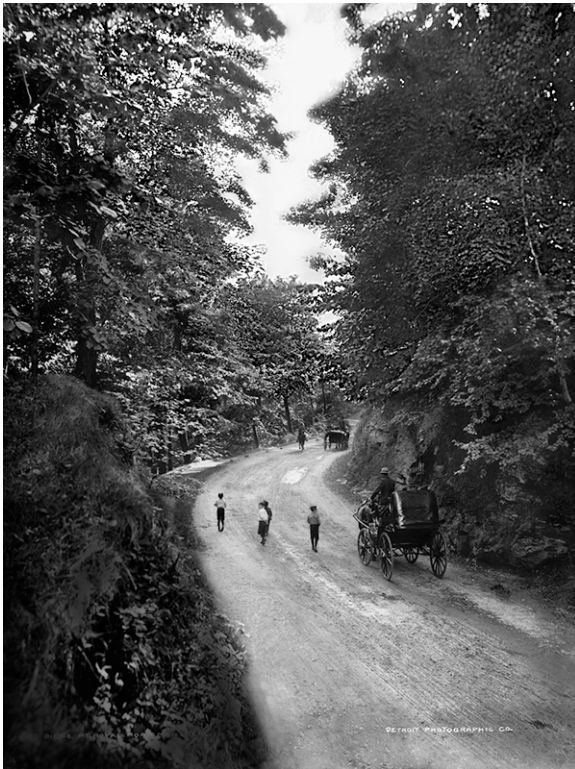


Figure 1.9 Road in Mount Royal Park, Montréal, photo taken c.1900.

Source: William Henry Jackson, “Mt. Royal Road, Montréal,” LC-DIG-det-4a08038, Detroit Publishing Company Photograph Collection, no. 012518, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.



Figure 1.10 The gentle carriage road Olmsted designed for Mount Royal Park, c.1900.

Source: William Henry Jackson, “A Carriage Road, Mt. Royal Park, Montréal,” LC-DIG-det-4a08032, Detroit Publishing Company Photograph Collection, no. 012511, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

¹⁹ Olmsted, *Mount Royal*, 42-43. To develop the site’s potential, Olmsted focused on the high degree of existing natural variety and designated eight topographical divisions on the mountain, each distinguished from its adjoining divisions by its natural characteristics. Olmsted, *Mount Royal*, 43.

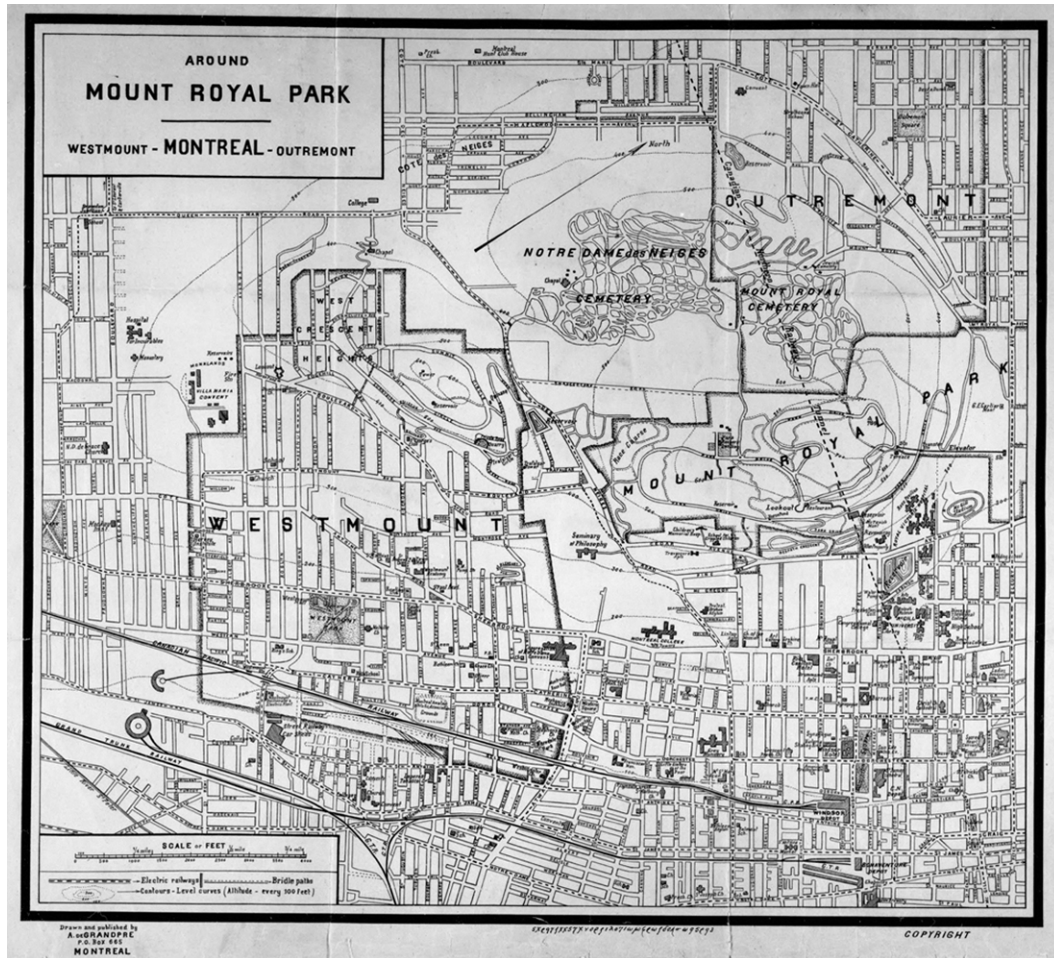


Figure 1.11 A map prepared in 1920, showing Mount Royal Park and the Cimetière Notre-Dame-des-Neiges and Mount Royal Cemetery adjacent to it. The map also shows that Mount Royal is divided between the city of Montréal and the affluent municipalities of Westmount and Outremont.

Source: A. de Grandpré, “Around Mount Royal Park: Westmount – Montréal - Outremont,” 1920, Montréal - 1920, Record number 1447, Library and Archives Canada (LAC).

At that time, Mount Royal was already host to the Catholic cemetery of Notre-Dame-des-Graces, and the Protestant cemetery of Mount Royal, two necropolises that had moved to the rural site in the mid-nineteenth century, when fears of contagion following cholera epidemics plaguing the then, unsanitary industrial city, prompted a relocation of burial grounds outside of the city core.²⁰ [Figure 1.11] Cemeteries in North America, inspired in large measure by the

²⁰ Nathalie Zinger and Peter Jacobs, “L’évolution d’un parc,” *La Montagne en Question*, vol 1 (Montréal: Groupe d’intervention urbaine de Montréal, 1988), 14. In addition to the Protestant and Catholic faiths,

pastoral English landscape tradition, were precursors to large urban parks. The motivation to create a public park for the city of Montréal during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, was not due to the imminent threat of urbanization, whose development was concentrated at that time along the St. Lawrence River and therefore, was still too distant to be perceived as a pressing menace, but rather, to the marked concern that the mountain's character as a natural setting would be gravely compromised by the self-serving tree-felling actions of wealthy landowners.²¹ In the 1850s when the cemeteries were created on the mountain, Mount Royal was shared by 16 landowners who for the most part, used their properties as secondary residences, and thus, the sparsely populated mountain was perceived largely as a picturesque backdrop to the city.²² However, by the end of the nineteenth century, the industrial and commercial development of Montréal's port on the Saint Lawrence River had intensified to a degree that religious institutions and the residential areas of the (mostly English-speaking) wealthy merchant class moved upward from the Old Port to the southern slope of the mountain.²³ Therefore, at the turn of the twentieth century, the mountain was gradually becoming urbanized and its list of vocations had expanded to encompass nature conservation, recreation and leisure activities,

the Jewish community of Montréal also acquired property on Mount Royal to lay out a cemetery. The first Jewish cemetery on the mountain was inaugurated in September 1854, with two other cemeteries created in the latter half of the century owing to divisions within the community. Poitras and Burgess, "Étude de Caractérisation de l'arrondissement historique et naturel du Mont-Royal," 76, 79.

²¹ The event that marks the beginnings of the sustained history of citizens advocating for the protection of their mountain since the nineteenth century, centers on the catalytic act committed by a certain land owner named Lamothe, who during a particularly harsh winter in the 1860s, cut down all of the trees on his property on the mountain's south slope for firewood. This was interpreted as a profanation of Mount Royal's sacred natural character and caused such lively protest that the city undertook to expropriate a portion of the mountain to create a public park. See Jean Décarie, "La ville entre fleuve et montagne," in *La Montagne en Question*, vol 1 (Montréal: Groupe d'intervention urbaine de Montréal, 1988), 2; Zinger and Jacobs, "L'évolution d'un parc," 14; and Marsan, *Sauver Montréal*, 108.

²² Zinger and Jacobs, "L'évolution d'un parc," 13-14.

²³ Zinger and Jacobs, "L'évolution d'un parc," 14.

commemorative functions (as a site of pilgrimage and necropolises), and institutions of higher learning and health care, as well as hosting luxurious residences for the city's elite. Climbing the mountain's slopes, therefore, became analogous to climbing the social ladder.

An elevated forest in the center of the city, Mount Royal Park was inaugurated in 1876 and covers 470 acres (190 hectares) or 14% of the mountain.²⁴ It was conceived by Olmsted to be a palliative to the ills of urban life and accessible to all members of the population, no matter how feeble in body.²⁵ This dimension of Olmsted's work was driven by his commitment to social reform, but ease of navigation within the confines of the park, presupposes that the mountain itself would be accessible to all. And yet, for most of the city's working class inhabitants who had settled close to the new industries along the St. Lawrence River, the Lachine Canal, and the industrial suburb of Maisonneuve located in Montréal's east end [Figures 1.12, 1.13, 1.14], the mountain felt inaccessible for more reasons that simply



Figure 1.12 A late nineteenth-century photograph showing part of Montréal's industrial zone along the St. Lawrence River and Lachine canal.
Source: Wm Notman & Son, "Montréal from Street Railway Power House Chimney, QC, 1896," VIEW-2943 © McCord Museum.

²⁴ Wendy Graham and Peter Jacobs, "Le Parc du Mont-Royal," in *La Montagne en Question*, vol 1 (Montréal: Groupe d'intervention urbaine de Montréal, 1988), 25; Marsan, *Sauver Montréal*, 123.

²⁵ Olmsted considered natural scenery to be conducive to "a change of mental occupation, exercise, and air-taking" and that it acts in a more direct way as "a prophylactic and therapeutic agent of vital value." Olmsted, *Mount Royal*, 22. For the park to be accessible to all, Olmsted proposed a walking path to the top of the mountain that included no stairs and whose grade would be so gentle that even people in wheelchairs could use it. Martin, *Genius of Place*, 324.



Figure 1.13 A map of Montréal prepared in 1907, showing the city’s various wards, and the Lachine canal’s connection to the St. Lawrence River. The industrial French-speaking suburb of Maisonneuve is visible in yellow at the east end of the island (at the lower far right of the map). Source: A. de Grandpré, “Map of the city of Montréal,” drawn, published and entered into the Act of Parliament of Canada in the year 1907, by A. de Grandpré in the Office of the Minister of Agriculture, Ottawa, NMC 20563, LAC.



Figure 1.14 A bird’s eye representation of Maisonneuve on the island of Montréal, c.1916. Source: Eugene Haberer, “Cité de Maisonneuve, Canada,” VM94-D98A, Archives de la Ville de Montréal (AVM).

geographic distance. In fact, by the second half of the nineteenth century, Mount Royal had come to symbolize a city divided economically and socio-culturally, the fault lines of this cleavage tracing the contrast between rich and poor, between English and French, between the different religious groups that developed institutions of public health and higher education in parallel to one another, and between the posh neighborhoods on the mountain's slopes and the working class quarters (many of them slums) on the topographically and socially "lower" levels of the city.²⁶

Scholar of Canadian culture, Sherrill Grace, asserts that both histories and stories are constructed narratives that rely on and recreate the documentary record and therefore, the narrative modes that purport to report 'fact' and those offering 'fiction' should not be considered discrete phenomena. Texts of all kinds, across all disciplines, are representations, and representations have great power to reveal and to disrupt, truth claims and ideological investments.²⁷ In this vein, literary works have also contributed to the discursive formation of Mount Royal's *mountainness* and its complex symbolic import. A brief sampling drawn from two twentieth-century novels that occupy an important place in the development of literature in Québec, serves to vividly illustrate this point.

²⁶ Burgess and Poitras, "Étude de Caractérisation," 11. Dagenais summarizes that to dominate the mountain was to dominate the city from a distance. Dagenais, "Entre tradition et modernité," 312.

An illuminating sociological study dating from the end of the nineteenth century, on the conditions in a working class quarter of Montréal during the early years of rapid industrialization is Sir Herbert Brown Ames, *The City Below the Hill; a Sociological Study of a Portion of the City of Montréal, Canada* (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1972; 1897). See also Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montréal* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993); and Yves Lamonde with Lucia Ferretti and Daniel LeBlanc, *La culture ouvrière À Montréal (1880-1920): bilan historiographique* (Québec: Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1982).

²⁷ Sherrill E. Grace, *Canada and the Idea of North* (Montréal; Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), xiii-xv.

Roger Viau's 1953 novel, *Au milieu, la montagne* ("In the middle, the mountain")²⁸ is set in Depression-era Montréal. With a realism that the establishment found contemptible, the narrative centers on a family hit relentlessly by hardship and humiliation through the agency of forces much larger than them and over which they have absolutely no control, and very little knowledge or understanding. Florian Malo, a father of five (only four of them living), and a bricklayer who is eminently proud of his *métier* and the skill with which he wields bricks and mortar, finds that unlike every other year when the summer takes him out of his cold-season unemployment (which gives the family a short reprieve from the insufficient food supplies and an apartment that remains barely above freezing during the cold months), that suddenly there is no more work to be had; no more bread to put on the table in his family's miserable East end apartment.²⁹ His bright, resourceful and attractive daughter, Jacqueline, falls for Gilbert Sergent, the lawyer's son and chemistry student, who lives in a grand house in the well-to-do neighborhood of Outremont, and whom she met at the base of the mountain. Although sharing the same mother tongue, they come from two different parts of the city, which amounts to coming from two different universes. Realizing that they do not inhabit the same city, they tease each other about the neighborhoods that the other does not know. Agreeing to initiate each

²⁸ Roger Viau, *Au Milieu, la montagne: roman* (Montréal, Québec: Éditions TYPO, 1987; 1951). When it was initially published, the novel enjoyed popular success, but this positive reception did not transpire within the literary establishment. The literary community was comprised of members of the Francophone bourgeoisie, and they greeted this novel – that had the audacity to describe French-Canadian society in a way that demonstrated the alienation of the majority for the benefit of a small, elite caste – with stony silence. What made things worse, was that Viau himself was an educated member of Montréal's bourgeoisie, and therefore, the way that his literary contribution called out the miseries of the poor and disturbed the established order, was enough to categorize him as a traitor of his own privileged class. Jean-Yves Soucy, preface to *Au Milieu, la montagne* by Roger Viau (Montréal, Québec: Éditions TYPO, 1987; 1951), 7-9.

²⁹ During the 1930s, French Canadians tended to be hit harder by the economic circumstances of the Depression than the English, because in general, they were less well off to begin with and more of them worked in transportation and construction industries, which had come to a standstill. Paul-André Linteau, *The History of Montréal: The Story of a Great North American City* [*Brève histoire de Montréal*], trans. Peter McCambridge (Montréal: Baraka Books, 2013. 1992), 131.

other to their respective familiar grounds, they begin with the scenic charm of the mountain, which for Jacqueline is *terra incognita* and ultimately will remain inaccessible to her.

There is also the fictional narrative of the family of Florentine Lacasse, who lives in equally squalid conditions as the Malos, but rather than Montréal's poor east end, the Lacasse family lives in the impoverished St-Henri neighborhood that lies low (both topographically and socially) to the south of the mountain. In Gabrielle Roy's 1945 novel *Bonheur d'occasion* (which means "second-hand happiness" or "hand-me-down happiness" but was translated into English as *The Tin Flute*),³⁰ the mountain is ever-present as a reference point that is situated within reachable geographic proximity, but which nevertheless, represents an insurmountable social distance. It is a landmass from which the harsh wind barrels down onto St-Henri and stands as a domineering symbol of privilege, power and for a limited few, possibility. The novel describes how from the vantage point afforded from below, the wealthy suburb of Westmount "climbs in tiers toward the mountain's ridge in its stiff English luxury" and poverty and superfluity stare at each other.³¹ We could add that this face-off transpires as the 'low' staring upwards with an uncomfortable mixture of awe and anger while the 'high' gaze outwards with the haughty indifference that is borne of the sense of entitlement. And yet, it is not the mountain that should be blamed for these inequalities, for as Roy contends, up there where the millionaires live and where hospitals care for the sick, away from the rumble of trains, the soot of factories and the stink of poverty, there is unlimited fresh, crystal air to be breathed in, silence and peace to be enjoyed, and eyefuls of beauty to store up in one's memory.³²

³⁰ Gabrielle Roy, *The Tin Flute* [*Bonheur d'occasion*] trans. Alan Brown (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989; 1945).

³¹ Roy, *The Tin Flute*, 34.

³² Roy, *The Tin Flute*, 319.

In other words, whether describing the low-lying and lowly South end of the city by the port and industrial canal, in contradistinction to its elevated, majestic North, with the affectionate empathy of Gabrielle Roy, or sharply highlighting the harsh contrast between the city's East and West ends with the unsparing social critique of Roger Viau, these fictional narratives depicting the inter-war period and WWII years in Montréal speak to the existence of an immaterial yet wholly palpable *cardo* and *decumanus* that draws and quarters the different limbs of the divided social body. Not coincidentally, these invisible lines that define geographic coordinates separating the 'haves' from the 'have-nots' invariably intersect at the mountain. Therefore, in both stories and histories of the city, Mount Royal looms large, occupying center-stage on the horizon of hoped-for possibilities and ambitious designs.

In this context, it becomes more readily apparent why the authorities of the Université de Montréal opted to erect their new campus on the mountain site³³ and why Cormier purchased a sloped plot of land overlooking the city, on which to build his lavish home: both intentionally draw from the prestige and symbolic *gravitas* of their privileged positions on the city's elevated landmark. The tower-cradling ornamental figure – that fuses Cormier's residence with his work for the university – sits on top of the house, which sits on top of Mount Royal, which sits above

³³ At the time there was considerable debate over the location of the future UdeM campus, with the main site options being: near Parc Lafontaine (visible in Figure 1.2 as the green polygon located roughly midway between the mountain and Maisonneuve); in Parc Maisonneuve; or on the northern slope of the mountain. See: Dr. Georges-E Cartier, "Pour aider à comprendre le problème universitaire," *L'Action nationale* 9, no. 6 (June 1937): 355-358; Msgr. Émile Chartier, *Trente années d'université, 1914-1944* (Sherbrooke, 1955) Publication no.55 (1982), 42-43, Fonds de la Division de la gestion de documents et des archives (D0036), Université de Montréal; Fournier, "Tradition and Modernism: The Construction of the Université de Montréal," 46-48.

Considerable pressure came from those advocating that the university should erect its new campus in the large park located in the industrial suburb of Maisonneuve, which was where a very large percentage of the French catholic population lived, as opposed to deserting its constituency to move to a "chic, Protestant neighborhood." See Frontenac, "L'Université sera construite à Maisonneuve," *L'Ère Nouvelle* vol. II, no.25 (3 nov 1926): [?], newspaper clipping ARCH259440, folder "ARV4/H-1," box 00-EC-002, Fonds Ernest Cormier, Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA). All archival materials cited in this dissertation are taken from the Fonds Ernest Cormier at the CCA unless stated otherwise.

and in the middle of the city, and thus artfully indexes both buildings' inscription in the mountain's charged topographic and sociocultural contours.

The 'two solitudes'

Built between water and mountain, and situated at the crossing of major rail and water trade routes, during the final quarter of the nineteenth century, Montréal became Canada's first industrial city. **[Figures 1.15 and 1.16]** With the construction of the transcontinental railway network in several phases by several railway companies in the nineteenth century, Montréal became an important node through which goods and capital flowed across the country and between Canada and the Atlantic coast of the United States. Related to this, its location on the St. Lawrence River, which marked the juncture of maritime and interior navigation, made Montréal a major stop for trade and industry, its port having become second in America to that of New York, but first in the world as an interior haven.³⁴ **[Figures 1.17 and 1.18]** Therefore, owing to its strategic location and its resultant attraction of large manufactures and financial institutions, between 1880 and 1930, Montréal transformed from a colonial merchant city of the British Empire to a North American metropolis that rose to prominence as Canada's economic and cultural capital.³⁵

As an important urban center on the continent that had grown quickly to metropolitan scale, the city had experienced waves of population increase and intensified urban development

³⁴ Raymond Tanghe, *Itinéraire canadien* (Montréal: Éditions B.-D. Simpson, 1945), 69-70; Jean-Claude Marsan, *Sauver Montréal: chroniques d'architecture et d'urbanisme* (Montréal: Les Éditions du Boréal, 1990), 18; David B. Hanna, "The Importance of Transportation Infrastructure," in *Montréal Metropolis, 1880-1930*, eds. Gournay and Vanlaethem, 44-57.

³⁵ Raymond Tanghe, *Géographie humaine de Montréal* (Montréal: Action canadienne-française, 1928), 123-124; Tanghe, *Itinéraire canadien* (Montréal: Éditions B.-D. Simpson, 1945), 67; Paul-André Linteau, "Factors in the development of Montréal," in *Montréal Metropolis, 1880-1930*, eds. Gournay and Vanlaethem, 32-33.



Figure 1.15 Color print of a bird's eye view of Montréal, 1892. Source: Anonymous, 1892, colored ink on paper, M984.210 © McCord Museum.

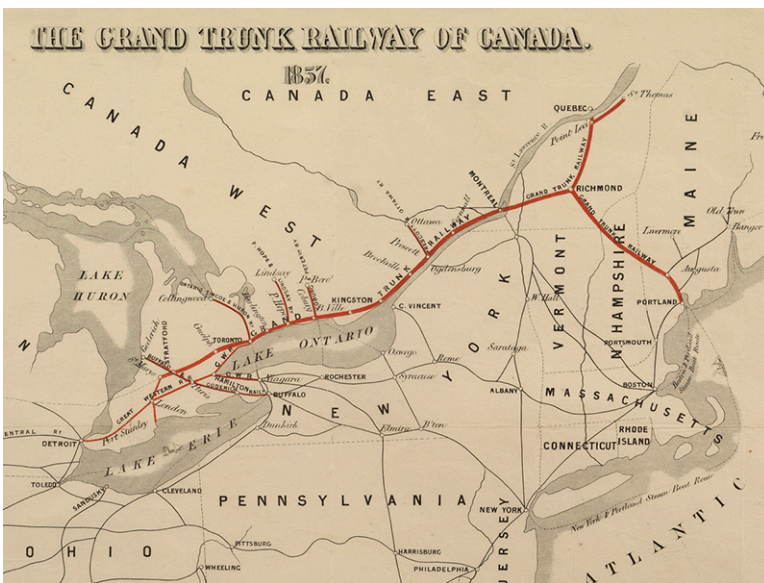


Figure 1.16 A Map of the Grand Trunk Railway of Canada lines connecting Montréal to the Atlantic seaboard via Portland, Maine, c.1857.

Source: [author unknown], "1857, London: Map of the Grand Trunk Railway of Canada, 1857; showing connections in the United States and with a list of principal stations on the Grand Trunk and distances from termini," The Baring Archive (ref: HC5.15.3).



Figure 1.17 Photograph of the harbor from the Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours Chapel, Montréal, QC, c.1900.

Source: Wm. Notman & Son, c1900, purchase from Associated Screen News Ltd, VIEW-3212.1 © McCord Museum.

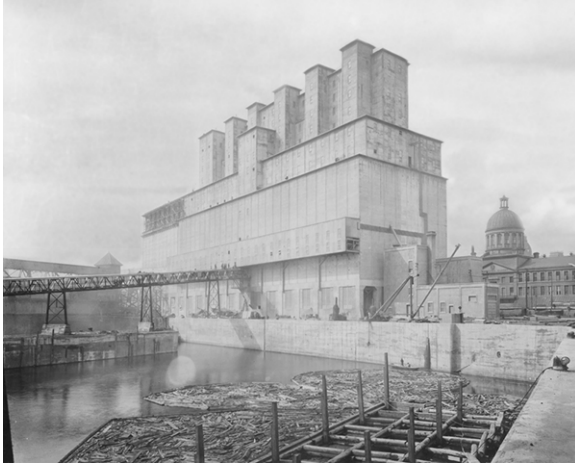


Figure 1.18 A photograph of Grain elevator no.2 in the Port of Montréal (now demolished), as seen from the Market basin with the Bonsecours Market building behind it to the right, photographed in October 1912. Source: [Unknown photographer], “Silo Port de Montréal,” APM-667, Port of Montréal Archives.

within the span of a few decades. During its 50-year boom period, the population of metropolitan Montréal increased from 140,000 to one million, and this was accompanied by three peak moments in construction activity, the third of which took place between 1922 and 1930.³⁶ [Figure 1.19] The new inhabitants of Montréal came mostly from rural communities in Quebec and from parts of English-speaking Canada. As well, two great waves of immigration (1903-14 and 1923-30) brought large numbers of British immigrants as well as representatives of various nationalities mostly of European origin, who were little represented in the city at that time. Among them were the Ashkenazi Jews arriving from Eastern Europe, who by 1921 represented 7% of the city’s population.³⁷ In this context a new urban culture began to develop during the early twentieth century, forming the basis of a more dynamic artistic and intellectual life,³⁸ although in many respects, Montréal remained rather provincial in character.

³⁶ Linteau, “Factors in the development of Montréal,” 27.

³⁷ Linteau, “Factors in the development of Montréal,” 28. For a balanced narrative on the challenges of the immigrant experience and its spatial implications within Montréal’s urban fabric, see the film, “La Main... et les autres: les visages du boulevard Saint-Laurent,” (52 min) produced by Paul Carvalho in collaboration with Radio-Canada as the second film in the five-part series *Montréal, mon amour, mon histoire* (Montréal: Les Films Perception, Inc., 2012). For information about this series see: <http://www.paulcarvalhofilms.com/home.html>

³⁸ Marcel Fournier and Véronique Rodriguez, “An Age Rich in Miracles,” in *Montréal Metropolis*, 35.

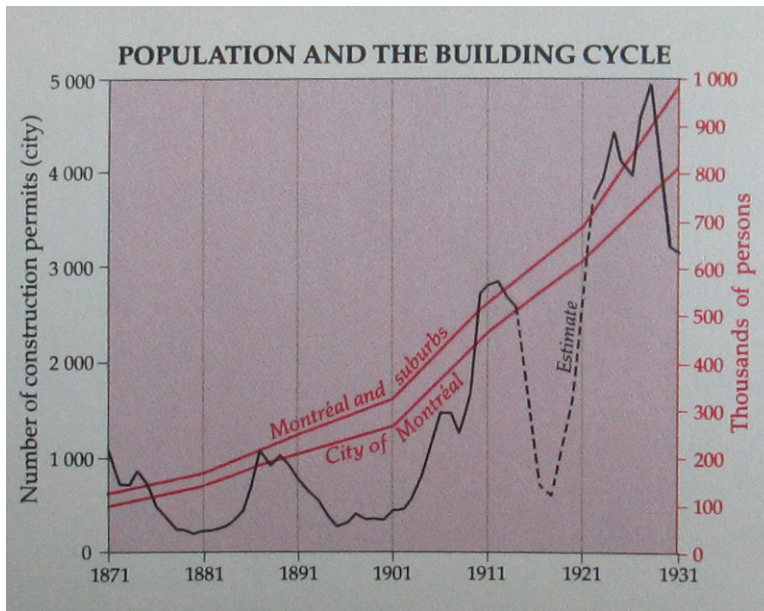


Figure 1.19 A chart of the population and building cycles in Montréal from 1871 to 1931. Source: Paul-André Linteau and Sylvie Taschereau, Plate 14, “The Industrial Development of Montréal,” in *Historical Atlas of Canada*, vol.3, eds., Donald Kerr and Deryck W. Holdsworth (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

By the 1920s the city’s population was three quarters Catholic and at least two thirds French-speaking, yet most of the city’s wealth and power (and by extension, that of the country), lay in the hands of Montréal’s small, ruling English-speaking elite.³⁹ In all of Canada, Montréal was the place where the two language groups were brought into the greatest and most sustained contact, although each group tended to occupy its own territory, and the divisions were often exacerbated by social disparities.⁴⁰ Outside of Montréal and with the exception of Quebec’s Eastern Townships, few English speakers were to be seen in other parts of the province. As for the neighboring province of Ontario, George Wrong, a professor of history at the University of Toronto writing in the mid-1920s, conjectured that among the six hundred thousand inhabitants

³⁹ Linteau, “Factors in the development of Montréal,” 32; Mgr. Olivier Maurault, *L’Université de Montréal* (Montréal: Les Éditions des Dix, 1952), 25.

⁴⁰ Linteau, “Factors in the development of Montréal,” 33. Canadian writer Stephen Leacock noted that, “The accumulation and concentration of wealth in Montréal had been made all the more evident and conspicuous by the fact that most of the superrich lived in one and the same residential quarter” and that this was “covering all the river face of the mountain slope.” Stephen Leacock, *Montréal: Seaport and City* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd, 1948, 1942), 141-142.

of Toronto, “five sixths of its people have never to their knowledge seen a French-Canadian or heard French as a spoken language [...and] they are hardly aware that the texture of Canadian political life is related to the existence of a French-speaking people.”⁴¹ His comparative assessment of the situation of French Canadians in the mid-1920s is also instructive. He writes:

“Probably two-thirds of the people in the province of Quebec are unable to speak English. All are, however, inevitably aware of the existence of the English as a factor in the population. The French-speaking Canadian lives under a federal parliament in which English is usually spoken; the head of the state represents the British monarch; the great industries, the railways and other public utilities of his province, are largely under the control of English-speaking people. Thus we have the states of mind: a numerous English-speaking element barely conscious that the French exist; a French element devoted to its own traditions but daily made aware that it constitutes a minority in the national life.”⁴²

⁴¹ George McKinnon Wrong, “The Two Races in Canada. Lecture Delivered before the Canadian Historical Association, Montréal, May 21st, 1925” (n.p., 1925), 8.

⁴² Wrong, “The Two Races in Canada,” 9. As a historical record of the prevailing views and social conditions in Canada during the first quarter of the twentieth century, this text is remarkable for its largely successful efforts to offer a balanced assessment of the perspectives and predicaments of both sides. Identifying that “Canada has the germs of a new type of society combining in a common patriotism the culture which England and France have produced in Europe,” Wrong speaks against cultural assimilation of the minority group, insisting that “[n]either element should be asked to abandon anything which it values in respect of its outlook upon life.” Instead, he argues for liberty and education as being essential to cultivating the kind of mutual understanding and appreciation that would be necessary to calm the existing antagonisms and reach agreement and cooperation. As ostensibly reasonable and even magnanimous as these pronouncements may have been for their time, from our postcolonial perspective, however, this tract and the far-reaching colonial understandings of ‘race’ that it participates in and reproduces, is also highly problematic for the way it operates from the unquestioned presupposition of the superiority of “the masterful white man” and makes offensive remarks about other ethnic groups. Wrong considers it appropriate to conclude that between the French and British in Canada, “[t]here is no mysterious gulf of race to be bridged” because they have “a common ancestry [and] are in fact of the same race,” that being representative of “the two most advanced nations of Europe.” In a similar vein, he observes that whether conquering or conquered, “[e]very race seems to believe in its own superiority,” but does not consider the possibility that what is “perhaps a universal characteristic of race” is this “desire to see its own type the master type,” is as flawed a presupposition on the part of “the [white, European] master race” as it is of other groups. See Wrong, “The Two Races in Canada,” 4-6, 14. For a more involved discussion of “Canada’s problem” that is also a revealing record of the historical actors’ core assumptions and biases, see André Siegfried, *The Race Question in Canada [Le Canada, les deux races; problèmes politiques contemporains]* trans. [not identified] (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1907, 1906).

The body of recent literature that conducts the important work of problematizing conceptions of ‘race’ is voluminous. It falls outside the scope of this study to attend to this issue in a detailed way, but the following is a selection of recent literature that analyzes the politics of race in the context of Canada from various perspectives: Jill Vickers and Annette Isaac, *The Politics of Race: Canada, the United States, and Australia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012, 2000) conducts a comparative analysis of foundational race regimes and subsequent race regimes in three settler states, and offers a discussion of

This condition of being a minority group within Canada but a majority population within the province of Quebec and the country's largest city was the result of important historical factors. As the first European culture to colonize what is now Canada, in the mid-eighteenth century this portion of the North American territory acquired by France had been conquered by the British, and its French-speaking inhabitants had found themselves in a subaltern position, with the social and psychological reverberations of this defeat felt ever since. Wrong summarizes:

“The mental outlook in the province of Quebec is what we should expect. The French-Canadian clings to the fine tradition of French culture with passionate tenacity. He is aware that his use of the French language condemns him, for the time at least, to isolation, in America, but he prefers even at this cost what seems to him the pure gold of French culture. The church has been his most potent friend in preserving his identity, and he counts her influence as one of his chief supports. [...] What he asks for himself is to be left alone. His isolation has made him all the more sensitive to criticism or interference. When, often quite unconsciously, the English-speaking element seem to assume an air of superiority, this causes a proud people to withdraw within themselves and to avoid contact.”⁴³

basic concepts for understanding the complex politics of race; Sunera Thobani, *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada* (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2007) foregrounds the concept of ‘race’ as a critical relation of power, examining how the state has sought to ‘fix’ and ‘stabilize’ its subjects in relation to the nation’s ‘others;’ and Himani Bannerji, “On the Dark Side of the Nation: Politics of Multiculturalism and the State of Canada,” in *Canadian Cultural Studies: A Reader*, eds. Sourayan Mookerjee, Imre Szeman, and Gail Farschou (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 327-343, takes issue with the understanding of “Canada” being heavily inscribed by the colonialist and essentialist identity markers of “French” or “English” and critically reflects on the nomenclature extended by multiculturalism to Canada’s “others.”

⁴³ Wrong, “The Two Races in Canada,” 9-10. He also remarks, “[T]he French-Canadian of to-day has an ancestry linked with Canada during, in many cases, three hundred years. Naturally he regards himself as the first and the true Canadian.” Wrong, “The Two Races in Canada,” 9.

An earlier historical source dating from the turn of the nineteenth century that offers a penetrating analysis of the economic, political and social life of French Canadians was penned by essayist Edmond de Nevers (1862-1906) during his eight-year sojourn in Paris from 1892 until 1900. His book opens with the following lamentation: “La France a possédé autrefois, dans l’Amérique du Nord, un territoire presque aussi vaste que l’Europe entière.... Mais un concours de circonstances, qu’il serait trop long d’énumérer, nous a privés de ce magnifique héritage. Partout où les Français étaient peu nombreux et mal établis, ils ont disparus. Le reste s’est aggloméré sur un petit espace et a passé sous d’autres lois. Les quatre cent mille Français du Canada forment, aujourd’hui, comme les débris d’un peuple ancien perdu au milieu des flots d’une nation nouvelle. Autour d’eux, la population étrangère grandit sans cesse; elle s’étend de tous côtés [...] Nous commencerons bientôt le quatrième siècle de notre existence nationale.” Edmond de Nevers, *L’Avenir du peuple canadien-français* (Paris: Henri Jouve, 1896), vii-ix. In the preface to the 1964 reprint, Claude Galarneau remarks that in many cases, de Nevers’ pertinent insights are still valid and that

This peculiar condition of the coexistence of, and uneasy relations between, the nation's English- and French-speaking people, was given vivid expression in Hugh MacLennan's 1945 novel *Two Solitudes*, which has become a classic of Canadian literature.⁴⁴ Set in the fictional Quebec town of St. Marc and in Montréal during the First World War up until the dawn of the WWII, the narrative squarely addressed the issue of Canadian identity, offering a realistic portrait of this cultural divide, which was (and continues to be), one of Canada's most defining features and its most challenging dichotomies. As a result, the expression 'two solitudes' entered popular language and persists as the catch phrase denoting this lack of mutual understanding and communication between the two groups.

Writing in 1924 in a less politically charged manner, English architect and professor Charles H. Reilly described the differences between the British and the French in Montréal, through an architectural analogy that compared the houses that the city's "leading French architect and the leading Scotch one" had designed for themselves.⁴⁵ Although these successful architects "approaching their prime" remain unnamed, it is clear from the description of their residences which are situated "within one hundred yards of each other" on the southern slope of Mount Royal, that the architectural exemplars presented as representative of each cultural group, are the residences of Jean-Omer Marchand (1872-1936) and Percy Erskine Nobbs (1875-1964), located at 486 Wood Avenue, and 38 Belvedere Road, respectively, both in the wealthy and

the book could have been written in the 1960s. See Claude Galarneau, preface to Edmond de Nevers, *L'Avenir du peuple canadien-français* (Montréal: Fides, 1964, 1896), 10.

⁴⁴ Hugh MacLennan, *Two Solitudes* (Toronto: M & S, 2003; 1945).

⁴⁵ C. H. Reilly, "Some Impressions of Canadian Towns - I. Montréal," 55. Preceding this he comments that as an English visitor to Canada, the most striking observation he made was that of the "the division of races," each civilization appearing to grow and develop side by side, but with a chasm lying between them. Reilly was an architect and professor and under his leadership during the first three decades of the twentieth century, the School of Architecture at the University of Liverpool became world-famous.

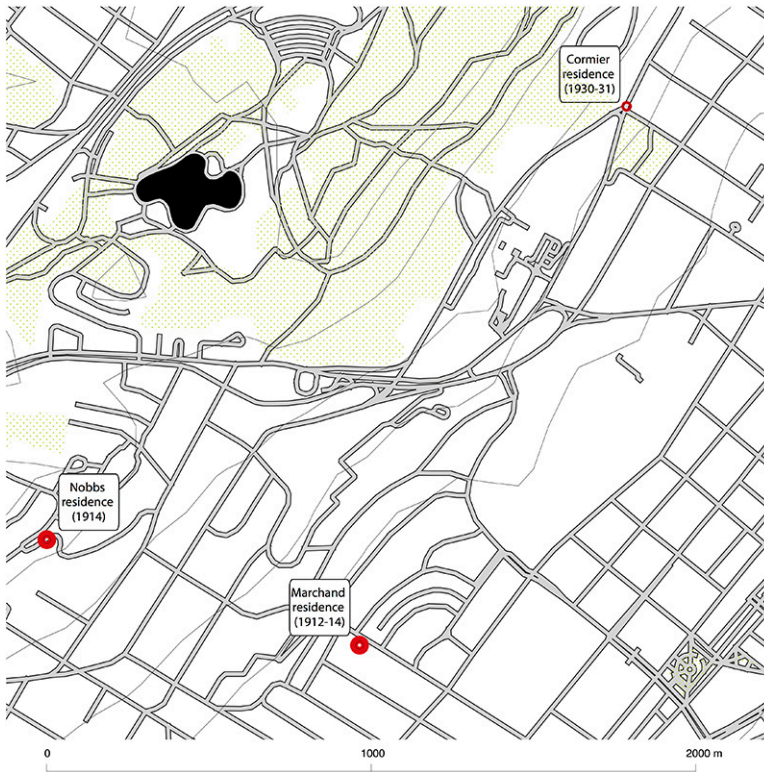


Figure 1.20 A map of a portion of the southern slope of Mount Royal, indicating the houses of Percy Nobbs (1914) and Jean-Omer Marchand (1912-14) in Westmount, and the proximity of Cormier’s residence that was completed seven years after the publication of Reilly’s article. All three are located close to the western end of Mount Royal Park. Source: Map data © OpenStreetMap elaborated by Alvise Pagnacco with Aliko Economides.

almost exclusively English-speaking neighborhood of Westmount.⁴⁶ [Figure 1.20] For Reilly the two houses “seemed to sum up two different civilizations, two entirely different views of life” that he deemed to be typical of the two aspects of Montréal, namely “its French vivacity and gaiety, [and] its Scotch fineness and solidity.”⁴⁷ He summarized:

“The Frenchman’s house, with its discreet exterior, seemed to look in upon itself for its pleasures, the Scotchman’s, perched on the mountain side, with its terrace and its wide windows, seemed in comparison ready to embrace the world.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ For descriptions and images of these houses see: Bruce Anderson, Geneviève Bégin, and Ariane Truong, *Fifty Houses in and around Montréal: An Album of Measured Drawings* (Westmount, QC: Anderson Architects, 2005), 183-187; and Norbert Schoenauer, “Percy Erskine Nobbs: Teacher and Builder of Architecture,” *Fontanus* 9 (1996): 46-57.

⁴⁷ Reilly, “Some Impressions of Canadian Towns - I. Montréal,” 55.

⁴⁸ Reilly, “Some Impressions of Canadian Towns - I. Montréal,” 55.

Climbing higher on the wooded slopes on Mount Royal, Reilly took in the view of the city

[**Figure 1.21**], commenting that Montréal is “one of the most picturesque towns in the world.”

He recounted,

“From this vantage point we can see that it is a city of tree-lined streets almost down to its business quarter [...] We see, striking across these tree-lined streets, a great thoroughfare running east and west. This is Sherbrooke, the Fifth Avenue of Montréal, containing its chief apartment-houses and hotels, its magnificent marble Art Gallery, and most of the mansions of its sixty-two millionaires. A strict account is kept of the latter, who are considered to be a noticeable feature of the town. Between the Mountain and Sherbrooke one sees a large open piece of grass surrounded by fine stone structures. This is the Campus of McGill and the University Buildings. [...] Further down, below Sherbrooke, there is the silver dome of the Cathedral, a miniature copy of St. Peter’s at Rome [...] In the same region, a little to the east, is the mass of tall buildings already mentioned, and beyond that again is the long line of docks and warehouses, with an occasional giant elevator standing up in gaunt concrete.”⁴⁹



Figure 1.21 Photograph of the view from Mount Royal, Montréal, QC, c1920.
Source: Anonymous, glass lantern slide, c.1920, MP-0000.25.214 © McCord Museum.

Architecture culture and the building of Montréal

With the significant and far-reaching transformations to the city wrought by industrialization and unprecedented urban growth during the pivotal period spanning from 1880 to 1930 that made Montréal the most economically and culturally advanced city in Canada, came a boom in the construction industry and important transformations to the architectural

⁴⁹ Reilly, “Some Impressions of Canadian Towns - I. Montréal,” 56.

profession. To illustrate this first point, in 1887, which was a year of notable urban growth, approximately 1000 construction permits were granted. By 1928, however, the number of permits issued that year had increased by five times.⁵⁰ In parallel to this increase in construction activity and opportunities for architects, it is also the case that at the close of the century, local architects were faced by substantial competition from Americans, largely based in New York, who were receiving most of the commissions for public buildings, due to the favoritism of Canadian patrons (particularly members of the Anglo-Protestant elite) for American architects. This meant that most of the important buildings in Canada during this period were not the work of Canadian offices.⁵¹ Among the numerous important commissions granted to Americans at the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth was the 8-story New York Life Insurance Company Building (1888) in Montréal's Place d'Armes, designed by Babb, Cook and Willard. Constructed of steel and red sandstone, this building was the first tall office building in the country and stood out in the cityscape dominated by grey limestone facades.⁵² The recourse to American expertise, which had become normative, was inseparable from the strong influence that American trends had on architecture in Canada. At the turn of the twentieth century, architecture in country's metropolis was largely characterized by the following competitive

⁵⁰ France Vanlaethem, "Montréal Architects and the Challenge of Commissions," in *Montréal Metropolis*, 72.

⁵¹ Percy E. Nobbs, "Architecture in Canada," *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* 1, no. 3 (July-Sept 1924): 91. Nobbs characterized the local architecture culture as consisting of three main groups: those born in Canada who have studied abroad (usually in the United States); American immigrants trained in the United States and there, mostly in the French academic tradition; and British immigrants, the majority hailing from Scottish architecture offices. Nobbs, "Architecture in Canada," 94.

⁵² Kelly Crossman, *Architecture in Transition: From Art to Practice, 1885-1906* (Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1987), 9-10; Vanlaethem, "Montréal Architects and the Challenge of Commissions," 71.

Other important buildings in Montréal designed by American architects include: the Canada Life Insurance Co. Building (1894-96) by Richard Waite; Windsor Station (1888-1889) by Bruce Price; the Bank of Montréal (1901-05) and the Royal Trust Building (1912-1913) by McKim, Mead and White.

influences: “a) Parisian academicism, b) the rarified classic of the McKim, Mead and White tradition, and c) Gothic revivalism in its many forms, including d) American romanesque.”⁵³

With the pressure and humiliation caused by the prejudice against local practitioners as sub-standard in favor of American designers, and the related problem of unfair practices in architectural competitions, Montréal architects were provoked to take measures to protect their interests. They undertook to formalize and improve the standards of architectural education, to assert the prestige and authority of their professional status, and to lobby for legislation that would impose a tax on foreign blueprints and that would introduce laws that would bar unlicensed Americans from practicing in the country without first registering with local societies.⁵⁴ Founded in 1890 by some 30 architects from Montréal and Quebec City, the ambition of the Province of Quebec Association of Architects (PQAA) was to gain control of architectural practice and to raise the professional standards of its members.⁵⁵ During the PQAA’s first meeting, emphasis was placed on the need to establish formal architectural study, as opposed to the apprenticeship model that had been in effect up until that time.⁵⁶ The professionalization of architectural training would thus increase the quality and prestige of

⁵³ Percy E. Nobbs, “Architecture in the Province of Quebec During the Early Years of the Twentieth Century,” *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* 33 (Nov 1956): 418.

⁵⁴ Crossman, *Architecture in Transition*. The *Act to Incorporate the Province of Quebec Association of Architects*, which was voted into Quebec law in December of 1890, was amended in 1905 with regards to an increase in penalties for illegalities, and was amended again in 1929 in a manner that limited the access of foreign architects to local commissions. “Appendix. Profiles of Institutions,” in *Montréal Metropolis*, eds. Gournay and Vanlaethem, 210

⁵⁵ “Appendix. Profiles of Institutions,” 210. The PQAA was also fully involved in the foundation of the federation of provincial architectural associations that was incorporated in 1908 under the name of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada.

⁵⁶ France Vanlaethem, “Les Premiers programmes d’enseignement de l’architecture: le centenaire de la corporation professionnelle des architectes du Québec,” *ARQ: Architecture/Quebec* 58 (Dec 1990): 35. For a more detailed discussion of the various informal ways that architects received their training prior to the formalization of architectural education see: Vanlaethem, “Montréal Architects and the Challenge of Commissions,” 74.

practice and improve the public image of local architects. Membership in the new professional association grew considerably during the first thirty years of its existence, but from among its 200-odd affiliates, only a small number had entered the profession from a formal program in architecture. Thus, despite the establishment of formal instruction during the early decades of the twentieth century, the majority of the PQAA's members took the exams after having spent four years apprenticing with an accredited architect. In other words, during its first decades of its existence, the PQAA never fully delegated control over its members' professional competence to the professional schools.⁵⁷ The efforts of the PQAA to promote its interests vis-à-vis the profession continued into the twentieth century, with the 1920s marked by particularly noteworthy measures to seek recognition of the role and importance of architects, including publishing articles in local papers, encouraging member participation in the annual Art Association exhibitions, and involving itself in making recommendations to government concerning legislation bearing on construction, building safety, urban planning and zoning.⁵⁸

Within the first decade of the twentieth century, architectural education in Montréal was increasingly centered in universities. This marked the beginnings in Canada of the means for a complete professional education in architecture.⁵⁹ In 1896 the Department of Architecture was founded at McGill University and its first Chair was the Scotsman Stewart H. Capper (1859-1925) who had studied architecture at the École des Beaux-Arts in the Atelier of Jean-Louis Pascal, and who upon arriving in Montréal, became involved in the PQAA and served as the

⁵⁷ Vanlaethem, "Les Premiers programmes d'enseignement de l'architecture," 35.

⁵⁸ See Pierre-Richard Bisson, "Montréal Architectural Practice during the Twenties," in *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal*, ed. Isabelle Gournay, 117-123.

⁵⁹ Nobbs, "Architecture in Canada," *JRAIC*, 93. Nobbs added that it took a decade of formal university-based architectural education before the recruitment of the profession from the schools became commensurate with the opportunities.

Association's President in 1900.⁶⁰ Capper's appointment marked the establishment of a Scottish-based academic tradition that dominated the architectural life of the university and would have a significant influence on the development of Canadian architecture, particularly as of 1903 with the arrival of his successor, Percy E. Nobbs (1875-1964), under whom McGill developed its architectural pedagogy under Arts & Crafts lines. With his colleague, Ramsay Traquair (1874-1952), who also arrived from Scotland and became head of the School in 1913, Nobbs shared an interest in vernacular architecture, particularly that of old Quebec, and was very active in the PQAA and in the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada.⁶¹

The first French-language program in architecture was established with Montréal's École Polytechnique in 1907, under French architects who were trained at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. The first head of the architecture division was Max Doumic (1863-1914), who was succeeded by Jules Poivert (1867-1955) two years later. Poivert had studied under, and practiced with, Victor Laloux before immigrating to Canada in 1909.⁶² As the first post-secondary institution in Canada to adopt the principles and methods of the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, the École Polytechnique's division of architecture and its teaching staff were absorbed into the École des Beaux-Arts de Montréal when it was created in 1922, and its building – designed by Jean-Omer Marchand and Ernest Cormier – opened its doors the following year. Highly influenced in its pedagogical orientation by the Parisian model, the school was nevertheless was

⁶⁰ Vanlaethem, "Montréal Architects and the Challenge of Commissions," 74-75.

⁶¹ After decades of fieldwork with students whom he took to study and document the architecture of New France, Traquair published *The old architecture of Quebec* (Toronto: Macmillan Co. of Canada, 1947). Of his own contribution to architectural history and preservation, Nobbs wrote: "I became instrumental in interesting the profession and the general public in the stirring qualities of the old architecture of the Province of Quebec." Nobbs, "Architecture in the Province of Quebec," 418. For a discussion of the earliest work done in architectural history in Canada see Annmarie Adams and Martin Bressani, "Canada: The Edge Condition," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 62, no. 1 (Mar 2003): 75-83.

⁶² "Poivert, Jules," *Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada, 1800-1950*, accessed February 28, 2015 <http://www.dictionaryofarchitectsincanada.org/node/1734>

not dominated by the culture of competition between studios or by using competitions and prizes as markers of students' progress.⁶³ Poivert remained head of the school and professor until his retirement in 1951, influencing several generations of students.

The two cultures of architectural pedagogy in Montréal during the first decades of the twentieth century not only instantiate one dimension of the broader sociocultural dynamics between French and English communities in the city, but also reflect the general trend concerning the distribution of the types of commissions obtained by architects during the first decades of the twentieth century. While Anglophone architects were generally more successful in obtaining commissions from large commercial and industrial clients, Francophone architects were typically better placed to obtain commissions for governmental institutions at the provincial and municipal levels, as well as for the design of churches and schools, given that the French-language school board fell under the jurisdiction of the Catholic church.⁶⁴ For instance, by the 1920s, the local firms that were giving each other stiff competition through their monopoly of a large portion of the available commissions were Ross and Macdonald (then, the largest firm in Canada),⁶⁵ Barott and Blackader, and Jean-Omer Marchand, who was associated with Ernest Cormier at the beginning of the 1920s.⁶⁶ The former two firms worked primarily in

⁶³ Vanlaethem, "Les Premiers programmes d'enseignement de l'architecture," 35. For a detailed study of the architectural pedagogy of Montréal's École des Beaux-Arts during the second quarter of the twentieth century see: François Giraldeau, "L'enseignement de l'architecture à l'École des Beaux-Arts de Montréal, de 1923 à 1957" (M.Sc.A., Université de Montréal, 1981).

⁶⁴ Raymonde Gauthier, *La tradition en architecture québécoise. Le XXe siècle* (Québec, QC: Musée de la civilisation, 1989), 70.

⁶⁵ From 1905 until 1912, George Allen Ross (1878-1946) worked in association with David Henry MacFarlane (1875-1950) under the title Ross and MacFarlane Architects. Subsequently, Ross formed the practice Ross and Macdonald Architects with Robert Henry Macdonald (1875-1942). They were active from 1913 until 1942. "Appendix: Architects active in Montréal, 1880-1930," in *Montréal Metropolis*, 206.

⁶⁶ Vanlaethem, "Montréal Architects and the Challenge of Commissions," 100-101.

the commercial sector, while Marchand had established himself largely through commissions from clients in government and the Roman Catholic church.⁶⁷

The decade between the end of the First World War in 1918 and the beginning of the economic crisis of 1929, was a period of prosperity and the development of Montréal's new commercial downtown intensified and witnessed the erection of the first skyscrapers.⁶⁸

Reflecting the city's new scale of commercial gigantism, two of the first skyscrapers in Montréal, namely, the Bell Telephone Company of Canada (1927-29) on Beaver Hall Hill, and the Aldred Building (1929-31) on Place d'Armes, were designed by Barott and Blackader. Another notable tall building in Montréal's downtown dating from this period is the Sun Life Insurance Company Building (1929-31) designed by Toronto architects Darling and Pearson. **[Figures 1.22 and 1.23]** Preceding and contributing to this increase in scale, however, were important developments in the available materials and methods of construction, which were first implemented in the context of industrial buildings that had a significant impact on architecture and urbanism in Montréal during the first decades of the twentieth century.

Prior to the turn of the twentieth century, reinforced concrete was used in a very limited way and on a small scale, but by 1908, it had outclassed structural steel coming to occupy a very important place in the Montréal market.⁶⁹ The first use of a reinforced concrete system in the city was for the American Tobacco Company factory, built in 1906 and employing the material

⁶⁷ Vanlaethem, "Montréal Architects and the Challenge of Commissions," 101. For a more complete discussion of the architects and firms most active in Montréal during the first three decades of the twentieth century, see pages 76-111.

⁶⁸ Vanlaethem, "Montréal Architects and the Challenge of Commissions," 100.

⁶⁹ Claire Poitras, "Les Architectes et l'introduction de béton armé à Montréal de 1900 à 1930" (M.A., Université de Montréal, 1989), 65, 88.



Figure 1.22 An oblique aerial view of downtown Montréal looking northeast, showing the Cathedral Marie-Reine-du-Monde, the Beaver Hall Building (Bell Telephone of Canada Headquarters), the Royal Bank of Canada tower, the Jacques Cartier Bridge under construction, and the Port of Montréal, c.1928-30.

Source: “Vue aérienne oblique du centre-ville,” 1928-1930, VM97,S3,D01,P028, AVM.



Figure 1.23 A photograph of Montréal taken from the lookout on Mount Royal, c.1939.

Source: Harry Sutcliffe, “Horseback riders at the lookout on Mount Royal, Montréal, QC, c.1939,” M2011.64.2.3.205 © McCord Museum.

for its structure (using the Hennebique system) as well as for its exterior cladding.⁷⁰ However, what came to be considered the most iconic uses of reinforced concrete during the first decades of the twentieth century, were to be found in the Port of Montréal’s industrial buildings, most of which were built by American firms specialized in the construction of grain silos and warehouses.⁷¹ [Figures 1.24 and 1.25] Grain silos in particular, were seen as loci of modern market exchanges and as the clear and monumental expression of the material.⁷² A case in point is grain silo number 2, built between 1910 and 1912 under the surveillance of the J.S. Metcalf

⁷⁰ Poitras, “Le béton armé à Montréal de 1900 à 1930,” 64-65, 88-89.

⁷¹ Poitras, “Le béton armé à Montréal de 1900 à 1930,” 93. Poitras also notes that for some important buildings in Montréal designed in reinforced concrete, it was Americans who maintained the control over almost the entire elaboration of the structure, with only the materials used being Canadian. See Poitras “Le béton armé à Montréal de 1900 à 1930,” 112.

⁷² Poitras, “Le béton armé à Montréal de 1900 à 1930,” 92.



Figure 1.24 Panoramic elevation drawing of Montréal, indicating the main buildings, squares and urban infrastructures (labeled within the panorama itself and in the lower margin of the drawing), 1906.
Source: J.L. Wiseman, [Panoramic view of] Montréal, AD.MDCLLVI. Date of registration 1904, NMC 11269, LAC.



Figure 1.25 Photograph of Montréal harbor, QC, photographed from the St. Lawrence River, 1919-20.
Source: Wm. Notman & Son, 1920-1930, VIEW-18805.0 © McCord Museum.

Company Ltd., built entirely of reinforced concrete and touted at the time of its construction, as the biggest of its kind in the world.⁷³ It would be this silo (now demolished) that Le Corbusier would famously publish in *Vers une architecture* as an admirable example of the work of engineers, but not before editing out the Marché Bonsecours, which sat behind it.⁷⁴ **[Figure 1.26]**

⁷³ Poitras, “Le béton armé à Montréal de 1900 à 1930,” 93. Poitras cites the *Official Guide to Montréal*, prepared for the Meeting of the Twelfth International Geological Congress (Montréal: F.E. Gratton & Sons, 1913), 59.

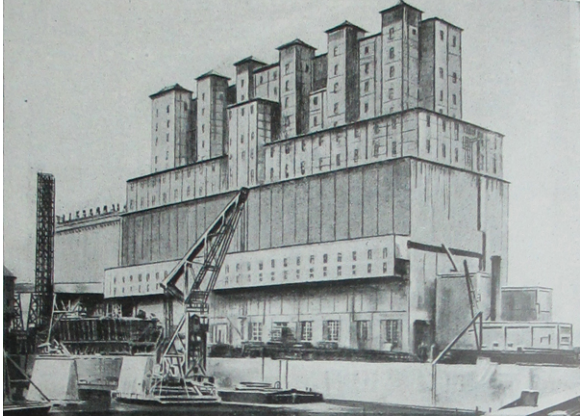


Figure 1.26 A photograph of Grain silo number 2 in the Port of Montréal, published by Le Corbusier after editing out the Bonsecours Market building in the background. Source: Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture* (Paris: Éditions G. Crès et Cie, 1923), 18. Ernest Cormier Library, Collection, CCA.

Not surprisingly, the use of reinforced concrete was slower to be adopted in the design and construction of public and religious buildings than in was in the sectors of industry and commerce. Among the first uses of reinforced concrete for religious buildings was that of the large convent, the Maison-Mère des Soeurs de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame (1905-1908), designed by Jean-Omer Marchand and Samuel Stevens Haskell.⁷⁵ Here, reinforced concrete was used for the structure, following the Hennebique system of the assemblage of columns and beams supporting floor slabs, but there is very little if anything on the building's exterior to indicate the use of reinforced concrete: the massing and composition of the facades are classical in spirit and the ornamentation is inspired by neo-Byzantine forms.⁷⁶ As with many institutional buildings using reinforced concrete in Montréal that date from the early years of the century, this convent reflects the architects' knowledge of the latest techniques but their adoption does not imply innovations in architectural form.⁷⁷ However, it is significant that Marchand and Haskell's

⁷⁴ Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture* (Paris: Éditions G. Crès et Cie, 1923), 18. Compare Figure 1.18. A similar image of this "Kornsilo und Elevator" in Montréal was published by Walter Gropius a decade earlier in *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Werkbundes* 2 (1913): [unpaginated plate].

⁷⁵ Poitras, "Le béton armé à Montréal de 1900 à 1930," 59-60, 117-118.

⁷⁶ Poitras, "Le béton armé à Montréal de 1900 à 1930," 119.

⁷⁷ Poitras, "Le béton armé à Montréal de 1900 à 1930," 119.

ecclesiastic client was open to their use of a non-traditional material at a time when this system of construction was exceptional in Montréal.⁷⁸



Figure 1.27 Photograph of Phillips Square in downtown Montréal, framed by the Canada Cement Company head office (1921-22) in the center, the Henry Birks Building to the right. Facing Canada Cement to the left is a partial view of the Dubrule Building by Marchand and Cormier (1919-21), c1950. Source: Le square Phillips, Montréal, 06M_E6S7SS1_P051084 © Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec.

In contrast, a more surprising case of the use in of this new, innovative material tempered by formal recourse to more traditional architecture, is found in the corporate headquarters of the Canada Cement Company (1920-21), designed by Barott and Blackader. Founded in 1909, the Canada Cement Company was the top producer of Portland Cement in the country, therefore, was highly influential in the use of reinforced concrete in Montréal.⁷⁹

[Figure 1.27] Occupying a prominent position in Phillips Square, the Canada Cement Company headquarters is the first office building in Canada to be constructed of reinforced concrete, and is also the first to feature an indoor parking lot, located in the building's basement.⁸⁰ And yet, while this building was well-received and thus contributed to the acceptance of reinforced concrete as an architectural material, its classically-inspired elevations and particularly its colonnade, meant that the architects did not exploit the particularities and expressive potential of

⁷⁸ Poitras, "Le béton armé à Montréal de 1900 à 1930," 119.

⁷⁹ Poitras, "Le béton armé à Montréal de 1900 à 1930," 79, 108.

⁸⁰ Vanlaethem, "Montréal Architects and the Challenge of Commissions," 100, 104.

the material, preferring to conceal the technological innovations behind more traditional surfaces that were deemed acceptable and that reflected the taste of the period.

These examples reflect the observation made by historian Gérard Morisset, that in Quebec during the first decades of the twentieth century, modern architecture was excessively timid; hidden in foundations and apparent for the most part only in utilitarian buildings, at times clad in traditional materials, and generally trying to compensate for its existence through its proportions inspired by antiquity.⁸¹ In a similar vein, architectural historian Harold Kalman explains that in the Canadian context of the 1920s, the word ‘modern’ was used to mean ‘contemporary’ or ‘of its time’, and thus a ‘modern’ architect was “one who sought an appropriate expression of the day – whatever that might be – and used up-to-date building technology.”⁸² Distinct from ‘modernism’ (or ‘modernist’) which was understood to relate to the European avant-garde, Canadian architects, although influenced by European and American trends, insisted that their work was modern, even if it borrowed historical forms.⁸³ This suggests why the reception to modernism in architecture in the province of Quebec was one borne of continuity rather than rupture.⁸⁴ Thus, despite the rapid growth and intense transformations to the metropolis during the first decades of the twentieth century, and even though some of its

⁸¹ Gérard Morisset, *L'Architecture en Nouvelle-France: ouvrage orné de 160 gravures* (Québec: Éditions du Pélican, 1980. 1949), 117.

⁸² Harold Kalman, *A History of Canadian Architecture*, vol 2 (Toronto; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 749.

⁸³ Kalman, *History of Canadian Architecture*, 748.

⁸⁴ France Vanlaethem, “Le Patrimoine de la modernité,” *Continuité: le patrimoine en perspective* 53 (Montréal: le patrimoine moderne’ (Spring 1992): 20. She writes: “La modernité architectural qui s’impose dès lors au Québec est plus française qu’allemande, elle se développe dans la continuité plutôt que dans la rupture: les formes étaient renouvelées sans que l’ornement fût reconnu comme un crime et que la mise en oeuvre des matériaux nouveaux et l’expérimentation technique devinssent des signes ostentatoires.”

industrial buildings were admired and disseminated as harbingers of modern architecture by the leaders of the Modern Movement, architecture culture in Montréal remained conservative.

Chapter 2 The importance of being Ernest

“Is it conceivable that a man can be at once an architect, an engineer
(a professor of these two sciences in universities),
a watercolorist and sculptor and excel in everything?
Moreover, he’s a Montréaler.
A Canadian of French language and culture.”

— Arthur Prévost, “La Personnalité de la Semaine” (1952)¹



Figure 2.1 Portrait of Ernest Cormier c.1920.
Source: Dupras & Colas photographic studio,
ARCH252098, P.6468N, EC 018, box Cormier
01-Photos-02P, FEC, CCA.

Montréal, 1885-1908

Born on December 5, 1885, Marie Joseph Anaclet Urgel Ernest Cormier² [Figure 2.1] was the eldest of three children of Malvina Généreux (? - 1933), the daughter of a wealthy

¹ “Peut-on concevoir qu'un homme peut être à la fois architecte, ingénieur, (professeur de ces deux sciences dans les universités) aquarelliste et sculpteur et exceller en tout? De plus, qu'il s'agit d'un Montréalais. D'un Canadien de langue et de culture françaises.” Arthur Prévost, “La Personnalité de la Semaine,” *Le Canada* 50ième année, no. 106 (Saturday, August 9, 1952), folder “ARCH259594 ‘Envoi de M. Arthur Prévost, journaliste [...] 9 août 1951’ 809/A-4,” box 001-2010-213 T. All translations from French to English are mine except where stated otherwise.

² Ernest Cormier’s baptismal certificate, dated December 6, 1885, ARCH257826, 001-045-1, box 001-2010-045 T. All archival materials cited are drawn from the Fonds Ernest Cormier (FEC) conserved at the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) unless otherwise stated.

landowner, and Dr. Isaïe Cormier (1855-1915), a pediatrician who had first studied civil engineering.³ Cormier was raised in Montréal's well-to-do Golden Square Mile neighborhood that extended from Mount Royal down to Sherbrooke Street, a prominent east-west artery and the most prestigious street in Montréal during the first decades of the twentieth century.⁴ The Cormier family home (now demolished), was situated at 52 Sherbrooke Street West⁵ at the corner of St. Urbain Street, one block away from the site on St. Urbain where Cormier would build his studio in the early 1920s, and five blocks from Le Collège Mont-St-Louis, the private boys' preparatory high school that he attended, which offered scientific and commercial courses of study. There, Cormier received training that was more technical and practical than what was typically offered in the classical colleges.⁶ An avid reader and inclined to draw and paint since

³ Robert Gagnon mentions that Cormier's father studied at the École Polytechnique for one year before switching to medicine, and speculates that this had an impact on the fact that both of his sons studied there. See Robert Gagnon with Armand J. Ross, *Histoire de L'École Polytechnique, 1873-1990: La Montée des ingénieurs francophones* (Montréal: Boréal, 1991), 78.

⁴ In Montréal, what is conventionally referred to as 'north,' 'south,' 'east,' and 'west' vis-à-vis the orientation of the island-city's network of streets, does not correspond to the true cardinal directions because to do so would make for convoluted nomenclature. For convenience sake, the streets lying roughly perpendicular to the St. Lawrence River are considered to run in a 'north-south' direction, when in fact, those streets run in a northwesterly-southeasterly direction. According to true north, then, Sherbrooke Street follows a NNE to SSW course, and what are commonly referred to as the 'northern' and 'southern' slopes of Mount Royal are in fact, more western and eastern in their respective orientations. As a result, maps of Montréal (historic ones in particular) often represent the city according to conventional attributions of north and south, rather than skewed to reflect geospatial accuracy. See Figures 1.11 and 0.2 as examples of maps representing the city's conventional and accurate cardinal orientations, respectively.

⁵ See mentions of this address in several places in the Fonds Cormier including: his postcard collection: boxes 149/A-1; 149/A-1 et A/2; 149/A-2; 150/A-1; 150/A-1 et A/2; 150/A-2; 150/A-3; in Cormier's burgundy reporter-style notebook dating from 1919, folder "[6 calepins – 1919 à 1950]," ARCH258541, box 001-2010-205 T; and in box 001-2010-202 T.

⁶ The College was located at 244 Sherbrooke Street East and offered scientific and commercial classes. The learning of French and English was mandatory, and German was optional. "Le MSL, un bref historique," Collège Mont-Saint-Louis, accessed September 13, 2014, <http://www.msl.qc.ca/le-msl/bref-historique.html>. See also Gournay, "Ernest Cormier: Training and Early Works," in *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal*, ed., Isabelle Gournay (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1990), 31. A

childhood, Cormier is paraphrased as saying in an interview that his father persuaded the Brothers of the College to allow him to follow a special curriculum that prioritized mathematics and drawing, which suited him better than the standard one.⁷

In 1902, Cormier began his studies in civil engineering at Montréal's École Polytechnique, graduating in 1906 with a Bachelor's degree in applied sciences with 11 other classmates, all graduating with diplomas in various branches of engineering.⁸ Cormier's first job as a professional civil engineer was for the Dominion Bridge Company, the Canada-wide engineering firm that was responsible for the erection of significant infrastructural works in steel across the country, among them, the Jacques Cartier Bridge (1929) in Montréal that spans the St. Lawrence River.⁹ Of his time working as a design engineer for Dominion Bridge, Cormier is said

description of the school's curriculum and pedagogical ambitions in the early 1930s can be found in *Album-Souvenir de l'Université de Montréal* (Montréal: Beaugrand-Champagne, 1933), 90-91.

⁷ In what gives the impression of a vainglorious attitude, he also added that he was a "bad pupil" owing to the fact that he studied a lot by himself, which meant that he was always ahead of his classmates in the course readings, and that he tended to arrive late to class. Betty Sigler, "Plans by Cormier," *Canadian Business* 24, no. 2 (July 1951): 34. In an interview a few years later for the "Who's Who in Business" section of a Toronto magazine, Cormier remarked, "When I was at school, I was always studying in advance. [...] I was curious, you see. I was interested, and it's still the same thing." J.W. Bacque, "If It's Big, I'll Take It," *Saturday Night* 69, no. 47 (August 28, 1954): 25.

⁸ Cormier received a diploma in civil engineering from the École Polytechnique and a "Bachelier ès Sciences appliquées" [Bachelor of Applied Science] from the Université Laval. The reason for the mention of two academic institutions is due to the fact that since 1887, the École Polytechnique des sciences appliquées was affiliated with the Montréal branch of the Université Laval, which less than two decades later, would attain its autonomy and begin functioning under the name Université de Montréal. See ARCH258348, folder 6/8, box 001-2010-139 T; ARCH258530, folder "RIBA [s.m.p. 92] 21.2.J; 1/1; 3x/H," box 001-2010-202 T.

Montréal's École Polytechnique had been offering instruction in engineering since 1874, and during the 1905-06 academic year, a total of 122 students were enrolled in the school, 11 of which graduated. During the 1902-03 academic year, when Cormier began his studies, 61 students were enrolled, meaning that over the span of merely four years the number of students at the school doubled. See Annexe 1 "Inscriptions et diplômés au premier cycle de 1874 à 1990" in Gagnon, *Histoire de l'École Polytechnique, 1873-1990*, 485. For the list of the 11 members of the École Polytechnique's graduating class in 1906 (30ème promotion) see: *Liste des diplômés de polytechnique* (Édition 1962), folder "ARCH258469 733/A-10," box 001-2010-176.

⁹ The promotional booklet produced by the Dominion Bridge Company (DBC) in 1951 states that the company built the first Canadian Pacific Railway (C.P.R.) Lachine Bridge in 1886, which at the time of its

to have recounted, “When I was making structural designs and I saw the architects at work, [...] I thought, ‘Why shouldn’t I become one myself?’”¹⁰ Setting his sights on the *École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts* in Paris, which was then the most prestigious institution from which to obtain an education in architecture, Cormier subscribed to the preparatory course offered by the *École du Bâtiment* in Paris, which would prepare him to enter the demanding competition for admission to the *École des Beaux-Arts*.¹¹ In the evenings, while working full-time, he diligently applied himself to completing the numerous weekly assignments prescribed by Monsieur Guichard, Director of the *École du Bâtiment*, who would return Cormier’s assignments with comments.¹² The numerous exercises Cormier completed in preparation for application to study in Paris attest to the level of technical skill in drafting and in the knowledge of classical and

construction, was the largest continuous span in the world. It also states that in 1941, the DBC built the Canadian National Railway (C.N.R.) Bridge over the Lachine Canal in Montréal. See Dominion Bridge Company Limited, “Report and Statement. The Year Ended October 31st, 1951,” (Lachine: Dominion Bridge Co., 1951), [1-4]. Cormier worked in the DBC’s Montréal office from 1906 until the summer of 1908.

¹⁰ Bacque, “If It’s Big, I’ll Take It,” 25.

¹¹ He subscribed to this course in the Spring of 1907. See ARCH258536, folder “1/3 [Correspondance, notes manuscrites – *École du Bâtiment*] 5(RO)c4, carton 724, ADC – 19,3,” box 001-2010-204 T. In 1907 he also took a course in clay sculpture (*modelage*) at the Monument National in Montréal. See “Chronology I. Ernest Cormier – Biographical Notes,” in *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal*, ed. Isabelle Gournay (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1990), 172.

¹² Guichard’s letter to Cormier dated April 24, 1907, lays out the terms of the long-distance tutoring for the fee of 20 Francs per month. Guichard instructs Cormier from the outset to develop very classical schemes that seek out the rich, decorative expression of his designs but to never employ forms that he has not been exposed to through this course, even if he has learned them in other contexts. Guichard adds that this “is the necessary condition for acquiring the right expression, style.” The original reads: “Faites des travaux très classiques, cherchez bien l’expression riche et décorative de votre conception; mais n’employer jamais de formes que vous n’avez pas dans le cours, même si vous les connaissez d’autre part. C’est la condition nécessaire pour acquérir l’expression juste, le style.” The mailing of the assignments that were returned to Cormier with comments took place between May 1907 and July 1908. See ARCH258536, folder “1/3 [Correspondance, notes manuscrites – *École du Bâtiment*] 5(RO)c4, carton 724, ADC – 19,3,” box 001-2010-204 T.

Gournay notes that the instructions Guichard gave are clearly in line with the basic principles of French academic models, and that the materials related to the correspondence course housed in Cormier’s archive allow us to better understand a system of education that is little known today. Gournay, “Training and Early Works,” 32.

neoclassical architecture that were deemed basic prerequisites for applying for admission to commence architectural studies. **[Figure 2.2]** The work Cormier produced indicates that he must have conducted private study to expand on the knowledge of architectural history that he had acquired through the two courses taught to civil engineering students at the École Polytechnique by Joseph Haynes.¹³ Clearly aligned with the tradition of French architectural theory that runs from Durand to Guadet,¹⁴ Cormier's exposure to architecture during his civil engineering studies were comprised of a rationalist definition of architecture with a prescriptive outline of "the path to follow in drawing up any plan," a general survey of architectural history, an overview of the parts of buildings and various construction methods and materials including

¹³ Sigler states that Cormier prepared for entry to the EBA by devouring book after book on art and architecture. Sigler, "Plans by Cormier," 34. Myra Nan Rosenfeld esteems that the drawings Cormier prepared for this correspondence course demonstrate that at this preliminary stage in his architectural education, Cormier was already familiar with eighteenth-century French architecture and theory, particularly the writings of Jacques-François Blondel (1705-74) whose pedagogical methods were the basis of the architectural education at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Myra Nan Rosenfeld, "Ernest Cormier and European Culture: The Influence of French Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Architecture and Theory on Cormier's Designs for the Université de Montréal," *Journal of Canadian Art History* 13, no. 2 - 14, no. 1 (1990-91): 83.

Deschamps notes that Haynes' courses offered a counterpoint to the predominantly technical courses Cormier took, but they nevertheless privileged practical information on building materials and methods over the historical, theoretical or aesthetic content that makes up architecture. Deschamps, "They Both Build: Notes on the Training of Ernest Cormier, Architect and Engineer-Builder," in *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal*, ed. Isabelle Gournay (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1990), 127.

¹⁴ The architect Jean-Nicholas-Louis Durand (1760-1834) who became Professor of Architecture at the École Polytechnique in Paris at the end of the eighteenth century, exercised considerable influence, particularly as a result of the prescriptive "Marche à suivre dans la composition d'un projet quelconque" [Procedure to be followed in the composition of any project] that he advanced, which was published in his *Précis des leçons d'architecture données à l'École Polytechnique* (1802-1805). Julien Azais Guadet (1834-1908), architect and professor at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, began directing an atelier in 1872, and in 1894 began teaching a course on architectural theory, which focused on the guiding principles of architecture with an emphasis on the composition of buildings (i.e., their elements and their ensembles). His four-volume tome *Éléments et théorie de l'architecture* (1902-04) was highly influential.

