

political regions carve the nation into distinct governmental jurisdictions; commercial and economic regions separate urban from rural communities; linguistic regions are defined by the primary tongue, English or French; and climatic regions unite groups with common meteorological conditions.

See How They Build . . .

Regionalism, for architects, is evident when building designs rely heavily on their location and context for inspiration. Architecture deals with space, light, shape, function, composition and scale and, when a community has a specific outlook on any of these, it is often revealed in the shape, colour and weight of its buildings.

The closer one looks, right down to individual neighbourhoods, the more architectural similarities one will find in neighbouring structures — especially older buildings. Thus the old stores at one end of Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, resemble stores at the other end, but none like them can be found elsewhere in Canada.

Originally, Canadian building design grew from established Western European concepts — both French and English. When European emigration was at its peak in the nineteenth century, colonial architecture showed little interest in local cultural or even climatic conditions. International attitudes of the day held that the great benefit of colonial enterprise was the exportation of the greater culture to the lesser. Local customs were commonly considered crude or, at best, quaint and unworthy of adoption. Canadian buildings of that time were intended to openly reflect the heritage and homelands of those who built them.

Those buildings can still be seen today, particularly in Atlantic Canada where colonial development first occurred. British buildings in the sober Georgian style stand in historic clumps, reminding visitors to Halifax, Nova Scotia, and to Saint John and Fredericton, New Brunswick, of the solidity and confidence of the empire that erected them. Since then, architects and urban planners have been challenged to create new structures which neither eclipse the heavy Georgian buildings nor suffer in comparison.

A celebrated example of an inspired response to this challenge can be found on the Atlantic coast in Halifax. One of the British Empire's most strategically important seaports for 150 years, Halifax bears the architectural stamp of its English heritage. The downtown area along the waterfront has been painstakingly restored to the clean lines of the 1850s, an achievement praised by both Canadian heritage enthusiasts and appreciative tourists. When a new hotel in the Sheraton chain opened in 1987, its design was skilfully crafted to complement the restoration.

Another new hotel — the Delta Barrington — was erected incorporating the entire façade of one of Halifax's major nineteenth-century streets. Every stone of the original streetfront remains, maintaining the stylistic influences of a noble history, behind which an elegant hotel and shopping concourse offer modern amenities.

On the same coast, historic pride and cultural sensitivity are seen in even the most modest of structures. Throughout Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, square wood-frame houses known affectionately as "saltboxes"

are the common feature of fishing villages. Originally a function of a simple economy, the pastel-painted saltbox house has come to symbolize an idyll: the simplicity of those who mark their time by the turn of the tide.

The House Tells the Tale . . .

Widespread acceptance and repetition of local housing forms can be found right across the country and can teach the traveller much about the people who inhabit them.

In Quebec, early French settlers responded to the demands of harsh winters by raising the ground storeys of their houses to accommodate large snowdrifts, installing multiple chimneys for adequate heating, and extending verandahs from sharply sloping roofs to keep moisture away from walls. These manor houses are found throughout the province, tightly insulated against the elements for the winter,

Square wood-frame houses known as "saltboxes" are common in Canada's east coast fishing villages.

© Melchior DiGiacomo/The Image Bank

