

Montreal is North America's great unknown city. Most Americans are aware that there is a Montreal but few who have not visited it have a clear grasp of its singular qualities. Many visitors to Expo '67 were amazed. First-time visitors to the 1976 Olympic games will be too. Below we reprint parts of an article which described, in June 1972, the ingenious way in which the city was then rebuilding its inner self. It still is; work has begun on Place Desjardins, a \$100 million complex on the edge of Chinatown, which will feature towers around a dome-covered square. These too will be linked to the underground Metro network of shops, theaters, restaurants and promenades described below. A reaction to the swift rush of rebuilding is, however, setting in. The new edifices have replaced the old and not all of those were dreary. When St. Jacques Church was razed this year, the steeple and one transept were preserved, but the handsome basement chapel was not. Twenty-three preservation groups combined loosely last fall in the Save Montreal movement and the city government has since lowered the high-rise height and density limitations.

The Great Metro Experiment

THE CITY OF MONTREAL has three million people, a mean winter temperature of 26°, an average annual snowfall of 120 inches and a Metro.

It has been called the "first twentieth century city in North America," a phrase that is in one sense too flattering. It suggests that Montreal and its citizens have solved the many-faceted problems which were planted when cities took modern form in the nineteenth century. Montreal has many urban problems, some in grievous form, but the Metro and its associated structures have offered solutions for some and at least hope that others can be solved. The core problem of the cities is, of course, the fact that their downtowns are decaying. Montreal was decaying. It is no longer.

It is possible now to move around downtown Montreal swiftly and comfortably and safely and to do so in a constantly pleasant environment. The Metro and the building complexes which rise from its principal stations make it possible to use the downtown part of the city as easily in February as in August. They have made it an underground metropolis where it is possible to live in the middle of a major city without ever feeling the cold wind or fearing the onslaught of a robber. It reflects, in the phrase of a visitor, Michael Harris of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, "a city in love with itself." The city paid for the Metro, and it continues to pay when there is an operating deficit, and it continues to benefit from its own munificence. The first flood of tax income from the new developments which have flourished as the Metro has grown made it possible for Montreal to finance a major part of the Metro.

The remaking of Montreal began largely when Donald Gordon, President of Canadian National

Railways, decided to do something constructive about twenty-two acres of ugly, open, elevated tracks coming into the heart of the city.

He invited New York developer William Zeckendorf to construct a building complex over the tracks. (Zeckendorf later lost the project to his English partners because of a personal financial debacle.)

Zeckendorf hired Vincent Ponte, of Boston, who in turn hired such architectural giants as I. M. Pei and Mies van der Rohe and "Corny" Cobb. The result, ingenious and beautiful, now covers a great connected block of downtown Montreal and it has created a multi-leveled city, a concept new in fact if somewhat older in theory. Ponte points out that Leonardo da Vinci drew a plan 480 years ago for putting pedestrians and wagons on different levels.

The dimensions of the planning are illustrated by the \$70 million Place Bonaventure, one of several complexes but the one which deals directly with Mr. Gordon's problem.

First there were the elevated tracks.

Now there are three levels below the track. On the bottom is the Metro. Above that is a shopping arcade. The shopping arcade has five acres of shops, a small handsome movie house, food, flowers, and the casual necessities of life such as razor blades. Above the arcade is a huge exhibit hall in which a reception for 12,000 can be held without crowding.

Above the exhibit hall are Canadian National's tracks and platforms, spruced up.

Above the tracks is the merchandise mart.

Above the mart is the 400-room Bonaventure Hotel, a luxurious inn with, among other things, an outdoor swimming pool, entered in winter as