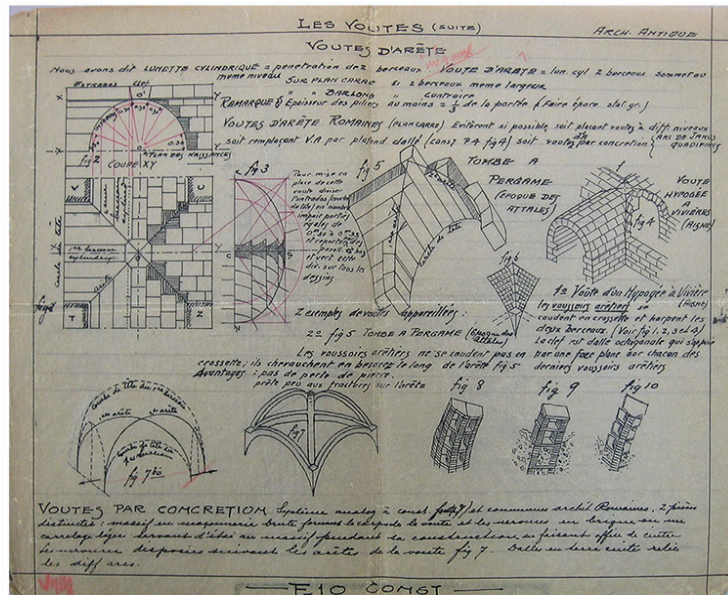
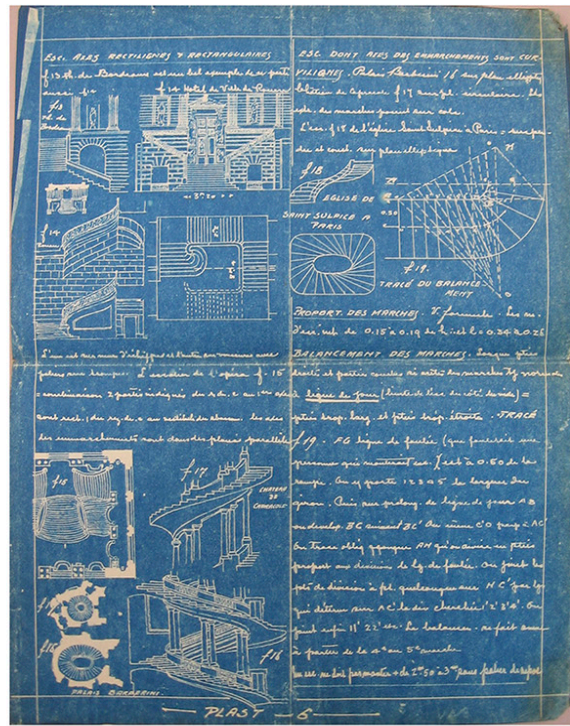
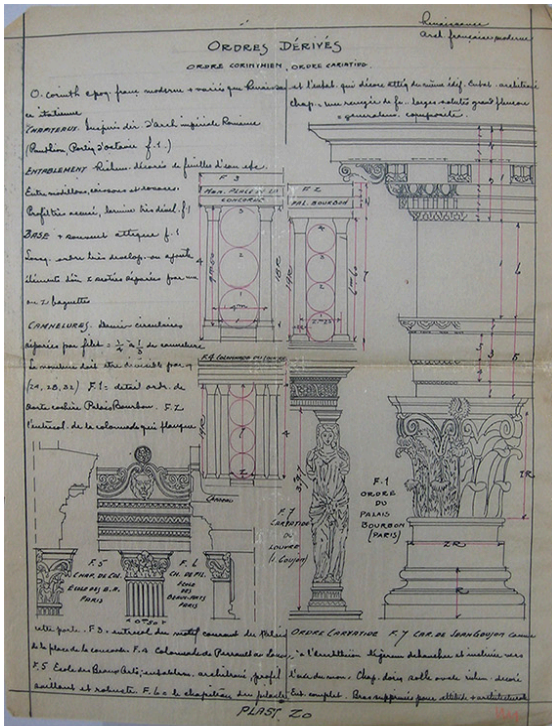


Figure 2.2 Three examples of the more than 50 sheets of exercises completed by Ernest Cormier from 1907 to 1908, for the correspondence course he took with the École du Bâtiment in Paris. Source: Ernest Cormier, exercises completed for the École du Bâtiment, Paris (1907-1908), folders “ARCH258536 1/3 5(RO)c4, carton 724, ADC – 19,3,” and “ARCH258536 2/3,” box 001-2010-204 T, FEC, CCA.

an introduction to reinforced concrete,¹⁵ all of which was nevertheless a contrast to the highly technical courses comprising the rest of his education in engineering.¹⁶

Europe, 1908-1918

By the summer of 1908, at the age of 22, Cormier felt ready to enter the École des Beaux-Arts admissions competition, and on August 1 – the day of his wedding to Berthe Leduc (1885-1918) – he and his wife set sail for what would be a 10-year sojourn in Europe. Gaining entry to the École des Beaux-Arts was challenging, and the competition did not favor non-French nationals. In 1908, Cormier was among the very few North Americans admitted to the Architecture Section of the École, beginning his Beaux-Arts studies in the preparatory

¹⁵ During the 1903-04 academic year (which was Cormier's second year of studies at the École Polytechnique), he took the Architecture Course (*Cours d'Architecture*) taught by Professor Joseph Haynes. The first page of Cormier's notebook of the Fall semester (dated September 7) defines "architecture for the engineer" as the search for the application of reasoning to the creation of any building having a specific purpose. The engineer will only ever construct buildings for which the decoration will be the consequence of the construction, this must always be applied taking into account the profiles and dimensions necessitated by nature and the strength of the materials employed. The original reads: "L'Architecture pour l'ingénieur peut être définie comme étant la recherche de l'application du raisonnement à la création d'une édifice qq ayant un but défini. L'ingénieur n'aura jamais à construire que les édifices dans lesquels la décoration sera la conséquence de la construction, celle-ci devant toujours s'appliquer en tenant compte des profils et des dimensions imposés par la nature et la résistance des matériaux utilisés." See Cormier's student notebooks for his course in architecture (taken in 1903-04) and his course in civil construction (1904-05), both taught by Joseph Haynes at the École Polytechnique in ARCH258515, box 001-2010-200 T. In this same notebook, Cormier records that architecture consists of three parts (composition, construction and decoration) and that the basic factors in any architectural project are the function of the building and its method of construction. Also see Deschamps, "They Both Build," 127-128.

¹⁶ Cormier's other notebooks attest to the courses he took in mechanics, chemistry (analytical and organic), machines, analytical geometry, heating, physics, differential and integral calculus. See his notebooks conserved in boxes 001-2010-198 T, 001-2010-199 T, and 001-2010-200 T.

Cormier's course in Industrial Legislation, taken in his final year of studies (1905-06), was taught by Édouard Montpetit, a lawyer and professor of political economy who would come to be the Secretary-General of the Université de Montréal from 1920 to 1950, and therefore, was a member of the client group that awarded Cormier the commission for the design of the Université's new campus in 1924. See Mgr. Olivier Maurault, *L'Université de Montréal* (Montréal: Les Éditions des Dix, 1952), 27; 29. As well, from 1925 until 1954, Cormier taught the course on architecture at the École Polytechnique, which means that the two were also professorial colleagues. See *École Polytechnique de Montréal Conditions d'Admission, Programme des Cours et Renseignements généraux*, édition 1930, folder "[Publications Diverses] ARCH258469, 733/A-10," box 001-2010-17.

architecture atelier [studio] of Godefroy and Freynet.¹⁷ In July 1909, he was admitted to the Atelier of Jean-Louis Pascal, and was awarded his diploma from the French government in November 1917.¹⁸ The Atelier Pascal was a very international architecture studio, drawing a number of American students and/or those who would later practice in America.¹⁹ **[Figures 2.3 and 2.4]** By the time Cormier became Pascal's *élève* [student], some influential architects of the twentieth century who were particularly active during the interwar period had studied there, among them Paul Cret (1876-1945) and Pierre Patout (1879-1965), who received their diplomas in 1903.²⁰ A description of Cormier dating from one decade after his studies in Paris states:

¹⁷ Letter from Godefroy addressed to the Inspector of the École des Beaux-Arts, dated January 9, 1909, in Ernest Cormier's student file, AJ*52, microfilm 418, École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts (EBA), Archives nationales, Paris.

¹⁸ Ernest Cormier, "Feuille de valeurs" [academic transcript], Section d'architecture, Atelier Pascal, École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris, AJ*52, microfilm 418, Archives nationales, Paris. *Élèves* who successfully completed the EBA's stringent requirements would attain the status of being "*Diplômé par le Gouvernement*" or DPLG.

¹⁹ A description of student life reads as follows: "The atelier Pascal, which perhaps the largest at the turn of the century, was then at 20 Rue Mazarine, where on the ground floor there was a junk shop; Pascal's students, up two flights of dilapidated stairs in the courtyard, worked in the top three stories of the building (and chased each other on the roofs around the chimney pots)." See Charles Collens, "The Beaux-Arts in 1900," *American Institute of Architects Journal* 7 (Feb, Mar, Apr 1947): 80-86; 144-51; 87-97; cited in Richard Chafee, "The Teaching of Architecture at the École des Beaux-Arts," in *The Architecture of the École des Beaux-Arts*, ed. Arthur Drexler (New York; Cambridge, MA: Museum of Modern Art; distributed by The MIT Press, 1977), 90, fn 133.

If this described the physical conditions of the atelier space, Cormier's apartment in Paris was certainly more salubrious. Compare Figures 2.3 and 2.4.

²⁰ Marie-Luce Fourchet is currently completing a dissertation on Patout entitled, "Pierre Patout (1879-1965), architecte, décorateur, urbaniste," that includes a *catalogue raisonné* of the architect's work. The research she conducted in the Fonds Cormier during her doctoral student residency at the CCA in the summer of 2011, was motivated in part by a search for traces of a collaboration between Cormier and Patout, and I am grateful to her for the exchanges we have had about our research findings as well as for her valuable assistance when I conducted research in the EBA fonds at the Archives nationales.

Among the architects whom Cormier would have had contact with at the EBA is Pol Abraham (1891-1966) was an *élève* of Jean-Louis Pascal and Alfred Recoura at the EBA before leaving for military service in 1913, and obtained his *diplôme* in 1920.

The Institut national d'histoire de l'art (INHA) in Paris has recently undertaken to making many useful documents from the EBA fonds accessible on their website. See their database "Dictionnaire des élèves architectes de l'École des beaux-arts (1800-1968)," <http://www.inha.fr/fr/ressources/bases->

“Ernest Cormier is sensitive to all forms of modern art: architecture, painting, sculpture and literature. To keep up to date, stay young and understand what is now being attempted in all the arts is what he has always tried to do. That is why, for his training, he chose the Pascal studio, where the most research was being done and where his classmates were all the artists now leading the decorative movement: Patout, Levard, Dufet, now with Ruhlman, Ziclis and Favier, now with Brandt. The movement started in the Pascal studio.”²¹

The École’s pedagogy was based on a system of open ateliers in which the relationship of the *patron* to the *élève*, was that of a master imparting wisdom through personal instruction, rather than as a professor addressing a class. As Julien Guadet would explain: “Were it not for fear of set formulas, we might best explain how the École works by saying that it does not teach architecture any more than it teaches painting, leaving this higher and more personal mission to the chosen master.”²² More important than official classes, the core of the École’s pedagogy was based on a system of competitions, and it was in the atelier that the student would train for these *concours d’émulation*. These took two main forms, namely, the *esquisse-esquisse* which was the rendering of a composition completed within 12 hours in an examination room [*en loge*], and the *projet rendu*, which was a large scale, finished drawing that the student elaborated from a rough sketch that had been completed in 12 hours. The former type of *concours* was intended to evaluate the student’s ability to express a *parti* [a course of action; a design direction], while the

documentaires/acces-global-et-organise-aux-ressources-en-histoire-de-l-art-aporha/dictionnaire-des-eleves-architectes-de-l-ecole-des-beaux-arts-1800-1968.html

²¹ Jean Chauvin, “Interviews d’artistes: Ernest Cormier, architecte, peintre, sculpteur,” *La Revue populaire - histoire, littérature, sciences* 20, no. 6 (June 1927): 11, translated in Geoffrey Simmins, ed., *Documents in Canadian Architecture* (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 1992), 166.

²² Julien Guadet, “L’Enseignement de l’architecture en France,” *The Architectural Review* XIV, no.83 (Oct 1903): 136; reproduced in English translation in Jacques Lucan, *Composition, Non-Composition: Architecture and Theory in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, trans. Theo Hakola (Lausanne, Switzerland; Abingdon, Oxford: EPFL Press; Routledge, 2012. 2009), 115.



Figure 2.3 An unlabeled, undated photograph of a studio kept in Cormier's archive [but likely the atelier Pascal in Paris].
Source: [Ernest Cormier?], P.6534, box P.6486 à P.6668, FEC, CCA.



Figure 2.4 Photograph of Cormier's spouse, Berthe Leduc, playing the harp in their Paris apartment between 1916 and 1918. Some of Cormier's drawings for the École des Beaux-Arts can be seen on the wall.
Source: Ernest Cormier, 01-ARC-494d, P.6536, EC024, box 01-Cormier-02P, FEC, CCA.

latter tested the student's ability to elaborate a complete project.²³ Under Pascal's tutelage, Cormier completed designs for such projects as a Museum of Comparative Anatomy, laboratory buildings for a School of Agriculture, an Oceanographic Institute, a bathing facility [Figure 2.5],

²³ Lucan, *Composition, Non-Composition*, 117. For an explanation of the requirements for a student's advancement from the *seconde classe* to the *première classe* and the different emphases of the various *concours* and prizes given, see Lucan, *Composition, Non-Composition*, 117-124.

and he earned four medals and numerous mentions.²⁴ Complimenting Cormier's Beaux-Arts education in architecture was the study of watercolor painting (with Pierre Vignal and Raphael Colin), sculpture (under the tutelage of Allard), and decorative arts (with Mayeux).²⁵

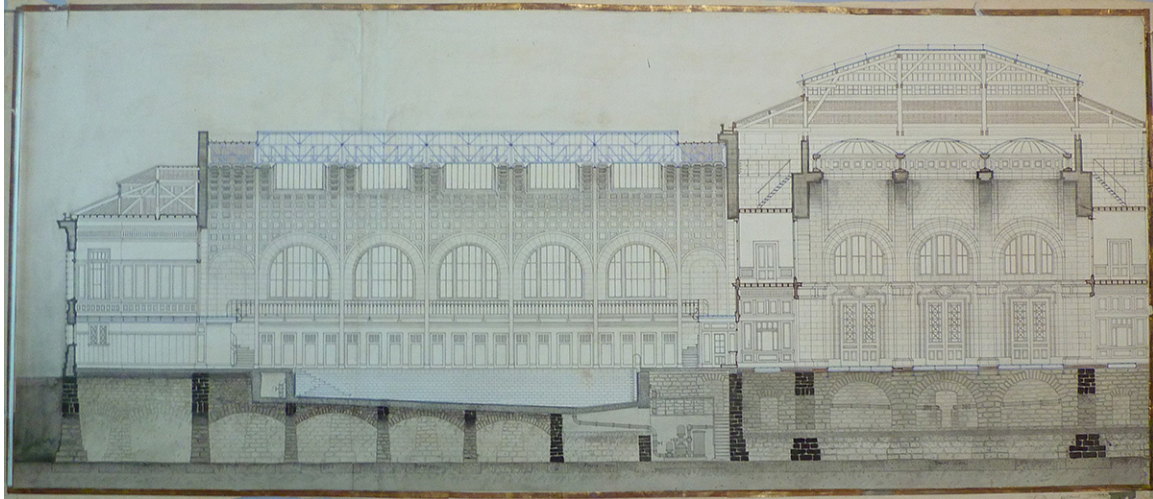


Figure 2.5 A longitudinal section of a bathing facility designed by Cormier while an *élève* of Jean-Louis Pascal at the École des Beaux-Arts [undated but c.1909-1914]. Source: Ernest Cormier, student work, “Concours d’émulation: projet pour un établissement de bains. Coupe longitudinale sur bassin et vaste hall attenant, couverture par verrière, voûte cintrée à caissons,” ARCON1993:0008:12A, ARCH271381, FEC, CCA. Gift of Bruce and Sarah Lay.

Cormier's academic training was largely inspired by the writings of Julien Guadet who taught a logical approach to the program and a rigorous working method. Seeking to set out the

²⁴ As an *élève* in the *2e classe* (where he was admitted in July 1909), he received a 3e Médaille for an ornamental drawing of an Ionic column capital (19 November 1910) and for another drawing (21 March 1911); a 2e Médaille for a drawing of a torso (19 February 1913); a 1er Sec. Médaille for the concours in the history of architecture (14 May 1912); and a 1er Sec. Médaille for his design of a Harbor Station. Ernest Cormier, “Feuille de valeurs,” EBA, AJ*52, microfilm 418, Archives nationales, Paris.

²⁵ Cormier's watercolor technique bears striking similarity to that of Vignal. For the collection of cut-outs of reproductions of Vignal's paintings kept in Cormier's archive see ARCH259449, box 00-EC-003.

These pursuits in watercolor painting, sculpture and decorative arts that complimented Cormier's architectural education do not appear on his transcript. However, several students enrolled in Professor John Bland's “History of Architecture in Canada” class at McGill University's School of Architecture, interviewed Cormier when writing their term papers, and these experiences were mentioned. See Athanassios Demopoulos, “Mr. Ernest Cormier: Architect and Engineer” (January 1960); Michel Lacroix, “A Report on the Université de Montréal Building” (March 1963); and Jacques Dalibard, “Ernest Cormier, architect and engineer” (1964). These unpublished texts are conserved at McGill's Rare Books and Special Collections Division (RBSC).

guiding principles of architecture, Guadet codified of the elements of composition, placing emphasis on working from the plan in order to attend to the programmatic requirements, and favored axial distribution, symmetry, and a clear hierarchical organization. Guadet's highly influential four-volume tome *Éléments et théorie de l'architecture* (1902-04)²⁶ became central to the architectural pedagogy of the École des Beaux-Arts. Of his contribution Guadet would write:

“Either by the elements of architecture – walls, doors, windows, porticos, floors, vaults, etc. – or by the elements composing a residential, educational, religious etc., edifice, I attempt to show students what is being done and why, while using universally admired examples without preference to any given style or era, nor affirming or imposing and preferences or exclusions. It is therefore, if I may use the word here, the *science* of architecture that makes up the program of this course. I am attempting to show, here again, what is certain, certain for everyone. I say: ‘Here is what is being done.’ I do not say: ‘Here is what should be done.’”²⁷

Differentiating between what he classified as elements of architecture (i.e., walls, roofs, vaults, openings) and elements of composition (i.e., different types of rooms, passages, stairs, vestibules), Guadet insisted that while “elements” could be taught, composition – the combination of the parts into a coherent whole – had to be learned through experience in the atelier.²⁸ Moreover, the study of architectural and compositional elements was deemed to correspond to the scientific dimension of architectural knowledge.²⁹

Credence can be given to the claim of the indelible influence left on Cormier by his Beaux-Arts education, particularly the teachings of Guadet. Of the few theoretical pronouncements that Cormier made, he often reiterated and expanded upon Guadet's maxims,

²⁶ Julien Guadet. *Éléments et Théorie de l'architecture: Cours professé à l'École nationale et spéciale des Beaux-Arts*, 4 vols (Paris: Librairie de la construction moderne, 1902-04). Ernest Cormier Library, Collection, CCA. Jean-Louis Pascal wrote the Preface to the fifth edition of Guadet's *Éléments et théorie* (1911).

²⁷ Julien Guadet, preface to *L'Enseignement à l'École nationale et spéciale des Beaux-Arts – section d'architecture*, by Henry Guédy (Paris: Librairie de la Construction moderne, 1899), iii. Ernest Cormier Library, Collection, CCA. The English translation of this excerpt is found in Lucan, *Composition, Non-Composition*, 158.

²⁸ Lucan, *Composition, Non-Composition*, 156-158.

²⁹ Lucan, *Composition, Non-Composition*, 158.

for example the notion that a sense of proportion is the highest artistic sense,³⁰ and his statement, early in his career that:

“Architecture is more constructive than ornamental. It resides in the proportion of voids and solids, the play of shadows and light, in the balance of volumes, in the general character [of the work]. You place a column somewhere and intentionally to have it support something. What we distinguish is whether it is a church, a railway station, or a factory that you wanted to realize. I am not seeking a particular style, although style is undoubtedly the source of all inspiration. However, the final form of a construction, whatever it turns out to be, must follow from the program and the means employed.”³¹

This passage encapsulates Cormier’s alignment with the French tradition of constructive (or ‘structural’) rationalism, of which Guadet was a prominent exponent.³²

Not being a French national, Cormier was not eligible to compete for the École’s coveted Prix de Rome. However, at the time, Canadians were British subjects and therefore, he was able to apply to the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) to study ancient and Renaissance art and architecture in Italy at the British School at Rome. Cormier was the second Canadian to receive the School’s Henry Jarvis Studentship, which enabled him to travel and conduct research for two years, arriving in Rome in October of 1914 and remaining in Italy until the Fall of 1916.³³ For his final project, he proposed a reconstruction of the Villa Madama on

³⁰ Phyllis Lambert, “Architecture where cultures meet,” in *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal*, ed. Isabelle Gournay (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1990), 24; Isabelle Gournay, “Ernest Cormier: Training and Early Works,” in *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal*, 32.

³¹ Chauvin, “Interviews d’artistes: Ernest Cormier,” 9-10. Yves Deschamps reads in this a formulation of Guadet’s maxim, “construction and decoration are the same thing, that is, architecture.” Deschamps, “They Both Build,” 33; Guadet, *Éléments et théorie*, I, 556.

³² Gournay, “Training and Early Works,” 32.

³³ The year 1914 was the second year of that competition’s organization and therefore, Cormier was the second recipient of the “British Prix de Rome.” France Vanlaethem, “Ernest Cormier, un grand professionnel,” *Journal of Canadian Art History* 13, no. 2 – 14 (1990-91): 48. Louis de Soissons, also a student of Pascal and a Montréal native, who subsequently went on to practice in London, was the first to win this two-year scholarship. During his studentship Cormier returned briefly to Montréal following the death of his father in 1915. Gournay, “Training and Early Works,” 33.

the Monte Mario, outside of Rome. The villa, whose construction had not been completed and which, by the early twentieth century was in a state of ruin, had been the object of substantial archaeological attention on the part of architects since the nineteenth century. The empirical study and archaeological surveying of ruins and their imaginative reconstruction through drawing was an important component of a Beaux-Arts education in architecture, and was deemed to be a necessary part of completing the practitioner's training.³⁴ Cormier would have been among the very few Canadian architects to have the opportunity for such a deep immersion in ancient and Renaissance culture, and its impact on him can be discerned in his classicizing aesthetic, which is apparent in his persistent attachment to abstractions of antique elements such as propylea, temples and friezes. The notes, photographs, site surveys, measured drawings and watercolor paintings that Cormier produced for his study of the Villa Madama demonstrate his rigorous combination of historical research, empirical documentation and informed conjecture.

Cormier's patient investigation requiring historical research, as well as empirical documentation, was a formative experience in his thinking about buildings occupying sloped sites. As importantly, in this work produced for his fellowship, Cormier paid meticulous attention to his study floor and ceiling treatments, representing these with a high level of detail as important dimensions of the building. **[Figures 2.6, 2.7 and 2.8]** This preoccupation with

The document Cormier received entitled, "The Rules of the British School at Rome" (Palazzo Odescalchi, Rome) specifies: "I. The School shall be, in the most comprehensive sense, a School of Roman and Italian Studies. It shall promote the study of Roman, and of Greek and Graeco-Roman, archaeology in all its departments, including palaeography. Every period of the language and literature, antiquities, art, and history of Rome and Italy shall be considered as coming within the province of the School. II. The School shall also be a centre at which information can be obtained and books consulted by British travellers pursuing serious objects in Italy. III. A Library of archaeological and other suitable books, including maps, plans and photographs, shall be formed and maintained in connexion with the School. [...]" ARCH258529, box 001-2010-202T.

³⁴ Gournay, "Training and Early Works," 33.

architecture's immersive decorative order would characterize his later work.³⁵ Most significantly, of this experience, Cormier himself stated that the two years he spent in Rome had “a profound influence on [his] training” and that “traces of it can be found in all the constructions [he] was able to execute throughout [his] career.”³⁶

At the end of his two-year Jarvis Studentship in the Fall of 1916, Cormier returned to Paris. For his final project at the École des Beaux-Arts, he submitted a design for a spa facility and obtained his DPLG in November 1917, thereby fulfilling his ambition to be an official part

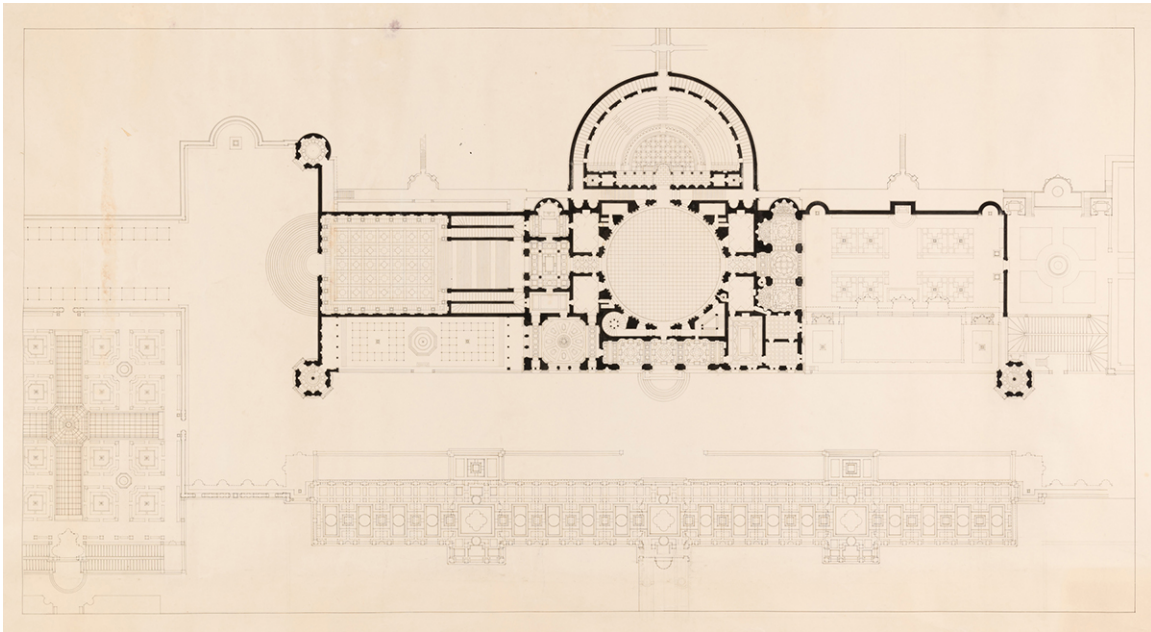


Figure 2.6 Cormier’s plan of the “completion” of the Villa Madama, Rome, Italy, indicating the actual loggia and the existing or proposed floor and ceiling patterns, 1916.

Source: Ernest Cormier, student work, ARCH271267, FEC, CCA. Gift of Bruce and Sarah Lay.

³⁵ Pierre du Prey, *The Villas of Pliny from Antiquity to Posterity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 69, 71.

³⁶ Cormier’s statement reads: “Mon séjour de deux années passées à Rome, d’octobre 1914 à octobre 1916, avant mon retour en France pour exercer ma profession d’ingénieur pour des travaux en rapport avec la guerre, a eu une influence profonde sur ma formation; on en trouve la trace dans toutes les constructions que j’ai pu exécuter au cours de ma carrière.” Letter from Cormier to Jean Marion, journalist of *Montréal-Matin* dated June 10, 1947, in folder “Nations Unies, Extraits de journaux E.C.,” box Fonds Cormier Library Transfer ARCON1992:0006 AR1992:0002 Boîte (2/6).

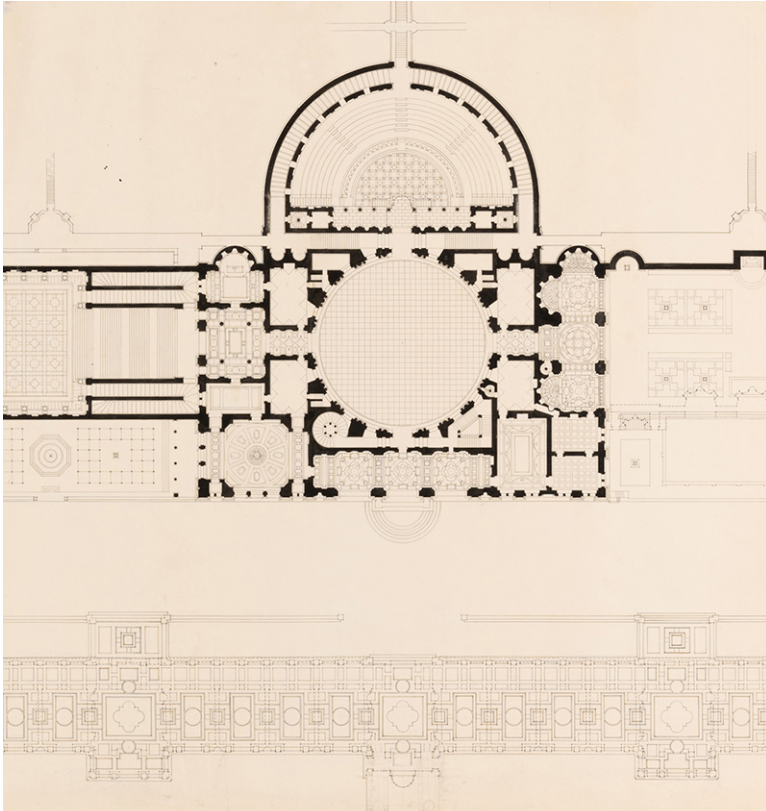


Figure 2.7 Detail of Cormier's plan of the "completion" of the Villa Madama, Rome, 1916. Source: Ernest Cormier, student work, ARCH271267, FEC, CCA. Gift of Bruce and Sarah Lay.



Figure 2.8 Watercolor painting of the ceiling of the central vault of the loggia of the Villa Madama, Rome, Italy, 1916. Source: Ernest Cormier, ARCH7494, FEC, CCA.

of the “*internationale des Beaux-Arts*.”³⁷ However, prior to completing this final requirement of his architectural education, Cormier’s contribution to the war effort³⁸ was to obtain employment with the military engineering firm Considère, Pelnard & Caquot, who were making innovative contributions to reinforced concrete construction.³⁹ In interview, Cormier recounted that his prospective employers were impressed by his training in civil engineering, particularly because in France, mention of “*École polytechnique*” carried tremendous prestige, and so the implicit assumption made that the school in Montréal was of a similar standing helped him to get his foot in the door.⁴⁰ **[Figure 2.9]** During the time of his employment in the office of Considère, Pelnard & Caquot, Cormier’s learning curve was steep as he worked on the designs for installations such as a hangar with parabolic roof and edge beams, a boiler room using the new thin shell construction technique, and a water tower employing the Monnoyer prefabrication process.⁴¹ In his profile on Cormier dating from 1927, Jean Chauvin would write that Cormier:

“joined Considère in Paris, where he worked for the French Government on reinforced concrete projects, assisting in the construction of bridges, factories,

³⁷ Cormier, “Feuille de valeurs,” EBA, Paris; Gournay, “Introduction,” 12.

³⁸ Cormier was not able to enlist for active military service for reasons that are not clear. A letter of recommendation written by Jean-Louis Pascal dated April 17, 1918, mentions that Cormier had “a physical handicap” but does not elaborate further. See folder EC ADC-2/6.

Late in his career Cormier spoke of his work for Considère, Pelnard & Caquot as part of the war effort. See his letter to Arthur Prévost dated June 17, 1975, folder “ARCH259594 809/A-4,” box 001-2010-213 T.

³⁹ For studies attending to the development of reinforced concrete in French culture see: Réjean Legault, “*L'appareil de l'architecture moderne: New materials and architectural modernity in France, 1889-1934*” (Ph.D., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1997); and Cyrille Simonnet, *Le Béton: histoire d'un matériau. Economie, technique, architecture* (Marseille: Parenthèses, 2005).

⁴⁰ Three letters sent to Cormier from the office of Considère-Pelnard-Caquot dated February 15, 1917, August 29, 1917 and December 29, 1917, outline the terms of his hire and progressive increases to his salary. See ARCH258528, box 001-2010-202 T.

⁴¹ Gournay, “Training and Early Works,” 33; Deschamps, “They Both Build.” For a list of the industrial projects Cormier worked on while in the employ of Considère, Pelnard & Caquot, see Chapter 3.

aircraft hangars, gunpowder factories and shipbuilding plants. He soon became prominent at Considère, renowned for his bold solutions to the problems of construction with this material, which did not come into common use until the war.”⁴²

A letter written in 1918 by the firm indicates his employer’s satisfaction with his work.⁴³



Figure 2.9 Photograph of Cormier, with fellow engineers Keller and Fontaine, colleagues at Considère, Pelnard & Caquot, Paris, c.1918. Source: [Unknown photographer], P.5590, box 01-Cormier-02P, FEC, CCA.

Cormier’s engineering experiences in France involved him in the latest methods in reinforced concrete construction, and also seem to have exposed him to a working tool that he continued to use in his practice in Canada. In his library, Cormier kept two non-identical sets of what I am inclined to call “structural cue cards.”⁴⁴ **[Figure 2.10 and 2.11]** These small, loose sheets contain charts, diagrams and equations for structural calculations, with much of the information compiled having to do with reinforced concrete construction. Some of these cards

⁴² Chauvin, “Interviews d’artistes: Ernest Cormier,” 8; translated in Simmins, ed., *Documents in Canadian Architecture*, 162.

⁴³ A certificate from Considère, Pelnard & Caquot dated April 12, 1918 states that Cormier’s “technical knowledge as an architect enabled him to occupy a special, important position in the design department.” See folder EC ADC-2/6; cited in Gournay, “Training and Early Works,” 40.

⁴⁴ In the archive there are two incomplete, non-identical sets of these structural cards that Cormier had kept in his library. A total of over 80 cards, approximately one quarter of which are duplicates or triplicates, were collected inside a brown leather book cover with Cormier’s name embossed on the front, and in a tattered cardstock case that could stand upright on a bookshelf. See CLP 17, box Library Transfer ARCON1992:0006, AR1992:0002, Boîte (5/6); and box Library Transfer ARCON1992:0006, AR1992:0002, Boîte (2/6) which contains some loose cards of this genre.

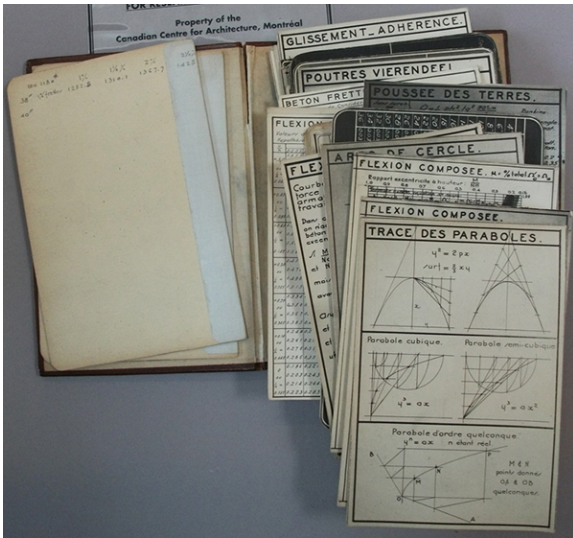


Figure 2.10 One of two non-identical sets of structural cue cards prepared by Cormier. Source: Ernest Cormier, box Library transfer, ARCON1992:-0006, AR1992:0002 boîte 5/6, FEC, CCA.

COLONNES OCTOGONALES FRETTEES

Ce tableau est calculé de la façon suivante:
 Noyau à 800°
 AGER VERTICAL à 12000°
 FRETTEES à 16000°, considérées comme acier vertical mais x par 2.4 fois leur volume.
 NOTE: Si $\lambda > 2000$, remplacer 1.2 par 1.13.3.

FORMULE CONSIDERE
 $1.5 \times R_0 \times R_0 + R_0(2.4 \times 2.4 \times R_0)$
 $R_0 =$ Section du noyau.
 $R_0 =$ des barres verticales
 $R_0 =$ des frettes considérées comme barres verticales fictives.

COTE	FRETTEES 1%										VERTICALES										COTE
	1/4	3/8	1/2	5/8	3/4	7/8	1	1 1/8	1 1/4	1 1/2	1/4	3/8	1/2	5/8	3/4	7/8	1	1 1/8	1 1/4	1 1/2	
12	2.7	3.4	4.1	4.8	5.5	6.2	6.9	7.6	8.3	9.0	1.6	2.0	2.4	2.8	3.2	3.6	4.0	4.4	4.8	5.2	
13	3.0	3.7	4.4	5.1	5.8	6.5	7.2	7.9	8.6	9.3	1.7	2.1	2.5	2.9	3.3	3.7	4.1	4.5	4.9	5.3	
14	3.3	4.0	4.7	5.4	6.1	6.8	7.5	8.2	8.9	9.6	1.8	2.2	2.6	3.0	3.4	3.8	4.2	4.6	5.0	5.4	
15	3.6	4.3	5.0	5.7	6.4	7.1	7.8	8.5	9.2	9.9	1.9	2.3	2.7	3.1	3.5	3.9	4.3	4.7	5.1	5.5	
16	3.9	4.6	5.3	6.0	6.7	7.4	8.1	8.8	9.5	10.2	2.0	2.4	2.8	3.2	3.6	4.0	4.4	4.8	5.2	5.6	
17	4.2	4.9	5.6	6.3	7.0	7.7	8.4	9.1	9.8	10.5	2.1	2.5	2.9	3.3	3.7	4.1	4.5	4.9	5.3	5.7	
18	4.5	5.2	5.9	6.6	7.3	8.0	8.7	9.4	10.1	10.8	2.2	2.6	3.0	3.4	3.8	4.2	4.6	5.0	5.4	5.8	
19	4.8	5.5	6.2	6.9	7.6	8.3	9.0	9.7	10.4	11.1	2.3	2.7	3.1	3.5	3.9	4.3	4.7	5.1	5.5	5.9	
20	5.1	5.8	6.5	7.2	7.9	8.6	9.3	10.0	10.7	11.4	2.4	2.8	3.2	3.6	4.0	4.4	4.8	5.2	5.6	6.0	
21	5.4	6.1	6.8	7.5	8.2	8.9	9.6	10.3	11.0	11.7	2.5	2.9	3.3	3.7	4.1	4.5	4.9	5.3	5.7	6.1	
22	5.7	6.4	7.1	7.8	8.5	9.2	9.9	10.6	11.3	12.0	2.6	3.0	3.4	3.8	4.2	4.6	5.0	5.4	5.8	6.2	
23	6.0	6.7	7.4	8.1	8.8	9.5	10.2	10.9	11.6	12.3	2.7	3.1	3.5	3.9	4.3	4.7	5.1	5.5	5.9	6.3	
24	6.3	7.0	7.7	8.4	9.1	9.8	10.5	11.2	11.9	12.6	2.8	3.2	3.6	4.0	4.4	4.8	5.2	5.6	6.0	6.4	

Figure 2.11 Chart for structural calculations of reinforced concrete octagonal fretted columns, indicating Considère's formula, (undated). Source: Ernest Cormier, double card for "Colonnes octogonales frettées," box Library transfer, ARCON1992:-0006, AR1992:0002 boîte 5/6, FEC, CCA.

show figures that go to several decimal points, indicating a very high level of technical precision. Portable in format, many of these cards are photographic reproductions of structural information that Cormier had gathered and composed on 8.5 x 11" paper, and developed in his dark room on smaller format paper [Figure 2.12], while others contain information that was handwritten directly on the cardstock. In many cases, the cards' graphic layout reveals Cormier's attention to the artful composition of text and image. Although they are undated and not all of them are numbered, making it impossible to know precisely when they were made and if there

was an intended sequence, it is reasonable to assume that the preparation of these cards was begun early in his career and were probably added to over the years, to be used as a handy reference set in the office, and possibly too on the job site. Several cards make reference to Considère, Pelnard & Caquot, such as Cormier’s notations concerning Considère’s formula, or to the project for the design of the “Ateliers de Marseille,” (numbered 29 on the verso) which Cormier worked on in 1917. One card features a diagram of the hooked reinforcing bar called the “Crochet Considère” (numbered 26 on the verso) which suggests that the engineering firm possibly printed and distributed these reference cards among their staff, and thus, that it was in Paris that Cormier began the practice of consolidating useful structural information in portable format for his reference as a young engineer experiencing a steep learning curve in reinforced concrete construction.

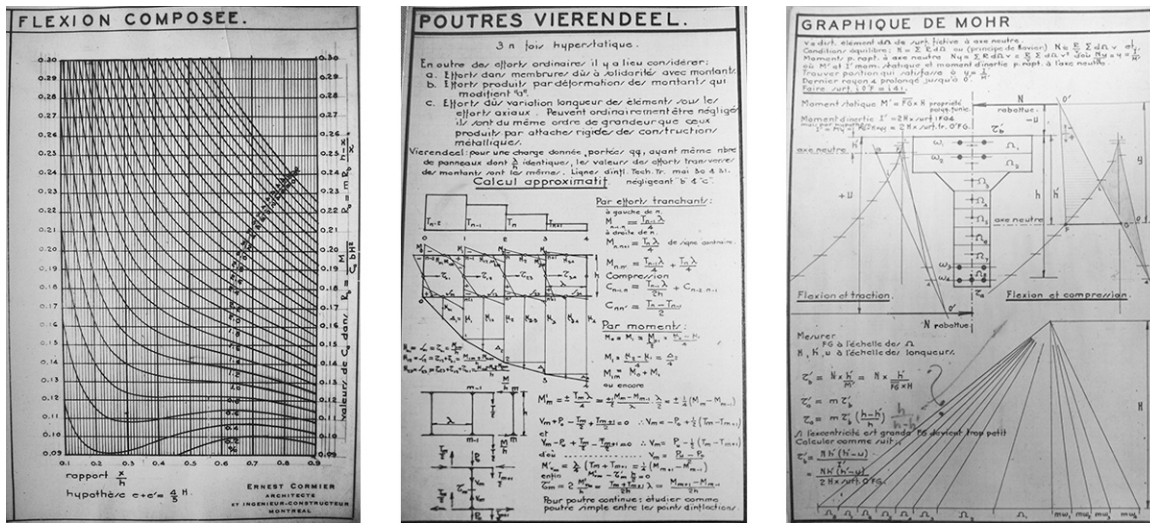


Figure 2.12 A few examples from among the dozens of index cards containing structural information housed in Cormier’s archive, (undated). Source: Ernest Cormier, cards for “Flexion composée,” “Poutres Vierendeel,” and “Graphique de Mohr,” box Library transfer, ARCON1992-0006, AR1992:0002 boîte 5/6, FEC, CCA.

Engineer, architect, artist

A tendency that can be seen beginning with Cormier's early training and spanning his entire career, is that he alternated between engineering and architectural pursuits with fluidity and ease. Yves Deschamps rightly observes that Cormier neither confused the two professions, nor saw a conflict between them.⁴⁵ Rather, Cormier's synthesis of these two branches of professional expertise bearing on building is one that was shaped by his commitment to construction, and intimates his understanding of their deep complementarity. In this way, Cormier's architectural studies at the École des Beaux-Arts can be seen as a continuation of his initial training in engineering at the École Polytechnique in Montréal, giving him access to "the best source for more specialization within the same integrated system"⁴⁶ followed by direct design experience in the latest technical innovations in reinforced concrete. Tellingly, Cormier asserted in interview that he considers the professions of engineer and architect to form but one, and thus seems to have had no anxiety about bridging what was perceived by many to be a cultural distance between the two fields.⁴⁷

Insisting on the need for the architect to be a master of all the arts, Cormier's fluid integration of architecture and engineering was enriched by the range of creative pursuits he engaged with in a sustained manner throughout his life, and at which he excelled. An award-winning watercolorist, avid photographer and bookbinder, Cormier also involved himself in sculpture, furniture design, and garden arts, and in his home he had various spaces specially

⁴⁵ Deschamps, "They Both Build," 125. Deschamps asserts that Cormier's dual training permitted him "to participate in two cultures and two visions of the world."

⁴⁶ Deschamps, "They Both Build," 127.

⁴⁷ Ernest Cormier, quoted by A. J. Sarrazin in his radio broadcast on May 27, 1949. The original reads: "Je considère, dit-il, que les professions d'ingénieur et d'architecte n'en forment qu'une seule." See A. J. Sarrazin, "Causerie de monsieur A. J. Sarrazin, prononcée à Radio-Canada, le 27 mai 1949," folder "ARCH259631 801/A-23," box 001-2010-213 T.

assigned to different artisanal pursuits.⁴⁸ Deeply curious, particularly about how things are made, Cormier was constantly at work on something, claiming that work relaxes him and that when he gets tired, he simply switches to a different activity.⁴⁹ **[Figure 2.13]** Bookbinding was a pastime that extended until the end of Cormier’s long life. In his library there exist over 15 completed bindings attributed to him, but his archive conserves copious lists that he made of both his completed pieces and the approximately 100 other books that he intended to bind.⁵⁰ **[Figures 2.14, 2.15 and 2.16]** In fact, as late as 1974, when he was almost 89 years old, he wrote out a list



Figure 2.13 A portrait of Ernest Cormier painting at an easel, (undated).
Source: [Unknown photographer], P.5910, folder “ADC-6,18_P.5904 à P.6155,” box 01-Cormier_P.5904 à P.6294, FEC, CCA.

⁴⁸ One commentator described, Cormier had various studio spaces for different kinds of work at his home: “A côté de sa confortable bibliothèque, entièrement fermée au monde extérieur, Ernest Cormier s’est aménagé deux ateliers de reliure et de céramique, ne tenant ces deux arts que de sa seule maîtrise personnelle... ‘Quand je suis fatigué d’une chose, je passe à une autre, dit-il volontiers...’ C’est alors que par une porte dérobée, il se retire dans son petit atelier ; et là... face à la ville endormie, le célèbre architecte redevient un humble artisan. Penché sur sa presse, ses instruments en main... ce grand bâtisseur d’Université demande à ses reliures de lui faire découvrir dans le travail manuel, la joie d’une perfection inlassablement recherchée.” Sarrazin, “Causerie.” See also Sigler, “Plans by Cormier,” 27.

⁴⁹ Sarrazin, “Causerie”.

⁵⁰ Not all of Cormier’s lists concerning which art bindings in his library were executed by him are consistent. See the documents in folders “Sur mes rayons ARCH257559, 001-023-1,” and “notes sur des fiches et “À Relier”, Reliure, ARCH257559, 001-023-02,” box 001-2010-023 T.

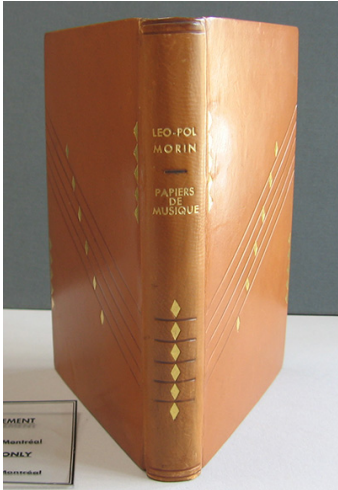


Figure 2.14 Cormier's binding of Leo-Pol Morin's *Papiers de Musique*, after 1930.

Source: Ernest Cormier, art binding for Leo-Pol Morin, *Papiers de Musique* (Montréal: Librairie d'action canadienne-française, 1930), Ernest Cormier Library, Collection, CCA.

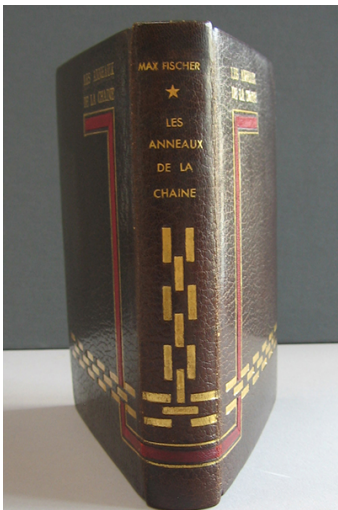


Figure 2.15 Cormier's binding of Max Fischer's *Anneaux de la chaîne*, after 1930.

Source: Ernest Cormier, art binding for Max Fischer's *Anneaux de la chaîne* (Paris: Flammarion, 1930), Ernest Cormier Library, Collection, CCA.



Figure 2.16 Photograph of Ernest Cormier in his bookbinding workshop at his home and office at 3675 chemin de la Côte-des-Neiges, in Montréal, c1970s. In the foreground is his bookbinding equipment.

Source: [Unknown photographer], ARCH250408, FEC, CCA.

of 11 books he still had the intention to make bindings for.⁵¹ While most of his artistic activities were pursued for his private enjoyment, he regularly displayed his watercolor paintings at the Montréal Art Association and other art exhibitions, and won awards for his graphic work.⁵²

[Figure 2.17] In addition, photography was an activity Cormier pursued as an artistic practice in its own right **[Figure 2.18]**, as well as using it as a tool – as a bridging device across different media; a locus of translation – in the creation of other works as diverse as technical index cards and watercolor paintings. **[Figures 2.19, 2.20, 2.21 and 2.22]** A sampling of his watercolors alongside large format photographs of the same scale and showing the same images as the paintings, provide convincing evidence that Cormier did not tend to sketch and paint “from life” but rather, enlarged photographs that he had taken during his travels, and then traced the outline of his compositions in order to then apply himself to the masterful technical execution of representing the scenes in the unforgiving medium of watercolor.

⁵¹ See his handwritten list, “À relier” dated November 15, 1974, in folder “Entrepôt Morgan Cormier Reliures,” box Fonds Cormier Library Transfer. This folder also contains and bookbinding supply catalogs, leather samples, and an instruction booklet.

⁵² See for instance, the letter he received from the Art Association dated April 21, 1927, stating that he has won the Jessie Dow Prize (\$100) for his watercolor “Fontaine du Jardin Borghèse a Rome” as well as the announcement of his winning of the Jessie Dow Prize in 1927, in the press clipping, “Le prix Jessie Dow,” *La Patrie*, April 23, 1927. See ARCH259799, box 01-EC-12, and ARCH258970, folder “236/B-2,” box 001-2011-193 T. A list of the exhibitions that Cormier participated in between 1908 and 1933, and which paintings he showed is kept in the archives of the Montréal Museum of Fine Arts. See the Artist’s File for Ernest Cormier, Montréal Museum of Fine Arts. Additionally, a list of 26 watercolors and the prizes they won at the Art Association of Montréal, dated 1932 is found in ARCH259510, folder “4009/A-13,” box 001-2011-293 T. Cormier had also exhibited in Paris where he received an honorable mention in the Salon des Artistes français in 1914. In the Salon’s official publication for that year, 9 watercolors by Cormier are mentioned. See Société des artistes Français, *Salon de 1914, 132e exposition officielle* (1914), 449, ARCH259796, box 01-EC-12.



Figure 2.17 A watercolor painting by Ernest Cormier entitled “Fontaine du Jardin Borghèse à Rome,” (undated), which won the Jessie Dow Prize at the Montréal Art Association Exhibition in 1927.

Source: Ernest Cormier, “Fontaine du Jardin Borghèse à Rome,” 1510/Y, box 01-1513/R Boîte Solander Format #4, FEC, CCA.



Figure 2.18 One of a long series of photographs of Clorinthe Perron posing in exotic garb, c.1920s.

Source: Ernest Cormier, P.5337, box Cormier 01-Photos-05P, FEC, CCA.



Figure 2.19 Cormier's enlargement of a photograph of the Temple of Jupiter, (undated).
Source: Ernest Cormier, P.4890, box Cormier 01-Photos-05P, FEC, CCA.



Figure 2.20 Cormier's watercolor painting of the "Temple of Jupiter, Paestum," (undated).
Source: Ernest Cormier, "Temple of Jupiter, Paestum," ARCH252132, FEC, CCA. Gift of Paul Maréchal.



Figure 2.21 Cormier's enlargement of a photograph of donkeys being led through arched opening in a thick masonry wall, somewhere in the Mediterranean, (undated).
Source: Ernest Cormier, P.5385, box Cormier 01-Photos-05P, FEC, CCA.

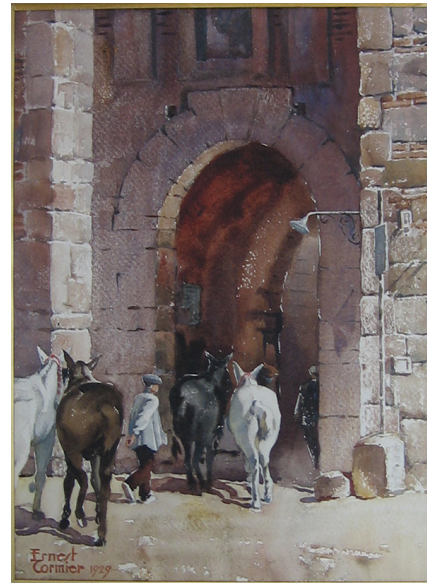


Figure 2.22 Cormier's watercolor of the portal to the Alcántara Bridge in Toledo, 1929. This painting is labeled on the verso as having been exhibited at the 48th Spring Exhibition of the Art Association of Montréal, 1931.
Source: Ernest Cormier, No.74, Espagne, "À Tolède. Portail d'accès au Pont d'Alcantara," 1506/M, Solander box 1506/L, 1506/M, FEC, CCA.

Montréal, 1918-1980

Just before WWI broke out in the Summer of 1914, Cormier had been offered a teaching position at the Architectural Association in London, which he politely declined because he was eager to return to his native Montréal to establish himself in practice, where he felt that better opportunities were awaiting him. Responding to the invitation from Cart de Lafontaine, Cormier wrote, “I intend to have a career in Canada where there are real advantages; it is important for me not to miss any opportunity of quickly securing a position.”⁵³ It is possible that being close to his family was a compelling factor in Cormier’s choice of where to establish his practice, but given his ambitions and the prestige of his training, which was exceptional for the Canadian context, it is surely the possibility of gaining important commissions in the country’s rapidly growing metropolis that made his return to Montréal as soon as he had completed his architectural education a priority. An additional advantage to setting up his practice back home was the social standing and connections of his family, which gave him an implicit professional advantage in obtaining commissions from clients in political, medical and ecclesiastic circles.⁵⁴ As

⁵³ Letter from Ernest Cormier to Cart de Lafontaine, dated April 7, 1914, folder ADC-18. The position was to teach the evening course in architecture. See also Gournay, “Training and Early Works,” 34, 40.

In a letter to fellow Montréaler Yves Tessier-Lavigne, dating from the Fall of 1970, Cormier inflates this episode from his early career somewhat by claiming, “Les lauréats du Rome Scholarship sont recherchés par les facultés d’architecture des universités du Commonwealth. Après la guerre de 14-18 on m’a offert la chaire d’architecture au Royal Architectural Association de Londres. J’ai préféré faire carrière dans mon pays.” ARCH257775, box 001-2010-037 T.

⁵⁴ For instance, his maternal grandfather was the founder of Notre-Dame Hospital in Montréal, and his father supervised the infant clinic at Notre-Dame Hospital. Additionally, as the medical director of the Grey Nun’s nursery, Cormier’s father who was a pediatrician, had the opportunity to visit New York and Paris several times in order to keep abreast of medical advances. Gournay, “Ernest Cormier: Training and Early Works,” *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal*, 31.

As well, Cormier’s parents were acquaintances of Liberal Québec Premier Lomer Gouin, and when Cormier was in Rome, he once had occasion to do Gouin a personal favor. Pierre-Richard Bisson, “Les Rapports entre Ernest Cormier et Jean-Omer Marchand: de l’émulation aux hostilités,” *ARQ: Architecture/Quebec* 53 (Feb 1990): 13. Gouin (1861-1929) was Premier of Quebec from 1905 to 1920, and always took a keen interest in the development of education, particularly technical and scientific education, through which he hoped that French Canadian participation in the province’s economic development would increase. In 1920, the administration of the Université de Montréal invited him to

a product of Montréal's small francophone bourgeoisie, Cormier tapped into everything available to him, keeping his finger on the pulse of local, national and international developments and making the most of his privileged status.

Returning to Montréal in April 1918, then, Cormier was equipped with top qualifications as well as an awareness of, and sensitivity to, new architectural trends that set him apart from his peers. In possession of two spheres of professional competence, which were uncommon among his fellow practitioners in Montréal, Cormier was equipped with a range of skills that enabled him to masterfully handle all aspects of any design project. Late in his life he would reflect that despite his young age, when he returned to Canada, the doors were wide open for him, his talents readily recognized because he had proven himself in France.⁵⁵ As Jacques Guillerme aptly observes, as an engineer close to the materials [of construction] and operating among artists who cultivated their image as *artistes*, Cormier knew how to skillfully navigate the Old and New Worlds. A perspicacious technician and aesthete traveler, Cormier was a particularly successful cultural hybrid.⁵⁶ Guillerme also contends that it is very likely that Cormier's exposure to the conditions of the École des Beaux-Arts competitions as well as to the French offices he worked

chair its governing council, and from 1921-1924, Gouin held a seat in the Liberal Federal Government of William Lyon MacKenzie King. Gouin died in 1929 during his brief stint as Lieutenant-Governor of Canada. Richard Jones, "GOUIN, Sir LOMER," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 15, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003, accessed November 28, 2014, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/gouin_lomer_15E.html.

⁵⁵ Speaking of himself in the third person, Cormier wrote [in hard to read geriatric script]: "malgré son jeune âge, les portes lui était grandes ouvertes. On lui reconnaissant [.. ?] de talents parce que il avait fait ses preuve en France." ARCH258619, folder 809/A-3, box 001-2010-221 T. In a similar vein, in a letter he wrote in 1973, Cormier stated how important being a RIBA fellow and winning the Jarvis Fellowship were to his having a successful career. Folder "Divers manuscrits ARCH257318_001-001-11," box 001-2010-001 T.

⁵⁶ The original passage reads: "Ingénieur proche de la matière, parmi les architectes qui cultivent leur image d'artiste, il sut habilement faire parade, en Amérique, du bon ton et des beaux quartiers de la vieille Europe. Technologue attentif et voyageur esthète, Cormier fut un hybride culturel particulièrement réussi." Jacques Guillerme, "Une hybridation exemplaire: notes sur la sagacité de Cormier," *ARQ: Architecture-Québec* 53 'Ernest Cormier' (Feb 1990): 11.

for, enabled him to develop a particular socio-professional *savoir-faire* in the subtle art of negotiating differences, that was not expressly taught, but that played a crucial role in his success.⁵⁷ Thus, Cormier's *savoir-faire* intertwined forms of knowledge and dexterity that encompass professional competence in the skilled production of various types of work, as well as polished interpersonal abilities. In other words, the term conveys the multilayered capacity to act competently and appropriately in all situations that emerge in society.⁵⁸ Cormier's fastidiousness about the quality of the production of anything he created, and his sustained concern for the work to meet the demands of the present and anticipate the needs of the future, is one instantiation of this.

Architect *and* engineer, his dual training was unusual in Quebec and was considered a great asset by clients who were concerned about paying professional fees. In this regard, Cormier did not miss opportunities to promote the obvious economic advantages of hiring an architect who would also serve as the project's structural engineer. Throughout his career, Cormier insisted on his twin credentials, fashioning for himself the fulsome professional title "*Architecte et Ingénieur-Constructeur*" [Architect and Engineer-Constructor], which was an unusual if not idiosyncratic formulation for the local culture, but was mobilized by Cormier to underscore his uniqueness. Moreover, Cormier was among the few Canadians to have studied architecture at

⁵⁷ Guillerme, "Une hybridation exemplaire," 11.

⁵⁸ The English language has adopted the noun 'savoir faire' into its lexicon of imported foreign terms, but in the process has shed some of the nuances of the original French. The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides the following definition: "Knowledge of the correct course of action in a particular situation, know-how. Now usually: *spec.* the ability to act or speak appropriately in social situations." While this is useful as a general definition, in English, 'savoir faire' retains the meaning of personal "savvy" in social situations but seems to disregard the crucial aspect of professional and/or artisanal knowledge and expertise; the complex set of skills required in the competent making of things. It is for this reason that in this dissertation, I insist on the more expansive definition of the original French term. See "savoir-faire, subst. masc. inv.," Centre national de ressources textuelles et lexicales, accessed on October 16, 2014, <http://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/savoir-faire> as compared to "savoir faire, n.," OED Online, Oxford University Press, accessed October 16, 2014, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/171476?redirectedFrom=savoir-faire&>

the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, which at the time, was deemed to elevate the standards of architectural practice, particularly in the cultural context of Quebec, in which formal training in architecture had only existed for twenty years. Adding to the impressive list of Cormier's accomplishments was the fact that he was only the second French-Canadian to have obtained his diploma in architecture in Paris. The first Canadian to accomplish this prestigious feat was Jean-Omer Marchand (1872-1936) who was thirteen years older than Cormier and was already established in practice in Montréal supported by a solid network of connections, comprised largely of political and ecclesiastic clients.⁵⁹ By the time Cormier returned to Montréal in 1918, Marchand had already obtained commissions for the chapel of the Grand Séminaire de Montréal (1903-07), the convent of the Soeurs de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame (1904-08), the reconstruction of the church of Sainte-Cunégonde (1905), three schools (1909-16), and, in association with Toronto architects Darling and Pearson, the reconstruction of the Canadian Parliament building in Ottawa (1916-19). As Jean-Pierre Bisson points out, it was Cormier and Marchand who had the most to gain or the most to lose within Montréal's architectural scene, when the newly graduated and eminently qualified Cormier returned home eager to establish himself in practice.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Marchand studied in the atelier of Redon, becoming DPLG in 1902. Jean-Omer Marchand, "Feuille de valeurs" [academic transcript], Section d'architecture, Atelier Redon, École nationale supérieur des Beaux-Arts, Paris, AJ*52, microfilm 408, Archives nationales, Paris.

Unfortunately no archive of Marchand's work has been preserved. Correspondence with respect to his collaborations with Cormier reflect the privileged nature of the relationships Marchand maintained with a number of politicians. Johanne Pérusse, "J.-O. Marchand, Premier architecte canadien diplômé de l'École des Beaux-Arts de Paris, et sa contribution à l'architecture de Montréal au début du vingtième siècle" (M.A., Concordia University, Canada, 1999), 134. Concerning Marchand's connections to Liberal politicians, through either family connections and/or social connections, see Pérusse, "J.-O. Marchand," 136.

⁶⁰ France Vanlaethem asserts that Cormier and Marchand were "without question Montréal's, if not Canada's, most innovative architects in the early twentieth century." France Vanlaethem, "Montréal Architects and the Challenge of Commissions," in *Montréal Metropolis, 1880-1930*, ed. Isabelle Gournay and France Vanlaethem (Montréal; Toronto: Canadian Centre for Architecture; Stoddart Publishing, 1998), 111.

Most probably out of a combination of a strategy to avoid competition as well as out of mutual respect for the privileges that their elite training conferred, the two *élèves* decided to join forces to collaborate on certain projects under the name “J.-O. Marchand et Ernest Cormier, ingénieur et architectes associés” and share the fees, while retaining separate offices in parallel.⁶¹ It is under this set-up that they collaborated on a few projects between 1919 to 1923, until their collegiality soured into irremediable hostility. Among the projects they worked together on (only a few of them realized) were: five projects for the client Mr. Dubrulé, of which only the office building in Philip’s Square (1919-1922) was realized; the Montréal Courthouse Annex (1920-26) for which officially, Cormier worked in collaboration with Amos and Saxe, with Marchand playing invisible hand to better influence political decisions bearing on the work, but nevertheless, weighing in on the design via Cormier and obtaining half of Cormier’s fees for the work; and the École des Beaux-Arts de Montréal (1922-23), which was the project around which the definitive breach in their relationship transpired.⁶² We may presume that this project for Montréal’s École des Beaux-Arts was also fraught with lasting tension for Cormier due to its siting. Located on the west side of St. Urbain Street, just north of Sherbrooke Street, it sits directly beside the studio Cormier had built for himself in 1921, and in between the studio and the Cormier family home, which stood on the south side of Sherbrooke Street at the corner of St. Urbain.

During the few years that they collaborated, the correspondence between the two architects gives the impression that Marchand adopted the attitude of the master addressing

⁶¹ Bisson, “Les Rapports entre Ernest Cormier et Jean-Omer Marchand,” 14; Pérusse, “J.-O. Marchand,” 133-135.

⁶² Bisson, “Les Rapports,” 15-16; Pérusse, “J.-O. Marchand,” 136-139.

Cormier as his junior colleague.⁶³ While initially, Cormier would likely have been flattered to align himself with the most renowned French-Canadian architect operating in Montréal at the time, he would not have taken kindly to be treated as an underling. Both architects being ambitious and seeking power, and each feeling wounded by the other over the affair for the *École des Beaux-Arts de Montréal*, a bitter rivalry seems to have simmered beneath the surface throughout the rest of their careers, each of them keeping tabs on the other and competitively accumulating honors. Bisson notes that Cormier followed Marchand's lead, tending to assume the same roles within professional associations and earn the same awards. Where Cormier was victorious in a manner of speaking, was with regards to the highly prestigious commission for the *Université de Montréal*, where Marchand's attempts to have the commission given to him failed. Mgr Émile Chartier, then the Vice-Rector of the university, recounted that one morning Marchand arrived at the offices of the administration with a roll of drawings under his arm, which he presented as the design for which he has been entrusted, adding that if the university authorities did not replace the drawings currently on the wall with these that he had brought, they would not be able to count on any official funding. As Chartier recounts, the Rector Mgr Piette, without even glancing at the drawings, before rolling them back up and placing them under the arm of the uninvited architect, firmly informed Marchand that the design he is referring to, was approved by all of the university authorities and that he will not tolerate a different design being imposed on the university, adding that if this were to deprive the institution of financial support, they will look for money elsewhere.⁶⁴ For the design of the

⁶³ Marchand tended to spend his summers at his summer home in Trois-Pistoles, Quebec, from where he would work and send instructions to Cormier via letters. Pérusse, "J.-O. Marchand," 134-135.

⁶⁴ Chartier recounts the encounter as follows: "Un matin, avant l'arrivée du recteur, l'architecte Marchand frappe à ma porte: il tenait sous le bras un énorme rouleau de bleus. Quand le recteur survint, le visiteur étala devant lui, sur la table du conseil, les multiples feuilles de son colis et: 'C'est là le plan dont on m'a chargé. Je dois vous dire aussi que, si vous ne le substituez pas à celui que j'aperçois sur les murs, vous ne

Université de Montréal, Cormier was a more appropriate choice than Marchand, who, until that point had not been particularly receptive to modern architecture, and therefore, who delighted in sarcastically referring to Cormier's main pavilion as "the factory" (*l'usine*).⁶⁵ The animosity following the end of their professional relationship was also fuelled by Marchand's allegations that Cormier had copied the large window on the front façade relating to the tall living room from Marchand's home on Wood Avenue in Westmount, built in 1912, 18 years before Cormier designed his residence on Pine Avenue.⁶⁶ Marchand predeceased Cormier by 44 years, having died in 1936 at the age of 64.

Of his personality, it has been noted that Cormier was an enigmatic figure: a gentle, loyal, circumspect and elegant man, but also someone who had some significant clashes with clients and colleagues in defending his design choices.⁶⁷ For the remainder of his career, Cormier collaborated with others on projects only occasionally, and this usually when building projects outside of Quebec, where a joint-venture arrangement with a local architect would have been necessary for obtaining building permits and for site supervision. Given how prolific Cormier was at the start of his career, the fact that he maintained a very small office is all the more astonishing. France Vanlaethem has studied the small office that Cormier established, noting

pouvez compter sur aucune subvention officielle.' Sans même examiner le dossier, le recteur enroula les feuilles, ficela le rouleau et le replaça sous le bras du visiteur. Puis, avec son flegme imperturbable: 'Le plan que vous apercevez a été approuvé par toutes les autorités universitaires. Je n'admets pas que qui que ce soit vienne nous imposer de le remplacer par un autre. Si cela nous prive de certaines générosités, nous nous en passerons et chercherons de l'argent ailleurs. L'architecte repartit avec son petit bonheur et oncques, depuis, n'en entendîmes-nous parler.' Msgr. Émile Chartier, *Trente années d'université, 1914-1944* (Sherbrooke, 1955), 45, Publication no.55 (1982), Fonds de la Division de la gestion de documents et des archives (D0036), UdeM.

⁶⁵ "J.-O. Marchand," 140. Marchand's daughter, Raymonde Paré, shared this anecdote.

⁶⁶ Pérusse, "J.-O. Marchand," 140. See Figure 1.20.

⁶⁷ Gournay, "Ernest Cormier: Training and Early Works," 31; Lambert, "Architecture where cultures meet," 18.

that over the years Cormier hired a total of around 20 transient draftsmen, but that typically, the core group amounted to four.⁶⁸ These engineers and architects, among them, Cormier's brother Maurice, who had studied architecture at the École Polytechnique in Montréal, were a loyal group who devoted their entire careers to working for Cormier.⁶⁹ Within this office culture, Cormier involved himself with all aspects of the design process, particularly the development of the *parti* and the presentation drawings, delegating instructions for the execution of working drawings to his small team.⁷⁰ As he recounted, he liked to work in the French manner, and does everything himself from the composition to the calculations.⁷¹ The result of this arrangement is that Cormier did not train any younger architects to replace him or, through the teaching of architects, otherwise have disciples. This lack of a following, may partly explain the limited scholarly attention paid to him, for rather than being the leader of a movement, Cormier appears in hindsight as a catalyst for important developments in architecture within Canada, and

⁶⁸ These were: civil engineer Aimé Genest (1887-1958); architect Maurice Cormier (1890-1955); architect Wilford Arthur Gagnon (1878- ?); and engineer James Rowe Jeffrey (1894- ?). France Vanlaethem, "Ernest Cormier, un grand professionnel," *Journal of Canadian Art History - Annales d'histoire de l'art canadien* 13, no. 2 - 14, no. 1 'Ernest Cormier' (1990-91): 52.

⁶⁹ The architecture section at the École Polytechnique in Montréal opened in 1907, one year after Cormier had graduated with a degree in civil engineering. Whether due to a lack of ambition, talent or financial means, or any other personal circumstances that precluded following in his brother's footsteps, Maurice Cormier did not pursue as prestigious an education or as high profile a career as Ernest. The absence of personal diaries or correspondence does not permit any confident assessment of the brothers' relationship. However, what can be traced in the archival record, is that Maurice Cormier worked for his illustrious older brother until his death in 1955 at the age of 60, and was paid less than Cormier's other employees. Vanlaethem, "Ernest Cormier, un grand professionnel," 52. Following his death, Maurice's widow, Ida, appears in the office payroll. It is unclear whether she had already been in the employ of Cormier as a type of secretary or bookkeeper or if this was a way of supporting a member of the extended family whose main breadwinner had passed away.

⁷⁰ Lalonde, "Le Fonds Ernest Cormier," 41.

⁷¹ Cormier was paraphrased as saying, "Mais j'aime travailler à la manière française, dit-il... je fais tout moi-même... la composition, les calculs de mes projets... je travaille chez moi dans la tranquillité absolue, tous les matins, et toutes les nuits..." Sarrazin, "Causerie."

particularly within the province of Quebec, yet without obvious, direct reverberations due to never having founded a ‘school.’⁷²

Managing so many projects, especially during the 1920s, with such a small team is all the more remarkable, given the fact that Cormier also gave his time and expertise to teaching and to the professional organization of the architectural profession. Within his first year of practice in Montréal, Cormier became a member of the Province of Quebec Association of Architects (PQAA) and made active contributions to various committees during the 1920s, taking over the role of the Presidency in 1929 and serving as a delegate of the Association to the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada.⁷³ That year the PQAA’s Council took important steps towards petitioning provincial legislature for revisions to the Association’s charter in order to establish a clearer definition of, and increased penalties for, illegal practice, and to insist on foreign architects’ collaboration with local practitioners, in order to counter the ongoing prejudice of Montréal patrons who favored hiring American architects.⁷⁴ From his involvement on these committees within the PQAA, emerges a clear picture of Cormier’s commitment to professionalism and his interest in the rules and regulations governing practice – in disciplining the discipline of architecture, as it were – rather than theoretical debates. In fact, although very well-read and up-to-date on national and international trends and discourses, Cormier did not participate in the debate on architectural modernism, and in fact, throughout his career, made

⁷² Vanlaethem, “Ernest Cormier, un grand professionnel.”

⁷³ Among the PQAA committees that Cormier served on, he was Chairman of the Membership and Scholarship Committee, the Legislation Committee, the Library and Yearbook Committee, the Delegates to the RAIC Committee, and (with Percy Nobbs) chaired the Town Planning Committee. See *JRAIC* vol. 5, no.4 (Apr 1928): 152-153; *JRAIC* vol. 6, no.2 (Feb 1929): 73-74. Cormier also served on the Montréal Building Code By-law Committee and drew up recommendations to improve public transportation. Sigler, “Plans by Cormier,” 37.

⁷⁴ See the report on the activities of the PQAA in the *JRAIC* 6, no.2 (Feb 1929): 72, 74.

few theoretical pronouncements. Rather, he busied himself on committees attending to pragmatic questions.

What has come down to us as Cormier's "theory" however are the notes he prepared for the architectural history course he taught for almost 30 years at the École Polytechnique.⁷⁵

Cormier's document entitled, "Course in Architecture for the use of Engineers" [*Cours d'architecture à l'usage des ingénieurs*] is a set of over 100 loose sheets, most of them typed and others handwritten notes, that ostensibly served as a compliment to his weekly lectures with slides.⁷⁶

What is significant about this course, which modestly falls within the French lineage of architects teaching engineers, is less the impact it might have had on a few generations of civil engineers, for the academic program reveals that Cormier's lecture course took place one hour per week for 10 weeks during the final semester of the curriculum in civil engineering.⁷⁷ A mere 10 hours of instruction during five years of study is unlikely to have had a significant impact on any of the

⁷⁵ Cormier taught at the École Polytechnique as a sessional lecturer from 1925-54. Near the end of his teaching career, Cormier commented that his primary reason for teaching was the enjoyment he obtained from having contact with young people. Sigler, "Plans by Cormier."

⁷⁶ Two undated sets of Cormier's *Cours* exist at the CCA. See ARCH258613, box 001-2010-218 T, Fonds Cormier, CCA.

⁷⁷ An academic schedule indicates that Cormier's course was taught on Saturdays. Horaire des cours," année scolaire 1930-31, deuxième terme, ARCH258469_733/A-10, box 001-2010-176 T. See also in this box the École Polytechnique de Montréal, *Conditions d'admission, programme des cours et renseignements généraux*, which offers the following description of his course: "Notions générales et définitions : l'architecture, l'architecte et l'ingénieur, le sublime, le beau, le caractère et le style, l'échelle. Notions d'histoire de l'architecture: Architectures égyptienne, assyrienne, égéenne et hellénique, perse, romaine, byzantine, romane, musulmane, gothique, de la renaissance, moderne et contemporaine. Éléments utilisés en composition architecturales: Murs et ouvertures dans les murs, toits et dômes, façades, masses et volumes, ordres antiques, portiques et arcades, planchers et plafonds, voûtes et trompes, en maçonnerie et en béton. Vestibules, circulations horizontales, corridors et cours, circulations verticales, escaliers et ascenseurs, forme et arrangement des pièces. Principes généraux de composition: Proportions et échelle, proportions spécifiques, proportions des arcs, proportions résultant des exigences du programme, de l'emplacement, de l'entourage, théorie géométrique. Le programme en architecture et le parti : Arrangement générale et arrangement spécifique, l'entourage, le plan d'ensemble, parties symétriques ou dissymétriques. Documentation raisonnée sur l'architecture contemporaine intéressant particulièrement l'ingénieur: Usines, aqueducs, ponts en maçonnerie, acier ou béton armé, canaux, grandes halles et hangars, silos, etc., machines, bateaux, locomotives, automobiles, avions."

engineering students, yet Cormier's pedagogical activities, are significant for what they reveal about his own thoughts about the history and theory of architecture.⁷⁸ The undated, unpaginated notes he prepared to accompany his lectures, which he states from the outset, were developed because of the absence of a suitable textbook on architecture for engineers, is a text he may have intended to publish. Not claiming any originality, this document is the most substantial textual record attesting to Cormier's understanding of the fundamentals of architecture. Any other theoretical insights he has articulated appear in fragmentary form in interviews. In his preface to these notes, Cormier says that due to the lack of an existing architectural treatise developed specifically for engineers, he has prepared a document of basic concepts, gathered from a large number of sources that are sometimes contradictory, at least in appearance. Claiming that in this course we will not find any originality beyond that of a very concise assemblage of indispensable information to the understanding of architecture, Cormier directs the reader to the bibliographic notes, where students will find cited texts and the developments necessary to a deeper study.⁷⁹ Thus, the text produced is a compliment to the weekly lectures, summarizing what can be understood without the numerous images used for this course, which is predominantly visual.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Ernest Cormier, "Cours d'architecture à l'usage des ingénieurs," ARCH258613, folder ARV-6/D, box 01-2010-218 T.

⁷⁹ Cormier, "Cours," [sheet 1]. The Preface reads: "À cause de l'absence de traité d'architecture établi spécialement pour des ingénieurs, les notions élémentaires qui vont suivre ont été recueillies dans un grand nombre d'ouvrages parfois contradictoires, du moins en apparence, suivant le point de vue où se place l'auteur. On cherchera, en vain, dans ce cours une originalité autre que celle d'un groupement, sous un volume réduit à l'extrême, de renseignements indispensables à la compréhension de l'architecture. D'ailleurs, des notes bibliographiques permettront à l'élève qui le désire de trouver, en plus des textes cités, les développements nécessaires à une étude plus approfondie."

