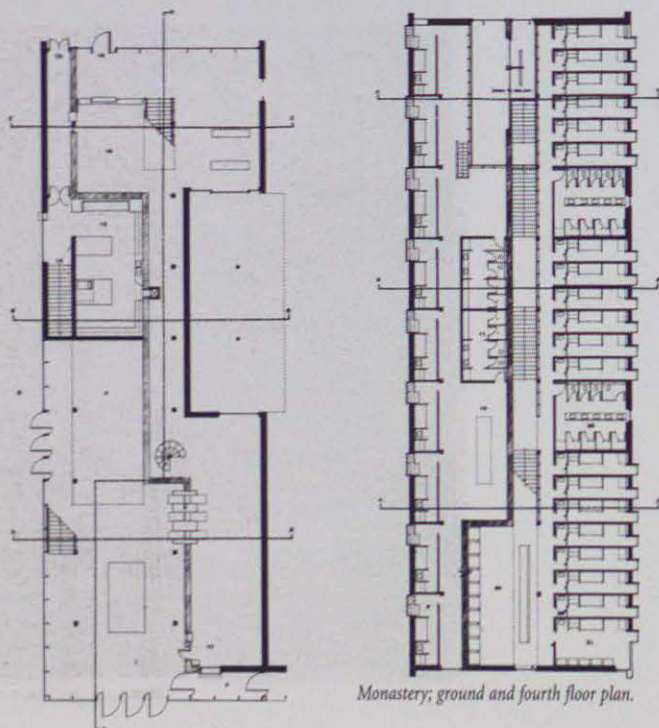
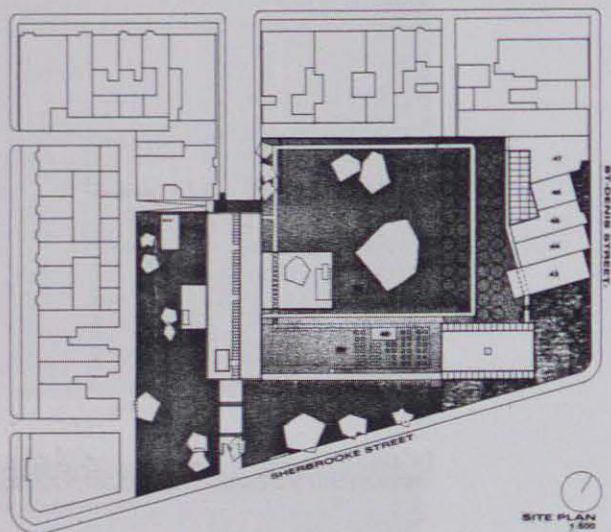


## Student Work: An Urban Monastery

Julie Dionne



### The Wall

THE WALL IS fundamental to architecture: it delineates what has been conquered (or acquired) and what has not (from which side it has been conquered, inside or out, is open for debate). The wall has two sides and a double personality. It divides spaces while simultaneously bonding them. It can link two rooms as easily as two opposed worlds. As a threshold or a niche, it can be a space in itself. It can fold to become a ceiling or a floor. Flattened, we can step on it. Raised high, it becomes an impenetrable rampart. The wall guides our steps, limits us, while stimulating our curiosity. What lies *behind* the wall?

The wall is the architectural element that best expresses the dilemma of the contemporary urban monastery, which must be both a remote place and part of the city. The monastery wall is primary, dividing sacred and secular grounds. It allows play between the various degrees of public and private spaces that result from the juxtaposition of city and monastery.

In this project, the wall is the element used to investigate the various relationships between the secular and religious worlds. An unambiguous marker in the living quarters, it thins out in the church, bonds buildings together in the working quarters and fiercely defends its limits at the boundaries of the site, while giving hints of the intense life taking place on both of its sides.

This study of the wall starts with an exploration of the private/public interface. The interface is important because the Dominican monastery is a place of public reverie, be it about God or Michelangelo, yet it retains the private qualities of monastic life. Because of its preaching profession, the Dominican Order has always been located in urban areas (often taking over buildings given to the church by devout worshippers). In this project, an added element, the médiathèque, reaffirms the vivid place of the Dominicans in the city.

