

**Plateau Mont-Royal
Montreal, Quebec
Victorian Row House,
Renovation of Second
and Third Floors**

**Architect: L. McComber Ltée.
General Contractor: PA Construction**

By John Bleasby

Residential real estate prices in Canada's largest metropolitan markets continue to increase, particularly in high density neighborhoods near downtown cores. Therefore, blending the efficient utilisation of interior space with the desire to remain historically relevant to the traditional street-side façades becomes both an architectural and construction challenge.

The Plateau Mont-Royal neighbourhood in Montréal speaks to the unique nature of the city's residential style, the most obvious being the street-front exterior staircases or iron railed balconies typical of the row duplexes and triplexes located throughout the city. In these pages, you can see how one of the heritage row houses in this Victorian-era enclave was exquisitely renovated.

"Many of these homes were built in the late 1800's, using techniques and materials of the day. We had some surprises waiting for us," explains architect Laurent McComber, principal of L. McComber Ltée.

The project involved reimagining and repurposing the second and third floors of this property to suit a family with children. What was soon discovered was that the home in fact had two roof structures: the current flat roof was actually built on top of an original sloped roof, thus compressing the potential living space on the third level.

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REACHING A NEW PLATEAU





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"There was no insulation in either roof," McComber says. "There was simply air space, multiple layers of tar, asphalt, and gravel." Both roof structures were demolished and reconstructed in halves, resulting in exposure of the building's interior to the elements for considerable lengths of time as each side was opened up and re-built. The contractor (PA Construction, Montreal) met this important challenge using numerous weather-proof tarps and temporary supports. New trusses and beams were installed to support the open space envisioned for the third level.

"We avoided a full demolition permit by only removing and replacing the roof. The street-side façade was simply cleaned up and repainted, and the rear only modified to allow for new windows." However, masonry was required to extend the brick walls to the new roof level elevation due to fire regulations, and the entire interior envelope fully insulated with fibreglass and BP Enermax panels for both energy and acoustical reasons.

Removal of the sloped roof inside the building opened up five additional feet of ceiling height on the third floor, for a total of 13 feet, creating in turn a number of exciting possibilities for a private living space. In opening this third floor space, McComber illuminated the area with natural light and white walls. For example, the space dedicated to the new master bedroom and adjoining artist studio gains natural

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light with the integration of a ribbon window at the top of the now-higher end wall; a tempered glass ceiling allows that light into the marble tiled shower.

Care was taken to allow re-use of the original hemlock roof beams with their extravagant patina, transforming them into eye-catching, wrap-around bookcases that are integral to the central wall structure. "The shelves seem to protect a secret," explains McComber.

Floors on the third floor are original, but epoxy-coated white in order to bring out their texture while emphasizing the impact of the natural hemlock wood grains elsewhere.

While the scope of work on the second level was less structural than on the third, it included restoring the lustre and grain of the natural wood floors. Other changes on that level support a contemporary family dynamic. Space distribution can be modified through the use of large moving doors, allowing easy adaptation to everyday needs with new areas dedicated to children and parents, all with the added possibility of privacy.





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