

# MONOCLE

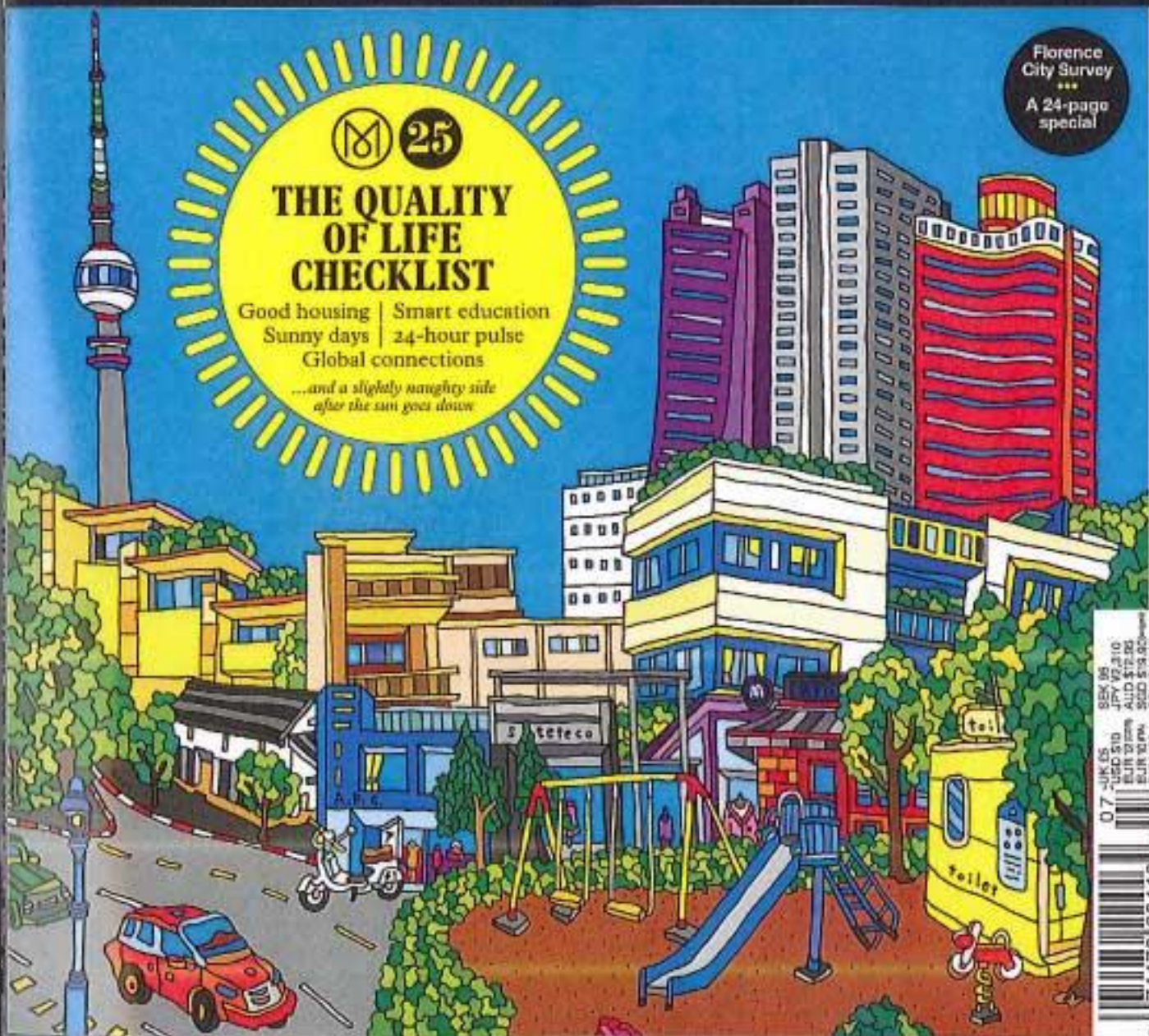
A BRIEFING ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS, BUSINESS, CULTURE & DESIGN

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## What does it take to make a city both liveable and lively?

