



Fig. 1. The House of Théo Mark on the reserve, a small house built soon after 1954 (this example has been renovated since).
(Photo: André Casault, 1998)

Abstract

Less than fifty years ago, the Innu of Unamen Shipu, a Northern Quebec native¹ community, were still a nomadic tribe, hunting, fishing, and gathering food in the vast lands of northeastern Canada. Since 1954, the year in which the Government of Canada officially created an autochthon reserve at Unamen Shipu, the Innu have moved into permanent houses.² This paper will begin by examining the relationship the Innu have with their reserve dwellings. That will be followed by the presentation of an exploratory design exercise,³ whose goal was to develop sustainable housing prototypes adapted to the Innu's present way of life. The exercise has raised several interesting questions as to the persistence of tradition and the importance of place and territory in the design of dwellings.

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House Hunting Or I've Never "Lived" In My House

The autochthon reserves were initially meant to be a temporary alternative to the Innu nomadic way of life, a kind of transition phase before their total integration into the Canadian society. The reserve at Unamen Shipu, a site that the Innu had been occupying seasonally for thousands of years, was created in 1954. The first permanent houses were built for the members of the community. Local recipients of the Canadian Government's welfare program began to receive a monthly allowance check. The children were sent to school from September to July in Sept-Îles, a city located several hours away by boat, and a new church was erected for the first catholic priest to permanently settle into the community. The Innu could finally look forward to a much easier life...

Although the Innu now live on a reserve in permanent houses, the vast majority of the population still takes part in traditional activities, such as hunting and fishing, several months a year. Unamen Shipu's population has grown from less than 200 in the 1950s to more than 800. The houses were all planned with standard North American divisions: a living room, a kitchen and a dining room, and two or three bedrooms. The living room has a large bay window, the kitchen is of the laboratory type, and there is neither an entry vestibule nor an adequate place to install a wood stove on the ground floor (fig. 1). All that said, the majority of community members, if not all, would not want to give up the comfort of those modern homes. Televisions, washing machines and dryers, skidoos, and trucks are all consumer goods that the Innu cherish, in the same way that most North American people do.

There has been little explicit criticism levelled against those houses by the Innu. However, upon visiting the reserve, one cannot help but observe an implicit but strong reaction to the North American style of houses that have been built there. As far as the Government is concerned, most of the problems associated with the houses stem from a lack of maintenance. But can the strong reactions and lack of maintenance rather be seen as a positive expression of traditional and cultural vivacity?

The Innu people have been alienated in their way of life by a centuries-old relationship with the white man. Even today, they are still having trouble with the recognition of their traditional nomadic fishing and hunting customs. Moreover, and

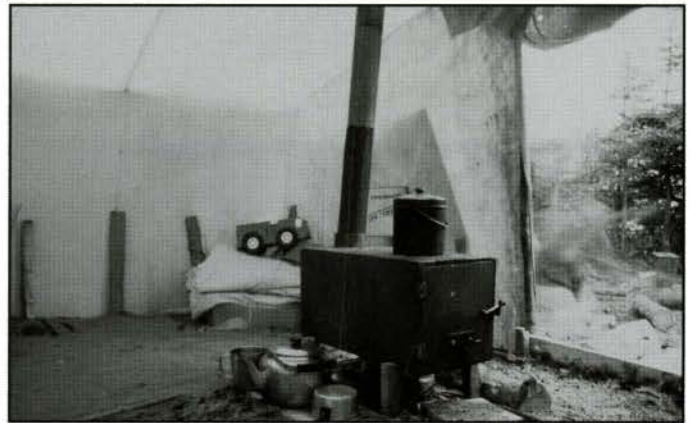


Fig. 2. A large territory of relatively flat land, arid, and austere, and dotted by thousands of lakes and rivers. A land where conifers grow and where, further north, the biggest trees rarely grow taller than a man.
(Photo: Louise Bellemare, 1999)



Fig. 3. A few tents mounted in a row on the edge of a lake in the fall.
(Photo: Louise Bellemare and Théo Mark, 1999)

Fig. 4. A canvas tent viewed from the inside, with the stove near the entrance.
(Photo: André Casault, 1998)



kilometres, is relatively flat, arid, and austere. It is a land dotted by thousands of lakes and rivers, a land made up of conifers where, further north, the biggest trees rarely grow taller than a man (fig. 2). That land did not belong to anybody—apart from the gods—and had no divisions. It was a land without limits where moose and caribou (the Innu's main game) roamed in large number. Nothing and nobody kept the Innu from going further and further in their search for food. After all, was it not a territory nobody else wanted?

In their search for game, the Innu moved from site to site in small family groups. Depending on the availability of wild game, they would settle on a site for a period of time, anywhere from a few days to a few weeks, rarely longer. Two, three, or four tents would form a campsite for about 20 to 40 people at the most. The tents would be set up along a riverbank or on the edge of a lake, not in circle (fig. 3). The canvas prospector tents of early European explorers had long since replaced their bark summer tent and their caribou hide huts. Easier to use and lighter to carry, though offering good resistance, the canvas tents rendered life a little easier for them. The first canvas tents built by the Innu had the same cone or dome shape as their fur or bark tents.⁴ The canvas tent they still used nowadays is rectangular and has a two-slope roof. Open at one end, it is equipped with a small hand-made wood stove during the winter, located near the entrance, but far enough in to allow people to easily come in and out of the tent. The chimney pipe goes out right above the stove, through a hole in the tent roof (fig. 4). The hand-made stove and chimney are built using sheet metal. That heating device is rather small and light, making it easy to carry. A little bit of sand put inside the stove corners prevents the wooden legs from becoming too hot and burning the floor covered with fragrant fir boughs. That amazing floor—or *sapinage* as it is called locally—that the Innu make for each tent can be more than a foot thick in the winter, while it is usually half as thick during the other seasons. Large fir branches are first laid down with the inside of the branch curve facing the snow. During the winter, the snow-

much more importantly, recognition of the ownership and jurisdiction of the lands they have been occupying and using for centuries is still a major issue.

During the first half of 1999, the author collaborated with members of the Innu community in their search for a more adequate sustainable dwelling, for a house that would correspond to and respect their way of life as well as their aspirations. A design exercise was undertaken by the Cross-Cultural Design Studio in the winter of 1999, to which sixteen students participated. This article reports on the exercise and has been structured in such a way as to reflect the working organization of the design studio.

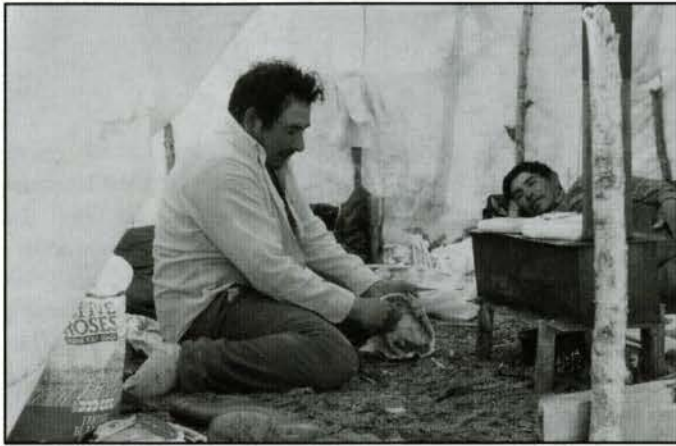
Before the Reserves – The Nomadic Life

The design studio project began by the students thoroughly researching the topic. All aspects of the subject were investigated: the life of the Innu in primitive times, then during the colony, the history of the reserve, the first permanent houses built as well as the current houses, and precedents (similar projects—if any), other people's experiences in the transition from a nomadic to a sedentary way of life, etc.

