

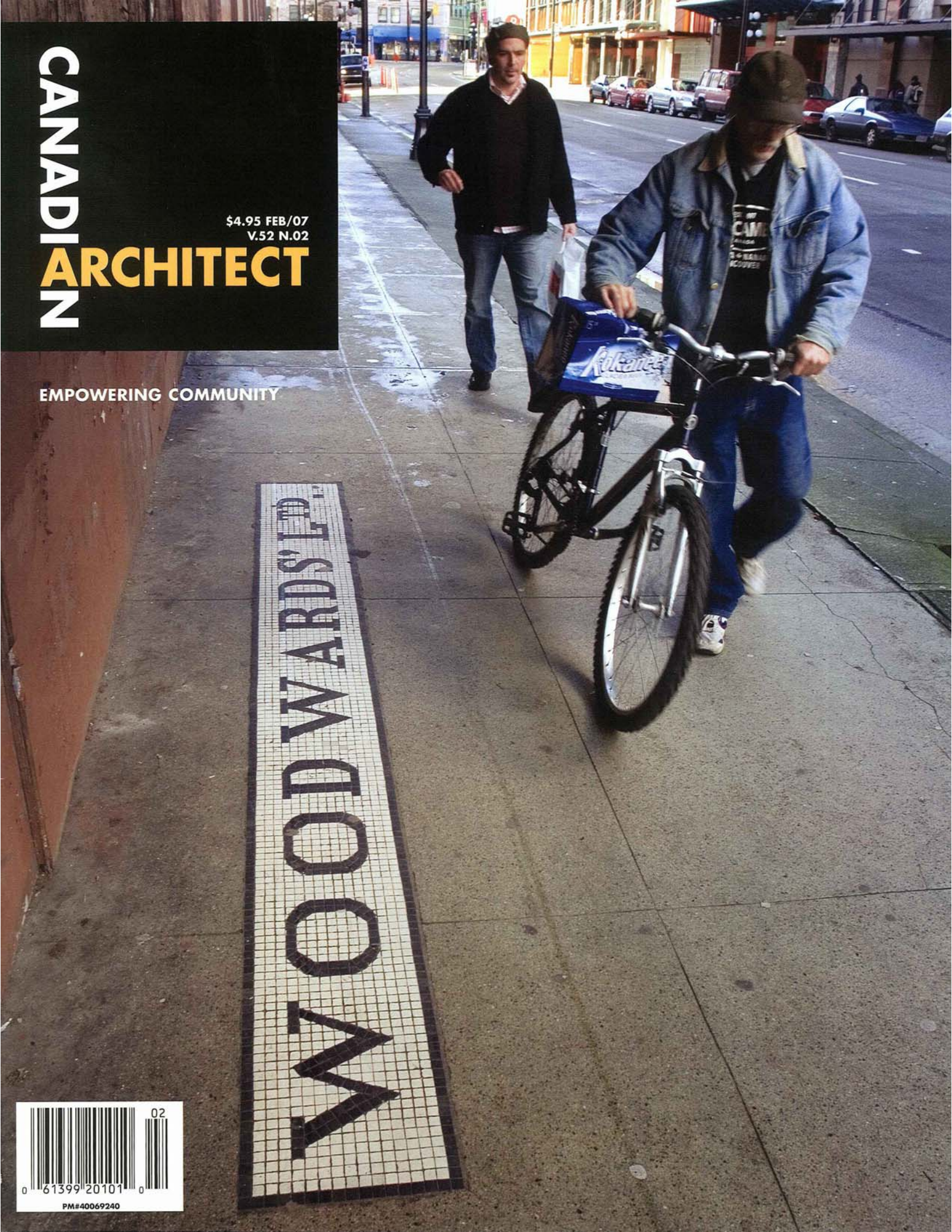
CANADIAN

ARCHITECT

\$4.95 FEB/07
V.52 N.02

EMPOWERING COMMUNITY

WOODWARD WARD'S LTD.