⁸⁰ Ernest Cormier, "Cours," [sheet 4]. It is unclear from these remarks whether Cormier intended to publish these notes, as his claim to be attempting to fill a void in the existing literature of architectural texts offering what would be of interest and necessary to know by the engineer, does not sit comfortably with the fact that this document cannot stand alone, but merely compliments the extensive visual demonstration that takes place in his class.

What is curious about Cormier's pedagogical activities, is that having had firsthand exposure to the then, highly respected Beaux-Arts method, one would be inclined to expect that Cormier would give priority to teaching design studio to architecture students, particularly since formal education in architecture was still a new phenomenon in Canada. Moreover, since his activities with the PQAA, which he conducted in parallel to teaching and maintaining an active practice, demonstrate a concern for elevating the standards of architectural practice in the province, it would be reasonable to assume that he deemed the quality of formal architectural training to be crucial. It is somewhat surprising therefore, that not only did Cormier teach engineers rather than architects, but that he taught architectural history rather than architectural design. Despite the desirability of his prestigious credentials, Cormier's teaching career seems not to have been entirely a matter of choice. Before leaving Europe in 1918, he had already tried to use his connections with the British School in Rome to help him gain employment at McGill University's School of Architecture. He had hoped to teach design but was assigned the role of assistant to Percy Nobbs in 1919 and his contract was not renewed.⁸¹ It is possible that the culture of the English-speaking university, whose architecture school's faculty were largely Scottish immigrants trained in the Arts and Crafts tradition, was not hospitable to the young francophone Beaux-Arts architect.

The more obvious school in Montréal for a prominent francophone architect trained in Paris in the Beaux-Arts tradition to obtain a teaching job in architecture would have been within the Architecture department of the École Polytechnique, which had opened in 1907. Yet by 1923, this department had moved to the École des Beaux-Arts, which Cormier had co-designed with Marchand. Further to their falling out over the design, the provincial government had

⁸¹ Cormier's correspondence with McGill is found in ARCH2593330SG4, folder "650/D-1,4," box 001-2011-198 T.

accorded Marchand the sole responsibility for bringing the project for the school to completion, and perhaps not coincidentally, a friend of Marchand's, the painter, Emmanuel Fougerat, became the first Director of the school.⁸² No correspondence has been found in the Cormier archive to suggest that Cormier sought teaching employment at Montréal's École des Beaux-Arts, but the risk of rejection and/or the distastefulness of putting himself in a position that Marchand might have had some influence over, may have been so obvious given Marchand's closeness to the administration, that any attempt would have been futile and therefore, not undertaken. This left Cormier's alma mater, the École Polytechnique as the institution of higher learning that would be most welcoming of his Beaux-Arts training and his knowledge of what the engineer would need to know about architecture.

It is interesting to note that Cormier's circle of friends in Montréal did not include practicing architects, whom for the most part, he found too conservative and provincial. Preferring the company of Montréal's avant-garde intellectuals and artists, Cormier was often surrounded by friends associated with *Le Nigog*, the short-lived but important periodical whose aim was to bring modernism and greater sophistication in the arts within the Montréal scene.⁸³ In the early 1920s Cormier designed a studio and garden for himself at 3460 St. Urbain Street, beside which the École des Beaux-Arts de Montréal co-designed with Marchand would be erected shortly thereafter. **[Figure 2.23]** Through the social events that Cormier hosted, the studio became an important place in the cultural and intellectual life of Montréal in the 1920s.⁸⁴ **[Figures 2.24 and 2.25]** Beyond this purpose-built artist studio, Cormier's only other realized

⁸² Pérusse, "J.-O. Marchand," 138-139.

⁸³ Lambert, "Architecture where cultures meet," 18.

⁸⁴ Michel Lalonde, "Le Fonds Ernest Cormier," *Archives: Revue de l'Association des archivistes du Québec* 16, no. 2 (Sept 1984): 41.

private commission was the house he designed for himself in 1930, and as of 1931, the social functions of his St. Urbain studio would be transferred there.



Figure 2.23 Photograph of the garden of Ernest Cormier's studio on St. Urbain Street, c1920s. Source: Ernest Cormier, contact sheet 348, box 01-Contacts-1@419, 1/3, FEC, CCA.



Figure 2.24 Party at Ernest Cormier's studio on St. Urbain Street, c1920s. Among the guests are Alphonse Jongers, Coco Maillet, Clorinthe Perron, Françoise Rainville, Margot Quintal, Hélène Laliberté, Mr. Quedru and Claudine Blais. Source: Ernest Cormier, P.5499, EC045, box 01-Cormier-02P, FEC, CCA.



Figure 2.25 Party at Ernest Cormier's studio on St. Urbain Street, after 1925. Among the guests are Clorinthe Perron, Paul Rainville, Fernand Rinfret, Fernand Prefontaine, and Alphonse Jongers. Source: Ernest Cormier, 01 ARC 528d, folder "Expo 273," box Exposition Cormier Rétirés, FEC, CCA.



Figure 2.26 Photo of Cormier, Fernand Préfontaine (sitting), Adrien Hébert and Henri Hébert, (undated).
Source: [Unknown photographer], P.6407, EC035, box Cormier 01-Photos-02P, FEC, CCA.



Figure 2.27 Photograph of Clorinthe Perron and Henri Hébert in the garden of the Studio Cormier, c1920s.
Source: Ernest Cormier, nitr.S19-30(12), 01-ARC-747N, box 01 – Contacts – S19-1 @ 19-83, 2/3, FEC, CCA.

Key members of this group who were friends and frequent companions of Cormier, were the brothers, Adrien Hébert (painter) and Henri Hébert (sculptor), and Fernand Préfontaine. **[Figures 2.26 and 2.27]** Through Henri Hébert, Cormier met Clorinthe Perron, and her sister Cécile who posed for the artists. Having been widowed in the Fall of 1918 at the age of 33, when he lost his wife to the Spanish Flu that was decimating the province of Quebec that season, Cormier began a relationship with Clorinthe in the early 1920s.⁸⁵ **[Figures 2.28,**

⁸⁵ After having accompanied Cormier during the ten years he spent studying and working in Europe, Berthe Leduc died less than one year after the couple returned to Montréal for Cormier to establish his practice. Documents in the archive indicate that her funeral took place on December 19, 1918. She and Cormier did not have any children. Fonds ARCH258528, box 001-2010-202 T. Msgr. Émile Chartier

2.29 and 2.30] In light of the absence of diaries and sparse personal correspondence in Cormier’s archive, the most voluminous record of his private life that we have are the photos he took of Clorinthe. **[Figure 2.31]** While they were not formally married until Cormier was 90 years old, due to the social unacceptability of the son of a doctor and an established architect and engineer with ecclesiastic clients, to marry a working class artist’s model who posed nude, they spent almost 60 years of their lives together, until Cormier’s death at the age of 94, on January 1, 1980.⁸⁶ **[Figure 2.32]**



Figure 2.28 Ernest Cormier and Clorinthe Perron consulting a folio in Henri Hébert’s studio, (undated).

Source: ARCH269652, nitr.S19-67(01), box 01-Contacts-S19-1 @ 19-83, 2/3, FEC, CCA.

described the desolation of the streets during the Fall of 1918 as the sick were dying like flies from the Spanish flu. Chartier, *Trente années de l’Université*, 13.

⁸⁶ Lambert, “Architecture where cultures meet,” 18.



Figure 2.29 Clorinthe Perron playing chess [undated but likely c.1930].
Source: [unknown photographer], P.5912, EC048, box 01-Cormier-02P, FEC, CCA.



Figure 2.30 Ernest Cormier playing chess, c.1930.
Source: [Unknown photographer], ARCH252686, EC046, P.5909, box 01-Cormier-02P, FEC, CCA.



Figure 2.31 A model within a model: Clorinthe Perron posing inside the model of the Montréal Courthouse Annex (designed by Cormier in collaboration with Amos and Saxe, 1920-26), 1926.
Source: ARCH250494, AR01-Nit-305b, box Cormier Projet #2000, FEC, CCA.



Figure 2.32 Photograph of Ernest Cormier and Clorinthe Perron, c1970s.
Source: [unknown photographer], ARCH269733, P.6954, box 01-Photos-05P, FEC, CCA.

Chapter 3 *Eupalinos, or, the Architect and Engineer-Constructor*

‘By dint of constructing,’ he put it with a smile, ‘I truly believe that I have constructed myself.’

– The soul of Phaedrus in dialogue with the soul of Socrates,
quoting the architect Eupalinos in Paul Valéry’s
Eupalinos, ou l’Architecte (1921)¹

The lavish house that Cormier designed for himself in Montréal in 1930 is the project within Cormier’s oeuvre that most strikingly brings together the range of his practices as a maker and his ambitions for the cultivation of a particular professional identity. **[Figure 3.1]** This chapter and the one that follows analyze the multiple, and indeed crucial, ways in which the house participated in the construction of the public image that Cormier assiduously applied himself to crafting. While Chapter 4 conducts a close reading of the interior of the house and the lifestyle it enabled, Chapter 3 examines one specific ornamental element found on the house’s front façade that I argue is key to understanding the various layers of Cormier’s artful construction of self, and interprets it in part, through an analysis of the professional title that he gave himself when he returned to Canada at the end of WWI, to establish his practice in Montréal. This chapter, therefore, examines how Cormier’s construction of his desired identity plays out in word and deed: through the medium of language, as well as through built form, both of them matters of design. In seeking to understand and contextualize Cormier’s professional title, my research has led me to conclude that the term *constructeur* [constructor] benefits as much from its presumed clarity as it does from its definitional fuzziness, and contains within it, a host of favorable nuances and cultural references that Cormier sought to fold into his identity.

¹ Paul Valéry, *Eupalinos, or, The Architect* [Eupalinos, ou l’Architecte], trans. William McCausland Stewart (London: Oxford University Press, 1932. 1921), 21. The original reads: “A force de construire, me fit-il en souriant, je crois bien que je me suis construit moi-même.” Paul Valéry, “Eupalinos, ou l’Architecte,” in *Eupalinos; L’Âme et la danse; Dialogue de l’arbre* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008. 1970. 1921), 28.

Construction as a polyvalent act

In the Spring of 1918, Cormier was eager to establish his practice in his native city. Having just spent a formative decade in Europe studying architecture at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris and the British School in Rome, and working as an engineer in the design of reinforced concrete military installations for Considère, Pelnard & Caquot, Cormier was exceptionally well-endowed with rigorous professional expertise and experience, as well as a cosmopolitan aura from his sustained immersion in European culture. The letterhead he used as of the early years of his long career announced his professional title as *Architecte et Ingénieur-Constructeur* [Architect and Engineer-Constructor] [Figure 3.2] which foregrounded his dual qualifications in architecture and civil engineering, as well as the cultural cachet of his elite training and experiences.² A somewhat unusual formulation, and certainly a title that none of his colleagues in Montréal could boast, Cormier's choice in his self-naming draws from a range of cultural associations that were desirable for the ways in which they elevated him and set him apart from his peers. By obtaining the necessary qualifications, Cormier's elite dual training constituted the prestigious foundations of his professional self-construction. Building on this, the title he chose to give himself when establishing his practice can be seen as the second most significant act in the careful crafting of his professional identity.

² Cormier's adoption of "Ingénieur-constructeur" definitely coincides with his return to Canada to set up his practice. Prior to this, when he lived in Europe, Cormier used stationery that described him as "Ernest Cormier, Architecte et Ingénieur civil," an example of which is found in the letter he sent to the landlord of his apartment at 219 rue de l'Université in Paris, dated December 27, 1917, in which he gives notice of terminating his lease owing to his departure from France either at the end of March or in April 1918. See ARCH258520, folder "Correspondance, 3x/H ADC/3A,2," box 001-2010-037 T.

Cormier also embossed numerous photographs and documents with "Architecte et Ingénieur-Constructeur," but he did not always insist on this title as numerous letters show him signing with the less cumbersome title of "Architecte et Ingénieur," yet this, often on letterhead that contained the longer formulation. However, what is relevant to note is that with the exception of calling himself *Ingénieur-conseil* [consulting engineer] in the context of projects for which he was not the main author, after 1918, whenever he did state which type of engineer he was, he always insisted on *ingénieur-constructeur*.



Figure 3.1 A view of the front and the upper part of the side elevations of the Cormier Residence (1930-31) at 1418 Pine Avenue West in Montréal, photographed in 2007. Source: Photography by Denis Robert, “Maison Cormier,” uploaded by Sandra Cohen-Rose and Colin Rose, Flickr Photo Sharing, accessed July 15, 2010, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/73416633@N00/1927879504/in/photostream/>



Figure 3.2 Ernest Cormier’s letterhead. Source: FEC, CCA.

The French term *constructeur* is ostensibly a straightforward term denoting one who builds, be that building something concrete (such as an edifice, or a work of art), or something more abstract (such as a system or a society),³ and yet it also contains ambiguity that warrants

³ The Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales provides the most comprehensive definition of ‘constructeur’: “A.1) Domaine *concr.* Celui qui construit quelque chose; a) Celui qui construit des édifices, des ouvrages d’art”; “b) Celui qui réalise un mécanisme complexe et fonctionnel (une œuvre, une construction mécanique ou autre, un navire)”; “2. Domaine *abstr.* Celui qui construit quelque chose (une société, un système)”; “B.1) Domaine *concr.* Qui s’occupe de la construction.” As well, the reference identifies terms that are synonymous with ‘constructeur’ listed in the following order of priority: *bâtitseur, architecte, créateur, fabricant, faiseur, promoteur, maître d’oeuvre, ingénieur, entrepreneur, constructif, édificateur*, which places the term’s association with the work of the architect high above that of the engineer. See “constructeur, -trice, subst.,” Centre national de ressources textuelles et lexicales, accessed on January 30, 2015, <http://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/constructeur>

Additionally, *Le Nouveau Petit Robert* updated in June 2000, defines ‘constructeur’ as a person who constructs buildings (referring the reader to the entries for ‘architecte’ and ‘bâtitseur’ [builder]), and as a person who constructs something more generally (directing the reader to the entry for ‘ingénieur’ [engineer]). The *Larousse, dictionnaire de la langue française* (1989) sheds less light on the matter, listing ‘constructeur’ within the entry for the verb ‘construire’ [to construct] as a noun and adjective without providing a definition, and making no mention of ‘constructeur’ in either the entry for ‘architecte’ or in that of ‘ingénieur.’ The compound terms for the various types of engineer listed in this reference are

unpacking. By the twentieth century, *constructeur* seems to have come to be used as a general synonym for *ingénieur* [engineer], and was used to form the compound term *ingénieur-constructeur* [engineer-constructor] which, although somewhat redundant given the coupling of presumably synonymous words, nevertheless serves to distinguish endeavors in civil and structural design from other branches of engineering. Yet, an element of redundancy remains, as the terms *ingénieur civil* and *ingénieur structures* accomplish the goal of clarifying the intended forms of engineering with greater precision. In the cases of both *constructeur* and *ingénieur-constructeur* there seems to be an assumption on the part of practitioners, theorists and historians that the meaning and application of the term is self-evident. This is seen in the fact that not even the French-language encyclopedic tome, *L'art de l'ingénieur: constructeur, entrepreneur, inventeur*, which offers a large-scale, international history of the technical and aesthetic achievements in engineering with an emphasis on the rise of the modern profession of engineering in French culture, provides among its more than 480 entries, a definition of either *constructeur* or *ingénieur-constructeur*, even though the terms are used throughout the book.⁴ In contrast to this seemingly unexamined,

limited to: *ingénieur civil, ingénieur de marine, ingénieur militaire, ingénieur du son, ingénieur-conseil, ingénieur-docteur* and *sous-ingénieur*. The term ‘ingénieur-constructeur’ does not appear in any of these dictionaries.

⁴ Antoine Picon, ed., *L'art de l'ingénieur: constructeur, entrepreneur, inventeur* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou; Le Moniteur, 1997). The large volume does not include *constructeur* or *ingénieur-constructeur* as stand-alone entries and the terms are not explained or theorized by the publication’s numerous contributors in the definition given for engineer, or in the entries discussing various related issues such as: the relationship between architects and engineers; the engineer’s aesthetic; the engineer’s training; technical thought; and the engineer’s responsibility. See in particular, the following contributions to *L'art de l'ingénieur*: Frank Newby “Architectes et ingénieurs,” 54-57; David P. Billington, “Esthétique de l’ingénieur,” 170-174; Antoine Picon, “Formation des ingénieurs,” 189-190; Hélène Vérin, “Ingénieur (définition),” 235; Tom F. Peters, “Pensée technique,” 358-360; and Michel Virlogeux, “Responsabilité de l’ingénieur,” 415-416.

Although the terminology is not clearly defined or theorized, three commentaries in this large book obliquely address the frequent attribution of ‘construction’ to ‘engineering’. The first is found in the entry on “structural intuition,” which asserts that properly speaking, there is no construction of the architect or construction of the engineer: what matters is the art of construction whether it be represented by an engineer, an architect or an autodidact. Yet inconsistent with this observation, the author of this entry quickly slips into using a cognate of ‘construction’ as interchangeable with engineering, when noting the constant confusion between “architectural form” and “constructive form,” and how today, architects and engineers seek to separate the two, which is not always for the best. See Frei Otto, “Intuition

customary use of the term, it is curious that entries for *ingénieur-constructeur* are almost entirely non-existent in technical lexicons as well as regular dictionaries.⁵ And yet its common usage persists as an established term, which raises the question of why the act of building should be more readily attributed to the engineer rather than to the architect, when both necessarily

structurelle,” 235-236. The second indirect reference to the interchangeability between ‘constructor’ and ‘engineer,’ is discussed in the explanation given of the tendency of engineers from the Renaissance onwards, particularly in the French context, to focus on the specialized areas of civil engineering and construction, which distinguished them from those engineers who designed machines in a more artisanal framework, and therefore, who would be more accurately considered mechanical engineers [*mécaniciens*]. See Antoine Picon, “Profession d’ingénieur,” 388. Finally, perhaps the best (if incomplete) clue to understanding the conflation of engineering with construction may be discerned in the entry addressing “theory and practice.” Here the meaning of a civil engineering work is described as being constituted by the final product as well as by the path taken to achieve the final goal. The authors assert that great engineers *were also* great constructors, a point that simultaneously brings the terms together and holds them apart: in this formulation, the engineer and the constructor are not one in the same, but rather, the latter is something additional that the engineer strove to be. See José A. Fernández Ordóñez and José Ramón Navarro Vera, “Théorie et pratique,” in *L’Art de l’ingénieur*, 503.

⁵ In eight of the nine French and multilingual dictionaries of building and construction terms that I consulted, published between 1906 and 2000, I did not find the term *ingénieur-constructeur*. The only source featuring *ingénieur-constructeur* defines it in the specific context of naval engineering, as ‘shipbuilder’, which is not helpful. However, in contrast to all of the other sources that define *constructeur* as ‘constructor’ or ‘builder’ without specific connection to engineering (and in some cases, make specific reference to ‘architect’, which suggests a lack of unanimity as to which profession has claim to the title of ‘constructor’), this same reference work is the only one to define *constructeur* as ‘designing engineer’. See Cornélis De Witt Willcox, *A French-English military technical dictionary with a supplement containing recent military and technical terms* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1917).

Other dictionaries identify compound terms to designate specific branches of engineering or professional rank, for example: *ingénieur civil* [civil engineer]; *ingénieur conseil* [consulting engineer]; *ingénieur électricien* [electrical engineer]; *ingénieur en chef* [chief engineer]; *ingénieur mécanicien* [mechanical engineer]; *ingénieur des travaux publics*, [engineer of public works], etc. The technical dictionaries, I consulted are listed in order of publication date: D. Carlos Huelin y Arssu, *Technological dictionary in the English, Spanish, German, and French languages containing technical terms and locutions employed in arts, trades, and industry in general, military and naval terms* (Madrid: Adrian Romo Editor, 1906); C. N. Caspar, *Caspar's technical dictionary, English-German and German-English comprising the most important words and terms employed in technology, engineering, machinery, chemistry, navigation, shipbuilding, electrotechnics, automobilism, aviation, etc. According to the usage and terms of expressions as employed in technical and scientific works, periodical publications, etc., and the latest authorities* (Milwaukee, WI: C. N. Caspar Co., Book Emporium, 1914); Edoardo Webber, *Technical dictionary in four languages: English, Italian, French and German*, 2nd edition (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, Ltd., 1917); Basil Butterworth and Janine Flitz, *Dictionnaire de la construction: français-anglais, anglais-français / Dictionary of building terms: French-English, English-French* (London: Construction Press, 1981); J.-P. Vandenberghe, ed., *Elsevier's dictionary of architecture in five languages: English, French, Spanish, German, and Dutch* (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science Publishers, 1988); J. R. Forbes, *Dictionnaire d'architecture et de construction: français-anglais, anglais-français / Dictionary of architecture and construction: French-English, English-French*, 3rd ed. (Paris; Secaucus, NJ: Technique et documentation; Lavoisier Publishing Inc., 1995); Chris Grech, ed., *Multilingual dictionary of architecture and building terms* (London: E & FN Spon, 1998); Jean de Vigan with CSTB, *Dicobat 2000: dictionnaire général du bâtiment* (Ris-Orangis : Éditions Arcature, 2000).

possess expert knowledge of construction methods and materials. Moreover, as continues to be the case today, with the exception of those few practitioners in the twentieth century who operated a construction firm alongside their design practice, neither architects nor engineers typically undertook the direct manual labor of constructing the edifice or infrastructural work, but rather monitored the work of the building contractor(s) to ensure conformity with the technical drawings and written specifications. Therefore, to better understand why Cormier incorporated “*constructeur*” in his title it is necessary to probe how and why it is the engineer who has come to be considered more of a constructor than the architect.

The history of the emergence of the modern connotations of the term *constructeur* vis-à-vis its distinction from the definition of architect, is illuminated by the writings of the late Enlightenment architectural theorist Quatremère de Quincy. In his three-volume *Encyclopédie Méthodique* on architecture, he introduces *constructeur* as a new word in the art of building, borrowed from naval architecture that designates “an artist who knows well the practice of all the arts that could contribute to the creation of any sort of building.”⁶ He states that a good *constructeur* is one who is well educated in the principles of mechanics, calculation and geometry that serve as the basis of the different operations inherent to the art of building.⁷ In addition, the *constructeur* ought to possess special knowledge of nature and the properties of the materials he may use, as well as the way in which to employ them, permitting him to determine the forms, dimensions and placement of the parts of the building, as well as to direct the work of laborers

⁶ Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy, *Encyclopédie Méthodique, ou par ordre de matières par une société de gens de lettres, de savans et d'artistes; précédée d'un Vocabulaire universel, servant de Table pour tout l'Ouvrage, ornée des Portraits de MM. Diderot & d'Alembert, premiers Éditeurs de l'Encyclopédie*. 3 vols (Paris; Liège: Panckoucke; Plomteux, 1788-1825), II: 56. The original reads as follows with the eighteenth-century French spelling retained: “C'est pour ainsi dire un nouveau mot dans l'art de bâtir, emprunté de l'architecture navale. Depuis quelques temps on désigne par ce mot un artiste qui connoît bien la pratique de tous les arts qui peuvent concourir à la formation de toute sorte d'édifice.”

⁷ Quatremère de Quincy, *Encyclopédie Méthodique, Architecture* (1801), II: 56.

such that the solidity and economy that ought to characterize all works of constructions will be ensured.⁸ What is most instructive for our purposes, however, is the observation Quatremère makes at the close of his entry on the *Constructeur*, namely, that the idea attached to this term at the end of the eighteenth century, is due to the spirit of analysis or of composition that the modern system of study introduced in all the arts, but especially in architecture. He elaborates that we already sense in the word *Architecte*, what misuse and weakness this division of the two parts of the same art have brought about, and concludes that ancient architects would have had difficulty understanding how it could be possible to include in the same published work, separate articles for *two words that ought to be synonymous*, yet he does so out of respect for the rules of analysis and for current terminological usage.⁹

Of note is that for the term *Ingénieur* [engineer], Quatremère offers a concise description of military and civil engineering, the two branches of engineering that existed in the eighteenth century, and their respective areas of expertise, without making any reference to *constructeur*.¹⁰ By contrast, his entry for *Architecte* [architect] begins with the term's Greek etymology to explain how it came to be the general name for those who profess the art of building, but he is quick to

⁸ Quatremère de Quincy, *Encyclopédie Méthodique, Architecture* (1801), II: 56.

He goes on to explain in more detail what a good *constructeur* will be equipped to carry out, namely: to account for the laborers' methods and to judge the possibility of carrying out the work; to anticipate the difficulties that may be encountered; to point out the means to realize the projects entrusted to him when normal means are insufficient; and to rectify faulty methods based on blind routine.

⁹ Quatremère de Quincy, *Encyclopédie Méthodique, Architecture* (1801), II: 56. Italics mine. The extended passage reads: "On doit observer au reste que l'idée attachée de notre temps au mot *Constructeur*, est due à l'esprit d'analyse ou de composition que le système d'étude moderne a introduit dans tous les arts, mais sur-tout dans l'architecture. On a déjà fait sentir, au mot *Architecte*, quels abus et quelle foiblesse cette division des deux parties d'un même art y avoient portés. Les architectes anciens, s'ils revenoient, auroient peine à concevoir comment il a été possible de faire dans un même ouvrage deux articles séparés de deux mots qui, pour le bien de l'art, devroient être synonymes. On l'a fait cependant pour obéir aux lois de l'analyse, plus encore que pour se conformer à l'usage; c'est dans le même sens que le mot Construction va devenir l'objet d'un article séparé."

¹⁰ Quatremère de Quincy, *Encyclopédie Méthodique, Architecture* (1801), II: 561-562.

add, that since architecture is ordinarily defined as “the art of building following defined rules and principles,” the title ‘architect’ is ascribed only to those who know those principles and can apply them to the buildings they design.¹¹ After a lengthy discussion of the wide range of skills and knowledge necessary to the architect, he asserts that it is through this competence and all of these qualities, that the architect deserves to lead all of the other arts, and through this, *architecture will regain its high rank: that privileged place from which architecture seems to have fallen for a long time.*¹²

Here, between the lines, we clearly detect the sensitive issue concerning the status of architecture vis-à-vis the rise of engineering as an increasingly autonomous profession that also practices the art of building. Tellingly therefore, as he elaborates in his definition of *architecture*, Quatremère depends on the notion of the art of building as integral to architecture, yet at the same time, wants to see architecture – the art *par excellence* that brings together so many branches of knowledge and so many skills, which combined, elevate it to the most distinguished ranks of culture – as both including, but importantly, also surpassing ‘mere’ construction.¹³ In other words, the architect’s contribution encompasses construction but also includes much more than

¹¹ Quatremère de Quincy, *Encyclopédie Méthodique, Architecture* (1788), I: 101-102.

¹² Quatremère de Quincy, *Encyclopédie Méthodique, Architecture* (1788), I: 108. Italics mine.

¹³ Quatremère de Quincy, *Encyclopédie Méthodique, Architecture* (1788), I: 109. The extended passage that most directly informs my discussion reads as follows: “Architecture, s. f. C'est l'art de bâtir suivant des proportions & des règles déterminées. Entre tous les arts, ces enfants du plaisir & de la nécessité, que l'homme s'est associés, pour l'aider à supporter les peines de la vie, & à transmettre sa mémoire aux générations futures, on ne sauroit nier que l'*architecture* ne doive tenir un rang des plus distingués. [...] On définit trop généralement l'*architecture*, l'art de bâtir: cette définition, qui est plutôt celle du mot, que celle de la chose, n'emporte pas avec elle des notions assez positives & assez étendues. Si l'art de bâtir s'envisage relativement à la science de l'*architecture*, ce n'est autre chose que la construction. (*Voyez* ce mot & *art de bâtir*.) Si on le considère relativement au besoin, il appartient à tous les tems & à tous les pays; mais l'art de l'*architecture*, c'est-à-dire l'art par excellence, suivant l'étymologie du mot Grec *αρχη τεχνοια*, loin d'être commun à tous les peuples & à tous les siècles, n'est au contraire réservé qu'à quelques âges & à quelques pays privilégiés; & doit se définir comme nous l'avons fait, *l'art de bâtir suivant des proportions & des règles déterminées & fixées par la Nature & le goût*. L'art de bâtir se trouve chez les peuples même sauvages; l'art de l'*architecture* au contraire n'a pu être que le fruit de la société la plus perfectionnée par la civilisation, par toutes les causes morales, par le concours de tous les autres arts.”

building, or, to take his point to its logical conclusion, the Architect is a Constructor but a Constructor is not necessarily all that an Architect is. Prepared during the second half of the eighteenth century, Quatremère's *Encyclopédie méthodique* is in part a product of, and witness to, the historic split between the professions of architecture and engineering in France. As such, it implicitly identifies the beginnings of the distribution of the act of building that was once solidly attributed to architecture, and the perceived encroachments by engineering that were manifesting themselves in the built environment and reflected in the new concept of the *constructeur*.¹⁴

Historians and theorists participating in architectural debate during the second half of the nineteenth century through to the first decades of the twentieth typically understood architecture to be the foundational discipline from which engineering was an off-shoot, and that particularly through processes of increasing industrialization, gradually acquired greater autonomy.¹⁵ In this regard, the engineers' ambition to take their turn occupying the central place given to the art of building was antithetical to the possibility of a reunification of architecture and engineering, which would reinstate the pre-existing hierarchies that had favored architecture.¹⁶ Whereas the origins of the profession of architecture were anterior to the Industrial Revolution (which partly explains architects' general tendency during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth century to focus more on the pristine final *product* than on its

¹⁴ For more detailed discussions of the separation of architecture and engineering into distinct professions beginning in the eighteenth century in France and its implications, see: Alberto Pérez Gómez, *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992. 1983); Antoine Picon, *French Architects and Engineers in the Age of Enlightenment [Architectes et ingénieurs au siècle des Lumières]*. Trans. Martin Thom (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Antoine Picon, *L'Invention de l'ingénieur moderne: l'École des Ponts et Chaussées, 1747-1851* (Paris: Presses de l'École nationale des Ponts et Chaussées, 1992. 1988).

¹⁵ Antoine Picon, "Introduction," in *L'art de l'ingénieur*, 31.

¹⁶ Picon, "Introduction," in *L'art de l'ingénieur*, 31.

fabrication or lifespan), the modern profession of engineering was born of this far-reaching techno-social transformation, which obliged the engineer to be more focused on the various *processes* necessary to achieving a determined goal.¹⁷ This distinction has significant implications: the engineer and the architect, each taken as a kind of ideal figure, emerge as professionals who proceed from the vantage point of opposing logics. While the architect is occupied primarily with the resolution of the appearance of an already finished, visible and meaningful object, the engineer is concerned with the object's fabrication, that is, with its structural resistance and the techniques necessary for its erection.¹⁸ According to this comparison, when the architect and the engineer are confronted by the same object, the former regards it as a visual element that ultimately conveys a message (i.e., the architect places the emphasis on the work's communicative or representational function), while the latter considers it to be an abstract model and as an object to be made (i.e., the engineer places the emphasis on construction; on the building site).¹⁹

¹⁷ Tom F. Peters, "Pensée technique," in *L'art de l'ingénieur*, 359-360.

¹⁸ Raymond Guidot and Alain Guilheux, "Des constructeurs qui inventent l'époque," in *L'art de l'ingénieur*, 18. My comments paraphrase the following excerpt: "Si l'on peut souhaiter que les distinctions concrètes s'estompent au profit tout simplement du constructeur, l'architecte et l'ingénieur procèdent, en tant que figures idéales, de deux logiques opposées. L'architecte se consacre à la détermination d'un objet déjà terminé, fini, visible, et par-dessus tout signifiant, dont il anticipe l'apparence, quand l'ingénieur est préoccupé par sa fabrication, en fonction de sa résistance structurelle et des techniques nécessaires à sa mise en œuvre."

¹⁹ Guidot and Guilheux, "Des constructeurs qui inventent l'époque," in *L'art de l'ingénieur*, 18. My comments paraphrase the following excerpt, which continues directly from the passage cited in the footnote above: "Confrontés à un même objet, ils le regardent l'un en tant qu'élément visuel et au bout du compte message, l'autre comme modèle abstrait et objet à fabriquer. La raison de l'architecte est celle de la communication (de l'usage, de la fonction), la raison de l'ingénieur est celle de la construction, donc du chantier."

An extension of this comparison would be to contrast an interest on the part of the architect in the object's inner logic, versus the engineer's emphasis on the functioning of that object, which would partly explain the latter's disinterest in epistemological questions in favor of matters of direct practical applicability. See Tom F. Peters, "Pensée technique," in *L'art de l'ingénieur*, 358.

Consistent with this, and particularly in the case of advances in reinforced concrete construction, is the fact that much more than architects, engineers were deeply involved in applied research, inventing and patenting structural systems that were tested through experiments geared at gauging the strength of materials, which characterized the engineer as having more direct contact with the materials and methods of building. Significantly, as of the second half of the nineteenth century (and particularly in the writings of Viollet-le-Duc), building materials, used in accordance with their properties and qualities, became the primary referent for notions of ‘truth’ in architecture. In other words, the privileged terrain of material – the constructive substance itself – when manipulated according to its innate “laws,” henceforth conferred virtue on the building and through this, construction came to be considered the moral substrate of architecture.²⁰ Cyrille Simonnet explains how, during the latter decades of the nineteenth century and up to the middle of the twentieth, the notion of construction came to be loaded with noble connotations:

“Construction ensures the moral basis of architecture. It is its guarantee that is simultaneously objective (i.e., there is no subject, therefore no affect; there is no pathos in the constructive), and universal (i.e., the laws of mechanics rule the built universe). Up until the 1950s, the signifier ‘construction’ thus constituted a sort of powerful attractive element, loaded with liberating potential, promising quality, health and even equality. In short, literally and figuratively, a construction is a good work.”²¹

The contributions of the modern engineer in an increasingly industrialized society, therefore, derived its meaning not only from the realization of the final (well-functioning, structurally

²⁰ Cyrille Simonnet, “Morale constructive,” in *L’Art de l’ingénieur*, 315.

²¹ Cyrille Simonnet, “Morale constructive,” in *L’Art de l’ingénieur*, 315. The original passage reads: “La construction assure le fondement moral de l’architecture, elle est sa caution à la fois objective (pas de sujet, donc pas d’affect, pas de pathos dans le constructif) et universelle (les lois de la mécanique régissent l’univers du bâti). Jusque dans les années cinquante, le signifiant ‘construction’ constitue ainsi une sorte d’élément attractif puissant, chargé de tout un potentiel libérateur, prometteur de qualité, de santé, d’égalité même: bref, au sens propre comme au sens figuré, la construction, c’est une bonne œuvre.”

sound) works, but importantly too from the accomplishment of the (laudatory) processes of their construction.²² This did much to encourage perceptions of the rightfulness of the engineer's claim to construction, and through this, to the title of 'constructor'. Moreover, with the engineers' innovations in the domain of construction also bound up with the modern notion of progress, an aura of heroism surrounded the engineer during the early twentieth century, which protagonists of the Modern Movement were quick to note and polemicize.

Prominent figures of twentieth-century architectural discourse such as Sigfried Giedion and Le Corbusier formulated influential arguments that associated the dawning of a new age with the phenomena of the appearance of new materials (such as iron and reinforced concrete), and theorized that through new modes of construction (with all of the moral vigor that these were perceived to be endowed with), architecture – argued to be currently in a degenerate state – would finally find the means to effect its much-needed rebirth. As Amédée Ozenfant and Charles-Édouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier) asserted:

“Architecture would be dead (because School killed it) if, by a fortunate detour, it hadn't found its way: architecture is not dead, because engineers and constructors, have taken over its grim fate to a reassuring extent.”²³

In the aftermath of the First World War, then, it is the example set by engineering that is touted by historians, avant-garde architects and artists alike as the path to architecture's salvation. For instance, Giedion equated the “inner expression of the life process” of the age with construction and industry, i.e., engineering, which he saw as slowing informing the development of a “new”

²² Fernández Ordóñez and Navarro Vera, “Théorie et pratique,” in *L'Art de l'ingénieur*, 503.

²³ “L'Esprit moderne,” in Amédée Ozenfant and Charles-Édouard Jeanneret Gris, *Après le cubisme* (Paris: Éditions des commentaires, 1918), 27. The original reads: “L'architecture serait morte (car l'École l'a tuée) si, par un détour heureux, elle n'avait retrouvé sa voie: l'architecture n'est pas morte, car les ingénieurs, les constructeurs, ont repris avec une ampleur rassurante sa destinée grave.”

architecture.²⁴ Similarly, in his highly influential *Vers une architecture* (1923), Le Corbusier famously intoned:

“Aesthetic of the Engineer, Architecture: two things firmly allied, sequential, the one in full flower, the other in painful regression. [...] Engineers construct the tools of their time. Everything, except the houses and rotten boudoirs. [...] Engineers are healthy and virile, active and useful, moral and joyful. Architects are disenchanting and idle, boastful or morose. That is because they will soon have nothing to do. *We have no more money* to pile up historical keepsakes. We need to cleanse ourselves. Engineers are equipped for this and they will build.”²⁵

Through this equation, Le Corbusier charted what became a famous opposition between the innovations of the engineer, which were extolled as virile and in tune with the age and therefore, morally superior, and the supposedly effete, historicist regurgitations of the architect who lags behind the times. His entreaty to architects was to tap into these dynamic (industrial) forces of the times that engineers were making manifest through their constructions, without losing their identity.²⁶

²⁴ Sigfried Giedion, *Building in France, Building in Iron, Building in Ferro-Concrete* [*Bauen in Frankreich, bauen in Eisen, bauen in Eisenbeton*], trans. J. Duncan Berry (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1995. 1928), 86; 88.

²⁵ Le Corbusier. *Toward an Architecture* [*Vers une architecture*], trans. John Goodman (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2007. 1923), 93, 94. In his library Cormier had a copy of the first edition of *Vers une architecture*, in which he would have found this argument in its original: “Esthétique de l’ingénieur, Architecture, deux choses solidaires, consécutives, l’une en plein épanouissement, l’autre en pénible régression. [...] Les ingénieurs construisent les outils de leur temps. Tout, sauf les maisons et les boudoirs pourris. [...] Les ingénieurs sont sains et virils, actifs et utiles, moraux et joyeux. Les architectes sont désenchantés in inoccupés, hâbleurs ou moroses. C’est qu’ils n’auront bientôt plus rien à faire. *Nous n’avons plus d’argent* pour échafauder des souvenirs historiques. Nous avons besoin de nous laver. Les ingénieurs y pourvoient et ils bâtiront.” Le Corbusier-Saugnier, *Vers une architecture* (Paris; Tours: Éditions G. Crès et Cie; Imprimerie E. Arrault et Cie, 1923), 5-7.

²⁶ A less damning version of Le Corbusier’s comparison, that identifies the redeeming dimensions of the architect’s contribution, is found in the annotated “Arguments” section of *Vers une architecture* that serves as the book’s Table of Contents, and is repeated at the beginning of the chapter “Esthétique de l’ingénieur, Architecture.” The English translation reads: “Aesthetic of the Engineer, Architecture: two things firmly allied, sequential, the one in full flower, the other in painful regression. The engineer, inspired by the law of Economy and guided by calculations, puts us in accord with universal laws. He attains harmony. The architect, through the ordonnance of forms, realizes an order that is a pure creation

By contrast, Cormier's (unpublished) formulation of the status and relationship between architects and engineers offers a substantially different interpretation:

“There is no clearly marked frontier between the professions of architect and engineer-constructor; both practice the art of building. [...] With the appearance of metallic structures, those most interested in the calculations of resistance of materials became engineers, while others continued mainly to practice the art of composition. The architect conceives forms then he verifies by calculation. The engineer first makes his calculations that he then translates by forms. They both construct.”²⁷

Through this concise symmetrical argument that unites architecture and engineering in the fertile and complex common ground of construction, Cormier privileges the natural and vital complementarity between the two professions over any kind of competitive antagonism.²⁸ Even though their approach to designing the built environment is understood as being diametrically opposed, what counts for Cormier is that they are each profoundly invested in, and contribute important perspectives and methods to, the noble practice of constructing. Thus, while Cormier understands very well that engineering and architecture are not the same thing, he also does not perceive a substantial difference between the two and moreover, seems disinterested in

of his mind; through forms, he affects our senses intensely, provoking plastic emotions: through the relationships that he creates, he stirs in us deep resonances, he gives us the measure of an order that we sense to be in accord with that of the world, he determines the diverse movements of our minds and our hearts; it is then that we experience beauty.” Le Corbusier. *Toward an Architecture*, 85, 92; Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture*, vii, 4.

²⁷ This statement was made by Cormier in 1954 in the context of being awarded the first Archambault medal for his accomplishments in the domain of applied sciences by the Association canadienne-française pour l'avancement des sciences (ACFAS). In this undated, two-page handwritten draft of his acknowledgement of the award, Cormier states: “Il n’y a pas de frontière bien définie entre les professions d’architecte et d’ingénieur-constructeur; toutes les deux pratiquent l’art de bâtir. Jusqu’au début du XIXe siècle, alors que l’empirisme et quelques calculs de statique suffisaient pour vérifier la stabilité des constructions, les deux professions d’architecte et d’ingénieur n’en faisaient qu’une. Avec l’apparition des structures métalliques, certains se sont intéressés plus spécialement aux calculs de résistance des matériaux et sont devenus des ingénieurs alors que d’autres ont continués de pratiquer principalement l’art de la composition. L’architecte conçoit des formes qu’il vérifie par le calcul. L’ingénieur fait d’abord des calculs qu’il traduit ensuite par les formes. Tout les deux construisent.” Cormier, ARCH257775, folder 410/B-4; 410 1/2, box 001-2010-037 T.

²⁸ Deschamps, “They Both Build,” in *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal*, 126.

determining dividing lines that stake out territories: he feels no jealous need to argue over the presumed superior status of either profession or their respective claims to authority. He has the luxury of being untroubled by these issues with their complex history because he embodies both cultures. Comfortable in his hybrid status that positions him first and foremost as one who constructs, Cormier had the benefit of drawing from an expansive spectrum of skills constituting his exceptional *savoir-faire* that made him an adept *constructeur*. Through the central place given to the loaded act of constructing, the two professions brought together in the figure of Cormier add up to more than the sum of their parts. Trained in both fields in the French academic tradition, and feeling a lifelong allegiance to, and general admiration for, French culture, the layered meanings and cultural values invested in the term *constructeur* would not have been lost on him. Therefore, the solid emphasis he places on constructing is key to understanding his perception of the fundamental nature and ultimate goal of his life's work, and also reveals why he was careful to ensure that *constructeur* be foregrounded in his professional title. Moreover, his career-long insistence on things being well made, also needs to be understood as bound up with the dignity and exemplary status accorded to constructing.

His concise evaluation of the professions' deep affinity was advanced by Cormier when he had the benefit of reflecting on his more than thirty years in practice as an architect and engineer-constructor. Yet judging from the notes he prepared for the course in architecture that he taught to civil engineering students at the École Polytechnique in Montréal as of 1925, it is clear that he was thinking about the professions' deep affinities as of the early days of his career. In the notes for his "Course in architecture for the use of engineers," Cormier outlined his pedagogical approach as being dependent on the use of numerous images to provide an abridged overview of good examples of past and present works, all of which embody that which is profound, immutable and eternal in building despite their differences in form. He added that in

all cases, the works' processes of construction will be drawn out, as well as the reasons for the forms employed, and the principles of composition will be highlighted. Another part of the course will demonstrate how these principles apply to the work of engineers, such as in the context of metal frame construction, reinforced concrete, vaults and bridges.²⁹ The emphasis placed on construction and composition are not only directly traceable to his formative Beaux-Arts training, but more importantly, the choice to focus on construction – the arena that both engineering and architecture make claims on – and then interpreting it through the lens of composition, Cormier can be understood to be encouraging an architectural understanding of all forms of construction in order to enrich the engineer's worldview, and through this, to do his part to break down the barriers between the professions. It would have been very interesting to know how he would have approached teaching a course in engineering for the use of architects. Given that Cormier valorized both professions and spoke their respective 'languages' authoritatively, he would have been very well-placed to cultivate a greater appreciation and mutual understanding between the fields.

The definitions Cormier gives for architecture and for engineering are instructive. He writes that architecture, as the art of constructing and as the first among the fine arts, is both an art that provokes plastic emotion, and a science that blends with the science of the engineer.³⁰ He states the basic distinction between the two professions that he repeated during the latter

²⁹ Cormier, "Cours d'architecture à l'usage des ingénieurs," (undated) [sheet 4], folder "ARCH258613 ARV-6/D," box 001-2010-218 T.

³⁰ Cormier, "Cours," [sheet 5]. This comment derives from the language promulgated by the movement in French architecture culture at that time, related to psychological aesthetics. One source where Cormier would have found this formulation about the emotional response elicited by architecture is in Le Corbusier's *Vers une architecture*. See fn. 27. Under the heading "Généralités," Cormier writes: "L'ARCHITECTURE est l'art de construire et, plus spécialement, de construire des édifices. / C'est à la fois un art, le premier des Beaux-Arts, et c'est aussi une science. / Comme art, l'architecture est chose d'émotion plastique. / Comme science, l'architecture se confond avec la science de l'ingénieur." For a recent study of the psychological aesthetic in French architectural theory, see Estelle Thibault, *La Géométrie des émotions: les esthétiques scientifiques de l'architecture en France, 1860-1950* (Wavre: Mardaga, 2010).

half of his career, namely that the architect conceives forms that he verifies by calculations while the engineer begins with calculations that are then translated into form.³¹ Both contribute something essential and valuable to construction. He explains that through the combination of volumes, lines, surfaces, and solids and voids, the architect achieves an order that has the power to awaken strong emotions in the spectator. This yields designs that only feeling can judge, and that are superior to calculation.³² The engineer, in turn, may succeed in creating architecture in the highest sense, if he makes evident the information selected for his determination of his calculations, and highlights the character of the materials he uses, and if he makes the function of the elements that he calculated understandable. Engineering work of this nature would put the viewer in harmony with the known laws of the universe and would elicit stirring emotions, because its perfection would not only be intrinsic but also obvious.³³

A more developed commentary than Cormier's, yet still demonstrating a symmetrical understanding of the *modi operandi* of the architect and the engineer, whose respective cultures and contributions to the built environment are posited as weighing the same but coming from opposite vantage points, was advanced by Le Corbusier, who by the 1940s, was no longer as militant in broadly denouncing contemporary architecture as degenerate in comparison to the

³¹ Cormier, "Cours," [sheet 5]. "L'architecte conçoit des formes qu'il vérifie par le calcul; L'ingénieur fait des calculs qu'il traduit par des formes."

³² Cormier, "Cours," [sheet 5]: "L'Architecte, par l'ordonnance des formes, réalise un ordre qui est une pure conception de son esprit, mais qu'on doit sentir en accord avec celui de la nature. Par la combinaison des volumes, des lignes, des surfaces, des pleins ou des vides, il peut éveiller dans l'âme du spectateur des impressions d'étonnement ou de majesté, de terreur ou de plaisir, de puissance ou de grâce. Il s'élève à des conceptions que le sentiment seul peut juger et qui sont supérieures au calcul."

³³ Cormier, "Cours," [sheet 5]: "L'ingénieur, dans tous les problèmes qui donnent naissance à des formes, a le choix de certaines données qui déterminent ses calculs. / Si l'ingénieur met ces données bien en évidence, / S'il met bien en évidence le caractère des matériaux qu'il emploie, / S'il fait bien comprendre la fonction des éléments qu'il a calculés, / l'ingénieur fait de l'architecture, / et nous met en accord avec les lois connues de l'Univers. Il peut alors provoquer les émotions plastiques décrites plus haut. / La perfection de son œuvre ne doit pas alors se contenter d'être intrinsèque; elle doit être évidente."

work of engineers. Written in collaboration with François de Pierrefeu, during the devastation of the second World War, the treatise *La Maison des hommes* (1942)³⁴ is preoccupied by the urgency for the built environment to address fundamental human needs, and thus places the emphasis on the basic social unit, the family, and its architectural corollary, the house. Significantly for our purposes, the hero extolled as the actor best equipped to respond to the needs of the age is neither the architect nor the engineer *per se*, but rather, the “Master of Works” [*le maître d’œuvre*], who, as an ideal figure, is defined as “a *humanist* [...] accommodating within himself – the better to vivify them through his breath – two distinct actors, an *architect* and an *engineer*.”³⁵ The authors explain that in light of the “dignity of the tasks of construction” and the eminent place that building holds, the “Master of Works” is that figure who commands “a veritable compendium of knowledge” and holds the special ability to not only accommodate the material and epistemological constraints that impinge on the art of building, but also to use these same constraints “to be of service and to sustain the poetic idea.”³⁶ This secret power is what elevates the “Master of Works” above the masters of other arts, his ascendancy being of supreme importance.³⁷ As embodiments of pure aesthetics and mathematical analysis, respectively, Le Corbusier sees these specializations as having value but at the same time as limited, and on their

³⁴ François de Pierrefeu and Le Corbusier, *La Maison des hommes* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1942). The book appeared a few years later in English translation, with the names of the authors inverted, as: Le Corbusier and François de Pierrefeu, *The Home of Man* [*La maison des hommes*], trans. Gordon Holt and Clive Entwistle (London: The Architectural Press, 1958. 1948. 1942).

³⁵ Le Corbusier and François de Pierrefeu, *Home of Man*, 31; *La Maison des hommes*, 108. The description of the master of works is elaborated in a way that connotes godliness: “This trinity – could it but be fully realised within one man – would for an instant imprison a ray of that Trinity to which we owe the creation and upholding of our world, and which one was justified in calling the Great Architect of the Universe [...]” *Home of Man*, 32; *La Maison des hommes*, 108.

³⁶ *Home of Man*, 31; *La Maison des hommes*, 104.

³⁷ *Home of Man*, 31; *La Maison des hommes*, 104, 106.

own, not sufficiently directed to cultivating the well-being of man.³⁸ Said differently, if architects and engineers drew more from each other, either of them would be better positioned to be worthy of the title “Master of Works.”

Le Corbusier’s diagram of the “Master of Works” and its explanation illustrates his more evolved understanding of the respective strengths and dynamic complementarity of the two professions.³⁹ **[Figure 3.3]** Two circles, representing the architect and the engineer respectively, are color-coded to show the proportions with which they each possess some measure of the “knowledge of man” (i.e., the spectrum of human spiritual, intellectual, social, physiological and material needs) and the “knowledge of physical laws” (which denotes the control of natural elements such as raw materials and their resistance, laws of gravity and statics, and mathematical calculations and hypotheses). The strengths of the architect and engineer are presented in inverse proportion to each other “because sensitiveness and technique are required in different degrees, though indissolubly blended together in the one as in the other discipline.”⁴⁰ The circles representing each profession are placed above and below a central band that sets out the “building tasks” organized across the spectrum defining two coordinating axes of what is deemed to be most properly the purview of “the spiritual man” (the architect) in contrast to the types of construction requiring the predominant involvement of “the economic man” (the engineer).

³⁸ *Home of Man*, 33; *La Maison des hommes*, 114.

³⁹ Le Corbusier, “Schéma du maître d’œuvre,” in *La Maison des hommes*, [unpaginated but is inserted after p.116]. In the English translation, the illustrations and their annotations are separated from the chapters, therefore unfortunately, this diagram (reproduced in black and white with a glossary on its verso that translates some of the words found within the diagram) appears at the back of the book on page 103 within the “Summary of Drawings,” rather than directly associated with the text in Chapter 4 that describes it.

⁴⁰ Le Corbusier and François de Pierrefeu, *The Home of Man*, 33; *La Maison des hommes*, 118.

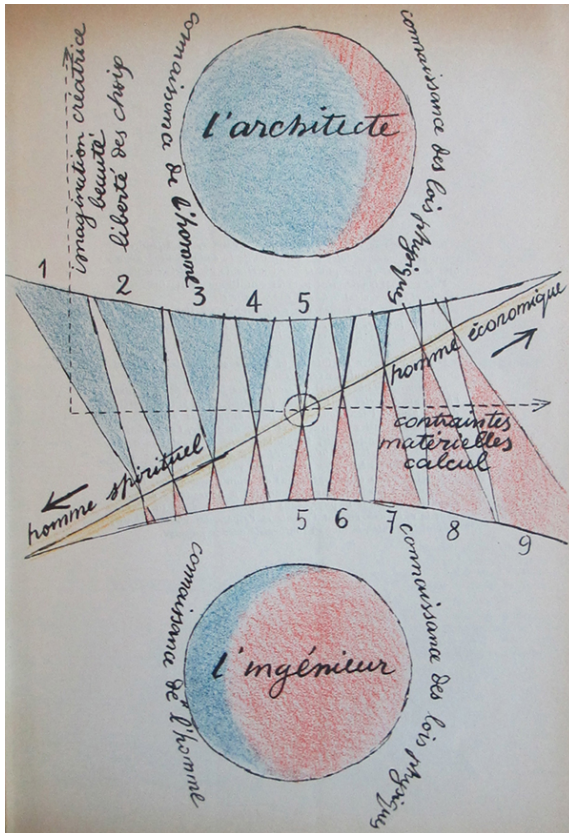


Figure 3.3 Le Corbusier's diagram of the Master of Works [*le maître d'oeuvre*]. Source: François de Pierrefeu and Le Corbusier, *La Maison des hommes* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1942), [unpaginated but inserted after page 116].

At the opposite ends of this middle band, the tasks of construction devoted to places of worship and national monuments, are assigned to the knowledge particular to the architect, who in those cases, should be Master of Works. Similarly, at the other pole, infrastructural projects such as roads, bridges, barrages, piers, etc., require more the competence and values of engineer to be Master of Works. Importantly, the one spot in this diagram (zone 5) that draws together the aptitudes of the two professions in equal measure – i.e., the central point from which the various building tasks with their varying degrees of spiritual vs. economic requirements, fan out to their extremities, and the point from which all of the energy of the diagram radiates – is the home.⁴¹

⁴¹ Not entirely consistent with what is presented in the diagram, the descriptive text demonstrates Le Corbusier's reluctance to relinquish the architect's control in the arenas that matter most to him. This is seen most explicitly in two comments in the text in which he says that "because of the importance of the human point of view, above all others, to the family tradition" the architect should be the master of

The diagram and accompanying commentary on the figure of the Master of Works is a revealing testament to the evolving understanding of the relationship between architects and engineers, and to how their roles as designers of the built environment were construed in the context of the pressures of an era that witnessed significant technological advance as well as the devastation of two world wars. In a narrower sense, Le Corbusier's analysis also provides a productive filter for reading Cormier, in two main ways. The most obvious is that through Cormier's harmonious merger of the figures of the engineer and the architect that equipped him to attend to all of the spiritual and material, aesthetic and calculation-based requirements of constructing, he sits comfortably at the dynamic central point of the diagram, which is Le Corbusier's ideal of a Master of Works. As well, given the merger of the most holistic manifestation of the Master of Works with the specific architectural program of the house, a parallel can be drawn to Cormier, for it is in the house he designed for himself in 1930, at the close of his most prolific decade and therefore, at a high point in his career, that we see playing out with the greatest depth and clarity, the full spectrum of his *savoir-faire* as an architect, engineer and artist, and its convergence with his self-construction through his identification with the ideal of the *constructeur*.⁴²

works for the home, followed by his remark that even in building tasks that require the engineer to be the master of works, the architect should never be absent. *The House of Man*, 34; *La maison des hommes*, 122.

⁴² While I am here taking advantage of a fortuitous parallel, an important distinction needs to be made concerning Le Corbusier's and Cormier's respective, and very different, understandings of the significance of the house. For the former, the house was the building typology that he most theorized in his writing and practice because it is a condition of enduring primordial significance, and which takes central place in his diagram of the Master of Works because he sees it as the type of building in the modern world that requires the most artful synthesis of the skills and talents of the architect and engineer in order to fulfill human needs in the most complete sense. In this regard, Le Corbusier speaks of the house as a general and pressing condition that needs to be addressed. By contrast, as someone who only completed residential designs for himself and didn't theorize the house discursively, the importance of the house for Cormier plays out in the specific context of the design of his own domestic space; as the program that calls for the fullest mobilization of his sensitivity and technique in equal measure to meet *his* personal needs.

Doors unlock stories

By the conventional standards for domestic architecture in Montréal during the early 1930s, the exterior of Cormier's semi-detached house was rather spare, its walls of reinforced concrete clad in artificial granite and/or stucco enlivened by a few, carefully placed decorative sculptural elements that were used to accent selected apertures.⁴³ The least visible of these ornamental devices are the two bas-reliefs of a ram's head on the side and rear façades of the house, both placed high up and in central positions above main apertures on the respective elevations.⁴⁴ [Figures 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6] The front elevation of the house, by contrast, which is the most visible of the house's three faces, receives the most ornamental treatment, this being concentrated above the front door, as well as above and below the tall, narrow window centered on the elevation of the house's double-height volume. [Figure 3.7] Above this 25-foot (7.6 m) tall window are three vertical bands of identical floral garlands in shallow relief, and at the window's base, a planter box that is attached to the wall, features on its exposed sides, a total of

⁴³ All four types of bas-relief found on the house's exterior are visible in Figure 3.1.

⁴⁴ It has been suggested that there may be a connection between this ornament and the year of the ram in the Chinese lunar calendar. Sandra Cohen-Rose, *Northern Deco: Art Deco Architecture in Montréal* (Montréal: Corona Pub., 1996), 50. If there is something to this, it seems most likely that the ram refers to 1931, the year of the house's completion, since 1885, the year of Cormier's birth, corresponds to the year of the rooster. For my present purposes, what is most relevant to point out is that in Cormier's archive there is a photographic print of a published image of a bas-relief of a ram's head that differs from the ones found on two of the house's façades, only in the leafy garland that is suspended from the ram's horns. The photo is unlabeled, providing no information as to the name, artist or source of the work, but its grimy condition suggests that it was used in a workshop. The contact sheet containing this and one related photo is sheet number 350, found in the second of two boxes within box 01- Contacts – 1@49, 1/3. Further sleuthing in publications dealing with sculpture conserved in Cormier's library, reveals this image to be an enlargement from a Plate of examples of bas-reliefs from the Boule School (a school of applied and decorative art in Paris), published in Henri Rapin, ed. *La Sculpture décorative moderne*, 3^{ème} série (Paris: Éditeur Ch. Moreau, 1929), Pl. 5. N.b. In the "Table des planches" listing the artists and contents of each plate, this sheet is listed as Pl. 6, but on the plate itself, it is identified as Pl. 5.

Photographs and elevation drawings showing the bas-reliefs of the ram's head in-situ, can be seen in Figures 4.9, 4.34, 4.35, and 4.38 in Chapter 4. Unfortunately, neither the lateral nor longitudinal section drawings of the house show the ram's head, even though the lateral section cuts the wall of the house's side elevation precisely on the centerline of this ornamental element. See Figure 4.21 in Chapter 4.



Figure 3.4 Cormier's drawing of the bas-relief of a ram's head that appears high up on central axes on the side and rear elevations of his residence.

Source: Ernest Cormier, detail of elevation drawing # 3005 – 2 (dated September 4, 1930 and October 20, 1930), graphite on vellum, ARCH5978, folder 01-3005-01, box Cormier 01-3005-01M, FEC, CCA.

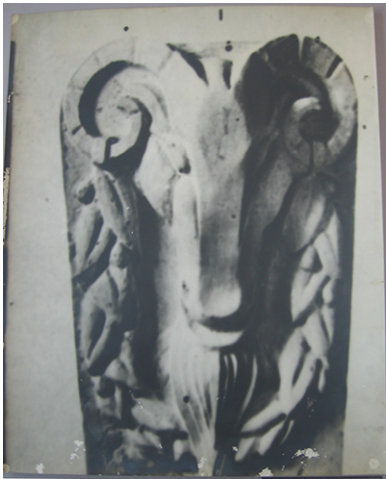


Figure 3.5 A photograph by Cormier of an image of a bas-relief of a ram's head, that seems to have been the direct inspiration for the ornament on the central upper levels of the side and rear façade of the Cormier residence.

Source: P.4928, box Cormier 01-Photos-05P, FEC, CCA.



Figure 3.6 A folio plate showing examples of bas-reliefs by students of the École Boulle in Paris. Of interest is image 3, showing a sculptural relief of a ram's head.

Source: Henri Rapin, ed., *La Sculpture décorative moderne*, 3^{ème} série (Paris: Éditeur Ch. Moreau, 1929), Pl. 5; Ernest Cormier Library, Collection, CCA.

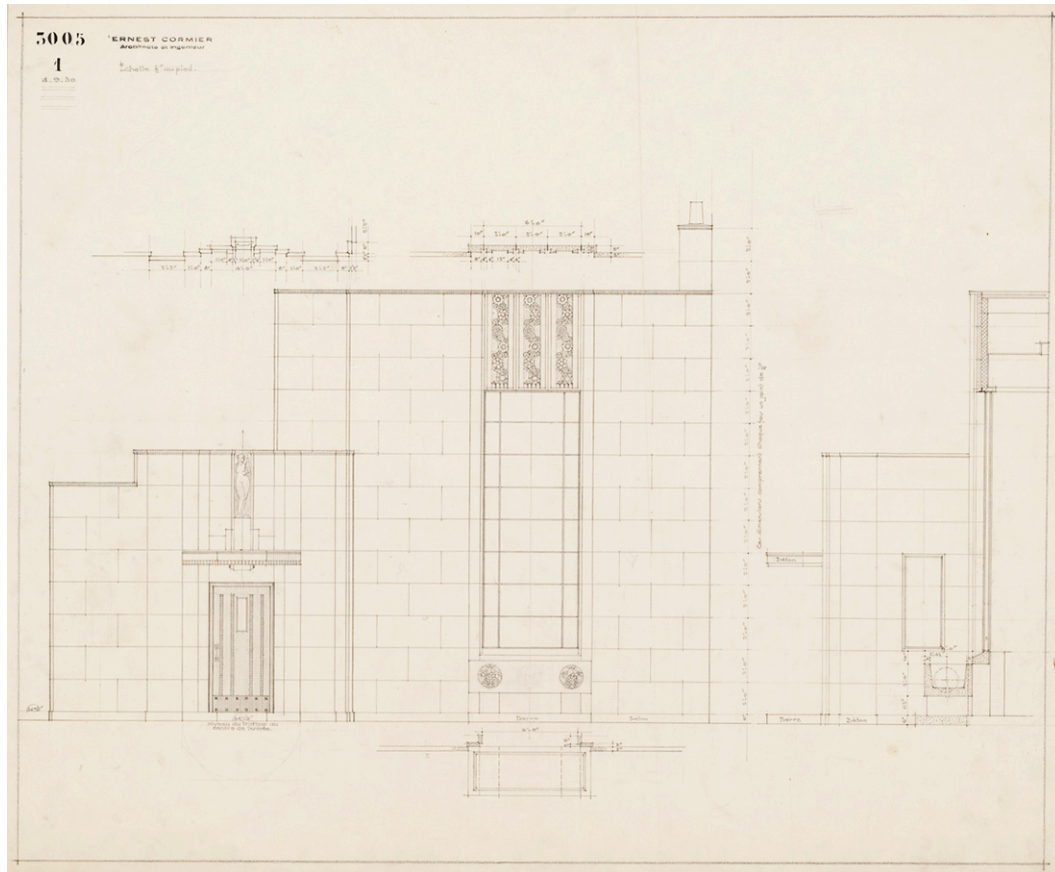


Figure 3.7 Front elevation and sectional elevation of the front facade, Cormier Residence (1930-31), 1418 Pine Avenue West, Montréal.
 Source: Ernest Cormier, drawing #3005 – 1 (dated September 4, 1930), graphite on vellum, ARCH5977, folder 01-3005-01, box Cormier 01-3005-01M, FEC, CCA.

four circular motifs of a cluster of grapes surrounded by leaves and tendrils.⁴⁵ [Figures 3.8, 3.9 and 3.10] Cormier’s inspiration for these three types of sculptural ornament seems to derive

⁴⁵ Similarly to the ram’s head, Cormier’s archive houses a photographic enlargement he made of an image of a bas-relief of a cluster of grapes published in the mid-1920s in a folio of modern French decorative sculpture in his library, that is not in pristine condition and therefore, appears to have been used in an artisanal workshop. The contact sheet containing this and related photos is sheet number 349, found in the second of two boxes within box 01- Contacts – 1@49, 1/3. This bas-relief of the grapes is credited to Saupique as having been created for the Church of Minimes at Reithel by the architect Glaize. See Henri Rapin, ed., *La Sculpture décorative moderne à l’exposition des arts décoratifs de 1925*, 2^{me} série (Paris: Éditeur Ch. Moreau, 1925), Pl. 30, in Ernest Cormier’s library, CCA. The main difference between this published bas-relief and the one that appears four times on the residence’s planter box, is that Cormier chose to place the grapes within a circular frame rather than within an oblong octagon as shown in the folio.

The direct precedent (if there is one) for the vertical garlands has been more challenging to establish. While this three-volume work contains numerous examples of floral motifs, some of which Cormier photographed, none of his photographic enlargements conserved in the archive are identical to the ornament above the tall window, although there is evidence to invite speculation that he was inspired by

from images reproduced in the portfolio-sized publication of modern decorative sculpture, that gathered examples of selected works by French sculptors and decorators displayed at the 1925 Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes in Paris, which Cormier visited.⁴⁶ Finally, the sculptural ornament on the house's exterior that most warrants close attention, is the bas-relief positioned above the front door: that of an elegant, curvaceous female, who is gazing at the miniature tower that she is supporting on her outstretched palm. **[Figure 3.11]** This ornament is central, both in terms of its physical placement and its significance, and is distinct from the others in a few key respects, namely: in *number*, for it is unique, unlike the others which are repeated two, three or four times; in *category*, for it represents human (high) culture, both through its refined anthropomorphism and its direct reference to architecture, as opposed to the more primeval themes based on animal, floral or vegetal motifs; and in *inspiration*, for while it too borrows from the work of others, it is not a direct copy of another bas-relief, but rather, translates ideas explored in other media, particularly stained glass and photography. As

several and based his own motif on a selection of these examples. Moreover, none of the other plates in this three-volume set contains an image of a floral bas-relief that looks like the one repeated three times above the window on the front façade. This could mean that either he designed his own pattern inspired by a combination of these examples (of which no drawings seem to have survived) or, the image he did use was derived from another published source and his photograph of it has not been conserved. See Cormier's photos P.4926 and P.4927 in box Cormier 01-Photos-05P, in comparison to Plates 9 and 13 featuring bas-reliefs by Gallerey and Hairo, respectively) in Henri Rapin, ed., *La Sculpture décorative moderne*, 1^{ère} série (Paris: Éditeur Ch. Moreau, 1925) conserved within the CCA's Collection as part of Ernest Cormier's library.

⁴⁶ See Henri Rapin, ed., *La sculpture décorative moderne*, 3 portfolios, Collection des meilleurs ouvrages sur les arts décoratifs modernes françaises (Paris: C. Moreau, 1925-29). This work devoted to sculpture is one of 15 publications featured within the series of the best works of modern French decorative arts, which showcased the decorative arts, architecture and garden designs displayed the 1925 Paris Expo.

Cormier traveled to Paris in 1925, and lists of the furniture in his home that he prepared when he was applying to have his house classified as heritage property, indicate that he purchased two small tables from that exhibition. See folder "Docs personnels: Propriété 1418 ave des Pins 816/A-3," box 001-2010-001 T. As well, this three-portfolio set bears the stamp of the Librairie Déom in Montréal, where Cormier purchased many of his books, meaning that while he may have seen many of these bas-reliefs on display in Paris, he purchased the folios documenting them in Montréal, likely on or after 1929, which is the publication date of the third volume, but clearly prior to completing the design of his house.

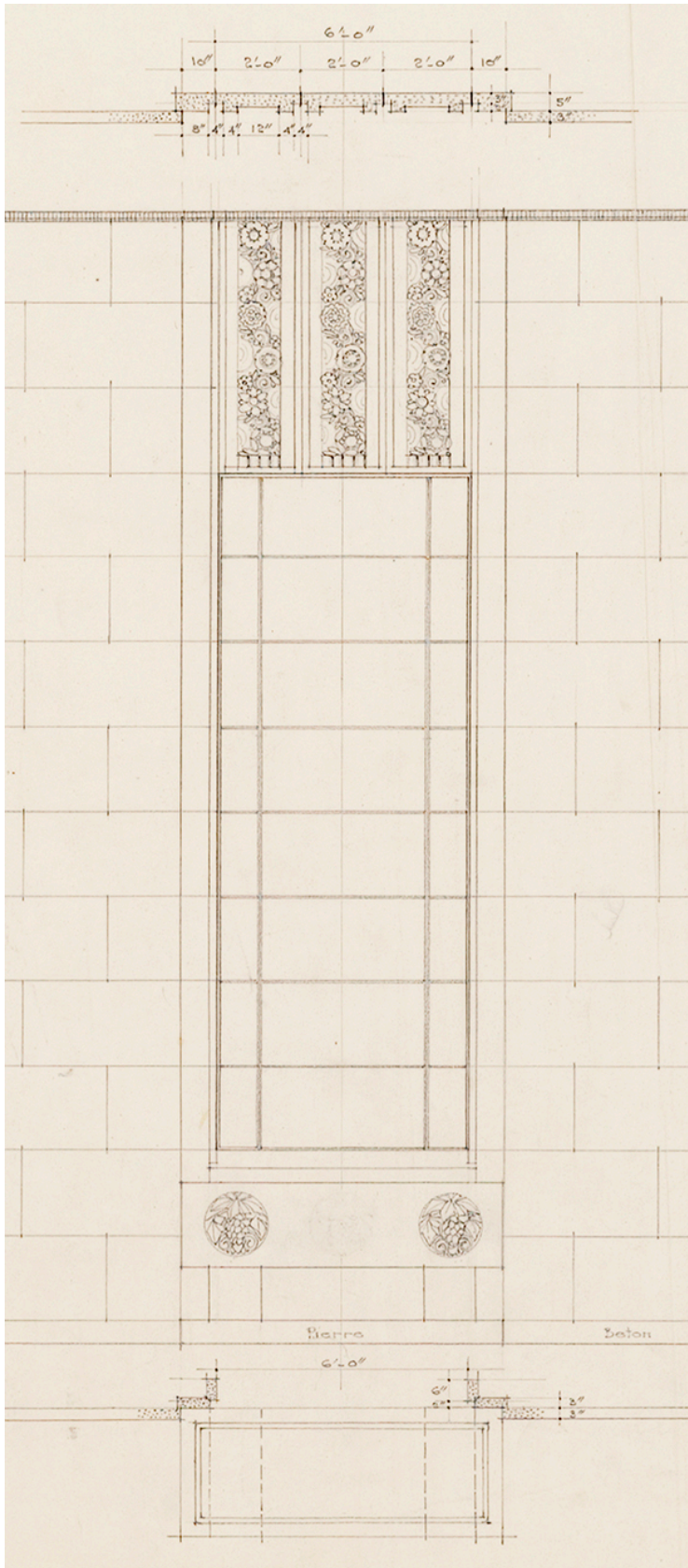


Figure 3.8 Cormier's drawing of the tall window on the front elevation of his residence bracketed by a bas-relief of three vertical floral bands above, and a planter box with four bas-reliefs of grapes below. Source: Ernest Cormier, detail of drawing #3005 – 1 (dated September 4, 1930), ARCH5977, folder 01-3005-01, box Cormier 01-3005-01M, FEC, CCA.



Figure 3.9 A photograph by Cormier of an image of a bas-relief of a cluster of grapes. The name, artist or source of the work is not identified on the print. With subtle modifications this seems to have been the direct inspiration for the ornament found on three sides of the planter box on the front elevation of his residence.
Source: P.4924, box Cormier 01-Photos-05P, FEC, CCA.



Figure 3.10 A folio plate showing examples of bas-reliefs by Saupique. Of interest is image 4, which is identified as a decorative bas-relief of grapes for the Church of Minimes at Rethel, by the architect Glaize.
Source: Henri Rapin, ed., *La Sculpture décorative moderne à l'exposition des arts décoratifs de 1925*, 2^{me} série (Paris: Éditeur Ch. Moreau, 1925), Pl. 30; Ernest Cormier Library, Collection, CCA.



Figure 3.11 Photograph of the bas-relief above front door to Cormier's residence, photographed February 16, 2009.
Source: "Le 1418 ave. des Pins Ouest," © Philippe du Berger, Flickr Photo Sharing, accessed October 19, 2014,
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/urbexplo/4308821495>

will be shown, this sculptural ornament condenses a range of architectural references that relate to Cormier's intentional alignment with French culture in general, and with the ideal of the *constructeur* and all that it connotes, in particular, and thus speaks eloquently, if discretely, of Cormier's ambitions to elaborate a particular professional image.

Reflecting on his career from a mature vantage point, Cormier said that he always “attached great importance on the exterior doors of [his] buildings, because they foretell what will be seen in the interior.”⁴⁷ Disappointingly, he did not elaborate on what he meant by this beyond listing his key works – in which he mentioned the house first – and commenting on the primary material out of which the doors for these buildings were made. This admission demonstrates that he favored oak and bronze, but does not give a clear indication of what these design choices might be foretelling about the spaces that unfold beyond their threshold. Typical of Cormier's descriptions of his own work, he offers suggestive hints that remain undeveloped or otherwise incomplete. Alerted to pay attention to his exterior doors, however, it becomes clear that the entire threshold that constitutes the front entrance to his residence merits a close reading. **[Figure 3.12]**

The front façade of Cormier's residence is composed of two interlocking volumes and possesses the simple elegance of a classicizing interpretation of architecture that derives from the aesthetics of the French *moderne* movement. The shorter and narrower of the two volumes juts

⁴⁷ Ernest Cormier said, “Toujours j'ai attaché une grande importance aux portes extérieures de mes édifices, car elles font présager ce qu'on verra à l'intérieur: les portes en chêne de mon ancienne maison et de l'Université de Montréal; les portes en bronze avec bas-reliefs du Palais de justice, maintenant occupé par le Ministère des Affaires Culturelles, des églises de Pawtucket et de Central Falls, Rhode-Island, aux Etats-Unis, de la Cour Suprême du Canada et du palais des Nations-Unies.” Willie Chevalier, “Entretien avec Ernest Cormier [An Interview with Ernest Cormier],” *Vie des Arts (Canada)* 20, no. 81 (Winter 1975-76): 18; English translation by Mildred Grand on page 89.

Long before this interview, and included in his explication of ‘surface’ within the notes he prepared for his architecture course for engineering students, Cormier opined that the openings of doors and windows are often destroyers of form, and that instead, they must be made to manifest form. Cormier, “Cours,” (undated) [sheet 76], folder “ARCH258613 ARV-6/D,” box 001-2010-218 T.



Figure 3.12 Photograph of the main entry to Cormier's residence at 1418 Pine Avenue West, Montréal (1930-31), photographed February 16, 2009. Source: "Le 1418 ave. des Pins Ouest," © Philippe du Berger, Flickr Photo Sharing, accessed October 19, 2014, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/urbexplo/4308821301>

forward slightly, and is connected to the sidewalk on Pine Avenue, by a paved pathway that guides the visitor's gaze and feet directly to the front door. The first thing we notice about this volume that appears both solidly monolithic and delicately layered, is the contrast between the warm tone of the custom-made oak door and the grey reconstituted stone cladding whose monochrome palette is livened up subtly by the blue-green accents of the oxidized copper coping of the parapet. In fact, the way that the copper's stain has bled onto certain parts of the façade, so as to tint only the bas-relief and the grouping that forms its pedestal, is so strategic that it seems to have been intentionally designed rather than accidental. What seems most important about the entrance to Cormier's residence is less the door itself, than the way in which this aperture is framed, highlighted and put into carefully choreographed relation to other elements.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ I am grateful to Maristella Casciato for calling my attention to the similarities between the framing of the front door of Peter Behrens' house (1901) in Darmstadt, Germany, which he designed as part of the Darmstadt Artists' Colony, and that of Cormier's residence. While Behrens makes greater use of color, and a bow window protrudes above the door rather than a recessed bas-relief, there is nevertheless, an aspect of carving into the thickness of the wall to access the recessed front door that is common to both. Cormier was certainly familiar with Behrens' work, possessing in his library journal issues featuring his

From the slightly recessed oak door, the panels of artificial granite that clad the front façade step outwards to frame the aperture, their symmetrical layering on either side of the entrance reinforcing the perception of a vertical line running through the center of the door, which is further emphasized by the door’s detailing of vertical stripes on either side of its narrow window. In contrast to this visual impression of horizontal extension (or a “parting in the middle”) of the cladding on either side of the door’s centerline, the composition of the front entrance to Cormier’s residence is also subjected to a kind of vertical pressure, or visual compressive force that the door must resist, due to its position between the stone slab that lies at its base and the reinforced concrete slab that emerges above it as a canopy. Standing between these mirrored masonry extrusions – both of equal size and shaped as octagons, whose five sides are visible while the other three seem to be contained within the thickness of the wall – the door seems to be uniting them and simultaneously holding them apart. **[Figure 3.13]**

The door canopy performs multiple programmatic roles in addition to serving the utilitarian function of offering some protection from the elements.⁴⁹ In the first instance, by being the only component of the entrance’s composition that juts out strikingly from the

projects, and the following monographs: Fritz Hoeber, *Peter Behrens* (München, G. Müller & E. Rentsch, 1913); Peter Behrens, *Peter Behrens* (Dortmund: F. W. Rufus, 1913); and Paul Joseph Cremers, *Peter Behrens, sein Werk von 1909 bis zur Gegenwart, zusammengestellt und geschrieben* (Essen: G.D. Baedeker, 1928).

