

But architecture in our own time came alive only when Canadians began to think and argue seriously about the nature of their cities. In the years since the beginning of the Second World War, Canada has changed from a rural to an urban society. Many thousands of Canadians have left the countryside for the cities, and a majority of the immigrants who have arrived since 1945 have been drawn to the cities in search of jobs.

All of this has been reflected in the architecture of our time. Canadian business officials have created dozens of office towers and hundreds of apartment buildings in and around the cities. In the 1950s, during the first great wave of post-war construction, these buildings — in Montréal, Toronto, Vancouver — tended to be planned without great care. They were simply placed in rows along already existing streets.

But in the late 1950s and the early 1960s Canadians began to develop a more thoughtful attitude toward their cities. They demanded better planning. People began to think of cities not just as collections of buildings but as communities where citizens gather to enjoy themselves and express themselves rather than just work. Canadians began to see the virtues of the great old European squares, where the physical design encourages people to mingle and stroll. It became clear that many of the new buildings were too crowded together; more space was needed, and more imagination.

The special needs of Canadian cities began to attract attention from architects and planners. If Europe had its open squares, what would be equivalent for Canada? In many parts of the country the winter lasts for as much as six months. Why then couldn't the city centres — or parts of them — be protected from the snow and the cold? Why couldn't people stroll in comfort from place to place?

Place Ville Marie, in downtown Montréal, was the historical beginning of an architectural trend that began in the early 1960s and hasn't stopped yet.