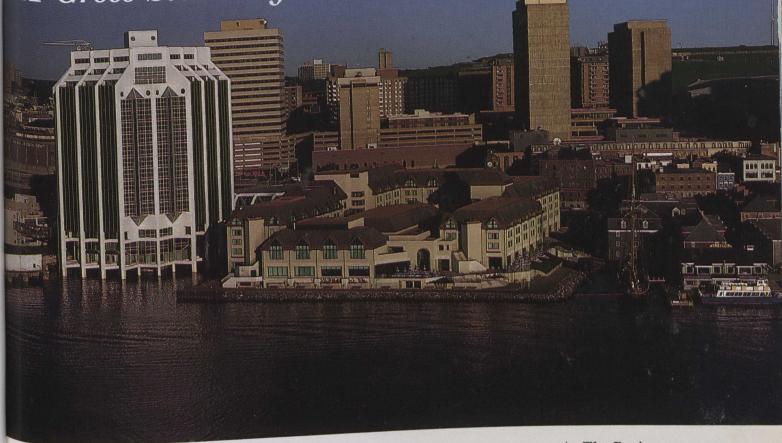# Building in Context:
A Cross Section of Canadian Architecture

The Halifax Sheraton Hotel masterfully integrates the old and the new.

The casual observer of global geography might wonder why Canada is only one nation. Three oceans border the longest coastline on earth. Radical changes in topography — from prairie to mountain to Arctic desert — constitute formidable internal boundaries. Cultural groups with widely varied origins and attitudes inhabit identifiable regions where dramatic differences in climate demand equally distinct approaches to work and play. And yet the nation is one.

A trip across Canada by train takes four days and five nights. Those who choose to see the country by car will drive 8 000 km from Newfoundland to British Columbia along the Trans-Canada Highway. A "quick" trip from coast to coast will take a full week. On such an adventure, even if the traveller could avoid meeting a single local inhabitant, the character and diversity of the Canadian population could be assessed with some accuracy simply by observing the architectural differences from one part of the country to another.

No surprise. A fishing village functions one way, a cattle town another. Around a seaside town are houses of similar design — perhaps "boxy" to nestle in the lee of the rocks, with small windows to protect against prevailing winds. Prairie houses are generally longer and lower, taking advantage of the unrestricted expanse of flat land. Mountain chalets on the west coast make use of the available high timber and feature soaring ceilings and gigantic picture windows to bring the beauty of the mountains indoors. Northern structures huddle low to the ground in protective circles.

As one moves from location to location, Canadian architecture offers many clues about the lifestyles, attitudes, skills and backgrounds of the people who build and use the various structures.

The Regions . . .

Canadians often see themselves in distinct geographic regions — Atlantic Canada, comprising the four easternmost provinces, Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island; Central Canada, consisting of Ontario and Quebec, and the Prairie provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta; the west coast province of British Columbia; and the North, forming a broad band across the top of the country.

These handy geographic divisions, however, are not the only appropriate perspective. Topographical regions distinguish people of the mountains from those of the plains;