In Cormier’s use of receding vertical panels framing the front door and the overdoor sculpture, Robert Little sees a direct connection to the doorway of the *Pavillon du Collectionneur*, designed by Pierre Patout (with the interior design by Emile Jacques Ruhlmann) for the 1925 Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes in Paris. The pavilion was conceived as the dwelling of an imaginary connoisseur and sophisticated patron of the arts whose collection was to be on display. Noting that this pavilion was not only widely praised at the time but also the focal point of France’s participation in the exhibition, Little interprets Cormier’s design for the entrance to his house as “appropriating for himself the role of the sophisticated modern connoisseur as a necessary complement to the role of architect-engineer.” Robert Little, “1418, avenue des Pins, la maison Ernest Cormier and the European Context,” *Journal of Canadian Art History* 13, no. 2 - 14, no. 1 (1990-91): 114.

⁴⁹ In addition to the drawings of construction details of the door threshold shown in Figure 3.13, drawings detailing the structure of the front door’s reinforced concrete canopy can be found in folder 01-3005-09, box Cormier 01-3005-01M.

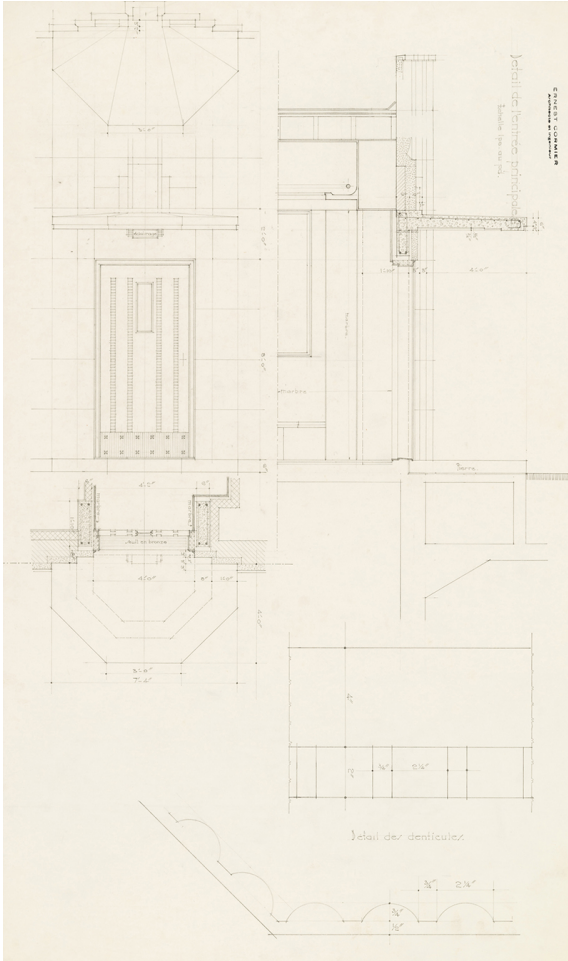


Figure 3.13 Elevation and sections through the front entrance of the Cormier residence. Source: Ernest Cormier, drawing of “Détail[s] de l’entrée principale,” c.1930-31, ARCH270908, folder 01-3005-04, box Cormier 01-3005-01M, FEC, CCA.



Figure 3.14 A photograph of the main entry to Cormier’s residence at 1418 Pine Avenue West, Montréal (1930-31), taken c.1990. The black and white image captures the dramatic shadows cast by the wall elements under certain lighting conditions, which reinforce the perception that the logic of a bas-relief sculpture generated the design of the entire façade. Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990-0138, box Szilasi II 1, Collection, CCA.

exterior wall, the canopy creates a contrast to the façade's relatively low relief. Through the play of shadows that are cast, the recessed layers and subtle textures of the front entrance are highlighted, contributing to reinforcing the impression that not only does the composition of the front door threshold *include* a bas-relief, but that it was the logic of bas-relief sculpture that may have guided the design of the entire façade. **[Figure 3.14]** As an art form that is both fragmentary by nature and that is ambiguously situated between sculpture and architecture,⁵⁰ the bas-relief was a form of ornament favored by many architects during the interwar period who strove to produce an architecture that was 'modern' while evoking continuity with the past.⁵¹ This sculptural mode is intriguing for the way that it visually suggests full three-dimensionality, yet accomplishes this within a shallow material depth. Unlike drawing or painting, where the rendered effects of color, light and shadow create an illusion of the desired depth that is represented on a flat surface, bas-reliefs operate under greater constraints: they are typically uniform in material and color, and rely on the lighting conditions of their physical site to illuminate their form. As decorative sculpture that is both added onto the surface of the building

⁵⁰ For a discussion of the reciprocal relationships between architecture, ornament and objects that examines issues of scale, portability and the complex relationship of ornamental sculpture to modernism in architecture, see Alina Payne, *From Ornament to Object: Genealogies of Architectural Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

⁵¹ This was particularly true of the work produced by architects and decorative artists during the interwar period in France, which was termed *moderne* by the historical actors, but decades later came to be referred to as 'art deco.' 'Art deco' has proven to be enduring both as nomenclature for a stylistic category that can be seen across a very wide spectrum of art practices, particularly during the 1920s and 30s, and as a stylistic movement that has a large international fan club. See Richard Striner, "Art Deco: Polemics and Synthesis," *Winterthur Portfolio* 25, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 21-34; Nancy J. Troy, *Modernism and the Decorative Arts in France: Art Nouveau to Le Corbusier*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Charlotte Benton, Tim Benton and Ghislaine Wood, eds. *Art Deco 1910-1939* (Boston; New York: Bulfinch Press, 2003).

In terms of the negotiation between age-old artistic practices and the incorporation of materials that were newly available in the twentieth century, in the Introduction to volume 1 of the folios he compiled devoted to modern decorative sculpture in France, Henri Rapin discusses how all materials, including common ones can be ennobled in the hands of the artisan, and makes a point of saying that even cement is an element that the artist ought not to neglect, as it too can be beautiful. See Rapin, ed., *La Sculpture décorative moderne*, 1^{ère} série, [unpaginated].

and that is intrinsic to the make-up of the wall itself, the bas-relief is deeply embedded into the body of the building, both materially and conceptually. In this regard, the female figure standing above the front entrance of Cormier's residence both animates the wall, and also *is* the wall: the material out of which she is made seeming to be seamless with the wall components framing her.⁵² Poised on a pedestal and filling the niche to which all of the stepped panels simultaneously recede and converge, this bas-relief of a glamorous, curvaceous figure wearing a long, clingy gown who is gazing at the miniature tower she is cradling in the palm of her right hand, she fills the niche provided for her without seeming squeezed by its constrained proportions. The sculpted figure's privileged position on the central axis of the threshold's composition and crowning the door is quite literally underscored by the dominant horizontal line of the canopy, whose most important function is to serve as the plinth supporting the pedestal on which the figure stands. This canopy simultaneously separates and unites the contrasting top and bottom

⁵² Disappointingly, the archive has not (yet?) revealed much information pertaining to the fabrication of this bas-relief or the other ornamental motifs that appear on the house's exterior, making it difficult to know the precise materials, the cost and date of their creation, the artisan or workshop who may have produced them, and how they are attached to their respective walls. Among the documents pertaining to the construction of the house, one bill from Petrucci & Carli, Statuaires, dated July 15, 1931, states that they provided one bas-relief in 'ciment' [cement] that cost \$20.80 and was paid on August 1, 1931, but no description is provided to clarify which of the bas-reliefs the invoice refers to. The fact that the invoice mentions a single sculpture suggests that this was likely the one of the female figure above the door, but in the absence of other evidence, this cannot be confirmed. See ARCH258993, folder "#3005 Matériaux Divers 01-905/A-6," box 001-2011-206 T.

Given that the front façade is clad in artificial granite and that its bas-reliefs seem to be made of the same or similar material, it seems reasonable to assume that the planter box and the floral bands above and below the large window were poured using a cement aggregate rather than carved from stone. Yet the two rams' heads are placed on surfaces covered in stucco, making their material composition harder to guess. To date, no drawings, molds, mock-ups of casts or other traces of the physical production of the exterior ornaments has been found in the Cormier archive, leaving many questions about these decorative elements unanswered, among them, whether Cormier made any of them himself or delegated the task to others. In this regard, no evidence has been found to suggest that the sculptor Henri Hébert, Cormier's close friend and collaborator for some of his projects, was involved in the creation of these bas-reliefs. The catalog accompanying the exhibition of Hébert's oeuvre identifies bas-reliefs commissioned by Cormier only for the following buildings: the Church of Sainte-Marguerite-Marie (1924); the garden of Cormier's studio (1925); Sainte-Julienne-Falconieri School (1925); the Church of St-Ambroise (c.1925); the Church of Saint John the Baptist (c.1925); and the Supreme Court of Canada (c.1940). See Janet Brooke, *Henri Hébert, 1884-1950: un sculpteur moderne* (Québec: Musée du Québec, 2000).

halves of the door threshold's composition because its central zone is the concentrated visual crossing point of the dynamic vertical and horizontal lines of force that define the entrance to the house. As a kind of fulcrum, the canopy-plinth serves to unite the door itself with its crowning bas-relief and through this, highlights the façade's composite charged center of gravity that is more than the oak door.

The careful attention Cormier paid to the design of his residence's front entrance suggests that in the house's interior we will find thickened thresholds that slow the circulation by marking the passage into significant spaces. Yet, there are other ways that the ensemble constituting the house's front door foretells what will be seen on the interior. Viewed from the pathway leading from the sidewalk to the house's front door, the object in the figure's hand, and the item to which her full gaze is directed, resembles a miniature version of the tower of the Université de Montréal,⁵³ [Figure 3.15] the prestigious large-scale commission that was, and



Figure 3.15 A stylized graphic representation of the bas-relief above the front door of Cormier's residence, derived from the logo designed by Carina Rose for the 10th international Art Deco Congress held in Montréal in 2009 and used as an icon on an online map to mark the locations of art deco buildings in Montréal.

Source: "Map of Art Deco sites in the Montréal Area," Art Déco Montréal website, consulted October 24, 2012, <http://artdecomontréal.com> ; and "graphics: art deco montréal," Carina Rose Design, consulted February 20, 2015, <http://carinarose.com/projects/3133369#1>

⁵³ It is generally assumed that the female muse above the front door of Cormier's house is holding a small-scale replica of the tower of the Université de Montréal. See: Pierre-Richard Bisson, "Maison Ernest-Cormier," in *Les Chemins de la mémoire. Vol 2: monuments et sites historiques du Québec*, ed. Commission des biens culturels du Québec (Québec: Publications du Québec, 1991), 127; Adrian Tinniswood, *The Art Deco House: Avant-Garde Houses of the 1920s and 1930s* (New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, 2002), 149. This is also attested to in part by the graphic design of the square icon (featuring a stylized representation of the muse's upper body and the university tower) used on the Art Déco Montréal website to indicate the placement of art deco buildings on the map provided. See Figure 3.15 and the "Map of Art Deco sites in the Montréal Area," available on the Art Deco Montréal website, consulted October 24, 2012, <http://artdecomontréal.com> . This icon is the upper segment of the logo designed by Carina Rose as the logo for the 10th international Art Deco Congress held in Montréal from May 24-30, 2009, "based on the bas-relief by Cormier on his Montréal house." See "graphics: art deco montréal," Carina Rose Design, consulted February 20, 2015, <http://carinarose.com/projects/3133369#1> This

continues to be considered Cormier's masterwork. Commissioned in 1924 but not inaugurated until 1943, the main pavilion of the university was still under construction on the northern slope of Mount Royal when Cormier moved into his house in 1931, and the tower was among the last parts of the mega-pavilion for the Université to be completed.⁵⁴ However, even at that vulnerable stage in the construction process, and largely through the public display of a detailed model showing the overall scheme of the building and the dissemination in print media of photographs of this model,⁵⁵ the tower had already acquired iconic status of representing the university's main building as a whole, as well as symbolizing the institution's ideological ambition to be a "beacon of knowledge," providing French-Canadians with higher education that would allow them to assume positions of professional leadership in the modern world.⁵⁶ Through its immense cultural significance in Montréal at that time, its gigantic scale, and the degree to which the project's development was given substantial coverage in local press, by 1931, the tower had also become emblematic of the exceptional degree of accomplishment that Cormier had

same website uses a more detailed representation of the upper portion of the tower of the Université de Montréal as its logo, which was designed through a collaborative effort of Art Déco Montréal. Sandra Cohen-Rose, email message to author, February 20, 2015.

⁵⁴ This reference to his not-yet completed masterwork was almost painfully premature, as within a few months of the house's completion, construction on the Université de Montréal came to a standstill and was not resumed for over a decade, and the project's eventual completion remained for a long time in a state of dire uncertainty. See Chapter 5 for a discussion of the challenges faced in the drawn-out realization of this project.

⁵⁵ For a discussion on the replacement of large, Beaux-Arts watercolor renderings of the main pavilion by Cormier, by photographs of the model used as a promotional medium, see Isabelle Gournay, "Graphisme et praxis chez Ernest Cormier, 'Architecte et Ingénieur-Constructeur': le 'pavillon principal' de l'Université de Montréal," *RACAR: revue d'art canadienne. Canadian art review* 16, no. 2 (1989): 161-64, 273-87.

⁵⁶ See chapter 5 for an analysis of the discursive construction of the significance of Cormier's design for the main pavilion of the Université de Montréal.

succeeded in attaining by that point in his career.⁵⁷ Therefore, in subtly placing a representation of his masterwork above the front door of his house – i.e., by establishing an invisible connecting line across the crest of Mount Royal, linking the house, situated on the south slope, to the monumental university rising on the north side – Cormier inscribed the prestige and far-reaching socio-cultural importance of one of his works, into the body of another, and through this self-referential gesture, also advertised the identity of the author and inhabitant of the house. In this regard, the ornamentation that is the key element of the residence’s front entrance is used to further Cormier’s professional self-promotion and his construction of his identity as an architect and engineer who is capable of undertaking very large and complex design challenges. The tower-holding muse also foretells that beyond the front door, one can expect to encounter more evidence of Cormier’s mastery of all aspects of making buildings.

And yet, the associations that the bas-relief condenses are revealed to be more complex than the architect and engineer-creator’s local self-promotion through works internal to his own oeuvre. In fact, upon closer inspection through photographs that offer a better vantage point from which to study the bas-relief than the view accorded to an observer standing on the ground and looking up, we see that the tower that the muse is holding, is in fact, *not* identical to that of the Université de Montréal. This is curious, as the design of the university had been completed by the time Cormier was designing his house: ground was broken on the construction site in May 1928, even if the construction of the tower itself was not completed for at least another decade. Ultimately, the tower-holding female above the front door of the Cormier residence was inspired by another allegory in feminine form, that, translated into his design for his bas-relief, indexes references that stretch beyond Montréal to evoke Cormier’s deep

⁵⁷ Of course, after the Fall of 1931, when construction came to a grinding halt due to lack of funds and the institution’s financial situation became a hotly contested public concern, the reflection on Cormier and the presumed “megalomaniac” scheme that the university had approved, was not entirely positive.

allegiance to France and to one figure of twentieth-century architecture culture in particular, that served Cormier's ambitions to fashion a professional identity with a certain aura.

In 1927, three years before he purchased the plot of land on which his house was built, Cormier exchanged letters with his colleague Charles Mauméjean, the Parisian glass artist whom Cormier had met in the Atelier Pascal at the École des Beaux-Arts and whose services he had retained for the stained glass windows at his Church of St. John the Baptist in Rhode Island.⁵⁸ In this correspondence, Cormier accepted with pleasure, Mauméjean's offer to prepare a mock-up of a stained glass window for his office on Mansfield Street in downtown Montréal, and provided the dimensions of the space in the waiting room "where all of [his] clients will see it," requesting that the theme adopted be that of "Architecture, treated in a modern fashion."⁵⁹ A reply from Mauméjean describes his proposal for this gift to Cormier and makes reference to a color mock-up of the stained glass window being sent under separate cover. Expressing a willingness to substitute some of the buildings represented in the mock-up with Cormier's works and/or with works in France that are better known, he invited Cormier to provide comments for the design's improvement.⁶⁰ Cormier subsequently prepared a full-size watercolor painting of the stained glass window with his modifications, which he signed "delineator", indicating that he did not take credit for the initial design. **[Figure 3.16]** The composition of the proposed stained glass window is organized around an allegory of Architecture in the form of a rather muscular, seated female figure who is nude save for some fabric draped over her hips and who is holding a

⁵⁸ Correspondence between Charles Mauméjean and Ernest Cormier, August 5, 1927 and October 20, 1927, in folder #3005 Matériaux factures 01-905/A-76, box 001-2011-204 T.

⁵⁹ Letter to Mauméjean from Cormier (which he signs *Architecte et ingénieur-constructeur*), August 5, 1927. Folder #3005 Matériaux factures 01-905/A-76, box 001-2011-204 T.

⁶⁰ Letter to Cormier (addressed as *Architecte-Constructeur*) from Mauméjean, October 20, 1927. Folder #3005 Matériaux factures 01-905/A-76, box 001-2011-204 T. If Cormier did keep the initial scheme for the stained glass window, it has not (yet) been found in the archive.



Figure 3.16 Watercolor study for a stained glass window, “Vitrail pour un architecte,” [undated but c.1927 or later].

Source: Ernest Cormier, watercolorist, based on the mock-up of an original design by Charles Mauméjean, glass artist, AR1503/N, ARCH7711, box Cormier-01-Aquarelles-01M, FEC, CCA.

drawing compass in her left hand and a miniature tower in her right.⁶¹ Above and below her are featured an eclectic array of architectural examples that are derived largely from France, including several monuments in Paris that Cormier would have had direct empirical experience of.⁶² Importantly, the stained glass window can be seen to simultaneously contrast and join

⁶¹ Myra Nan Rosenfeld has noted a similarity between Mauméjean's allegory of Architecture in this composition and the figure of Paris depicted in a painting by Robert Delaunay, which was on display at the 1925 Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels, in the *Appartements de réception d'une ambassade française*, reproduced in Yvonne Brunhamer and Suzanne Tise with Jean-Pierre Khalifa and la Société des artistes décorateurs, *Les artistes décorateurs, 1900-1942* (Paris, Flammarion, 1990), 111. As well, she has pointed out that that this figure allegorizing Architecture is similar to the stained glass work by Mauméjean Frères, entitled, "Luxury", published in Gaston Varenne, "Quelques aspects nouveaux de l'art du vitrail," *Art et décoration* 49 (Jan-June 1926): 170-182. See Myra Nan Rosenfeld, "Ernest Cormier and European Culture: The Influence of French Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Architecture and Theory on Cormier's Designs for the Université de Montréal." *Journal of Canadian Art History* 13, no. 2 - 14, no. 1 (1990-91): 87.

⁶² Rosenfeld has conducted a meticulous study of many of the architectural elements making up the composition, speculating both on how Cormier would have been familiar with them and mentioning publications in which images of these buildings circulated. In the upper section of the composition (from left to right), she identified the Romanesque churches of Notre-Dame at Ibos and Notre-Dame d'Orcival; in the center and placed at the apex of the composition is the church of les Invalides (1676-1691) by Jules Hardouin Mansart, under which are clustered Jacques-François Blondel's Porte Saint-Denis, the École Militaire (1751-1775) by Ange-Jacques Gabriel, the Collège des Quatre Nations (1662-1688) by Louis Le Vau and François d'Orbay, and the church of St-Sulpice by Servandoni (1736), all located in Paris. In the upper right-hand corner of the composition we find the Parisian churches of Montmartre and Saint-Étienne-du-Mont as well as Notre-Dame-de Paris. In addition to the Eiffel Tower, the lower section of the composition features some Italian and American architectural examples, notably the dome of the Mole Antonelliana in Turin (1863) by Alessandro Antonelli, and the Pantheon in Rome, as well as the Shelton Hotel in New York and the Gothic revival skyscraper of the Cathedral of Learning on the University of Pittsburgh campus, both dating from the interwar period, as well as a utopian model of a business district drawn by Hugh Ferriss. See Rosenfeld, "Ernest Cormier and European Culture," *JCAH*: 80-108. See in particular pages 86-89 and their associated endnotes.

Rosenfeld's interest is to identify examples of seventeenth and eighteenth-century French architecture that Cormier may have drawn on as precedents when developing his design for the main pavilion of the Université de Montréal, and therefore, she analyzes his watercolor painting for the stained glass window as providing clues to which monuments in Paris would have likely inspired him. She makes no connection between the tower-holding figure in the 1927 watercolor and the tower-holding figure in the 1930-31 bas-relief on the front façade of Cormier's house.

It must be remembered that at the time of this exchange with Mauméjean concerning the stained glass window, Cormier was working on the design of the new campus of the Université de Montréal. In her discussion of art deco architecture in Montréal, Sandra Cohen-Rose has suggested that the massing of the UdeM resembles the Shelton Hotel in New York (1924), which was designed by Richard Shreve, William F. Lamb and Arthur L. Harmon, the same architects who six years later designed the Empire State Building. See Cohen-Rose, *Northern Deco*, 44. While it is not possible to be certain whether or not the Shelton Hotel appeared in Mauméjean's original design for Cormier's stained glass window, the fact

together two traditions: European architecture (for the most part concentrated in the top half of the composition) and American architecture (found exclusively in the bottom half), within which, many of the European buildings represented are religious, while the American examples are secular. A study of the architectural examples chosen does not indicate that Cormier took up Mauméjean on the offer to include his own works, with the sole possible exception being the hangar-type structure found in the lower portion of the composition underneath the Ionic column capital on which Architecture personified sits. This bears some resemblance to the *Hall de chaudronnerie* [boiler room] in Marseille that Cormier designed in 1917 [Figure 3.17] while working as an engineer in Paris for the engineering firm Considère, Pelnard & Caquot, specialists in reinforced concrete design.⁶³

that he says in his letter that he has included French monuments, encourages speculation that the Shelton Hotel was likely Cormier's addition.

⁶³ This commission for this project was granted to Considère, Pelnard & Caquot by the Société Provençale de constructions navales as part of several installations constituting their factory complex in Marseille. On the blueprints for this project (no. 3714) Cormier is identified as the engineer, while other initials designate the *dessinateur* [draftsman]. See dossier 194-035-0957, Fonds Pelnard-Considère-Caquot, Archives Nationales du monde du travail, Roubaix, France, as well as ARCH259446 and the blueprints in folder 01-ARV-2/B1.5, box 001-2011-244 T, Fonds Cormier, CCA. See box 001-2011-213 T in the Fonds Cormier for blueprints showing the site plan of the various buildings constituting project no. 3714 (including a foundry and workshop) for the Société Provençale de constructions navales.

Projects that Cormier was responsible for as an engineer working for Considère, Pelnard & Caquot during the final years of World War I are: "Poteaux pour transport de force," for the Société des Forces de la Sélune (project no. 3551); "Ateliers de la Ciotat, Passerelle," for the Société Provençale de constructions (project no. 3713); a factory complex for the Société Provençale de constructions navales in Marseille (project no. 3714); "Hangar pour avions à Villacoublay," (project no. 3859); "Hangar à Sens," for the Société Anonyme des Fourneaux & fonderies de Pont-à-Mousson (project no. 3862); and a "Hangar de 2 x 220 x 40 x 40m pour grands ballons dirigeables," Ministère de la Marine (project no. 4093). See boxes 001-2011-213 T, 001-2011-310 T, and 001-2011-244 T in the Fonds Cormier, CCA, as well as dossiers 194-035-0957, 194-035-1297, in the Fonds Pelnard-Considère-Caquot, Archives Nationales du monde du travail, Roubaix, France.

The above list is based on the graphic documents I have found in the archives, but in a form that Cormier filled out in 1940, he states some other projects in reinforced concrete that he worked on as an engineer in the employ of Considère in Paris, for which drawings have not been found in either the Fonds Cormier or the Fonds Pelnard-Considère-Caquot: "hangar aeroplanes & dirigeables; concours hangar d'Orly; usines Soc. Provençale Constr. navales, Marseille; Bâtiment 22 Poudrerie Toulouse; Usine artillerie à Arbel; Allèges de mer etremorqueurs; Passerelle à l'Estague; Réservoir usine à gaz Marseille, etc." See Formule de renseignements for Association des anciens élèves de l'École Polytechnique de Montréal, ARCH258470, folder "727/D-1," box 001-2010-176 T.



Figure 3.17 A photograph of the Boiler room of the Société Provençale de constructions navales in Marseille (1917), designed by Ernest Cormier and photographed c.1918. Source: [Unknown photographer], EC087, box Cormier 01-Photos-03P, FEC, CCA.

Unfortunately, this watercolor painting by Cormier is the only trace of the stained glass window that has come down to us, yet even though it seems to have never been realized in glass, the work is nevertheless highly illuminating.⁶⁴ Not only do Cormier's choices vis-à-vis the buildings showcased, demonstrate his strong allegiance to Europe in general and to French culture in particular, but through this work, he can be understood to be drawing around him architectural icons that would bestow upon him a cosmopolitan aura of a well-traveled architect in the perception of those who would have seen the stained glass window on display in his office, and also intimate his ease of negotiation between different cultural traditions. Most significantly however, is that in addition to the female figure, there is one prominent feature that we know for certain that Cormier retained from the original design, namely, the Perret brothers' tower of the Church of Notre-Dame-du-Raincy that had been completed in 1923, which

⁶⁴ The reasons behind the stained glass window never having been realized (or if realized, apparently no longer extant) are unknown, but judging from the correspondence between Cormier and Charles Mauméjean over the coming years, this does not seem to have adversely affected the cordiality of their relations. In a letter dated October 23, 1929, sent to Cormier at the Hôtel Palais d'Orsay, Charles Mauméjean asks Cormier to inform him of his departure date so that he can organize a dinner at his house at which time he would like to introduce him to a few other guests, as well as discuss the possible gift of a stained glass window for the Université de Montréal, that would be made by Mme la Comtesse Greffulhe (née Princesse de Caraman-Chimay). See folder CLP 17, box Fonds Cormier Library Transfer ARCON1992:0006 AR1992:0002 Boîte (2/6).

Architecture holds in her hand, with demurely nodding attention.⁶⁵ Cormier would have been familiar with this work through his frequent travels to Europe as well as from his journal subscriptions that included the inaugural issue of *L'Architecture vivante*, the first magazine in France to focus on the 'new architecture', which gave substantial space to Perret's work.⁶⁶

[Figure 3.18] The memorial church of Notre Dame du Raincy (1923) was built into the crest of a gently sloping hill in a working-class neighborhood located 9 miles (14 km) northeast of Paris. A prominent landmark in the center of the town, the church was built with very limited financial resources and its modest-looking exterior belies the interior's rich spatial qualities. A building of high technical innovation, through which Perret gave full expression to his structural rationalist philosophy, the building's construction was deployed almost entirely as an assemblage of molded concrete components (including the altar and baptismal font as well as the columns, walls and vaulted roof) that created perforated screens through which light filtered into the space through colored glass to create an uplifting interior despite the roughness of the material. While relying on materials that reflected the industrial character of the building's context, the design of the church reinterpreted traditional ecclesiastic typologies and embodied an economy of means through the modern material of reinforced concrete, while maintaining a palpable connection to established forms. Considered revolutionary, Perret's church gave reinforced concrete aesthetic

⁶⁵ In the October 20, 1927 letter, Mauméjean clearly states, "Entre les mains du personnage symbolisant l'Architecture, nous avons placé la Tour que les Frères Perret ont construite au Raincy," which confirms that this element was part of the original design.

⁶⁶ In the text discussing Notre-Dame du Raincy by Auguste and Gustave Perret, written by Jean Badovici, the church is described as a convincing demonstration of the resources and the advantages of reinforced concrete, and bearing witness to the plasticity of the new laws out of which it was born. See Jean Badovici, "Entretiens sur l'architecture vivante: Notre-Dame du Raincy, par A. et G. Perret," *L'Architecture vivante* 1 (Fall-Winter 1923): 11. His commentary on cladding being an issue of politeness versus reinforced concrete's frank expression in unadorned grey is worth noting: "Pour l'édifice d'une destination élégante, le revêtement devient une question de politesse. On revêt, par exemple, un théâtre de matières précieuses, comme on s'habille pour aller au spectacle ou à une réunion élégante. Dans les autres cas, il faut laisser à l'édifice la couleur grise, l'expression franche qu'implique le style du ciment armé."



Figure 3.18 A photograph of the front façade of the reinforced concrete Church of Notre-Dame-du-Raincy outside of Paris, by Auguste and Gustave Perret (1923). Source: *L'Architecture vivante* 1 (Fall-Winter 1923): Plate 2-3; Ernest Cormier Library, Collection, CCA.

expression. Its spire, that is a freestanding tower measuring 145 feet (43 meters), is the iconic element that makes the building recognizable as a church, and is composed of three distinct strata that are visible on the exterior: a long window panel (which on the interior forms the organ tribune); above which is a belfry; and at the top, slender groups of piers that diminish in number and that terminate in a cross.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Karla Britton, *Auguste Perret* (London: Phaidon, 2001), 25, 76-89; Jean-Louis Cohen, Joseph Abram and Guy Lambert, eds., *Encyclopédie Perret* (Paris: Monum, Éditions du patrimoine; IFA, Institut français d'architecture; Moniteur, 2002), 107-112, 117-118; Maurice Culot, David Peyceré and Gilles Ragot, eds., *Les Frères Perret: L'oeuvre complète: les archives d'Auguste Perret (1874-1954) et Gustave Perret (1876-1952) Architectes-Entrepreneurs* (Paris: Institut français d'architecture; Éditions Norma, 2000), 124-129; Hilary J. Grainger, "Perret, Auguste 1874-1954," in *Encyclopedia of 20th Century Architecture*, ed. R. Stephen Sennott, 3 vols (New York; London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2004), III, 1001.

A comparison of the towers for Notre-Dame-du-Raincy and the Université de Montréal, with the tower depicted in the watercolor of the stained glass and that of the bas-relief at Cormier's residence [Figures 3.19, 3.20 and 3.21], reveals a multilayered story. In Cormier's design for the door's bas-relief, the base of the miniature tower suggests that it is accessible from the ground plane (like at Raincy, but not like at the UdeM), but its rounded crown is closer to the design of the university's tower, than to the pointier and more porous top of the church spire. As well, the tall central stripe in the tower held by the muse that suggests glazing, is only a slightly more accurate description of the UdeM's tower than the stained glass that is found in Perret's tower (as well as almost everywhere in this church). Common to both towers is that they rise from the central point on the front elevation of the edifices they crown, vertically demarcating their respective buildings' principal axes. These similarities and differences reveal that Cormier has the muse above his front door holding a model of a tower that is a hybrid of these two constructed towers, similar enough to certain features of each to be recognizable, but not an entirely faithful reproduction of either.⁶⁸ Like a child who bears resemblances to each parent, but as the synthesis of their inherited characteristics, is a unique individual, the tower of the Cormier residence's bas-relief has two fathers – Cormier and Perret, with Mauméjean serving as a kind of matchmaker and midwife – and is cradled by a voluptuous allegory of Architecture, who is gazing at it with the adoring affection of a mother.

⁶⁸ The question remains as to how many of Cormier's peers in Montréal at that time would have understood the layers of cultural allusion. Therefore, it is possible that whatever aspirations Cormier may have had to surround himself with a Perret-esque aura (and possibly through this, cultivate a cult of personality) in the end, he may have been making a reference that to a large extent, was not perceived by many beyond him and those with whom he may have discussed it.



Figure 3.19 Detail of “Vitrail pour un architecte,” [undated but c.1927 or later].
Source: Ernest Cormier, AR1503/N, ARCH7711, box Cormier-01-Aquarelles-01M, FEC, CCA.

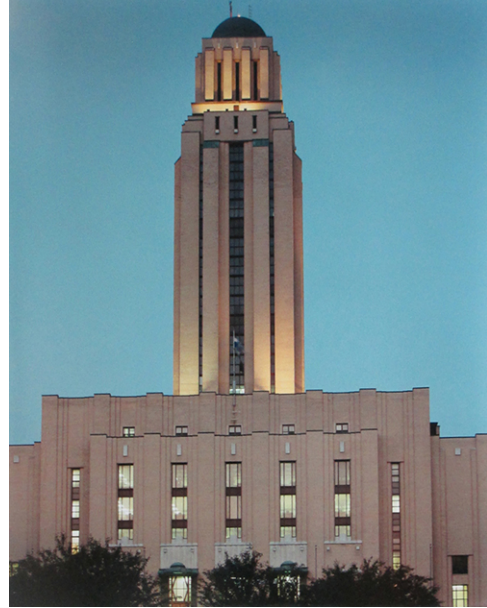


Figure 3.20 Photo of the Université de Montréal’s central wing and tower (1924-43), photographed c.1990.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990.0040, box Archival Storage III-2 Colour, Collection, CCA.



Figure 3.21 Detail of the bas-relief above the main door to the Maison Cormier (1930-31), photographed c.1990.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, detail of PH1990-0139, box Szilasi II 1, Collection, CCA.

Valéry's *Eupalinos* and the meaning of 'construction' for Perret

Cormier's admiration of his contemporary, Auguste Perret (1874-1954) preceded both the design of the stained glass window and the bas-relief for his house.⁶⁹ By the first quarter of the twentieth century, Perret's pre-eminence as a master of reinforced concrete architecture was well-established, and Cormier, having lived mostly in Paris from 1908-1918, could not have avoided becoming familiar with his work and the enormous respect he commanded. Following his return to Canada, Cormier would have been able to keep up with Perret's work through his regular purchases of books and journals and his frequent travels to Europe.⁷⁰

Both Perret and Cormier were heirs to the principles of structural rationalism espoused by an eminent line of French architectural theorists beginning with Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879), continuing through Auguste Choisy (1841-1909) and disseminated at the *École des Beaux-Arts* at the end of the nineteenth century and into the beginning of the twentieth through the teaching and writings of Julien Guadet (1834-1908). Both Perret and Cormier were committed to the continuity of tradition alongside (and in fact, through) the use of modern building materials and techniques, most notably, reinforced concrete, which yielded in each of their

⁶⁹ The brothers Auguste and Gustave Perret (1876-1952) both studied architecture at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in the studio of Julien Gaudet, but left the school before receiving their diplomas, and subsequently established the design firm "Perret frères." While they signed all of their projects together, it is Auguste who is acknowledged as being the more critically outspoken and dominant front man of the team, and therefore, my focus is on his influence on Cormier. A third brother, Claude, was also involved in the office but he handled the business management aspects of the company rather than the design-build dimensions of their work. For information about the Perret brothers' family background and how this influenced the culture of their design-build practice, see Britton, *Auguste Perret*, Introduction.

⁷⁰ Cormier made 34 trips to Europe during his lifetime. Chevalier, "Entretien avec Ernest Cormier," 15, 88. He also stayed abreast of architectural developments through his sizeable library and journal subscriptions. As well, contact sheets of photos taken by Cormier of published images of Perret's buildings suggest that he was showing slides of Perret's work in his architecture lectures to engineering students at the *École Polytechnique*.

oeuvres an innately classicizing interpretation of modern architecture, albeit in different ways.⁷¹ Both privileged the craft dimension of architecture over the avant-garde's gravitation to industrial production, and were deeply concerned for the careful making of things. Both shared an enduring loyalty to the tectonic logic of the structural frame, and both gave priority in their work to that which endures over the fleeting or temporary. Finally, and of most direct significance to Cormier's project of identity construction, both adopted the title of *constructeur* to designate the focus of their professional investment.

The Perret brothers were the architects as well as the general contractors for their projects, and therefore, advertised themselves as *Architectes-Constructeurs* [Architect-Constructors], which made it clear that as 'constructors' they carried their schemes through all stages of development from preliminary design to completed construction.⁷² What is significant about this for my purposes is that they could have called themselves *entrepreneurs* [contractors] but instead, chose to underscore the craft tradition and noble connotations of the art of building encapsulated by the term *constructeur*. Cormier, by contrast, did not serve as the contractor for the erection of his buildings, nor did he innovate and patent structural systems as did other civil engineers.⁷³ However, there is something key that emerges within both architects' and engineers'

⁷¹ The most notable difference between their respective approaches is that in most cases, Cormier chose to conceal the reinforced concrete structure rather than allow it to be both structure and skin. In addition to Cormier's latent design predilections, this tendency can partly be explained by what the cultural context in Montréal during the first decades of the twentieth century would have tolerated, compared to the less conservative urban context of Paris in which Perret was operating.

⁷² The significance of this choice of title was not lost on Le Corbusier, who wrote of the Perret brothers, that "they inaugurated [...] a new function, for which the age was waiting: the Builder [*Constructeur*] – not simply an architect or simply an engineer, but both in a *responsible* whole." Le Corbusier, "Auguste Perret," *Architectural Education* 1 (1983): 10. Although no translator is explicitly mentioned, a note at the end of the article states that the text, previously unpublished in English, was made available by Erno Goldfinger. This article was originally published as Le Corbusier, "Perret," *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui* 7 (Oct 1932): 7-9.

⁷³ It must be noted, however, that given his concern for his buildings to be well made, Cormier did at times insist upon the rigorous testing of materials before making his choice. The selection of the American-made glazed yellow brick for the Université de Montréal for instance, was something he fought

appropriation of the term *constructeur* in the twentieth century, that was explored in the first section of this chapter and resurfaces here in the context of Perret, that grants Cormier entitlement to the title: more important than doing the physical labor, construction results from the execution by others, of the decisions made by an individual who occupies a position of high responsibility. The instructions that ensue are based on expert knowledge and a keen evaluation of what the situation calls for.⁷⁴ In other words, the mental work that is behind the construction of a building is deemed to rank higher in importance and skill than the manual labor that realizes the construction: the true constructor is the one who gives well-informed commands. It is in this way that the architect and the engineer *build*.

Perret, a pre-eminent *constructeur*, was revered as a modern Master, who, through his poetic handling of construction technique, showed that reinforced concrete was a medium that could have plastic expression. Cormier's alignment with Perret, both through the reference to the church at Raincy in his bas-relief and through his choice of professional title, can be seen as a deliberate act of self-construction by association: one that drew toward him both the ennobling connotations bound up with the title of 'constructor' (in this case, adopted by an architect), and one that reinforced the distinguishing aura of Parisian cosmopolitan cachet that Cormier sought to cultivate as part of his aura upon his return to Canada. Cormier's deliberate affiliation with French architecture culture also had to do with his desire to test himself against those whom he

hard for in the face of public pressure to specify Canadian-made products, on the grounds of its technical superiority. See chapter 6 as well as Gilles Maury, "La brique jaune: matériau privilégié d'un certain Mouvement Moderne?" (CEAA Architecture, histoire et patrimoine moderne, École d'architecture de Lille –Régions Nord, 1996-97).

⁷⁴ Franco Borsi, *The Monumental Era: European Architecture and Design 1929-1939* [*L'ordre monumental*], trans. Pamela Marwood (New York: Rizzoli, 1987. 1986), 17.



Figure 3.22 A photograph of the front facade of the Motordrome (the Montée du Zouave Garage) on Sherbrooke Street in Montréal, by Ernest Cormier (1919-20), taken c.1920.
Source: S. J. Hayward Studios, ARCH252070, Cormier SNP 3, EC 089, box 01-Photos-03P, FEC, CCA.



Figure 3.23 A photograph of the interior of the Motordrome (the Montée du Zouave Garage) by Ernest Cormier (1919-20), taken c.1920.
Source: S. J. Hayward Studios, ARCH252071, Cormier SNP 3, EC 090, box 01-Photos-03P, FEC, CCA.



Figure 3.24 Blueprint of the plan of the Motordrome (Garage de la montée du Zouave) and its awkward site, Montréal (1919-1920)
Source: Ernest Cormier, ARCH252067, roll 1513/Y, box 01-SNP3-02 R, FEC, CCA.

considered his peers in Paris.⁷⁵ For example, parallels can be drawn between Perret's garage on the rue Ponthieu (1906; destroyed in 1970)⁷⁶ which Cormier likely saw firsthand, and the Motordrome he designed in Montréal (1919), both early examples of parking garages that rely on concrete frame construction and that negotiate awkward spaces. **[Figures 3.22, 3.23 and 3.24]** Perhaps the project in Cormier's oeuvre that is the most Perret-esque in its expression of the structural frame and innovative use of reinforced concrete, is the seaplane hangar that he designed at Point-aux-Trembles for the Compagnie aérienne franco-canadienne (C.A.C.F.), located at the eastern end of the island of Montréal, a 6-mile tram ride from downtown.

[Figures 3.25 and 3.26] The hangar dates from 1928-30, that is, it was designed after the watercolor of the stained glass, and before his house with its principal bas-relief. Manifesting Cormier's formative exposure to the latest engineering techniques in the employ of Considère, Pelnard & Caquot, this building was heralded as "the first concrete arch hangar built in North America"⁷⁷ and one that earned him the status of a pioneer in Canadian applications of reinforced concrete.⁷⁸ As Susan Bronson has noted, the hangar was much more than a North

⁷⁵ Phyllis Lambert, "Architecture Where Cultures Meet," in *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal*, ed. Isabelle Gournay (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture; The MIT Press, 1990), 25.

⁷⁶ On the Perrets' Garage Ponthieu see Culot, Peyceré and Ragot, eds., *Les Frères Perret*, 92-92; Britton, *Auguste Perret*, 15, 19.

⁷⁷ The Portland Cement Association, "Montréal Has First Concrete Arch Hangar Built in North America," *Contract Record and Engineering Review* 44, no. 5 (January 29, 1930): 94. The seaplane hangar was lauded in other local and American publications. See for example: "Le plus grand hangar d'aviation en béton armé du Canada," *La Revue populaire - art, lettres, sciences, histoire* 22, no. 5 (May 1929): 18; "First Concrete Arch Hangar in North America Built in Canada," *Concrete Highways and Public Improvements Magazine*, vol. XIII, no.6 (Nov-Dec 1929): 130; "L'Aéroport de la Pointe aux Trembles comporte plusieurs caractéristiques architecturales et structurales," *Le Constructeur du Québec* 5, no. 5 (May 1930): 17; The Portland Cement Association, *Air Terminals* (Chicago: Portland Cement Association, 1931), 9. See boxes 001-2011-037 T, 001-2011-038 T and 001-2011-281 T 823/C-1 for documents pertaining to the seaplane hangar.

⁷⁸ A engineering journal published a profile on Cormier that contained the following reference to his design of the hangar: "After returning to Canada in 1919, the name of Ernest Cormier became associated with pioneer Canadian applications of reinforced concrete on a scientific basis. Mr. Cormier built the first

American prototype:

“[I]t was a pure and unadorned statement about the fundamental relationships between architecture and engineering, form and material, history and technology, Europe and Québec.”⁷⁹

Beginning with the dimensional requirements of the program (100' x 100' x 27'), Cormier composed the remaining proportions in light of the structural properties of reinforced concrete. Defining the hangar's thin, curved roof were a series of arch ribs with 100' spans, set at 10' intervals, with nonstructural aerocrete panels providing the infill between the columns. To provide structural and visual stability, as well as an element from which windows and doors on the end walls could be hung, reinforced concrete tie rods, suspended from each arch rib at 20' intervals, were connected to horizontal beams positioned at the base of the curve.⁸⁰ Through its economy of means, frank expression of its tectonic logic and truth to materials, this project of Cormier's is an honest testimony of the deployment of reinforced concrete construction during its time, and particularly, of the values he shared with, and which, to a certain extent were inspired by, Perret.

structure in North America requiring a large free span of reinforced concrete -- an aircraft hangar near Montréal.” “Ernest Cormier, Pioneer in Concrete Designing,” *Engineering and Contract Record* (January 1954): 142, folder “ARCH259631 801/A-23,” box 001-2010-213 T.

⁷⁹ Susan D. Bronson, “Cormier's seaplane hangar at Pointe-Aux-Trembles: more than just a North American prototype,” *ARQ: Architecture/Quebec* 53 (Feb 1990): 17. Post WWI, the allure of aviation was paramount, and in 1927, the C.A.C.F. had decided to introduce a sightseeing and taxi plane service in Quebec. In 1982 the hangar was recognized in the Communauté urbaine de Montréal's Repertory of industrial architecture as “the sole example of industrial construction designed by Cormier,” but nevertheless, was unceremoniously demolished without a permit in April 1987. See Bronson, “Cormier's seaplane hangar,” 18-19.

⁸⁰ Bronson, “Cormier's seaplane hangar,” 18-19.



Figure 3.25 A journal article praising Cormier’s reinforced concrete seaplane hangar at Pointe-aux-Trembles, Québec (1928-30).
 Source: The Portland Cement Association, “Montréal Has First Concrete Arch Hangar Built in North America,” *Contract Record and Engineering Review* 44, no. 5 (January 29, 1930): 94; folder “01-2801 Dossier ARC258674 247/B-5,” box 001-2011-038 T, FEC, CCA.



Figure 3.26 A photograph of the interior of the reinforced concrete seaplane hangar (1928-30), that Cormier designed for the Compagnie Aérienne Franco-Canadienne, (undated).
 Source: [Unknown photographer], ARCH258693, folder 906/A-25, box 001-2011-037 T, FEC, CCA.

Perret is an obvious precedent as a model for Cormier, not only due to his mobilization of the title *constructeur*, and for the various values he espoused that resonated deeply with Cormier’s professional-intellectual commitments, but also in large measure to the impact that the writings of the poet Paul Valéry had on a generation of architects. In particular, Valéry’s *Eupalinos, ou l’architecte*, acquired the mythical status of a foundational text representative of an era

and one that advanced a favorable image of the architect.⁸¹ Taking the form of an extended dialog between the soul of Phaedrus and that of Socrates who converse in the afterlife about the philosophical implications of the creative process and on what they had found beautiful in their embodied states, *Eupalinos* is a poetic articulation of the psychological power of architecture, and of the centrality of construction, in terms of its inseparability from any idea about a building and the poetic quality of the building site, and as a process that is akin to the godliness of the Demiurge's creation of the Universe that neglects no aspect of the design, no matter how small.⁸² As Franco Borsi summarizes,

“The whole dialogue is based on the spiritual quality of building, on the process of building as a process of cognition, transforming natural shapelessness into deliberate form, into architecture.”⁸³

Though not authored by an architectural historian or theorist, *Eupalinos* was very present in the big architectural debates of its time.⁸⁴ First published in 1921, *Eupalinos* was an occasional piece, commissioned by the French architects and decorators, Süe and Mare as a Preface to a large folio edition of their work, much of which was engravings of interior decors that sought to resurrect art *à la française*.⁸⁵ Ironically, Valéry's text has very little if anything to do with the question of

⁸¹ Paul Valéry, *Eupalinos; L'âme et la danse; Dialogue de l'arbre* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008. 1970. 1921).

⁸² See Paul Valéry, *Eupalinos, or, The Architect* [Eupalinos, ou l'Architecte], trans. William McCausland Stewart (London: Oxford University Press, 1932. 1921), 8-9; 11; 22-24; 91-94. Borsi, *The Monumental Era*, 17-20.

The argument advanced by Valéry that in the art of building, nothing is too trivial not to warrant careful attention, was a value shared by Cormier. On a handwritten sheet of quotations kept with his notes for his *Cours*, we the following precept taken directly from *Eupalinos*: “Il n'y a point de détails dans l'exécution.” Cormier, “Cours,” (undated) [sheet 115], folder “ARCH258613 ARV-6/D,” box 001-2010-218 T.

⁸³ Borsi, *The Monumental Era*, 18.

⁸⁴ Bruno Foucart, “Paul Valéry devant l'architecture de son temps, d'*Eupalinos* à Auguste Perret,” in *Paul Valéry et les arts* (Arles: Actes sud, 1995), 46, 48.

⁸⁵ For descriptions of the context of the original publication of *Eupalinos* and the precise formal constraints Valéry had to work within, as well as some of the casual choices made by Valéry in the

French national art, but in its promotion of architecture to the level of philosophy (which elevated architecture from a mechanical art to one of pure intellect), and its reflection of the interwar period's concerns and values, it bestowed on architecture a vital role in the salient project of a "return to order": it ratified the faith that through the redeeming work of the architect, the human condition could be improved.⁸⁶

Valéry's text has been described as "a splendid vindication of the importance of technique."⁸⁷ He thinks through the material of language, using the imposed constraints of the precise word count to generate the form of the text, much like the architect develops built form out of the constraints (and opportunities) inherent to the construction materials. This analogy between the formal creation of the dialog and its thematic content is not accidental. Like the idea of a temple, which Valéry, through the voice of Phaedrus, insists cannot be distinguished from the activity of its construction, the dialog is first and foremost a process of construction, not merely a final, constructed product.⁸⁸ And interestingly, in this text that insists that "[o]f all

construction of this text that acquired the status of gospel, see: Borsi, *The Monumental Era*, 16; Foucart, "Paul Valéry," 38; Geert Bekaert, "Le Réel du discours: Eupalinos ou l'Architecte," *OASE* 75 (July 2008): 230.

⁸⁶ Borsi, *The Monumental Era*, 16, 21; Foucart, "Paul Valéry," 37. Foucart identifies art deco, regionalism and classicizing modernity as three architectural currents that characterize the interwar period, all of which align with the remarks advanced in Valéry's text, albeit somewhat incompatibly. See Foucart, "Paul Valéry," 46. For a Heideggerian reading of Valéry, see Massimo Cacciari, "Eupalinos ou l'architecture," *Critique* 476-477 (Jan-Feb 1987).

⁸⁷ William McCausland Stewart, translator's preface to *Eupalinos, or, the Architect*, by Paul Valéry, vii.

⁸⁸ Recounting to Socrates the explanations provided by the architect Eupalinos concerning the construction of the Temple of Artemis, Phaedrus exclaims, "You cannot believe, Socrates, what a joy it was for my soul to have knowledge of a thing so well regulated. I no longer separate the idea of a temple from that of its edification. When I see one, I see an admirable action, yet more glorious than a victory and more contrary to wretched nature. Destroying and constructing are equal in importance, and we must have souls for the one and the other; but constructing is the dearer to my mind. O most happy Eupalinos!" Valéry, *Eupalinos, or, the Architect*, 9-10. In the original French see page 15.

acts the most complete is that of constructing,”⁸⁹ the reader only accesses the poetic dimensions of the physical concreteness of construction through immaterial layers of physical absence, i.e., from a position far removed from the tangible, realm of worldly affairs. Not only are Socrates and Phaedrus speaking from the disembodied vantage point of souls dwelling in the hereafter, but even the dialogue’s eponymous protagonist, Eupalinos the architect from Megara, is physically absent, his vivid experiences and passionate thoughts about his métier, remembered to us and paraphrased by the soul of Phaedrus. This deep connection and productive tension between the material process of construction and the immaterial processes of cognition and communication underscore the interconnected ideas that *constructing is knowing* and that ‘real’ construction (in the sense of material fabrication) attains higher poetic ideals.

Although taking the classical form of an ancient Greek philosophical dialogue, Valéry’s text is given specific relevance to the French architecture culture of the interwar period through the – not explicitly named, but widely assumed – association of the character of Eupalinos with the figure of Auguste Perret.⁹⁰ Valéry and Perret were acquaintances if not friends and seemed to have inspired each other, their positions vis-à-vis architecture bearing conspicuous parallels.⁹¹ The architecture of Perret came to be surrounded by the aura of Valéry’s thought and Perret’s definitive *Contribution à une théorie de l’architecture*, published in 1952, two years before his death, can be seen as a striking example of Valéry’s literary influence as well as Perret’s response to

⁸⁹ Valéry, *Eupalinos, or, the Architect*, 91. Foucart comments that Valéry thinks about architecture like a belated rationalist trained in the Viollet-le-Duc school of thought. Foucart, “Paul Valéry,” 43.

⁹⁰ Roberto Gargiani, *Auguste Perret, 1874-1954: teoria e opere* (Milano: Electa, 1993), 37, 40; Foucart, “Paul Valéry,” 37; Réjean Legault, Introduction to *Concrete: The Vision of a New Architecture*, by Peter Collins, 2nd edition (Montréal; Ithaca: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004. 1959), liii; Britton, *Auguste Perret*, 33, 156.

⁹¹ For discussions of how *Eupalinos* resulted from a direct conversation between Valéry and Perret, and how the text served as a continual source of inspiration for Perret that confirmed his intuitions, see: Gargiani, *Auguste Perret*, 37, 40, 56; Foucart, “Paul Valéry,” 46-48.

Eupalinos in the restrained, poetic form of aphoristic insights that summarize his understanding of the moral imperatives and technical requirements of architecture.⁹² This small-format book draws together 36 dense sentences that Perret had published elsewhere in fragments and had distilled over the years. Not surprisingly, his *Contribution* places the emphasis on construction, which he asserts constitutes the mother tongue of the architect: the poet who thinks and speaks in construction.⁹³ Opening with the assertion that anything that occupies space belongs to the domain of architecture, Perret credits construction as that which gives expression to architecture, which in turn organizes space.⁹⁴ This is effected through the ability of the architect as the *constructeur* to satisfy temporary and permanent conditions, with an emphasis placed on that which has lasting value.⁹⁵ Perret also devotes several of his aphorisms to the issue of the structural frame that he associates with truth and authenticity, which leads to beauty.⁹⁶

⁹² Foucart, “Paul Valéry,” 47; Britton, *Auguste Perret*, 26.

⁹³ “La construction est la langue maternelle de l’architecte. / L’architecte est un poète qui pense et parle en construction.” Inseparable from construction, Perret also places emphasis on technique and its poetic uses which bring us to architecture: “Technique, permanent hommage rendu à la nature, essentiel aliment de l’imagination, authentique source d’inspiration, prière, de toutes la plus efficace, langue maternelle de tout créateur. / Technique parlée en poète nous conduit en architecture.” Auguste Perret, *Contribution à une théorie de l’architecture* (Paris: Cercle d’Études Architecturales; André Wahl, 1952), unpaginated.

⁹⁴ “Mobile ou immobile, tout ce qui occupe l’espace appartient au domaine de l’architecture;” “L’Architecture est l’art d’organiser l’espace. C’est par la construction qu’il s’exprime.” Perret, *Contribution*, unpaginated.

On a handwritten sheet of aphorisms kept with Cormier’s notes for his architecture course to engineers, we find the quotation by Perret, “L’architecture est l’art d’organiser l’espace.” Cormier, “Cours,” (undated) [sheet 115], folder “ARCH258613 ARV-6/D, box 001-2010-218 T.

⁹⁵ This is a value that Cormier shared. In the section of his course notes devoted to contemporary architecture, he writes: “Seule une construction rationnelle est durable et ne subit pas les caprices de la mode parce qu’elle seule satisfait à la fois l’œil et la raison et que le goût et la logique sont les seuls guides vraiment sûrs dans tous les arts, en général, l’architecture en particulier.” Cormier, “Cours,” (undated) [sheet 72], folder ARCH258613 ARV-6/D, box 001-2010-218 T.

⁹⁶ Similarly here, Cormier repeats the commonplace equation of truth with beauty, but like Perret (and other rationalists) ties it to structure. He writes, “La beauté est incompatible avec le mensonge en architecture, avec la structure feinte qui cache l’idée vraie au lieu de l’exprimer, qui supprime l’expression véritable.” Cormier, “Cours,” (undated) [sheet 8], folder ARCH258613 ARV-6/D, box 001-2010-218 T.

Two years after the publication of *Eupalinos*, the opening pages of the inaugural issue of the journal *L'Architecture vivante* (that showcased Perret's Church of Notre-Dame du Raincy) featured a quotation from *Eupalinos*, followed by a definition of *architecture vivante* [living architecture] by Perret. Quoting the now famous Valéryian triad of the distinction between buildings that are mute, those that speak, and most rare of all, those that sing, Phaedrus concludes that it is neither the buildings' function nor their form that animates them or reduces them to silence, but rather that this owes to talent of their *constructeur*, or to the favor of the Muses.⁹⁷ Directly following this is Perret's affirmation that living architecture is that which faithfully expresses its time, and that examples of these are found in all domains of construction. He explains that the works chosen [for this journal issue, notably his work among others], are strictly subordinated to their use, and realized by the judicious use of the material, attaining beauty through the arrangement and the harmonious proportions of the necessary elements from which they are composed.⁹⁸ In other words, it is through its artful construction that architecture sings.

The parallel made in *Eupalinos* between architecture and music, and their elevation to the level of the ultimate paradigms for the "work of the spirit," is based on an understanding that architecture and music are unlike other arts in the way they have to power to transport us.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Valéry, *Eupalinos, or, the Architect*, 22-23; Valéry, "Eupalinos, ou l'Architecte," 29-30.

⁹⁸ Auguste Perret, "Page liminaire," *L'Architecture vivante* 1 (Fall-Winter 1923): 5. The original text reads : "L'Architecture vivante est celle qui exprime fidèlement son époque. On en cherchera des exemples dans tous les domaines de la construction. On choisira les œuvres qui strictement subordonnées à leur usage réalisées par l'emploi judicieux de la matière, atteindront à la beauté par les dispositions et les proportions harmonieuses des éléments nécessaires qui les composent." Cormier owned a copy of this journal issue.

⁹⁹ Socrates says: "But Music and Architecture make us think of something quite other than themselves; they are in the midst of this world like the monuments of another world; or, if you will, like the examples, disseminated here and there, of a structure and duration that are not those of beings but those of forms and of laws. They seem dedicated to reminding us directly – one, of the formation of the universe, the other, of its order and stability; they invoke the constructions of the mind, and its freedom, which is in search of this order and reconstitutes it in a thousand ways; the therefore neglect the particular appearances with which the world and the mind are ordinarily occupied: plants, beasts and people... I

Valéry has the soul of Socrates explaining that these are the two arts that immerse the individual inside the work, enveloping us and relating to us without intermediaries. Thus prior to discussing the relationship between architecture and music as rooted in number, it is the profound relationship that humans have to both architecture and music that is theorized initially: one that stems from the immediacy of our embodied experience of the work, which is immersive and transportative, entailing a radical ‘insiderness’ (like fish in water) that painting and sculpture do not evoke due to their discrete scales.¹⁰⁰ Valéry’s extended comparison of architecture and music had a significant influence on the architects of the period, among them, Ernest Cormier. On several sheets in the notes for the course he taught on architecture for engineers, Cormier drew analogies between the work of the architect and that of the musician, between the senses of sight and hearing, and between the judgment of space and the measure of time, all governed by a sense of proportion.¹⁰¹

At the age of 89, in what was the last interview that Cormier gave, his interlocutor narrated that the first time he had had the pleasure of meeting Cormier, he had questioned him

have even observed sometimes, when listening to music, with an attention equal to its complexity, that I was as it were no longer perceiving the sounds of the instruments as sensations of the ear. The symphony itself made me forget the sense of hearing. It transformed itself so promptly, so exactly, into animated truths and universal adventures, or even into abstract combinations, that I no longer was conscious of the sensible intermediary, sound.” Valéry, *Eupalinos, or, the Architect*, 40, or in the original, Valéry, “Eupalinos, ou l’Architecte,” 46-47; Bekaert, “Le Réel du discours,” 233, 237.

¹⁰⁰ Valéry, *Eupalinos, or, the Architect*, 34-40; Valéry, “Eupalinos, ou l’Architecte,” 41-44.

¹⁰¹ Under the section on general concepts, Cormier writes: “L’architecture et la musique sont deux arts similaires: l’architecte s’adjudge l’espace qui est une perception de la vue, le musicien mesure le temps perçu par l’ouïe” and “Tous les deux, l’architecte et le musicien, usent de la proportion, de la consonance, du contraste, du rythme, de la cadence et peuvent nous causer des impressions qui atteignent au sublime et qui semblent tout à fait contraires aux moyens employés. / ‘Architecture is frozen music’.” Within his discussion of proportions, Cormier explains: “La vue semble un sens analogue à l’ouïe, lequel sens est choqué par une dissonance; un contrepointiste m’expliquera pourquoi mon oreille doit être choquée. Une raison analogue semble exister pour ce qui concerne les yeux.” He also records a quotation from Valéry without naming the source: “Les temple antiques chantent.” Cormier, “Cours,” (undated) [sheets 5, 6, 79 and 101], folder ARCH258613 ARV-6/D, box 001-2010-218 T.

on *Eupalinos, ou l'architecte*, and that turning around and brandished his visibly well-thumbed annotated copy, Cormier had stated that this book has done him a lot of good, having taught him a lot and given him much to reflect upon.¹⁰² After the preliminary exchanges during the subsequent interview, Willie Chevalier (who claims to had never understood anything in Valéry's book) returned to the subject of *Eupalinos*, and Cormier explained that in the hereafter, Phaedrus and Socrates meet and discuss what they had considered beautiful during their life on earth. He then went on contextualize the book by explaining Valéry's study of mathematics, summarizing that Valéry "rediscover[ed] the taste for artistic creation while seeking to establish the creative unity of the mind."¹⁰³

Valéry's (and Perret's) consideration of architecture as "the most complete of the arts," and of construction as the most complete of all acts,¹⁰⁴ resonated deeply with Cormier and contributed to his sense of purpose and his self-fashioning as an *Architecte et ingénieur-constructeur*. When Phaedrus quotes the architect Eupalinos as having said, "By dint of constructing [...] I truly believe that I have constructed myself,"¹⁰⁵ Valéry offers the insight that only through making does one ultimately know oneself. Revealingly, for its appropriateness to Cormier's self-

¹⁰² Willie Chevalier, "Entretien avec Ernest Cormier [An Interview with Ernest Cormier]." *Vie des Arts (Canada)* 20, no. 81 (Winter 1975-76): 15. No details about the date of this first meeting are provided in the article.

Unfortunately, that dog-eared copy of the book containing Cormier's annotations did not come to the CCA as part of Cormier's library. In the inventory conducted by the CCA librarians who oversaw the acquisition of much of Cormier's personal and professional library (in which they noted on which shelves in which rooms the books were located), only Valéry's *Pièces sur l'art*, 8th edition (1934) is mentioned. See Cormier library inventory boxes ID90-A392, CORM 25, 1; ID90-A392, CORM 25, 2 and 6; ID90-A392, CORM 25, 3.

¹⁰³ Chevalier, "Entretien avec Ernest Cormier," 17, 88. Among the issues covered in this interview, Chevalier and Cormier discuss Cormier's multiple artistic talents, his education, travels and library, and a few of his key projects, therefore, the discussion of *Eupalinos* is not the focus of their exchange and does not receive sustained commentary.

¹⁰⁴ Valéry, *Eupalinos, or, the Architect*, 73, 91; Valéry, *Eupalinos, ou l'Architect*, 82, 100.

¹⁰⁵ Valéry, *Eupalinos, or, the Architect*, 21; Valéry, *Eupalinos, ou l'Architect*, 28.

construction through construction, a parallel between what we make and what we are is elaborated in *Eupalinos* through the example of the design of a house. Eupalinos is quoted as saying:

“[...] Oh Phaedrus, when I design a dwelling (whether it be for the gods, or for a man), and when I lovingly seek its form, studying to create an object that shall delight the view, that shall hold converse with the mind, that shall accord with reason and the numerous proprieties... I confess, how strange soever [*sic*] it may appear to you, *that it seems to me my body is playing its part in the game....*”¹⁰⁶

Inscribing into the public face of his private residence, an ornamental sculpture that indexed a reference to his own work, to that of Perret, to Valéry and French culture at large, and most significantly and unifying all of the above, to the very loaded act of constructing, Cormier folds into his construction of his persona through the design of his home, a vast array of associations that support and reinforce his identity as an Architect and Engineer-Constructor. Thus, when A. J. Sarrazin conducted a radio broadcast on Cormier in 1949, and he opened with, “The life of Ernest Cormier is a construction as logical, [and] as balanced as the monuments he erected on Canadian soil,”¹⁰⁷ he likely did not know, just how much truth his comment contained.

¹⁰⁶ Valéry, *Eupalinos, or, the Architect*, 30. The original reads: “O Phèdre, quand je compose une demeure, (qu’elle soit pour les dieux, qu’elle soit pour un homme), et quand je cherche cette forme avec amour, m’étudiant à créer un objet qui réjouisse le regard, qui s’entretienne avec l’esprit, qui s’accorde avec la raison et les nombreuses convenances, ... je te dirai cette chose étrange *qu’il me semble que mon corps est de la partie...*” Paul Valéry, “Eupalinos, ou l’Architecte,” 36-37.

¹⁰⁷ Transcript of the “Causerie de monsieur A. J. Sarrazin prononcée à Radio-Canada, le 27 mai 1949,” ARCH259631, folder 801/A-23, box 001-2010-213 T. Given in French, the opening sentence of Sarrazin’s broadcast was, “La vie d’Ernest Cormier est une construction aussi logique, aussi équilibrée que les monuments qu’il a édifiés sur la terre canadienne.”

“Composition has not just to implement the elements called for by the program; there are also those elements that connect and provide access, the ones we can sum up with a single general word: *circulations*.

A program does not actually recommend vestibules, passages, stairways, and such. They are needed nevertheless, and the combination of circulations is often the very soul of composition.”

– Julien Guadet, *Éléments et théorie de l'architecture* (1902-04)¹

Siting the Maison Cormier

In the summer of 1930, Ernest Cormier purchased a vacant lot on the southern slope of Mount Royal overlooking downtown Montreal and the St. Lawrence River beyond.² The sloped piece of land fronting Pine Avenue West was located in the upscale neighborhood that came to be referred to as the Golden Square Mile,³ and sat immediately adjacent to the house of the

¹ Julien Guadet, *Éléments et théorie de l'architecture: cours professé à l'École nationale et spéciale des Beaux-Arts*, 4 vols (Paris: Librairie de la construction moderne, 1902-04): II, Book VI, 15. Ernest Cormier Library, Collection, CCA. The English translation of this passage is taken from Jacques Lucan, *Composition, Non-Composition: Architecture and Theory in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, trans. Theo Hakola (Lausanne, Switzerland; Abingdon, Oxford: EPFL Press; Routledge, 2012. 2009), 167.

² Letter to Ernest Cormier from A. E. Abbott Real Estate and Insurance on behalf of the Executors of the Estate of the late George Hague dated July 31, 1930, and confirming acceptance of Cormier's offer of \$16,000.00 for the empty lot. The sale was finalized on September 19, 1930. ARCH258992, folder “01-905/A-39,” box 001-2011-205 T, and folder 01-905/A-2, box 01-2011-206 T.

³ The neologism ‘Golden Square Mile’ was not an official neighborhood or municipality, but rather an affluent area of the city that boasted opulent, suburban homes and upper class institutions set in luxuriant greenery. As of the second half of the nineteenth century, the majority of the neighborhood's inhabitants were of British origin and controlled much of Canada's wealth. The area no longer exists as such, but it occupied a significant portion of the southern slope of Mount Royal and what is now Montreal's central business district. See François Rémillard and Brian Merrett, *Mansions of the Golden Square Mile: Montreal, 1850-1930* [*Demeures bourgeoises de Montréal: Le Mille carré doré, 1850-1930*], trans. Joshua Wolfe (Montreal: Meridian, 1987. 1986). As well, for a study of the urban history of the Golden Square Mile and its social implications during the second half of the nineteenth century, when it developed into a predominantly anglophone, Protestant milieu accompanying the rise of capitalist institutions, see Roderick Kenneth MacLeod, “Salubrious Settings and Fortunate Families: The Making of Montreal's Golden Square Mile, 1840-1895” (Ph.D., McGill University, 1997).

merchant Thomas J. Gillespie, designed by Barott and Blackader architects in 1925-26.⁴ [Figure 4.1] The siting of the house not only afforded Cormier a panoramic view through the treetops of the city below, but also placed him within close proximity to the mansions of many of Montreal's then business and social elite.⁵ [Figures 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4] At the turn of the twentieth century, approximately three quarters of Canada's millionaires lived in the Golden Square Mile.⁶ Given that Mount Royal was considered the center of the city, both geographically and symbolically, height determined gradations of prestige, and as a result, the mountain's coveted southern slope was a magnet for the affluent who sought out the quiet, fresh air and magnificent views of the higher altitudes, at a comfortable remove from the noise of downtown, the pollution of the city's industrial zones and the working poor.⁷

⁴ Images of the interior of the Gillespie residence can be found in H. L. Fetherstonaugh, "Recent Domestic Architecture in the Province of Quebec," *Journal / Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* 5, no. 5 (May 1928): 171-83.

Figure 4.1 shows a small portion of the adjacent vacant lot at 1418 Pine Avenue and the view of the city below. In the distance and visible in this photo is the Beaver Hall Building (1928-29) also designed by Barott and Blackader. Designed as the headquarters of the Bell Telephone Company of Canada, this twenty-story tower was one of the first skyscrapers to be built in the country. See "The Beaver Hall Building, Montreal," in *JRAIC* 6, no. 10 (Oct 1929): 353; James Bloomfield, "The Beaver Hall Building, Montreal," *Construction* 22 (Nov 1929): 338-346; and Susan W. Wagg, *Ernest Isbell Barott, Architect: une Introduction = Ernest Isbell Barott, Architect: An Introduction*, trans. André Bernier (Montréal: Centre canadien d'architecture, 1985), 15.

⁵ Rémillard and Merrett, *Mansions of the Golden Square Mile*, provides descriptions of the mansions in proximity to the Cormier residence that are keyed to the map shown in Figure 4.4. See also *Répertoire d'architecture traditionnelle sur le territoire de la communauté urbaine de Montréal*, vol. 10 'Architecture domestique I: les résidences' (Montréal: Communauté urbaine de Montréal, Service de la planification du territoire, 1987).

The archive contains some traces that Cormier enjoyed cordial social relations with some of the neighbors. For instance, an undated note from Harel [?] Colville at 1371 Pine Avenue West, states: "If you are free / For a sort of spree / At eight o'clock, April the seventh; / There'll be some food / Gingerale and Vermouth / And possibly conversation. / Maybe they'll play; maybe they'll sing; / We really can't tell at all; / But a word in reply, / On which to rely, / Would considerably help the cook." See folder 01-905/A-12, box 01-2011-206 T.

⁶ Rémillard and Merrett, *Mansions of the Golden Square Mile*, 21.

⁷ Peter Jacobs, "La Montagne magique," *La Montagne en question*, vol 1 (Montréal: Groupe d'intervention urbaine de Montréal), 11; Walter van Nus, "A Community of Communities: Suburbs in the development



Figure 4.1 Photograph of the Residence for T. Gillespie, Esq., located at 1420 Pine Avenue West in Montreal, designed by architects Barott and Blackader in 1925-26, photographed c1926-1930.
Source: P.7815, folder “03 #142 Gillespie Residence,” box 03-PH-03, Fonds Ernest Isbell Barott, CCA.



Figure 4.2 Photograph (glass lantern slide) of the view from Mount Royal, 1931.
Source: [Unknown photographer], MP-0000.25.203 © McCord Museum.



Figure 4.3 Photograph of the view of downtown Montreal from the top of slope on Cormier’s property, (undated).
Source: Ernest Cormier, nitr.S19-69(02), box 01 – Contacts – S19-1 @ 19-83 2/3, FEC, CCA.

of ‘Greater Montreal,’” in *Montreal Metropolis, 1880-1930*, eds. Isabelle Gournay and France Vanlaethem (Montreal; Toronto: Canadian Centre for Architecture; Stoddart Publishing, 1998), 62.



Figure 4.4 Map of houses in Montreal’s affluent Golden Square Mile neighborhood, most of them sited on the southern slope of Mount Royal. The Cormier residence is indicated in red.

Source: François Rémillard and Brian Merrett, *Mansions of the Golden Square Mile: Montreal 1850-1930*, trans. Joshua Wolfe (Montreal: Meridian Press, 1987, 1986), 66.

The property line of Cormier’s site falls directly along the northwest exterior wall of the Gillespie residence, which meant that one of the preliminary constraints governing Cormier’s decisions about the massing and placement of his semi-detached house, was to make concessions to the windows and doors on that elevation of the neighbor’s house. [Figures 4.5] To date, only one process sketch of the design of the overall volume of the house has been found in the archive, which gives the impression that Cormier’s residence grew out of the mountain slope almost fully mature and polished from birth.⁸ [Figure 4.6] Although this sketch differs in some aspects from the final design, it nevertheless shows the persistence of two, unequal volumes anchored to the slope, with doors on the front and side elevations, and a tall window occupying a central position on the front facade. Given the fact that Cormier placed this

⁸ Ernest Cormier, sketch in red ink of the preliminary massing of the Cormier residence, dated 1930, ARCH264039, box 001-2011-205 T. The Fonds Cormier contains working drawings and finished plans, sections and elevations of the house, but a disappointingly surprising paucity of process sketches indicating the phases of its design development. (Photographs of the site and/or the construction process are also lacking). This suggests the possibility that Cormier may not have valued the messy proto-stages of the design process enough to retain early traces of the project’s conception and development, or that these sketches were accidentally destroyed or lost. The possible explanation that I prefer, however, is that other sketches do exist but they were misclassified and are lurking somewhere unlikely, awaiting discovery in the archive.



Figure 4.5 Photograph of the front elevations of 1418 and 1420 Pine Avenue West in Montreal, (undated). Source: Ernest Cormier, P.6721, box 01-EC_P.6669 à 6938, FEC, CCA.

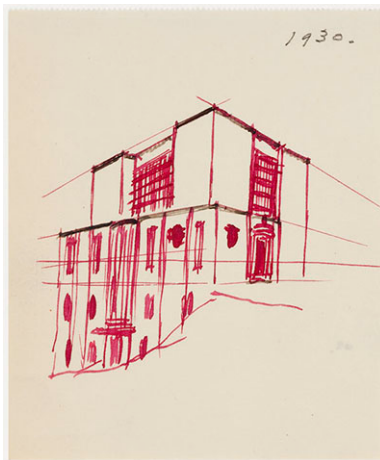


Figure 4.6 Sketch of the overall massing of the Cormier Residence on its sloped site, dated 1930 in Cormier's hand. Source: Ernest Cormier, ARCH264039, box 001-2011-205 T, FEC. CCA.

sketch with the documents concerning the purchase of the site as opposed to with the subsequent design documents pertaining to the house, it is possible that this sketch was drawn in the spring or summer of 1930, prior to his confirmed purchase of the lot. In addition to conveying Cormier's early intuition about how to occupy the site, this sketch is also revealing for what it owes to his formative experience, documenting and graphically reconstructing the Villa Madama on the Monte Mario, outside of Rome, which he undertook in 1915-16 as his final project for his scholarship from the Royal Institute of British Architects. Concerning this time he spent studying ancient and Renaissance architecture in Rome early in his career, Cormier would later remark that the experience had such a profound influence on his thinking that traces

of it can be found in all of his subsequent work.⁹ On the Monte Mario, he had sustained exposure to the limitations and possibilities of sloped sites and to the association of this kind of site condition with the grandeur of the villa typology. Whereas the Villa Madama had been in a ruinous state at the time, necessitating imaginative reconstruction based on substantial textual and empirical research, for the villa that Cormier designed for himself on Mount Royal, he had a virgin site on which to build.

Smoke screens and other architectural devices

In 1932, one year after Cormier moved into his new residence at 1418 Pine Avenue West, the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada awarded the house a Gold Medal. An article in the July 1932 issue of the Institute's journal featured a description of the house written in English by Cormier, and was illustrated with photographs he had commissioned from Hayward Studios, the professional photographers he frequently employed to document his work.¹⁰

[Figure 4.7] A close reading of Cormier's short text is instructive:

“The residence of Mr. Ernest Cormier is unusual in many ways. It is built on the slope of a hill with the front of the house facing Pine Avenue, and the garage at the rear of the property facing Redpath Street. The lot is one hundred and sixty feet deep, with a difference in levels between the two streets of fifty feet.

The main entrance to the house is on the higher level, resulting in the main living rooms being located on the top floor. One of the striking features of the house is the studio on this floor, it is eighteen feet wide, twenty-eight feet long and twenty-five feet high with light on the north, east and west sides. Leading

⁹ Letter from Cormier to Jean Marion, journalist of *Montréal-Matin* dated June 10, 1947, in folder “Nations Unies, Extraits de journaux E.C.,” box Fonds Cormier Library Transfer ARCON1992:0006 AR1992:0002 Boîte (2/6).

¹⁰ [Ernest Cormier], “Residence of Ernest Cormier, Esq., Montreal, P.Q.,” *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* 9, no.7 (July 1932): 158-164. Following the publication of the house in the July 1932 issue of the *JRAIC*, a call for submissions for the RAIC medal was issued in the journal's September 1932 issue. Representations of the winning projects were displayed at the Art Association exhibition in Toronto in November and the list of winners and honorable mentions for the categories ‘public buildings,’ ‘ecclesiastical,’ ‘educational,’ and ‘residential’ were published in the November 1932 issue of *JRAIC*. The RAIC Gold Medal that Cormier received is found in ARCH6414, box Cormier 01-objets-01 S.