For thousands of years, the Innu had hunted and fished on the lands north of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, vis-à-vis Anticosti Island. That huge territory, made up of thousands of square

Fig. 6. Skidoos in front of a campsite (the "utatnun" is pulled by the skidoo second to the left).
(Photo: Louise Bellemare and Théo Mark, 1999)

Fig. 5. A comfortable floor made of fir branches.
(Photo: Louise Bellemare and Théo Mark, 1999)



covered ground is carefully packed down before the branches are laid down. The first layer is then covered with much smaller fir branches. That type of floor provides excellent insulation from the cold and turns the uneven ground into a flat, soft, and very comfortable floor (fig. 5). The description of that floor would not be complete if we forgot another one of its outstanding qualities: its smell. In fact, who has never smelled the wonderful fragrance exuded by freshly cut fir branches? The tent is literally filled with that fragrant odour. The introduction of the utatnun, a box-like long and narrow sleigh attached on the back of a skidoo (fig. 6), made it easier for the Innu to transport luggage and they now cover the bough floor with carpets—that nowadays replace the caribou furs used in the past (fig. 4 and 7). The difference lies in the fact that the furs were not brought back home as is, but were transformed, as needed, into moccasins, mittens, or others leather goods.

On the outside of the tent, snow is packed against the sides for insulation from the cold. On the inside, bedclothes, blankets, small mattresses, and clothing are carefully hung up on the tent walls during the daytime (fig. 7). Not only does that arrangement keep the heat in, it is also very comfortable to lean back on! The actual fabric of the tent—the canvas—contributes to create a special interior atmosphere. The canvas is white (or natural light beige) and translucent, and thus allows the outside light to filter in. On nights when the moon is full, the inside of the tent is slightly illuminated. Another interesting characteristic of the tent is directly related to the fact that it is made of fabric, thus allowing exterior noises to penetrate. Those are features that make the living space very much in contact with the surrounding nature.

That type of tent is still used today by the Innu for their hunting and fishing expeditions. Some families sometimes also set up camp near the reserve to trap small game such as beavers, lynx, seals, foxes, wolves, martens, etc., either for their meat or their fur. They may go there for a few days, or even just for a few hours, to relax and to come into closer contact with nature.

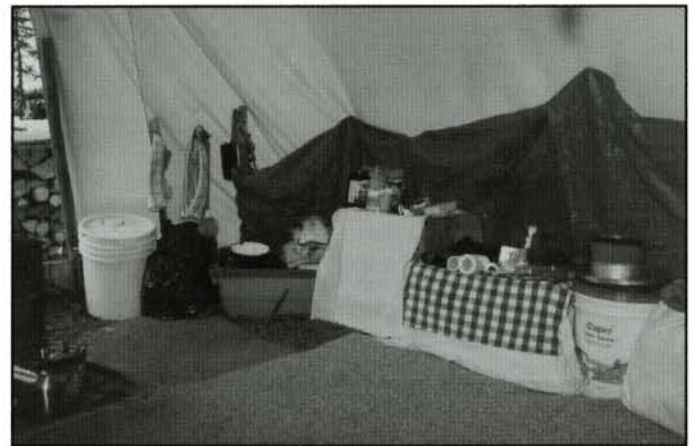


Fig. 7. Things are carefully tied up along the interior walls of the tent.
(Photo: Louise Bellemare and Théo Mark, 1999)

The Reserves – The First Houses

The reserves were created in an effort to concentrate the autochthon population in a smaller area. That was convenient for the allochthons (the white people) who began to be aware of the many yet unexplored resources of that vast land. Wood was one of the first resources to interest the white community (to be precise, fur was the first resource the whites had been interested in, but they were dependent on the natives to hunt them). In the case of La Romaine, the hydroelectric potential and the mineral resources of the area were things men from the south wanted to exploit. For several decades, the Innu had been pushed further and further north, far away from the cities. Since the beginning of the colony, the Catholic Church had also been interested in concentrating the autochthon population in a smaller area—that centralization would greatly facilitate the evangelization it had undertaken. Because of its isolated location, the creation of a reserve on what is known today as La Romaine came quite late as compared to certain other sites. In fact, there are no roads leading to La Romaine. Due to the large number of lakes and rivers in that part of the country, coupled with a very low population density, a road would be extremely costly to build. One has to take a boat or a plane to reach that settlement located on the shores of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, a few hundred kilometres away from the nearest village serviced by a road. In winter, however, things are quite different. The lakes and rivers freeze



Fig. 8. Aerial photograph showing La Romaine and its two settlements. The beige spot in the middle of the photograph is the Innu reserve. Underneath it, is the white people's village on the peninsula, circa 1985. (Photo: Ministère des ressources naturelles du Québec)

families came and fished near the Unamen River. It was often the occasion for great festivities. That is why the site gradually became a trading post—called Nitassinan by the traders—where trading companies, attracted by such large gatherings, came and exchanged goods with the Indians.

Today, La Romaine is made up of two distinct villages or settlements that co-exist side by side. On the west side lies the allochthon or “white” village, on the east side the autochthon or Innu settlement (fig. 8). The allochthon village is a rather spontaneous set-



Fig. 9. A road, a few houses, and the church in the west part of La Romaine. (Photo: Louise Bellemare and Théo Mark, circa 1993)

