

## Globe Arts



### WHO WILL BUILD CANADA'S FUTURE?

Alex Bozikovic reports on the 200 architects vying to make their mark – even if the odds are forever stacked against them



**F**rom across the country, they came: In a loft space in downtown Toronto, a group of youngish designers from Quebec and Newfoundland and Queen Street West crowded around photographs and models, talking shop. Canada's design culture was being built before my eyes, one beer and one anecdote at a time.

Most of the crowd were part of Twenty + Change: Next Generation, an exhibition, with an accompanying catalogue, that captures some of Canada's best up-and-coming architects, urban designers and landscape architects.

"This means a lot to an office like ours," said the Newfoundland architect Chris Woodford. He'd flown in with his wife and partner Taryn Sheppard and intern architect Jessica Stanford. Woodford Sheppard are among the 13 design firms featured in this year's exhibition and the accompanying book.

There were maybe 200 people in the room – but these are some of the people who will be building Canada's future, and they were getting a meaningful boost.

20+C, Page 3



CLOCK-  
WISE FROM  
TOP LEFT:  
ARCHITECTURE  
MICROCLIMATE,  
WOODFORD  
SHEPPARD ARCHITECTS,  
FARRAWAY AND SOLO  
ARCHITECTS, UJURE, PETER SAMPSON ARCHITECTURE STUDIO



# A Frank Sinatra celebration – do we care?



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Under the radar, mostly, there's a Frank Sinatra craze under way. Timed to the centennial of his birth, his life, work and legend are being celebrated. Not analyzed much, mind you, but certainly celebrated.

But here's the thing – one suspects that the desired level of excitement isn't there. Sinatra was a complicated figure and too much the embodiment of a time that now embarrasses us.

Earlier this year, HBO aired *Sinatra: All or Nothing At All*, a two-part, four-hour extravaganza. Made by Alex Gibney (who also made the provocative doc *Going Clear: Scientology and the Prison of Belief*), it was a lavish feting, built cleverly around the concert film of Sinatra's "final" performance in 1971.

It was made with the participation of Sinatra's estate. The music,

the songs, the films and the stories were pored over by various people who knew him. Mostly they appeared off-screen as the focus was on the work of the man himself.

The documentary skipped lightly over Sinatra's alleged ties to organized crime and his on/off friendship with John F. Kennedy. But it has some bite in coverage of his relationships with women, and his temper. I can recall Lauren Bacall in it, saying, with matter-of-fact precision, "Frank was a womanizer. He wanted to be in the sack with everybody."

Some sanitizing is bound to be part of the heft of a centennial celebration and this weekend, CBS and The Recording Academy unite for a two-hour special.

*Sinatra 100: An All-Star Grammy Concert* (Sunday, CBS, City, 9 p.m.) is it and it's a tribute, including performances from Tony Bennett, Garth Brooks, Alicia Keys, John Legend, Adam Levine, Carrie Underwood, Usher, Zac Brown, Harry Connick Jr., Celine Dion, Lady Gaga and Juanes. It also includes "rare archival footage narrated by the man himself."

Bing Crosby once said, "Frank Sinatra is a singer who comes along once in a lifetime. But why

did he have to come in mine?"

At one point in time, people understood what Crosby meant. Sinatra was, for a time, simply called "The Voice" because of his gift for phrasing, and knack for coaxing a lyric around a melody line. It was his core gift.

One can imagine some of the listed performers in the CBS special doing a very good job with a Sinatra song. Others, no.

Alicia Keys you can file under "maybe." In advance, Keys pronounced: "My grandfather introduced me to Frank Sinatra. I love hearing his songs: the phrasing, the innocence, the subtle depth that knocks you out when you concentrate on the lyrics. And those arrangements! It brings me back to the lost art of 'the gentleman.'"

And there's the rub – the idea of Sinatra as "the gentleman" is far-fetched, these days. Through the perspective of the present there is something deeply unsavoury about Sinatra. For all the skill, he embodied much more. And what he embodies tends to creep people out today.

Celebrating Sinatra cannot be a celebration of his temper, his violence toward women, his instinctive, physical lashing out at

people he disliked. The stories told about Sinatra in Paul Anka's memoir *My Way* would make your hair stand on end. While Anka says, "Frank Sinatra lived life more fully than anyone I've met before or since," that's nice, but not an actual endorsement of his life.