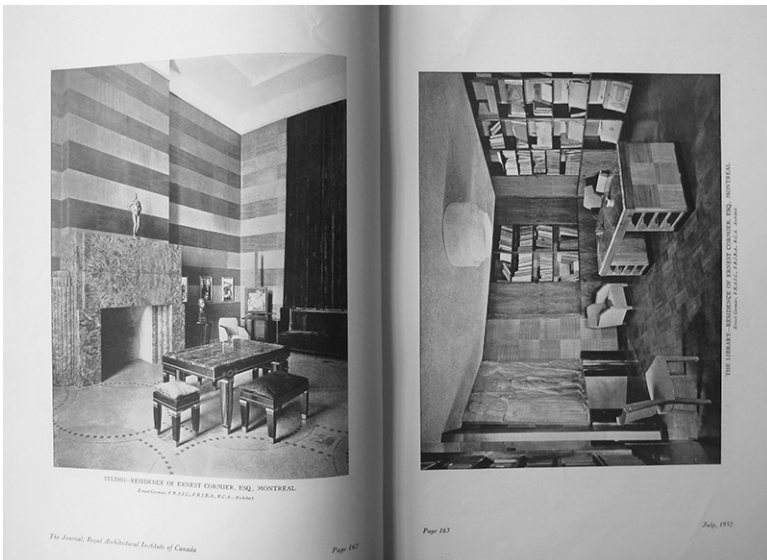
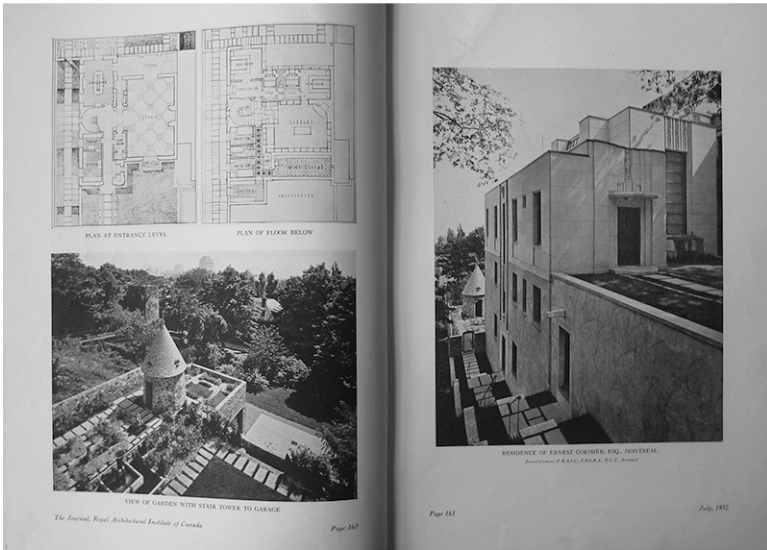
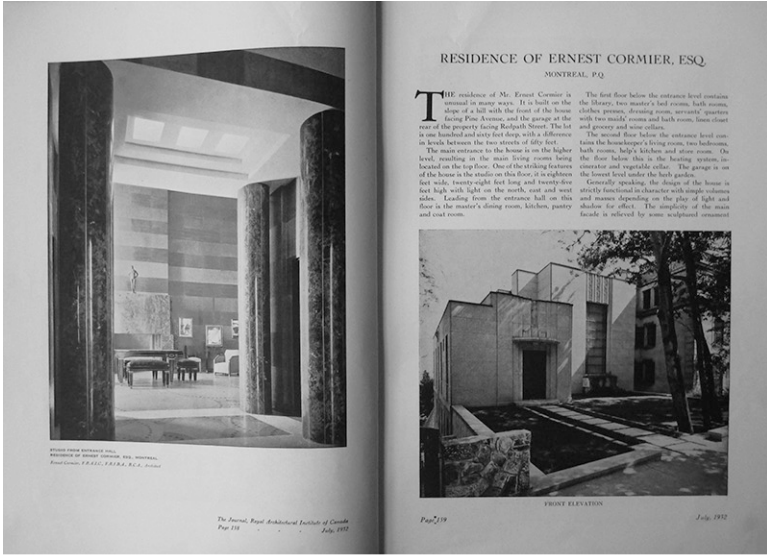


Figure 4.7 The pages of the *JRAIC* article showcasing Cormier's residence, published in 1932. Pages 158-159 show the 'studio' (i.e., the formal living room) seen through the room's monumental threshold, and an oblique view of the front facade giving onto Pine Avenue. Pages 160-161 show rendered plans of the house's top and second from top levels; a photograph of the roof garden and turret containing the stairs leading to the garage below, and an oblique view of the front and side facades of the house showing the stepped pathway descending from Pine Avenue to the garden. Pages 162-163 show the 'studio' and his library. Source: [Ernest Cormier], "Residence of Ernest Cormier, Esq., Montreal, P.Q.," *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* 9, no.7 (July 1932): 158-164.

from the entrance hall on this floor is the master's dining room, kitchen, pantry and coat room.

The first floor below the entrance level contains the library, two master's bed rooms, bath rooms, clothes presses, dressing room, servants' quarters with two maids' rooms and bath room, linen closet and grocery and wine cellars.

The second floor below the entrance level contains the housekeeper's living room, two bedrooms, bath rooms, help's kitchen and store room. On the floor below this is the heating system, incinerator and vegetable cellar. The garage is on the lowest level under the herb garden.

Generally speaking, the design of the house is strictly functional in character with simple volumes and masses depending on the play of light and shadow for effect. The simplicity of the main facade is relieved by some sculptured ornament over the front entrance and on the lintel of the studio window.

The house is built of reinforced concrete of fireproof construction throughout. The exterior walls above the main entrance level are of artificial granite. The walls below this level are of stucco. The walls of the garden, garage and stair tower leading to the garage are of stone extracted from the site when excavating for the foundations.

The floors are of marble, terrazzo or tile, except for the library, dining room and bed rooms which are of walnut, oak parquet flooring laid directly on the concrete. Generally the walls are finished with Japanese wood of various designs and colours, except the walls of the dining room which are veneered with French Walnut and the master's bathrooms which are finished in Brignolle Marble."¹¹

What we notice in this seemingly straightforward, if somewhat flat description of the spaces found on each of the house's five levels, is that the primary determinant of the house's organization was the 55-foot (16.76m) difference in elevation between the point of access at the top of the slope on Pine Avenue and the bottom (rear) of the site, on Redpath Street.¹² This resulted in an unusual inversion of the typical programmatic distribution of domestic spaces. Rather than the communal living spaces being located on the main floor and sleeping quarters placed above, much of the organization of the Cormier residence is upside down. Here one descends to the private quarters as well as to the roof garden, which lies on a lower level than all

¹¹ [Cormier], "Residence of Ernest Cormier, Esq.," 159; 164.

¹² Although Cormier does not mention the specific "hill" on which his house is located, anyone familiar with Montreal would know that the only location in the city in which one would find such a difference in height within one residentially zoned plot of land would be on the coveted upper slopes of Mount Royal.

of the living spaces. Calling attention to the most striking feature of the house, Cormier leaves it unclear as to whether the spacious, prominently located ‘studio’ [*atelier*] is in fact a workshop for creative production, or some sort of living room. The published photos show a pristine and luxurious space rather than a messy artist’s studio or drafting room, yet the name he assigns to this showpiece room of the house, fashionable at the time in Parisian circles, strongly suggests activities of making, even if creative work is only displayed there.¹³

We also note that on the second and third floors from the top, Cormier has provided abundant accommodation for live-in servants in the form of bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchens and living room spaces. This not only retains a vestige of the social infrastructure that characterized the bourgeois home up to the early twentieth century, but the repetition of functions on the top three floors of his house in terms of the number of service spaces and servants’ quarters seems curiously excessive or at best redundant, particularly since he was a childless widower who presumably lived on his own. That no plan or photograph of the third floor from the top is provided with the description makes it challenging to understand how all of these spaces are used and why many of them are deemed necessary.

It is also revealing to note the gap between what the images communicate about the house and Cormier’s description of it. While the photos reveal his investment in luxurious materials with decorative textures and the careful treatment of surfaces, the only ornament

¹³ Robert Little notes that c.1914 the materials typically used to decorate the more formal, sumptuous Parisian salon or *chambre d’apparat* were replaced by those more appropriate to a *studio-fumoir* in the homes of bachelors with artistic inclinations. See Robert Little, “1418, Avenue des Pins, La Maison Ernest Cormier and the European Context,” *Journal of Canadian Art History* 13, no. 2 - 14, no. 1 (1990-91): 128.

In addition to the furniture pieces designed by Cormier, a number of his watercolors are visible in the photographs of the studio published in the *JRAIC*. Two sculptures by Cormier’s friend Henri Hébert (1884-1950) are visible in Figure 4.7, namely: the bronze bust of Gio-Casimir Papineau-Couture (1929), commissioned by Cormier on January 15, 1927; and placed on the mantel, the sculpture “Danseuse d’Oslo.” For more information about Henri Hébert’s oeuvre including his commissions for a number of Cormier’s buildings, see Janet Brooke, *Henri Hébert, 1884-1950: un sculpteur moderne* (Québec: Musée du Québec, 2000), and “Henri Hébert,” Artist’s File, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts Archives.

Cormier calls attention to is that which is found on the front elevation, and yet, he does so in a way that promptly dismisses this “sculptured ornament” as ostensibly having no significance beyond livening up an otherwise plain façade. Moreover, Cormier’s assertion that the design is “strictly functional” does not speak in a clear way to his obvious artistic investment in the house’s interior. What does come through in his description is that he took pride in his choice of construction methods and (largely posh) materials, and therefore, emphasized *how and with what the house was made* over its formal properties, spatial qualities, and the ways in which those spaces were used.¹⁴ All of these points of ambiguity and/or inconsistency point to the fact that what is most interesting and indeed, most relevant, to an analysis of the house is what Cormier’s description deliberately leaves out. As the project in Cormier’s oeuvre through which he most fully actualizes his identity as a multifaceted constructor, this chapter conducts a close reading of his house and its participation in Cormier’s careful construction of self. Reading the lived experience that the house accommodated alongside what was considered socially acceptable for the culture of 1930s Quebec, this analysis is attentive to what the architecture communicates about the author’s unarticulated intentions as well as what the work may represent that its author never intended.

Décor and decorum

From its front elevation the house appears to be an one-story edifice comprised of two asymmetrically balanced masses that are set back from the sidewalk: a tall, wider stone block that is slightly recessed interlocks with a shorter, narrower block that projects slightly forward.

¹⁴ Cormier’s assertion that the house is constructed of reinforced concrete is not entirely accurate as numerous steel beams constitute a good portion of the structure, and where reinforced concrete is used, it is clad and therefore not visible, meaning that the house is not at all an example of the expressive potential of reinforced concrete. For documents pertaining to the structural steel components of the house see: folder *Commande et achats de matériaux 01-905/A-4*, box 001-2011-206 T, and the drawings in box 01-3005-01M.

[Figure 4.8] It is only when looking to the side, at the private pathway leading from the sidewalk down to the rooftop garden below, that it becomes evident that the house is a large, multistory building projecting far out from the slope of the mountain. **[Figure 4.9]** The Cormier residence distinguishes itself from the neighboring house's white stucco façade and stone quoined corners, primarily through its massing and the mostly grey tone of its material palette. Distinct from the more traditional houses in the neighborhood, its modern appearance is nevertheless inconspicuous enough by 1930s standards, to have not caused offence.¹⁵

Passing under the canopy of the mostly smooth, pale grey masonry front façade of the Cormier residence and through its oak door, one enters an intimately scaled vestibule that is saturated with the visually dense texture of its gleaming grey and burgundy-veined marble walls. **[Figure 4.10]** Beneath the vestibule's only window and centered within stepped layers of wall, a bench made of the same patterned marble in the shape of part of an octagon, echoes the truncated octagon shape of the reinforced concrete door canopy.¹⁶ With three of the suggested eight sides of the canopy not visible – which gives the impression that they are embedded in the layered depth of the front façade to better anchor the cantilevered slab – this marble bench positioned just inside the front door, lends itself to being interpreted as a kind of transmutation into a luxurious, monolithic material, of that concealed slice of the concrete canopy, both elements straddling the entrance threshold, and both playing roles that are as functional as they are decorative. The slab on the house's exterior is a part of an octagonal surface on which the sculpted female figure above the front door stands, while immediately on the inside, the

¹⁵ Little, "1418, Avenue des Pins," 110. A contemporary of Cormier's would remark, "Cette maison hospitalière jette des lignes sobres et modernes dans cette rue où certains déplorent de pseudo-styles espagnol, renaissance et baroque [*sic*]." Arthur Prévost, "La Personnalité de la semaine," *Le Canada* 50ième année, no. 106 (Saturday, August 9, 1952).

¹⁶ See figures 3.13 and 3.14 in Chapter 3.

remaining portion of the octagon avails itself as a surface on which Cormier and his guests could sit.



Figure 4.8 Photograph of the Pine Avenue West elevation of the Cormier Residence showing it mitoyen to the Gillespie house, photographed in 2012.

Source: “Maison Ernest-Cormier,” © Alain Laforest, Ville de Montréal, Le site officiel du Mont-Royal, City of Montreal, accessed May 9, 2014, <http://www1.ville.montreal.qc.ca/siteofficiel dumontroyal/batiment-residentiel/maison-ernest-cormier>

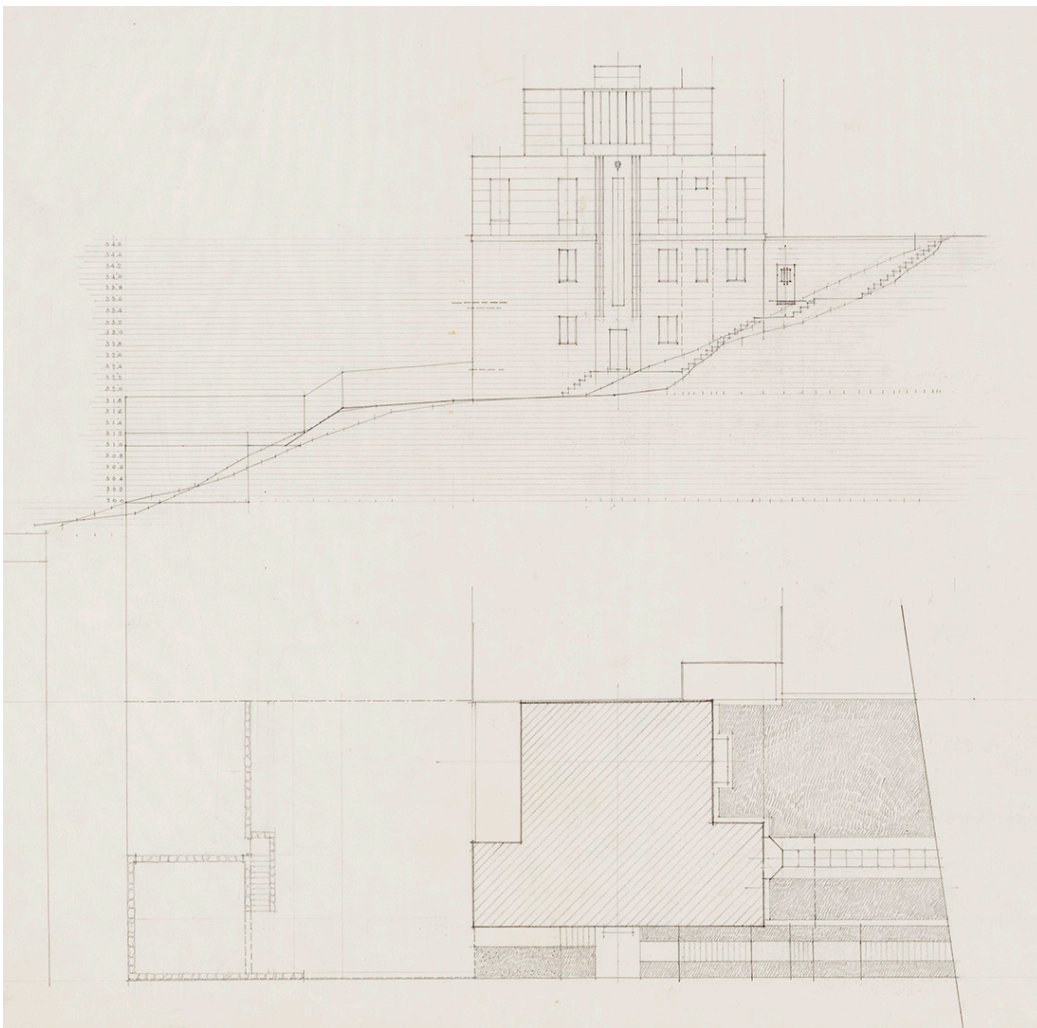


Figure 4.9 Side elevation and roof plan of the Cormier Residence.

Source: Ernest Cormier, drawing #3005-4, dated September 4, 1930, ARCH5980, folder 01-3005-01, box Cormier 01-3005-01M, FEC, CCA.



Figure 4.10 Vestibule of the front entrance to the Cormier Residence, taken standing just inside the front door, looking towards the vestibule’s interior door, showing the marble-clad walls and custom-designed bronze grillwork over the radiator, c.1931.

Source: S. J. Hayward Studios, P.6732, box 01-EC_P.6669 à 6938, FEC, CCA.

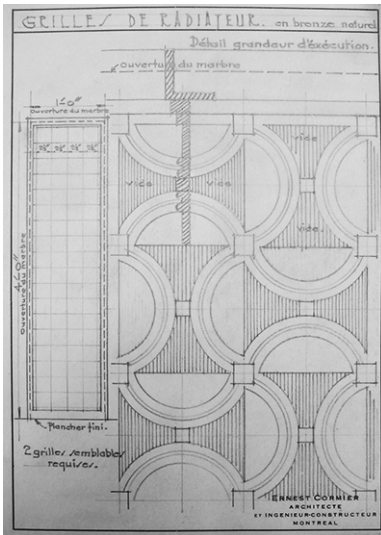


Figure 4.11 Design of bronze radiator grills, vestibule of Cormier Residence

Source: Ernest Cormier, “Grilles de radiateur en bronze naturel,” folder “01-905/A-5_01Aic539d,” box 01-2011-206 T, FEC, CCA.

The contrast between the sober façade and the immersive surface intensity of the vestibule on the inside of the front wall is markedly Loosian in character.¹⁷ Moreover, our understanding that the posh, swirling marble is a thin a-tectonic skin covering the structure of

¹⁷ For example, Loos’ use of materials such as textiles, wood grain and veined marbles to provide rich, decorative colors and textures on the interior spaces of the Moller House in Vienna (1927-28) and Müller House in Prague (1928-30), as compared to these houses’ opaque exterior faces. On Loos’ equation of ‘modern’ with being inconspicuous in public, see his article “Men’s Fashion” (1898) in Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime: Selected Essays*, trans. Michael Mitchel (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 1997), 39-44.

Adele Freedman has described the Cormier house as “dignified on the outside, delirious on the inside.” Adele Freedman, *Sight Lines: Looking at Architecture and Design in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1990), 124.

these walls is encouraged by the evidence of the porous cavities containing the radiators that are covered by bronze grillwork designed by Cormier.¹⁸ This motif based on half circles, is related but not identical to the ornament developed for other spaces of the house. [Figure 4.11] As a chamber that plunges the visitor into a material palette and decorative logic that is more exuberant than what one encounters on the house's exterior, the vestibule is a transition space that both thickens the threshold of the front door, and contributes to foretelling of what one will find on the house's interior. [Figure 4.12]

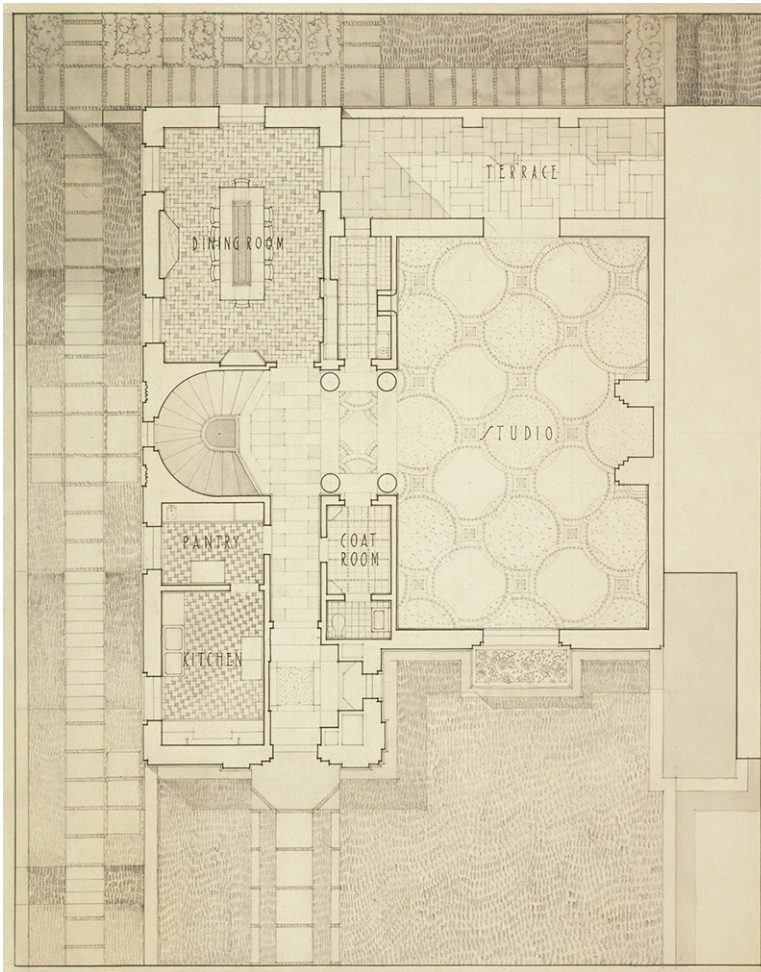


Figure 4.12 Rendered plan of the top floor (level 5/ floor D) of the Cormier Residence showing flooring treatment and landscaping.

Source: Ernest Cormier, ARCH252706[1], folder "01 ARC 553d," box Cormier 01-3005-01M, FEC, CCA.

¹⁸ See the technical plan (working drawing) of this floor in folder 01-3005-01, box Cormier 01-3005-01M.

The interior door of the vestibule opens onto a corridor that runs the length of the house. This axis is bracketed by service spaces, namely, a kitchen and pantry to the left and a coat room and powder room to the right, and terminates in the walnut-paneled dining room that is furnished with a table, chairs and side tables in walnut and Macassar ebony designed by Cormier.¹⁹ [Figure 4.13] Before arriving there, however, this corridor is bisected by a wider, primary axis that runs transversely through the middle of the house and intersects with the longitudinal axis in a way as to create an expanded threshold that orients the direction and tempo of the circulation on this floor. The point of crossing between the two axes invites pause: turning to the right, the normal speed of circulation here slows to become processional.



Figure 4.13 Photograph of the dining room with the furniture designed by Ernest Cormier, photographed c.1985. Source: Photography by Peter Vitale in Susan Mary Alsop, “Architectural Digest Visits: Pierre Trudeau,” *Architectural Digest* 43, no. 1 (Jan 1986): 112.

¹⁹ Sarah McCutcheon and Rodney Payne, “The Cormier House, Montreal: Its Design and Furnishing in Art Deco,” *Canadian Collector* 16 (May/June 1981): 27. Robert Little has conducted a careful analysis of the furniture pieces the Cormier designed for his house. See Robert Little, “Collection Ernest-Cormier,” in *Les Chemins de la mémoire. Vol. 3: Biens mobiliers du Québec*, ed. Commission des biens culturels du Québec, 145-149. (Québec: Publications du Québec, 1999); Little, “1418, Avenue des Pins,” 116-20.

A built-in china cabinet is located immediately upon entering the dining room on the right side and features a ‘secret’ button that when pushed, causes one of the panels to roll open. To date, no photos of this custom-designed furniture item have been found in the Cormier archive, and the drawings related to the dining room do not feature any details related to such a mechanism. However, a receipt dated June 9, 1931, confirming the payment of \$50 to Eugene Villeneuve for the installation of the “moteur de cabinet de salle à manger” is conserved in folder 01-905/A-6, box 01-2011-206 T. I was fortunate to witness a demonstration of this cabinet’s mechanism during my visit to the house in 2012 and was delighted to see that over 80 years after its construction, the button still works.

Comprised of a curving staircase in pinkish-ochre marble with a chromed brass handrail to the left and two pairs of monumental columns faced with grey Bois Jourdain marble to the right, this crossing of primary and secondary circulation routes marks the dramatic entrance to a sumptuous, double-height space which Cormier referred to as the *Atelier* [studio] and which served as the house's formal living room and public gathering space.²⁰ **[Figure 4.14]** The hierarchical significance of this ceremonial axis is communicated through its program, proportions and material palette. Originating at the staircase and terminating on the opposite wall in the monumental marble fireplace of the studio (made of the same material as the columns of the room's threshold) this main line of energy bisecting the house is punctuated by formally arranged furniture pieces, custom-designed by Cormier, which organize the space.²¹

[Figures 4.15a and 4.15b]. This floor of the house (level 5, also indicated as floor D on some of Cormier's drawings) is designed to accommodate large groups and is both the most public zone of the Cormier residence and the most luxurious.

²⁰ This threshold creates a dramatic parting in the band of service spaces (powder room and coat room on one side and wet bar adjacent to the dining room on the other) that separate the studio from the longitudinal corridor that runs parallel to it.

²¹ In his analysis of the custom-made furniture pieces in the house, Little has noted that Cormier systematized his designs for seating and table furniture according to their placement and function, elaborating three basic types of seating which he used throughout the house. Fixed, larger-scaled furniture, such as the long divan placed beneath the window of the studio (whose block-like arms were veneered in macassar ebony and the rest covered in amethyst velvet to match the curtains above it) was visually conceived as part of the architectural framework. By contrast, smaller chairs would be moved around according to social needs. The design of the table with marble top with its two long and two short benches that are placed on axis with the fireplace, as well as a marble octagonal table (that is Cormier's reworking in luxurious materials of the standard studio model's pedestal, whose upper part and four legs swivel on a track in its octagonal base), were designed by Cormier for his studio on St. Urbain Street and were subsequently moved to the studio of the house. Little also comments on the influence that the work of Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann, Jean-Michel Frank and Francis Jourdain had on Cormier's furniture designs. See Little, "1418, Avenue des Pins," 115-120; Little, "Collection Ernest-Cormier," 145-149. See also McCutcheon and Payne, "The Cormier House," 26. For drawings of Cormier's furniture designs see folder 01-3005-07, box Cormier 01-3005-01M.

For a discussion of the exotic materials favored by French designers during the interwar period, see Franco Borsi, *The Monumental Era: European Architecture and Design 1929-1939* [*L'ordre monumental*], trans. Pamela Marwood (New York: Rizzoli, 1987. 1986), 174-191.



Figure 4.14 Photograph of the landing of the circular staircase and the studio's threshold, as seen from the studio of the Cormier residence, taken in January 1976.

Source: Photography by Denis Robert, detail of "Maison Cormier," uploaded by Colin Rose, Flickr Photo Sharing, accessed July 15, 2010, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/73416633@N00/508410117/>



Figure 4.15a Photograph of the Atelier's fireplace and symmetrically arranged furniture and artwork, as seen through the marble-columned threshold, c.1931-32.

Source: S. J. Hayward Studios, P.6749[?], box 01-EC_P.6669 à 6938, FEC, CCA.



Figure 4.15b Photograph of the Atelier's fireplace and furniture designed by Cormier, as seen through the marble-columned threshold, c.1985.

Source: Photography by Peter Vitale in Susan Mary Alsop, "Architectural Digest Visits: Pierre Trudeau," *Architectural Digest* 43, no. 1 (Jan 1986): 110.

The Propylaeum-like entrance to the studio, defined by four over-scaled columns, coffered ceiling and marble flooring whose pattern is akin to, but distinct from, that of the

adjoining space, is not merely a linear passage, but a space unto itself. The scale of this thick threshold is both intimate and imposing, and, relative to the open, airy space that unfolds, it sets up the experience of compression immediately followed by release that heightens the drama of one's rite of passage into what is the centerpiece of the house. **[Figure 4.16]** Passing through this monumental threshold, the space expands in all directions: the airy, generously proportioned room capped by a coffered ceiling and clerestory lighting. The walls of the studio are clad with thin honey-colored sheets made with the fiber of Japanese pear trees. Placed in bands that alternate the wood grain to create different effects under the play of light, the horizontal bands provide scale and a streamlined effect within the room, while also reinforcing the monumental formality of the space through their evocation of stone coursing.²² The warm-toned red and yellow terrazzo flooring pattern of interlocking circles, that visually coheres with the patterns designed for the studio's threshold and the bronze radiator grills, offsets the dark lacquered furniture, curtains and marble fireplace. Through the combination of this material palette with the light streaming in from the clerestory window located immediately above the studio's threshold and from the tall glazed apertures on opposite sides of the room, the studio space is filled with a golden glow.²³

²² Inspiration for this choice of wall-covering may have come from a 1928 issue of *Art et décoration*, which Cormier had in his library, showing the interior design work of B.-J. Klotz, a rare example of a female *décorateur* of the period, who in the design of a bar area in a house, used squares of beige wood fiber wallpaper in a checkerboard pattern created by alternating the direction of the grain. See René Chavance, "Mme B.-J. Klotz et le décor de la maison," *Art et Décoration* 54 (July-Dec 1928): 65-76. Ernest Cormier library, Collection, CCA.

As well, this wood-fiber paper was featured in *Canadian Homes and Gardens* (June 1929): 44, showing the interiors of a home in Montreal decorated by the T. Eaton Co. Ltd. An advertisement for "Le Bois Essif," in which the promotional text is printed on a sample of the wood-fiber paper was published in *Art et Industrie*, 5th year (May 10, 1929), between pages 8 and 9. Little, "1418, Avenue des Pins," 132 (fn 56).

²³ Receipts from the Eaton's Company store in Montreal dating from May to August 1931 mention wall covering but do not provide further details. See folder 01-905/A-6, box 01-2011-206 T.



Figure 4.16 Photograph of the interior of the Atelier showing furniture and artwork by Cormier, looking back to the threshold towards the spiral staircase, c.1931-32.
Source: S. J. Hayward Studios, P.6684, box 01-EC_P.6669 à 6938, FEC, CCA.



Figure 4.17 Photograph of the interior of the Atelier showing furniture and artwork by Cormier, looking towards the front of the house
Source: S. J. Hayward Studios, ARCH269732, P.6736, box 01-EC_P.6669 à 6938, FEC, CCA.



Figure 4.18 Photograph of former Canadian Prime Minister, Pierre Elliott Trudeau (the third owner of the Cormier residence) standing in the studio with his back to the glazed access giving onto the terrace of the top floor looking onto the city, c.1985.
Source: Photography by Peter Vitale in Susan Mary Alsop, "Architectural Digest Visits: Pierre Trudeau," *Architectural Digest* 43, no. 1 (Jan 1986): 106-107.

The tall, narrow apertures that mirror each other across the length of the room are not identical. **[Figures 4.17 and 4.18]** The window giving onto the front façade is treated to reduce visibility into the room’s interior from the outside, and when its purple velvet curtains are drawn above the divan that Cormier designed and upholstered in the same fabric, a dark vertical band running from the floor to ceiling visually transforms this ‘void’ into what has the feel of a monolithic solid.²⁴ Thus, while this window is a prominent feature of the house’s front elevation, it is ultimately opaque, turning its back onto Pine Avenue and orienting our focus towards the back of the house. On the studio’s rear wall, the 25-foot tall (7.6m) window is also a door leading to a large balcony that overlooks the garden and the city beyond. It is toward this vista that the house is oriented.

This top floor of the Cormier residence is organized around, and given spatial coherence largely through, the processional movement through its compartmentalized spaces.²⁵ This movement is characterized by a formal fluidity and also tight control, the ritualistic dynamism of the procession evoking the atmosphere of a temple. Rooms do not communicate with each other directly, and other than the longitudinal path that leads from the front entrance to the transverse axis that directs circulation into the studio, there are no alternate paths or secret passages for the visitor to explore (with the exception of accessing the powder room through the coat room). The only internal access to the lower levels of the house is via the open, curved marble staircase, which reads as a pin boring into the ground and anchoring the house to the

²⁴ In his choice to give pride of place to a double-height studio space with a tall window, Cormier was accused by Jean-Omer Marchand of having copied this idea from his house at 486 Wood Avenue in Westmount (1912-14) designed in the Tudor style. Photographs and drawings of Marchand’s residence can be seen in Bruce Anderson, Geneviève Bégin and Ariane Truong, *Fifty Houses in and around Montreal: An Album of Measured Drawings* (Westmount, QC: Anderson Architects, 2005), 183-187.

²⁵ My thinking about circulation, thresholds and doors has been influenced largely by the delightful writings of Robin Evans. See in particular: Robin Evans, “Figures, Doors, Passages,” in *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays* (London: Architectural Association, 1997), 78.

slope as it organizes the axial hierarchies and dictates the circulation. Visual continuity between the horizontal axis through the studio space and its intersection with the vertical axis of the stairwell is provided in part by formal variations in the handling of the wood-fiber wallpaper. The alternating golden strata in the *atelier* are broken up into a checkerboard pattern on the walls of the studio threshold and continue down the shaft of the circular staircase: the long horizontal striations of the double-heighted public space dissolving into a smaller scale pattern of squares, announcing visual and material continuity between the two floors, but also a diminution in scale as one descends to the next level. **[Figures 4.19 and 4.20]**

On the second from top floor (level 4, or floor C), the space encountered feels more compressed and intimate, yet still formal and grand. **[Figure 4.21]** The four grey-bronze marble columns that designated the monumental threshold into the studio-living room on the main floor find their echo directly below as two pairs of columns covered in shimmering gold leaf that define the threshold into Cormier's library. Proportional to this space, whose ceiling is lower and which feels somewhat compressed under the weight of the larger volume of the studio above it, the columns are placed closer together than their counterparts above, thereby creating a more intimately scaled entrance into the enclosed sanctum of the library, but nevertheless, one that orchestrates a processional movement through a passage that evokes a 1930s poetic interpretation of ancient architecture. **[Figures 4.22 and 4.23]** As with the furniture grouping placed in the middle of the atelier, and the table and chairs in the dining room, here, the walnut



Figure 4.19 Photograph taken from the Atelier on level 5 (floor D) looking through the threshold towards the circular staircase
Source: S. J. Hayward Studios, P.6940, box 01-EC_P.6669 à 6938, FEC, CCA.



Figure 4.20 Photograph taken from the library on level 4 (floor C) looking through the threshold towards the circular staircase.
Source: S. J. Hayward Studios, P.6688, box 01-EC_P.6669 à 6938, FEC, CCA.

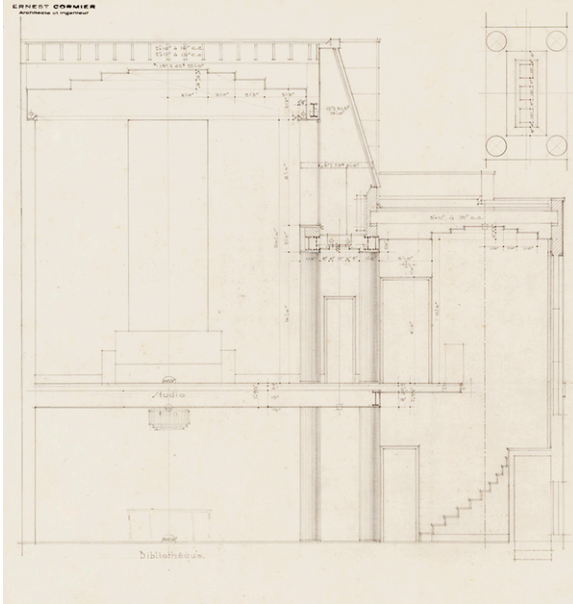


Figure 4.21 Transverse section through level 5 (floor D) and level 4 (floor C) of the Cormier Residence showing the reflected ceiling plan of the atelier's threshold, the staircase connecting these two top floors, the dominant axis bisecting the house, and the spatial relationship between the studio and the library below it. Source: Ernest Cormier, detail of an unnumbered sheet of drawings for the Maison Cormier, dated November 1, 1930, ARCH264124, folder 01-3005-03, box Cormier 01-3005-01M, FEC, CCA.



Figure 4.22 View into the library of the Cormier residence from the threshold demarcated by golden columns, c.1976. Source: Photography by Denis Robert, "Maison Cormier," uploaded by Colin Rose, Flickr Photo Sharing, accessed July 15, 2010, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/73416633@N00/1863332199/>



Figure 4.23 Photograph from interior of library looking toward golden-columned threshold and door to the staircase leading to the lower level, c.1931-32. Source: S. J. Hayward Studios, P.6751, box 01-EC_P.6669 à 6938, FEC, CCA.

desk that Cormier designed for himself, commands the center of the library.²⁶ In contrast to the bright and airy studio, the library itself is windowless and inward-looking although it receives some indirect light from the window in the curved stairwell and from the windows in the adjoining room that is marked “Bedroom” on the plan. The room feels dense and somber owing to the predominance of walnut paneling and built-in shelves full of books that dominate the portions of the wall covered in squares of golden wood fiber paper, and the marble fireplace with an imposing plaster reproduction of an ancient bas-relief defining the mantel that feels monumental in this mysterious space.²⁷ [Figure 4.24] With its ordered yet mysterious subterranean atmosphere, the library is an insulated quiet space for reading and working: it is at once cozy and warm, and as stiflingly still as an Egyptian tomb.

The plan of this second-from-top story (level 4) of the house reveals a similar hierarchy

²⁶ Little, “Collection Ernest-Cormier,” 148. This marble-topped desk constructed in solid black walnut was designed as a “partner’s desk,” i.e., a large writing table with drawers on both sides intended for two people sitting opposite each other. Cormier’s desk features solid pieces of walnut which slide, designed to hold blueprints and drawings. McCutcheon and Payne, “The Cormier House,” 28.

Also worth noting, is that like the divan in the studio, the couch that Cormier builds into the library is not a furniture item that is intended to be moved. As seen on Cormier’s rendered plan of this level (Figure 4.25), it has its fixed place as part of the built-in bookcases and as an architectural element that creates a low wall on one side of the gold-columned entry threshold. The placement of his desk is also indicated on this plan.

²⁷ In contrast to the large, monumental fireplace of the studio which dictates the symmetrical organization of the room, here, the fireplace is not only radically more modest in scale and placed in a corner, but the framing of the hearth by two stubby black columns without a mantel, strongly suggests that it was designed with the bas-relief as an integral component: a sculptural element that is both artwork and wall. (See Figure 4.22). This supports the argument that sculptural friezes played a significant role in Cormier’s architectural imaginary.

This relief, referred to as the Stele of Eleusis, depicts the young Triptolemus receiving grain (symbolic of agricultural knowledge) from the goddess Demeter, of the Eleusinian Mysteries, and her daughter Persephone. Pierre-Richard Bisson, “Maison Ernest-Cormier,” in *Les Chemins de la mémoire, vol 2: monuments et sites historiques du Québec*, ed. Commission des biens culturels du Québec (Québec: Publications du Québec, 1991), 128. Cormier seems to have owned two copies of this reproduction of the votive relief that is conserved at the National Archaeological Museum of Athens. Little, “Collection Ernest-Cormier,” 148. The one kept at his office on Côte-des-Neiges (at the corner of Pine Avenue West, a short walk from his house) is seen in a photograph published in a 1948 issue of the *JRAIC*, without accompanying text. See “Architects’ Offices,” *JRAIC* 25, no. 10 (Oct 1948): 364. As well, a frontal view of part of this copy of the bas-relief can be seen in portraits of Cormier taken by Nakash, conserved in box Cormier 01-Photos-05P. These portraits are undated but judging from Cormier’s mature appearance, were likely not taken before the late 1940s.



Figure 4.24 Photograph of the copy of the ancient bas-relief of the Stele of Eleusis, placed above the fireplace in the library of the Cormier residence, c.1985.

Source: Photography by Peter Vitale in Susan Mary Alsop, "Architectural Digest Visits: Pierre Trudeau," *Architectural Digest* 43, no. 1 (Jan 1986): 109.

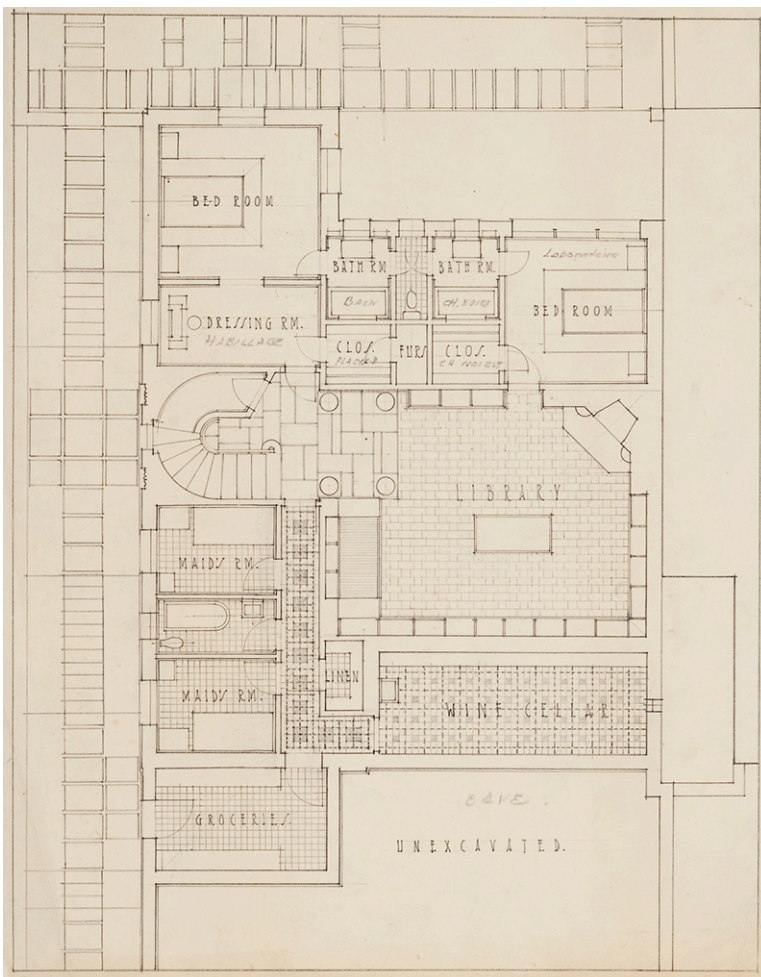


Figure 4.25 Rendered plan of the second-from-top floor (level 4/ floor C) of the Cormier Residence showing flooring patterns. Source: Ernest Cormier, ARCH264118, folder EC 265, box 01-3005-01M, FEC, CCA.

of circulation to that of the uppermost floor, with some subtle but important adjustments.

[Figure 4.25] As with the main floor, this level is organized around a fulcrum generated by the charged crossing of hierarchically distinct longitudinal and transversal paths of circulation: a

narrower secondary axis runs from the front to the back of the house clustering service spaces along its length, and a wider primary axis runs from the circular stair, through a ceremonial threshold and ends in the fireplace of that story's principal room. The spatial sequence of this central zone that bisects the house directly below the same axis on the upper floor, here separates Cormier's private quarters (located at the back end of the house and overlooking the rooftop garden) from the service areas and servants' quarters (i.e., the wine cellar, the room designated "groceries," and accommodations for two live-in housekeepers) that are tucked into the mountain slope. Doors on either side of the staircase landing seal off the secondary corridor from view. Through this bracketing of the main axis, the stair-threshold-library space is prioritized as a self-contained unit, giving the impression of functioning as a semi-autonomous zone, and one that could receive guests without revealing the nature of this story's other rooms.

From the circular staircase, one turns left along the secondary corridor that runs the length of the house, toward the master bedroom, passing first through the dressing room, which acts as its threshold. **[Figure 4.26]** Continuing the wood fiber wallpaper, but subtly modifying the checkered pattern found in the stairwell by elongating the pieces whose grain is placed horizontally, visual and material continuity is maintained while signaling a difference in program: the dressing room is at once a destination in its own right, a service space from which one accesses a closet that also contains a specially designated compartment for the storage of fur coats, and a threshold to the bedroom beyond.²⁸ **[Figures 4.27 and 4.28]** Bracketed by chests

²⁸ A discrepancy in the representation of the circulation exists between the rendered plan of this floor (Figure 4.25) and the plan Cormier drew of the bedroom detailing the curtains covering the perimeter walls (Figure 4.28). In the latter, the door to the bedroom follows a straight line from the door leading from the hall into the dressing room, but in the rendered plan, he indicates a jog in the circulation, such that entry to the master bedroom happens at the middle of the wall shared by the dressing room and bedroom, which would increase visual privacy. During my visit to the house, I was not able to enter the private rooms, so I have not seen which option Cormier eventually chose. The furniture shown in Figure 4.26 was designed by Cormier.



Figure 4.26 Dressing room of the Master bedroom, Cormier Residence, with furniture designed by Cormier, c.1931.
Source: S. J. Hayward Studios, ARCH264229, contact sheet A-1025, A-N°1001 à A-N°1062, box 01-Contacts-A,B,C,D, FEC, CCA.



Figure 4.27 Master bedroom, Cormier Residence, with night tables designed by Cormier, c.1931.
Source: S. J. Hayward Studios, ARCH264229, contact sheet A-1025, A-N°1001 à A-N°1062, box 01-Contacts-A,B,C,D, FEC, CCA.

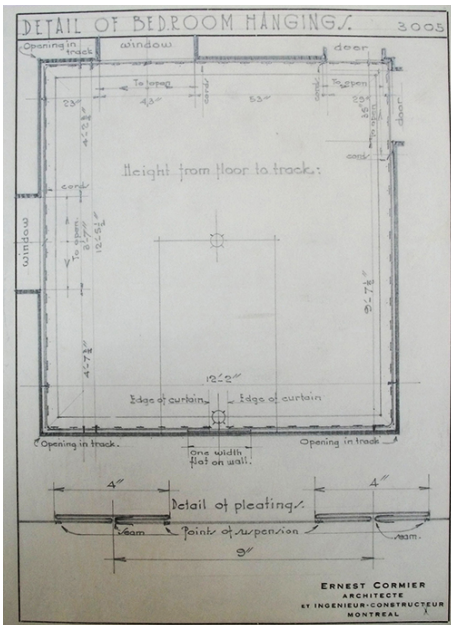


Figure 4.28 Plan of perimeter curtains in Master bedroom, Cormier residence, (undated).
Source: Ernest Cormier, "Detail of Bedroom hangings," folder "01-905/A-5_01Aic534d," box 001-2011-206 T, FEC, CCA.

veneered in walnut and macassar ebony designed by Cormier, the bed in the master bedroom is centered on a carpet, sitting in the middle of a room that is insulated acoustically, and isolated visually, by sumptuous floor to ceiling pleated velvet curtains that cover its four walls.²⁹

Unlike the limited, explicitly ordained paths of circulation on the story above, in which rooms are accessible as compartmentalized spokes off of the central stair, on this level, there exists a discrete, tertiary axis designed for Cormier's private use, which connects the two rooms labeled 'bedroom' via a passage that cuts through a cluster of connected bathroom spaces. Running parallel to the primary staircase-library axis, yet completely concealed from view, this tertiary axis reflects what Robin Evans has described as "convenient" rooms, meaning rooms that have more than one door and therefore, act as both destinations and thoroughfares.³⁰ A closer look at this plan, reveals that in fainter handwriting, Cormier has labeled the bedroom that is accessible from the library as "*laboratoire*" [laboratory] and its adjoining bathroom and closet each as "*chambre noire*", designating wet and dry dark rooms for the development of photographs. This strongly suggests that the official programmatic functions of the rooms as given in Cormier's published description of the house do not reflect what these spaces were actually

²⁹ McCutcheon and Payne, "The Cormier House," 28-29; Little, "1418, Avenue des Pins," 122-123; Little, "Collection Ernest-Cormier," 149. Little sees in this design choice a parallel to both medieval times when bedrooms were fitted out with wall textiles for warmth, and the classicism of the Napoleonic period in France, when bedrooms were often partially or completely curtained. Hénault and Richards suggest that this sumptuousness and spatial was typical of the tastes of the period. See Odile Hénault and Larry Richards, "Cormier House," *Trace* 1, no. 1 (1980): 31. Although less exuberant in its use of textiles, Cormier's bedroom can be compared to that designed by Adolf Loos for his wife Lina, which has been described as a "bag of fur and cloth." See Beatriz Colomina, "The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism," in *Sexuality and Space*, ed. Beatriz Colomina (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), 92.

Documents pertaining to the design of Cormier's master bedroom (particularly with regards to the wall hangings and their cost and the design of the furniture) are conserved in box 001-2011-205 T; folder 01-905/A-5 aic534, box 001-2011-206 T, and folder 01-ARC-455N, box Cormier 01-3005-01M.

³⁰ Evans, "Figures, Doors, Passages," 63-65. Evans' reflections on the changing social relations in domestic spaces through changes in the organization of circulation, is relevant to this study, not only because of the keen insights it offers, but also for the fact that in his discussion of "convenient" rooms in the sixteenth-century villa, Evans takes the Villa Madama as an exemplary case.

used for.³¹ A contemporary's description of the library "that is completely closed to the outside world" with its adjoining rooms containing studios for bookbinding and ceramics, supports this.³² Moreover, this sole instance of an alternate internal path to arrive at key spaces within the house, shows that Cormier designed for himself the opportunity to circulate between his bedroom and library without traversing the landing of the grandiose circular stair and/or crossing paths with any servants. Therefore, this floor's "convenient" rooms do not fuel the social relations of the house but to the contrary, set up the desired conditions for solitude and minimal contact with others.

This floor is both semi-public and very private and is the level of the house that feels the most underground. Occasionally, Cormier would receive guests in his library, and given the attention he paid to designing the flooring treatment of the wine cellar and the corridor leading to it from the curving staircase, it is reasonable to hypothesize that from time to time he may have shown his sizeable collection of bottles to his guests.³³ Flooring patterns and the treatment of ceilings are a consistent preoccupation of Cormier's, his keen attention to the surfaces and textures above and below the circulating subject having been made striking apparent early in his career in his study of the Villa Madama. Here, in his villa, floors and ceilings constitute an important aspect of his careful orchestration of circulation in various ways, namely: in terms of

³¹ In addition to this rendered plan of level 4, other plans drawn by Cormier label his bedroom as "*Chambre de maître*," the other bedroom as "*laboratoire*," and the closet and bathroom spaces off of this room, each labeled "*Ch. noire*." See Ernest Cormier, folder #3005 1503/U (undated), folder 01-ARC-081N, box Cormier 01-Aquarelles-01M. See also the list of doors for the house that specifies rooms for "*impression*" [printing], "*développement*" [developing of photographic prints] and "*laboratoire*," in folder 01-905/A-57, box 01-2011-205 T.

³² "A côté de sa confortable bibliothèque, entièrement fermée au monde extérieur, Ernest Cormier s'est aménagé deux ateliers de reliure et de céramique, ne tenant ces deux arts que de sa seule maîtrise personnelle." A. J. Sarrazin, "Causerie de monsieur A. J. Sarrazin, prononcée à Radio-Canada, le 27 mai 1949," folder "ARCH259631 801/A-23," box 001-2010-213 T.

³³ See Hénault and Richards, "Cormier House," for color reproductions of the various flooring patterns in the house.

direction and access; in terms of speed or tempo (most notably through the way thresholds are defined that invite solemn pause); and significantly, too, through the spatial hierarchies instantiated. Flooring motifs, ceiling patterns and other decorative elements such as wall paneling, light fixtures, ornamental metal grillwork and even mechanical systems, were of sustained interest to Cormier and were carefully detailed because he considered them important to the coherent formal expression of a building.³⁴ Although he did not theorize this openly, Cormier’s work demonstrates that ornament – expressed through the properties of the materials used and through the design of decorative motifs that are conceived as a family of repeating geometries and colors – is a crucial element in consolidating the various parts of his

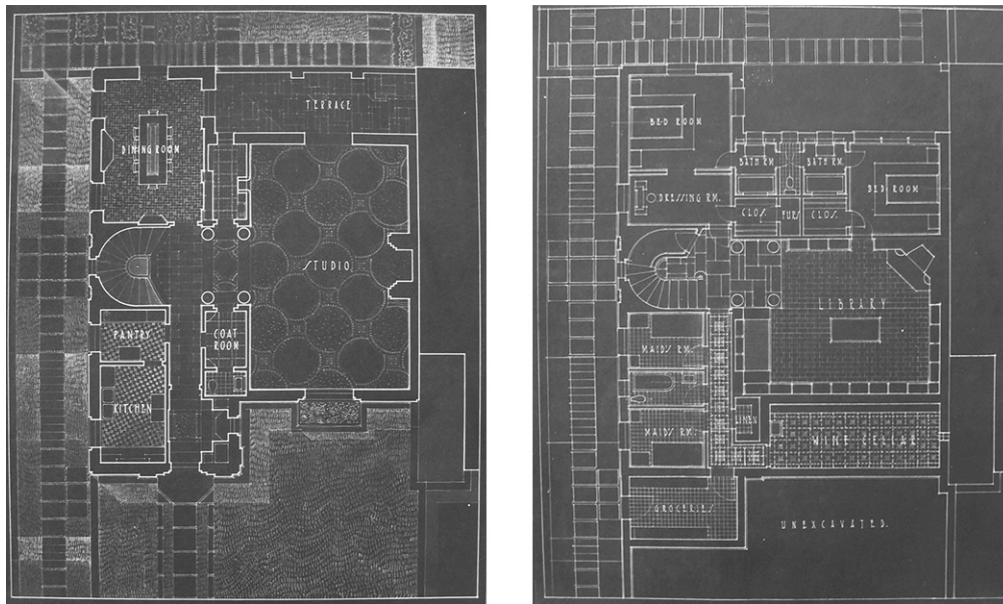


Figure 4.29 Photographic prints of the negatives of the presentation plans for the top floor (level 5/ floor D) and the second-from-top floor (level 4/ floor C) of the Cormier residence. Source: Ernest Cormier, P.1542 and P.1543, box 01-EC-P.1421 à 1543, FEC, CCA.

³⁴ Phyllis Lambert, “Architecture Where Cultures Meet,” in *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal*, ed. Isabelle Gournay (Montreal: Canadian Centre for Architecture; The MIT Press, 1990), 19.

The tall thin window that illuminates the spiral stair is acid-etched in an intersecting lozenge pattern, and is framed by smooth, chrome tubing. This is a heating coil that not only plays a functional role within the mechanical systems of the house, but contributes to the decorative order of the dominant axis of the house on its upper two stories. This heating coil around the window is visible in Figures 4.14, 4.19 and 4.48. Drawings pertaining to the heating pipes framing the staircase window are found in folder 01-905/A-5, box 01-2011-206 T, and in folder 01-3005-03, box Cormier 01-3005-01M.

compositions. For example, a comparison of Cormier’s plans for levels 5 and 4 [Figure 4.29] as well as the plan of his garden [Figure 4.30], reveals the obsessive attention he paid to the ground plane, and the rigor with which he detailed its patterns, colors and textures.³⁵

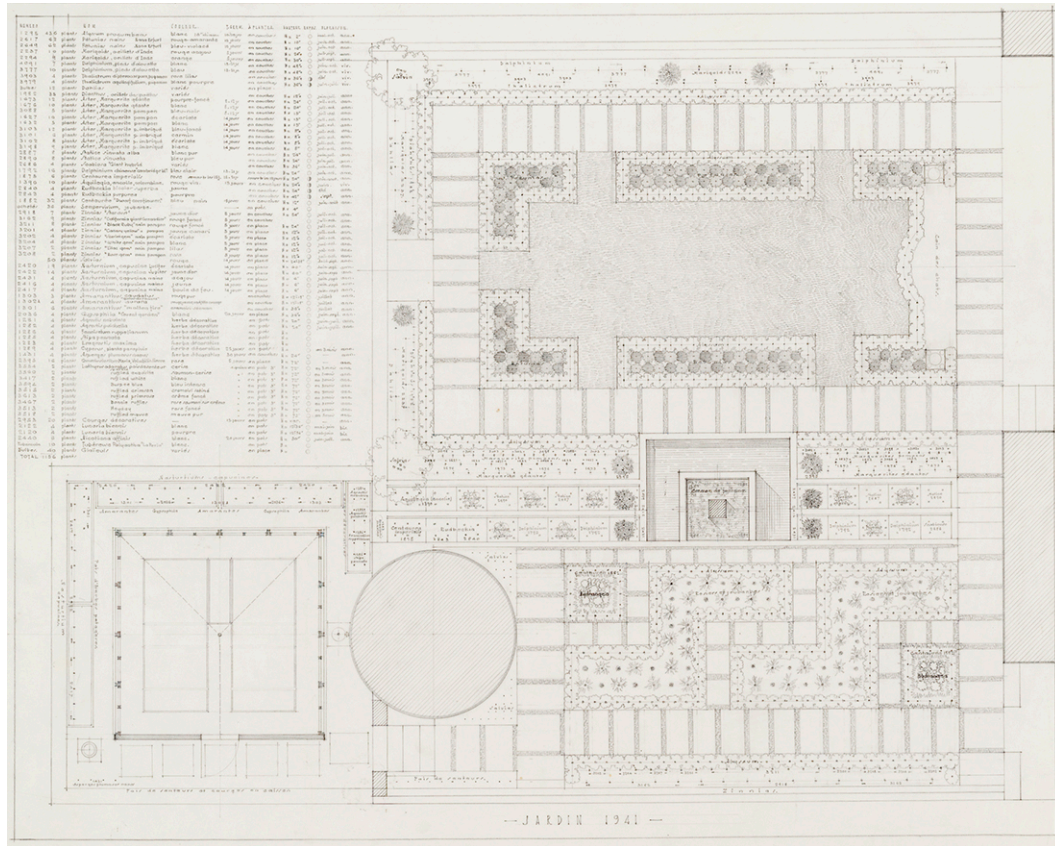


Figure 4.30 Plan of the roof garden of the Cormier residence detailing all of the plantings, c.1941.

Source: Ernest Cormier, ARCH264121, folder “Plan du Jardin,” box Cormier 01-3005-01M, FEC, CCA.

Interestingly, Cormier’s creative investment in both the graphic representation and the ornamental elaboration of the two uppermost floors of his house, is conspicuously lacking for

³⁵ The chart in the upper left area of the plan of the garden shown in Figure 4.30, specifies in meticulous detail, pertinent information about every type of plant, namely, the number Cormier assigned to the plant, the quantity of each type of plant used, the name, color, germination period, when to plant each specimen, the height, sun exposure requirements and flowering season.

the floor beneath this library level: i.e., for the most private, if not semi-*secret*, inhabited zone of the house.³⁶ [Figures 4.31 and 4.32].

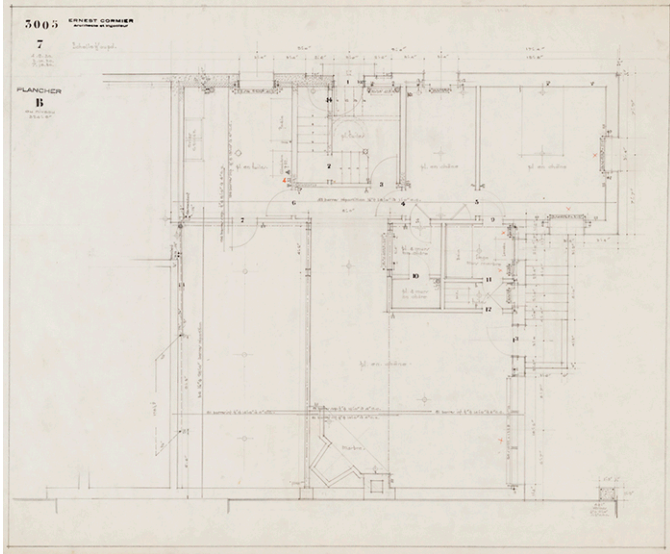


Figure 4.31 Plan (working drawing) of level 3 (floor B) of the Cormier Residence
Source: Ernest Cormier, drawing #3005-7, dated September 4, October 3 and October 7, 1930, graphite on trace paper, ARCH5983, folder 01-3005-01, box Cormier 01-3005-01M, FEC, CCA.

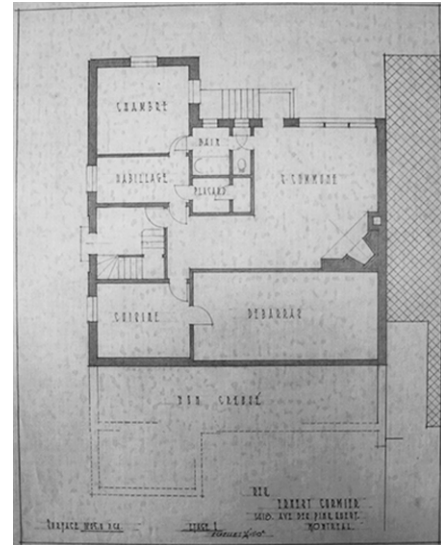


Figure 4.32 Plan of level 3 (floor B) of the Cormier Residence, showing the staircase transformed into an orthogonal service stair, and the access to the roof garden, undated.
Source: Ernest Cormier, folder #3005 1503/U, folder 01-ARC-081N, box Cormier 01-Aquarelles-01M, FEC, CCA.

³⁶ The only rendered drawings of the house that Cormier prepared are the plans for the top and second-from-top floors, which he published in 1932 in the *JRAIC* and which are visible in Figures, 4.7b, 4.12, 4.25, 4.29a and 4.29b. However, in addition to the large-format working drawings he drafted for each floor, Cormier also prepared a small set of plans (graphite on 8.5 x 11” sheets of trace) that unfortunately have become smudged over time. In these simplified plans, no designs of floors are represented, yet on the plans for the two top stories only, Cormier does indicate the paving patterns of the paths to the side and rear of the house. The plans for the two lower levels provide no information about the site, save for indicating the house’s attachment on one side to the neighboring residence. This set does not include a plan of the garage level, which is level 1. See Figure 4.32 for the plan of level 3 (floor B) from this set of drawings. Cormier, folder #3005 1503/U, folder 01-ARC-081N, box Cormier 01-Aquarelles-01M. For Cormier’s working drawings of the house, see folder 01-3005-01, box Cormier 01-3005-01M



Figure 4.33 Photograph of the curving marble staircase on level 4 of the Cormier residence, as seen through the columns framing the entry to the library, c.1985. Source: Photography by Peter Vitale in Susan Mary Alsop, “Architectural Digest Visits: Pierre Trudeau,” *Architectural Digest* 43, no. 1 (Jan 1986): 108.

Descending further into the depths of the Cormier residence, the open and elegant curving marble staircase that connects levels 5 and 4, is now terminated by a door that could easily be mistaken for a broom closet.³⁷ **[Figure 4.33]** Behind this door, the staircase is transformed into a concealed, narrow, orthogonal service stair that leads to a vestibule, which in turn relates to an exterior door on the house’s side elevation. This renders level 3 directly accessible from the outside and reveals that the house was conceived in a way as to function as a single unit or as two distinct yet internally connected apartments with separate entrances.

[Figures 4.34 and 4.35] It would appear that the house operated both ways simultaneously, and for good reason. Only one professional photograph exists of this floor **[Figure 4.36]**, and it shows a bright and airy living room that opens onto an exterior staircase giving access to the fragrant rooftop garden. Although this room features the checkerboard pattern of Japanese wood-fiber paper, and a few of the armchairs that Cormier designed that appear elsewhere in the

³⁷ See also Figure 4.23, which shows the framed view that Cormier would have had of this door from his desk in the library. The sightlines that enable the monitoring of circulation, particularly the circulation to and from the most private, lower story of the house, suggest that Cormier had a well-developed need for control.

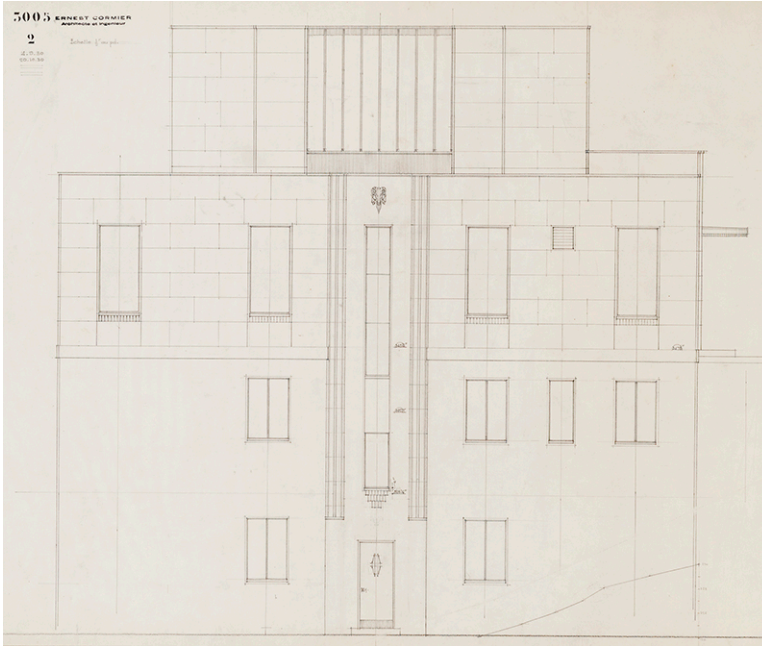


Figure 4.34 Side elevation of the Cormier Residence, 1930. Source: Cormier, drawing # 3005 – 2 , dated September 4, 1930 and October 20, 1930, ARCH5978, folder 01-3005-01, box 01-3005-01M, FEC, CCA.



Figure 4.35 Side elevation of the Cormier Residence and oblique view of the rear elevations of the Cormier and Gillespie residences, c.1931. Source: Hayward Studios, ARCH262186, P.6729, box 01-EC P.6669 à 6938, FEC, CCA.



Figure 4.36 Photograph of the living room on level 3 (floor C) of the Cormier Residence, c.1931. This is the only photo of this floor of the house that has been found in the archive. Source: S. J. Hayward Studios, ARCH264030, P.6671, box 01-EC P.6669 à 6938, FEC, CCA.

house, these seem to be the only significant design elements that straddle the carefully controlled division of public from private that is operative between the upper two floors and this one. As well, although on the upper floors the glitter of gold, bronze and brushed chrome compliment the shiny, sumptuous surfaces of variously colored marbles and the custom-designed furniture pieces made of exotic hardwoods and expensive fabrics, level 3 reveals a marked reduction in costly materials and luxurious finishes, as well as a larger quantity of furniture purchased from department stores, than objects designed by Cormier.³⁸ While limited financial resources could have very well been a compelling motivation for these choices, the designed result nevertheless conveys that this half-buried floor of the house was subordinate.

This apartment was designed for Clorinthe Perron, who, along with her sister Cécile, worked as an artist's model for Cormier and his friends, the sculptor Henri Hébert and his brother Adrien, the painter. Cormier met Perron in 1919 and she came to be his romantic companion until the end of his life. At the time, however, a woman of working class origins who posed nude as a model for artists would not have been deemed an appropriate wife for a prominent architect and engineer who had clients in influential positions, most notably, in ecclesiastic circles.³⁹ During the 1920s, Cormier had kept an apartment for Perron near his studio,⁴⁰ but by 1930, when he was designing a house for himself, his choices about its siting and internal organization communicate clearly his aim to accommodate his romantic partner – whose

³⁸ Little, "1418, Avenue des Pins," 124. See the notice concerning delivery of bedroom and mattresses to 1418 Avenue des Pins Ouest in 1931, in folder 01-905/A-6.

³⁹ Lambert, "Architecture Where Cultures Meet," 28. It must be remembered that most of Cormier's clients throughout his career, and those during the 1920s in particular, were affiliated with the Catholic church. Being awarded the commission for the highly publicized Université de Montréal in the mid-1920s, meant that not only was he working for a Catholic institution, but that through the substantial attention paid by the public to the sensitive issue of the project's completion, Cormier was increasingly placed in the spotlight that extended beyond Montreal's architectural community.

⁴⁰ Lambert, "Architecture Where Cultures Meet," 28, fn3.

occupancy was not sanctified by marriage – in a permanent but discrete fashion, out of view of the disapproving scrutiny of the public whose mores were informed to a very large extent by the conservative values of the Catholic church, and could have entailed negative professional repercussions for Cormier by casting doubts on his respectability.⁴¹ Strategic professional self-representation was key for Cormier, who was not lacking in ambition. As the son of a respected physician and member of Montreal’s small francophone bourgeoisie, Cormier obviously felt considerable pressure to maintain appearances that Montreal’s establishment would have deemed acceptable. Evidence of this concern is found in several documents in his archive, such as the profile on Cormier in a business journal dating from the early 1950s, which advanced the party line that the flu epidemic killed his wife and that since then, “There has been no second Mme. Cormier.”⁴² Consistent with this is that as late as 1975, when Cormier was completing his dossier for consideration for the highly prestigious Order of Canada, the form he filled out stated his marital status as widowed, which was as entirely true a statement of fact as it was misleading as a representation of his life choices. In fact, it was not until 1976, when Cormier was 90 years old, had retired from practice, was an Officer of the Order of Canada, and was no longer living at 1418 Pine Avenue West, that he and Clorinthe Perron were married, and through this, formalized their liaison of over 50 years.⁴³

⁴¹ On the conservative cultural climate of Montreal during the first decades of the twentieth century, see: France Vanlaethem, “Montreal Architects and the Challenge of Commissions,” in *Montreal Metropolis, 1880-1930*, eds. Isabelle Gournay and France Vanlaethem (Toronto: Stoddard Publishing Co.; Canadian Centre for Architecture), 111.

⁴² Sigler, Betty. “Plans by Cormier.” *Canadian Business* 24, no. 2 (July 1951): 34. Widowed in December of 1918, when his wife of 10 years, Berthe Cormier (née Leduc) died of the Spanish Flu, Cormier’s public image was of a respectable professional who had lost his wife at the young age of 33, with whom he did not have any children, and since then had never remarried.

⁴³ Phyllis Lambert had the opportunity to interview Clorinthe Perron-Cormier several times between Cormier’s death in 1980 and her passing in 1984. See Lambert, “Architecture Where Cultures Meet,” 28. The couple were married in April 1976.

Cormier's description of his house published in 1932 in the *JRAIC* stated that level 3 of the house "contains the housekeeper's living room, two bedrooms, help's kitchen and store room," and that on level 4, there are "servants' quarters with two maid's rooms and bath room."⁴⁴ Yet the true domestic arrangements of the house are revealed to be substantially different. While it is true that Cormier did have live-in domestic help for whom he provided bedroom and bathroom facilities, and it is even true that at least as late as the 1950s, the List of Electors for Cormier's district states 'Ernest Cormier, architect' as the official occupant of 1418 Pine Avenue, and 'Miss Cecile Perron' and 'Miss Clorinthe Perron' as housekeepers,⁴⁵ the various 'servants' ascribed to the house do not all represent the same category of occupant. According to Cormier's housekeeper, it was in this living room on level 3 that the couple lived out most of their daily life together.⁴⁶

Level 3 follows a similar pattern to that of levels 4 and 5 in which service spaces, in this case a kitchen and large storage room, are nestled into the slope, while the inhabited rooms are

⁴⁴ [Cormier], "Residence of Ernest Cormier, Esq.," 159.

⁴⁵ Extract from the Canada Elections Act Urban Preliminary List of Electors, 1953. Electoral District of St. Lawrence-St. George, City of Montreal, Urban Polling Division No.10 (June), ARCH257775, folder 410/B-4; 410 1/2, box 01-2010-137 T. The information stated in this census suggests that both of the sisters lived in the house with Cormier, at least for a certain period, but how the living arrangements played out exactly are unclear, i.e., which bedrooms were used by whom, and how long Cecile lived in the house, or whether she lived elsewhere but merely used Cormier's house as her official address. Based on the evidence that the second bedroom on level 4 was used as a creative workspace, and that there is only one bedroom on level 3 (as opposed to a bedroom for each sister), and that the plans indicate single mattresses in all bedrooms, my best hypothesis is that Cormier used the master bedroom suite on level 4, Clorinthe used the bedroom suite on level 3, and Cécile's occupancy of the house was transient. In his will, Cormier clarifies that on the story occupied by Miss Clorinthe and Miss Cécile Perron, the personal possessions that have accumulated over the past 50 years, are not included in his estate. See folder "1962-68, ARCH258322," box 01-2010-130 T.

⁴⁶ Little, "1418, Avenue des Pins," 124. This is the floor that has been the most altered from its original design due to the renovations undertaken by Pierre Elliott Trudeau in the 1980s to better accommodate his three sons. An indoor swimming pool connected to the house through a corridor running from level 2, was built over the parking space and garage in 1984. See the *Répertoire d'architecture traditionnelle sur le territoire de la communauté urbaine de Montréal*, vol. 10 'Architecture domestique I: les résidences,' 150.

placed at the back of the house to benefit from the light and views onto the city below. As with level 4, this story features a dressing room to the left of the staircase, which leads onto a bedroom with adjoining bathroom and closet (including fur storage) creating a compact but comfortable bedroom suite. This cluster of dressing room, closet(s), bedroom, and bathroom has the same dimensions as Cormier's master bedroom suite and sits directly beneath it, but the finishes are radically less luxurious. Here as well, the main line of circulation flows from the staircase across the width of the house and terminates in a fireplace, in this case that of the living room, but the axis lacks the formal grandeur of its corollaries on the upper levels, and since this story, does not dig as deeply into the slope, the longitudinal corridor is shorter than that on levels 4 and 5.

Everyone invited to Cormier's home experienced the luxurious splendor of the main floor, yet not as many people would have been admitted to level 4 of the house, and fewer people still would have ever seen level 3. Moreover, guests invited to enjoy the garden could easily be directed to its terraces via the stepped pathway beside the house. Analyzed in section, therefore, the Cormier residence reveals clearly defined strata of increasing privacy as one descends the central staircase, with an abrupt transition effected between levels 4 and 3, where the stairs' open curve transforms into a closed box. Mapping rather directly onto these gradients of distinction between public and private is Cormier's choice to invest the bulk of his design energy and budget in the parts of the house that would serve to impress his guests. Using the public realm of the house as a showpiece for his professional self-promotion, Cormier elaborated his public persona as a cultivated, multi-talented architect and engineer-constructor of social standing, and left the private, more conventional domestic setting that he shared with his partner, relatively modest.

Knowledge of the house's programmatic-psychological complexity, invites a re-

interpretation of the official circulation that Cormier so carefully orchestrated. An examination of his plot plan with arrows indicating the four exterior doors of the house, suggests both alternate access paths to and from the residence and the hierarchies in place that allowed for discrete comings and goings, as well as the smooth running of the residence in a manner that occupants and hired help could largely avoid coming into contact.⁴⁷ **[Figure 4.37]** In addition to the front door to the house, which is the most important entrance to the house, two doors are found on the side elevation below the level of the sidewalk, accessible from the stepped path that descends from Pine Avenue to the garden at the back.⁴⁸ The first is the service door on level 4 that burrows under the built-up front lawn of the house and opens onto the room designated as “grocery” on the plan through which the servants could access the house and discretely oversee the delivery of provisions. Further down on level 3 is the door leading to Clorinthe Perron’s apartment. Given this door’s placement two stories below street level and its proximity to the servants’ entrance, the identity and status of the Perron sisters could be kept conveniently vague. Finally, on the house’s rear elevation a door connects the living room of level 3 to a small terrace with steps down to the garden **[Figure 4.38]**, in which there is a medieval-looking stone turret made out of the rubble from the excavation of the site, that contains the staircase leading to the garage on level 1.⁴⁹ A rather odd feature of this modern house, the stone turret gives the

⁴⁷ The Cormier residence was designed with a total of six exterior doors, if we consider the door to the balcony off of the studio-living room that overlooks the garden from the top floor of the house, and the door from level 2 (that was reserved for the mechanical rooms, kiln and the storage of gardening equipment) that opens onto the lower tier of the roof garden, but this discussion focuses on the doors that were used for regular entry or exit to the house.

⁴⁸ These are most visible in Figures 4.9, 4.25, 4.34 and 4.35.