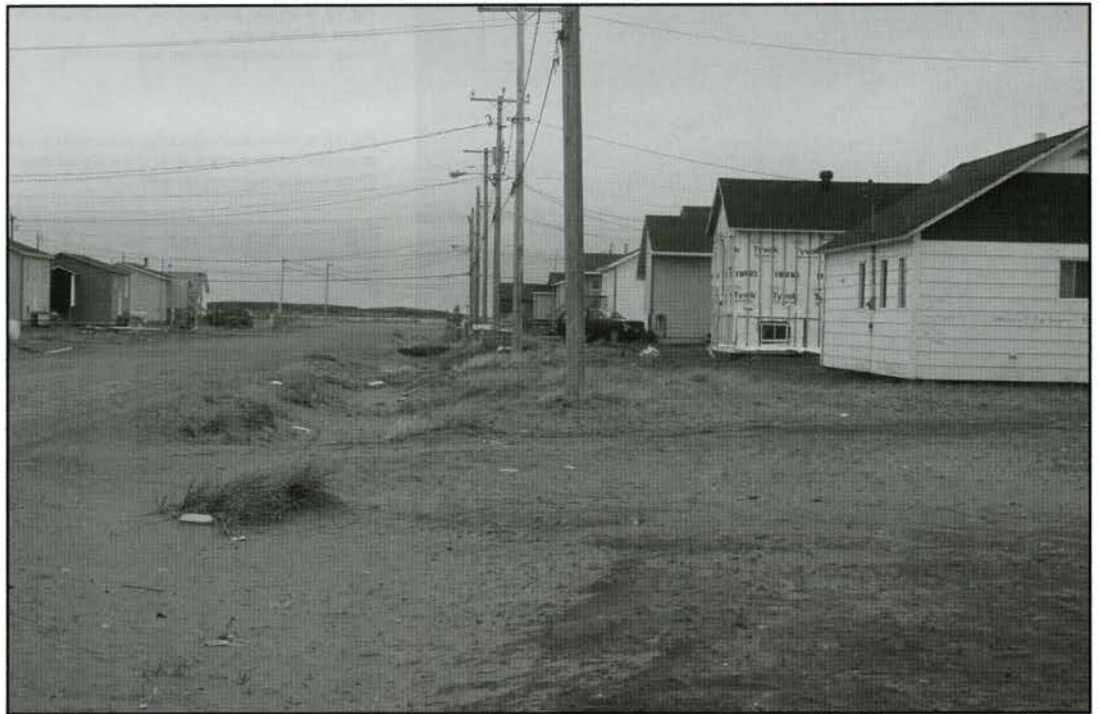
tlement where the houses are all different from one another. They are built on lots that may or may not be bordered by a fence. The village is criss-crossed with a few narrow streets that closely hug the contours of the landscape. Visibly, the houses have been built and progressively transformed by their owners. Every action that is taken is under the direct control of its inhabitants. Autumn starts early November to be precise. The wind is quite strong during that season, and the vegetation has, to say the least, a difficult time. There is nothing luxurious around the houses, simply the natural indigenous vegetation that has survived and can resist in such a climate (fig. 9).

The street layout and the housing design are very different in the autochthon part of La Romaine (the allochthon village is not part of the reserve). The streets are aligned and form a gridiron pattern. Another important difference, the streets are much wider, and bordered by ditches (fig. 10). Many houses are identical. In fact, after a quick walk around the Innu settlement, it is easy to see that the couple of hundred or so houses on the reserve have only been built in four or five different styles. All the houses are more or less set back the same distance from the street and are equidistant from one another. It is obvious that the whole site

over and the land is covered in snow. To the great happiness of local residents and visitors as well, it becomes much easier, if not a pleasure, to circulate. In fact, everyone uses a snowmobile or skidoo to get around in the region and winter roads are well maintained and marked out.

As mentioned above, for many centuries La Romaine had been a seasonal site where the Innu liked to gather. Large

Fig. 10. A dirt street on the reserve bordered by ditches, with the houses well aligned.
(Photo: André Casault, 1998)



was bulldozed prior to construction: it is all sandy or covered by scarce and fragile vegetation.

Around the houses, one will frequently see small sheds or hangars, which replace what was probably a common thing in the past, the traditional conic tent that we rarely see nowadays (fig. 11). Skidoos and canoes are stored in the yard or in the sheds and hangars, which are also often used to repair the skidoos and canoes. A small piece of land, just at the back of the house, is frequently reserved for the preparation of the traditional bread, or Innu pakueshikan as the Innu call it⁹ (fig. 12), which the women cook directly in the hot sand. A few clotheslines can be seen here and there and, at the back of many houses, wood is stacked for the stove.

Elderly people sometimes use the sheds or hangars as “retreats” or, less often, as secondary houses. Those sheds and hangars have the same dimensions as the canvas tents, and the Innu usually install a small handmade wood stove in them and spread a few old carpets on the floor. The elderly like to meet there to smoke a pipe, to chat with friends, or to repair fishing nets, snowshoes, etc.

The residents very seldom put up fences around their lot. The typical North American lawn is practically inexistent⁹ in the Innu part of La Romaine. Only a few families have attempted to landscape the area surrounding their house.¹⁰ Marks of territory



Fig. 11. At the back of a house, an all terrain vehicle, a traditional tent, a skidoo, and a small shed.
(Photo: Louise Bellemare and Théo Mark, circa 1993)

appropriation seem to be more temporary than permanent. Without the obvious and clear street pattern and the rigid alignment of houses, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to recognize any plot area. Demonstrations of property limits are therefore relatively absent. In fact, it would be very interesting to take an aerial photograph of the reserve in the winter, just after a snowfall, to see how people circulate in the reserve, from house to house, in and out of the reserve, walking or using skidoos.



Fig. 12. A woman preparing the "Innu pakueshikan", the traditional Innu bread, at the back of a house on the reserve.
(Photo: Louise Bellemare and Théo Mark, circa 1993)

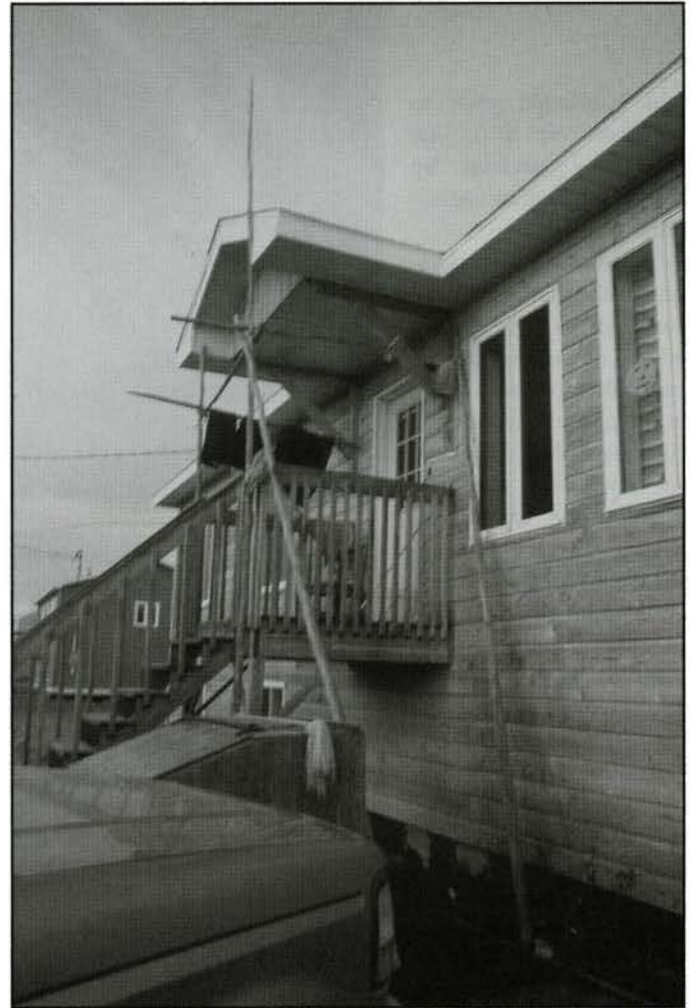
Such photographs would probably confirm what we saw around the houses during our survey, in November: pedestrian paths and small all-terrain vehicle trails totally ignore official plot divisions, at least the ones that exist on paper.

