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Case Study: Gate Towers, Abu Dhabi

Designing Tall to Promote Physical Activity in China

The Monadnock Building, Technically Reconsidered

Thermal Breaks in High-Rise Balconies

Demolition or Renovation?

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History, Theory & Criticism

The Monadnock Building, Technically Reconsidered



For being the world's last and tallest "Joan of Architecture," the Monadnock was a perfectly transitional structural achievement, making important advances in steel construction while still relying upon the "Joan of Architecture" for its structural integrity. Technically, it was the last building to be designed and constructed in the traditional manner of a single-story building, and its construction was a testament to the skill and ingenuity of the early 20th-century building industry.

Thomas Leslie

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Materials

Thermal Breaks and Energy Performance in High-Rise Concrete Balconies



Thermal breaks in high-rise concrete balconies are a critical component for energy efficiency and structural integrity. This article explores the challenges of integrating thermal breaks into concrete balconies and provides a detailed analysis of various construction methods and materials used to achieve optimal performance.

Dieter Hardock & Patrick Roppel

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Talking Tall: Phyllis Lambert

"Joan of Architecture" and the Difficulty of Simplicity



Phyllis Lambert, the daughter of the legendary American architect Philip Johnson, explores the challenges of simplicity in architecture. She discusses the importance of understanding the historical context of architecture and the role of the architect in creating meaningful and enduring structures.

Phyllis Lambert

“Preliminary research in China finds that density is inversely correlated with physical activity. These findings suggest that not all dense urban development patterns promote physical activity. Designing tall buildings to promote physical activity is an objective of increasing global significance.”

Day et al., page 18

“Joan of Architecture” and the Difficulty of Simplicity



Phyllis Lambert

Interviewee

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Phyllis Lambert

Phyllis Lambert is founding director and chair of the board of trustees of the Centre Canadien d'Architecture in Montreal. As Director of Planning for the Seagram Building, she was influential in bringing Ludwig Mies van der Rohe onto the project. In 1975, she founded the heritage preservation group Heritage Montreal. In 1979, she founded the Centre Canadien d'Architecture, a museum and research center in Montreal with an international reputation. In 1990 she received an honorary DFA in Architecture from the Pratt Institute. In 1992, she was made Officier of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres de France. She holds honorary degrees from some 26 universities in North America and in Europe. Her work also includes serving as developer on the restoration of the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles by architect Gene Summers as well as designing the Saidye Bronfman Centre in Montreal with Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. In 1985 she was made a Member of the Order of Canada, promoted to Officer in 1990, and promoted to Companion in 2001. In 1985, she was made a Knight of the National Order of Quebec and was promoted to Grand Officer in 2005. She has contributed essays to numerous books and is the subject of the 2007 documentary film *Citizen Lambert: Joan of Architecture*.

Phyllis Lambert, the daughter of the Seagram beverage company owner Samuel Bronfman, played an integral role in selecting Mies van der Rohe and Phillip Johnson to design the definitive International Style skyscraper, the 1956 Seagram Building in New York (see Figure 1). Her career of advocacy for better urban design continued, when she mounted numerous protests against ill-advised construction projects in her hometown of Montreal, Canada. She later founded the Centre Canadien d'Architecture (Canadian Center for Architecture), which holds one of the world's most significant collections of architectural drawings. Lambert's experience has been highlighted in new detail in her chronicle of the Seagram project: *Building Seagram* (see Review, page 56). On November 14, she will return to her alma mater, the Illinois Institute of Technology, home of the CTBUH headquarters office. Editor Daniel Safarik caught up with Lambert before her journey.

Given your advocacy for one of the most important skyscrapers of all time, I was surprised to learn that you actually participated in a struggle against an earlier design for a tall building, the Place Montreal Trust (see Figure 2), which was eventually built, though differently than what was planned. What was it that you objected to?

Well, it was a double thing. The original plan would have blocked views of Mont Royal, and some codes in Montreal guard against that, but of course cities let developers break those codes if they think somebody's going to put up a building that will generate taxes. Also, the developers privatized the public street and turned it into a shopping center, and those were heinous things. And I didn't care who was doing it. I said, "No you couldn't do it!"

The Seagram was pretty important in that discussion, and it was one of the first to have a plaza cleared around it.

