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2005 10 03

157 Coxwell, Part 1



One morning standing with the lead carpenter a man shouts from the street, "I want what he's on!" As if to say, he wants the same drugs that the guy, me, must be on to imagined this house. HOPE! Would have been my response if I weren't in the presence of my frustrated tradesman who was unaccustomed to the attention he had received while working on this house. It had unbalanced his sensibilities and my schedule.



A realtor showed 157 Coxwell Avenue to me. He thought I could understand why this seemingly idyllic property in the middle of the city was not selling. I visited the site, reviewed the survey and such. I am exceedingly capable of doing 'normal' in my sleep with a fever and hemorrhoids. High end or low end it doesn't matter. Even thought understanding 'normal' can be helpful, it is not essential in creating alternative design and building strategies. Nonetheless it became apparent that between tree by-laws, zoning by-laws, right-of-ways on title, water table, slope from the street and a few other things, there were enough potential problems that making a profit was unlikely for the average builder or designer.

Think Toronto

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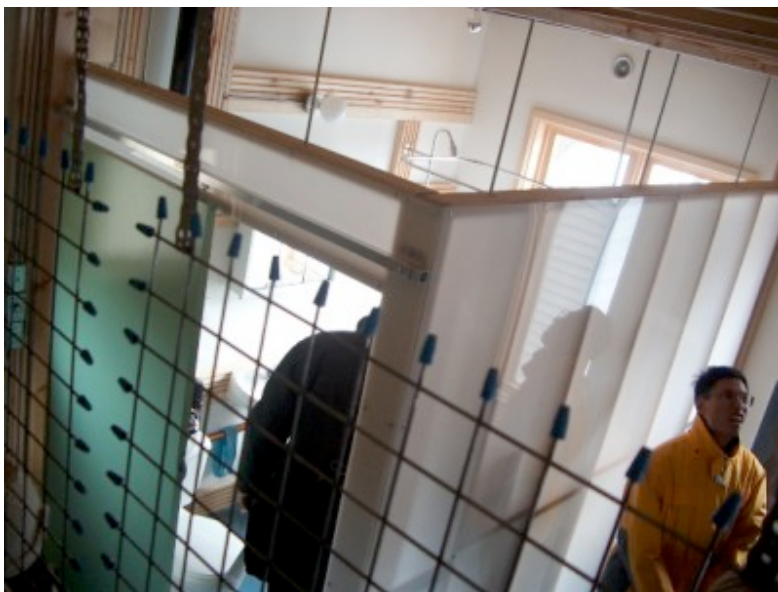
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I began to salivate inwardly. Was this ego or opportunity? A little of both. In architecture, ego in the wrong measure produces a stand-alone erection, completely self-gratifying. Ego in the right measure might possibly lead to constructive dialogue and contribution. This property at 157 Coxwell illuminated for me this delicate dance.

My life was already challenged? Newly separated from my wife, I now had to make my own way. It's survival time. I'm an assistant art director in film. I'm not happy. I had just started a film starring Harrison Ford when Gino Cerneka, the owner of Amato's Pizza called me. He knew I was in turmoil. Gino had scouted me to design the makeover of the Drake Hotel that he was ready to buy. Gino called me on the first day of the film and asked in his beautiful Italian accent, "Rohan ... architecture or film? Choose. Choose now." If I left the film I would piss off one of Toronto's most influential art directors (now a production designer). I quit the film that night. A short while later, the very day Gino bought the Drake Hotel, he died. I still drop a tear – not at the loss of the hotel – but here was a guy who sought out alternative strategies in life, in people and in business. His employees truly liked him; A testament to the man



So here I was: separated, Gino was buried, I was broke, I could not return to film. It had become clear where I had to be. My heart was with my children and my architecture. Gino helped me see my truth, which meant life was going to get exceedingly bad before things would get better. On the bad side, part-time work at Home Depot. On the good side, hope was alive.

157 design strategies next week

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