Accesses to the houses, wooden stairs, and small balconies or porches are designed and constructed quite simply. Sometimes, on the porch roof or balcony, people will install a few poles to hang small game or pieces of meat to be dried (fig. 13). There are no carports or garages; people who own a car or truck park it in front of the house or just beside it.

Because the houses must be built on deep foundations (foundation footage at five or six feet below ground level, just beneath freezing level), each house has a basement (a very common way of building in Canada). The first level above the ground is quite high (fig. 13). The basement is practically empty, except for a wood-burning stove. The elderly use that space to prepare caribou hides and dry caribou meat. Today, that little-used space is often claimed by teenagers who like to be able to play their loud music without disturbing their parents (too much), a place where they can have their own private entrance.¹¹

Inside the houses, people usually gather in the living room. In a typical living room, one may see a sofa, a television set, a carpet on the floor, and nothing (or almost) on the walls. In the bedrooms, wardrobe doors have often been removed and there are no clothes on hangers. The wardrobes are quite empty and clothes are instead stacked in the corners of the room (fig. 14). Very often the only piece of furniture is a mattress on the floor. Those rooms seem to be underutilized.¹² The kitchen is generally a typical laboratory kitchen. Usually, the kitchen is the space in the house where food is prepared, cooked and where, in some cultures, people eat. It is an important part of the house where the dwelling habits of a given culture are strongly expressed. Here, the kitchen is neither adaptable nor flexible; the counters are too high for most of the women using them, and the space too small to allow more than a few people in the room at the same time. It would be impossible, at the very least very difficult, to properly and safely install a wood stove. In fact, in the whole design process no attempt has been made to adapt the kitchen layout to the Innu way of life.

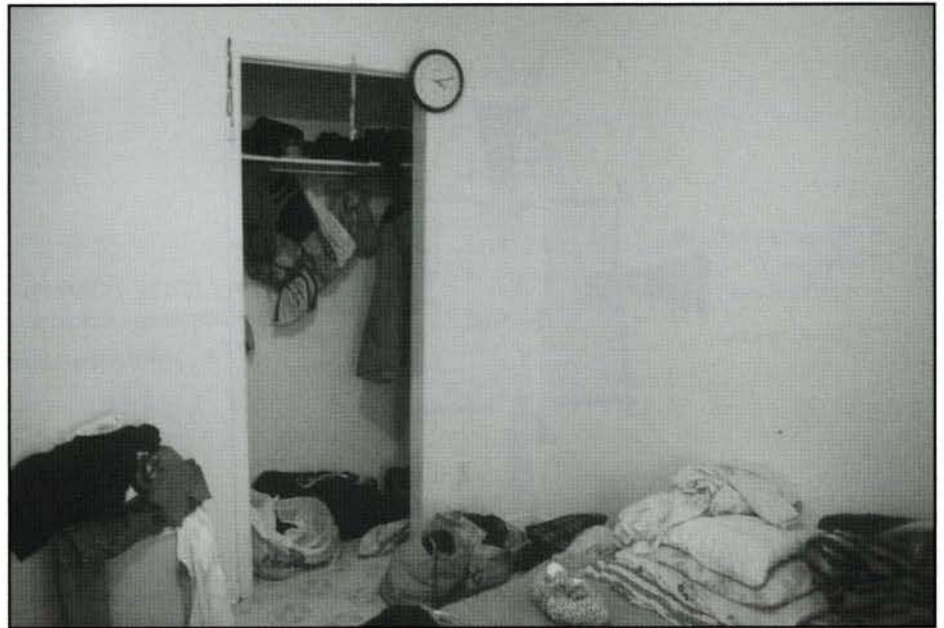
Fig. 13. A roofed porch with a few poles used to hang small game or pieces of meat to be dried. Also notice the high level of the ground floor.
(Photo: André Casault, November 1998)



All building supplies come from outside the reserve. They must be ordered months in advance and are, most of the time, delivered by boat. As all other imported goods, construction materials are expensive and that definitely has an influence on the availability of building supplies for general maintenance.

One does not need to be an expert to realize that the design of Innu houses has simply been imported from the South. The design standards are North American. The layout of the reserve and the design of the houses are planned by outsiders from the Canadian Mortgage Housing Corporation or from the Ministry of Indian Affairs.¹³ Until now, no participatory process has preceded the design or the construction of dwellings on the reserve. What kind of control, if any, do the Innu have over the construction of their settlement and dwellings?

Fig. 14. Who should adapt to whom, the wardrobe to the people or the people to the wardrobe?
(Photo: André Casault, 1998)



A Design Exploration A Search for a Sustainable Dwelling Better Adapted to the Innu's Contemporary Way of Life

The design studio and research were based on three major premises. First, the house form is highly influenced by a community's culture and the daily life of its members. Secondly, the Innu socio-cultural aspirations play a very important role in shaping the dwelling form. And thirdly, it is extremely important that the residents have a control over the house design, construction, and transformation in order for the house to have a shape that is adapted to their particular needs.

Those three premises and the design studio's general structure and activities derive from my own experience in teaching design in cross-cultural situations, as well as from diverse theoretical works: John N. Habraken on the importance of syntax, territorial boundaries, and control concepts and rules versus space deployment; Christopher Alexander mainly for the rules–design patterns–; Amos Rapoport for the influence of culture and domestic activities in modifying the house form; and Augustin Berque for the ethical notion of territorialization/deterritorialization in association with the relation the Innu maintain with their natural and built environment.¹⁴

The first phase of the design process consisted in searching the principles or patterns that would be used to define the rules that would guide the design of the first prototypes. The objective of the search for such rules was to help the designers (here the students in a learning process) by giving them guidelines. The latter would ensure the respect of the cultural aspects through the design mechanism, thus helping to create a certain uniformity in the proposed prototypes.¹⁵ The rules (we have called them the rules of deployment) were presented to a few members of the community for discussion and evaluation. They were then experimented with for a quick exercise session—about a week—during which the first sketches were produced. The sketches were presented and discussed in a meeting and a few informal discussions, and comments were given to reorient the design work. A particular effort was made to encourage the students to follow the rules, which was not particularly popular in the beginning (for the students, the general tendency was to revert to their habitual and much more idiosyncratic method of design). Intermediary and final design proposals were produced and evaluated

with the participating community members. Sixteen prototypes were prepared (sets of drawings and models) and presented to the entire community for discussion.

The Rules of Deployment

The exploration of the rules lasted about a week. In groups of four, the students worked on four different categories of rules. The first category consisted of the rules regulating the relationship between the dwelling and the site and nature in general (large scale): orientation, sun, wind, configuration, and relationship with neighbours, etc. The second category was made up of the rules regulating indoor activities: sleeping, cooking, eating, working, playing, etc. The third category dealt with the rules regulating the narrow relationship between the house and its immediate surroundings and outdoor domestic activities: access, entry, threshold, view (windows and others openings), light, etc. The fourth and final category consisted of the rules regulating construction of the dwelling: building materials and techniques, labour skills, maintenance, transportation, feasibility, sustainability, etc.

