

Montreal's Molson Centre

Now two and a half years old, Montreal's new Molson Centre is a shrine to sports in this Canadian city and a symbol of the sports enthusiasm of Montrealers (over 100,000 people showed up for the open house!). To the people of Montreal, it is their hockey and entertainment stadium; to its designers, it is an experiment in urban planning; and to the city fathers, it is a hope for urban renewal.

Designed by Montreal's Lemay Associates and Lemoyne Lapointe Magne, the \$230 million Molson Centre is the best thing to happen in Montreal in some time. It enlivens an area that includes historic buildings, mega-towers, small shops and parking lots. Alternately shabby and shiny, the district offers a mess of cues, some contradictory. Rather than shrink from diversity, the architects embraced it.

Located right in downtown Montreal, Molson Centre turned out brilliantly, especially given the usual constraints of space, money, and program. It's a downtown complex in every sense of the term, both a destination and a thoroughfare, a place to go and a way to get there, successfully woven right into the fabric of the downtown area. The decision to build the complex downtown rather than out in the suburbs, was a risky one, and it was done at a time when many Montreal residents and businesses were leaving. When SkyDome was built, many felt that it should go somewhere outside the city, but professional sport is a strictly urban phenomenon, after all, and a function of the metropolis and its crowds.

Though there's parking available for 650 cars (which isn't all that much for an arena that seats 21,400), the facility wasn't designed for the automobile. Instead, Molson Centre is a public transportation hub, totally accessible by subway and train. And, for all of its size, it's a compact building. The steeply angled towers place viewers not just above the action but over it. Two of the six floors are devoted to corporate boxes, but, even so, seats in the farthest reaches of the arena still have unobstructed views.

As with just about all of the modern "sports" complexes, Molson Centre is designed to be a multi-use complex. For example, it has also become a major concert venue and destination for touring stars of the entertainment world.

There *is* a cover from Molson Centre [shown here courtesy of Stan Tombs], and Stan says it should be considered a treasure. Here's why... Stan received it from Claude Pelletier, who spent 1 1/2 hours pleading with many people at the Molson Centre last October for a caddy of these matchbooks (in response to Stan's request for a caddy). Claude offered to pay for the caddy. He was turned down at every request, even after having lunch there. Eventually, Claude left with three matchbooks—one for himself, one for Stan, and one which Stan sent in to yours truly so it could be shared with everyone else. So, we all owe a debt of gratitude to Claude's determination and persistence!

I house such treasures in my "Famous Places" collection, but Sports collectors may have their own "Stadiums" collection, or it could be put with team covers (*Montreal Canadiens*), or... in a vault, perhaps!