The songs, yes, for celebration. The singer, not so much.

## Also airing this weekend

*Girlfriends' Guide to Divorce* (Sunday, Slice, 8 p.m.) returns for a second season. The gist of the episode is this: "Abby chooses between boyfriend, Will, and husband, Jake, while fielding a job offer from an online magazine called SheShe; Abby faces opposition from a rival editor at SheShe; Phoebe acts out in response to Kori's civil suit against her." And it's a lot more substantial than the gist suggests. Lisa Edelstein (Cuddy on *House*) plays Abby, a bestselling author of self-help books, who is separated from her husband and dating again. The humour in that is smart, sometimes cutting.

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## HEART BEATS

Sean Michaels's songs of the week

### 1 The Wainwright Sisters – *Lullaby* (2015)

For *Songs in the Dark*, Martha Wainwright and her half-sister Lucy Wainwright Roche assembled a collection of grim, pointed lullabies. Forget sleepy-time's standard, fluffy soporifics: these are grim ballads, cowboy songs, mordant serenades to infants who just won't settle down. Some are originals, some are covers; there's material by Simon & Garfunkel, Townes Van Zandt, Kate McGarrigle (Martha's mom) and the Roches' Terre Roche (Lucy's aunt). But as Martha put it at this week's Montreal album launch, "I know very little about these songs." The sisters chose the material not for greater context but because they liked the songs, because the tunes felt right together, because there is a certain integrity to lullabies as dark as drowsy.

On Tuesday, Lucy and Martha closed their set by playing Loudon Wainwright III's *Lullaby*, and their father was in-house to hear it. It's my favourite track on the album; the Wainwright women improve upon the original by slowing it down, emphasizing the contrast between comely chords and bone-tired exasperation. "Shut up and go to bed," they sing. "Shut up and shut your eyes ... Shut up and count some sheep / do me a favour, don't bitch in your sleep." Whereas Loudon was an insomniac who had exhausted himself, Lucy and Martha sound like aunts and mothers at the ends of their ropes, singing gently through gritted teeth. The effect is bleakly hilarious, all the more because it is so beautifully performed. Lucy's voice, lilting and soft; Martha's, in close harmony, with a magnificently sharp edge. One's a sheriff, the other's a shepherdess; both just want some peace and quiet.

### 2 ANOHNI – *4 Degrees* (2015)

Somewhere in Paris, Earth's leaders are sitting down at big, gorged tables hewn from centuries-old trees. The planet's careening toward climate disaster and the UN's serving catered lunches, trying to cajole bureaucrats into compromise. I wonder if they feel that they are standing at a precipice. I wonder if they dream at night of the end of the world. I wonder: do they? And: should I?

*4 Degrees* is a song of apocalypse and complicity. ANOHNI is Antony Hegarty, whose incredible, fluttering voice is at the forefront of the group Antony and the Johnsons. As ANOHNI she works with the electronic/dance producers Hudson Mohawke and Oneohtrix Point Never, building a soundscape of terrifying scale: smashing drums, boiling synths, tidal waves of brass. The title is an allusion to the temperature rise that experts say would doom us, and Hegarty's refrain – "It's only four degrees" – is both the activist's rallying cry and the polluter's excuse. On *4 Degrees*, ANOHNI never lets herself off the hook. "I want to burn the sky, I want to burn the breeze," she sings. "I want to see the animals die in the trees." Angry, mournful, awake to the fact that if we are not saving the world, we are damning it.

Sean Michaels received the 2014 Scotiabank Giller Prize for his novel *Us Conductors*. He is the editor of the music blog *Said the Gramophone*.



Woodford Sheppard Architects, whose design is shown above, is among the 13 firms featured in this year's Twenty + Change: Next Generation exhibition.

## FROM PAGE 1

## 20+C: Goal of exhibit is to change climate surrounding architecture

“Even having the book in the office matters,” Woodford told me this week from St. John’s. “When clients come by, we show it to them. We’ve been published! Most of our buildings are still going up, so this seems to give us a new level of legitimacy.”

Like most 20+C winners, they practise architecture, and that is a tough line of work. It’s an art that has an impact on all of our lives; it’s also a profession in which it’s absurdly difficult to get launched. To call yourself an architect requires a master’s degree and then several years of poorly paid apprenticeship. Then you have to find clients and, often, explain to them just what it is you do.