As mentioned before, the students defined the rules after thoroughly researching the subject and according to observations made while visiting Innu campsites and houses on the reserve. The following enumeration of rules is by no means exhaustive. It rather lists the most important rules, the ones that were most often used in the design process. Since we concentrated mainly on the dwelling, I will begin by introducing the rules that guided the design, and continue with the rules related to construction.¹⁶

One of the most important rules deals with the development of a large, central and versatile room in the house. That room should be located on the main floor and be well connected to the other rooms in the house. It should be large enough to accommodate a big family gathering (fig. 15). A second important rule concerns the wood stove. We have already described how it is

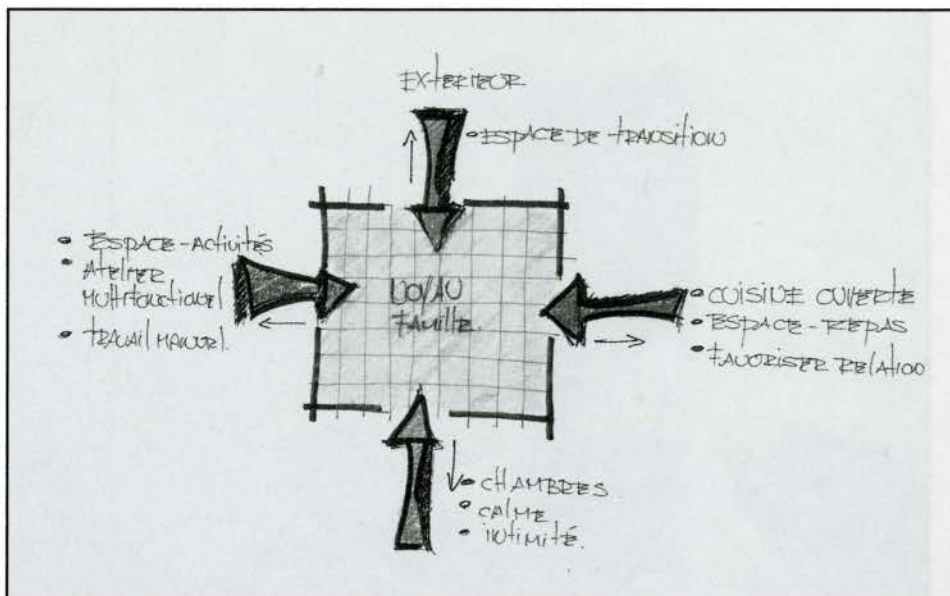


Fig. 15. An example of a rule, the need for a central room.

(From the rules elaborated by Karine Fourmier, Marie-France Biron and Karine Simard, students from the Cross Cultural Design Studio, winter 1999)

which allow the Innu to sit on the floor yet still be in contact both with the people doing other activities in the house, and with the outside. Contacts with the W.C., however, should be minimized. The Innu (as they willingly admit themselves) are rather prudish. The toilet and bathroom should therefore be apart from the main room of the house, and in retreat from other activities.

used in the tents. While visiting the reserve we also observed the place it occupies in the shelters that people build behind their houses. Based on those observations, it was decided that the house should be able to accommodate a wood-burning stove and everything that goes with it (proper base, tools, wood bin, etc.). The stove should be in a central location, convenient for family gatherings; it should also be close enough to the cooking area to facilitate meal preparation. Another important rule deals with house accesses. At least one access (if not two) should be through a large enclosed vestibule, large enough to allow two or three people dressed in heavy winter clothes and boots to come in or go out together. That hall should have two doors in order to create an airlock type intermediary room, to prevent loss of heat and wind while stopping snow from entering the house; it should be sufficiently large and adaptable to contain a large freezer and a deep maintenance sink. Another rule concerns the "transition space" linking the halls or vestibules with the surroundings and nature. Entrances to the house should be as close as possible to ground level, with the main floor of the house in close relation with the exterior, neither too high nor too low (a low entrance creates problems with snow during the winter and a high entrance is unpleasant for the elderly). Every room in the house should have a good view of the outside in order to allow the residents to be in close contact with their surroundings and to easily feel daily and seasonal transformations as well as changes in the weather.

Yet other rules deal with the floor and sitting rooms. The material in which the floor is made should be versatile enough to accommodate a wide variety of activities. For example, the Innu usually prepare their furs in the house. The floor should therefore be easy to wash and very resistant. While in their tents, the Innu sit on the floor (the comfortable sapinage floor described above). In much the same way, in their houses, they also often work, play, watch television, or simply chat with friends while sitting on the floor. The layout of the rooms and the design of the floor should be such so as to create comfortable sitting areas,

used in the tents.

Rules related to work space(s), cooking and sleeping areas, and storage devices were also defined. Spaces that are convenient to use for all traditional Innu activities, with the appropriate dimensions and surfaces, should be integrated into the house or be very easily accessed from it. Rooms should be set aside for the repair of skidoos, canoes, fishing nets, etc., for the preparation of skins (tanning, drying, smoking, and cutting), as well as for the sewing of mittens, moccasins, and other objects. Cooking areas should be flexible and adaptable in order to allow different cooking methods (traditional) to be used. The wood stove should be installed in such a way as to be accessible for different cooking activities in or near the cooking area. Sleeping areas should be in retreat from the main activities of the house but do not necessarily have to be made up of separate rooms. Standard North American bedrooms seem underutilized, at least during the daytime. Many cultures store clothes differently from the way we do in our western cultures. The Innu are no exception to that and they do not seem fond of the standard North American wardrobe. Perhaps they simply need a different storage device. The students were therefore encouraged to explore better-adapted storage devices that would reflect the needs and traditional storage habits of the Innu (for example, the way they store their clothes and other objects in their campsites (fig. 7).

Other rules were related to house shape and size. The house shape should be simple and economical, with a two or four-slope roof. It should be energy efficient and the shape should be such so as not to create any undesirable accumulation of snow around the house (for example, making access difficult). The proposed prototypes should have approximately the same size and price (or less expensive) as the ones presently built on the reserve, by no means bigger or more expensive.

Finally, a few rules were established concerning building methods, construction techniques, and construction materials. All building methods and construction techniques should be easily applicable in and by the community. They should be

accessible to local manpower. Maximum participation of local manpower should be encouraged. Building supplies should be easy to transport by boat (neither too heavy nor too big). Building elements and components should be easy to maintain and repair, and easily accessible when they need to be replaced. Construction materials should be ecological and sustainable.

The rules, as defined by the students, were presented to members of the community and to a group of teachers for discussion, and evaluation. A final selection of the appropriate rules was then made and used in the elaboration of the first sketches.

