

85 Spadina Road

Arthur, Eric

The Globe and Mail (1936-); Apr 22, 1976; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Globe and Mail

pg. 7

of Wellesley, we have neighborhoods that are the envy of planners and others who come to study Toronto. I have been saying that for years, but it was never my thought that they should become architectural ghettos. He makes no mention of my preference for giving young architects a chance to design the subway stations as that, I presume, would be anathema to him.

He tells us that in saving the Spadina house—"What has been stressed was the value of the building in the streetscape and the intrusive effect of any other sort of station entrance into the context of the Annex." The assumption there is that the finest of new stations would be an offence to the harmony of material and the rhythm of facades of the Spadina Road houses. I don't know of any polite term to counter that sort of argument.

The following story should interest Mr. Dendy as an architectural historian, and the Toronto Historical Board for whom he seems to speak. Many years ago, when I was editor of the *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada*, I led the attack on the Government, for bringing to Ottawa a French town planner, Mr. Greber. Mixed with the emotions that were aroused by his appointment, was the gossip that Mackenzie King had made it clear to his planners that the architecture of the capital should follow the lines of the Chateau Laurier—more and more steep French roofs.

A senator took the trouble to come down from Ottawa to tell me that that was Mr. King's wish, and he threw in for good measure that Mr. King was responsible for the

design of Constitution Square, or Confusion Square, as it has been affectionately called ever since. The upshot of our conversation was that it might be tactful to go easy on critical editorials as Mr. Greber himself might be happy to get rid of the roof as a symbol of the architecture of Ottawa. Shortly after, he was guest of honor at a dinner of the Royal Institute, and the applause can be imagined when he said the roof would be a regrettable symbol for the architecture he envisaged in his plans for the city.

He then said something that I have never forgotten, and I pass it on to Mr. Dendy and his colleagues on the board. Mr. Greber told us that, before leaving France, he had completed his plans for the historic city of Rouen, and that the beauty of that city came from the fact that, over a thousand years, succeeding generations had built in the manner of their time, and he had no hesitation in giving his blessing to a modern building in the cathedral square. He convinced the Prime Minister, and the steep roofs of the Chateau are no longer the model for new building, federal or otherwise.

When I built my present house, I was told by a real estate man that a healthy sign on a street was the presence of houses with young children; the same, I believe to be true in terms of architecture in the Annex. The neighborhood mustn't be allowed to age and vegetate without frequent injections of new blood.

If the Toronto Historical Board were to stay with history, as most people understand the word, there are many useful

things it could do where Mr. Dendy would be a valuable staff member, especially in the field of measuring, photography and recording scores of buildings characteristic of a neighborhood. Instead, it is using history as a kind of dead hand to inhibit growth in some of our, potentially, liveliest areas. Mr. Dendy's letter, and the use of that dismal house as a subway station, are ample proof of that attitude.

Eric Arthur
Toronto

85 Spadina Road

William Dendy's reply (85 Spadina Road—April 14) to my letter concerning the subway on Spadina calls for a rebuttal. He agrees with me that, in the Annex and the area east of Yonge, all the way to the end