It's a private company building with a great architect, which is rare. What happened with the Seagram Building, and also with the Lever House across the street, was that zoning changes were made in New York. The city gave 10 square feet of bulk to the building per 1 square foot of open plaza on the street level. So that change was taken up by everybody. New York changed, very much because of the zoning. It was very advantageous to builders.

It seems the International Style championed by van der Rohe was a boon for developers, but when it was copied, it was copied badly. What are the essential characteristics that made that architecture great and made all the copies very different?

When I walk down the street and I look at the Seagram Building (see Figure 3), and I look at all the other buildings, I wonder why they can't do it. It's so simple! The proportions are so elegant and so wonderful. The Seagram was not just a commercial building stuck up by some architect who was trying to make a buck for a developer. It really was a great architect, whose question was, "what is this civilization we live in?" So there's a philosophic basis of the whole attitude towards the building. And when that's pulled out of the equation, and it's just a bad

What has changed since that time?

I think developers are becoming a lot more sensitive to the public realm and to the social aspects of architecture. But they used to think that they were doing everybody a favor by building without any discussion with the people. That's been slowly changing.



Figure 1. Philip Johnson, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Phyllis Lambert in front of an image of the model for the Seagram building, New York, 1955. Source: Fonds Phyllis Lambert, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal. © United Press International.

copy, then it loses all the qualities. They're not artists. They're copyists. You've seen it all through history.

Mies famously said "God is in the details." Is it the details the "copyists" tend to throw aside, just because they lack the philosophy that you described?

Yes of course! There's no question about it! There is a wonderful edition of *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* at the time of the Seagram Building, that was written about Mies, called, « L'art difficile d'être simple, » "The Difficult Art of Being Simple." There is a difference between somebody who's creating something according to a deeply understood idea of what society is, versus somebody who's doing something commercially.

To take the devil's advocate position, the ideal design project would achieve both a commercial and artistic objective.

It's not so much that cheap, run-off copies are bad; it's the fact that there's no thought given as to why the building is being done. Why are you putting up a building? If it's just to house some occupational people, okay, but that's not going to make anything special, especially when it's a large building that has an effect on the city. It's a question of how you think, not of anything else. And when you are concerned about the public realm and what happens to people, then you do something quite different.

The mid-century period is currently enjoying a resurgence of interest. We have so much nostalgia now for mid-century furniture and clothes from the period, and it extends to architecture. Why do you think that is, and do you think it's healthy?

Well I don't know that it is nostalgia. I think that it's just lack of "inventivity." Everything in art, literature, and architecture looks back from time to time. I think things have improved since Post-Modernism, and there has been lots of very good research on materials; you can do such interesting things with concrete and glass now. And I think that there are a lot of good buildings built with the impulse that created the International Style, that industrial architecture. But then also we've added concern for the environment, which is great



Figure 2. Place Montreal Trust. © Jean Gagnon

because we can get back to not having everything [mechanically conditioned].

When Mies and I were talking about glass in buildings such as 860–880 Lake Shore Drive (see Figure 4), he said, "Well, it's really not up to the architect, it's up to the engineers to find some way to stop the heat from coming in or going out." Well, that has become politically incorrect. People are beginning to reason that you just can't throw the book at it, and there is a kind of containment one has to have about what one's doing.

It's interesting, because our fascination with the "Mad Men" era has a lot to do with fetishizing social behaviors that we now think of as irresponsible. Yet the certainty and solidity of the principles that informed the International Style seem to remain valid. They're very strong, absolutely. I guess what post-modernism was doing was trying to relate to the traditional city, but not very successfully. They didn't know where to stand. Now with interest in materiality and the environmental movement, people think differently.

Speaking of movements, at one point, you actually picketed the offices of a developer, Cadillac Fairview, on whose board you sat.

Yeah. It was my own family. I did it because money is not the most important thing to me. The most important thing is living on Earth. So when something is wrong, I have no choice but to say, "You can't do this."

“The proportions are so elegant and so wonderful. The Seagram was not just a commercial building stuck up by some architect who was trying to make a buck for a developer.”

Given how shareholder-driven corporations are today, and your past work in getting people to change their minds about design, do you think a shareholder revolt in favor of better design would be possible?