HOUSING TRANSITIONS



PROTECTED FROM THE HARD EDGES ALONG LANSDOWNE AVENUE IN TORONTO'S WEST END, A HOUSING DEVELOPMENT IS BRINGING WARMTH AND HOPE TO THE CITY'S HOMELESS MEN.

PROJECT CHRISTIE OSSINGTON NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE, TORONTO, ONTARIO

ARCHITECTS LEVITT GOODMAN ARCHITECTS LTD.

TEXT JACOB ALLDERDICE

PHOTOS BEN RAHN/A-FRAME INC.

The street marks what J.B. Jackson called a "stranger's path": you enter it at the Gardiner Expressway by Lake Ontario by taking the Jameson Avenue exit and travel its six-kilometre length north to St. Clair Avenue. There your travels end at the picturesque meanderings of Prospect Cemetery.

Between birth by the lake and death at St. Clair, your path crosses storied Toronto streets like Queen, Dundas, Bloor and Davenport. Here and there it jogs and weaves, with the subtle adjustments or mistakes made by historic

ABOVE WITH NEW MARKET CONDOS RISING IN THE BACKGROUND, THE INTERIOR COURTYARD PROVIDES QUIET REPOSE AMIDST THE RAPIDLY CHANGING NEIGHBOURHOOD.

land surveyors and farmers: realignments that give occasional relief throughout Toronto's gridiron street layout, and create opportunities for charmed neighbourhoods.

These subtle grid inflections, where programs and activities accrue "naturally," are like the silted banks of curving streambeds. They can give rise to places of character throughout the city, like Little Italy (centred on the gentle S-curve of College Street) or Little India (which crunches against a shift in grid where Gerrard Street East jogs north to avoid a former marshland).

In the case of Lansdowne, the nexus of encouraging siltification is at the intersection of Dupont Street, midway between Bloor and Davenport. At this crossing, traffic slows, bobs and weaves—in three dimensions. It drops to pass beneath railroad bridges to the north and west, and grinds to a crawl with traffic lights and grid shifts to the east and south.

A stranger arriving here would see signs of change all around, quite

literally: “Coming Soon: Dupont Lofts”; “The Standard Loft Residences”; “Davenport Village Townhouses”; “Foundry Lofts”; “Chelsea Lofts”. The stranger would also see reminders of a grittier past: a 22-storey monolithic apartment project advertising \$500 bachelor apartments, and a 24-hour donut store with parking for 20 cars at grade: ample room for police cars and tow trucks, night and day.

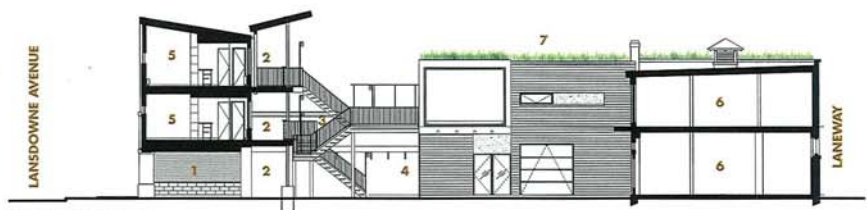
A slightly deeper observation would reveal the band of former industrial land that’s made possible the real-estate opportunities. A “border vacuum,” in Jane Jacobs’ phrase, parallels Lansdowne to the west for much of its length, and offers that rare commodity: large tracts of developable land and a stock of solid, reusable buildings within the city proper.

It’s no wonder Lansdowne is “feeling the love” these days.

