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2005 10 24

157 Coxwell, Part 4



For the Coxwell opening I wanted the work of another artist/explorer: one whose work would be seen as independent in its genesis, attitudinally commensurate and bold enough to disengage the viewer from the architecture surrounding them. I asked one of my favourite artists, Vince Mancuso, to consider providing an installation of his work, not knowing if I could afford him or if he would think it possible because of the nature of my

architectural space. He said he would be delighted. Furthermore, he had a recent body of work that would be appropriate to my vision and his. We did a deal. The art he placed was better than we both imagined. That is to say, it brought the interior to another level of life. This is potentially the power of good, well-situated art. Both the container and the contained provide the beginnings of good resonance. However, for this installation to really be complete, it needed people: interested people, curious people, even jaded people. Good design, good art and good architecture need engaged people.

There were three newspaper articles about Coxwell just before the opening — two English language papers and one Chinese newspaper. I am not media savvy and I wouldn't have dreamed that more than 300 friends and public might stop by. To my absolute shock when I got to the house on the first day of the opening there was already a lineup. It was 8:00 a.m. and minus 16 degrees C with the wind chill. I sensed then that the opening was going to be a little CRAZY! The umbilical cord (the entry bridge) was fully loaded with people (a dynamic load) for nine hours a day for two straight days in the middle of winter. Inwardly I thanked my structural engineer Christian Bellini. No joke.



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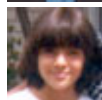
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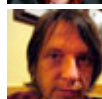
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I quickly recruited more friends and family to attend each floor. Over the two days we gave out over 3000 information sheets. I trained my helpers in the basics of the house: the structural economy and ease of assembly of using 4, 8, 12 and 16 foot modules within a rectilinear governance, the economy and health of warm floors, the efficiency an instantaneous water heater/furnace combinations, the placement of the glass garage door, the southern Ontarian colour palette, exposed utilities and floor joists, 'geo-sewer' heating and so on.

It was a long haul getting to the opening day of the little house on Coxwell. Building Coxwell was the easy part. The incredible scrutiny / doubt / ridicule / pessimism of financial lenders, inspectors, and the head carpenter made the process exhausting. Nonetheless, the pain was mitigated by some wonderful voices such as Lisa Rochon (architectural critic), Ann Lazar Mirvish (artist), Connie Adair (writer), Vince Mancuso (artist), Ken Montague (curator) and Sel Owen (developer/real-estate). Their support reduced the self-doubt that comes with designing outside of the norm.

Thank you Robert Ouellette of Reading Toronto for asking me to convey some of the thoughts and situations that brought 1292 College Street and 157 Coxwell Avenue into existence.

Sincerely, Rohan Walters

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