I suppose you could get environmentalists and people concerned with architecture to do that. But I think it's much deeper than that. You have to have a society that's interested in the public realm. I wrote a lot about that in *Mies in America* in one chapter.



Figure 3. Seagram Building, New York. © Antony Wood

Ultimately the person who's responsible for what happens to the building is the person who's paying for it, the client de facto. But at the same time, what that person can do is governed by the laws of the city. Those rules are subject to public opinion. So it's a view of society, rather than just shareholders.

What do you think of your public title as "Joan of Architecture?"

I think it's supposed to be flattering. Joan of Arc led the way, she held up her flame and said, "This is the way." I didn't do that alone; I was able to work with a lot of people. There's a great story about Michelangelo and [the dome of the Sistine Chapel]. He was asked, "How do you make a dome like that stand up?" And Michelangelo said, "Oh it's very simple... how do you make an egg stand up?" Someone sees a simple, direct way of doing things, and then people see the point. That's why it's important to have public debate.

Have you had a chance to see any of the conversions of Modernist skyscrapers from office to residential or hotel?

I'm involved in Westmount Square here in Montreal. It's two residential skyscrapers, and one office skyscraper by Mies. The developers want to convert the office skyscraper into a residential one. They've asked me to consult with them, which was great. The architects came up with a very, very good study, the kind of study that would have been done in Mies' office, of all the possibilities. One of the problems is that the spandrel on the office building is deeper than the spandrel on the

residential building. And so if you use a hopper window, then the spandrels get to almost the same size. But that presented practical difficulties, so they came up with the idea of making the hopper the same proportion to the office building window as on the residential buildings. They haven't finalized the thing, but this is what they're looking at.

I was pleasantly surprised at the intervention at the IBM Building in Chicago, which now has a Langham Hotel in the lower half. It's radically different to what it was on the inside, but it doesn't feel like the building has been diminished. And it's virtually unchanged on the outside.

I'll tell you the reason it doesn't make any difference. When Seagram was built, I thought, "Oh, I'll go and visit all of the offices and see the people in this wonderful building and what kind of marvelous offices they did." And after about three of them, I thought, "Oh God, I'm not going to visit any more of them." They brought in all their old furniture to make it look like an old building or something. You can't control what people do inside. Mies always tried to mitigate that by doing things like choosing a uniform lighting system for the Seagram. Otherwise people are going to do what they do.

So you don't really believe in the idea that all these buildings should be kept pristine, as they were originally intended.

Yes of course, keep them as well as you can! But there's always a point at which you have to see how you can make it work. Here in Montreal we have one building, which is based on the International style. It will never compare to 860–880 Lake Shore Drive or the Seagram Building, but it's a fine building, and in the lobby they have a wonderful mosaic made by a local artist. It has a canopy they want to take off so people can see the mosaic better. But I always argue against it, because people don't understand, the minute you take that off, what do you do with maintaining the columns that go up and everything else? There are always these kinds of issues.

It seems like there's an emerging consciousness about renovating and adapting buildings for the city of today,

instead of demolishing them by default. The psychology of "urban renewal" has changed a lot since the Seagram was built.

That was a period when people wanted to look like war again... as if they wanted the cities to look like they'd been bombed. It was crazy.

Maybe it was an attempt to erase the past in some way?

I think that psychology was revealed here in Montreal when a number of us got going on Save Montreal and Heritage Patrol, to make people understand how these 19th-century grey stone buildings were so unique and marvelous. But because the French population built most of these [as colonials or religious missionaries], some people said, "We're poor and these buildings represent our poverty. And so we don't want them anymore, we want something bright and new and foreign looking."

This happens in places like Scotland, too. There are these wonderful streets with grey and red stone buildings and the church actually lined up in the façade the way the houses are. And they're making ten-story groups of buildings in the fields outside of town, which are horrible because there are no amenities or social space. It's not just a building it has a lot of stuff around it. That's one of the things I think Seagram Building and Mies' buildings actually did well; they created a kind of oasis, a sort of clearing in the urban forest. ■

“That was a period when people wanted to look like war again... as if they wanted the cities to look like they'd been bombed. It was crazy.”



Figure 4. 860–880 North Lake Shore Drive, Chicago.
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