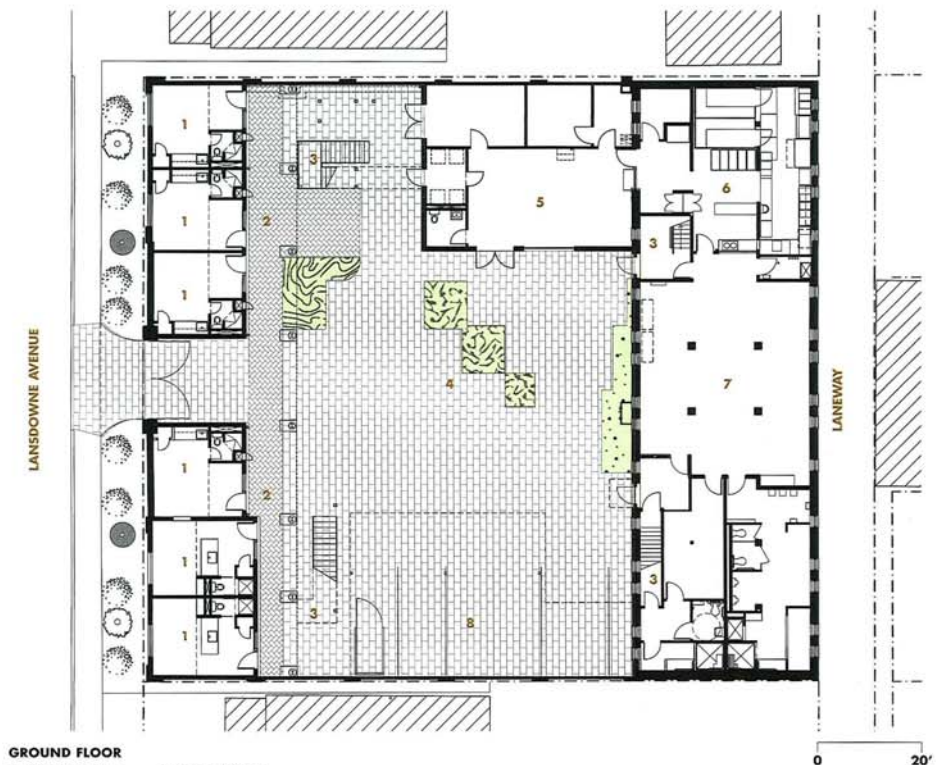
Nestled into this eclectic mix is a remarkable new building by architects Janna Levitt and Dean Goodman. At three storeys in height, with a 105-foot frontage southeast of Dupont on Lansdowne, the building presents to the street a mute wall: one storey of dusky red brick topped by two storeys of horizontal grey boards. Unmarked except for a number plate at the portico, it’s 973 Lansdowne Avenue.

It’s a homeless shelter and transitional housing for Toronto men in need. The shelter offers emergency nightly bunk-bed accommodations for up to 45 men, plus a dining room where meals are served and a kitchen where meals are prepared. The transitional housing consists of 20 one-room apartments measuring approximately 16’ x 16’ each, on three storeys, plus a two-storey wing containing a meeting room/dining room on the ground floor and offices and administration on the second floor. The apartments are available furnished, on a rent-geared-to-income basis (the starting rate is \$121 per month). The whole complex is arranged around a square, sun-filled brick courtyard.

The building was commissioned by the Christie Ossington Neighbourhood Centre and constructed over a period of several years, including a full year of outreach to ensure the project’s acceptance by its more established and well-off neighbours. Its setting is a former municipal storage compound owned by the city and provided on a 100-year lease to the client. Its budget was about \$2 million, with funding from all levels of government in addition to private charitable donations: notably, a gift of \$250,000 from Lou Odette, after whom the administration wing is named. The brick wall of the ground floor facing Lansdowne was the former outer wall of the city compound; the horizontal boards cladding the upper two floors are reclaimed Douglas fir from a former barn in the yard. It’s this sensitive reuse of historic structures that garnered the architects a “Brownie” award from the Canadian Urban Institute (for brownfield development) in 2006.



- SECTION/ELEVATION**
- | | |
|--------------|----------------------|
| 1 ENTRY | 5 APARTMENT UNIT |
| 2 WALKWAY | 6 HOSTEL |
| 3 EXIT STAIR | 7 PHASE 3 GREEN ROOF |
| 4 COURTYARD | |



- GROUND FLOOR**
- | | |
|------------------|----------------------|
| 1 APARTMENT UNIT | 5 HOSTEL LOUNGE |
| 2 WALKWAY | 6 KITCHEN |
| 3 EXIT STAIR | 7 HOSTEL DINING ROOM |
| 4 COURTYARD | 8 PARKING |