The church holds a special status in the monastery complex as the common ground between the public and the monks. Traditionally, this meeting space has enforced a strong hierarchy: the entrance for each group is clearly marked and often they are located at the two opposite extremes of the building. The internal spatial arrangement usually enhances this hierarchy by differentiating the secular and religious realms. Even the position of the abbot, who while officiating stands with his back turned away

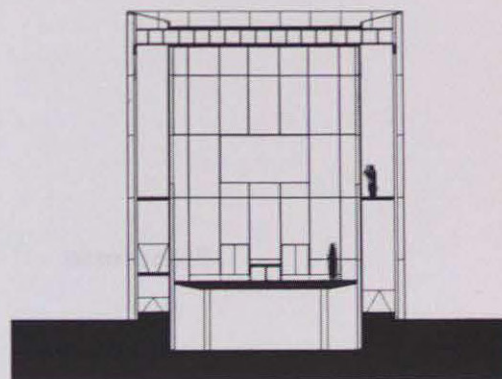
from the crowd and towards the altar, dictates a hierarchy.

While I want to respect these traditions, my design tries to recognize the territorial neutrality of the church. For instance, an exploded helical circulation pattern serves to diminish the expected strong hierarchy. I ask both monks and public to quit their respective realms and enter new grounds. Visitors enter at street level and ascend a ramp in order to access the atrium. The monks, on the other hand, descend a ramp to reach the sacristy. The ramps can also be seen as cloister-like spaces, where one removes oneself from the busy world in order to reconnect with God.

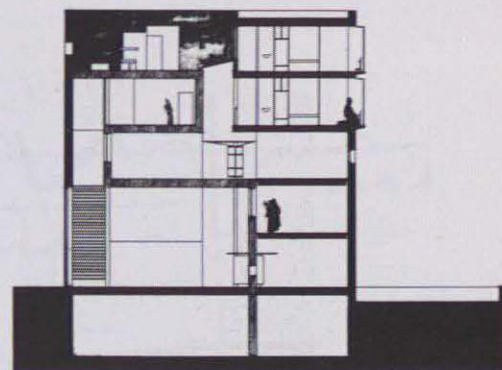
The location of the altar, in the middle of the church, also contributes to the concept of a closer relation between the religious men and the masses. The abbot can officiate facing the audience. The location thus reinforces the idea of centrality and unification: both worlds are joined in this one man. A skylight above casts a sharp beam of light upon the altar, further strengthening this point of focus.

Because the church is part of the monastic grounds, and because of the new close relationship between the monks and the faithful, I express the wall in a new way. Traditionally thick and almost blind, the monastery wall here dissolves in light while keeping a material and symbolic presence. Taking my inspiration from Peter Zumthor's beautiful gallery, the Kunsthaus in Bregenz, Austria, I expand the wall into an inhabitable space, bounded with two layers of translucent materials. In order to allow in great amounts of light, the outside skin is made of translucent glass, while the inner skin, made of alabaster stone panels, filters the light into a soft glow. This kind of stone is particular to Roman Catholic Church construction. Not merely decorative here, it expresses its beauty and purity as the main material in the inner core of the church. The stone becomes a translator of light, of God's light.

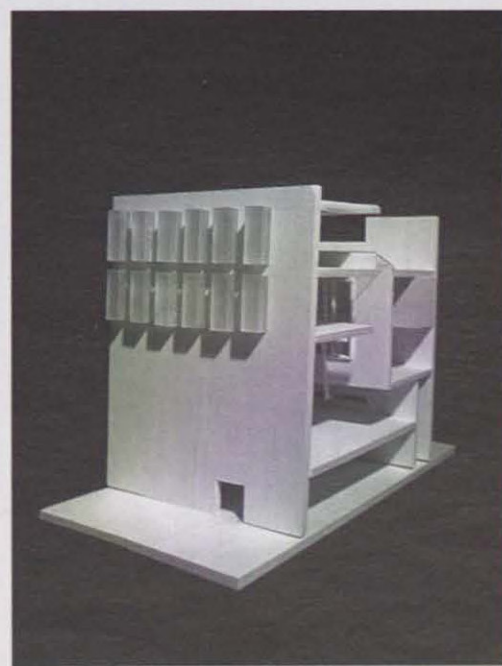
*Julie Dionne, B.Arch McGill '00, was awarded a Dunlop Travel Scholarship; she spent last summer investigating gardens in Italy.*



*Section through church.*



*Section through monastery.*



*Monastery; sectional model.*