The First Sketches

The students were required to use the rules elaborated. In teams of two, they were given a week to prepare their first sketch. On the one hand, the rules served as “runway lights” or “beacons” to guide the designers’ work. On the other hand, the relatively short time that was given them necessarily brought a dose of spontaneity and intuitiveness to the process, which, we believe, was complementary to the rational aspect of the rule method (and perhaps its shortcoming). The first sketches were presented and discussed at the school of architecture in the presence of a few residents of La Romaine and the group of teachers. Rarely was a rule discarded. Rather, it was reformulated or restated in a different manner. The residents of La Romaine who participated in that first discussion had the mandate of bringing the sketches back to the reserve and presenting them to a small group of people interested in the project. The sketches were also discussed informally with friends and relatives. Neither the teachers nor any architects or construction professionals took part in the discussions. The evaluation had to be as free of outer influences as possible and professional advice and consultations were planned for a subsequent phase.

Sixteen schemes (one per student) were prepared during that phase. In the paragraphs below, are described the main characteristics of those schemes, what made them stand out and what aspects raised the most discussion among our Innu clients.¹⁷ Some schemes reflected one or several facets of the traditional setting (the campsite) such as the conic roof, the circular plan, or the use of local construction materials such as log walls. Some others were more influenced by the settlement as it exists today and the way the Innu live in it. These latter schemes were more contemporary in their approach and often integrated modern reinterpretations of tradition with complex forms: several flat or sloped roofs, large glass openings, a fashionable look, etc. Others had a more “modest” approach and were more preoccupied with creating interesting spaces for domestic activities.

Generally, those schemes had simpler house shapes. The houses proposed had one or two stories, some had basements, others not. Some had mezzanines incorporated in their design. Some schemes had a pit around the wood stove in the central room, while others proposed a long built-in bench along the wall. Some had vestibules, others not. Some proposed a flat horizontal ceiling while others left the roof structure visible, generally with a sloped ceiling. Some had built-in tables and seats in the kitchen. A variety of bedroom layouts were presented, some enclosed, some set apart from the rest of the house. Finally, certain houses had a patio or a terrace, and some had a shed or a small hangar in the yard.

To the great disappointment of my students, all complicated shapes, either for the house itself or for the roof, were discarded. Fashionable designs and new and sometimes inventive or intriguing design ideas (often put forward by good students) were not discarded, but simply ignored (at least the ones that were proper to the architects’ “culture of taste.”¹⁸ Flat roof dwelling schemes were rejected, as if a dwelling could not be lived in if it had a flat roof. One-storey houses were preferred to the two storeys, while houses with mezzanines were seen as a curiosity and raised a certain amount of interest. The design of outdoor elements such as patios or terraces did not seem to attract any interest or attention.

The simplest schemes were the most popular among the Innu: a simple rectangular shape, a two or four-slope roof, a relatively “plain” appearance... My students were not depressed but almost... I remember some of them saying: “What the Innu really want are the bungalows they are presently living in...!” In fact, the resemblance between their bungalows and the schemes they chose was striking... but not surprising! Looking closer at the selections made, it is obvious that they were greatly influenced by what the Innu are familiar with in terms of dwellings, what they have been exposed to in real life (in contrast to just seeing it on television), that is to say canvas tents and bungalows. At that stage, I had to make a choice: I could either leave the students free to design houses that they would themselves like to live in (and I as well in some cases!) and more or less ignore the wishes of our clients or, and that is what I decided to do, stick to the initial objectives we had set, and ask the students to develop simpler shaped dwellings. They had to focus on finding the right solutions to the Innu’s spatial needs for traditional and domestic activities, and to better develop and clarify the design of details. All that said, I must point out that many features presented by the students in those first sketches were seen as being very positive, such as the design of central living areas, the space

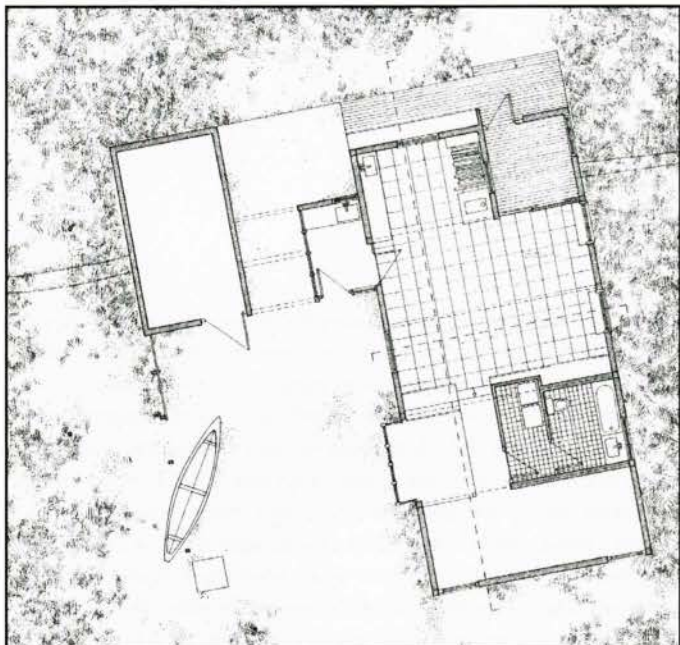


Fig. 16. The plan of a proposed prototype, with two large vestibules, a large central room, a wood stove in between the kitchen and the central room, a sleeping area in retreat, and a hangar next to the house.

(Project by Frédéric Bataillard, Cross Cultural Design Studio, winter 1999)

Fig. 19. Section and elevation drawings showing the general shape of the house, the use of the crawl space underneath the house, and the elevated central room, see the plan in Fig. 18.

(Project by Pierre Duguay, Cross Cultural Design Studio, winter 1999)

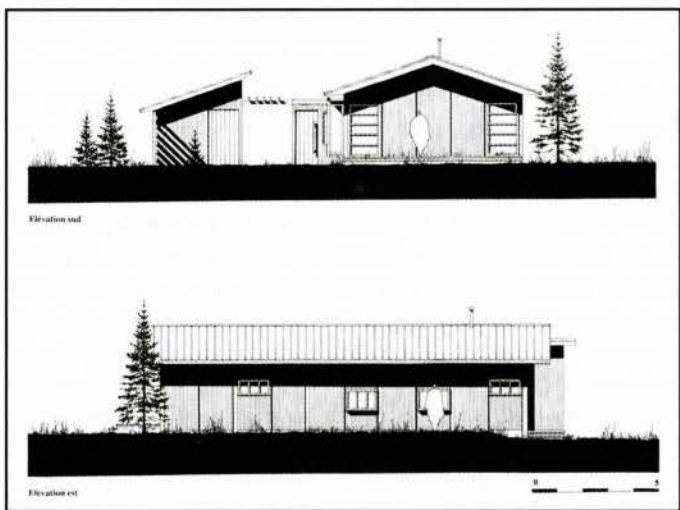
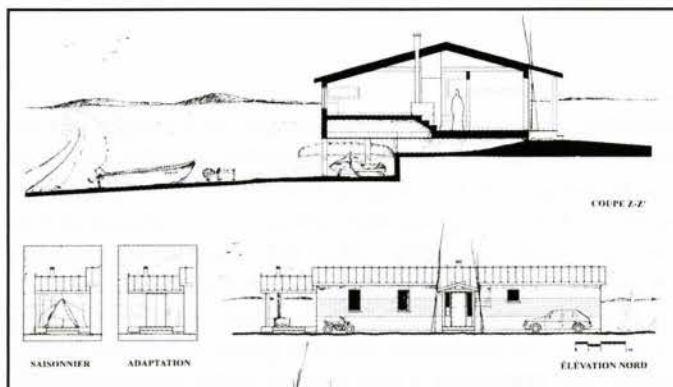


Fig. 17. Two elevation drawings showing the two slope roof, the simple shape of the house, and the hangar next to it, see the plan in Fig. 16.

