

ST. VIAEUR STREET EAST: A NEW LIFE CYCLE BEGINS

MICHELINE CLOUARD | VLAN PAYSAGES



THE VISION for the revitalization of the St. Viateur East area is centred on the idea of starting a new life cycle in a place that has experienced substantial recent development. The vision aimed to get municipal stakeholders and neighbourhood residents on the same page, in order to promote a specific perspective on the neighbourhood. The project needed to be grounded in the elements underpinning the essence of the place: its origins, transformation, nature and residents.

The St. Viateur area is located in central Montreal, in the Plateau Mont-Royal borough. For several years the number of resident artists and creative companies in its aging textile- and garment-industry buildings has grown spontaneously. The City wanted to enhance the area by creating landscape elements designed to foster neighbourhood life and pleasant streets. The landscapes should promote the neighbourhood's social integration into the urban fabric, create places for people to gather and interact and improve access to transportation networks.

MIRRORING STITCHING IN CONCRETE | PHOTOS GABRIEL JONES

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The mission, for vln paysages, was to study the elements of the landscape, define the vision, and fill in the details at the street and human scale. Vln was inspired by the remnants of an industrial past deeply inscribed in the urban landscape, and by the mix of land uses and accompanying architectural typologies. Equally important were the diversity of spontaneous green spaces inserted in urban gaps and the local preference for casual pedestrian movement. Perhaps the most immediately noticeable elements of vln's design are its references to the area's industrial origins in textiles and garments, with its focus on linear shapes, overlock stitching, piquet fabric, embroidering – resulting in a poetry of place. Today's St. Viateur Street East redefines the urban landscape in its changing industrial and residential setting. It reflects and helps create a unique neighbourhood life: St. Viateur is an ecosystem and a destination.

TERRA INCOGNITA PETER SOLAND

FOR MORE THAN TWO YEARS, we have been working with the City of Montreal to restore and present the remains of the city's fortifications found at the Champ de Mars. Through various conversations, I have come to the surprising realization that Montreal's history is largely unknown, especially when we are talking about the French regime and the era when the city was fortified (1717-1817). Although many ruins were highlighted around 1992, when Montreal marked the 350th anniversary of its founding, many people are surprised when they hear about the existence of these fragments of the demolished walls. A person walking into Old Montreal drifts over this heritage without realizing its meaning and implications for the city's identity.

The restoration of the ruins is accompanied by a rather uncommon approach to interpretation in urban archaeology. Working with experts from the City and the provincial department of Culture, Communications and the Status of Women, a new covering for the vestiges of the walls serves goals related to both conservation and public appreciation in a thoroughly contemporary fashion: the cut limestone blocks and grassy strips are capped by stainless steel teeth. The teeth include all the technical components required for lighting the ruins, as well as an event-lighting rig. Finding the right tone for this project was not only a design goal, but a feat of communications: we had to convince all stakeholders of the value of a contemporary feature as an aid to reading and understanding these ruins. As we wait for heritage specialists to deliver their verdict, the concept highlights the military geometry of the walls, their early 19th-century demolition, and their integration into the grassy parade ground of Champ de Mars: a new urban landscape where archaeology, design, and the landscape come together to revive a piece of Montreal history in the public imagination.

PHOTOS PETER SOLAND

PETER SOLAND is project manager for the Urban Soland / Lafontaine & Soucy architectes / Genivar consortium. Tak Design (industrial design) and Photonic Dreams (lighting) also participated in this project led by landscape architect Marie-France Charlebois of Montreal's major parks and green space development authority (Direction des grands parcs et du verdissement, Ville de Montréal). | info@urban-soland.com

