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DCYSA and Mont Tremblant have a mutually beneficial relationship. The resort offers a stunning locale and laudable ecological vision; the architects respond with award-winning designs for its hotels and residential villages. Win-win.

Building Green Means Restoring Entire Ecosystems

This Quebecois ski resort is watching out for the wildlife by clearing trees according to bird-nesting patterns and restoring streams for fish. All it needs are floating islands that maintain the wetlands. Oh wait, it has them.

By Ashley T. Kjos

Located on twenty square kilometers of land inside the Mont Tremblant National Park in Quebec is the Mont Tremblant Ski Resort. For years, it was a resort in trouble, embattled with financial difficulties and threatened every three to four years with the prospect of closing permanently. Things began to turn around when the resort was purchased by Intrawest, a resort-management-and-development company responsible for many successful ski resorts in the North America, including Whistler, Steamboat, and Blue Mountain. Intrawest focused on improving the services, the restaurants, and the quality of equipment while keeping the spirit of conservation at the forefront—a spirit that had always existed within the park and the surrounding community.

PROJECT

Location Mont Tremblant National Park, Quebec
Completed Ongoing, two phases completed 2008
Program Retail and residential space

Due to its location mostly within the national park, rehabilitating and developing new areas on Mont Tremblant Ski Resort came with a unique set of restrictions and limitations, but Intrawest accepted the challenge. Two significant additions have been added to the resort in recent years. The first is the South Side Village, a dense, European-style pedestrian retail and residential hub. “With the South Side Village, Intrawest and its development team have created a true destination, one that guests enjoy and don’t want to leave,” says Bruno St-Jean of DCYSA Architecture & Design, the project’s design architect.

TEAM

Client Intrawest

Architect DCYSA Architecture

General Contractor Pomerleau Construction

The second is Versant Soleil, a smaller project that includes two residential areas and a casino. In order to conserve forest area, Versant Soleil was concentrated on ten acres, which resulted in a dense central village area suitable for travel by foot and increased the sustainable nature of the project. To account for any loss of wildlife habitats or other adverse environmental effects of the new

development, various compensation projects were employed. “Instead of doing something detrimental, this project was seen as a way to improve the quality of the environment, to do something positive,” explains Christine Tremblay, the environment project manager at Intrawest. A fish-enhancement project, for example, was conducted in the Mercier Creek just five kilometers from the resort to mitigate any fish habitat losses attributable to Versant Soleil. It included building 40 weirs along the creek that increase the water’s oxygen content, clearing gravel that acts as a spawning location, and planting trees along the banks so the water remains fresh and viable for fish life.

Versant Soleil’s inspiration was Quebec’s natural environment. Characterized by less density and more contact with the natural elements of the site such as the mountain ecology and the pond and streams that run through the neighborhood, the village’s sustainable features include well-planned cross-ventilation and high levels of insulation. The structures’ orientations and the placement of windows in the front and

back allow occupants to forego air-conditioning in the summer months, and during Quebec’s harsh winters, the buildings rely on their insulation and air-to-air heat exchanges, where the existing air is used to heat the incoming air with a 70 percent recuperation rate. All the lighting on the village site is oriented toward the ground to eliminate ambient light as part of the resort’s Dark Sky Initiative.

The South Side Village, too, echoes the environmental awareness of the resort as a whole, and it is also tied to a sense of the local culture. “The idea for the South Side Village was for it to be a celebration of Quebec,” St-Jean says. To accomplish this, the village was designed with shops at the bottom level and residential space above, and much of the retail is locally driven with artisan crafts and goods. “The buildings create streets and plazas; they become outdoor rooms where the population spends a lot of time,” he says.

GREEN

Certification Not applicable

Walkability Pedestrian-friendly design of villages

Energy Tight insulation, cross ventilation

Landscape All wood kept on-site, used in soil and signage

The resort’s environmental efforts aren’t limited to its residences. The natural aspects of the area are taken into careful consideration when designing and removing trees for the ski trails and ski slopes. Any wood cut or removed from the national park cannot be taken off-site or sold; it all stays on the trails. “Much of the soil here is thin, and there isn’t that much organic material on the trails, so we include wood in the soil and use it to shape the slopes,” Tremblay says. The resort also has a strict wood-cutting policy to coincide with the local bird’s nesting season; wood-cutting for all projects occurs between August and April.

“Environmental stewardship is at the core of our business,” Tremblay says. “We want to offer the guests a nice environment, high quality of design, and to take care of the natural habitat throughout.”



At Mont Tremblant, floating islands were added to Plouff’s Pond as part of the resort’s wetlands-compensation project. Photos: Mont Tremblant

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