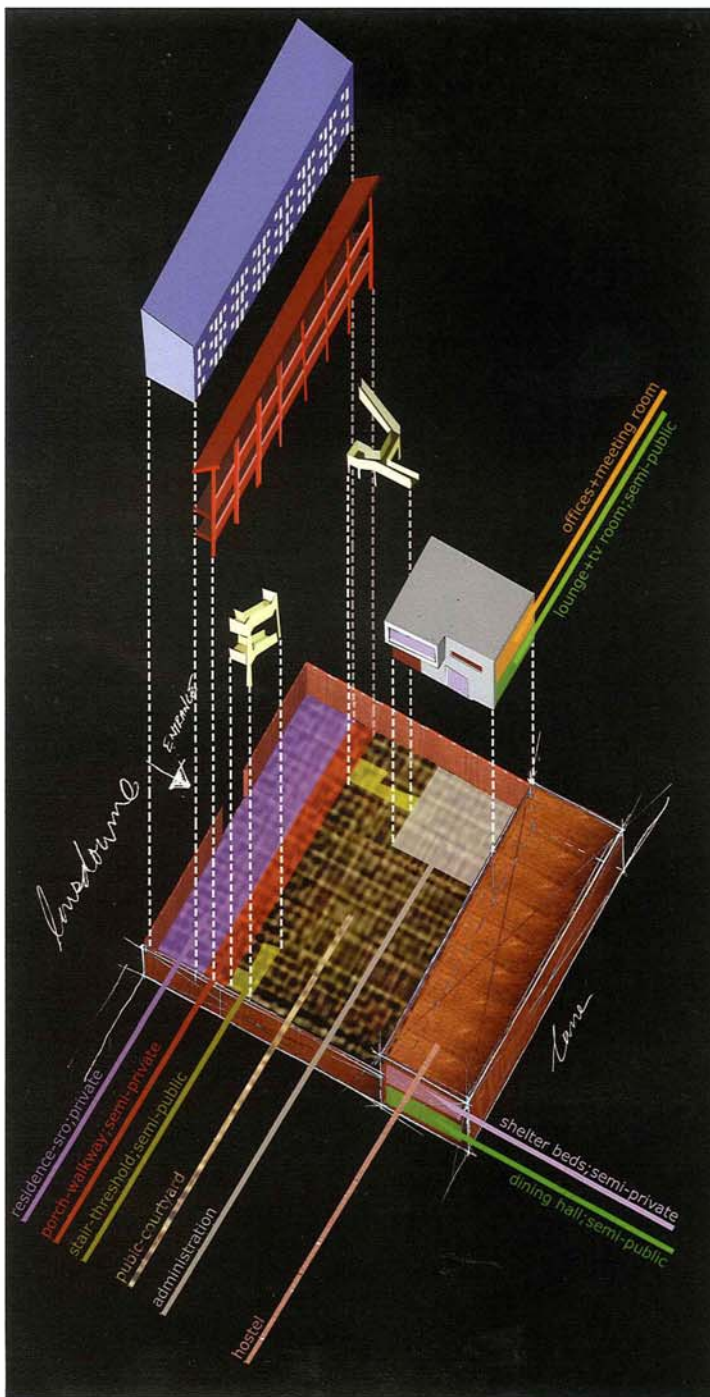
- SECOND FLOOR**
- 1 APARTMENT UNIT
 - 2 WALKWAY
 - 3 EXIT STAIR
 - 4 COURTYARD BELOW
 - 5 MEETING ROOM
 - 6 ADMINISTRATION
 - 7 LOUNGE
 - 8 HOSTEL DORMITORY

OPPOSITE BRIGHT RED BALCONIES AND GENEROUS OVERHANGS INTRODUCE TRADITIONAL CHINESE ARCHITECTURAL INFLUENCES WHILE OFFERING PROTECTED IMPROMPTU SOCIAL SPACES FOR THE TENANTS. **ABOVE** ALONG LANSDOWNNE AVENUE, CARS STREAM BY A PROTECTIVE FAÇADE COMPRISED OF WOOD, ACRYLIC STUCCO FINISH AND ORIGINAL BRICK WALLS AT THE BASE.

