

INSIDE THE BOX — *Montréal*

Preface:

Habitat 67 proves that buildings created for events – in this case the Montréal Expo of 1967 – can continue to be useful. Built along the Saint Lawrence River, the striking concrete cubes now contain homes for nearly 150 residents.

Habitat 67 is Montréal's iconic residential housing complex that looks like a precarious pile of concrete boxes spread over a landfill site on the outskirts of downtown Montréal. Originally built as housing for visitors to Expo 67 it was a symbol of Montréal's emergence as a multi-cultural, socially emancipated, politically progressive city.

At the time, Moshe Safdie's building – an adaptation of his graduate thesis at Montréal's McGill University – was a radical solution for affordable housing. Safdie wanted to bring suburban amenities to an urban environment: light, views, privacy, fresh air and a sense of community.

In 1985, however, Habitat 67 owner Central Mortgage and Housing wanted to sell it. The residents joined forces to buy the building and today almost a third of the original occupants still live there.

When cubes become available to buy they are snapped up straight away. Maintenance fees look exorbitant: each cube

pays CA\$800 a month. But this is actually very fair when you consider the charge includes heat, electricity, air conditioning, television, internet and property taxes, an hourly shuttle to Montréal, snow removal, gardening, building maintenance and security.

Habitat 67 was awarded heritage status in 2009 by the Québec minister of culture. Today the building is still held up as a pioneering example of prefabricated housing and Safdie is happy. "People love to live there. Habitat showed the ideal: it was a highly idealised realisation of an urban residential environment." — (M)



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01 Outdoor terraces overlooking Saint Lawrence River

02 Bright and airy enclosed terrace

03 Cut-out views can be seen between the cubes



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