(Project by Frédéric Bataillard, Cross Cultural Design Studio, winter 1999)

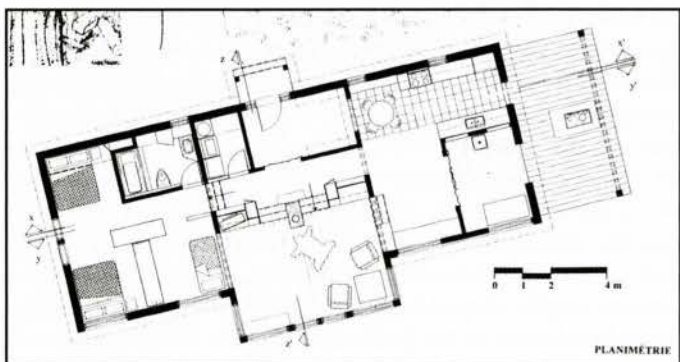


Fig. 18. Another plan showing the main vestibule leading to the central area which is slightly elevated, with the wood stove in the middle. In this scheme, the second vestibule is equipped with a stove and can also be used as a working place. Here, the bedrooms are more conventional.

(Project by Pierre Duguay, Cross Cultural Design Studio, winter 1999)

allocated to wood stoves, house accesses and vestibules. Nevertheless, most of them had to be refined and developed in more detail.

Final Phase

Using the first sketches and comments we had received from the community as a basis, we continued to work in the above-mentioned direction, developing on each scheme.¹⁹ I was very encouraged by the improvements brought about by the students. Obviously, they had seriously thought things through. Unfortunately, community members did not participate in that intermediate review. We simply had a few telephone conversations during which they were made aware of the general orientations that the design of the prototypes had taken.

At the final review, at a first glance, the different schemes may have appeared to be nothing more than standard (and elegant!) bungalow designs. However, for me, for my students, for our guest reviewers, and, most importantly, for our clients, the reaction was very different: they were "special bungalows."²⁰ In fact, looking at each proposed prototype individually, one could see that special emphasis had been put on the planning of the houses: the entrance hall, the central room with its wood stove, the working place, the sleeping areas, the storage devices, the hangar and its link with the house, etc. (fig. 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20 briefly present an overview of the final prototypes).²¹

Next Steps...

The whole process is very slow. The sixteen models were recently shipped to Sept-Îles and presented to three Innu Band Councils, including the Innu Chiefs of Unamen Shipu. The work must still be presented to and discussed with the local population. That should be followed by the construction of a one-to-one scale model. A first prototype will be built and tested... eventually! Obviously, that rather simple and short first phase exercise could not lead us (or anyone) to any profound conclusions. The problem is extremely complex and a great deal more investigation

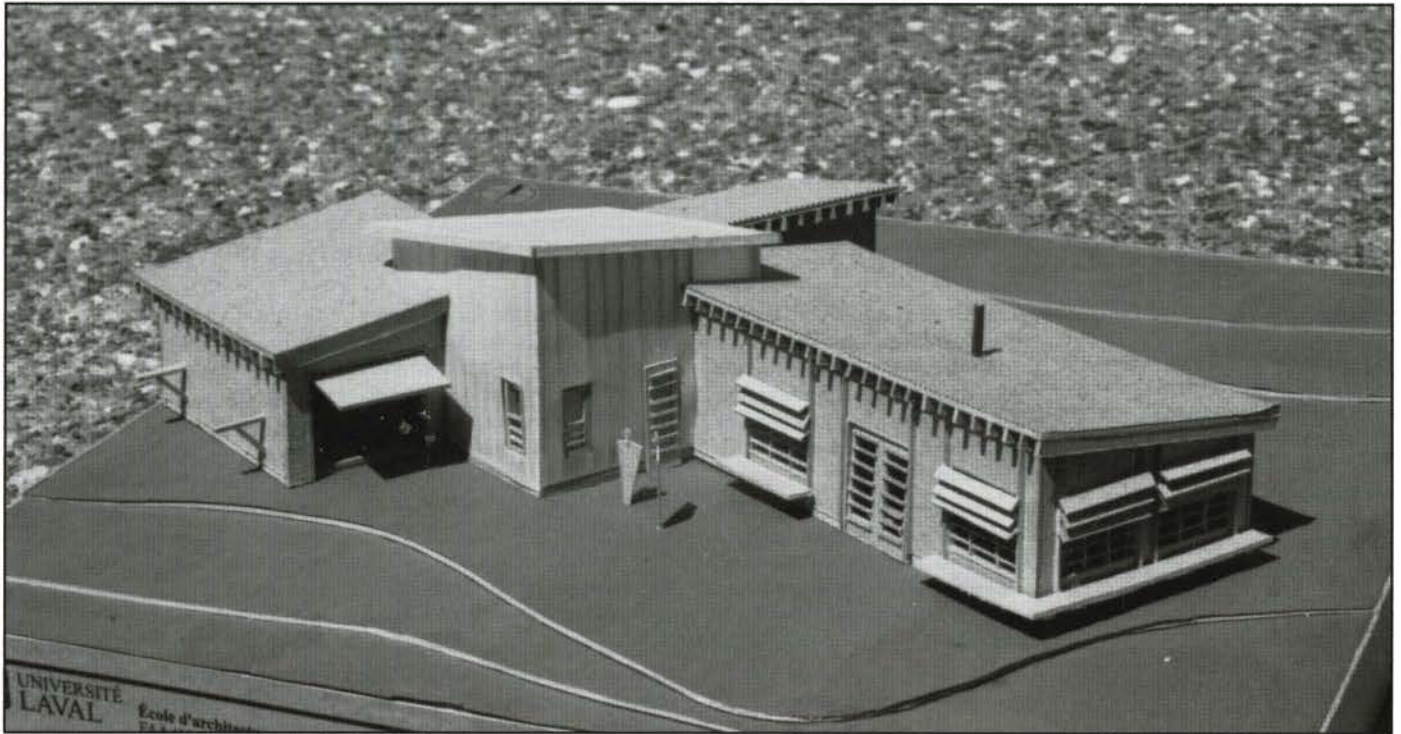


Fig. 20. A model showing the central translucent vestibule, linking the hangar to the left, the main body of the house with the kitchen and the central room to the right, and the sleeping pavilion at the back.

(Source: Project by Karine Fournier, Cross Cultural Design Studio, winter 1999)

and experimentation must be undertaken, in close relation with the Innu, before any lasting solutions can be found. A lot remains to be done. However, both sides have learned to work together, defining vocabularies and clarifying objectives. For the time being, the Innu are much more concerned (and rightly so) with self-government and control over their territories.

