

Sustainable architecture and the sense of place at ASK?event

By Virginia Atkins

?Out of the box and into the jet stream? describes Paul Raff, a bright star in Canada's artistic galaxy.

His orbit attracts clients who want sustainability built into the excitement of dazzling design. This can also be the description of the stunning panels arrayed left and right of the highway, blazing with sunlight to mark a grand entrance to the city of Regina. As the sun moves across the horizon, its rays are reflected in a gentle arc, opening to the city like huge pages of a supernatural book ? unforgettable!

Raff's youth in Saskatoon instilled intuitive understanding of Canada's expanse, variety and beauty. Moving to Toronto in the late ?70s, he saw subway stations as a significant slice of a commuter's daily experience and perhaps a significant challenge to the creative team at the Paul Raff Studio (PRS); soon the TTC's Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Station (VMC) will unveil Raff's answer: ?Atmospheric Lens? built into the domed ceiling of the entry building. Its random skylights and reflective panels ?provide a visual depth, optical richness and subtle shifts? mirroring or shadowing the flow of hurrying feet. These features are reminiscent of other PRS creative installations, ?Mirage? at Underpass Park below the Eastern Avenue ramps and ?Wavelengths? at the new Market Wharf in Toronto.

Raff's reputation blossomed in 1993 with an award- winning design for Toronto's waterfront makeover; the Spanish city of Barcelona also chose his concept for its waterfront development. International high flyers commissioned PRS to design the Chinese vice-president's Shanghai residence. On a hillside near Phuket in Thailand, Raff's plans for Treetop Villas, a simple yet elegant resort complex, arose to completion overlooking the sea.

For each project there is unique connection between the man-made and nature's inspiration; in many projects recycled building materials express dedication to the idea of environmental sustainability.

Raff's Forest Hill Cascade House, the Bridle Path Echo House and Counterpoint House as part of the PRS portfolio have resulted in many awards. Raff was honoured in 2001 as the youngest recipient ever to receive the Ontario Association of Architects' Allied Arts Award for Lifetime Achievement and in 2009, the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada awarded him its Allied Arts Medal. In 2012 he received the Ron Thom Award by the Canada Council for the Arts. Raff has lectured at the AGO, New York University and the Schulich School of Business at York University on his major theme: ?Sustainability and artistic innovation.?

Paul Raff's illustrated talk will take place at the King City Public Library, at 7 p.m. Wednesday, May 13. Admission free. The event is co-sponsored by ASK, KTPL and The KT Historical Society.