

[‘Architecture is an art form we live in’ - John Leroux](#)

STEPHEN LLEWELLYN Fredericton Daily Gleaner

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Saint John-based architects Stephen Kopp, left, and Monica Adair were two of the presenters at the Making Architecture Matter event held at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery on Thursday night.

Photo: James West/The Daily Gleaner

Architects need great clients and great communities to make amazing buildings happen, says half of the design team working on the new Picaroons Microbrewery on the north side of Fredericton.

Monica Adair, of Acre Architects of Saint John, was recently named one of the country’s top young architects by the Royal Architect Institute of Canada.

She said she’s excited to be involved in the Picaroons project.

“What we’re hoping is this will be a place of cultural activity ... It’s going to be a hub that connects to the park,” she said.

“One of things that we believe is we can’t rely on your past or your history to define who we are ... I think it’s really important that we tell our own story.”

More than 125 people filled a gallery at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery in Fredericton on Thursday night to hear a presentation entitled “Making Architecture Matter.”

The principals of Acre Architects, one of three companies involved in the event, talked about the importance of architecture.

Stephen Kopp, the other half of Acre Architects, said the microbrewery will be located in the former train roundhouse adjacent to Carleton Park and will have a public space included.

He showed the audience a slide of what the interior of the building looks like now – a gutted industrial space with the floor covered in broken-up concrete.

Then Kopp showed an artist’s rendition of what the room will look like when it’s complete.

“We’re really excited about the potential transformation,” he said.

Adair and Kopp showed the audience slides of various projects they had worked on including: a modern home on the St. John River that at first glance looks like a traditional farm house, a house located on 10 acres of undeveloped land in the centre of Saint John clad with weathered wood from Wyoming, and a contemporary house in St. Andrews, which has been featured in both *East Coast Living* and *Playboy* magazines.

“We love what we do,” said Kopp. “We love solving problems.”

Christian Hebert and Leo Goguen, of Moncton-based Design Plus Architecture, showed off their awarded-winning building at 83 Botsford St. in Moncton.

It houses their offices on the ground floor and residential units above.

The design wowed Moncton city hall so much, the firm was allowed to tear down a heritage building to construct it.

Design Plus also designed the new CBC building in Moncton, which repurposes an old Zellers building.

Event host and noted Fredericton architect John Leroux gave the third presentation in place of Halifax-based architect Omar Gandhi, who was storm-stayed.

There was a question and answer session after the three presentations.

One member of the audience asked the architects what they would do if a client wanted to put vinyl siding on an historic home.

Some of the architects reeled back in pretend horror.

On a serious note, Adair said it's up to architects to educate clients about the importance of using good materials. She admitted that can be challenging when the budget is tight.

The architects were also asked how to break into the architecture businesses, if there's any money in architecture, how to pick a good builder and what their favourite building materials are for construction.

It turns out even architects have trouble finding good builders.

Goguen said his firm once did a residential project in which its builder didn't even bother looking at their drawings, but just constructed the house the way he wanted.

Leroux said he was pleased by how many people turned out for the event.

He said it's a kickoff for a public lecture series on architecture coming to the University of New Brunswick this fall that will bring some of the best architects in North America to Fredericton.

“Architecture is an art form,” said Leroux. “It's an art form we live in and there are some great architectural artists in the Maritimes. We want to just let people know about it.”

He said Thursday night's event was about celebrating young New Brunswick architects and how central architecture is in our lives.

“We should really strive for excellence in our built environment for a whole bunch of reasons: social, cultural, economic, health and wellness,” said Leroux. “It’s all related.”

He said New Brunswick is starting to punch above its weight when it comes to architecture. He cited Adair’s award.

“It’s a big deal ... New Brunswick’s never won a prize like that ever,” he said.

“There are some people who are really doing some good, really progressive, really sensitive, beautiful work.”

He said Design Plus just won a Governor General’s award for architecture.

“They just did one of the finest and most sophisticated and intelligent and beautiful urban interventions I’ve seen in decades in Moncton,” said Leroux.

“It’s just a spectacular building and it was done very low-budget ... It’s right in the downtown. It’s a multi-use building. Their offices are in it with residences above it. It’s just gorgeous.”

For a long time, things were a little bit tired here in New Brunswick for architecture, he said.

“They never really pushed the envelope ...

“It was the thing where you always thought a great building was done somewhere else in Canada. You wouldn’t find a great contemporary building in New Brunswick. You’d have to go to Toronto or Vancouver for it,” Leroux said.

“But now some of the smaller areas around the country have some people who really care. They’re working within tight budgets but also just being really smart with how they design, and they’re working well with the landscape and the clients ... They’re doing some spectacular things.”

Leroux said Thursday night’s event wasn’t designed to drum up business for New Brunswick architects.

“I want people to know the work, but these guys do get a lot of New Brunswick (work),” he said.

“Most of the time people in New Brunswick do hire New Brunswick architects.”

He said he has nothing against bringing in architects from out of the province. He said his bottom line is he wants great buildings.

“If someone from Toronto can give a great building, excellent,” said Leroux.

“But people here should know that we have some young firms that are up and coming, and doing great work and capable of it. You want to celebrate those.”

He said one shouldn’t pick an architect just because he or she is from New Brunswick, but because that architect is offering the best work possible.

“We want to raise the bar, and this is just about tonight celebrating people who are raising the bar,” Leroux said.