The results are in for our annual **QUALITY OF LIFE** survey. Who's up? Who's down? And who's out in our ranking of the world's 25 best cities to call home (there are a few surprises)

- A AFFAIRS** Next stop Newark: a mayor on a mission
  - B BUSINESS** Why Montpellier is good for start-ups
  - C CULTURE** The family shaking up Sydney's arts scene
  - D DESIGN** How 'made in San Francisco' is reviving the city
  - E EDITS** Baristas from Stockholm to Melbourne on their favourite shops, cafés and markets
- EXPO** Five cities made special with a dose of grit and edge



**25**  
**THE QUALITY OF LIFE CHECKLIST**  
Good housing | Smart education  
Sunny days | 24-hour pulse  
Global connections  
*...and a slightly naughty side after the sun goes down*

Florence City Survey  
...  
A 24-page special

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- 01 Exterior of Habitat 67
- 02 Silhouette
- 03 Iconic stacked cement cubes



**D**  
REPORT  
Habitat 67



02  
**INSIDE  
THE BOX**  
—*Montréal*

**Preface**

Habitat 67 proves that buildings created for events – in this case Montréal's Expo of 1967 – can continue to be useful. We meet three residents and talk to the architect about why the project has been such a success.

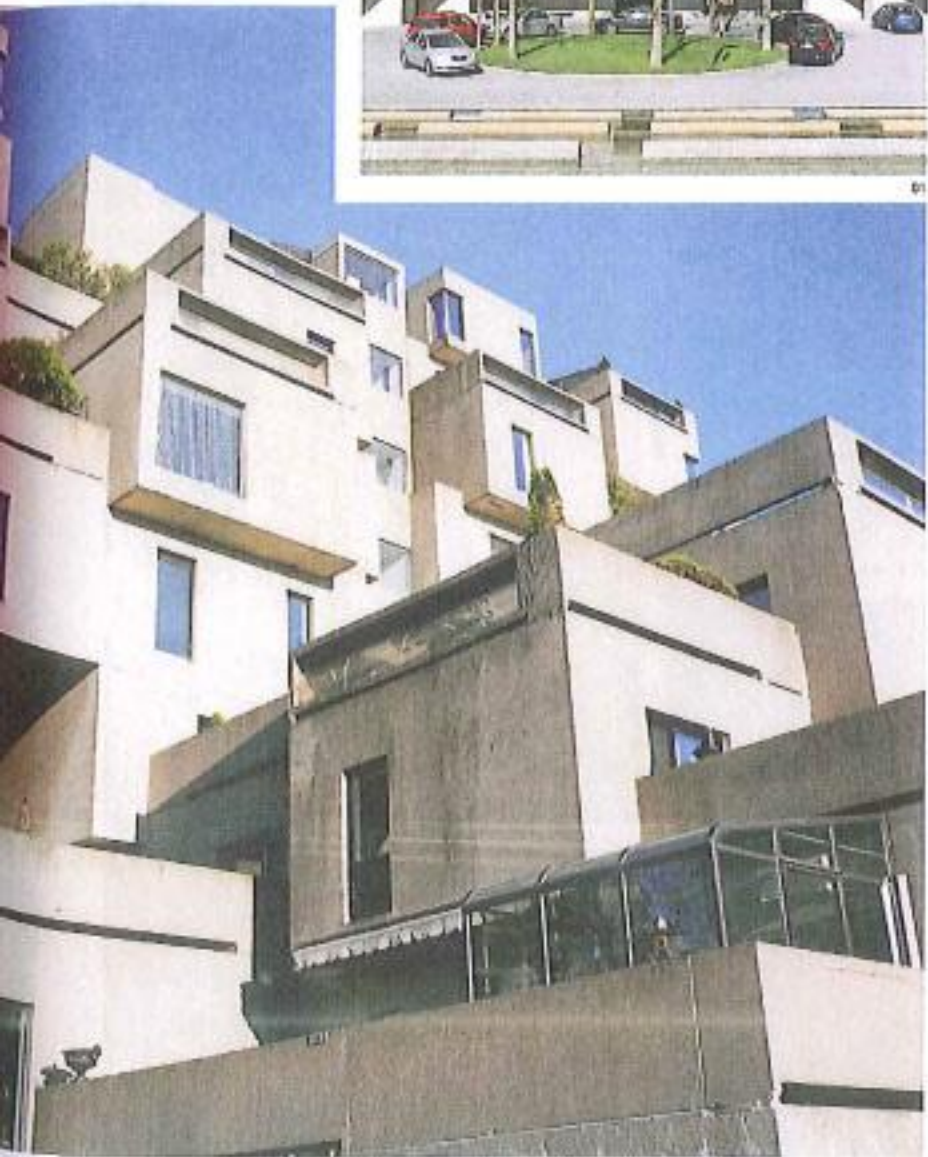
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Habitat 67 is Montréal's iconic residential housing complex that looks like a precarious pile of concrete boxes spread over a landfill site on the outskirts of downtown Montréal. Originally built as housing for visitors to Expo 67 it was a symbol of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