The End of Tradition(?), Deterritorialization(?), A Place-less Culture(?)

All over the world, the autochthons, more than any other cultural or ethnic group, are fighting for their recognition as a people and are struggling to define themselves in our globalized world. In their fight, whether we like it or not, autochthons have turned to aboriginal people in other countries and to the United Nations for support, and the definition of their traditions and culture now goes through an international "filter." The way in which they perceive and therefore define themselves is necessarily much vaster than the limits of their own territory.

It would be highly unrealistic to think that the autochthons could go back to their traditional way of life. However, although their complete assimilation into the mainstream of the Canadian society is highly possible, it is not inevitable. It is not inevitable if the Innu themselves, as many other cultural groups in the world, fight for the recognition of their way of life, fight for their own self-government. Basically, it comes down to nothing less than the right to be different. New means of communications (television, internet, etc.) are contributing to globalize that fight

while, at the same time, underlining the importance of differences.²²

The built environment is perhaps becoming more uniform worldwide. However, that uniformity cannot be enriching if it results in everyone giving up his or her own cultural specificities and even idiosyncrasies, in an attempt to follow the strongest and most influential ones. That uniformity can, however, also be rich, vast, complex, and diverse if we let it be. It all depends on us.

For many years the Innu of La Romaine will be able to define themselves geographically and territorially. But to do so, they need to take full control of their built environment. That control over the deployment of the built environment is the major guarantee that the dwelling form will correspond to a local culture, whatever it is. Of course, as every other group, the Innu will have to find their place, explicitly and implicitly, in relation to an increasingly vaster world. That part of the redefinition of their identity is place-less. Their "house hunting" will continue...

Notes

1. In this article the terms native people and autochthon are used to describe the type of ethnic group to which the Innu of Unamen Shipu belong. The Innu and all the other autochthon groups of Canada are so-called because they are considered to be the first inhabitants of Canada, established there long before the arrival of the first European settlers.
2. Please refer to Vitart, Anne, 1995, *Les Indiens montagnais du Québec – entre deux mondes*, Paris, Les Éditions Sépia, Musée de l'homme, p. 11-34.
3. That exercise was undertaken by a group of students from the Cross-Cultural Design Studio (winter 1999) at the School of Architecture of Université Laval, Quebec City, Canada.
4. For a few examples, please refer to Bédard, Hélène, 1988, *Les Montagnais et la réserve de Betsiamites 1850–1900*, Québec, Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, Collection Edmond-de-Nevers n° 7, p. 61.
5. Traditionally, North American Christmas trees are fir trees.
6. Charron, Denise, and René Boudreault, 1994, *La Romaine: Unaman-shipit*, Québec, Conseil de bande de La Romaine, Institut culturel et éducatif montagnais, p. 12.
7. The name La Romaine comes from the Innu words *orumen* and *olumenne* that mean painting, red earth, red ochre, and represent the colour of the earth on the river edge (Charron and Boudreault).
8. Fortin, Jean, o.m.i. (1954-1980), 1992, *Coup d'œil sur le monde merveilleux des Montagnais de la Côte-Nord*, Québec, Canada, Institut québécois de la culture montagnaise (ICEM), p. 76.
9. An exhibition of the Canadian Center for Architecture (CCA) in Montreal, Canada, a few years ago, presented an exhibit on the "American Lawn" and how, over the last decades, it has become an object of cultural representation used as a strong demonstration of social status and clear territory delimitation.
10. To grow grass around one's house may sometimes be laughed at by other members of the community and is seen by some white people as something that Indians cannot do.
11. As do a lot of their young white people counterparts.
12. Those observations and remarks may appear to be intuitive rather than based on real fact. I cannot deny, in fact, the intuitive aspect of the survey work that has been done. Although I wish I could have undertaken an extensive survey before starting the design exercise, I believe that three things allowed me to go further and participate in that explorative design exercise with my students. First of all, those observations were made during my visit to La Romaine in the fall of 1998. I had the opportunity to visit the reserve and about thirty houses, and to be guided by a few local people from the reserve, including Sylvestre Mullen, the person in charge of housing construction, renovation, and maintenance in the reserve and our local partner in the exercise, as well as Louise Bellemare and Théo Mark, also from La Romaine, who actively took part in the design exercise and helped us during the entire semester. Secondly, over the years, I have accumulated a fair amount of experience as an architect, professor of architecture, and researcher in the field, not only in my own country, but in many other countries where I lived or which I have visited extensively, and where I regularly have the opportunity to work and participate in design exercises or field research with local colleagues. Thirdly, the literature on the subject of the Montagnais or Innu, though not yet very extensive on the subject of architecture and dwelling culture, has been a valuable source of valid information. All of that has greatly helped us to minimize the gratuity or fortuitous nature of some of our observations.
13. Or by private firms they commissioned. See also Fortin : 50.
14. In addition, the following are the references used for the design exploration and research; Berque, Augustin, 1996, *Être humain sur la terre*, Paris, Éditions Gallimard; and Berque, Augustin, 2000, *Écoumène, Introduction à l'étude des milieux humains*, Paris, Éditions Belin (for the writing of this article); Rapoport, Amos, 1972, *House Form and Culture*, Paris, Dunod (for the French translation).
15. Our main point of reference is the work of John Habraken, mainly: Habraken, N. John, et al., 1981, *The Grunfeld Variations: A Report on Thematic Development of an Urban Tissue*, Cambridge, Mass., Ed. Dept. of Architecture Massachusetts of Technology. We also examined the excellent research project undertaken by the Minimum Cost Housing Group of the School of Architecture of McGill University: Bhatt, Vikram, et al., 1990, *How The Other Half Builds* (Vol. 1, 2, and 3), Montreal, Ed. MCHG, McGill University. The works of Christopher Alexander, Thomas Thiis-Evensen and Giancarlo De Carlo were also examined.
16. The students did not have to follow all the rules. They were free to choose, among the rules defined, a set of rules that they judged relevant. They could of course adapt or modify them, and even create new ones. But, whatever rules they chose, they had to be critical, explaining their choices and why and how they were using them.
17. For the architects and teachers involved either in the exercise or in the reviews, the preparation of the first sketches was the occasion to raise the appropriate questions with a larger number of community members.
18. Here, we are referring to that "culture of taste" that is propagated in the world of architecture by international architectural magazines (some say the glazy ones) and that have a huge influence on architects and architecture students.
19. In most cases, I encouraged the students to keep their initial ideas, to adapt and develop them, instead of asking them to start from scratch.
20. Here, the term "bungalow" refers to its common and popular meaning in eastern regions of Canada.
21. A report, that includes the sixteen prototypes developed, was edited and is to be presented along with the models to the Innu community at La Romaine. We saw that work as the first phase of an extensive project. The second phase anticipated was the development of a first model at a scale of one-to-one, which people could visit and comment. That one-to-one scale model would hopefully lead to the construction of a first real prototype, which could be inhabited for testing and further evaluations.
22. In the last decades, the redefinition and recognition of ethnic minorities have necessarily passed by some international institutions under the eye of the world's television network.