

# Off Plaza sparkles on St-Hubert

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Off Plaza — an innovative mix of eight residential and two office spaces with one main outdoor common area designed to maximize interaction (while respecting the six-foot social distancing rule) for a true urban village feel — beats with an energy all its own.

Alive with a near constant buzz of activity thanks to both the buildings' residents, many of them people who work from home, as well as nearby Plaza St-Hubert, the unique project was designed from the street up to blend seamlessly with the urban landscape and surrounding neighbourhood, as well as to create commercial spaces for L. McComber, the architecture firm, and Écohabitation, the non-profit that facilitates healthy housing and offers support to builders targeting LEED certification in their projects.

"It used to be two mixed-use

duplexes, built in the Twenties or so. The upper floors were residential for years, but in the Fifties or Sixties, they became commercial spaces. Then, someone took over both buildings and it became one big combined unit," said Laurent McComber, leading architect behind the project.

"During the Nineties, the building went unheated over the winters, without any maintenance, so it was in very bad shape."

L. McComber specializes in living architecture that's responsive to human needs and sensibilities, as well as the natural environment.

With Off Plaza, McComber estimates that he tripled the amount of usable space on the lot as the project now houses eight individual condos — four townhouses, two penthouses and two studios — organized around a large inner courtyard and a network of galvanized steel staircases that's neighbourly, but secluded.



The project houses eight individual condos—four townhouses, two penthouses and two studios. -PHOTOS SUPPLIED

"One of the most successful common spaces in the project is outdoors, in the back. It's a courtyard formed by both buildings. We wanted to provide a homey way for people to come home, not the same multi-unit interior staircase that we see all the time," McComber said.

"The central courtyard is very lively and looks a little like a theatre stage set, with all the doors. We thought a lot about conviviality when we designed it, and felt that it would promote exchanges between the neighbours, to build a small community."

The other (previously hidden) benefit of not having an interior staircase and shared common space is that it's made preventing the spread of COVID-19 easier, for residents.

Half of the condos face St-Hubert Street, while the other half face the alleyway; apart from the two studios on the second floor, every residence has its own mezzanine, on the third floor, that opens on to a large private terrace.

"It's a partially green roof; a large terrace occupies the biggest portion of the rooftop, and there are planters with vegetation, on both sides, for intimacy," the architect said. "The edge of the roof to-

wards the street is also green, so you feel a bit of nature when you're on the rooftop."

The four townhouses, which are located in the four corners of the building, are family-sized three-bedroom units, each organized as a two-storey space topped by a private terrace, on the rooftop. In the centre of the building, the two penthouses are built on top of the two studios.

The bedrooms of the townhouses are laid out on the lower floor, which is the building's second storey, while the small mezzanine can be used as part of the living room, a guest room or office.

"The mezzanine is one of the architectural highlights, indoors," McComber said. "The actual living space is small, but the double-height of the mezzanine, and all the natural light it lets in, makes it feel a lot bigger."

Outside, the front façade features St-Marc limestone that's used both in split-face format, placed at a 45 degree angle, as well as regular brickwork.

"We worked a lot on the façade because it's our showcase opportunity and we wanted to create a spectacular effect," McComber said. "When the sun hits the split stone, it's a very sparkling and reflective



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That sparkle also helps Off Plaza from feeling heavy, despite the fact that it's a storey taller than its neighbours.

"The front façade has several horizontal layers and both commercial spaces are a little set back, and painted black," he added. "Then you have the stone followed by the reflective metal cladding, at the top of the building, and some greenery on the rooftop. Because the building is so high, we wanted to make sure the last floor wouldn't be too dark or overbearing."



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