⁴⁹ The fact that the three facades of Cormier’s residence are very different in sensibility is noteworthy. The front elevation is public and dignified, but opaque; the side elevation features minimal fenestration and is semi-private; and the rear elevation is the most private and features many apertures to take advantage of the light and views of the city.

roof terrace more of the feel of a *bortus conclusus*.⁵⁰

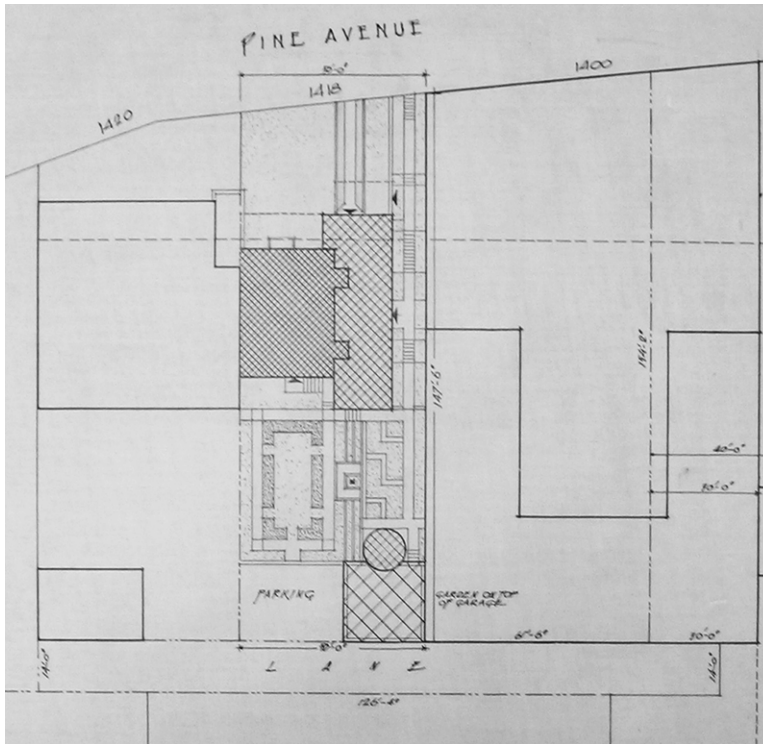


Figure 4.37 Detail of the plan of the property belonging to Ernest Cormier (dated September 18, 1967) with small arrows indicating the four exterior doors to the house. Source: folder #3005 1503/U, box Cormier 01-Aquarelles-01M, FEC, CCA.

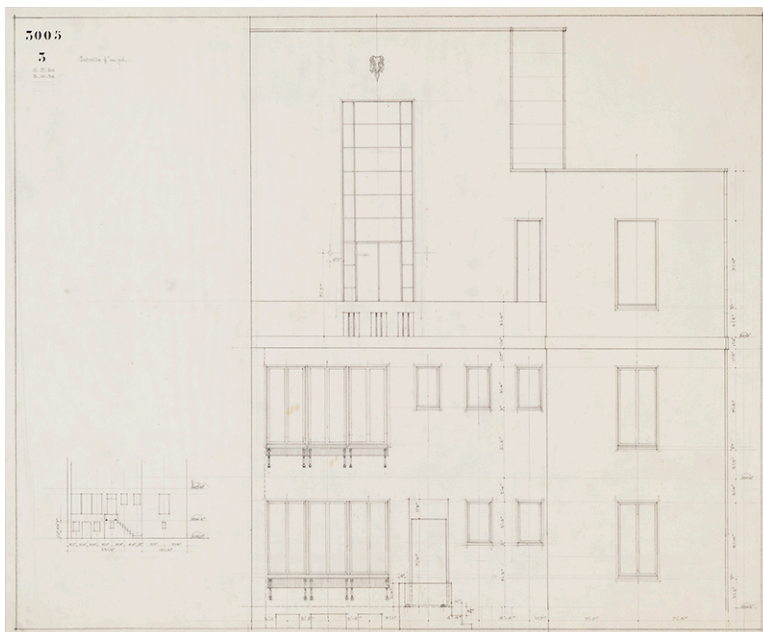


Figure 4.38 Rear elevation of the Cormier Residence, 1930. Source: Cormier, drawing # 3005 – 3, dated September 4, 1930 and October 20, 1930, ARCH5979, folder 01-3005-01, box 01-3005-01M, FEC, CCA.

⁵⁰ This is visible in Figures 4.42 and 4.43.

Key to an informed reading of the lived experience of the Cormier residence is to take note of the new technologies that Cormier incorporated into the design, that have a direct correlation to the issue of circulation. For example, servants were tucked out of sight and out of earshot, but could be beckoned easily through the dictograph system installed in the house. Six buttons, placed in the studio and pantry on level 5, in the library and servants' hall on level 4, and in the lower kitchen and garage, reflect Cormier's understanding of the compartmentalized spaces of the house as participating in a networked system through the technology of the intercom.⁵¹ Perhaps even more significant is the fact that Cormier incorporated the car, which was then a fairly new technology, into the life and body of the house and its garden complex.⁵² Effecting a cut and fill operation in the construction of his house, the portion of the slope excavated to allow the residence to burrow into the mountain, was used to extend build up an extension of the house's body to contain the garage and the garden plinth above. In his design of the rear portion of the property, 'technology' is the unseen substratum of 'nature.' Given how few people in Montreal in 1930 owned a private vehicle, this resolutely modern design move is significant to understanding Cormier's choice of site as well as his will to be 'modern' and to anticipate the needs of the future. Rather than accessing the house from the more trafficked Pine Avenue, the car drives along the main artery of Sherbrooke Street, and turns at the Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul onto Redpath Street that climbs up the slope of Mount Royal.

[Figures 4.39 and 4.40] Redpath Street soon terminates in a small lane that ends in a cul-de-sac

⁵¹ See folder 01-905/A-7, box 01-2011-206 T.

⁵² On the incorporation of the car into urban domestic life, see Patrick Celeste, "L'apparition de l'automobile individuelle dans l'immeuble urbain d'habitation," *Les Cahiers de la recherche architecturale* 22, no. 1er trimestre (1988): 12-19.



Figure 4.39 Looking east along Sherbrooke St. from Redpath St., Montreal, QC, c.1929.
Source: Anonymous, c.1929, MP-1985.31.81 © McCord Museum.



Figure 4.40 Redpath Street showing the rear facades of the Gillespie and Cormier residences. The photo is undated but must have been taken in the late 1950s, given the presence of the tall apartment block beside Cormier's residence.
Source: Cormier, P.6725, box 01-EC P.6669 à 6938, FEC, CCA.



Figure 4.41 Photo taken from the parking space beside the entry to the garage in the laneway behind Cormier's residence, (undated).
Source: Cormier, nitr.B-2085, box 01-Contacts-A,B,C,D, FEC, CCA.

and gives access to the back ends of the properties sitting on that portion of the slope. In contrast to the noise and bustle of Sherbrooke Street below, this semi-private laneway is a transitional space into this calm residential zone. From the vantage point of the parking spot in

front of Cormier's garage, only the two upper stories of his house are visible [Figure 4.41]. Entering the garage and climbing the spiral stairs of the stone turret, we emerge onto the manicured order of Cormier's roof garden before following the paved path that leads to the short flight of stairs up to the door opening onto the living room of level 3. [Figures 4.42 and 4.43] Recasting the access to the house in this way, it becomes clear that Cormier's choice of site was guided by the prestige of the neighborhood and the views out to the city, but significantly too, by the privacy of movement that the slope offered, enabling the house to best keep the activities of its inhabitants out of sight. Therefore, rather than presenting constraints that had to be overcome, the siting of the house on Mount Royal afforded coveted opportunities for the compartmentalization of Cormier's life in plan and in section.



Figure 4.42 Photograph of roof garden with turret containing the stairs leading to the garage.
Source: [S. J. Hayward?], ARCH264036, P.6730, folder "P-6730 @ 6751," box P-6669 à 6938, FEC, CCA.



Figure 4.43 Rear elevation and roof garden of the Cormier residence, (undated).
Source: [S. J. Hayward?], nitr.A-1023, box 01-Contacts-A,B,C,D, FEC, CCA.



Figure 4.44 The front elevation of the Cormier residence, photographed in October 2011.

Source: “Cormier House,” © Decopix [Randy Juster], Flickr Photo Sharing, accessed February 15, 2015, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/55864565@N08/6497728319/in/photolist-b6t4jk-aUbyfB>

Having entered the house from the back through this alternate path that originated with the car, we take the staircase up from level 3. Upon reaching the landing of level 5, we nod respectfully in the direction of the studio and turning right to follow the secondary corridor that leads to the vestibule, we exit the Cormier residence from its formal front door, contemplating the house’s eccentricities as we do so. Bearing in mind Cormier’s stated insistence on the importance he always placed on the exterior doors of his projects because of what they foretell about the interior,⁵³ we are compelled to take a backwards glance at the front elevation. **[Figure 4.44]** Our attention is drawn to the bas-relief of the curvaceous female who is given prominent placement above the entrance. Holding in her right hand what is commonly assumed to be a miniature version of the tower Cormier designed for the Université de Montréal, we are encouraged to speculate that what Cormier wanted us to understand through his self-referential gesture, is that beyond this threshold, we may expect to see more of his professional and artistic accomplishments, ostensibly all pursued with the same combination of elegance and virile rigor with which he undertook the design of his large-scaled masterwork. Yet, there is more to it than this, because at its most elemental, the tower is a phallic object, and here it is placed above the

⁵³ See Cormier’s responses to Willie Chevalier’s questionnaire, which were subsequently published in Willie Chevalier, “Entretien avec Ernest Cormier [an Interview with Ernest Cormier],” *Vie des Arts (Canada)* 20, no. 81 (Winter 1975-76): 18; 89; folder “Réponses aux questions de Monsieur Willie Chevalier ARCH258619 809/A-3,” box 001-2010-221 T.

main door to his residence, in the hand of a voluptuous female figure who is gazing at it intently. A new and somewhat startling interpretation of this ornament's unruly representational power now presents itself to our twenty-first-century gaze, and it is one that was most probably never intended or ever fathomed by the historical actors: the sculpture of a sensual female who stands contained within a niche that was carefully designed for her, holding a phallus that is directly associated with Cormier, speaks rather explicitly to the erotic dynamics that played out in the private depths of the house, between Ernest Cormier, the Architect and Engineer-Constructor and his human muse, Clorinthe Perron. In other words, as a cryptogram, the sculpted ornament crowning the main entrance to Cormier's residence unwittingly hides in plain sight, the secret life of the house. Inadvertently, then, the ornament that Cormier had described in the journal article showcasing the house, as merely relieving the simplicity of the front façade, reveals itself to be a most eloquent encapsulation of the house's true inner workings.

Clorinthe Perron was initially Cormier's lover then his long-term partner and she appears in most of the photographs that he took for artistic purposes. Materials in his archive substantiate the interpretation that she was an inspiration and a model for the sculpted muse above his front door. **[Figures 4.45, 4.46 and 4.47]** From among the numerous photos by Cormier that feature Clorinthe Perron as a model, one, dating from the mid-1920s, stands out as particularly important for the way it seems to have been a catalyst for the series of translations between media that chart the process of abstraction from human to masonry muse.⁵⁴ Beginning

⁵⁴ Sources that have helped me to think through my evolving ideas about the nature and implications of translation include: Robin Evans, *The Projective Cast: Architecture and its Three Geometries* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000. 1995); Robin Evans, *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays* (London: Architectural Association, 1997); Alberto Pérez Gómez and Louise Pelletier, *Architectural Representation and the Perspective Hinge* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997); Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet, eds., *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Joseph Rykwert, "Translation and/or Representation." *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 34 (Autumn 1998): 64-70; Esra Akcan, *Architecture in Translation: Germany, Turkey, and the Modern House* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).



Figure 4.45 Clorinthe Perron posing on the octagonal marble table in Cormier's studio on St. Urbain street, c.1925.
Source: Ernest Cormier, contact sheet S19-40 (06), 001-ARC-895, box 01-Contacts-S19-1 @ S19-83 2/3, FEC, CCA.

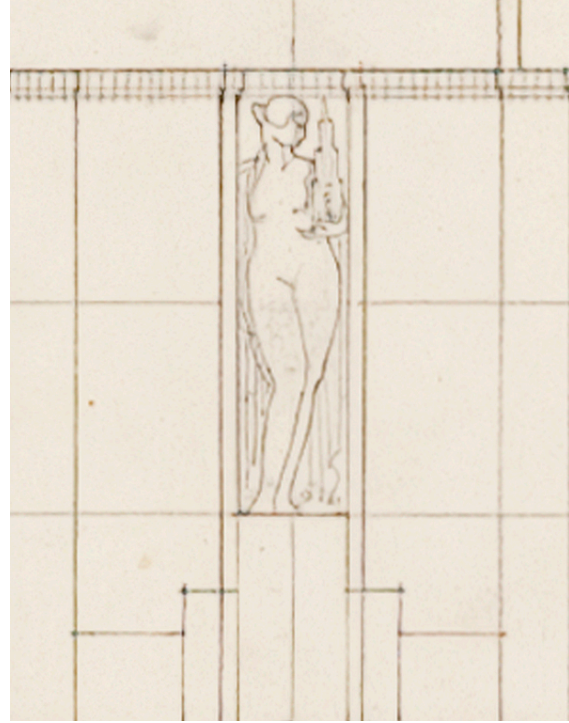


Figure 4.46 Detail of the bas-relief above the front door of the Cormier Residence as represented on Cormier's drawing of his front elevation.
Source: Ernest Cormier, drawing #3005 – 1 (dated September 4, 1930), ARCH5977, folder 01-3005-01, box Cormier 01-3005-01M, FEC, CCA.



Figure 4.47 Bas-relief above the front door of Cormier's Residence (1930-31), Montreal, photographed c.1990.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990-0139, box Szilasi II 1, Collection CCA.

with a photograph taken in Cormier's studio on St. Urbain Street, Clorinthe Perron poses nude on the octagonal table designed by Cormier (that was moved to the studio of his house a few years later). Gazing at the camera with a coy expression, her generous hips are thrust forward in a pose that is both languid and solidly planted. In her outstretched right hand, she holds a small round object that looks like a ball, or possibly a symbol of forbidden fruit. Next, Cormier's elevation drawing of the front façade of his house, dating from September 1930, shows a curvaceous female contained within a wall niche, who is nude save for the cape that is draped on her shoulders cascading behind her. Standing on a pedestal that rises above an octagonal canopy above the house's front door, the carriage of this figure's hips is the mirror reflection of the posture seen in the aforementioned photograph of Clorinthe, and instead of a ball, she directs her gaze to the small tower that she is affectionately cradling in the crook of her left arm. Finally, the bas-relief cast in reconstituted stone, retains the tower shown in the elevation drawing, but instead of cradling it, the female figure presents it to us on her outstretched palm. Similar to the photograph, her weight is carried by her left leg and her offering is held in her right hand. Unlike either referent that preceded it, the sensual, stylized female here is fully dressed, wearing an elegant gown that simultaneously emphasizes and conceals her curves. Common to all three variations on this theme is that the female represented is placed on an octagonal plinth.⁵⁵

Translation is always a creative act, each instantiation resulting in a new work that bears strong resemblances to its referent without being identical to it. The translations between these three representations are multilayered and interconnected. In the passage from photograph to drawing to sculpture, the female figure is transformed from a state of raw nudity to elegant dress, the object she holds transforms from orb to cylinder, and she is abstracted from a specific woman to an a-specific allegory of Woman. With each transposition in the creative development

⁵⁵ It is an amusing (and amazing) coincidence that in French, "Perron" means "doorstep."

leading up to the muse's final instantiation as a bas-relief, a layer of naughtiness has been removed, and the final version that graces the most public façade of the Cormier house in its upscale neighborhood, is not surprisingly, the most socially acceptable of the three.

This new perspective on the layers of meaning of the front door also encourages a reappraisal of the house's massing: its two interlocking, asymmetrical blocks – one more stocky and robust, the other more smaller and more delicate – now read as an architectural portrait of the couple. This interpretation draws from Valéry's description of architecture, in which he advances the claim that buildings “mathematically” capture specific individuals. Through the mouth of Phaedrus who is quoting Eupalinos the architect, Valéry writes:

“This delicate temple, none knows it, is the mathematical image of a girl of Corinth whom I happily loved. It reproduces faithfully proportions that were peculiarly hers. It lives for me! It gives me back what I have given it...”⁵⁶

That Valéry's idealized woman-temple hails from ‘Corinth,’ makes the parallel to ‘Clorinthe’ all the more vivid. Given the importance of this Valéry's *Eupalinos* to Cormier, it is unlikely that the near homonym would have been lost on him when he designed in house-temple on the mountain.⁵⁷

Modern domesticity as *Gesamtkunstwerk*

An avid photographer, an award-winning watercolorist, a sculptor, bookbinder, furniture designer and gardener, as well as an architect and engineer-constructor, Cormier was a man of many talents.⁵⁸ First and foremost a maker of things, he did not consider there to be a significant

⁵⁶ Paul Valéry, *Eupalinos, or, the Architect* [Eupalinos, ou l'Architecte], trans. William McCausland Stewart (London: Oxford University Press, 1932. 1921), 22-23.

⁵⁷ I am grateful to Martin Bressani for his attentive reading of this work, his insightful criticisms and above all, his intellectual generosity.

⁵⁸ Jean Chauvin, “Interviews d'artistes: Ernest Cormier, architecte, peintre, sculpteur,” *La Revue populaire - histoire, littérature, sciences* 20, no. 6 (June 1927): 11.

division between his various activities,⁵⁹ and his fastidious involvement in the design of all aspects of the house, reveals his commitment to designing a total environment. The house he designed for himself at a high point in his career, is the most definitive reflection in his oeuvre of this thoroughgoing attention to, and masterful handling of, all technical and aesthetic aspects of the design, not only because he designed so many of its components, and used the house as an exhibition space for the display of his own artworks, but importantly too, because it is largely through this house, that Cormier constructed himself, consolidating into one complex but coherent whole, the various facets of his private and public life and his identity as a multifaceted *constructeur*. Through this most comprehensive definition of the house's program, the Cormier residence can be read as a total work of art.⁶⁰

Most discussions of Cormier's house, by scholars and enthusiasts alike, categorize it as a notable example of Art Deco design in Canada.⁶¹ That Cormier was a local proponent of foreign ideas, and the observation that he imported and translated European and North American influences into the context of Montreal, to generate a unique synthesis that demonstrated the

⁵⁹ Phyllis Lambert, "Architecture Where Cultures Meet," 18.

⁶⁰ One precedent for my reading of Cormier's house as a total work of art, is a study of the Saarinen House, built at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan in the 1920s, that analyzes the work through the lens of the architect's belief in the inextricability of life and art. See Gregory Wittkopp, ed. *Saarinen House and Garden: A Total Work of Art* (New York; Bloomfield Hills, MI: H. N. Abrams; Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum, 1995).

⁶¹ See for example Sandra Cohen-Rose, *Northern Deco: Art Deco Architecture in Montreal* (Montréal: Corona Pub., 1996); Rosalind Pepal, "L'Art déco au Canada," in *1925: Quand l'Art déco séduit le monde*, eds. (Paris: Cité du patrimoine et de l'architecture, 2013), 246-253; Adrian Tinniswood, *The Art Deco House: Avant-Garde Houses of the 1920s and 1930s* (New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 2002). For a survey of Art Deco architecture in Montreal see Nicole Gilbert, "Présence de l'art déco dans l'architecture montréalaise" (M.A., Université du Québec à Montréal, 1988).

The byline to the article "This is the house that Ernest built," reads: "Ernest Cormier has been called 'the Leonardo da Vinci of Canada.' An engineer and architect of renown, his former home at 1418 Pine Ave. is a monument to a movement.... Deco splendor." See Suzanne de Lotbinière-Harwood, "This is the house that Ernest built," *The Montreal Star*, January 31, 1976, Lifestyles section.

formal inclinations, luxurious material palette and attention to ornament, representative of the decorative *moderne* movement in France during the interwar period, is valid. Yet, while art deco can be understood as a totalizing artistic movement that left no surface untouched, studies of art deco generally tend to employ style as an analytical category, which is useful in identifying commonalities between works in different media, but risks missing much of what is going on in the work beneath the surface.⁶² In the case of Cormier's residence, much of what is going on in the design and much of what makes this house a 'modern' work, is bound up with the house's social aspects.⁶³ For this reason, I find the concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or Total Work of Art – understood as attending to the relation of art to life in a manner that accommodates all media and annuls the difference between social spheres and artistic ones⁶⁴ – to take better account than Art Deco, of the house's sociability and performative reach, because it is through the design and use of this house that Cormier elaborates the fullest, most complete version of himself. While he does not seem to have ever used the term, evidence exists to support the claim that he

⁶² Exceptions to this include: Charlotte Benton, Tim Benton and Ghislaine Wood, eds. *Art Deco 1910-1939* (Boston; New York: Bulfinch Press, 2003) and Michael Windover, *Art Deco: A Mode of Mobility* (Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2012). Windover's study uses the theme of mobility as the lens through which to both analyze what is behind the iconography and formal qualities of the objects and buildings (largely in Canada) that emerged during the interwar period, and to find meaningful connections between this work's seemingly disparate qualities.

⁶³ Relevant to recall is that Cormier's textual description of his residence emphasized how the house was organized and how it was made, but other than listing the various rooms, it was not forthcoming about how the house was *used*. While this is certainly reflective of Cormier's commitment to discretion as well as his interests and priorities vis-à-vis making, it also speaks to the general values of the age in which he operated. As Robin Evans reminds us, from the middle of the nineteenth century and extending well into the twentieth, the social aspect of architecture – narrowly thought of in terms of the great improvements to daily life – which surfaced as an integral feature of architectural theory, was more concerned with the production and fabrication of buildings than with their occupation. In this context, the “[e]mphasis shifted from the nature of the place to the procedures of its assembly,” and the house came to be considered first and foremost as an item of production. Evans, “Figures, Doors, Passages,” 79-80.

⁶⁴ Danielle Follett and Anke Finger, “Dynamiting the *Gesamtkunstwerk*: An Introduction to the Aesthetics of the Total Artwork,” in *The Aesthetics of the Total Artwork: on Borders and Fragments*, eds. Anke Finger and Danielle Follett (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

nevertheless enacted many of the principle values driving the conceptualization of the *Gestamkunstwerk*, namely, on an aesthetic level, a lack of bounded distinctions between different art forms and genres; the more political dimension of the transgression of the borders between art and life, or art and society that invites ‘audience participation,’ (which in some cases is utopian or explicitly revolutionary, but in the case of Cormier is confined to the more personal sphere of self-fashioning); and may involve an aspiration toward more metaphysical forms of borderlessness, manifested among other ways through ritual.⁶⁵

While *Gestamkunstwerk* is a nineteenth-century concept, I argue that Cormier’s particular enactment of the Total Work of Art makes it new. For instance, an important instantiation of Cormier’s commitment to aesthetic totality is found in his application to have the house classified as heritage property, he was insistent that the furniture he designed and his numerous works of art, be included as an integral part of the property.⁶⁶ Another example that Cormier

⁶⁵ The aesthetic concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* or total artwork, operative in the twentieth-century and still useful today, has never represented a single aesthetic project, nor has it had an entirely stable or unified identity. Rather, “it describes an uneven cluster of aesthetic elements that can be regarded as common to some quite disparate artistic endeavours.” Across a heterogeneous ensemble of works that have been associated with the project of the total artwork, the blending and merging that characterizes the *Gestamkunstwerk*’s aspiration for borderlessness, takes many forms, and is not synonymous with simple mixed media or synesthesia. See Follett and Finger, “Dynamiting the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.” The capaciousness of the concept encourages me to draw from it, but serves as a productive entry point for analyzing Cormier’s will to total design, without being excessively preoccupied by the fact that unlike other broader scaled and decisively more political and utopian manifestations of the project for a total work of art, Cormier manifests dimensions of the notion that remain more intimately circumscribed.

For a discussion of the influential contribution of composer Richard Wagner, who was one of the first and most comprehensive theorists of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, and the relation of the concept to German aesthetic theory and criticism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see: Juliet Koss, *Modernism after Wagner*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. And for a study that demonstrates the centrality of the total work of art to European modernism as far back as the French Revolution, attending both to how the total work of art sought to reunite the arts into an integrated whole, fuelled by the desire to recover and renew the public function of art in the service of social and cultural regeneration, see: David Roberts, *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2011). Roberts asserts, “The total work, moreover, cuts across the neat equation of avant-gardism with progress and deconstructs the familiar left-right divide between revolution and reaction, or between the modern and the antimodern.” Roberts, *The Total Work of Art*, 1-2.

⁶⁶ The Maison Ernest-Cormier and the furniture designed by Cormier and built by Louis Pisono for the house, which are designated as the Collection Ernest-Cormier, were classified as works of art on June 11,

considered all artifacts of his creative output found in the house to be indivisible from their architectural support, is not only the display of his artworks within the house, but that he considered the works of art (as he considered key furniture pieces) as fixed architectural elements themselves. This is particularly the case in the house's studio, where even at the design stage of one of the room's elevations, Cormier indicates the symmetrical hanging of his watercolors on either side of the entry threshold, as though these regularly spaced rectangular elements were an integral feature of the wall and a factor to be considered in designing the proportions of the room.⁶⁷ [Figure 4.48] Not only would the hanging of paintings in this most public room of the house, showcase his talents as a prize-winning artist, but their placement would create a datum at eye level that would give scale and a sense of intimacy in this tall, monumental space. In addition, the content of the paintings – mostly representations of scenes from Cormier's travels to Europe, in which historic architecture and lush gardens illuminated by the Mediterranean sun figure prominently – combined with the exoticism and luxury of the room's finishes, would transport Cormier and his guests to places more culturally sophisticated and socially permissive than the provincial city that lies just outside.⁶⁸

1974, by the Ministère de la Culture, des Communications et de la Condition féminine of Quebec.

⁶⁷ In addition to the placement of the paintings and divan, in this elevation we also see the cabinet of the built-in stereo designed by Cormier that is flush with the wall and it is also visible in a photos of one of the social gatherings that Cormier hosted. Related to this technological feature of the studio, is Cormier's design of a polygonal box housing the speaker for this stereo system, which was placed on the ledge of the clerestory window, and is visible in Figure 4.16. See folder 01-905/A-5 aic545d, box 01-2011-206 T.

⁶⁸ As noted in footnote 13, Cormier also commissioned artworks from his friends, which he displayed in his home. In the studio, Cormier hung the two-part bas-relief “Éternelle chanson: Eros et La Femme” (1925) by Henri Hébert, which are inspired by mythical themes in classical culture, that was atypical for sculptors in Montreal at that time. These sculptures were initially hung on the wall of the garden of Cormier's studio on St. Urbain and were subsequently moved to his house on Pine Avenue. See Brooke, Henri Hébert, 79; Cohen-Rose, Northern Deco, 54. See Figure 4.18, where they hang on the wall of the house's studio, on either side of the tall window and door to the balcony overlooking the garden and the city. In addition to work by Henri Hébert, Cormier also collected the work of Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté (1869-1937). Lambert, “Architecture Where Culture Meet,” 27; “Suzor-Coté,” Artist's Files, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts Archives.

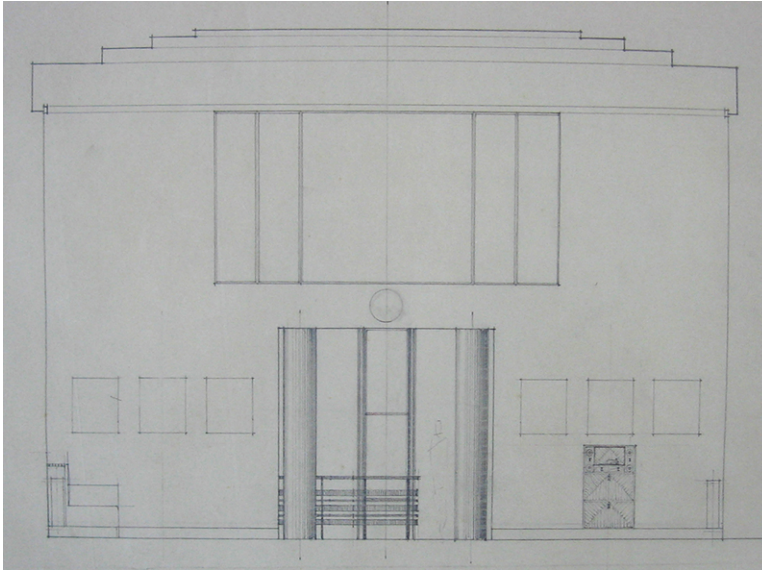


Figure 4.48 Elevation drawing of interior wall of the Atelier of the Cormier Residence (undated)
 Source: Ernest Cormier, drawing for project # 3005, folder 01-3005-03, box Cormier 01-3005-01M, FEC, CCA.

Of equal importance to an understanding of the house as a “total work of art”, however, and the dimension the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* that activates all of the contents of Cormier’s residence, is the house’s role as the setting for Cormier’s social life. Through his twin role as actor and host, he choreographed social relations and effected his self-fashioning in the company of others, whom he chose as the audience. On its uppermost level, the house sustained a dynamic social milieu.⁶⁹ As already noted, this is evinced by the intense investment of Cormier’s design attention and financial resources into the house’s most extroverted space, by the allocation of service spaces and the associated personnel to attend to the needs of guests

⁶⁹ The main precedent for this space is the only other design for a building with a domestic program that Cormier realized, and tellingly, that too, was for himself. Cormier’s studio and garden on St. Urbain Street in downtown Montreal (in the southern section of the sector of the city that came to be identified as the ‘Golden Square Mile’) was designed in 1921 and was inspired by the French model of the purpose-built artist’s studio. While at the time, this was a very common typology in Europe (especially in Paris), it was not at all common in North America. As a space in which he would work after office hours, pursue his artistic projects, and receive friends, his studio was a gathering spot for local artists, particularly the members of the avant-garde *Nigog* circle. Robert Fortier, “Fonds Ernest-Cormier,” in *Les Chemins de la mémoire, vol. 3: Biens mobiliers du Québec*, ed. Commission des biens culturels du Québec (Québec: Publications Québec, 1999), 354.

(e.g., maids and butlers receiving guests at the front door, hanging their coats in the coat room, serving food and drinks, etc.), and by the naming of that space in a way that evokes the Parisian-styled milieu that Cormier wished to recreate in Montreal, with all of the associations with creative activity that *'atelier'* connotes.⁷⁰

Cormier's self-construction as an architect, engineer-constructor and artist is polyvalent, and in important ways, is effected for and through an audience that he collected around himself, using the house as the stage for the enactment of his self-fashioning. The place given to art (broadly construed), and in fact, more precisely, *life lived as a work of art*, is the vehicle through which Cormier consolidated all of the facets of his persona into a coherent, if complex whole. Through the spatial and social implications of the design and use of the house, Cormier enacts his self-construction and it is his sustained engagement with various artistic practices that serves as a zone of connection and overlap between his public professional persona and his private life.

As the subsequent owner of the Maison Cormier recounted, when Cormier moved into the house in 1931, he left behind the studio he had designed for himself on St. Urbain Street and this prominent room on the main floor of the house became his new studio.⁷¹ On Saturday afternoons, the *atelier* was the regular meeting place of Cormier's artist friends, most of whom had studied in Paris and had returned during the years of the First World War with the ambition

⁷⁰ Although perhaps less fashionable at the time, in light of the studio's programmatic functions, Cormier could have named this room his *'salon'* instead, not only because this means 'living room' in French, but specifically for its historical connotations of a kind of reception room in a grand house where eminent people (such as artists and intellectuals) would gather, as well as for the aura of connoisseurship and discriminating taste that were associated with exhibition of artworks in the Parisian Salons. In fact, the formality of Cormier's *atelier* is incongruous with both the associations of the messiness of a functioning studio space, and with the informality of some of the social gatherings he hosted.

⁷¹ With his partner Jacques Beyderwellen, who purchased the house from Cormier in 1974, Denis Robert claimed to have maintained close contact with Cormier, consulting him on maintenance issues to do with the house, and obtaining from him directly, information about the house's social activities. See Denis Robert, "Le 1418 Avenue des Pins: de Cormier à Trudeau, vécu par Denis Robert," *DécorMag* 124 (Oct 1983): 44-54.

of bringing sophistication and modernism to the arts in Montreal, who would gather here to draw and to paint.⁷² Later on Saturdays, more friends would join the group to play chess, to tell stories and read excerpts of their texts in progress, as well as to dance and when an international star would pass through Montreal, the *atelier* was considered *the* place to visit and Cormier, *the* man to meet.⁷³ Testimony from the period also makes a point of saying that the studio was frequented by artists, writers and celebrities.⁷⁴

Photographs conserved in the Cormier archive give some insights into the atmosphere of the social gatherings Cormier hosted. In one series of small format, informal photographs taken at one of these parties, Cormier's guests are shown lounging in the studio, conversing, laughing, flirting and drinking copious amounts of alcohol. On the verso of these prints are handwritten annotations that make humorous and at times risqué commentary on what the photos depict.⁷⁵ **[Figures 4.49, 4.50 and 4.51]** Other photos taken in the studio reveal an

⁷² Lambert, "Architecture Where Culture Meet," 18. In terms of Cormier and Perron's liaison, it seems that close friends would have known of their living arrangements and less intimate guests may have been aware of their liaison without being taken on a tour of the house's levels and being given a frank explanation of the living arrangements. It is not possible to know how much of their private life was revealed to guests, but it seems reasonable to assume, that anyone whose disapproval Cormier was seriously worried about, would likely not have been invited to the house, or at least, not while Clorinthe Perron was present.

⁷³ Robert, "Le 1418 Avenue des Pins," 49.

⁷⁴ "De tous les pays, des architectes, des artistes, des écrivains, viennent le voir dans sa résidence de l'Avenue des Pins, d'où la vue domine le St. Laurent. Il y a reçu toutes les personnalités les plus diverses depuis son ami Maurice Ravel, jusqu'à Suzy Solidor ! et chaque samedi un groupe d'amis canadiens, dont les frères Hébert, Ringuet, et quelques autres s'y retrouvent... C'est qu'Ernest Cormier est le meilleur des amis, très sensible, très bon, aussi fidèle en amitié qu'exacte à ses rendez-vous, et ponctuel dans ses travaux ... !" Sarrazin, "Causerie de monsieur A. J. Sarrazin, prononcée à Radio-Canada, le 27 mai 1949."

⁷⁵ Comments relating to flirting, seduction and orgasms, as well as humorous chiding about the pedantic communication style of some guests are typical of this set of photos. See P. 6086, folder ADC-6,18_P.5904 à P.6155, box 01-Cormier_P.5904 à 6479.

The FEC also conserves 18 spools of 16mm film, dating from c.1928-1939, totaling approximately 30 minutes of footage. A list of the contents of these spools indicates that several of these film clips taken by Cormier are sited in the house and garden. Unfortunately, these films were not yet digitized at the time of this dissertation's completion, but it is my hope to be able to watch them as I am hopeful that



Figure 4.49 Photo of a social gathering in the Atelier of Cormier's residence, showing Clorinthe listening while a guest reads a text out loud, c.1930s
Source: Ernest Cormier, P.6086, folder "ADC-6,18_P.5904 à P.6155," box 01-Cormier_P.5904 à 6479, FEC, CCA.



Figure 4.50 The sculptor Henri Hébert at a social gathering in the Atelier of Cormier's residence, hovering beside an unidentified woman, c.1930s. On the verso of this photo is written in pencil, "attention! on vous observe, ou l'Ecole du Flirt" [Careful, we're watching you, or, the School of Flirting].
Source: Ernest Cormier, P.6111, folder "ADC-6,18_P.5904 à P.6155," box 01-Cormier_P.5904 à 6479, FEC, CCA.



Figure 4.51 Henri Hébert at a social gathering in the Atelier of Cormier's residence, attentively tending to an unidentified woman, c.1930s. On the verso of this photo is written in pencil, "un peu de bubussi ? [...] ça fera effet... Whopee !" [A little bubbly? It will take effect.... Whoopie!!].
Source: Ernest Cormier, P.6115, folder "ADC-6,18_P.5904 à P.6155," box 01-Cormier_P.5904 à 6479, FEC, CCA.

eclectic array of social events, from informal afternoon gatherings, to formal soirées, and even to something as unusual as a jousting match⁷⁶ [Figures 4.52, 4.53 and 4.54] and dated, handwritten guest lists reveal the frequency with which Cormier hosted events.⁷⁷ In all of these

they will offer insights into the vibrant social life of the Cormier residence as well as into the culture of 1930s Montreal.

⁷⁶ See folder ADC-6,18_P.5904 à P.6155, box 01-Cormier P.5904 à 6479, and the nitrates conserved in contact sheets box 2 of 3.

⁷⁷ A series of scraps of paper in the Cormier archive, indicate small groups of people invited to the house on Saturday, November 14 [1931]; Sunday, November 15; Tuesday, November 17; Saturday, November

cases, Cormier emerges as the gracious host and cultivated patron of the arts, the connoisseur of contemporary foreign design trends and the affluent purveyor of luxury commestibles – imported cigars, chocolate, wine and champagne being items that he would offer to his guests, even during the Depression era⁷⁸ – as well as an engaged participant in this intimate if contrived universe of modern artists and intellectuals. Through Cormier’s vibrant social life, therefore, the house in general and the studio space in particular, are the manifestation of, and stage for, the performative elaboration of the architect-engineer-artist-client-patron-host’s construction of self.



Figure 4.52 Photo of Cormier and one of the guests at a social gathering he hosted in his Atelier, c.1930s

Source: [Photographer unknown, but likely Clorinthe Perron], P.6090, folder “ADC–6,18_P.5904 à P.6155,” box 01-Cormier_P.5904 à 6479, FEC, CCA.

21; Saturday, November 28; Saturday, December 5; and Tuesday, December 8. See folder 01-905/A-12, box 01-2011-206 T.

⁷⁸ Cormier went to astounding lengths to please and impress his guests. For instance, in March 1932, Cormier placed an order for the importation of 19 cases of assorted French wines that cost \$603 CDN. Translated into 2014 dollars, this means that in the early years of the economic Depression, Cormier spent an astounding \$9,516.58 on alcohol alone. (Due to inflation this amount would be the equivalent to \$9,609.35 in 2015). See the Bank of Canada’s inflation calculator, accessed November 28, 2014 and February 26, 2015, <http://www.bankofcanada.ca/rates/related/inflation-calculator/>

Among these receipts for supplies for his social gatherings we find orders for champagne and many sweet and savory imported gourmet food items. See folder 01-905-A-24 in box 01-2011-206 T. In contrast to this decadence, the archive also reveals multiple cases of accounts overdue to suppliers, which raises the question as to whether Cormier was simply inconsiderate about paying some of his debts, or was living beyond his means and simply prioritized spending on his social life than in settling the accounts pertaining to the construction of his house. See boxes 01-2011-204 T, boxes 01-2011-205 T, and boxes 01-2011-206 T.



Figure 4.53 Photo of a formal gathering hosted by Cormier in his Atelier, after 1930. Source: Ernest Cormier, P.6131, folder “ADC-6,18_P.5904 à P.6155,” box 01-Cormier_P.5904 à 6479, FEC, CCA.

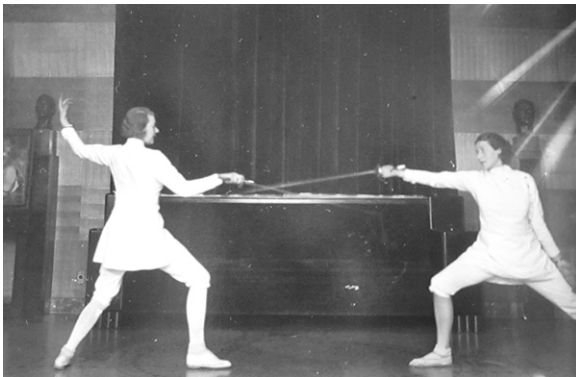


Figure 4.54 Photo of guests jousting in the studio of the Cormier residence, undated. Source: Ernest Cormier, nitr.S19-3(03), box 01 – Contacts – S19-1 @ 19-83 2/3, FEC, CCA.

The revolution that was modern architecture began in the home.⁷⁹ As Beatriz Colomina has noted:

“Perhaps no one thing distinguishes twentieth-century architecture more than the central role played by the private house. [...]virtually all the major architects of this century, on both sides of the Atlantic, have elaborated their most important architectural ideas through the design of houses.”⁸⁰

But what is it exactly that makes the Cormier residence ‘modern’ (or not)? The typical places that scholars tend look to for signs of modernity in architecture are the form, materials, and concept of space of the building, and in the case of Cormier’s house, attention has been called to his use of reinforced concrete, his elaboration of his own translation of art deco aesthetics, and the

⁷⁹ Reyner Banham, *Guide to Modern Architecture* (London: Architectural Press, 1962), 25.

⁸⁰ Beatriz Colomina, “The Media House,” *Assemblage*, no. 27 (Aug 1995): 55-66.

parallels that can be drawn between the rear, white stuccoed façade of his house and other early twentieth-century domestic works. As well, there is the fact of its marked distinction from the vast majority of contemporaneous designs of domestic architecture in Montreal, or even in Canada at large.⁸¹ To this overview, we could add Cormier's use of richly textured cladding materials for ornamental effect on the interior, as compared to the relatively inconspicuous exterior faces of his residence that is a strategy reminiscent of Loos. And yet, even setting aside the most exacting standards of the best known avant-garde examples of European modernism in architecture, there are many aspects of the house that would not satisfy even looser criteria of orthodox modernism in architecture. For instance, a series of carefully connected – and held apart – compartmentalized spaces, the Cormier house neither participates in the design of open flowing volumes of contemporaneous houses such as Le Corbusier's iconic Villa Savoye (1928-30) outside of Paris, or Mies' Tugendhat House in Brno (1930) in which the unfolding of space is to be appreciated by the moving spectator, nor does it embody the fluid, interpenetrating spaces of Frank Lloyd Wright's residential architecture, despite the fact that it has its own particular dynamic progression. As well, in the Cormier residence, a striving for transparency (and all that this came to connote in the theories of historiographers of modern architecture beginning with Giedion) is precisely the design strategy that is avoided.⁸² In addition, the Cormier residence consistently privileges the custom-made over the industrially produces and embraces posh and monumental materials that speak of an innate classicism. As well, the

⁸¹ One study that showcases modern residential designs in the province of Quebec by a contemporary of Cormier is Agathe Chiasson-Leblanc, "Vision d'espaces modernes: l'architecture résidentielle de Robert Blatter, 1929-1957" (M.A., Université Laval (Canada), 2005).

⁸² Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002. 1941); Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky, "Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal," *Perspecta* 8 (1963): 45-54; Eve Blau, "Transparency and the Irreconcilable Contradictions of Modernity," *Praxis: journal of writing & building* 9 'Expanding Surface' (2007): 50-59.

kitchen, which was a domestic zone that received much theoretical and design attention in the early twentieth century, seems not to have been reinvented or rethought in any way by Cormier, probably due to a large extent to the fact that he didn't use it. Related to this are the vestiges of the persistence of nineteenth-century sensibilities manifested in the servants' rooms and corridor and their separate access through the delivery door at the side of the house.

While this chapter acknowledges the formal-aesthetic aspects of the house that contribute to its characterization as an example of modern architecture, what I argue is that most important of all in what makes the house 'modern' is the way it transcends the sum of its formal-aesthetic and technological parts to create a total work of art that was used to orchestrate a particular lifestyle through which Cormier constructed a particular identity. As Robert Little has aptly observed, this house "is an expression in architectural terms of Ernest Cormier himself."⁸³ A residence that was both a social focal point among Montreal's avant-garde community as of 1931 and one that jealously guarded its secrets in order to keep up appearances in the eye of the general public, this house is the locus of the merger of Cormier's various selves, that all find their common root in his identity as a maker/ constructor. Advancing a set of arguments for the accommodation of modern life, the house is a manifesto, but in keeping with Cormier's tendency toward discursive discretion, its polemics are articulated in private.

⁸³ Little, "1418, Avenue des Pins," 109.

Chapter 5 **Constructing national identity: the Université de Montréal as the face of French Canada**

“It is not necessary to think for a long time to realize that with the university question arises the question of our higher education, and with the question of our higher education, that of the future of our youth, our province and our country. We hear it said everywhere that it is supremely important for us to create an intellectual elite, and it is certain that if this elite is formed and developed in the direction of all our traditions, we will have the means to inspire respect and consideration.”

– Monsignor Georges Gauthier, Rector, Université de Montréal (1919)¹

We had to build

In 1919 and again in 1922, fires ravaged the main building of the Montréal branch of the Université de Laval on St. Denis Street in the city’s downtown, destroying at least three stories and ruining precious collections.² **[Figure 5.1]** Designed by Perrault, Mesnard and Venne in 1893-95, this building housed the administration, Faculties of Law and Medicine and the School of Pharmacy, and was described as being,

“[o]f no particular and traditional architecture, unless it be Romanesque, the front is marked by a long stone loggia, stretching between the two wings, and preceded by a flight of steps in the shape of a horse-shoe, not very elegant but convenient for exterior demonstrations and receptions.”³

¹ Mgr. Georges Gauthier, *La Mission de l'Université* (Montréal: Bibliothèque de l'Action française, 1920), 1-2. This text reproduces the lecture given by the Université de Montréal’s Rector, Mgr. Gauthier, on November 13, 1919. The original passage reads: “Il n'est pas nécessaire de réfléchir bien longuement pour ce rendre compte qu'avec la question universitaire c'est la question de notre enseignement supérieur qui se pose, et avec la question de notre enseignement supérieur celle de l'avenir de notre jeunesse, de notre province et de notre pays. L'on entend dire de toutes parts qu'il est souverainement important de nous créer une élite intellectuelle, et il est bien certain que si cette élite se forme et se développe dans le sens de nos traditions, de toutes nos traditions, nous tenons en elle le moyen de nous imposer au respect et à la considération.”

² These fires broke out on November 22, 1919 and November 14, 1922. A fire in the School of Surgery located on St. Hubert Street on November 30, 1922, further aggravated the institution’s situation. Mgr. Olivier Maurault, *L'Université de Montréal* (Montréal: Les Éditions des Dix, 1952), 27-28.

³ Olivier Maurault, “The University of Montréal,” *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* 3, no. 1 (Jan-Feb 1926): 7.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the Faculties of Law and Medicine had a combined total of barely 300 students, but by the early 1920s the faculties had outgrown the available space, such that labs were crowded, available classrooms were difficult to reserve, and two or three professors were obliged to share offices that were barely large enough for one person.⁴ As of 1920, classrooms were required for the courses newly being offered by the Faculties of Letters and Sciences as well as the School of Social, Economic and Political Sciences, and new faculties and schools were affiliating themselves with the university, making the state of the existing facilities intolerable.⁵ In addition, the major risk of fire weighed heavily on the conscience of the institution's administration.⁶ In light of the total inadequacy of the existing facilities, there was no



Figure 5.1 A photograph of the fire damage to the Montréal branch of the Université Laval's main building in 1922. Source: 1Fp,05004, Fonds du Bureau de l'information (D0037), Division de la gestion de documents et des archives, UdeM.

⁴ Parizeau, "Pourquoi et comment on construit l'Université de Montréal," *Annuaire général de l'Université de Montréal 1932-33* 12e année (1933): 205-206; Marcel Fournier, "Tradition and Modernism: The Construction of the Université de Montréal," in *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal*, ed. Isabelle Gournay (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1990), 46.

⁵ Mgr. Olivier Maurault, "Histoire de l'Université," *Annuaire général de l'Université de Montréal 1935-36*, 15e année (1936): 201, 203.

⁶ Parizeau, "Pourquoi et comment on construit l'UdeM," 205-206.

question that a new university had to be erected to ensure the provision of the material and intellectual needs of the constantly growing faculties. Moreover, it was strongly felt that to not provide for the future in this way, would be both shortsighted and irresponsible.⁷ Thus it was understood that the time had come for the university to set itself to the task of building.⁸ In the meantime, however, the outmoded existing facilities needed to be repaired in order to continue offering instruction while the new campus was being built, and this work cost almost half a million dollars.⁹

Yet the university's ambitions to establish adequate facilities was colored by more than a pragmatic stocktaking of the inadequacies and hazardous risks of the current accommodations. The end of the suffering caused by World War I, brought about a sense of a return to order, and the 1920s was a period of prosperity in Canada that encouraged a belief in the good times lasting.¹⁰ It was generally felt that a new era was dawning and that it was time to think seriously of the future.¹¹ In addition to counting on financial support from various sources including the city and the provincial government, a public subscription campaign was launched by the university in 1919 to help pay for the costly repairs to the fire-damaged facilities and to provide for the accommodation of new faculties.¹² Coinciding with this period of optimism was the long sought-after attainment of full independence from the Université Laval in Quebec City, for which the

⁷ Parizeau, "Pourquoi et comment on construit l'UdeM," 206-207; Maurault, "Histoire de l'Université," 203.

⁸ Dr. Georges-E. Cartier, "Pour aider à comprendre le problème universitaire," *L'Action nationale* 9, no. 6 (June 1937): 355; Maurault, "Histoire de l'Université," 203.

⁹ Maurault, "Histoire de l'Université," 201.

¹⁰ Cartier, "Pour aider à comprendre le problème universitaire," 354-355.

¹¹ Maurault, "Histoire de l'Université," 201; Cartier, "Pour aider à comprendre le problème universitaire," 353.

¹² Maurault, "Histoire de l'Université," 200.

institution in Montréal had been established as a satellite in 1878.¹³ As a Catholic institution of higher education, the Université Laval was under the control of Rome. Supportive of a single French-language, Catholic university in the province of Quebec, Rome had been resistant to the creation of a second university, but had authorized the establishment of a branch in Montréal, to which it granted some measure of autonomy in terms of appointing its deans and faculty, yet still remained subordinate to the Université Laval. Yet by the end of World War I, support for the full independence from Laval had become sufficiently widespread in Montréal that the episcopate of the ecclesiastical province submitted an official brief to the Holy See. The main argument levied, was that failure to grant the Montréal branch its independence, risked the creation of a state or secular French-language university, over which the Church would have no influence. As a result of these efforts, by 1920, the new Université de Montréal had attained independent status and its accompanying liberty of action.¹⁴

The combination of the university's new-found autonomy, its pressing needs for new facilities and the generally optimistic outlook of the period, fuelled a desire to develop Montréal's French-language university along the lines of the bigness, beauty and modern comforts of

¹³ The Université Laval was established in Quebec City in 1852 and it exercised hegemonic control over French-language higher education in the province of Quebec. By contrast, Montréal's English-speaking population already had McGill College, which had been founded in 1821. With the backing of industrialists and financiers, McGill had become a dynamic institution of higher learning in the country. See: Fournier, "Tradition and Modernism: The Construction of the Université de Montréal," 43.

¹⁴ Fournier, "Tradition and Modernism," 44. In the *Annuaire générale de l'Université de Montréal* produced annually by the university during this period beginning in the academic year 1920-21, an one-page overview of the institution's history is consistently provided. It reads: "En 1919 et 1920, la succursale a été doté de son autonomie complète, de droit et de fait. Dans l'ordre canonique, elle fut d'abord régie, à partir du 8 mai 1919, par un rescrit préparatoire à une Bulle pontificale. La charte civile lui a été octroyée par la Législature provinciale de Québec, le 14 février 1920. Le 30 octobre 1927, elle recevait enfin de Rome la Bulle définitive." See for example, "Université de Montréal: historique," *Annuaire générale de l'Université de Montréal 1932-33* (1933), 9.

American schools.¹⁵ With these grand ambitions, the choice of site for the new campus became a contentious issue as various factions were invested in advocating for different parts of the city. The university authorities felt that in light of the city's rapid urban development and the noisiness of the surrounding activities, they ought to seek out a spot that was spacious enough to host larger buildings and conducive to the quiet and meditation necessary for serious study.¹⁶ Of the sites suggested, three were taken into serious consideration.¹⁷ **[Figure 5.2]** One was Parc Lafontaine, which was bounded by four streets making it convenient to access. As well, its proximity to Notre-Dame Hospital was deemed advantageous in serving the teaching needs of the Faculty of Medicine. However, the considerations that lead to the park being discounted as a viable option were its proximity to slaughterhouses, the poor substratum of the soil, and the fact that the park was owned by the Federal government, who refused to relinquish the land.¹⁸ The site that was proposed to the university as the obvious choice for the new campus because it was located in the heart of the city's French Catholic population, was the Parc Maisonneuve in the city's east end, but this park was located in a factory district that would have obliged students to cross some of the city's most unsavory neighborhoods.¹⁹ The local east-end newspaper, *L'Ère*

¹⁵ Cartier, "Pour aider à comprendre le problème universitaire," 353-354. Piette, "Une autre année de vie Universitaire," *Annuaire général de l'Université de Montréal 1928-29* (1929), 342.

¹⁶ Mgr. Vincent Piette, "Quatre années de vie universitaire," *Annuaire général de l'Université de Montréal, 1927-28 7e année* (1928): 308.

¹⁷ A fourth proposal was made to remove the university from Montréal entirely and to build the new campus on nearby Ile-Sainte-Hélène, on the grounds that the small island site would remove students from the tumult of the city and provide an ideal location for study. See Henri Talbot-Gouin, *Quatre Lettres: de la reconstruction de l'Université de Montréal* (Montréal: J.P.R. Drouin, Éditeur, 1922) 28-30.

¹⁸ Mgr Émile Chartier, *Trente années d'Université, 1914-1944* (Sherbrooke, 1955), Publication 55 (1982), 42, Fonds de la Division de la gestion de documents et des archives (D0036), Université de Montréal; Fournier, "Tradition and Modernism," 47.

¹⁹ Argus, "Le site de l'université," *Le Quartier latin*, March 11, 1920, 4.

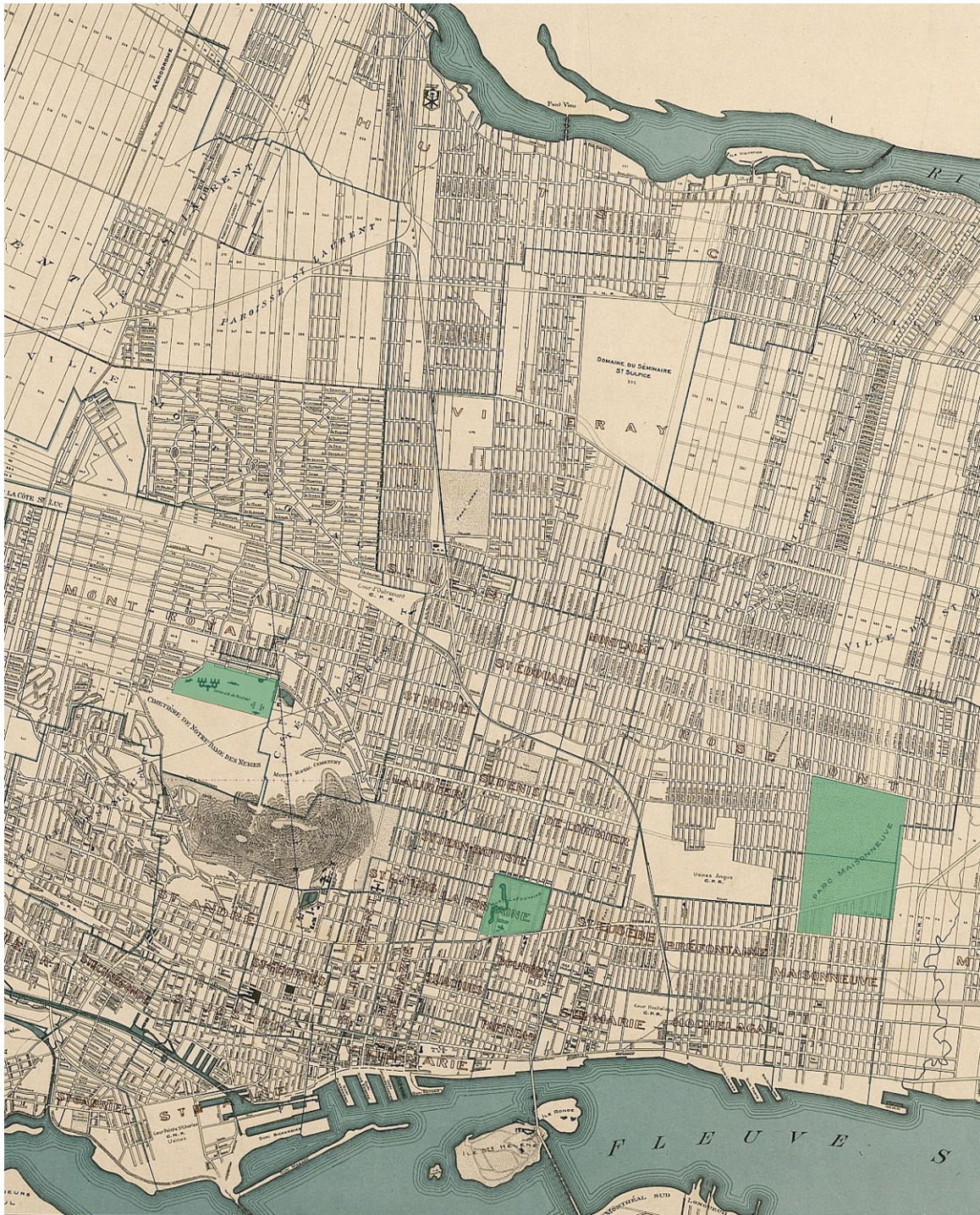


Figure 5.2 Detail of a map of the city of Montréal and its environs, prepared in January 1931, showing the footprint of the university’s giant main pavilion on Mount Royal. Green highlights have been added to indicate the three principal sites that were considered for the Université de Montréal’s new campus. Source: [No cartographer credited], “Plan de la Cité de Montréal et de ses environs,” 1931, NMC 1998, LAC.

Nouvelle, launched a vigorous propaganda campaign to pressure the university to choose Maisonneuve, arguing that while the park is located *near* an industrial neighborhood, industries are banned from developing around the park, and moreover, the park itself is so large that it constitutes a neighborhood in its own right.²⁰ Initially, it had seemed that the suburb of Maisonneuve was willing to gift its park to the university, but upon closer examination of the documents, this proved not to be the case.²¹

The fortuitous development that did much to settle the question was the city's promise to donate land on the northern slope of Mount Royal. Instead of dollars, this land would be Montréal's contribution to the university's subscription campaign.²² The city offered a 53-acre plot of land on Maplewood Avenue, located between the neighborhoods of Outremont and Côte-des-Neiges, which was already serviced by tramways, and was within reasonable proximity to St. Joseph's Oratory, an important pilgrimage site in the city for French Catholics.²³ **[Figures 5.3 and 5.4]** A limestone quarry that had been abandoned since 1920, this plot alone was not large enough for the campus, and so the university purchased adjacent properties to increase the

²⁰ Frontenac, "L'Université sera construite à Maisonneuve," *L'Ère Nouvelle* vol. II, no.25, November 3, 1926; ARCH259440, folder "ARV4/H-1," box 00-EC-002. For a critical discussion of this vigorous opinion campaign see: Cartier, "Pour aider à comprendre le problème universitaire," 355-356.

²¹ Maisonneuve Park was owned by a group of financiers who intended to sell it at a high price. Regarding the deliberations, the Vice-Rector of the university recounted: "Maisonneuve, noyau de la population française, 'avait offert gratuitement son parc central,' affirmait-on, et cela par une délibération de son Conseil de ville, pour le case où la nouvelle université consentirait à s'y installer. La délibération existait en fait; mais, à l'examen du document je constatai que le conseil se déclarait seulement 'prêt à *entrer en pourparlers* avec les autorités universitaires pour *leur vendre son parc*.' Or, le parc appartenait, nous finîmes par le découvrir, à une compagnie de financiers; et, loin de vouloir faire don de son terrain, celle-ci entendait bien de vendre à gros prix. Il fallait en rebattre." Chartier, *Trente années de l'Université*, 42-43.

²² Maurault, "Histoire de l'Université," 202. City Council had promised this contribution in May 1922, but the gift was not officially offered until March 1923. Fournier, "Tradition and Modernism," 47.

²³ Maurault, *L'Université de Montréal*, 29.



Figure 5.3 Photograph of St. Joseph's Oratory on Queen Mary Road, Montréal, QC, photographed October 1950.
Source: Joseph Guibord, Service du tourisme, Office provincial de publicité, E6,S7,SS1,P51085, BAnQ Vieux-Montréal.

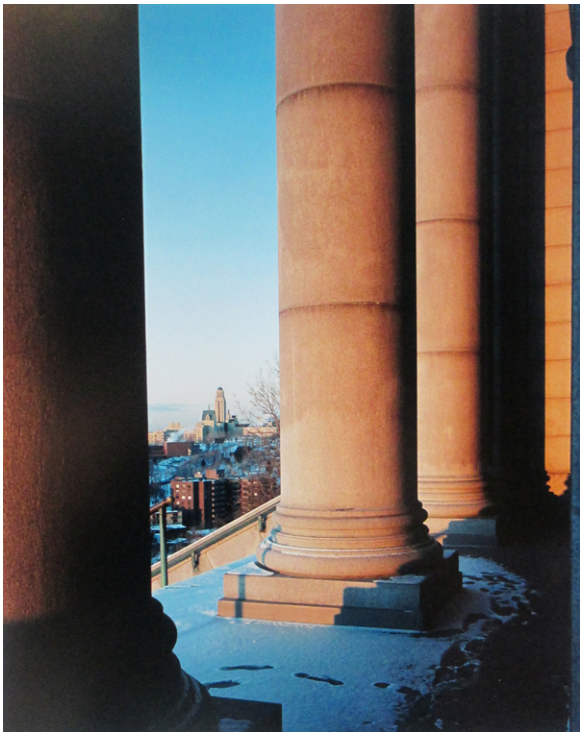


Figure 5.4 View of the tower of the Université de Montréal as seen through the portico of the Oratoire St-Joseph, c.1990.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990.0036, box Archival Storage III-2 Colour, Collection, CCA.

site to 150 acres.²⁴ From the corner of Bellingham Road and Maplewood Avenue, the augmented site extended along Maplewood for approximately half a mile (almost 4000 feet) in frontage, and 1500 feet to the slope's summit at its greatest depth.²⁵

²⁴ *Album-Souvenir de l'Université de Montréal* (Montréal: Beaugrand-Champagne, 1933), 16. The university acquired neighbouring lands to the east and west owned by Jesuits, Franciscans and the Northmount

While at the time, the site lacked amenities such as the provision of water and electricity, it was considered to boast many advantages. The available acreage and the site's three broad plateaus would allow for the accommodation of not only the faculties and schools, but also student housing and the university sports complex, which meant that the university authorities began to envision the development of the university's new buildings with greater scope. Additionally, the campus' removal from the noise, foul smells and other urban agitations meant that professors and students would be able to work and study in a calm and beautiful setting. Moreover, it was noted, that the university would continue to enjoy its open, airy spaces even after the increasing urban density of the metropolis would have spread to fully encircle the mountain, thereby displacing the physical center of the island-city's population.²⁶ And yet, alongside the inevitable future encroachments of urban development onto this prominent landmark of 'urban nature,' the primary source of the gravitational pull exerted by the mountain was symbolic: in the collective urban imaginary, Mount Royal was already the 'center' of the city. As the site of symbolic conquests, then, it was not lost on the university authorities and everyone supportive of the project and choice of site, that building the university on Mount Royal would endow the institution with greater *gravitas* and prestige, than if the campus were to be built on the plain. As one commentator noted at the time:

“Could we remain indifferent to the idea that one day, if we didn't act fast enough, the last available spot on the mountain and possibly the nicest, would go to the English or the Jews, and the French Canadian, whose ancestors were the

Construction Company in order to enlarge its territory. Guy Pinard, “L'édifice principal de l'Université de Montréal,” *La Presse*, May 29, 1988, E-7.

The soil conditions of this former quarry would prove to cause problems, additional expenses and delays to the construction of the foundations, due to a fault in the strata that required additional piles.

²⁵ Maurault, “The University of Montréal,” *JRAIC*, 10; Maurault, *L'Université de Montréal*, 29, fn11.

²⁶ Parizeau, “Pourquoi et comment on construit l'UdeM,” 207-208, 211; Cartier, “Pour aider à comprendre le problème universitaire,” 357.

first to tread on this soil, would again remain in the background, below the hill?”²⁷

As the university’s Rector, Monsignor Vincent Piette was to comment in 1923, regarding the various site options, the slope of Mount Royal seemed to please the majority in terms of aesthetics and national pride.²⁸

Nationalist ferment

Up until and during the first half of the twentieth century, the two primary components of French-Canadian national identity were that its members were native French speakers and Roman Catholic. Since the British Conquest of New France in 1760, the French living in what would become the province of Quebec within the Dominion of Canada a century later, had found themselves in a subaltern position, highly protective of their culture and preferring isolation within North America to losing their language and faith.²⁹ In Montréal, French Canadians constituted the majority in terms of population, but given that the city’s (and indeed the country’s) wealth and power lay in the hands of Montréal’s small, English-speaking elite, they were a minority group. As a Canadian historian writing in the mid-1920s summarized:

“Separated from France they would remain French and cling to the language, the social customs, the laws, the religion which made up the French type of culture.

²⁷ Cartier, “Pour aider à comprendre le problème universitaire,” 357. The original reads: *Pouvait-on rester insensible à l'idée qu'un jour, si l'on ne se décidait pas assez tôt, le dernier emplacement disponible, le plus beau peut-être, à la Montagne irait aux Anglais ou aux Juifs, et que le Canadien français, lui, dont les ancêtres avaient les premiers foulé ce sol, resterait encore à l'arrière-plan, en bas de la côte?*”

²⁸ Mgr Piette, 29th meeting of the Commission d’études, October 29, 1923, Fonds D45/421, Archives, UdeM.

²⁹ George McKinnon Wrong, “The Two Races in Canada. Lecture Delivered before the Canadian Historical Association, Montréal, May 21st, 1925” (n.p., 1925), 10. Wrong also commented that in Canada “we find the Englishman despising the French-Canadian as an inferior people, and we find the French-Canadian in return consoling himself by the reflection that while he was weaker in the brutal weapons of the flesh, and in the ruthless search for material success, he had gifts which made him the real superior, a culture, a faith, a love of things of the soul and of the home which gave him the deeper insight into the real value of life.” Wrong, “The Two Races in Canada,” 6.

At first the English failed to see the strength of this depressed and poverty-stricken people. The commerce, the government, the glamour of social prestige in Canada were all chiefly with the new masters of the country.”³⁰

These sociopolitical dynamics mean that for over 150 years prior to the Université de Montréal’s ambitious plans to build new and up-to-date facilities to serve Montréal’s French-speaking citizenry, the largely working class French-Canadian population had felt vulnerable and marginalized.

During the first decades of the twentieth century, national consciousness among French Canadians developed as a key preoccupation among intellectuals. Within the struggle to save the “menaced French-Canadian race,”³¹ a growing body of intellectuals began calling out the inequalities between English and French Canadians and the social frameworks in place in Canada at the time that sanctioned “the superiority of one race for the humiliation of the other.”³² Tapping into the collective indignation and the will to organize a defense of their language, culture and rights in order to create a more equitable future, French-Canadian nationalist sentiment began to gather force. While an allegiance to all aspects of French culture was central to French-Canadian identity, nationalist sentiment was not monolithic in its values and aspirations. The ideological visions for the culture’s survival can be broadly divided into two main

³⁰ Wrong, “The Two Races in Canada,” 6-7.

³¹ Catherine Pomeyrols, *Les intellectuels québécois: formation et engagements, 1919-1939* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), 12. In her study of the educational reforms and the francophone intellectuals who played key roles in the elaboration of a French-Canadian nationalist agenda in the early twentieth century, Pomeyrols seeks to provide a revisionist history of the interwar period in Quebec, which has commonly been considered a period of darkness [*la grande noirceur*] in which very little ideological activity existed due to the tyrannical power wielded by the French Catholic clergy. Instead, she convincingly argues that the stirrings of what would blossom into the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s began during the interwar period.

³² Lionel Groulx and André Laurendeau, “Manifeste de la jeune génération,” (1932-33), reproduced in Pomeyrols, *Les intellectuels québécois: formation et engagements, 1919-1939*, 517-519. An English translation (without mention of the authors) was published as: “Manifesto of the Jeune Canada Movement,” trans. Joanne L’Heureux and Richard Howard, in *The Essential Laurendeau*, ed. Ramsay Cook and Michael D. Behiels (Vancouver: Copp Clark Pub., 1976), 117-120.

camps, namely, those who turned to the past and promoted an attachment to the land and agriculture in order to faithfully protect the French language and traditions, and those who advocated for progress, science and democracy, and saw higher education as the means for French-Canadians to assume positions of leadership in modern society. Thus, this ideological division within the Francophone community, that drew a fault line between the nationalist agendas of conservative representatives of the clergy, and those of the intellectual elite (which included progressive members of religious communities), emerged as a conflict between faith and reason; it was in effect, a Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns.³³

The interwar period in Quebec was thus characterized by substantial ideological turbulence and a lot of public activity on the part of intellectuals, in which French Canadian nationalism ranked high as a preoccupation.³⁴ Among the key contributions to the nationalist discourse at this time, were the voluminous writings of the abbot Lionel Groulx (1878-1967)³⁵ and those of Édouard Montpetit (1881-1954), a lawyer, political economist, university professor, and spokesman for French-Canadian academics who, as of 1920, served as Secretary-General for the Université de Montréal for 30 years.³⁶ Through his sustained involvement in the advent of the modern university, Montpetit stands out as particularly eloquent and influential.³⁷ In a stirring

³³ Marcel Fournier, *L'entrée dans la modernité: science, culture et société au Québec* (Montréal: Editions Saint-Martin, 1986), 9-10.

³⁴ Pomeyrols, *Les intellectuels québécois*, 11, 12.

³⁵ For a concise overview of the life and accomplishments of l'abbé Lionel Groulx see: Noël E. Lanoix, ed, *Les Biographies françaises d'Amérique* (Montréal: Les Journalistes Associés Éditeurs, 1950; 1942), 624. For a discussion of Groulx's prolific writings, the various pseudonyms he used, and his reasons for doing so, see Marie-Pier Luneau, "Les Lionel Groulx: la pseudonymie comme stratégie littéraire et jeu institutionnel (1900-1966)" (M.A., Université de Sherbrooke (Canada), 1996).

³⁶ See Lanoix, ed, *Les Biographies françaises d'Amérique* (1950), 620-621.

³⁷ Fournier, *L'entrée dans la modernité*, 44.

lecture given in Montréal in 1917, entitled, “Notre Avenir” [Our future],³⁸ Montpetit asserted that the pressing duty of the hour for the French Canadian people is not to convince themselves that they belong to a superior race of Latin stock, but rather to *prove it*, arguing that a minority that sinks into self-satisfaction based on its past glories without stimulating anything new and fighting with continual progress for its legitimate aspirations, is doomed. He stated that the time has come to acquire intellectual power in all domains, particularly in politics and in business, in order to be in a position to influence the destiny of the nation.³⁹ Montpetit’s central argument was that the national question for French Canada is fundamentally an economic one, and that it is only through economic power that French Canadians will be able to attain sufficient material comfort to be in a position to make significant cultural contributions. Most importantly, it is education that is the means of assuring this elevated status – school being the crucible where specialists are trained and where we prepare ourselves for the future – and therefore, he insisted that all efforts should be directed toward creating this expertise. Such a body of learned individuals would be in a strong position to “serve their race” with competence.⁴⁰ These efforts will thus constitute a working, thinking elite to whom the future of French Canada would be entrusted.⁴¹ Important to

³⁸ Montpetit gave the lecture, “Notre avenir: l’enseignement professionnel et la constitution d’une élite,” at the Monument National in downtown Montréal, on January 14, 1917 under the auspices of the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste. It was subsequently published as Edouard Montpetit, “Notre Avenir,” *Revue Trimestrielle Canadienne* 2ième année, no. 8 (Feb 1917): 305-321.

³⁹ Montpetit, “Notre Avenir,” 314-315.

⁴⁰ Montpetit, “Notre Avenir,” 315-317. Montpetit noted that while there already exist a number of professional schools, they are not well-enough attended. He also proposed that the most gifted students ought to be sent abroad on scholarships in order to complete their professional training, such that when they return home, they will be able to make even more valuable contributions. See Montpetit, “Notre Avenir,” 319.

⁴¹ Montpetit, “Notre Avenir,” 319. The original statement reads: “L’homme cultivé devient une double valeur. Comme nous avons formé des médecins, des ingénieurs, des avocats, des notaires, nous formerons des industriels, des commerçants, des financiers, des ouvriers d’art et de métier. Nous constituerons ainsi une élite du travail qui sera, aussi bien, une élite de la pensée; et nous lui confierons notre avenir. Voilà le but.”

clarify is that by 'elite,' the thinkers who shared this vision for the future of French Canadians, were not referring to a small body representative of a particular social class, but precisely to the contrary, held an inclusive vision of members from all strata of society aspiring to join this educated group and to contribute to the intellectual and material progress of the nation.⁴²

The end of Montpetit's speech took a metaphorical turn, in which he spoke of this political-pedagogical project as a building, whose design will be given by these skilled, learned men, and towards whose construction, all will contribute. This edifice cannot be born and developed without the aid of a guiding spirit, he intoned. It cannot be realized solely through the effects of harmonious coincidences, but rather, in order to triumph, a direction needs to be drawn out in advance. Montpetit summarized, "This is what we will obtain by professional education being placed as the foundation of economic reform."⁴³ Uttered figuratively in 1917, in less than a decade, this metaphor of the collective national project as an edifice would become prophetically literal.

With the understanding that as the center of thought, culture, social instruction and professional training, the university is one of the key institutions of the nation, the Université de Montréal's plans for pedagogical and architectural expansion quickly became inseparable from the nationalist cause.⁴⁴ At its broadest level, the Université de Montréal understood itself as the chosen vessel of French thought in America, entrusted with the preservation and dissemination

⁴² Parizeau, "Pourquoi et comment on construit l'UdeM," 204-205.

⁴³ Montpetit, "Notre Avenir," 320. The original statement reads: "C'est ce que nous obtiendrons par l'enseignement professionnel placé à la base d'une réforme économique."

⁴⁴ Esdras Minville, "À l'Université," *L'Action nationale* 5, no. 5 (Jan 1935): 5.

of the language and culture.⁴⁵ Seeing as its mission the creation of a “Christian center of higher learning in the midst of a society eager for scientific knowledge”⁴⁶ the university had the challenging mandate of preserving its traditions while striving to be leaders in modern society. Beginning with the inaugural *Annuaire général* [Annual Report] of the Université de Montréal, covering the 1920-21 academic year, a clear statement concerning the university’s commitment to providing higher education in its faculties and professional schools, always in keeping with Catholic principles, is found in the “Recommandations conciliaires” [Recommendations of Council Fathers], a text concerning Catholic universities excerpted from the Proceedings of the First Plenary Council of Canada held in Quebec City in 1909.⁴⁷ This excerpt is preceded by introductory remarks informing the reader that therein we will find entreaties and instructions that are important to be aware of, and are of interest to the authorities of the university’s faculties and schools as well as to the students’ parents. The ensuing recommendations outline: the necessity of organizing catholic universities so that the youth will not attend educational establishments where they will be taught a less sound doctrine; that the faithful be encouraged to financially support the maintenance and development of universities according to their means; that the professors be chosen for their excellence and knowledge of their doctrine in the sciences and letters, and especially by their religious knowledge, in order to better guide the students in the development of individual, civic and social morals; and that the Christian training of the students will be vigilant to prevent them from being charmed by specious theories that could adversely

⁴⁵ *Le Petit Journal* (7 Feb 1932): 5; “L’Université n’est pas une question de pantoufles”, *Le Canada* 9, April 1937, ARCH259481, folder 410/B-18, box 00-EC-003.

⁴⁶ Abbot Charles Perrier, “Appendice. Allocution de M. l’abbé Perrier,” in *La Mission de l’Université* by Mgr Georges Gauthier, 29.

⁴⁷ “Recommandations Conciliaires [1909],” *Annuaire général de l’Université de Montréal, 1920-21, 1er année* (1921): 37-40.

influence them, namely, materialism, liberalism and modernism, among others. Finally, the text recommends that students be recruited to attend university in order to firmly discourage them from attending non-Catholic universities. Given the fact that these recommendations continued to be reproduced annually in the university's published reports for decades, and that an article published in 1956 by the university's Rector described the purpose of the Université de Montréal as that of "giv[ing], in conformity with Catholic principles, higher and professional teaching,"⁴⁸ it is reasonable to conclude that these directives remained representative of the institution's values and vision into the second half of the twentieth century. As one journalist, commenting on the ambitious task the university set for itself, summarized:

"[D]rawing alike upon the experience of the Old World and the progressiveness of the New, the University of Montréal will proceed with renewed strength on the mission it has set itself, which is in a way the mission of French Canada in North America: to fan and feed the flame of French culture on this continent, to adapt French thought to New World conditions, and to prolong the traditions which the French Canadians have so jealously guarded in their past isolation."⁴⁹

Building the university

In April 1924, the university authorities entrusted Ernest Cormier with the design of their new campus. This first and most important building to be erected on the mountain site, was the immense main pavilion designed to house most of the university's faculties and schools as well as a teaching hospital. A photograph of the model of the project was used as of the late 1920s to disseminate and promote the design and appears in numerous publications.⁵⁰ **[Figures 5.5 and**

⁴⁸ Mgr Olivier Maurault, "L'Université de Montréal." *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* 33, no. 11 (Nov 1956): 437-438, 451. (The name of the translator of article is not given).