The goal of 20+C is to change that climate. “There’s a lot of work we need to do to help people understand the value of design,” says Toronto architect Heather Dubbeldam, the director of the 20+C initiative. “And, in Canada, we need to develop a conversation across the country. ... This is kick-starting a new awareness.”

The exhibition, the only one of its kind in the country, has a real impact on Canadian culture. Yet it has been driven largely by volunteer work and led by two people with other jobs: Lola Sheppard, a University of Waterloo professor and partner at Lateral Office, who co-curated the last two exhibitions, and Dubbeldam.

I served on the curatorial committee this year, and we looked through more than 60 submissions – some of them from firms I’d never heard of, such as Woodford Sheppard, and many displaying remarkable skill and ambition. “Architecture,” as Dubbeldam puts it, “has a long chrysalis period” – the work takes time, and it’s difficult to find clients who will bet on ambition and youth. Especially in Canada. This is why architecture has its own peculiar category, “emerging,” for those people in their 30s or even 40s who are still rising toward their best work.

Still, this year’s submissions showed a youngish crop of designers who are building with creativity and hustle. Vancouver’s Scott and Scott are twisting the



Ufief, a firm that is also featured in this year’s Twenty + Change exhibit, designed the interior of this house in Bolsover, Ont. NAHO KUBOTA

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Heather Dubbeldam  
Toronto architect and director of the Twenty + Change initiative

wood-heavy tradition of Canadian modern architecture in novel directions. A few, such as the Toronto office JA Architect Studio, are designing inventive forms while becoming developers themselves.

They will go on to make an impact, if history is any guide. This is the fourth iteration of the show; the first, in 2007, covered design in Toronto, and was founded by the office Superkul. It was succeeded by Canada-wide versions in 2009 and 2011. Some of the designers who were included have enjoyed a rapid rise since then, including Winnipeg’s 5468796 Architecture, which won a prize at last year’s World Architecture Festival, and Toronto’s PARTISANS, which was shortlisted there this year. Those two firms share a fearlessness and entrepreneurial spirit that have pushed them toward strong designs and toward clients.

And yet even for people like this – who are capable, ambitious and in any other business would be storming to success – a stamp of approval matters. “Design is such an award-driven and media-driven field; there is a sense of celebrity,” says Monica Adair of the St. John firm Acre Architects, which has been featured by 20+C in the past. “It’s always nice when you have a project and you get recognized as being able to do great things. You have the potential to be at the table.”

In the national scene, 20+C “is important in identifying and boosting the profile of young, talented designers and firms,” says Elsa Lam, the editor of Canadian Architect magazine. “Like startups in all fields, new design firms bring fresh ideas to the table,” she says, “but they need material and moral support to succeed in taking their businesses to the next level.”

That support is rare: Canada has very little public conversation about contemporary architecture, never mind the work of emerging firms. We have no national museum of design or building. And while the Canada Council for the Arts has awards programs, and supports architecture events and publications such as 20+C, it has

relatively little money to work with.

Canada’s lack of attention to design is a strategic error. Promoting design is something that other countries see as a matter of cultural diplomacy and economic development; at a trade show this week, I received a handsome package promoting Spanish architecture and product design. The Canadian Government doesn’t do this. And Canadian architects are also hampered by their own professional culture, which sees self-promotion (and indeed any talk of money) as uncouth.

Dubbeldam, the co-director of 20+C and a friend of mine, is a reflection of that culture. She is a gifted and thoughtful architect – and perversely modest about her accomplishments. In Winnipeg in 2014, I saw her speak at a national architects’ convention about a dozen “emerging firms.” Not including her own. “I could have talked about my work,” she told me this week with a laugh, “but it wouldn’t have felt right.”

Who flies halfway across the country to promote other people’s work? A curator, not a businessperson. And yet Dubbeldam also does run a business, full-time and then some; she routinely sends e-mails at midnight. Her office, founded in 2002, now employs six people and is hiring; they have moved on from house renovations to designing office spaces and hotels. She has no spare time. Then why does she do it? To make a difference.

And that is what makes great landscapes and great places: people who care passionately – who believe that they are not just service providers, but artists and citizens.

“It’s our responsibility, as architects,” Dubbeldam said, “to make sure that architecture rises to the level of art.”

Twenty + Change: Next Generation runs at Urbanspace Gallery in Toronto through Feb. 6. The catalogue is available from Riverside Architectural Press.

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