At the time, 26-year-old 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, Central Mortgage and Housing, which owned Habitat, wanted to sell it. The residents joined

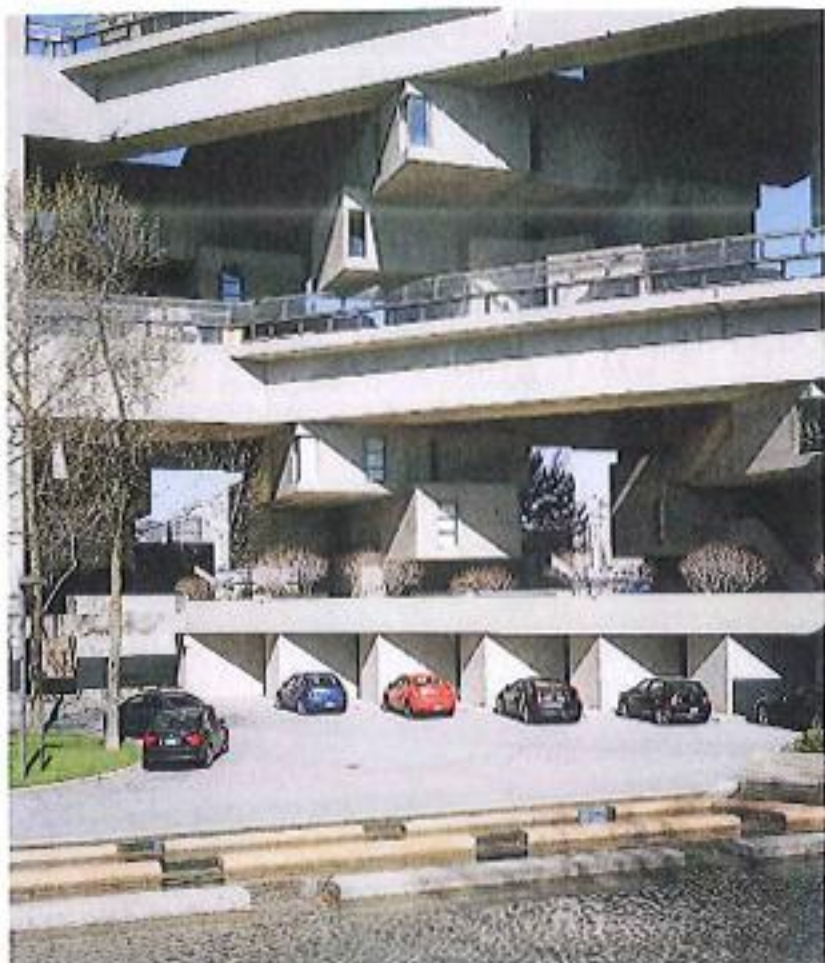


forces to buy the building and today, almost a third of the original occupants still live here. When "cubes" become available to buy they are snapped up straight away.