⁴⁹ Louis Carrier, "French Model used in University Plan," *The New York Times*, July 26, 1931, E7, ARCH259472, folder 236/C-1, box 00-EC-007.

⁵⁰ Additionally, postcards prepared after 1943 featuring images of the completed building provided a description on the back that stated: "The French Catholic University of Montréal dates back to 1876 and occupied its modern quarters on Mount Royal in October 1942. This immense structure is one of the

5.6] When construction began in 1928, the pavilion was not only the largest construction job in metropolitan Montréal at that time, but it was also said to be “the most ambitious university



Figure 5.5 A photograph of the model of the main pavilion of the Université de Montréal, [c1928]

Source: S. J. Hayward, P.1708, folder “P.1705 à 1714,” box 01-2402-01P, FEC, CCA.

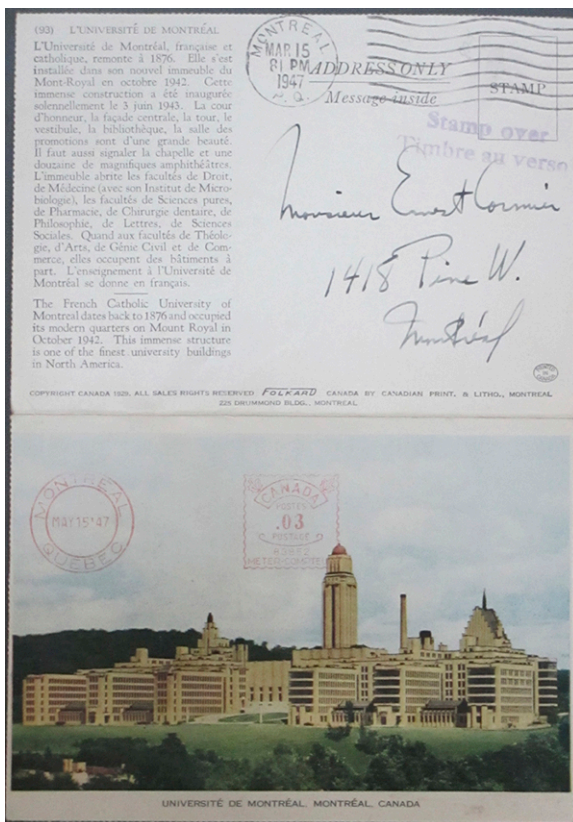


Figure 5.6 A color postcard of the Université de Montréal mailed to Cormier’s home by an unknown sender on March 15, 1947.

Source: Postcard, EC 201, folder “ARCH259631 801/A-23,” box 001-2010-213 T, FEC, CCA.

finest university buildings in North America.” See the postcard mailed to Ernest Cormier on March 15, 1947, EC 201, folder “ARCH259631 801/A-23,” box 001-2010-213 T.

undertaking ever carried out at one time in the British Empire.”⁵¹ The gigantic size of the complex reflected the increasing urban scale of the modern metropolis. As Esdras Minville, the Director of the University’s *École des Hautes Études commerciales*, would remark, the size of the building reflects the scale of its mission and is worthy of its prestige.⁵²

With the intensification of French Canadian nationalist ferment during the interwar period and its fusion with the Université de Montréal’s expansive pedagogical mission, it was not long before the design of the new campus took on a symbolic valence, construed as giving concrete expression to these now inextricably bound ambitions. The main pavilion’s central tower in particular, acquired iconic status as the logo of the institution, and more importantly, as symbol of the “beacon of higher learning” in French Canada. **[Figure 5.7 and 5.8]** As was rhetorically posed at the time of its inauguration,

“The central tower of the new building of the Université de Montréal rises imposingly above the rest of the superb edifice. Isn’t its mass of classical majesty, flooded with sunlight, the striking symbol of the intellectual light that the university must disseminate among the French Canadian people?”⁵³

Visible from a distance, the tower was interpreted as a symbol of the increasing rise of the Université de Montréal and of the “*rôle français*” that it maintains in all of America.⁵⁴ **[Figure 5.9]**

⁵¹ France Vanlaethem, “Montréal Architects and the Challenge of Commissions,” in *Montréal Metropolis, 1880-1930*, eds. Isabelle Gournay and France Vanlaethem (Montréal; Toronto: Canadian Centre for Architecture; Stoddart Publishing, 1998), 109; Carrier, “French Model used in University Plan,” E7.

⁵² Esdras Minville, “L’École des H.E.C.,” *L’Action universitaire* 9, no. 1 (Sept 1942), 51.

⁵³ “L’Université de Montréal,” *La Patrie*, May 30, 1943, front cover, ARCH259472, folder 236/C-10, box 00-EC-007. The original passage reads: “La tour centrale du nouvel immeuble de l’Université de Montréal domine de façon imposante tout le reste du superbe édifice. Sa masse, toute de majesté classique et inondée de soleil, n’est-elle pas le frappant symbole de la lumière intellectuelle que l’Université doit répandre sur le peuple canadien-français?”

⁵⁴ *Documentaire sur l’Université de Montréal* (Montréal: Édition “Le Quartier Latin,” 1943), 3.

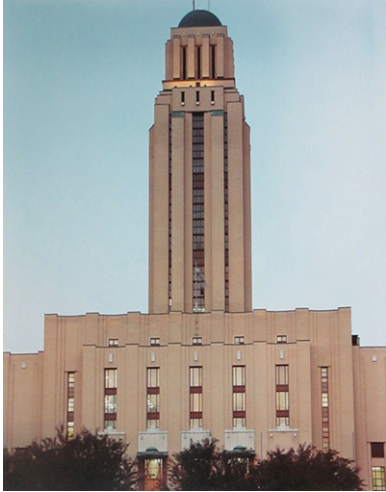


Figure 5.7 The central portion and tower of the Université de Montréal's main pavilion, photographed in 1990.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990.0038, Archival Storage III-2 Colour, Collection, CCA.

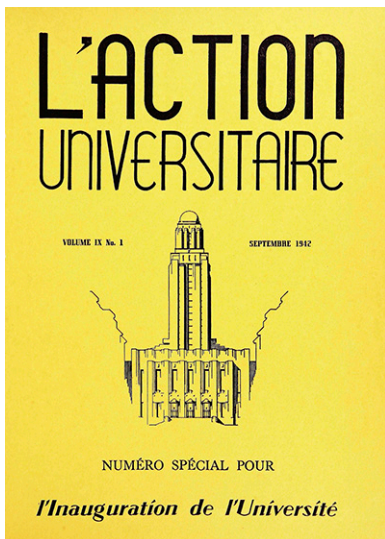


Figure 5.8 Cover of the special issue of *L'Action universitaire*, published by the Association Générale des Diplômés de l'Université de Montréal, commemorating the inauguration of the main pavilion of the UdeM.
Source: *L'Action universitaire*, 9, no.1, 'L'Inauguration de l'Université' special issue (Sept 1942).



Figure 5.9 A photograph of a summer course given outdoors at the Université de Montréal by Abbot Charbonneau in 1958.
Source: David Bier Studios, "Cours d'été donné par l'Abbé Charbonneau, août 1958," 1FP,00364, Fonds du Bureau de l'information (D0037), Archives UdeM.

While the immense scale of the main pavilion aligned well with that of the pedagogical-political ambitions of the client, the fact that the university had committed itself to building a megastructure, was also its Achilles' heel because it could not be built in self-contained stages as could smaller, separate pavilions. The combined factors of the substantial investment of funds necessitated for this undertaking, the university's chronic financial difficulties, and the adverse effects of the economic crisis of 1929, resulted in the construction of the main pavilion coming to a grinding halt in the early 1930s. **[Figure 5.10 and 5.11]** This hiatus to the work would last a decade, during which time, the main pavilion's eventual completion was very uncertain. On September 23, 1931, the university's Executive Committee unanimously decided to suspend construction, with the exception of taking the necessary measures to protect the parts of the pavilion that had already been built.⁵⁵ To determine these, it was decided at this meeting, to ask Cormier to prepare a report on the absolutely indispensable measures to be taken to protect the buildings in-progress and the associated costs.⁵⁶ By the end of 1931, a significant portion of the complex had been built but the tower had not been started, and work came to a definitive stop early in 1932. **[Figure 5.12]** Throughout this period, numerous setbacks plagued the completion of the construction, primarily to do with the university's dire shortage of funds and the damages sustained by the exposed parts of the building that endured so many harsh winters. As well, by the late 1930s, the conditions created by World War II, further aggravated the situation due to the

⁵⁵ Procès-verbal [Meeting Minutes], 207e comité exécutif, September 23, 1931, ARCH258745, folder "Procès verbaux 1931 367/A-8," box 001-2011-069 T. For a detailed overview of the design and construction process, see "Chronology III. Construction of the Université de Montréal," in *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal*, ed. Isabelle Gournay (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1990), 174-176.

⁵⁶ Cormier produced numerous lists charting the suspension to the construction, including records of supplementary work to be done to protect and repair the damaged parts of the building. See folders "ARCH258716 'Tableau de l'historique de la suspension des travaux' 362/A-17," and "Dommages et responsabilité – dossiers divers 362/B-6," and "Entreprises générale – entrevues avec l'entrepreneur" 362/A-15," box 001-2011-049 T.

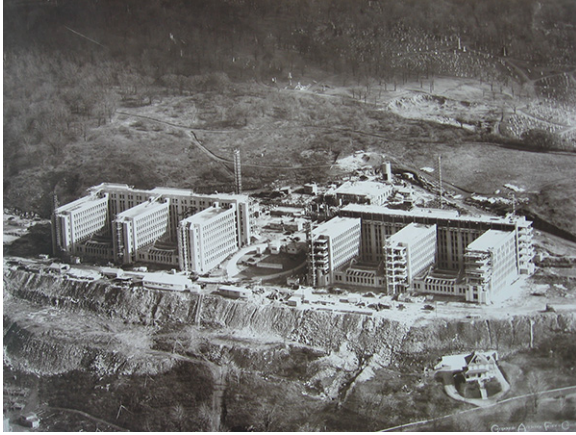


Figure 5.10 An aerial photograph of the construction site of the Université de Montréal showing the rear wings and central part of the main pavilion not built, dated October 30, 1930. Source: Compagnie Aérienne Franco Canadienne, folder “chemise sans numéro,” box 01-2402-04P, FEC, CCA.



Figure 5.11 A photograph of the front wings of the main pavilion under construction, dated November 8, 1930. Source: S. J. Hayward, “Vue des façades C', B', A', A, I, B, J, C et vue du solarium sud de D,” P.1848, box 01-2402-01P, FEC, CCA.



Figure 5.12 An aerial photograph of the main pavilion of the UdeM under construction on the northern side of Mount Royal with downtown Montréal and the St Lawrence River visible beyond, taken in September 1931. Source: 1Fp,05025, Fonds du Bureau de l'information (D0037), Archives UdeM.

scarcity of the workforce, the difficulty in obtaining materials and other restrictions owing to the priority given to military works over civil undertakings.⁵⁷

From the beginning, the university authorities had been conscientious to keep the public informed about the institution's financial situation,⁵⁸ but it was undeniable that the project for the new campus was taking an extended toll on the provincial government's pocket. More than an issue affecting Montréal, throughout the 1930s, the "university problem" had become a political issue in electoral campaigns at the provincial level. Calling the project "a splendid monument to stupidity and folly," the new provincial secretary and Minister of Education, Dr. Albini Paquette, preferred to abandon the partially built hulk on the mountain and proposed that instead, the university be erected, one building at a time in the east end of Montréal.⁵⁹ One journalist protested that the situation was a disgraceful scandal, writing,

"Classrooms rising out of dust and noise [of the construction site], the meager or nonexistent salaries of the teaching staff, mounting debts and deficits, an enormous, lamentable white elephant... a reputation entirely undermined by glaring mistakes and squandered resources."⁶⁰

Subject to significant public scrutiny, the university administration now faced criticism of its foolhardy "megalomania," and photographs taken to document the construction process were used as counterpropaganda to criticize the undertaking.⁶¹ One local newspaper published an article in 1933 featuring a photograph of the front of the construction site, taken from lower

⁵⁷ Raymond Tanghe, "Laetare!," *L'Action universitaire* 9, no. 1 'Numéro spéciale pour l'Inauguration de l'Université' (Sept 1942): 7.

⁵⁸ For statements of the university's finances, see for instance, the *Annuaire générale de l'Université de Montréal* dating from the 1920s and 30s; *Album-Souvenir de l'Université de Montréal*, 17-19.

⁵⁹ *Le Canada*, March 5, 1937, 1; Fournier, "Tradition and Modernism," 50, 53.

⁶⁰ Jean-Charles Harvey, "Plus qu'une pitié, une honte!" *Le Jour*, 49, August 19, 1939): 1; translated in Fournier, "Tradition and Modernism," 53.

⁶¹ Isabelle Gournay, "Introduction," In *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal*, ed. Isabelle Gournay (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1990), 11.

down on the slope, with the heading “Is this the silhouette of a burnt down city? No, it’s the Université de Montréal.”⁶²

A comparison of the operating budgets of other universities in Canada in the mid-1930s revealed that the Université de Montréal was third largest in the country in terms of its fixed assets but stood in eleventh place in terms of its revenue.⁶³ For example, the Faculties of Medicine at McGill and the University of Toronto had budgets of \$310,000 and \$376,000 respectively, while that of the Université de Montréal was but \$79,616. Further fueling sentiments of “national and religious honor” was that while the Université de Montréal struggled to make due with a total budget of less than \$500,000, that of the University of Toronto was \$3,000,000, and that of McGill was \$2,490,000.⁶⁴ **[Figure 5.13]** In the course of their comparative research, the university authorities learned the eye-opening fact that North American universities of the



Figure 5.13 Aerial view of the campus of McGill University, Montréal, QC, 1921. Source: Anonymous, photograph, 1921, MP-0000.1877.2 © McCord Museum.

⁶² Sans Quartier, “Les Tribulations des propriétaires et les explications de la commission du chômage,” *Le Petit Journal*, December 10, 1933, 20, ARCH259472, folder 236/C-1, box 00-EC-007.

⁶³ Maurault, “Histoire de l’Université,” 202.

⁶⁴ Maurault, “Histoire de l’Université,” 201-202.

same type as theirs possessed significant endowments.⁶⁵ The problem faced by the Université de Montréal was identified by some of the historical actors as owing to a double crisis: one that was as much financial as it was cultural. The former issue being well-known, the cultural crisis was framed as a critique of the shortsighted attitude of a people who refuse the means to improve their lot and to grow in their own estimate, as well as in the estimate of foreigners, by supporting their university.⁶⁶ In an effort to stimulate public awareness and support, particularly among alumni, the graduates of the university undertook to inform readers through their organ, *L'Action universitaire*, of the donations and bequests made to different universities in the world.

Among the main criticisms levied within and without the university, was that pedagogy had taken a back seat to the construction of the new pavilion: that the intellectual development of faculty and students was being seriously compromised by the financial over-extension necessitated to realize this megaproject.⁶⁷ Those deemed to be hit the hardest were the professors, who worked in squalid conditions and for 15 years, along with university administrators, had selflessly accepted to reduce their meager salaries by 10% and at times, had gone for months without pay.⁶⁸ Anxieties were high that the university might be forced to shut down entirely, which was increasingly becoming a very distinct possibility. Addressing the university professors in 1934, in a speech that was clearly intended to boost morale, the Rector insisted that under the current difficult circumstances, it is useless and even dangerous to allow ourselves to be

⁶⁵ Maurault, "Histoire de l'Université," 202. For instance, at the time, Harvard's endowment was \$86 million, Columbia's was \$43 million and that of Yale was \$58 million.

⁶⁶ Cartier, "Pour aider à comprendre le problème universitaire," 349-351.

⁶⁷ Louis Dupiré, "À propos de l'Université," *Le Devoir*, June 2, 1922, 4; "Le site de l'Université," *Le Devoir*, February 14, 1924, 16; Nemo, "Libéralité libérale," *Le Devoir*, January 27, 1928, 1; Cartier, "Pour aider à comprendre le problème universitaire," 351-352.

⁶⁸ Chartier, *Trente années*, 61; The savings to the university resulting from these efforts amounted to \$30,000. See Fournier, "Tradition and Modernism," 51-52.

hypnotized by the problems. Instead we must call upon God's help and remain optimistic and devoted to this necessary undertaking that is the university.⁶⁹ Already facing abundant public criticism, the Rector also asked his colleagues to resist any badmouthing about the university in front of the public, where simple misunderstandings take on exaggerated proportions, so that the project that was started can be completed in peace.⁷⁰

With the very existence of the university hanging in the balance, what the dire situation made abundantly apparent was the irrevocable extent to which the fate of the institution had become inseparable from the fate of its new building. As the material vessel of the university's pedagogical mission, the construction of its main pavilion had become emblematic of the construction of the French Canadian nation. If the building fell, the university would fall, and with it, the nationalist project to ensure a viable future for French Canadians in the modern world, meaning that beyond being a serious problem faced by the university, all French Canadians would bear the burden of the disaster.⁷¹ Thus, what was at stake in the eventual completion (or not) of the enormous main pavilion was as critical and indeed as dramatic as *the survival of the French Canadian race*.

Calling upon all who feel their lives to be intimately linked to the small French Canadian collective, writers asked all to reflect seriously on the problem and to carefully weight the short- and long-term consequences of this eminently national and religious work, posing the rhetorical question, "Can Canada's metropolis, a city that is largely French and Catholic, afford to let its

⁶⁹ "Discours prononcé par M. Olivier Maurault, p.S.-S., recteur, au déjeuner des professeurs le 7 octobre 1934," in *Annuaire général de l'Université de Montréal 1935-36* (1936), 193-195.

⁷⁰ "Discours prononcé par M. Olivier Maurault," 194-195.

⁷¹ L'Action nationale, "L'Université de Montréal," *L'Action nationale* (Nov 1933): 154.

university down?”⁷² Neither able to afford to complete the construction, nor able to afford *not* to, the fulfillment of the University’s national mission was eloquently summarized as follows:

“Work has been halted for lack of money. For the honor and future of the race, French Canada must make the effort needed to see the project through. We have made an initial gesture, a beginning toward providing our young Québec intellectuals with a university worthy of French Canadians... The second largest French-speaking city in the world, Montréal, seat of Latin culture and spiritual life in materialistic North America, wants to be worthy of the role it is called upon to play.”⁷³

It was a near miracle that the project managed to obtain the necessary approval and financial support to be completed enough to be inaugurated in 1943. **[Figure 5.14]** At the inauguration of the main pavilion on June 3, the Chancellor Mgr Joseph Charbonneau pronounced: “In 1643, Monsieur de Maisonneuve placed the cross on the mountain of Montréal. Three hundred years later, we inaugurate, on this same mountain of Mount Royal, the city of knowledge.”⁷⁴ From its



Figure 5.14 A photograph of students climbing the 103 wooden steps leading up the mountain slope to the main pavilion of the Université de Montréal, (undated). Source: National Archives of Canada, EC 257, #195, box 01-2402-04P, FEC, CCA.

⁷² L'Action nationale, “L'Université de Montréal,” 153-153. The original reads: “La métropole du Canada, ville en grande majorité française et catholique, a-t-elle les moyens de laisser faillir son Université?”

⁷³ *Le Petit Journal*, February 7, 1932, 5. Translated in Fournier, “Tradition and Modernism,” 53.

⁷⁴ “1943, Le phare sur la montagne”, *Le Devoir*, January 10, 2004, G11.

privileged site, “dominating” over the great Canadian metropolis and its surroundings, the imposing main building of the Université de Montréal represented a quarter century of struggle and the achievements of a collective.⁷⁵ [Figure 5.15]

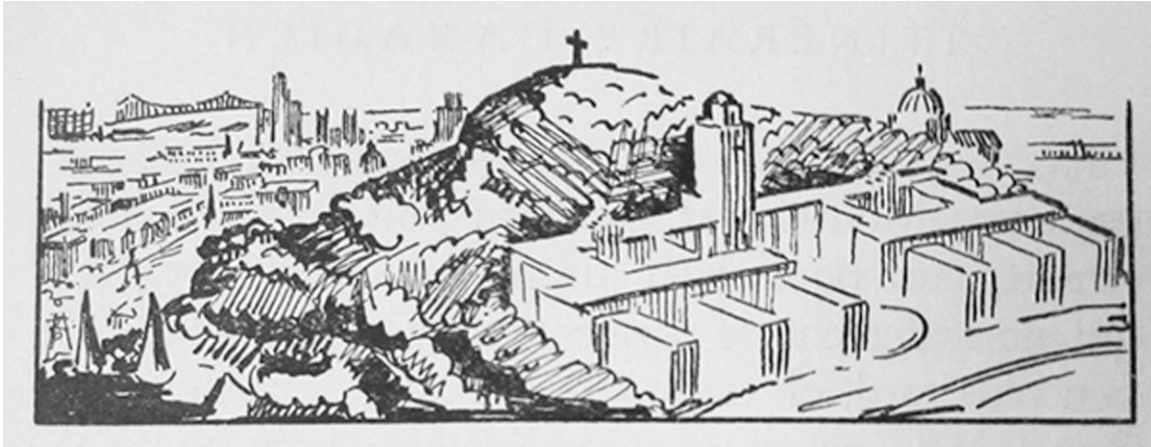


Figure 5.15 An illustration of the main pavilion of the Université de Montréal dominating Mount Royal. Source: [Unknown illustrator], image for the chapter, “Montréal, Métropole du Canada,” in Raymond Tanghe, *Itinéraire canadien* (Montréal: Éditions B.-D. Simpson, 1945), 65.

⁷⁵ On the occasion of the pavilion’s inauguration, many commentators spoke of the university as the symbol of French culture that from its elevated position, now dominates the city. See for example, Mgr Olivier Maurault, “Enfin!...” *L’Action universitaire* 9, no. 1 ‘Numéro spéciale pour l’Inauguration de l’Université’ (Sept 1942): 11; Association Générale des Diplômés de l’Université de Montréal. *Université de Montréal: gala d’Inauguration, 3 juin 1943*. Montréal: Therrien Frères, 1943, inside book cover, 3; Roland G. Lefrançois, *Documentaire sur l’Université de Montréal* (Montréal: Édition “Le Quartier Latin,” 1943), i.

Chapter 6 The composition and construction of the main pavilion

“Remember that you are an actor in a play, which is as the playwright wants it to be: short if he wants it short, long if he wants it long. If he wants you to play a beggar, play even this part skillfully, or a cripple, or a public official, or a private citizen. What is yours is to play the assigned part well. But to choose it belongs to someone else.”

– Article 17 of Epictetus’ “Encheiridion” (2nd century A.D.)¹

Beginnings

In his memoir, former Vice-Rector Mgr Émile Chartier, recalled the moment in the mid-1920s, when the Rector Mgr Vincent Piette asked Chartier to accompany him to Mount Royal.² Driving in the Rector’s Ford from the university’s overcrowded and outmoded building on St. Denis Street in downtown Montreal, up to Maplewood Avenue (now chemin Édouard Montpetit) that runs along a portion of the mountain’s north side, the pair parked the car and climbed the slope to better appreciate the fresh air and panoramic view. Opening his arms expansively, Piette asked Chartier what he thought if they built the university here. After discussing the available acreage and the advantages of this location, they descended the slope and there encountered a Cadillac out of which emerged Ernest Cormier “with his perpetual smile,” who, unbeknownst to Chartier, had been invited to join them. The Rector is said to have

¹ Epictetus, “Encheiridion” [Handbook], in *Classics of Western Philosophy*, ed. Steven M. Cahn (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1995), 341. At the end of his life, Cormier divulged that Epictetus’ manual (a compilation of Stoic maxims for the right conduct of one’s life) has served him as a guide his whole life. See Willie Chevalier, “Entretien avec Ernest Cormier [An Interview with Ernest Cormier],” *Vie des Arts (Canada)* 20, no. 81 (Winter 1975-76): 19; 89. English translation by Mildred Grand.

² Monsignor Vincent Piette was Rector of the Université de Montréal from 1923 until 1934. Monsignor Émile Chartier served as Vice-Rector from 1920 until 1944. For a fuller list of the terms served by the various members of the university administration see Mgr. Olivier Maurault, *L’Université de Montréal* (Montréal: Les Éditions des Dix, 1952), 26-27.

posed the same question to Cormier, and expressed his interest in hearing his reply before noon the following day. Cormier agreed, asking to be left alone in order to set himself to the task of surveying the site, and arrived at the Rector's office at 10am the following morning with drawings in hand.³ In his description of this meeting, Chartier paints a romantic picture of the design of the university building as it was eventually constructed, as having emerged fully formed from the mind of the architect overnight. In truth, the scheme evolved over several years through close exchanges with the university administration and heads of each faculty, as well as through input from external experts, undergoing some significant phases of development that cannot be credited exclusively to Cormier.⁴ What is most relevant about this anecdote, however, is that Cormier seems to have been hand-picked for this large-scale, ambitious undertaking, without having gone through a design competition, and seemingly too, without the university authorities having seriously considered any other contenders.⁵ On April 11, 1924, the university's Executive Committee officially awarded the commission to Cormier to design the new campus

³ Mgr Émile Chartier, *Trente années d'Université, 1914-1944* (Sherbrooke, 1955), Publication 55 (1982), Fonds de la Division de la gestion de documents et des archives (D0036), Université de Montréal. This account is found on pages 43-44.

⁴ He writes: "Le lendemain, à 10 heures en effet, M. Cormier nous arrivait tout rayonnant. En ma présence, il remit à Mgr Piette l'esquisse exacte, tracée pendant la nuit, du monument babylonien (Désiré Defauw *dixit*) qui orne aujourd'hui ce flanc du mont Royal." Chartier, *Trente années d'Université*, 44.

Among the university officials who were involved in the development of the project, Dr. Téléphore Parizeau, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine of the Université de Montréal, commented on how the design resulted from two years of work through an intimate collaboration between the administration, the architect, and the heads of each faculty. Téléphore Parizeau, "Pourquoi et comment on construit l'Université de Montréal," *Annuaire général de l'Université de Montréal 1932-33* 12e année (1933): 208.

⁵ The circumstances surrounding the decision to award Cormier the commission for the university's new campus that preceded his official appointment in the Spring of 1924, are not well-documented. The Province of Quebec Association of Architects took issue with the fact that there had not been a design competition, which put pressure on the university to host one, but this never transpired. See Isabelle Gournay, "The Work of Ernest Cormier at the Université de Montréal," in *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal*, ed. Isabelle Gournay (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1990), 63.

on the northern slope of Mount Royal.⁶ At the time, Cormier was 38 years old and had been in practice in Montreal as an *Architecte et ingénieur-constructeur* [Architect and Engineer-Constructor] for only six years. To his credit, he had already earned a reputation as a local practitioner of note, primarily through his major contribution to the design of the Montreal Courthouse Annex (1920-26), a building of stately neoclassical bearing and the largest public commission Cormier had worked on to date.⁷ [Figure 6.1] It is also likely that Cormier’s family connections and general social standing would have played a favorable role in his selection by the university. Yet

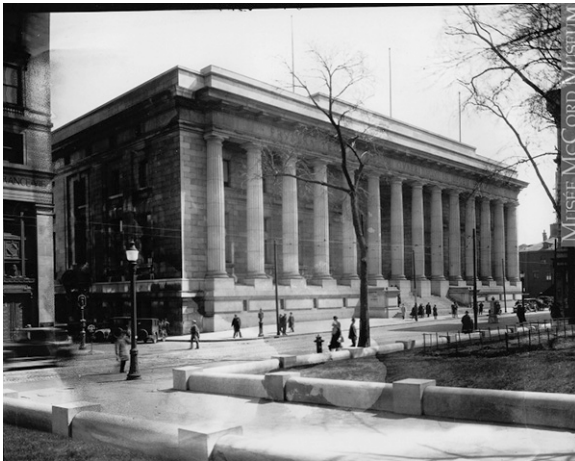


Figure 6.1 A photograph of the front façade of the Montreal Courthouse Annex photographed c.1926. Source: Wm. Notman & Son, VIEW-6480 © McCord Museum.

⁶ The Executive Committee that chose Cormier in 1924 was comprised of: The Honorable Senator F.-L. Béique (The President of the Administration); Mgr Piette (Rector); General Labelle; the Honorable Raoul Dandurand; The Honorable Judge Lafontaine; Mr A.-J. Laurence; and Mr. Edouard Montpetit (Secretary-General). Mgr. Olivier Maurault, *L'Université de Montréal*, 29, fn 13.

⁷ This commission was officially undertaken in collaboration with Louis-Auguste Amos and Charles J. Saxe, but Jean-Omer Marchand was an active player behind the scenes, doing political maneuvering to better advance the project under the guise of a disinterested third party, while giving his input on the design. In this capacity, Marchand received half of Cormier’s fees. See Pierre-Richard Bisson, “Les Rapports entre Ernest Cormier et Jean-Omer Marchand: de l’émulation aux hostilités,” *ARQ: Architecture/Quebec* 53 (Feb 1990): 14.

France Vanlaethem and Isabelle Gournay have demonstrated that Cormier took the upper hand in the design of the Courthouse Annex project, developing the design of the building and much of its ornamental program. See France Vanlaethem and Isabelle Gournay, “La construction de l’immeuble,” in Ministère de la culture et des communications, Direction générale du secrétariat et des communications, *L’Édifice Ernest-Cormier: Siège de la Cour d’appel du Québec à Montréal* (Québec: Ministère de la Culture et des communications; Les publications du Québec, 2005), 15-28.

surely of greatest importance was the fact of Cormier's professional qualifications as architect and civil engineer, and the prestige of his uncommon status as an architect who graduated from the *École des Beaux-Arts*. Trained at home as well as successful abroad, deeply local but also cosmopolitan, Cormier had about him the aura of a refined professional of remarkable talent and credentials. Cormier himself was keenly aware of the elevated status he enjoyed due to his training in Europe, remarking that when he returned to Canada at the end of the First World War to establish himself in practice, "the doors were wide open [to him] because [he] had succeeded in France."⁸

The project for the Université de Montréal's new campus was the first large commission that Cormier had received to undertake on his own, and judging from the fact that he retained a small office throughout his career and involved himself in all aspects of the design, he does not seem to have been daunted by the scale of the commission. For the Université de Montréal alone, the CCA conserves over 1000 drawings produced by Cormier and his small team of architects and engineers.⁹ Early sketches reveal that he tested out several possibilities but his initial approach remained fundamentally as one of multiple pavilions splayed out on the site, symmetrically organized around a central exterior court. **[Figure 6.2]** A large overall plan of the planning of the mountain site dating from September 1926 **[Figure 6.3]** shows the various

⁸ In his reply to Willie Chevalier's questionnaire in the Spring of 1975 and his corrections to the draft of Chevalier's article, Cormier wrote of himself (with multiple typos), "Malgré son jeune age, les portes lui était grandes ouvertes. On lui reconnaissant [.. ?] de talents parce que il avait fait ses preuve en France." See folders "ARCH258619 809/A-3," and "ARCH258619 809/A-9," box 001-2010-221 T. These remarks were not included in the published article based on these exchanges. See Chevalier, "Entretien avec Ernest Cormier."

⁹ Isabelle Gournay notes that although entrusted with large and important commissions, the initials that appear on the drawings reveal that Cormier surrounded himself with a loyal staff of five regular collaborating architects and engineers. Given that Cormier was involved at all stages of the design and construction process, and strictly oversaw the production of his team, the graphic output of his office is remarkably homogeneous. Isabelle Gournay, "Graphisme et praxis chez Ernest Cormier, 'architecte et ingénieur-constructeur': le 'pavillon principal' de l'Université de Montréal," *RACAR: revue d'art canadienne. Canadian art review* 16, no. 2 (1989): 162-163.

proposed university buildings clustered into three main programmatic zones, namely: the “Ensemble des sports” to the left end of the site, grouping the stadium and arena, as well as the “Maison des animaux” [animal facility] at the top of the site; in the middle, the residential complex labeled “Ensemble de l’habitation,” comprising a 300-room dormitory and social center, as well as an outdoor amphitheater/botanical garden; and the buildings constituting the academic complex [the “Ensemble des études”] located to the right and situated on a natural

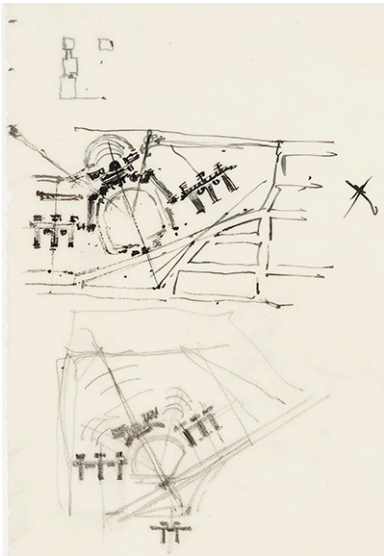


Figure 6.2 One example on an early sketch of the academic complex for the UdeM, [c.1924]. Source: Ernest Cormier, ARCH264227, folder 670/A-22, box 001-2011-175 T, FEC, CCA.

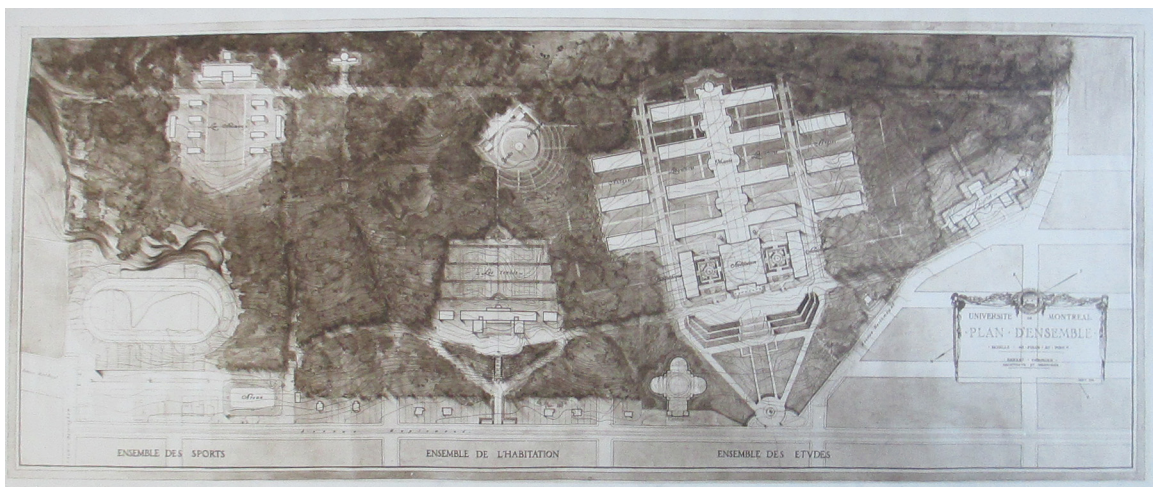


Figure 6.3 Photostat of Ernest Cormier’s site plan for the university campus, September 1926. Source: Ernest Cormier, Plan d’ensemble, EC 166, ARCH252467, box 02-2002-020M, FEC, CCA.

plateau on the site that benefitted from great visibility, to be accessed from the intersection of Maplewood and Northmount Avenues (currently blvd Édouard Montpetit and avenue Louis Colin). In this site plan, the main auditorium is given a prominent place at the front of the academic complex and is bracketed by the library and administrative offices, behind which, laboratory wings are distributed in tiers along a long connecting bar that is to be a museum, with “annexes” symmetrically distributed on either side of this central comb shape. Further over to the right, is a small building designated as a hospital. This first site plan makes reference to well-established architectural types, and as a large presentation drawing in watercolor (complete with elaborate cartouche, exaggerated foliage, and Roman font that becomes ornate when labeling the different buildings), it falls directly in line with the École des Beaux-Arts’ tradition of the *rendu*.¹⁰

By contrast, Cormier’s definitive site plan dating from May 1927, features a dramatic move away from the original scheme of separate pavilions constituting the academic complex, in favor of one megastructure symmetrically organized around a central court. **[Figure 6.4]** In parallel to this pivotal transformation in the *parti*, which reflects the new urban scale of the metropolis, it is significant that Cormier modified his graphic technique towards a more realistic representation of the design of the site, using fine hatching to indicate the foliage in a more subtle way and making more evident the site’s contour lines, the circulation, and the massing of the built elements through their cast shadows. As well, recognizably Beaux-Arts elements such as the small oratory that Cormier had placed just below the academic complex in the 1926 scheme are eliminated, and the font used is more contemporary, i.e., ‘modern.’¹¹ Significantly, as

¹⁰ Gournay, “Graphisme et praxis,” 162-163. It seems that the original site plan has not survived, as what the CCA conserves is only a photostat. Given the scale of 480:1, the original plan must have measured over 10’-10” (3.3m) in length.

¹¹ Gournay, “Graphisme et praxis,” 163. Gournay identifies the important parallels between the evolution of the project from a more traditional academic ensemble to the large ‘compact plan’ that was adopted,

of January 1928, when a model of the main pavilion was publicly displayed, photographs of this model taken by Hayward studios began to be used to disseminate and promote Cormier's design, rather than watercolor renderings.¹² [Figure 6.5]

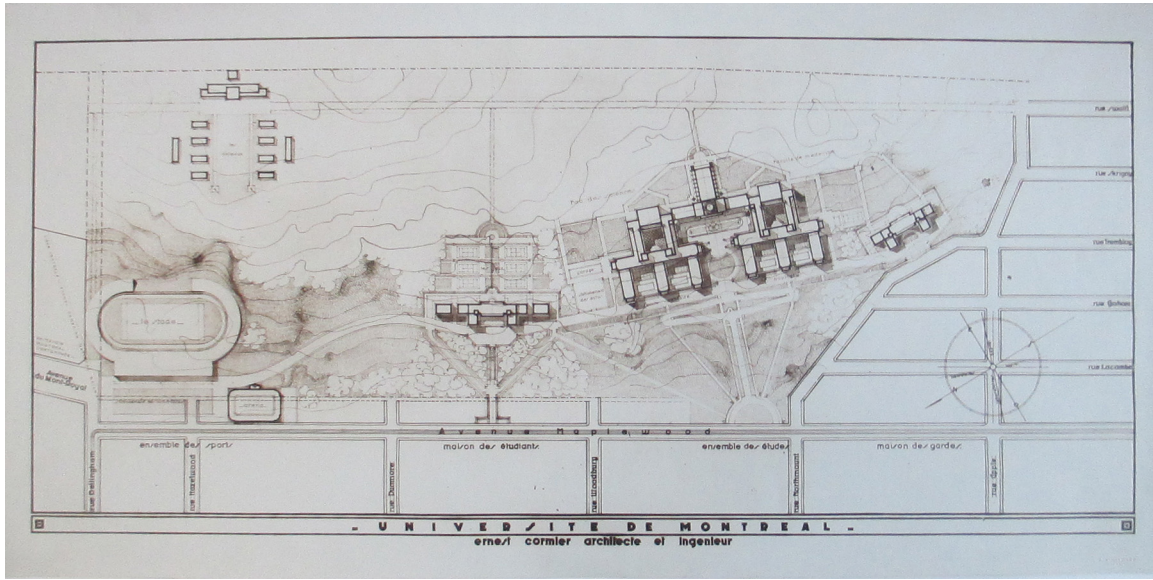


Figure 6.4 Photograph of Ernest Cormier's site plan for the university campus, May 1927. Source: Photograph by S.J. Hayward of Ernest Cormier, Plan d'ensemble, EC 177, ARCH7772, box 02-2002-020M, FEC, CCA.

and the 'modernization' of Cormier's representational techniques, which included the replacement of large Beaux-Arts watercolors with the use of photographs of a model of the project.

¹² Gournay, "Graphisme et praxis," 163. The model itself is now lost, but photographs of it taken from different angles are conserved in the Cormier archive. See box 01-2402-01P.

Among the publications in which the model photograph was reproduced are: J. Rawson Gardiner, "The Architectural Exhibit at the Art Gallery, Montréal," *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* 5, no. 6 (June 1928): 211-18; [07], [09]; Jean Chauvin, *Ateliers: études sur vingt-deux peintres et sculpteurs canadiens: illustrées de reproductions d'oeuvres* (Montréal; New York: Louis Carrier & cie, 1928), 36; "Four Million Dollar Contract for the University of Montréal Buildings," in *Contract Record and Engineering Review*, vol 44, no. 19 (May 7, 1930): 526-527; "The University of Montréal Builds Monumental Home," *The Dunham Magazine* 16, no. 11 (Nov 1930): 177-178; "L'Université de Montréal," *La Revue populaire - art, lettres, sciences, histoire* (February 1931): 11.



Figure 6.5 A photograph of the model of the design for the main pavilion turned into a postcard stating “Université de Montréal. Ernest Cormier architecte et ingénieur” in the upper left corner, (undated). Source: S. J. Hayward Studios, P.1705, box 01-2402-01P, FEC, CCA.

Early in the process the university authorities had established a construction committee to determine the university’s needs, and had asked each faculty to project 25 years into the future, assessing what their likely needs would be, and avoiding extravagance, to submit these suggestions to the architect.¹³ In parallel, the university had sought funding and expert counsel from the Division of Medical Education of the Rockefeller Foundation, and through this contact, was guided in the research undertaken that better helped to clarify the university’s needs. The role of the Rockefeller Foundation in the growth of the Université de Montréal is an instance of the important role played by American philanthropy in Canada during the early decades of the twentieth century. Up until the establishment of the Canada Council in 1957, there was no federal source of funding for the creation and maintenance of a cultural and intellectual infrastructure internal to Canada.¹⁴ In a letter to the Foundation dated December 18, 1919, John D. Rockefeller articulated a very strong hint for how he wanted his new gift of \$5,000,000 to be dispersed. He wrote:

¹³ Marcel Fournier, “Tradition and Modernism: The Construction of the Université de Montréal,” in *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal*, ed. Isabelle Gournay (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1990), 48.

¹⁴ Jeffrey Brison has studied the pivotal role played by American philanthropy in the development of research and the expansion of cultural institutions in Canada during the first half of the twentieth century, and calls into question the enduring essentialist notions of the contrasting Canadian and American national identities. See Jeffrey D. Brison, *Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Canada: American Philanthropy and the Arts and Letters in Canada* (Montréal; Ithaca: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005). I am grateful to Mariana Siracusa for calling my attention to this book and to the issues it broaches.

“I am greatly interested in the work which is being done throughout the world in combating disease through the improvement of medical education, public health administration and scientific research. You may perhaps know that I have recently made a contribution to the General Education Board specifically for the purpose of promoting medical education in the United States. My attention has been recently called to the needs of some of the medical schools in Canada, but as the activities of the General Education Board are by its charter limited to the United States I understand that no part of that gift may be used for the Canadian schools. The Canadian people are our near neighbors. They are closely bound to us by ties of race, language and international friendship; and they have without stint sacrificed themselves – their youth and their resources – to the end that democracy might be saved and extended. For these reasons, if your Board should see fit to use any part of this new gift in promoting medical education in Canada, such action would meet with my very cordial approval.”¹⁵

Upon this recommendation, members of the Foundation’s Division of Medical Education conducted a preliminary tour of universities in Canada to formulate a Dominion-wide policy for the best allocation of funds.¹⁶ Ultimately it was decided that the Université de Montréal would receive an annual grant of \$25,000, with the understanding that half a million dollars in capital would be paid once the university had raised an equal sum expressly for the purposes of erecting a teaching hospital.¹⁷ Having pledged \$25,000 per year during the five academic years beginning 1925-1926, the Foundation later resolved to continue this funding for another block of five

¹⁵ Letter from John D. Rockefeller to the Rockefeller Foundation, dated December 18, 1919, RF Minutes 19157, Canadian Medical Program, December 19, 1919, “Historical Record. Development of Medical Education in Canada, 1919-1925,” folder 33 “Canada – Medical Education – Historical Record – CAN,” box 4, Rockefeller Foundation Records, RG 1.1 (FA386), Series 427 Canada; Subseries 427 A, Canada – Medical Sciences, Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC).

¹⁶ RF Minutes 20024-20025, Canadian Medical Program, February 25, 1920, “Historical Record. Development of Medical Education in Canada, 1919-1925,” folder 33, box 4, Rockefeller Foundation Records, RG 1.1 (FA386), Series 427 Canada; Subseries 427 A, Canada – Medical Sciences, RAC. The two Canadian medical schools that were esteemed to be the best in the country were those at the University of Toronto and McGill University, each receiving \$1,000,000 from this funding allocated to further medical education in Canada. See RF Minutes 20152, Canadian Medical Program, December 1, 1920, folder 33, box 4, Rockefeller Foundation Records, RG 1.1 (FA386), Series 427 Canada; Subseries 427 A, Canada – Medical Sciences, RAC.

¹⁷ This money was promised in 1925 and the grant was officially made to the Université de Montréal in April 1930. See the letter from Dr. Richard Pearce to Mgr Piette dated May 19, 1929, and the letter from Nora S. Thompson, Secretary of the Rockefeller Foundation, to Mgr Piette dated April 16, 1930, Fonds du Secrétariat général (D0035), Archives, UdeM; Fournier, “Tradition and Modernism,” 48.

years beginning in the academic year 1930-31.¹⁸ However, when by 1935, the university had not succeeded in securing the necessary funds to match the Foundation's proposed half million dollar endowment, the Rockefeller cancelled its commitment and in their books, closed the project.¹⁹

Despite what would ultimately be a commitment of partial funding, the importance of the Rockefeller Foundation's counsel on the development of the design should not be underestimated. A study trip organized with the Rockefeller's support, had three groups representing the university, visit a total of twelve sites in the United States that were deemed to offer relevant examples of current work.²⁰ **[Figure 6.6]** Between April 25 to May 8, 1924, Cormier and the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Dr. Louis de Lotbinière-Harwood, visited New York, Chicago, Ann Arbor, Cincinnati and St. Louis; the Rector Mgr Piette and the Dean of the Faculty of Science, Dr. Georges Baril, visited New York, Boston, New Haven and Baltimore; and Dr. Téléphone Parizeau, the Dean of the Medical School, visited New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Cleveland and Detroit.²¹ The Rockefeller's main criterion for offering funding to the Université de Montréal was that the design would include a university hospital.

¹⁸ RF report dated April 16, 1930, folder "University of Montreal – Faculty of Medicine (1930-1937, 1941-43), box 5, Rockefeller Foundation Records, RG 1.2 (FA387), Series 427 Canada; Subseries 427 A, Canada – Medical Sciences, RAC.

¹⁹ Historical Record, University of Montreal, Faculty of Medicine, 1920-1930, UMo MF, page 8, box 9, Rockefeller Foundation Records, Projects, RG 1.1 (FA386), Series 427 Canada; Subseries 427 A, Canada – Medical Sciences, RAC.

²⁰ In New York, Cormier and the rest of the university delegation would have visited the monumentally sized Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center (1924-27) designed by former École des Beaux-Arts student James Gamble Rogers. Another precedent for the design of the main pavilion is the Montgomery Ward Memorial Building (1926) in Chicago also designed Rogers, which had not been constructed at the time of Cormier's visit to Chicago, but would have been known to him and to the university authorities through their contacts at the Rockefeller and through publications. Gournay, "The Work of Ernest Cormier at the UdeM," 69. See also Isabelle Gournay, "L'architecture hospitalo-universitaire: le tournant des années 20." *Journal of Canadian Art History* 13, no. 2 - 14, no. 1 (1990-91): 26-43.

²¹ Fournier, "Tradition and Modernism," 48.

This incorporation of a university hospital that would serve the pedagogical needs of the Faculty of Medicine was an idea that the university was amenable to and in a preliminary way, was included in Cormier's 1926 master plan.

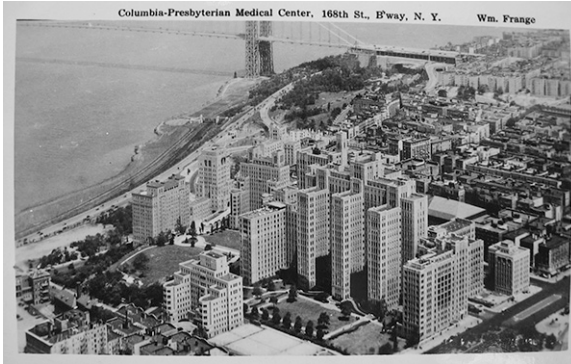


Figure 6.6 A postcard showing an aerial view of the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center in New York City (1924-27) designed by James Gamble Rogers. Source: Postcard enclosed in a letter sent to Cormier, dated May 5, 1944, folder "ARCH257775 410/B-4; 410 1/2," box 01-2010-037 T, FEC, CCA.

A key turning point in the attitude of Cormier and the client vis-à-vis the design direction, transpired through exchanges with the Rockefeller Foundation early in 1927. In his correspondence with the Université de Montréal's Rector, Dr. Pearce, the Director of the Rockefeller's Medical Division, recounted what he had discussed in his meeting with Cormier that had taken place on January 12, 1927. After reviewing the preliminary drawings presented by Cormier (no longer extant), Pearce expressed his opinion that the scheme seems excellent and that he feels that it will meet the university's needs. However, one point that concerned him was that it did not seem certain that on this site it would be possible to build a hospital serving the teaching needs of the Faculty of Medicine, and recommended that until this is decided, it would be best not to rush in drawing up the plans of the Faculty of Medicine in the space that Cormier has reserved for this in his sketches. Pearce insisted on the importance of the Faculty of Medicine and teaching hospital being in as close a relationship as possible, and ideally, that this arrangement could be orchestrated for the new campus, but clarified that if the hospital could not be built on the site, then it would be preferable to build the Faculty of Medicine beside an existing hospital in the city and to unite all of the other university departments on the new site.

While claiming that he did not want to meddle with the university's affairs, he clearly stated that the Rockefeller's promised contribution was contingent on the Faculty of Medicine and the hospital being erected on the same site. To help the university better envisage the type of building that would best meet the needs of the institution, he suggested that a visit be paid to the University of Rochester's new hospital and faculty of medicine, which he described as featuring the most modern methods combining the work of laboratories with that of clinics. If the university group decided to go to Rochester, he offered to ask the Dean there to make available all possible opportunities to study the facilities.²²

These recommendations were taken very seriously and the delegation that traveled to Rochester in May 1927 was composed of the President of the university's administration, Senator Béïque, Mgr Piette, Dr. de Lotbinière-Harwood, Dr. Parizeau and Cormier.²³ The university group was reassured by this research into current methods, through which they came to understand that the modern formula for a Faculty of Medicine was one of ensuring the close proximity of theory (classrooms) and practice (hospital).²⁴ Thus following their enlightening trip to the Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester, the decision was made to cluster all of the departments requiring the use of laboratories, namely the teaching hospital, the Faculty of Medicine, the Faculty of Sciences, the School of Pharmacy, and possibly too, the Faculty of Dental Surgery. It was deemed that this choice would have pedagogical as well as economic

²² Piette, "Une autre année de vie universitaire," *Annuaire général de l'Université de Montréal 1928-29* (1929): 344-345.

²³ Piette, "Une autre année de vie universitaire," 345. Cormier's notes from this trip to the Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester, New York, show various charts and lists of the distribution of spaces distinguishing between "Teaching" and "Hospital," dated May 3, 5 and 19, 1927. See folder "ARCH259251 363/A-6 2/2," box 001-2011-273 T.

²⁴ Mgr Olivier Maurault, "Histoire de l'Université," *Annuaire général de l'Université de Montréal, 1935-36* 15e année (1936): 203-204.

value.²⁵ For instance, in light of the fact that certain spaces and teaching materials may overlap, it would be convenient if they were to be shared by different departments, and through this, a culture of collaboration and exchange would be encouraged, which would be difficult to achieve if all of the departments were housed in separate pavilions.²⁶

With this definitive direction to be taken in the development of the design, Cormier tackled the planning of the medical faculty-hospital portion first, as this was by far, the more challenging zone of the building due to the complex spatial relationships that had to be established between the medical faculty, the teaching hospital and the laboratories.²⁷ This led to the adoption of what was termed the ‘compact plan,’ which marked a radical departure from Cormier’s September 1926 master plan that had featured separate pavilions and a modestly-scaled hospital building located at a distance from the academic complex. The change in the *parti* dating from 1927 represented a dramatic shift in scale and ambition, resulting in the design of a megastructure that would measure nearly 1000 feet (305 m) in length with over 645,835 square feet (60,000 m²) of floor space.²⁸ It was calculated that all of the corridors of the building add up to a distance of 8 miles (12.8 km).²⁹ **[Figure 6.7]** Not surprisingly then, when construction began at the end of the 1920s, the main pavilion was the largest project being built in the

²⁵ Piette, “Une autre année de vie universitaire,” 345.

²⁶ Parizeau, “Pourquoi et comment on construit l’Université de Montréal,” 209-210.

²⁷ Ernest Cormier, “Les Plans de l’Université de Montréal,” *Architecture-Bâtiment-Construction* 2, no. 10 (Jan 1947): 30, translated in Geoffrey Simmins, ed., *Documents in Canadian Architecture* (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 1992), 167-168.

²⁸ Gournay, “Introduction,” in *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal*, ed. Isabelle Gournay (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1990), 13.

²⁹ “Four Million Dollar Contract for the University of Montréal Buildings” in *Contract Record and Engineering Review*, vol 44, no. 19 (May 7, 1930): 527 [ARCH259480, folder: Dossier de Presse, 1930-69, box 00-EC-002]; “L’Université de Montréal,” *La Revue populaire - art, lettres, sciences, histoire* (Feb 1931): 11; Ernest Cormier, “New Buildings for University of Montréal,” *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* 8, no. 6 (June 1931): 249.

metropolis, and moreover, was among the first academic institutions to break away from conventional campus planning through the complete integration of the parts into one immense unit. As Isabelle Gournay notes, this spectacular evolution in Cormier's *parti* leading to the adoption of an unprecedented arrangement for the academic complex, reflected a "scientific spirit" on the part of the architect and client.³⁰ In seeking guidance and approval from esteemed experts, the university authorities were greatly encouraged by the Rockefeller Foundation's assessment, that if the Université de Montréal adopted this arrangement, the institution would be on equal footing with the most up-to-date facilities in North America.³¹



Figure 6.7 An aerial photograph of the main pavilion of the UdeM, taken on July 25, 1948. Source: 1Fp,01973, Fonds D0036, Archives UdeM.

The intervention of the Rockefeller, therefore, played a pivotal role in the direction the design took. At the same time, the decision to proceed with the design of one large complex instead of separate pavilions was also motivated, and generally justified by practical

³⁰ Gournay, "Graphisme et praxis," 163.

³¹ As Dr. Parizeau would recount, "Le résultat final nous a donné une formule, qui de l'aveu de l'ancien président de la Fondation, Mr. Vincent, et de son collaborateur, le regretté Dr. Pearce, mettra l'Université de Montréal sur un pied d'égalité avec les installations les plus efficaces de l'Amérique du Nord." Parizeau, "Pourquoi et comment on construit l'Université de Montréal," 208.

See also the following positive assessment, published in a technical journal: "The inclusion of the Hospital in the University building is unique in college architecture in the Dominion." "The University of Montreal Builds Monumental Home," *The Dunham Magazine* 16, no. 11 (Nov 1930): 177, item 358/A-28, folder "01 ARC 239N, 378/B-6," box 00-EC-008.

considerations, especially that of climate which takes on particular significance in Quebec given the harsh Montreal winters.³² In addition to the discomfort of moving between buildings in the winter on the exposed mountain slope, and the space that would be wasted by having to provide cloakrooms for outerwear in each building, a key consideration was the cost of heating. In this regard, the advantage of one large building over multiple self-contained edifices, was deemed to offer a reduction in the number of exterior walls exposed to the cold and wind, and thus, with less overall heat loss, the university would benefit from cost savings in heating over the long term.³³ Another perceived advantage of adopting this ‘compact plan’ was that space would not be given over to multiple administration and surveillance facilities, as would be necessary if all the Faculties were to be housed in their own buildings. Finally, given the rocky soil conditions, the construction of underground tunnels connecting different buildings was not considered feasible. For all of these reasons, Cormier and the university authorities were discouraged from proceeding with individual pavilions. As Cormier succinctly explained:

“The need to make the faculties of science and medicine adjacent, the sharing of some lecture halls and laboratories by groups from different faculties, the need to centralize heating, electricity and refrigeration and the rocky soil which made communications tunnels impossible ruled out the concept of separate buildings from the outset. This meant we had to have a sufficiently compact design with enough flexibility to allow for future expansion.”³⁴

In hindsight, what is somewhat ironic in all of these conscientious deliberations about the

³² Mgr Olivier Maurault, who took over as the Rector of the Université de Montréal in 1934, would remark that the university authorities could have decided to build separate pavilions as funds allowed, but that they were advised by people in Canada and the US who are very well-placed to speak about university planning that a *parti* based on separate pavilions is elegant but costly. Especially in a country like Canada where winter lasts for months and the snow falls in abundance, the system is impracticable. Maurault, “Histoire de l’Université,” 203; Mgr Olivier Maurault, *Propos et Portraits* (Montréal: Éditions Bernard Valiquette, 1941), 172.

³³ Dr. Georges-E. Cartier, “Pour aider à comprendre le problème universitaire,” *L’Action nationale* 9, no. 6 (June 1937): 358; Parizeau, “Pourquoi et comment on construit l’Université de Montréal,” 210.

³⁴ Cormier, “Les Plans de l’Université de Montréal,” 30; English translation in Simmins, 167.

practical measures to be taken to reduce waste and cost and to provide amply for the future, is that the sheer scale of the project obliged the university to commit to constructing an immense facility all at once, with the substantial financial burden that this entailed, as opposed to proceeding pavilion by self-contained pavilion as financial resources became available. Thus, the university's decision to adopt the compact plan was its greatest strength and simultaneously the weakness that almost led to the institution's total undoing.

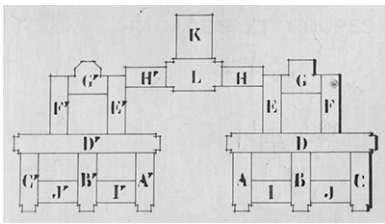


Figure 6.8 Diagram of the wings of the main pavilion of the Université de Montréal.

Source: Ernest Cormier, legend of drawing 00008 from the series “Façades et coupes” dated 5.4.1929, 17.1.1930, folder Cormier 1513/Z, FEC, CCA.

Distribution

The overall organization of the main pavilion resembles what the Rector Mgr Maurault affectionately called “a key without a shaft.”³⁵ [Figure 6.8] Two clusters of a series of transverse bars, protruding wings and inner courts are organized symmetrically around an anchoring central quadrangle constituted by an exterior court that leads to the main entry block. This core of the pavilion is comprised of a monumental entry hall, main auditorium, lecture halls, administrative offices and library, and is crowned by a tower. Sitting on a tiered slope, the wings terminating at the front of the complex feature more stories than those at the rear, and entry into the pavilion through the main central doors would place the visitor on the fourth floor of the pavilion. In his explanation of his approach to the design, Cormier remarked that while it was comparatively easy to provide the necessary spaces for the faculties housing the humanities and social sciences,

³⁵ Maurault used the expression “un clef sans tige.” See *L'Université de Montréal: Guide* (Montréal: Thérien Frères, 1946), 11.

what was by far more challenging, was to design the medical faculty-teaching hospital grouping due to the complexity of the contacts that had to be established between the school of medicine, the hospital and the science laboratories that would also serve other departments.³⁶ For this reason he started the planning with this cluster, which would occupy the right half of the complex. Providing for 480 hospital beds, which was deemed to offer a broad enough field of observation, the front three wings (A, B, and C, each measuring 45' in width and 145' in length) and the transverse bar that connects them (wing D), were designed to host the hospital. The single-story bars that connect these hospital wings at the front of the complex (wings I and J) were designed as outpatient clinics, and the Faculty of Medicine along with bacteriology and pathology, occupy the quadrangle in the rear (wings E, F and G). The client felt that the simple and practical design of the teaching hospital would offer every facility that modern medicine had devised to date.³⁷ A presentation board that Cormier prepared showcases the plans for the fourth and sixth floors of the hospital wings containing the medical surgery functions, and the configuration of the wards. It is unknown when and for which specific purpose he prepared this large panel, but given the inclusion of the photograph of the model of the pavilion and the fact that the textual description written in his hand is in English, it is reasonable to presume that this was shown to the authorities of the Medical Division of the Rockefeller Foundation some time on or after 1928. **[Figure 6.9]**

The cluster located to the left of the central zone, is very similar to that of the medicine-hospital grouping to the right, and is occupied largely by departments within the Faculties of

³⁶ Cormier, "Les Plans de l'Université de Montréal," 30; English translation in Simmins, 167-168.

³⁷ Dr. Téléphore Parizeau, "Commentaires pour servir à l'exposé des plans de la faculté de médecine et de l'hôpital universitaire," Mtrl, n.d., 11, Fonds du secrétariat général, D35/430, Archives, UdeM; Parizeau, "Pourquoi et comment on construit l'Université de Montréal," 210 ; Fournier, "Tradition and Modernism," 48.

Science and Medicine that attend to purely scientific teaching and therefore, do not require the direct observation of patients and the physical proximity that this would entail.³⁸ [Figures 6.10 and 6.11] The Faculty of Dental Surgery occupies the lower two floors of the three front wings, mirroring the hospital clinics on the other side. The degree to which Cormier's development of the plan was driven by a commitment to symmetrical organization around the central core, is reinforced by the way he labeled the various wings. Beginning with the grouping to the right and designating the hospital wing closest to the inner court as wing A, followed by wings B and C extending to the right, he envisaged the left grouping as a mirror reflection of this, labeling the wing beside the central exterior court A', followed by B' and C' extending to the left. Cormier asserted that the interior organization of the pavilion was not compromised in order to achieve regularity and symmetry, but rather, these defining characteristics of the scheme were achieved by grouping and stacking rooms of similar function and layout [Figures 6.12 and 6.13],³⁹ and through the standardization of the laboratories, in part through the use of regularly spaced columns which would allow for a laboratory to be configured using half, a whole or several units, depending on the needs.⁴⁰ In descriptions of the main pavilion advanced by Cormier as well as by members of the university administration, the consistent emphasis placed on the portions of the complex that were designed to accommodate the specialized needs of science

³⁸ For a selection of drawings related to the design of the lecture halls and laboratory spaces of the Faculties of Science and Medicine, see boxes 01-2002-019M, 01-2002-020M, 01-2002-021M, and folders "617x/A # 2402," and "629x/O # 2402, ARC8000 à ARCH8002."

³⁹ Among the innovations to the pedagogical spaces were the white screens on the walls of the lecture halls. As one contemporary observed: "White screens on wall is for motion pictures and forms part of every lecture hall. Some are so equipped that teachers can step into a completely equipped laboratory behind a sliding panel blackboard and screen, demonstrate experiments, come back into class, work theory out on blackboard then roll it back and teach by movies." John Kelly, "Université de Montréal," *The Standard* [1943]: 12-14; ARCH259472, folder 370/A-2, box 00-EC-007.

⁴⁰ Cormier, "Les Plans de l'Université de Montréal," 29-30; English translation in Simmins, 167-168.

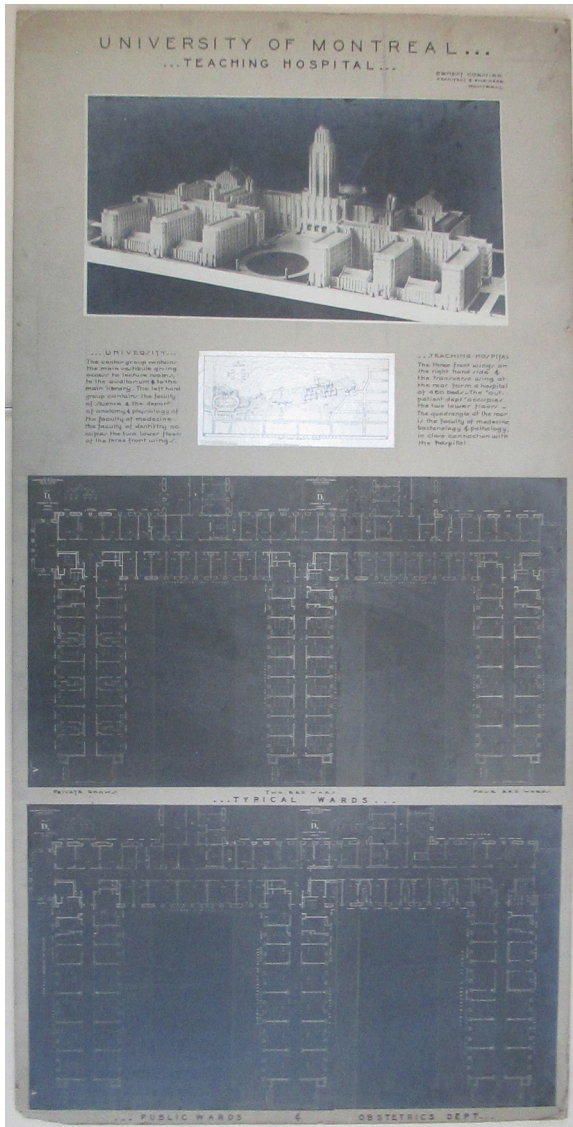


Figure 6.9 A presentation board explaining the teaching hospital for the Université de Montréal showing plans of the fourth and sixth floors of wing D, [undated but not earlier than 1928]. Source: Ernest Cormier, “University of Montreal.... Teaching Hospital,” folder “Cormier 270xx/E, #2402”, box 01-2002-020M, FEC, CCA.

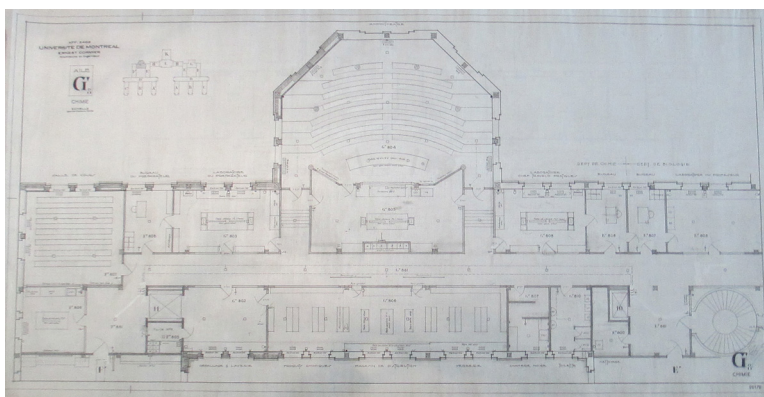


Figure 6.10 Plan of wing G'8 of the Chemistry department, (undated). Source: Ernest Cormier, drawing 00170, Aile G'8, Chimie, folder “617x/A #2402,” FEC, CCA.

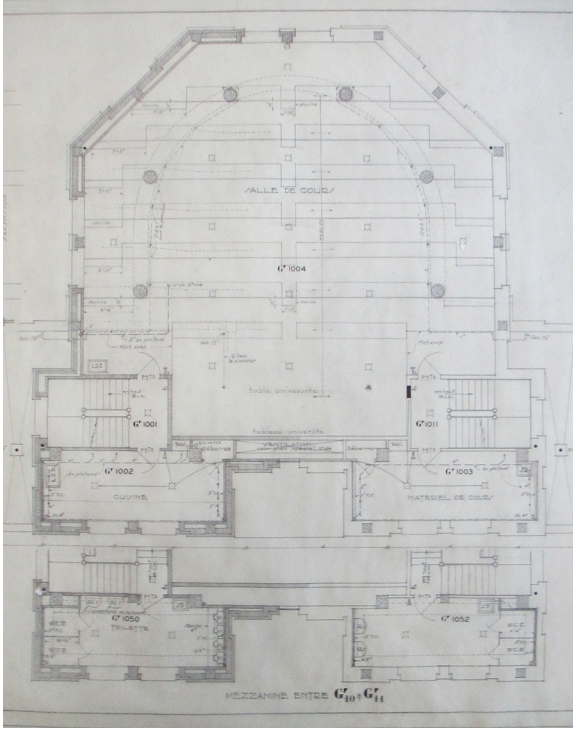


Figure 6.11 Detail of the plan of wing G'10 of the Faculty of Science showing a lecture hall with adjacent spaces reserved for course materials and kitchen facilities, dated February 2, 1932 and revised on July 28, 1941. Source: Ernest Cormier, unnumbered drawing, folder "629x/0 #2402, ARCH8000 à ARCH8002," FEC, CCA.

and medicine, not only gives the misleading impression that the university was primarily, if not exclusively an institution devoted to the teaching of the hard sciences, but more importantly, it foregrounds the seriousness with which the Université de Montréal's broad pedagogical and nationalist mission to equip French Canadians to thrive professionally in the modern world, was motivated by the pursuit of scientific legitimacy. The irony of the emphasis on the hospital which played such a catalytic role in the direction that the design took, is that when the pavilion was officially inaugurated in June 1943, the interior space of the wings designated for this purpose had not yet been outfitted as such due to lack of funds, and in fact, with the expansion of other Faculties and departments over time, which encroached on those spaces, the Université de Montréal's projected teaching hospital on the mountain campus never materialized.

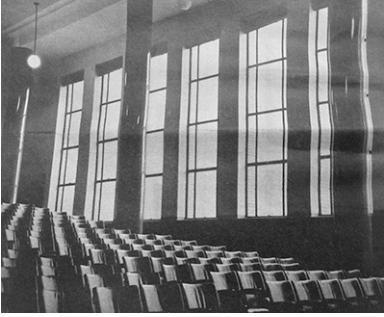


Figure 6.12 A photograph of one of the lecture halls in the Faculty of Medicine, published in a special feature in *La Presse* (June 5, 1943).
Source: ARCH259472, folder 370/A-2, box 00-EC-007, FEC, CCA.

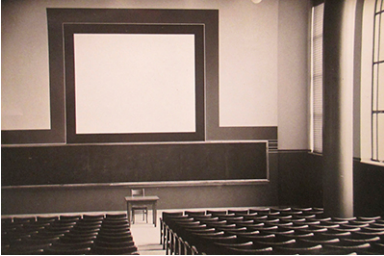


Figure 6.13 A photograph of the interior of a lecture hall at the Université de Montréal showing the large projection screen behind the professor's desk, (undated).
Source: [unknown photographer], P.2041, folder "P.1969 à 2042," box Cormier 01-2402-01P, FEC, CCA.

Anchoring these two forking clusters of wings, are the spaces comprising the main axis of the pavilion, which are central in both placement and hierarchy, constituting the most monumental feature of the composition in terms of scale, proportions, material palette and program. **[Figure 6.14]** From the exterior court [*cour d'honneur*], one climbs a short flight of steps to arrive before the three oak doors that comprise the formal entrance to the main pavilion. **[Figures 6.15 and 6.16]** Recessed from the yellow brick facing of the front elevation, each door is framed by one quarter of a fluted column on either side. Contrasting the surrounding wall surface through their color and rounded form, these quarter columns frame and widen the aperture of each door, giving them more presence, and significantly too, thickening the threshold of each portal by 'pushing' each door inwards. While the operable portion of each oak door is of human scale, Cormier expanded these portals vertically to assume much more imposing proportions through the use of glass panes decoratively framed in oak, that substantially increase the height of the opening, while bringing light into the interior. Above this glazed extension to each door, a large canopy juts out, casting a deep shadow. The composition



Figure 6.14 A view of the central and west parts of the main pavilion, overlooking the residential neighborhood situated lower on the slope of Mount Royal, c.1990.

Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990.0037_002, Archival Storage II-2 Colour, Collection, CCA.



Figure 6.15 Photograph showing the sculptural-ornamental treatment of the central doors of the main pavilion of the UdeM.

Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990.0043, Archival Storage II-2 Colour, Collection, CCA.



Figure 6.16 Photograph of men entering the main pavilion through the door labeled 'student entrance,' below the monumental main entrance, (undated).

Source: Henri Paul, P.1571, EC 226, box 01-2402-03P, FEC, CCA.

of each door is further extended vertically, through the placement of masonry panels – that read as pared down, industrial interpretations of bas-reliefs – in the space of the wall between the door canopies and the tall windows rising above. It is through the composition of this ensemble, that each door, which would be fairly modest in isolation, attains a monumental presence.

Passing through this thickened threshold, we enter into the main entry hall [*Vestibule d'honneur*]. [Figures 6.17, 6.18, 6.19, 6.20 and 6.21] This hall is largely defined by the placement of the faceted reinforced concrete columns that are clad in strips of polished black marble, and the treatment of the ceiling with its three large recesses that simultaneously illuminate the space



Figure 6.17 Photograph of the entry hall [*Vestibule d'honneur*] of the main pavilion immediately to the inside of the main doors, (undated).
Source: [unknown photographer], P.5185, EC 227, box 01-2402-04P, FEC, CCA.

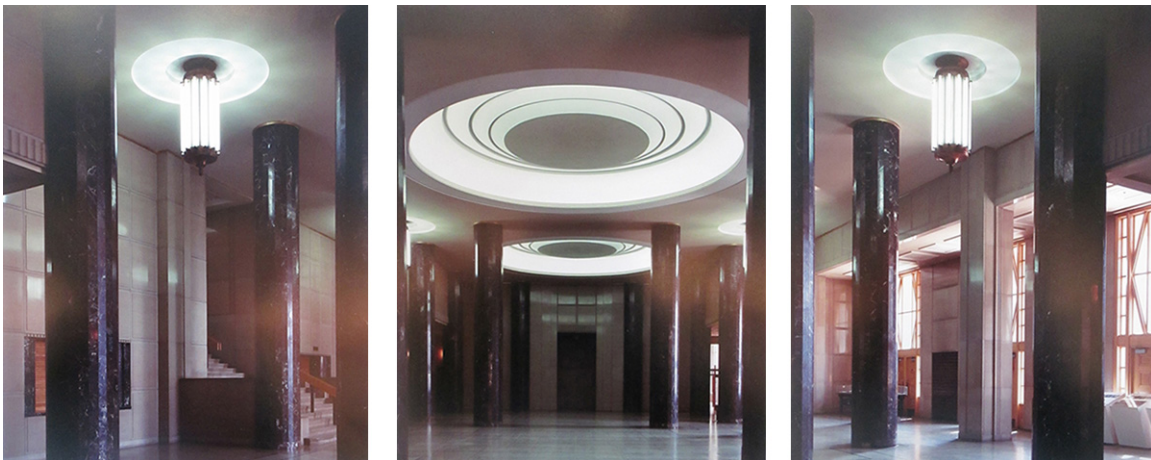


Figure 6.18 Triptych of the interior of the *Vestibule d'honneur* of the Université de Montréal, c1990.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990.0019.001, PH1990.0019.002 and PH1990.0019.003, Collection, CCA.

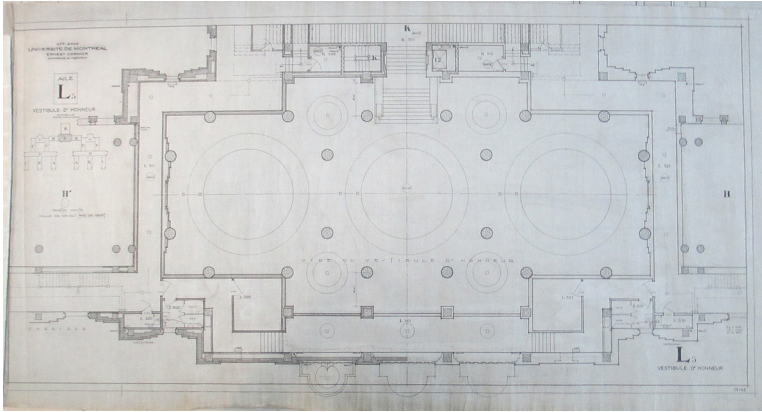


Figure 6.19 Plan of level 5 of the entry hall [*Vestibule d'honneur*] showing the ceiling recesses and placement of the columns, (undated).
Source: Ernest Cormier, dwg00183 "Aile L5, Vestibule d'honneur," folder "617x/A # 2402," FEC, CCA.



Figure 6.20 Photograph of a corner of the *Vestibule d'honneur*, showing the layered treatment of the marble-clad wall and the faceted columns treated as pilasters, c.1990.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990.0046, box Archival Storage III-2 Colour, Collection, CCA.



Figure 6.21 Photograph of the *Vestibule d'honneur* showing a faceted column, bronze grillwork, layered treatment of the walls, and ceiling ornament, c.1990.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990.0059, box Archival Storage III-2 Colour, Collection CCA.

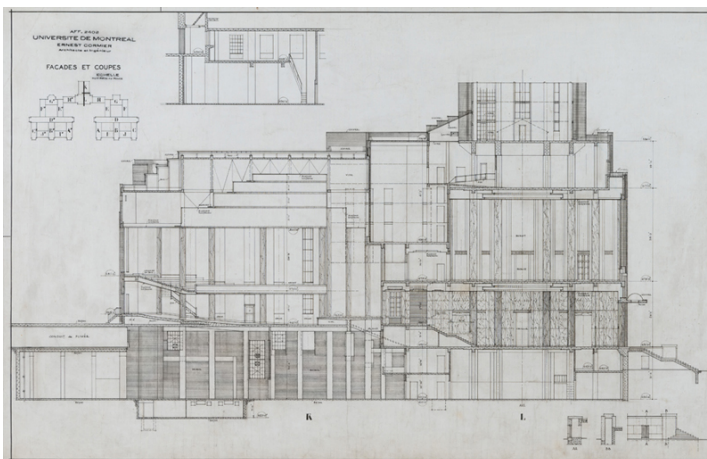


Figure 6.22 Section through wings K (main auditorium) and L (entry hall), 5 April 1929 and 17 January 1930.
Source; Ernest Cormier, detail of drawing 00002, "Facades et coupes," ARCH8020, folder "1513/Z," FEC, CCA.

