
Cultural Daily

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Inside-Outside: Notes on the Treatment of the Storefront

Maurice Amiel · Saturday, August 27th, 2022

Basic observation

Summer is the season when we enjoy doing our own food shopping, particularly when fruits and vegetables are on **display inside and outside the storefront of food stores** along our main streets

I noted a variety of ways of treating that display, whether the store belongs to a chain of the supermarket type or is a one-off associated with an ethnic group or with some exotic specialty food.

I chose to observe three such stores: one of the chain type and two of the one-off specialty type; my intuition at this point was that each type of store would have a particular treatment of its storefront.

Three sites: illustration and analysis

The **Mont Carmel** fruit and vegetable store occupies a strategic main street corner in the Snowdon district of Montreal, a bloc away from its subway station and across a side street from an old supermarket.

As the image below shows, its entrance fronts a busy commercial hub and benefits from a setback that it exploits for exterior placing of items on sale under a folding canopy, picking up the green colour scheme for its sign.



Look, pick up, but don't forget to pay

Both sidewalks and the set back are generous enough to allow for “layers” of active buyers examining the produce before entering to pay, the cashier being conveniently, if not strategically, located at the entrance.

Note the placing of boxes of flowers near the edge of the sidewalk creating an outer limit for the appropriated sidewalk area.

The **Exo Fruits store**, in the Côte-des-neiges district of Montreal, is a specialty fruit and vegetable as well as delicatessen store that occupies what used to be an Italian restaurant that extended under a vaulted roof. That feature is a local landmark probably protected from demolition as can be seen below.



Can't miss that from a block or two away

The entrance is located under one of the two vaults that frame the large sign. The generously glazed storefront has its bottom part decorated with painted images of some of its key produce, while the top is left for direct viewing of the produce and for neon-lit names of their star produce.

The vault over the store entrance harbours also the service entrance and some shelves of produce offered at special sale prices. It shelters also the occasional beggar that some clients will favour with their generosity.

The third storefront example is of an old supermarket of the **Metro** chain. Its size and location next to its neighbourhood subway station has given the area outside its storefront a social function framed by the row of trees, the benches, the large door overhang bearing an illuminated sign and the longer one running the full width of the storefront.



Nice day for hanging around

The red-clad beggar examining the incoming and outgoing traffic, the bench seated onlooker checking the scene, the upcoming trio in the distance who, while walking under the long overhang, is most likely checking the inside of the store through the large glazed store front ... all animate the rather unattractive architecture.

In previous seasons one could find a series of round tables with chairs along the long store front, under the protective overhang, where clients could sit and have a drink bought indoors or simply wait for a ride to come and get them with their bags of groceries

End words

If the **contribution of storefront to a sense of urbanity** is tied to the variety and number of people they attract, their interactions, activities and movement that make up that quality of urban life, it is now threatened by the emergence of boxy commercial emporia that are the **classic expression of suburbanity**, i.e. where the only meaningful relationship to their storefront is the shortest distance possible from parking space to their entrance ... a sad prospect as shown below.



Where is the parking spot closest to the entrance?

Credit

All photos were taken by the author.

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