



Architect Olivier Legault, principal associate of Beïque Legault Thuot (BLTA) in Montreal. PHOTO BY GILLES DELISLE



Cité du Commerce Électronique, Montreal's E-Commerce Place, on René-Lévesque Blvd. between Mountain and Lucien L'Allier Sts. (photo at left), with part of Le Crystal de la Montagne visible at far right in the frame. An artist's rendering of the Icône condominium tower (above) on René-Lévesque Blvd. and Mountain St. also shows Hotel Le Crystal partly visible (left of the frame). Beïque Legault Thuot (BLTA) was instrumental in the creation of all three buildings. BOTH IMAGES COURTESY OF BLTA

Real estate PROFILE

A Q&A WITH ARCHITECT OLIVIER LEGAULT

LORRI BENEDIK

Olivier Legault, architect and principal associate of Beïque Legault Thuot (BLTA), has Montreal roots that run deep. His father's family has been here for 10 generations. Olivier's dad, architect Guy R. Legault, had a 30-year career with the city of Montreal from 1956 to 1987, culminating with his position as chief of urban planning.

Olivier is the third of five children. His siblings include an engineer, a doctor, an accountant and an educator of special-needs children who Olivier describes as "the heart of the family." He attended Collège Saint-Stanislas and studied architecture at l'Université de Montréal.

We met at the BLTA office on St-Laurent Blvd.

Did you always want to be an architect?

Not really. I just loved to draw. As a teenager I preferred to stay home and create pencil drawings of Mick Jagger or Albert Einstein than go out with friends. I chose architecture because it combines reality and dreams; this suits me well.

Montreal is experiencing a moment (of evolution) in the form of central densification. Urban sprawl is slowing in favour of building vertically, in the downtown core.

Even today, business people tend to perceive me as an artist, and artists see me as a businessman. It is the fine line between the two that defines me.

What happened after university?

I accepted a job with Lemay (Architects). Early on, I had the opportunity to travel to Vancouver for an international competition. While there I visited the office of Arthur Erickson, considered to be the greatest Canadian architect. This experience had a great impact on me. The highlight of my years at Lemay was signing the contract for Le 1000 de la Gauchetière, on which I collaborated with architect Dimitri Dimakopoulos.

Where did you go from there?

I joined Jacques Beïque's firm in 1996. Since then, I have worked almost exclusively on projects in the Ville-Marie borough. Because of circumstances a few of them, in very close proximity to each other, have been completed recently.

What do you mean by "circumstances?"

When creating a 40-storey structure, which can cost \$100 million to build, there are multiple conditions which must coincide favourably. These include: current events, the economy, interest rates, land costs, zoning bylaws and environmental issues. The absence of any crucial component can cause a delay. For example, Roccabella Condos, at René-Lévesque Blvd. and Mountain St., is a project I have been working on for more than two decades. Phase 1 was finally completed late last year. My involvement with Roccabella began in 1994 with Trizec Corp. Through the years, the project started and stopped multiple times. Until now, the timing was not perfect.

Within one city block, all around the Bell Centre, we have a few other developments; Cité du Commerce Électronique, Icône Condos, Le Crystal de la Montagne — which was Jacques Beïque's last project before retiring — and, most recently, l'Avenue Condos, a Broccolini venture designed by Mansoor Kazerouni and Groupe IBI/Page + Steele; BLTA did the plans and we are overseeing construction.

Why are there so many condos going up downtown?

In a city's history there are peri-



An artist's rendering shows the Roccabella Condos at René-Lévesque Blvd. and Mountain St., a project on which architect Olivier Legault worked for more than 20 years. Timing is everything and the timing just never seemed right — until now. Phase 1 of the project was finally completed late last year. ARTIST'S RENDERING COURTESY OF BLTA

ods of evolution, which I call "moments in time." Currently, Montreal is experiencing such a moment in the form of central densification. Urban sprawl is slowing in favour of building vertically, in the downtown core.

One of the main reasons is global warming. People of all ages want to live "greener" existences. Someone who lives in a house in the suburbs and commutes, uses 10 times more fossil fuel than one who lives in a downtown condo and walks everywhere.

How can one compare a house to a condo?

Making the comparison requires a shift in perspective. Condo complexes are conceived to include large common areas and amenities, such as a gym, pool, spa or rooftop terrace, intended to be perceived as extensions of the living unit. Each project has its own flavour and offers something different. Buyers can choose based on their preferences. At this time, 80 to 90 per cent of new downtown condos are sold — many of which have not even been built yet.

What puts the spring in your step?

I am motivated by my own environmental consciousness and feel proud to be part of the equation which will help so many Montrealers reduce their carbon footprint. The location of our office was cho-

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sen because it permits us to walk to and from work sites. When I travel by plane, I compensate via a program called Carbone Boréal, an initiative of l'Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, which allows me to plant trees to offset the greenhouse gas emissions produced by the aircraft.

And when you are not working? I am busy being totally inspired by my life partner, Anik Matern, who is a working actress and founder of the Dynamic Theatre Factory. Since 1998, she has helped more than 1,000 children and young adults manage life challenges through acting.

I might build structures that decorate the urban landscape, but Anik is building up Montreal's future generations — from the inside.



L'Avenue Condos, a 50-storey mixed-use structure being built across from the Bell Centre, on l'Avenue des Canadiens de Montréal. ARTIST'S RENDERING COURTESY OF GROUPE IBI/PAGE + STEELE