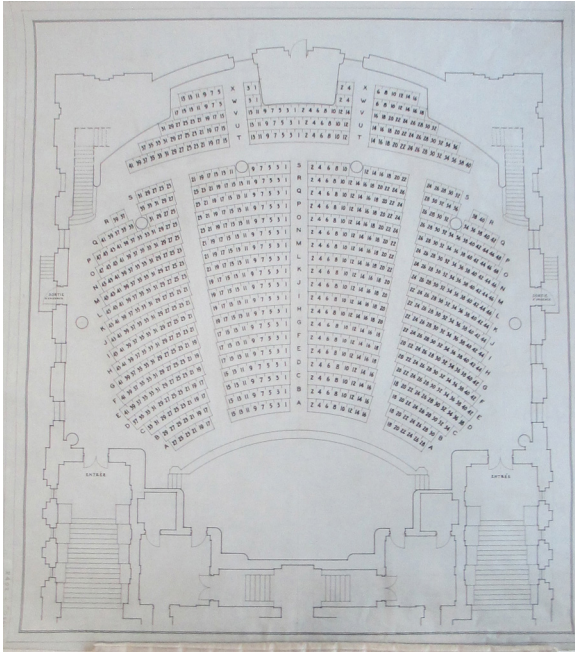


Figure 6.23 Plan of the stage level of the main auditorium [*Salle de promotions*], Université de Montréal.

Source: Ernest Cormier, drawing 2402-#0361, folder “Cormier 605x/M-1, #2402”, box 01-2002-020M, FEC, CCA.

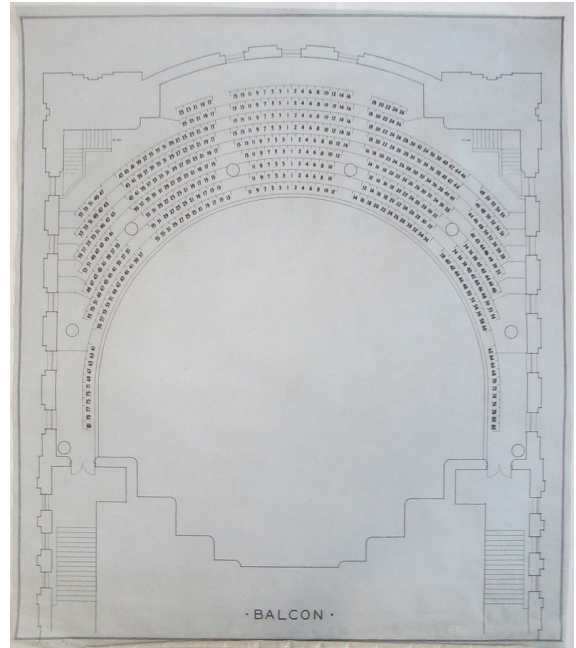


Figure 6.24 Plan of the balcony level of the main auditorium [*Salle de promotions*], Université de Montréal.

Source: Ernest Cormier, drawing 2402-#0362, folder “Cormier 605x/M-1, #2402”, box 01-2002-020M, FEC, CCA.



Figure 6.25 Triptych of the interior of the *Salle de promotions*, Université de Montréal, c1990.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990.0022_001-003, Collection CCA.

and give it a semi-cavernous feel. From this space we are led to the main auditorium [*Salle des promotions*], which seats 2500 people, and has excellent acoustics. **[Figures 6.22, 6.23, 6.24 and 6.25]** Intersecting this dominant horizontal axis is the pronounced vertical axis that pierces through the Hall of Honor, and the library reading room that sits above it, culminating in the 270' (82m) tall tower that has become the icon of the university. **[Figure 6.26]** Providing a striking vertical element that is a dynamic counterpoint to the symmetrical arrangement of wings around the main courtyard, this tower is supported visually and structurally by the marble-clad columns that rise from the entry hall, piercing through the floor of the airy 50'-tall reading room, where they transform from black into yellow marble. **[Figures 6.27 and 6.28]** What is most significant about this tower that was designed to store books and to terminate in an astronomical observatory, is that it derives from models of civic architecture, particularly the skyscraper. **[Figures 6.29 and 6.30]** For an institution that defined itself first and foremost as French-speaking and Catholic, and considered part of its mission the preservation and dissemination of Catholic values, it is striking that a secular book tower occupies the central place that would have traditionally been given over to a chapel crowned by a steeple and cross. Cormier refrained from making any ideological or poetic commentary regarding this design choice. In fact, in the short description he authored describing the design of the main pavilion, he rather flatly stated that the building “has a tower with an astronomical observatory at the top and the library stacks below” and then proceeded to enumerate the building’s mechanical features, as though this technical aspect of the design followed logically from his previous statement. He wrote: “The basement of the building contains the university's mechanical equipment: a 3,200 horsepower heating plant with 200% output, a 2,750kva electrical plant and a refrigeration plant with a capacity of 30

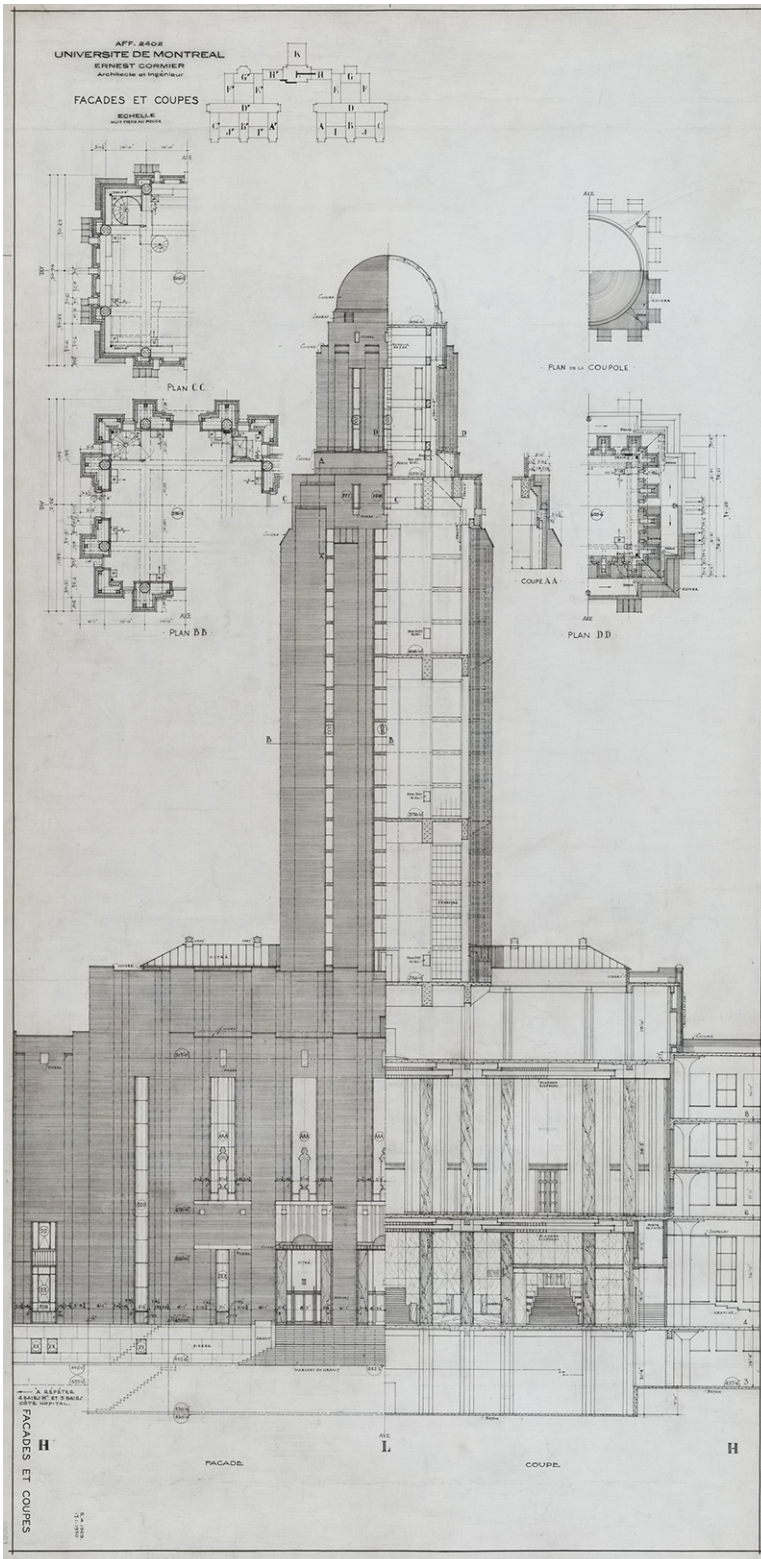


Figure 6.26 Elevation and section of the entrance hall and tower of the main pavilion of the Université de Montréal, 5 April 1929 and 17 January 1930. Source: Ernest Cormier, drawing 00001, "Façades et coupes," ARCH8019, folder 1513/Z, FEC, CCA.



Figure 6.27 A photograph of the Reading Room of the main library of the Université de Montréal, photographed c.1966.
Source: 1Fp,03827, Fonds D0037, Archives UdeM.



Figure 6.28 A photograph of the Reading Room of the main library of the Université de Montréal, photographed c.1966.
Source: 1Fp,03829, Fonds D0037, Archives UdeM.



Figure 6.29 A clipping of a rendering of the Louisiana State Capitol by Weiss, Dreyfous & Seiferth, (undated).
Source: [no source given], folder“4002/A-26,” box 00-EC-008, FEC, CCA.



Figure 6.30 Postcard of a drawing of Paul Cret’s design for the Library Building and tower at the University of Texas at Austin, indicating in pencil that the tower is a library, stamped April 3, 1937.
Source: folder “236/C-8,” box Exposition Cormier Retirés, FEC, CCA.

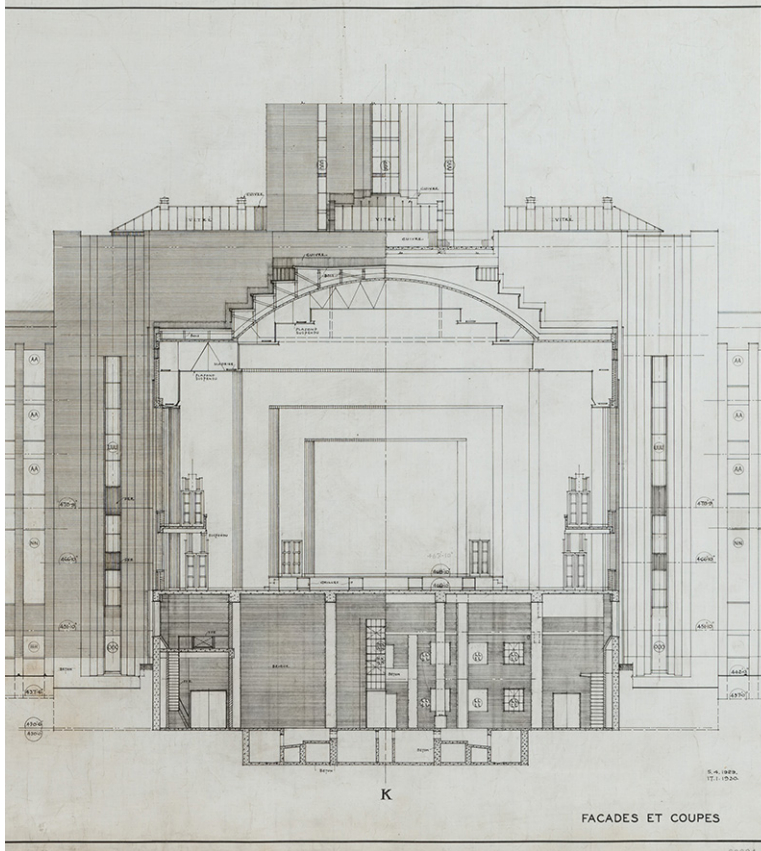


Figure 6.31 Section through the main auditorium [*Salle de promotions*] showing the mechanical equipment in the basement, 5 April 1929 and 17 January 1930. Source: Ernest Cormier, detail of drawing 00004, Pavilion K, “Façades et coupes,” ARCH8022, folder 1513/Z, FEC, CCA.

tons.”⁴¹ [Figure 6.31] By contrast, the university authorities and other intellectuals invested in the institution’s furthering of French Canadian nationalist ambitions, were quick to interpret the tall tower’s true significance as extending far beyond its functional role as storage space for books. Thus, through no discursive contribution on Cormier’s part, the tower was widely interpreted and promoted as symbolizing “the beacon of higher learning” in French Canada.⁴² The argument could be made that Cormier did not need to pontificate on his design’s representational power, as others were performing that function. It is also true that throughout

⁴¹ Cormier, “Les Plans de l’Université de Montréal,” 30; Simmins, 168-169. Without being given credit as the author, this statement first appeared in the 1933 version of his description of the university, published under the title “Explication des plans de la nouvelle université,” in *Album-Souvenir de l’Université de Montréal* (Montreal: Beaugrand-Champagne, 1933), 43-46.

⁴² Maurault, *L’Université de Montréal*, 30.

his career, Cormier was more outspoken on practical matters, giving a strong indication as where his interests lay. Yet the choice to provide the university with a secular tower invested with a program that epitomizes learning in a very direct manner, did not come about by chance but was proposed to the client as part of what he felt best met the client's needs for scientific legitimacy and a 'modern' image. As with Cormier's house, the communicative power of the work itself is much more articulate than anything he says about it.

Modern yet not 'modernistic'

The earliest formulation of Cormier's description of the design of the main pavilion, which is also the most concise, stands out because it is the only version written in English and the one in which he comes the closest to taking a theoretical position. Of his scheme he wrote:

“Architecturally, the buildings are modern in design yet not modernistic. They have been designed from the point of view of practicability, and nothing has been done purely for the sake of aspect.”⁴³

This concise statement warrants unpacking. In the first instance, the distinction he is making, is between a 'modern' design, understood by him and his North American contemporaries as one that is of its time, using the latest materials and methods of construction, which is what he feels he is doing. This is opposed to a 'modernist' or 'modernistic' design that would be formally aligned with the European avant-garde, which was not his ambition. His emphasis on practicability speaks to the priority he gave to meeting the functional needs of the program. Deeply concerned with his work being up-to-date to meet the needs of the present, and to anticipate the needs of the future in order to have ongoing relevance, Cormier kept abreast of developments in European and North American architecture cultures through travel and reading.

⁴³ Cormier, “New Buildings for University of Montréal,” *JRAIC* 8, no. 6 (June 1931): 248. This description was published one year prior to his article in *JRAIC* describing his house.

Finally, his assertion that nothing has been done purely for the sake of appearances relates to his commitment to the structural rationalist approach to using ornament as a means of expressing the structure, not as a superfluous element for its own sake. In interview Cormier explained:

“Nothing that is popularly thought of as style, whether Gothic or Renaissance, appears in the plans for the university. A university must serve the purposes for which it is built. What is important is, above all, practical convenience and maximum usable surface. Naked but enormous laboratories, bright with high ceilings. Literature, philosophy, law, social sciences and economics take up hardly any space here. Thus I settled on the design of a scientific university. It is the arrangement of laboratories and also in general composition that I am trying to break new ground along the lines of current trends. Our university must not be outdated within twenty years.”⁴⁴

Cormier’s pride in the absence of any historicist pastiche in the design of the university is well warranted, for the main pavilion is the first institutional building designed in Canada without recourse to historicism. Striving to best express the conditions of modernity in the twentieth century, Cormier designed a mega-complex using what was in essence a column and slab system in reinforced concrete. **[Figures 6.32, 6.33, 6.34 and 6.35]** The yellow brick cladding was used to ornamental effect to express the structural logic of the building. **[Figures 6.36 and 6.37]** For instance, facades feature piers built up in brick to emphasize the vertical load and bricks laid in ornamental patterns highlight their role as spandrel panels. **[Figures 6.38, 6.39 and 6.40]** As well, capping the Faculty of Medicine on the right half of the pavilion is what was designed to be the chapel, and there, the a-tectonic nature of the brick façade is emphasized by its extension beyond the pitch of the chapel’s roofline. **[Figure 6.41].**

⁴⁴ Jean Chauvin, “Interviews d’artistes: Ernest Cormier, architecte, peintre, sculpteur,” *La Revue populaire - histoire, littérature, sciences* 20, no. 6 (June 1927): 10. English translation in “A Description of Ernest Cormier,” in Simmins, 164.



Figure 6.32 A photo of the construction of the reinforced concrete canopies over the main doors to the main pavilion, dated June 25, 1931. Source: [S. J. Hayward], P.1855, “Perron principal de l’aile L. Marquises au dessus des entrées. À l’extérieur gauche partie de l’aile H⁸,” box 02-2402-01P, FEC, CCA.



Figure 6.33 A photograph of the central zone of the main pavilion under construction, dated July 25, 1931. Source: S. J. Hayward, P.1846, “Pose de la brique ailes D’ et E’. Perrons d’honneur aile L, étages 4, 6, 9 aile L étages 3 à 9 aile H,” box 02-2402-01P, FEC, CCA.

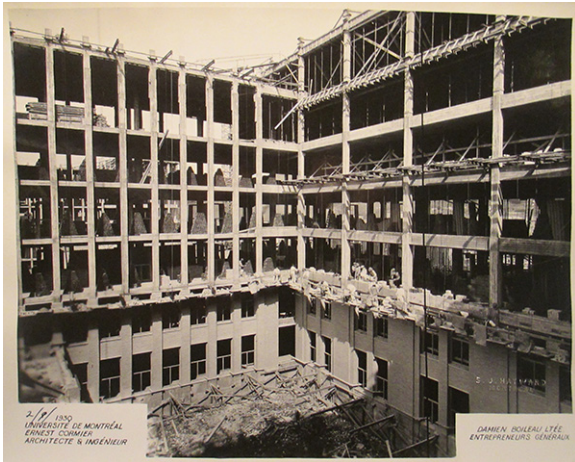


Figure 6.34 A photograph of the brick cladding of the walls of the court in wing I in progress, dated September 2, 1930. Source: S. J. Hayward, P.1949, “Vue de la cour intérieure de I et partie des ailes A & D,” box 02-2402-01P, FEC, CCA.

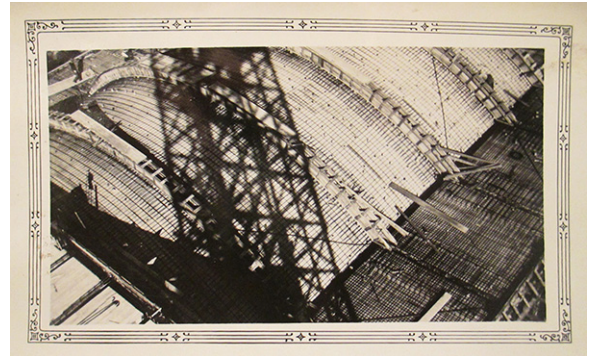


Figure 6.35 Photograph of the rebar of the reinforced concrete vault above the main auditorium of the main pavilion, (undated). Source: [unknown photographer], P.2011, box 01-2402-01P, FEC, CCA.

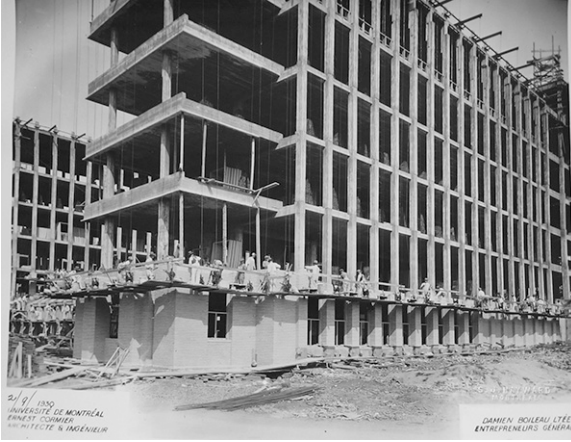


Figure 6.36 A photograph showing bricklayers building up one of the hospital solarium wings, dated September 2, 1930.

Source: S. J. Hayward, P.1950, “de gauche à droite: façade latérale de B, façade de J, façade de C et façade latérale de cette aile,” box 02-2402-01P, FEC, CCA.



Figure 6.37 A photograph wing B of the hospital connected to adjacent wings through the low single-story connectors intended to house the outpatient clinics, (undated).

Source: [unknown photographer], P.5173, EC 224, box 01-2011-04P, FEC, CCA.



Figure 6.38 A view of the exterior wall of the main pavilion, showing the decorative expression of structure in the cladding of the reinforced concrete piers.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990.0041, Archival Storage II-2 Colour, Collection, CCA.



Figure 6.39 A view of the western corner of the central courtyard of the UdeM, showing the decorative treatment given to the piers through the handling of the brickwork.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990.0042, Archival Storage II-2 Colour, Collection, CCA.

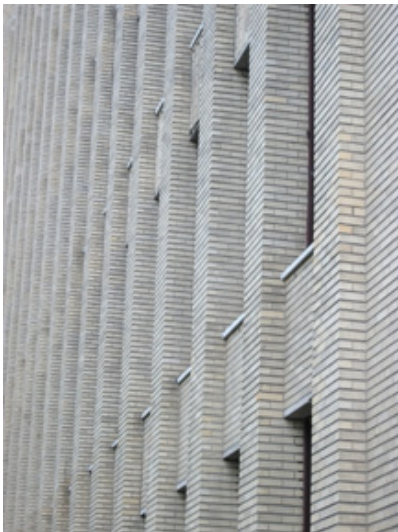


Figure 6.40 An oblique view of an exterior wall of the main pavilion showing the ornamental expression of the structure.
Source: Aliko Economides, 2010.

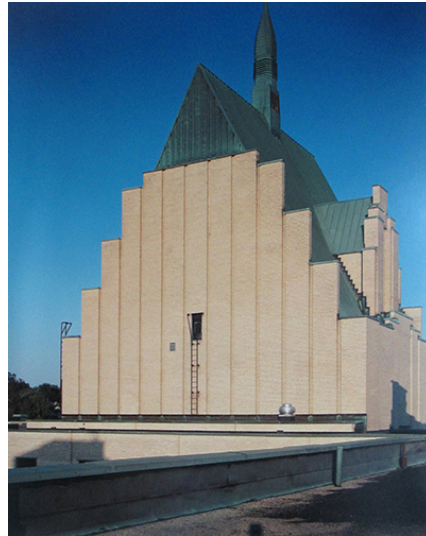


Figure 6.41 A view of the part of the roofline of the main pavilion's chapel, photographed 1990.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990.0056_002, Archival Storage II-2 Colour, Collection, CCA.



Figure 6.42 Photograph of Montréal looking north from the Southam Press Building, 1926-27, showing the large water reservoirs that were a standard feature on the roofs of large buildings at the time. Source: Wm. Notman & Son, VIEW-24047 © McCord Museum.

The cityscape of Montréal in the 1920s featured ungainly water reservoirs on the rooftops of large buildings. **[Figure 6.42]** One of Cormier's innovations was to turn utilitarian elements such as water tanks, stairwells, elevator shafts, and mechanical exhaust vents to good advantage by giving them ornamental treatment that would in turn embellish the pavilion's silhouette and break down its massive horizontal lines. **[Figures 6.43 and 6.44]** Through these flourishes, the clusters of wings are symmetrical but not identical. Also contributing a measure of coherence to the design and breaking down the pavilion's overwhelming size, is Cormier's attention to incorporating recurrent ornamental motifs that echo one another at different scales, in ways that are recognizable although not identical. For example, a comparison of the tower to a crowning feature of the low bar connecting hospital wings, to the detailing of the staircase railing, demonstrate the role that ornament plays in uniting the various parts. **[Figures 6.45, 6.46 and 6.47]**



Figure 6.43 A view of the part of the main pavilion's roof line showing the tower and water reservoirs at the tops of staircase towers, photographed 1990.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990.0056_001, Archival Storage II-2 Colour, Collection, CCA.

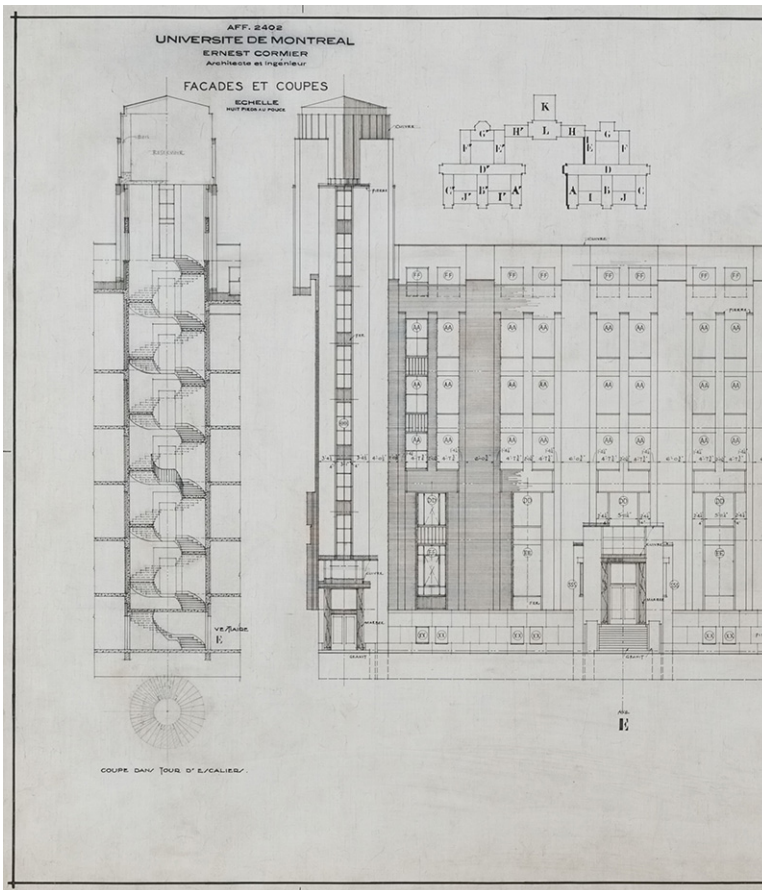


Figure 6.44 Section and elevation of the circular staircase tower that terminates in a water reservoir, wing E, April 5, 1929 and January 17, 1930.

Source: Ernest Cormier, detail of drawing 00007, "Façades et coupes," ARCH8025, folder 1513/Z, FEC, CCA.



Figure 6.45 Photograph of the upper portion of the tower of the Université de Montréal, c.1990.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, detail of PH1990.0029_002, Collection, CCA.



Figure 6.46 A photograph of an ornamental feature of wing J, that echoes the form of the tower.
Source: Aliko Economides, detail of the main pavilion of the Université de Montréal, c.2010.



Figure 6.47 Photograph of the ornamental treatment of a staircase banister at the Université de Montréal, c.1990.
Source: Gabor Szilasi, PH1990.0007, box Szilasi II-5, Collection, CCA.

Another dimension of Cormier's vigilance to the design being the appropriate expression of its time and serving the needs of the program can be discerned in his rigorous research in a range of technical matters bearing on the composition and construction of the building. For instance, the proportions of the courts between wings were determined after studying the lighting conditions on the worst days of the year, in order to ensure the maximum natural sunlight entering the building.⁴⁵ Related to this concern for maximum sunlight was the choice of yellow brick that became a contentious issue, because following rigorous testing, Cormier was dissatisfied with the quality of the bricks produced by Canadian manufacturers and insisted on the choice of American bricks. Where Cormier's rigor was most impressive was in his extensive study of the occupancy requirements for the various parts of the pavilion alongside prevailing wind conditions and the associated heat loss, in order to design the heating system for the immense pavilion.⁴⁶ Cormier's design of twelve zones for the differential heating system, was lauded by experts in this domain.⁴⁷ All of Cormier's efforts to ensure that the building would not be quickly outdated seem to have paid off, for although almost 20 years passed between the award of the commission and the main pavilion's inauguration, Cormier was able to claim his design did not need to be altered in order to bring into line with the most recent ideas.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ See the undated chart calculating the sunlight between the wings of the Université de Montréal, Ernest Cormier, "Éclairage des cours," box 01-2402-01P.

⁴⁶ Among the research Cormier conducted to determine the heating needs of the various parts of the building are a series of undated charts entitled: "Courbes montrant la pression de la vapeur nécessaire. La température intérieure à 70 avec des températures extérieures variées ;" "Rapport du volume et de la température de la vapeur à la pression;" "Emission de chaleur par les radiateurs;" "Différences comparatives de température entre des radiateurs à vapeur et l'air des pièces;" "Comparaison des températures intérieures, système de vacuum différentiel;" and "Economie théorique et réelle en pourcentage du system au vacuum différentiel." See folder "ARCH259251 #2402 260xx/B-8," box 001-2011-273 T.

⁴⁷ "The University of Montreal Builds Monumental Home," 177-78; "Zoned Heat in New University," *Heat and Power* 8, no. 1 (Jan 1931): 38-41.

⁴⁸ "Les Plans de l'Université de Montréal," 30; English translation in Simmins, 169.

Epilogue: constructing international cooperation

“Then, even as the two race-legends woke again remembering ancient enmities, there woke with them also the felt knowledge that together they had fought and survived one great war they had never made and that now they had entered another; that for nearly a hundred years the nation had been spread out on the top half of the continent over the powerhouse of the United States and still was there; [...] And almost grudgingly, out of the instinct to do what was necessary, the country took the first irrevocable steps toward becoming herself, knowing against her will that she was not unique but like all the others, alone with history, with science, with the future.”

– Hugh MacLennan, *Two Solitudes* (1945)¹

Canada in the Postwar World

As a major contributor to the allied war effort, Canada emerged at the close of the Second World War, much stronger internationally than it had been in 1939. The country was seen to have “come of age as an active middle power in world affairs” and had earned the respect of other nations.² A statement made in 1945 sets out some of the factors that contributed to Canada’s new position in the postwar world:

“We Canadians learned during six long years of our war that we could do things that were important for other countries as well as for ourselves; things that were big for a small country of 12 million people scattered over the breadth of a continent. During those years we enlisted by voluntary recruitment nearly a million men to fight; we built up a war industry from nothing until, at the end, we were the fourth largest war producer among the United Nations, making practically everything that is needed for modern war, from tanks, to four-engined bombers, to atomic energy. We became an essential source of raw materials, vital for the winning of the war, and the production of which we increased to the limit of our resources without thought of the future. We increased our food production mightily, with a much reduced agricultural population.”³

¹ Hugh MacLennan, *Two Solitudes* (Toronto: M & S, 2003; 1945), 511.

² John Hilliker and Donald Barry, *Canada's Department of External Affairs: Vol. 2, Coming of Age, 1946-1968* (Montréal; Kingston: Institute of Public Administration of Canada; McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 3.

³ Lester B. Pearson, “Canada and the Post War World,” Address Given at Calvin Bullock Forum, New York, N.Y., November 26, 1945, p.1, box L. B. Pearson papers - speeches, MG 26 N9, vol.1, Lester B. Pearson fonds, Library and Archives Canada (LAC).

Alongside, and emerging roughly a decade prior to the country's notable contribution to the war effort, two new factors began to play a role in Canada's national and international transformation, namely, the 'discovery' of the Great North and its mining potential, and the aviation routes that would make the northern part of the continent an important zone of air transit. These developments positioned Canada to play a leading role in global political relations.⁴

Like the country, Canada's Department of External Affairs matured internationally during this period. Its main representatives, the Secretary of State, Louis Saint-Laurent⁵ and Under-Secretary of State, Lester B. Pearson⁶, shared the convictions that "nationalism and

In the context of this intensified activity on the home front, Therrien and Vanlaethem note that "[a]lthough the Second World War took its toll of human lives, it did not mark a halt to all activity – quite the reverse. The economy was revitalized, the process of modernization gathered pace and Canada opened itself to the world." Marie-Josée Therrien and France Vanlaethem, "Modern Architecture in Canada 1940-1967," in Hubert-Jan Henket and Hilde Heynen, eds., *Back from Utopia: The Challenge of the Modern Movement* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2002), 126.

⁴ André Siegfried, preface to *Itinéraire canadien* by Raymond Tanghe (Montréal: Éditions B.-D. Simpson, 1945), 9-10. One of the implications of aviation in Canada's north was that the USSR was brought into proximity as a northern neighbor.

⁵ A prominent, respected lawyer in the province of Quebec, Louis Saint-Laurent (1882-1973) entered the federal government in 1941 as a wartime duty to serve as Minister of Justice, but was persuaded to accept the position of Secretary of State for External Affairs in September 1946. He was the first francophone to hold this office and led Canada's delegation to the United Nations General Assembly. He was elected leader of the Liberal Party in 1948 and succeeded William Lyon Mackenzie King as the country's Prime Minister from 1948 until 1957. Hilliker and Barry, *Coming of Age, 1946-1968*, 4-5; Noël E. Lanoix, ed., *Les Biographies françaises d'Amérique* (Sherbrooke, QC: Les Journalistes Associés Éditeurs, 1950; 1942), 8-10.

⁶ Initially a history professor at the University of Toronto, Lester Bowles Pearson (1897-1972) served as a diplomat for many years (including assignments to London during WWII and his service as the Canadian Ambassador to the United States in 1945), making him one of Canada's most experienced diplomats by the time took up the position of Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs in September 1946. Having been a member of the Canadian Delegation that participated in the UN Conference on International Organization held in San Francisco in April 1945, he subsequently participated directly in many postwar international negotiations and played a dominant role in Canadian foreign policy, particularly from the mid-1940s through the 1950s. If there is a historical actor with the authority to speak about Canada's position in the international postwar context and specifically about its relationships to the USA and the UK, it is Pearson. In 1958 he left the civil service to enter federal politics, where he was elected leader of the Liberal Party, and was Prime Minister of Canada from 1963-68. Hilliker and Barry, *Coming of Age, 1946-1968*, 3-7; Lester B. Pearson, *Mike: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson*. 3 vols (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1972); Andrew Cohen, *Lester B. Pearson* (Toronto: Penguin, 2008).

internationalism are two sides of the same coin” and that “the country should play its full part in the international organization of peace and security.” Through their leadership, Canada became increasingly involved in the negotiations and planning necessitated in the aftermath of the war.⁷ Pearson in particular, excelled in the conduct of diplomacy, and worked assiduously to dispel misconceptions about Canada, taking every opportunity to point out that his country is neither a northern extension of the USA nor a colonial outpost of the UK, but rather, is now a nation in its own right that stands on its own feet, “even though we want to walk in step with our friends.”⁸ He wrote:

“Canada is a North American nation, conscious of her destiny on this continent. She is also a nation in a world-wide British Commonwealth of Nations, and she cherishes that association. If those two things conflict, Canada’s position becomes impossible. To avoid such a conflict, we in Canada will go to almost any lengths [...] We will certainly do our best to hold that position and to maintain in peace and understanding that North Atlantic triangle whose apexes are Washington – London – Ottawa.”⁹

Identifying Canada as playing the role of “the interpreter, the bridge, the link, the lynchpin”¹⁰ in Anglo-American relations, Pearson was emphasizing one unique dimension of the important contribution Canada was poised to make on the international scene. Tellingly, Pearson was seriously considered for the position of United Nations Secretary-General, but his candidacy was defeated by the Soviet Union, on the grounds that the site of the organization’s headquarters *and*

⁷ Hilliker and Barry, *Coming of Age, 1946-1968*, 3, 5, 8.

⁸ L. B. Pearson, “Address at Canadian Society Dinner,” New York, February 3, 1945, pp.15-16, box L. B. Pearson papers - speeches, MG 26 N9, vol.1, Pearson fonds, LAC.

⁹ L. B. Pearson, “Canada and the United States,” Address Given at Atlantic City to the Annual Convention of the New Jersey Teachers Federation, November 30, 1945, p.8, box L. B. Pearson papers - speeches, MG 26 N9, vol.1, Pearson fonds, LAC.

¹⁰ Pearson, “Address at Canadian Society Dinner,” p.12. Pearson was certainly not unique in identifying the key role Canada was then playing between the UK and the USA. See for example, Raymond Tanghe and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, *Le Canada dans l'ordre international; tribune d'information sur les problèmes de l'après-guerre* (Montréal: Fides, 1944), 9-24.

its chief officer should not both be North American.¹¹ As a result of the need to reach a compromise, the Norwegian politician, Trygve Lie was elected first UN Secretary-General.

Making Peace: The United Nations Headquarters, New York

At the first meeting of the United Nations Headquarters Advisory Committee, Chairman, US Senator Warren R. Austin proclaimed:

“To us falls the task of making the Headquarters of the United Nations an appropriate representation of the progress of history and a promise for the future that will be constantly telling mankind that we are working in harmony; that we are maintaining unity. In this way we can contribute toward that great objective to which we aspire – the avoidance of war.”¹²

To achieve this goal, it was decided that Wallace K. Harrison, the prominent New York architect who had been the principal designer of the Rockefeller Center, would be appointed Director of Planning for the UN Headquarters, and that in this leadership capacity, would be given complete authority to establish the team and the working procedures he considered necessary to the fulfillment of the task. There was a strong conviction that the spirit of international cooperation, which the United Nations considered central to its purpose, should permeate each of its activities, and thus, to ensure that the planning work would be both of the highest caliber and would be carried out on a truly international collaborative basis, it was decided that a board of “ten eminent international experts qualified in the various architectural and engineering aspects of the project” drawn from the 29 member nations, who will represent “a wide geographical distribution of countries” would be appointed to assist Harrison.¹³ Assisting this team of

¹¹ Hilliker and Barry, *Coming of Age, 1946-1968*, 7.

¹² This first meeting of the UN Headquarters Advisory Committee was held on January 6, 1947. See: Secretary-General, United Nations, *Report to the General Assembly of the United Nations by the Secretary-General on the Permanent Headquarters of the United Nations* (Lake Success, NY: United Nations, 1947), 3, 8. Ernest Cormier Library.

designers would be four other categories of consultants and personnel, drawn mostly from professionals based in New York.¹⁴ The selection of the Board of Design Consultants transpired in two phases, the first being the appointment of half of the team, mostly representatives of the “Big Four” countries, who were summoned to New York to begin work as early as mid-February, and the remaining five who were to be selected shortly thereafter. With Harrison representing the United States as the Director of Planning overseeing the 10-member board, the other national representatives appointed in this first round were Ssu-Ch’eng Liang (China), Howard Robertson (United Kingdom), and Nikolai D. Bassov (U.S.S.R.), to which were added Oscar Niemeyer (Brazil) and Le Corbusier (France).¹⁵ The Board of Design worked on

¹³ Advisory Committee Memorandum by the Secretary-General, “General Problems of Organizing the Planning of Work,” A/AC.7/W.1, 2 January 1947, Restricted, folder “Abramovitz – U.N. – Advisory Committee Minutes & Meetings, 1990.007, 15:5,” box C323 Abramovitz Box 15 – Proj. Records & U.N., Max Abramovitz Architectural Records and Papers Collection, 1926-1995, Avery Architecture Library Archives, Columbia University; Extracts from the memo from UN Headquarters Planning dated February 13, 1947, included in a letter sent to Ernest Cormier on February 25, 1947 from Charles David, President of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, folder “Nations Unies, Nomination,” box Fonds Cormier Library Transfer ARCON1992:0006 AR1992:0002 Boîte (2/6); Secretary-General, UN, *Report to the General Assembly on the Permanent Headquarters*, 8-10.

¹⁴ The other categories of personnel were: Associate architects and engineers; Technicians, Specialists and others (to be employed by the firm of the Director of Planning and by the firms of the associate architects); Contractual services (for things like engineering studies, surveys, drawings, model-making, etc.); and Members of the regular Secretariat staff for administrative and clerical services. See Secretary-General, UN, *Report to the General Assembly on the Permanent Headquarters*, 10.

The organizational chart showing the primary groups in charge of Headquarters planning can be viewed on line, United Nations, “United Nations, Organizational chart,” accessed August 9, 2013, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/70217867@N07/8262108882/>

¹⁵ Two excellent sources that discuss the design of the UN Headquarters are George A. Dudley, *A Workshop for Peace: Designing the United Nations Headquarters* (New York, NY; Cambridge, MA: Architectural History Foundation; The MIT Press, 1994), and Linda Sue Phipps, “Constructing the United Nations Headquarters: Modern Architecture as Public Diplomacy” (Ph.D., Harvard University, 1998). The latter is only available for consultation at the Special Collections division of the Frances Loeb Library at Harvard University’s Graduate School of Design. As well, the documentary film, “A Workshop for Peace,” (54 min, 2005) <http://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/webcast/2011/09/a-workshop-for-peace.html> produced by Peter Rosen Productions Inc. in association with United Nations Department of Public Information, provides a good overview of the main phases of the Headquarters’ design development.

the 27th floor of the RKO building in New York, and met officially 45 times between February and June 1947.

At the time, it was noted that the ultimate client for this ambitious undertaking of the design of the UN's permanent Headquarters, was the world itself.¹⁶ Dr. Liang, China's representative on the Board opined, "My feeling is that this group of buildings should be not only international in character, but un-national – expressing no country's characteristic but expressive of the world as a whole."¹⁷ By using architecture to communicate its goals for peaceful international relations, as well as to house and facilitate its far-reaching activities, and ultimately, to extend its influence, the United Nations offered the world "a workshop for peace."¹⁸ The work of the Board of Design in particular, then, can be understood as a microcosm of the strained efforts to 'make peace' in the postwar world. Moreover, as both a design process and a final designed product, the Headquarters was a representation of the United Nation's self-definition: a figurative and literal construction of the political organization's identity and *raison d'être*.¹⁹ In the context of this highly publicized project, the professional mandate and personal identity of each designer appointed to the Board, was expanded politically to include the role of national ambassador on the international stage.

¹⁶ Eric Arthur, "Editorial," *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* 25, no. 3 (Mar 1948): 68.

¹⁷ Gertrude Stein, "What Kind of Capitol for the U.N.?", *New York Times Magazine*, April 20, 1947, 56.

¹⁸ When W.K. Harrison presented the plans agreed upon by the Board of Design, to the Headquarters Advisory Committee in May 1947, he stated, "The world hopes for a symbol of peace; we have given them a workshop for peace." Secretary-General, UN, *Report to the General Assembly on the Permanent Headquarters*, 3.

¹⁹ Phipps' rigorous study examines the reception of the UN Headquarters and analyzes it as a strategy of public diplomacy, discussing how the UN presented its Board of Design team as a microcosm of the international cooperation that the organization represented. Phipps, "Constructing the United Nations Headquarters: Modern Architecture as Public Diplomacy."

The Architect-Engineer as Designer-Diplomat

Upon receiving word from the UN Planning Office in January 1947, requesting that the Canadian government propose “an outstanding professional man for possible membership on [the] Board of Design Consultants,”²⁰ the Department for External Affairs contacted Charles David, the President of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, requesting that the RAIC submit “the names of six or eight outstanding professional men for appointment of one to an Advisory Board of Consultants for the designing of the U.N.O. buildings.”²¹ David followed through with a telegram listing the seven nominees whom the RAIC’s Executive Council had voted on.²² They were: Eric R. Arthur, Ernest I. Barott, Ernest Cormier, Charles David, Harold L. Fetherstonhaugh, John Roxburgh Smith, and Hazen Size.²³ The Canadian government made

²⁰ Outgoing cablegram from David Owen, Acting Secretary-General of the UN, sent to Ottawa, Baghdad, Wellington, Kiev, Kabul and Copenhagen on January 10, 1947. See folder “S-0472, Box – 3, File 6, Central Registry (120-3-1) SG - HQ Planning - Board of Design Consultants – General, 09 Jan 1947 -14 April 1950,” box S-0472-003-06; Central Registry (RAG-1) 1946-51, Office of the Secretary-General – Headquarters planning – Board of Design Consultants – General, Archives and Records Management Services (ARMS), United Nations Headquarters, NY.

²¹ Correspondence dated January 24, 1947, sent from R.G. Riddell on behalf of L.B. Pearson, the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa, to Charles David, President of the RAIC, referred to in Riddell’s letter to David dated February 21, 1947. A copy of selected exchanges between the Federal government and the RAIC concerning the nomination of architects to the UN’s Board of Design was forwarded to Cormier by Charles David on February 25, 1947. See folder “Nations Unies, Nomination,” box Fonds Cormier Library Transfer ARCON1992:0006 AR1992:0002 Boîte (2/6). The precise wording of the government’s request is recorded in the Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Council of the RAIC held on January 27, 1947. See “Article 1416. Department of External Affairs,” p.5, RAIC, Minutes of Executive Committee and Council Meetings, 1947-1950 (M.G. 28, I 239, Volume 9), LAC.

²² This telegram was sent on January 28, 1947, the day after the Meeting of the RAIC Executive Committee. See the February 21, 1947 correspondence from R.G. Riddell, Department of External Affairs, Ottawa.

²³ Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Council of the RAIC held on January 27, 1947. See “Article 1416. Department of External Affairs,” p.5, RAIC, Minutes of Executive Committee and Council Meetings, 1947-1950 (M.G. 28, I 239, Volume 9), LAC.

Had Toronto architect John M. Lyle (1872-1945) not passed away by the time of these deliberations, he would have likely been included in this list. A prolific architect and one who was actively involved in efforts to elevate the profile of architecture in Canada, Lyle’s writings and work attest to his search for a uniquely Canadian architectural expression.

the selection within three days, and Cormier was promptly informed by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, that his name has already been put forth to the UN's Secretary-General, clarifying that the final decision will be made by the Secretary-General on the recommendation of the Director of Planning and in concert with the Headquarters Advisory Committee.²⁴

This list of the seven architects working in Canada who were nominated by their peers as suitable candidates for consideration for this prestigious assignment is instructive for what it reveals about architecture culture in Canada immediately following World War II. The first thing to notice is that with the exception of Eric Arthur in Toronto, all of the nominees were Montréal-based practitioners, indicating that there was no architect practicing outside of those urban centers in Canada at that time, who was deemed to be of sufficient standing to represent the country on an international team of architects. In addition, three of the seven had immigrated to Canada as adults, meaning that only four members of this select group were native-born Canadians. As well, all but Barott and Sise had demonstrated a commitment to serving the profession at large through their involvement in their provincial Association of Architects and/or in the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada. A brief discussion of the other candidates will help to elucidate what made Cormier stand out as the country's top architect.

²⁴ Letter from Louis Saint-Laurent, Secrétaire d'État aux Affaires extérieures Canada to Ernest Cormier, dated February 4, 1947, folder "Nations Unies Nomination," box Fonds Cormier Library Transfer ARCON1992:0006 AR1992:0002 Boîte (2/6).

The incoming cablegram from the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa to the Acting Secretary-General, dated February 3, 1947, states: "I have the honor to suggest the name of Mr. Ernest Cormier 2039 Mansfield Avenue Montréal for possible membership on Board of Design Consultants to assist Director of Headquarters Planning in developing architectural plans for Permanent Headquarters and related matters. Biographical background on Mr. Cormier will be communicated to the Director of Headquarters Planning as soon as possible." See folder "S-0472, Box – 3, File 10, Central Registry (120-3-3) SG - HQ Planning – Board of Design Consultants nominations by member Government – Canada, 24 Jan 1947 - 07 April 1947," box S-0472-003-06; Central Registry (RAG-1) 1946-51, Office of the Secretary-General – Headquarters planning – Board of Design Consultants – General, ARMS.

Eric Ross Arthur (1898-1982) was born in New Zealand, and studied architecture at the University of Liverpool, where he was three times a finalist for the Rome Scholarship. After graduating in 1923, he worked in London for Edwin Lutyens, and won the design competition for the Dewsbury Yorkshire War Memorial, on which he had collaborated with W. Naseby Adams of London. In 1924 he immigrated to Canada to take up a teaching position at the University of Toronto, and in his capacity as architect, professor, author and chief editor of the *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (JRAIC)* from 1937 until 1959, Arthur played a crucial role in the cultural project(s) of promoting architectural modernism in Canada – which he did much more through his discursive contribution than through his built work – and of introducing the preservation movement in the province of Ontario.²⁵

Ernest Isbell Barott (1884-1966) was born in New York State and in 1902 began studying architecture at Syracuse University, which at the time, was strongly influenced by the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris. He spent a year traveling in Europe and worked for McKim, Mead and White in New York from 1905-1911, then moved to Montréal to work as chief draftsman for the Canadian Pacific Railway's extensive additions to Windsor Station. Barott established his practice in Montréal in 1912 in partnership with Gordon H. Blackader (1885-1916) and Daniel T. Webster (d.1939?) who had both worked for McKim, Mead and White. Barott would be the principal of a series of firms in Montréal until the end of his life and with his associates, was very successful in obtaining numerous commissions for major commercial and institutional buildings, among them, the Canada Cement Company Building (1921-22), the Beaver Hall Building (1928-29), and the Aldred Building (1929-31) all located in downtown

²⁵ “Arthur, Eric Ross,” *Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada, 1800-1950*, accessed February 28, 2015, <http://www.dictionaryofarchitectsincanada.org/node/61>; Michelangelo Sabatino, “Eric Arthur: Practical Visions,” *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada* 26, no. 1, 2 (2001): 33-42.

Montréal, as well as the Bank of Montréal Building in Ottawa (1930-32) that faces the Canadian Parliament Buildings.²⁶

Charles David (1890-1962) was a Montréal native, who attended the private boys' school Mont-Saint-Louis (as did Cormier) and graduated with a degree in architecture from Montréal's École Polytechnique in 1914, followed by a year of study at the University of Pennsylvania. In 1916 he began working for Ross & MacDonald in Montréal and opened his own practice in 1919, specializing in the design of schools and other institutional buildings, including the Cercle Universitaire de Montréal, of which he was a member. In the 1940s he was Director of Wartime Housing Limited, Canada's first national housing corporation, serving also as the representative for the province of Quebec for that organization. Highly regarded by his colleagues, David was appointed President of the Province of Quebec Association of Architects (PQAA) in 1942, and President of the RAIC in 1946.²⁷

Harold Lea Fetherstonaugh (1887-1971) was born in Montréal and studied architecture at McGill University, graduating in 1909. Working in New York and Montréal, and traveling abroad from 1911-13, he studied briefly at the École des Beaux-Arts in the Atelier Laloux, and established his architectural practice in Montréal following the close of World War I. Largely devoted to residential commissions, he also obtained some commissions for public buildings, especially a few extensions and small buildings for McGill University. Fetherstonaugh also

²⁶ Susan W. Wagg, *Ernest Isbell Barott, Architect: une introduction = Ernest Isbell Barott, Architect: An Introduction*, trans. André Bernier (Montréal: Centre canadien d'architecture, 1985). See also the description of the Fonds Ernest Isbell Barott conserved at the CCA, Collection Online, accessed June 18, 2014, <http://svrdam.cca.qc.ca/search/bs.aspx?langID=1#s=fonds%20barott&p=1&a=k&nr=1&cnq=1>

²⁷ Noël E. Lanoix, ed., *Les Biographies françaises d'Amérique* (Montréal: Les Journalistes Associés Éditeurs, 1942), 530; "David, Charles," *Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada, 1800-1950*, accessed February 28, 2015, <http://www.dictionaryofarchitectsincanada.org/node/821> ; Charles David's RAIC membership application, dated January 7, 1936, MG 28, I 239, vol. 19, RAIC fonds, LAC.

served as President of the PQAA, and from 1928 to 1939 was President of the RAIC.²⁸

John Roxborough [alternately spelled Roxburgh] Smith (1881-1975) was born in Scotland and articulated with the firm of Clarke & Bell, while taking classes in architecture at the Glasgow School of Art. Immigrating to Canada in 1904, he worked for Edward and William S. Maxwell in Montréal where he contributed to the design of important commissions such as the Montréal Art Gallery and the Legislative Buildings in Regina, Saskatchewan. Admitted as a Licentiate to the Royal Institute of British Architects (LRIBA) in 1912, he spent the following four years working for various architects on train stations in Quebec City and Toronto and spent six months in 1913 in the Atelier Hebrard at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. In 1916 he began working for Fetherstonhaugh & McDougall, and formally entered into partnership with McDougall and Fleming in 1946. He first established himself in practice in 1921 after passing the PQAA qualifying exam and taught night classes in architectural drawing at the Montréal Technical Institute for 25 years. In 1941 was elected President of the PQAA.²⁹

Hazen Edward Sise (1906-1974) was born in Montréal and was educated at McGill University and then at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston, where he graduated in 1930. He gained important experience working for some of the leading firms in Montréal, such as Barott and Blackader, Nobbs & Hyde, A. Galt Durnford, and Perry & Luke, and from 1930-38, he sought experiences abroad, working for Le Corbusier in Paris for six months, for the New York firm of Howe & Lescaze, and for Adamson, Thompson & E. Maxwell Fry in

²⁸ “Harold Lea Fetherstonhaugh, CAC Accession No: 17,” The John Bland Canadian Architecture Collection, McGill University, accessed February 28, 2015, <http://cac.mcgill.ca/home/archives2.htm>; “Fetherstonhaugh, Harold Lea,” Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada, 1800-1950, accessed February 28, 2015, <http://www.dictionaryofarchitectsincanada.org/node/1565>

²⁹ “John Roxburgh Smith,” Dictionary of Scottish Architects, accessed February 28, 2015, http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=203593; “Smith, John Roxborough,” Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada, 1800-1950, accessed February 28, 2015, <http://www.dictionaryofarchitectsincanada.org/node/466>

London, where he also became a member of the Modern Architectural Research (MARS) Group.³⁰ Upon his return to Canada in 1938, he was employed with the National Film Board of Canada. The youngest of the seven candidates, Sise is best known for the important role he would play in the development of modern architecture in Montréal in the post-1950 period. Thus, while Sise showed tremendous potential at the time of the RAIC's nomination to represent Canada on the Board of Design, he had not yet firmly established himself as a main player on the architectural scene at home.

By contrast to his colleagues, Cormier was the only one to hold a diploma from the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, the prestige of which stood as a solid testament to his talent and competence. Moreover, as an architect and civil engineer, he embodied a wider range of professional expertise that could be brought to the collaborative design of the UN Headquarters. In this regard, Cormier would also have had a competitive edge over architects nominated by other member nations, and therefore, with Cormier as its representative, Canada stood a better chance of claiming one of the five remaining positions on the Board of Design. In addition to his formal qualifications, Cormier had not only been entrusted with the commission for the main pavilion for the Université de Montréal, which was immense in scale and in significance, but he was also already known at the federal level, having received the commission for the Supreme Court of Canada (1938-50) in Ottawa, which sits beside the Canadian government's neo-Gothic "agitated silhouette of buildings" on Parliament Hill.³¹ **[Figure 7.1]** While I have

³⁰ "Sise, Hazen Edward," Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada, 1800-1950, accessed February 28, 2015, <http://www.dictionaryofarchitectsincanada.org/node/447> See also the description of the Fonds Hazen Sise conserved at the CCA, Collection Online, <http://svrdam.cca.qc.ca/search/bs.aspx?langID=1#s=fonds%20hazen%20sise&p=1&a=k&nr=1&nq=1>

³¹ I borrow this apt characterization from Annmarie Adams and Martin Bressani, "Canada: The Edge Condition," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 62, no. 1 (Mar 2003): 75-76.



Figure 7.1 A photo of the interior of a Justice's office at the Supreme Court of Canada (1938-50), Ottawa, designed by Ernest Cormier. Visible through the window is the silhouette of the neo-Gothic Parliament buildings.
Source: [Unknown photographer], #3700, EC282.2, box 01-Photos-03P, FEC, CCA.

not found archival documents disclosing the behind-closed-doors deliberations internal to the Department of External Affairs over their selection of Cormier,³² there are factors in addition to him being eminently qualified and a known quantity at all levels of government, that although more subtle and more difficult to substantiate, may have reinforced Cormier's favorable position. In the first instance, Cormier was a longtime supporter of the Liberal Party that was

For a discussion of Cormier's design for the Supreme Court Building, see the chapter entitled, "The Supreme Court Building," by Isabelle Gournay and France Vanlaethem, in *The Supreme Court of Canada and Its Justices, 1875-2000: A Commemorative Book = La Cour Suprême du Canada et ses juges, 1875-2000: un livre commémoratif* (Toronto: Published by Dundurn Group and the Supreme Court of Canada in Cooperation with Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2000), 195-211. I am grateful to France Vanlaethem for calling my attention to this publication as well as to directing me to the diaries of William Lyon Mackenzie King, who was Prime Minister of Canada at the time, and who expressed opinions about the design of the Supreme Court, which he initially found "too modern." William Lyon Mackenzie King fonds, Diary series, MG 26 J13, Library and Archives Canada (LAC).

³² It has been noted by historians of Canadian politics that Louis St-Laurent preferred to deal with matters orally and to make decisions quickly, rarely making written comments on memoranda. While this enabled him to conduct affairs in an efficient manner, it also means that his role in the decision making process often went unrecorded. Hilliker and Barry, *Coming of Age, 1946-1968*, 6.

then in power.³³ As well, prior to serving as Secretary of State for External Affairs from 1946-48, Louis Saint-Laurent had met Cormier, both of them being members of the Cercle Universitaire, and both of them having received honorary doctorates at the Université de Montréal's graduation ceremony in 1943 that inaugurated the main pavilion that Cormier had designed.³⁴

After being nominated first by his peers and then selected by his government, Cormier nevertheless had to pass through a final round of consideration to be appointed one of the five remaining members of the Board of Design. Given Canada's strategic geographic and political position, it is plausible that the country would have been assured a spot, regardless of the credentials of the proposed architect. However, given the government's vision for the new role that Canada would play in all aspects of international affairs, it was certain that their chosen representative had to be of world class caliber in order to size up well against the competition, particularly since four out the other five middle powers (namely, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Mexico and the Netherlands)³⁵ were also vying for inclusion. In the one-page version of

³³ Lanoix, ed., *Les Biographies françaises d'Amérique* (1950), 808. Cormier was not politically outspoken, but his allegiance to the Liberal Party likely served him well and in ways that were largely due to the accident of circumstance rather than by design. For instance, it was the Liberal Party that was in power in Quebec when the Université de Montréal was in desperate need of government funding to complete construction of its main pavilion, and as a result of its generous emergency intervention, the provincial government proudly claimed the project as its own. As well, the federal commissions Cormier received for the Supreme Court of Canada (1938-1950) and the National Printing Bureau (1950-59) were both awarded by Liberal governments of Canada, under Prime Ministers William Lyon Mackenzie King, and Louis Saint-Laurent, respectively. Finally, the residence that Cormier designed for himself on Pine Avenue in Montréal was purchased by former Liberal Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau after his retirement from politics and is still owned by the family.

³⁴ Louis Saint-Laurent was elected leader of the Liberal Party in 1948 and succeeded William Lyon Mackenzie King as the country's Prime Minister from 1948 until 1957. See Lanoix, ed., *Les Biographies françaises d'Amérique* (1950), 8-10; Mgr. Émile Chartier, Vice-recteur de l'Université, "L'Esprit d'une collation de grades," in Association Générale des Diplômés de l'Université de Montréal, *Université de Montréal: gala d'Inauguration, 3 juin 1943* (Montréal: Therrien Frères, 1943) 19; 21. He was conferred an honorary doctorate from the UdeM in his capacity as federal Minister of Justice.

³⁵ L. B. Pearson, "Canada in World Affairs," Broadcast over CBC [Canada Broadcasting Corporation], Washington, July 1, 1945, pp.2-3, L.B. Pearson Papers, MG 26 N9, vol.1, Pearson fonds, LAC.

Cormier's CV, which was transmitted to the Headquarters Planning Office by the Department of External Affairs, he lists his principle works as being the Montréal Court House, Montréal University, and the Supreme Court Building, and highlights his experience as "Designing Engineer" for the Dominion Bridge Company as well as for Considère, Pelnard & Caquot in Paris, emphasizing that the latter specialized in reinforced concrete.³⁶ These professional highlights would have impressed upon Harrison, that on top of his experience designing all aspects of large, institutional projects, Cormier was well-positioned as a practitioner at home, and also had international experience.

Cormier's name was put forth to the UN as Canada's nominee in early February 1947,³⁷ and the decision to appoint the five additional members to the Board of Design who hailed from Australia (Gyle A. Sollicieux), Belgium (Gaston Brunfaut), Canada (Ernest Cormier), Sweden (Sven Markelius) and Uruguay (Julio Vilamajó) was unanimously approved at the Headquarters Advisory Committee meeting held on March 7.³⁸ In the interval, it appears that the Department

³⁶ For the brief resume sent by R.G. Riddell on behalf of Lester B. Pearson, Under Secretary of State for External Affairs to Wallace K. Harrison on February 4, 1947, followed by the abovementioned CV, sent on February 8, 1947, see: the letter and enclosure sent by Cormier to Riddell on February 5, 1947, folder "Nations Unies Nomination," box Fonds Cormier Library Transfer ARCON1992:0006 AR1992:0002 Boîte (2/6); and folder "S-0472, Box – 3, File 10, Central Registry (120-3-3) SG - HQ Planning – Board of Design Consultants nominations by member Government – Canada, 24 Jan 1947 - 07 April 1947," box S-0472-003-06; Central Registry (RAG-1) 1946-51, Office of the Secretary-General – Headquarters planning – Board of Design Consultants – General, ARMS.

³⁷ In his correspondence with RAIC President Charles David (who on top of not being the successful candidate, had the task of transmitting the government's decision to Cormier) Cormier wrote, "Si ma nomination est confirmée par M. Wallace K. Harrison, architecte-directeur, je ferai de mon mieux pour justifier le choix de mes confrères canadiens." Letter from Ernest Cormier to Charles David, RAIC, dated February 27, 1947, folder Nations Unies Nomination, box Fonds Cormier Library Transfer ARCON1992:0006 AR1992:0002 Boîte (2/6).

³⁸ Secretary-General, UN, *Report to the General Assembly on the Permanent Headquarters*, 9. The news of Cormier's appointment to the Board of Design was announced at the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the RAIC held on March 22, 1947. "Article 1453. Appointment of Mr. Cormier," RAIC Executive Committee Minutes for the Meeting held on March 22, 1947, p.18, RAIC, Minutes of Executive Committee and Council Meetings, 1947-1950 (M.G. 28, I 239, Volume 9), LAC.

The numerous mentions of his appointment in the local papers expressed pride that Canada was held

of External Affairs actively sought to encourage Canada's selection by instructing Cormier to travel to New York to rub elbows with Harrison, which he did on February 28 and March 1, 1947.³⁹ Appointed the following week, Cormier took up his post as member of the Board of Design, joining the team on April 10, in time for Meeting 28, along with Gyle Soilleux from Australia.⁴⁰ **[Figure 7.2]**

The promotional pamphlet that advertised the publication of the Report concerning the Permanent Headquarters of the United Nations, propounded:

“One noteworthy fact: in the course of this long and arduous work of collaboration, a singleness of viewpoint became manifest and all major decisions were arrived at unanimously. The spirit of the times seemed to rally all those engaged in the task, and the result must certainly be that the architectural concepts born in the workshop of the Headquarters Planning Office express that spirit.”⁴¹

a place on this Board, but the French-language press proudly stressed the fact that the Canadian government had chosen a renowned *French Canadian* as its national representative. See among other examples: “Les architectes des Nations Unies” [no source, date or page reference noted on the clipping], folder “Nations Unies, Extraits de journaux E.C.,” box Fonds Cormier Library Transfer ARCON1992:0006 AR1992:0002 Boîte (2/6); “Un Canadien de renom, M. Ernest Cormier, Architecte et ingénieur,” *Le Constructeur du Québec* (May 1947): 11, [?], folder ARCH259631 801/A-23, box 001-2010-213 T.

³⁹ A note in Cormier's handwriting dated February 26, 1947 indicates that he received a call from Riddell instructing him to ask Mr. Scully, the Consul General of Canada, to arrange a lunch with Harrison for Friday, February 28. As well, Cormier's notes recorded on Biltmore Hotel stationary dated February 28 and March 1, indicate that he met Board of Design members at Rockefeller Plaza, dined with Harrison, Bennett and Abramovitz, and was unsuccessful in reaching Le Corbusier by phone. See folders “Nations Unies, Félicitations, invitations,” and “Nations Unies, Notes diverses,” box Fonds Cormier Library Transfer ARCON1992:0006 AR1992:0002 Boîte (2/6).

⁴⁰ Dudley, *Workshop for Peace*, 191. Markelius had arrived from Sweden in mid-March; Vilamajó arrived from Uruguay in time for Meeting 30 held on April 18; Brunfaut arrived for Meeting 37 on May 7; and Robertson, the UK's representative, finally arrived on May 8. See Dudley, *Workshop for Peace*, 268.

Unlike the others who took up permanent residency in New York during the months that the Board of Design met, Cormier would leave New York on weekends and return on Tuesday morning. In 1947, he spent 52 days in New York. See the letters from Cormier to Ralph Walker and to Markley Stevenson, both dated May 22, 1947, folder “Nations Unies, Félicitations, invitations,” and the list of Cormier's 17 trips to New York in 1947 (document dated March 17, 1948), unlabeled folder, box Fonds Cormier Library Transfer ARCON1992:0006 AR1992:0002 Boîte (2/6).

⁴¹ United Nations, “The Permanent Headquarters of the United Nations” [Promotional Pamphlet] (New York: United Nations, 1947).



Figure 7.2 A detail of a page from *Architectural Forum* that published photographs of the UN Board of Design members in meetings during the Spring of 1947. The individuals are identified above. Source: “UN plans unveiled,” in the News section of *Architectural Forum* 86, no.6 (June 1947), 14. Photographs by LIFE Photos/Frank Scherschel/Graphic House.

In contrast to the public image of harmony and unruffled solidarity that the UN actively promoted as a central feature of its self-definition, the realities of the collaborative process were not nearly so smooth. In mid-April, Le Corbusier authored a moving “Declaration” that he delivered on April 18 during Meeting 30, calling upon Cormier to perform the simultaneous translation into English.⁴² In it, he insisted that the Board of Design is a united World Team for the UN and that no names are attached to this work, because the honor of being called upon to work in this team should be sufficient, adding after a dramatic pause, that “Each one of us can give to Mr. Harrison the assurance that all will work anonymously.” And yet, competition and

⁴² Dudley, *A Workshop for Peace*, 210, 212. Dudley also notes that Le Corbusier had Miss Laurence assigned to him as interpreter, yet on numerous occasions, he seems to have expected Cormier to perform those services. See Betty Sigler, “Plans by Cormier,” *Canadian Business* 24, no. 2 (July 1951): 27; Arthur Prévost, “La Personnalité de la semaine,” *Le Canada*, Cinquantième année – No. 106 (Montréal, August 9, 1952); “Ogdensburger’s Brother: Helped Change Skyline; Cormier Noted Architect,” *Ogdensburg News* (Dec 21, 1952), Advance-News section; [page not noted in the clipping]; folder “Nations Unies, Extraits de journaux E.C.,” box Fonds Cormier Library Transfer ARCON1992:0006 AR1992:0002 Boîte (2/6). The local newspaper in Ogdensburg, NY, featured an article on Cormier because through his sister Antoinette, he was the brother-in-law of Ogdensburg resident, Henry C. Tyo.

the issue of authorship would soon become contentious.⁴³ Of the experience, Cormier has been quoted as saying, “I wouldn’t want to do it over again. [...] Imagine 10 artists trying to agree on a design – a practically impossible job. Fifty-two schemes were worked out [...] before the final draft was presented to the General Assembly for approval.”⁴⁴ Reflecting on the experience one decade later, Harrison concurred:

“We got up to the last minute and ran into a dead end. One-half believed in one thing and one-half in another thing. I took the bull by the horns and made the decision. ‘You’ll hate me for this,’ I said, and I was right. Le Corbusier hasn’t spoken to me since. This time I have refused to take that position. I won’t go through that damn thing again. It put me in the hospital for six months.”⁴⁵

⁴³ The English translation of Le Corbusier’s “Déclaration,” dated April 18, 1947, is reproduced in Dudley, *A Workshop for Peace*, 210, 212-213.

A humorous perspective on the competing ideas among Board members was shared by Hugh Ferriss (who produced many of the renderings of the various schemes) in the Address he gave on January 24, 1948 at the Fifty-Eighth Annual of the Ontario Association of Architects. This was subsequently published as Hugh Ferriss, “Designing the United Nations Headquarters,” *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* 25, no. 3 (1948): 69-80.

⁴⁴ “Ogdensburger’s Brother.” Less diplomatically, in his private correspondence Cormier took umbrage with Le Corbusier’s tendency to take credit for inventing things that were already in existence and his will to dominate the collaborative endeavor at the UN by threatening his resignation in order to force the Board’s acceptance of some of his ideas. He adds that they had to wait for his final departure before correcting his most unacceptable ideas. Letter from Ernest Cormier to M. Yves Tessier-Lavigne, January 12, 1971, folder “ARCH257775 801/A-34,” box 01-2010-037 T. For other comments on Le Corbusier made by Cormier see his letter to Gérard Arthur (Radio-Canada) dated December 26, 1947, folder “Doc prof. généraux: activité profess. varia ‘EC divers’ ARCH259595 809/A-24,” box 001-2010-213 T.

⁴⁵ Harold C. Schonberg, “Six Architects in Search of a Center,” *The New York Times Magazine*, February 8, 1959, 22, 24, [?], folder “Nations Unies, Extraits de journaux E.C.,” box Fonds Cormier Library Transfer ARCON1992:0006 AR1992:0002 Boîte (2/6).

In the heated campaign that Le Corbusier launched after the Board of Design disbanded and no concessions were made to his adamant requests to oversee the construction of “his” design, Harrison wrote: “I am delighted that you feel that you are the one who designed the United Nations Headquarters. It pleases me equally that other members of the Board have that same satisfaction. After all, the combined work was to be symbolic of the unity and selflessness of the United Nations. The decision as to how the building of the Headquarters is to be carried on is in the hands of the United Nations. Whatever they decide, I will abide by.” Letter from Wallace K. Harrison to Le Corbusier dated December 9, 1947, folder “Abramovitz – 1990.007 United Nations, 1947 Dec 9, Harrison to Le Corbusier, 15:40,” box C323 Abramovitz Box 15 – Proj. Records & U.N., Abramovitz Collection, Avery Archives.

Doors of peace, justice, truth and fraternity

Overlooking the East River and running between 42nd and 48th streets along First Avenue in New York City, the United Nations Headquarters is comprised of the tall Secretariat Building, the Conference Area (containing the General Assembly Hall, Council Chambers and Conference and Committee Rooms), and Auxiliary elements (accommodating the library, an exhibition area, staff facilities, parking, etc.). **[Figure 7.3]** From the formal 47th Street access to the Headquarters, the visitor traverses the northern plaza, approaching the shimmering glass and marble elevation of the General Assembly Hall and enters the ‘architectural organism’ of the UN by passing through the seven monumental doors that lead directly into the luminous space of main public lobby.⁴⁶ **[Figures 7.4, 7.5, 7.6]** The large surface of the General Assembly’s north elevation is an elegant composition of alternating vertical bands of translucent glass set between marble-clad columns, whose rhythm defines the proportions of the doors, and extends horizontally beyond the building, into the paving pattern of the plaza.



Figure 7.3 Aerial view (looking south) of the UN Headquarters complex located between First Avenue and the East River, and between 42nd and 48th streets in New York.

Source: UN Photo/Lois Connor, Photo #200704, March 9, 1987.

⁴⁶ The various building elements of the UN Headquarters were described by the United Nations as “organs” and their interaction, as “functioning parts of a single coherent organism.” Secretary-General, UN, *Report to the General Assembly of the United Nations*, 27.

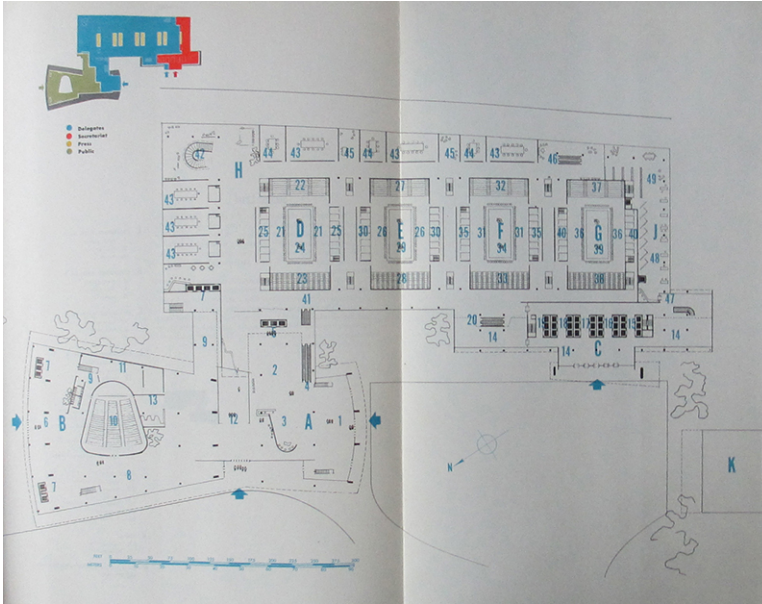


Figure 7.4 Plan of the Main entrance level of the United Nations Headquarters in New York, indicating (with a blue arrow at the lower far left of the plan) the public entrance to the General Assembly building. Source: Secretary-General, United Nations, *Report to the General Assembly of the United Nations by the Secretary-General on the Permanent Headquarters of the United Nations* (Lake Success, NY: United Nations, 1947), 47.



Figure 7.5 Photograph of the main public entrance to the General Assembly Building, showing the seven nickel-bronze doors designed by Cormier and the glass and marble wall of the north facade, photographed in 1962. Source: UN Photo/MB, Photo #336365, October 1, 1962.



Figure 7.6 Partial view of north end of the main public lobby of the UN Headquarters General Assembly Building, showing the information desk and the seven doors designed by Cormier, photographed in 1952.
Source: UN Photo/MB, Photo #55507, October 1, 1952.

A commission that fell outside of his mandate as member of the Board of Design, Cormier designed these seven identical nickel-bronze doors in the early 1950s as Canada’s gift to the United Nations, when the Canadian sculptor failed to deliver.⁴⁷ Sheltered by a canopy that is the only horizontal element on this elevation, the doors’ composition echoes the façade’s balance between translucency and opacity. Comprised of four horizontal windows, each featuring a bas-relief on the right side, the doors’ design harmonizes well within the wall’s logic of alternating solid and translucent bands, and simultaneously differentiates enough from that logic to provide a human scale to this otherwise imposing elevation. The top panel of the four remains fixed to the doorframe, while the lower three constitute the operable portion of each door. The bas-reliefs personify Peace [*Pax*], Justice [*Justitia*], Truth [*Veritas*], and Fraternity [*Fraternitas*], and their iconography, which evokes classical antiquity, speaks to the long history through which humanity has persisted, and of the enduring values that have sustained it through strife. **[Figures 7.7 and 7.8]** Allegorizing four of the ideals that are core to the United Nations’

⁴⁷ “Ogdensburger’s Brother.”

self-definition and mandate, these panels each feature a maple leaf – the emblem of Canada – in an upper corner, thereby speaking to the role that Canada expected to play in the cultivation of international cooperation in the postwar world.

For Cormier, spatial thresholds and particularly doors were something he always placed



Figure 7.7 A photo of Cormier standing in front of a full-size mock-up of one of the doors he designed for the UN Headquarters' General Assembly Building as Canada's gift to the United Nations, c.1951.

Source: Associated Screen News Ltd., ARCH252642, P.6803, folder EC 286, box 01-Photos-02P, FEC, CCA.



Figure 7.8 Photographs of the bas-reliefs of *Pax* [Peace], *Justitia* [Justice], *Veritas* [Truth] and *Fraternitas* [Fraternity] that Cormier designed for the nickel-bronze doors of the General Assembly Building of the United Nations, c.1952.

Source: S. J. Hayward Studios, box Library transfer, ARCON1992:-0006, AR1992:0002 boîte 2/6, FEC, CCA.

great emphasis on. They offer important clues to reading his work, as by his own admission, the exterior doors of his projects foretell what will be encountered in the interior.⁴⁸ It is most fitting then, that the architect and engineer whom Canada chose to represent the country on the international stage, was also given the assignment of constructing the country's gift of the main doors of this world organization.

⁴⁸ In the last interview that Ernest Cormier gave, he was quoted as saying, "I have always attached great importance to the exterior doors of my buildings, because they foretell what will be seen in the interior." Willie Chevalier, "Entretien avec Ernest Cormier [An Interview with Ernest Cormier]," *Vie des Arts (Canada)* 20, no.81 (Winter 1975-76): 18, 89.

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