

THE MAKING OF HABITAT 67

A Tense *Pas de Deux* between Moshe Safdie and August Komendant

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Habitat 67 is Montreal's, but also Canada's most iconic and internationally known work of postwar architecture (fig. 1).¹ From the moment the project's first images were published to the day of its inauguration, Habitat captured the architectural world's attention.² Designed by Moshe Safdie [b. 1938], an Israeli-born Canadian trained at McGill University's School of Architecture, Habitat is a high-density urban housing complex containing one hundred and fifty-eight apartments made up of three hundred and fifty-four prefabricated reinforced concrete modules stacked twelve storeys high in a stepped-up pattern. Straddling typological and technological innovation, the project engaged many of the most pressing issues then being discussed in debates about the future of architecture.

Built in the context of the 1967 International and Universal Exhibition, Habitat became one of the main attractions of the event. It also drew the attention of critics eager to assess its contribution to the future of housing. For the *New York Times* architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable, Habitat 67 was an exciting prefabricated housing concept that was undermined by flaws in its execution.³ A similar tension between enthusiasm and uneasiness permeated the review of Douglas Haskell, editor of *Architectural Forum*, who wrote: "Habitat 67 is spectacular, wonderful, and, in some ways, a failure."⁴ After praising its form, its plan, its philosophy, and its implications for urban living, Haskell said: "its technology is, quite obviously, anachronistic." A few years later, the



FIG. 1. HABITAT 67, MONTREAL, 2021. | BERNARD LEGAULT