Maintenance fees are exorbitant – \$800 (€565) per cube per month. But it's cheap when you consider that \$800 includes heat, electricity, air conditioning, cable, internet, school and property taxes, an hourly shuttle to Montréal, snow removal, gardening, building maintenance and 24-hour security.

Habitat 67 was awarded Heritage status in 2009 by the Québec minister of culture. Today the building remains 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."

Safdie's most recent creation is the Habitat of the Future, which proposes new design strategies built on the Habitat concept to address density in growing cities. Safdie's Golden Dream Bay housing project in China has shared amenities, public spaces, light and gardens, and with 2,200 units, it's the most ambitious adaptation of Habitat yet. Safdie says, "I did write somewhere: 'Habitat is a concept whose idea is yet to come.'" Maybe it is finally here. — (M)



- 01 East-facing exterior with car park
- 02 Walkways
- 03 The architecture offers cut out views between the cubes





04

05



06

- 04 Original light switches
- 05 Staircase in Dexter and Maria's house
- 06 Dexter Peart, Maria Varvarikos-Peart and baby Kaya Sofia
- 07 Upstairs shelves
- 08 The original 1970s kitchen



07

#### Resident profile 01

*Dexter Peart and Maria Varvarikos-Peart: unit 645*

The Pearts had no intention of moving out of their apartment in Old Montréal. The call came on the Monday afternoon that a Habitat unit was put up for sale. By 16.00 that same day, the Pearts were the proud owners of unit 645.

"I was blown away the first time I visited Habitat," says Maria Varvarikos-Peart, who runs a PR firm in Montréal and New York. "I could hear the St Lawrence River rapids and the place was so beautiful and energising. I'm in love with water, and it's what I've always dreamed of." Now with two-year-old daughter Kaya Sofia, the couple has breathed new life into the space. Maria says, "Everyone in the building is so excited to see Kaya and everyone has offered to babysit. It's been a while since there's been a child in the building."

Their unit hadn't had any renovations since the 1970s and many of the original details — including a one-piece fibreglass bathroom unit — were intact. Also remaining were the low-voltage switches, the recessed lighting above the cupboards and the original aluminium-lined grey laminated kitchen cupboards.

Dexter Peart, one of the twin brothers behind luxury leather line WANT Les Essentiels de la Vie, says, "As a designer, I look at the fact that Safdie has created a space that still works after 44 years, and still has an emotional impact for everyone who lives here. That is the epitome of good design."

Dexter is amazed by the fact that "everyone here lives in a version of the same box but everyone is having a different experience just based on the view".

Maria says, "I feel so far away and yet I'm four minutes from downtown. It's exactly what Safdie envisioned and he achieved it. It's a sanctuary in the city and way ahead of its time." — (M)



08

- 01 Resident Frank Motter
- 02 The enclosed terrace
- 03 Sitting room
- 04 Outdoor terraces



01



02



03



04

### Resident profile 02

*Frank Motter: unit 222*

Frank Motter moved to Habitat in 1974 because "Habitat had tennis courts. And I'm a nut for tennis. But this was not the place to live – it was very contrarian. It was out of the way, there was nothing here except Expo."

Frank started with two units, added another two, then four and now owns eight but lives in five cubes. He raised two children here and his son has just bought two cubes next door.

His stuccoed ceilings and mouldings hide much of the original Habitat. Motter has redone all the bathrooms and replaced many of the original features with dark wood panelling. "I can only speak for myself but I feel very lucky to live here. I love to look at the water. People are nice here, all different personalities. It's good to have creative people in here. I can park my cars. It's warm in winter – concrete is a great insulator. Montréal is an island and there is only a certain amount of shoreline and we have a big chunk of it. I feel fortunate every day to have all this space as the city encroaches."

— (N)