One remarkable feature of this building is the courtyard at its heart. Conceived as a community gathering place, the courtyard meets the street via a breach in the original brick walls of the compound: now a portico, here the original iron gates stand permanently open, while a security camera's silent eyeball stands lonely guard. Once inside, eight-foot-deep balconies serve three purposes: open-air entrance corridors for the apartments above, meeting places, and observation galleries. From them one surveys the activities in the reclaimed red brick-cobbled courtyard below.

The architecture expresses the Christie Ossington Neighbourhood Centre's commitment to the community: "We're a force of revitalization, not of gentrification," says Lynn Daly, Executive Director. She offers nothing but praise for the architects, who were brought on stream on the strength of their previous work with what Daly calls "the same population"—a 26-room SRO at 25 Leonard Street in Toronto that garnered the architects a CMHC "Best Practice" award in 2006. Throughout the project, according to Daly, the architects were "creative and patient people, resourceful at the design end, and able to work well with the contractors to generate many built-in efficiencies."

Dean Goodman doesn't crow about his accomplishments, and in fact



ABOVE THE SIMPLE, YET INVITING INTERIOR OF ONE OF THE APARTMENTS.

downplays Daly's stress on efficiencies. "The financing was largely a lump-sum 'Skippy grant' for the SRO apartments," he says. "Skippy" is actually SCPI, or "Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative," a federal homelessness granting program under the former Liberal government, now discontinued. It aimed to place federal money into locally based solutions across the country, allowing a high degree of flexibility in how the money was spent. Goodman elaborates: "Single-loaded corridors are actually quite inefficient, where the same width of circulation space only serves one room." However, for Goodman, these "corridors" are for much more than just room access. "They are balconies. They provide a view and interaction with the courtyard below. We made them extra-wide to create places for informal gathering and the fostering of community."

As he describes the project, echoes of Herman Hertzberger's "non-programmed" spatial strategies resound: the creation of places for the accommodation of unanticipated activities. Goodman acknowledges this resonance, as well as another one: Christopher Alexander's "intimacy gradient" pattern. A clear and defensible transition between "most public" and "most private" is especially important to men whose lives have been stripped of many of the dignities most of us take for granted.

At 973 Lansdowne, J.B. Jackson's "stranger" has found a moment of calm along his path, a place of restitution and safety, a "home" in its most fundamental sense. Its economical use of materials and celebration of the object-type of bare concrete floors, exposed painted brick, galvanized steel exterior stairs, and bolt-ends protruding through the exterior walls, fits in with the aesthetic of the high-end lofts being constructed in the disused industrial buildings all around it.

Goodman is justly proud of the way his design incorporates the historic elements of the project. Indeed, a visitor to his reused industrial loft office on King Street West, with its creaky, well-worn wood stairs and raw, painted brick interior walls, would be excused in thinking Goodman has designed a place he himself would be comfortable calling "home." **CA**

Jacob Allderdice is an architectural graduate and urban designer. He teaches interior design at the International Academy of Design in Toronto.

CLIENT CHRISTIE OSSINGTON NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE (CONC)
ARCHITECT TEAM DEAN GOODMAN, ALEXANDER TEDESCO, JANINA LEVITT
STRUCTURAL G.D. JEWELL ENGINEERING INC.
MECHANICAL/ELECTRICAL LAM & ASSOCIATES LTD.
INTERIORS LEVITT GOODMAN ARCHITECTS LTD.
CONTRACTOR DASD CONTRACTING INC.
ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANT THE ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT GROUP LTD.
CODE CONSULTANT ARENCON INC.
AREA 29,150 FT²
COMPLETION 2005

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------|
| 1 WALKWAY/DECK | 5 SHELVES |
| 2 ENTRY | 6 WC |
| 3 LIVING/SLEEPING | 7 SHOWER |
| 4 KITCHEN | 8 CLOSET |



TYPICAL UNIT