C O N N E C T I N G
T W O
C O M M U N I T I E S

The Impact of a Shared Space Between Two Communities

Disclaimer and Land Acknowledgement

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Cet zine a été produit dans le cadre du programme de microsubventions pour l'exploration créative ou culturelle du Musée du Montréal juif, avec le soutien des Fonds d'innovation communautaire et le Fondation Betty Averbach. Les points de vue et opinions exprimés dans ce projet et/ou événement sont ceux du (des) créateur(s) et ne reflètent pas nécessairement la position du Musée du Montréal juif. Le Fonds d'innovation communautaire est en partie financé par le Programme de partenariats pour le développement social du gouvernement du Canada – volet enfants et familles. Il fait partie du plan d'action pour les langues officielles – 2018-2023 : Investir dans notre avenir. Le Fonds est géré par le Quebec Community Groups Network.

We are not historians nor claim to be. This zine is dedicated to the rarely told history of Chinatown. It's about how on this land, Jewish and Chinese communities resided side by side. We want to explore what they faced and how we can try to bring our communities together. This work is an attempt to explain this history through available sources and interviewees whose experiences may differ from certain recorded history. This zine is produced through a lay person's lens and does not claim to be an academic source. Above all, we hope this zine can add or open discussions about the displacement of communities that are affected by gentrification and systemic barriers.

We want this to be a conversation starter and hope it will encourage people to further appreciate Chinatown's history. This neighbourbood is on the unceded land of the Kanien'kehá:ka nation in Tiohtià:ke. We recognize them as the custodians of the land and waters on which the Chinatown community exists.

Authors, Editors and Interviewers

Maka

Creator/Author

Maka started the @mychinatownmtl Instagram page in 2021 in response to the anti-Asian racism Chinatown faced during the peak of the pandemic in hopes to raise awareness of gentrification, xenophobia, and racism that Chinatown and the Asian community experienced. Some recent projects completed include the zine “Pass the Nước Mắm” which she co-created and is now sold out. During le cœur d’île de Montréal summer festivities in Chinatown, Maka co-hosted and co-produced two comedy shows “Chinatown Comedy Nights”, and co-organized a Mahjong night. With continuing the mission of raising awareness of the issues Chinatown faces, she hopes to bring additional awareness to other historical factors of Chinatown.

Terry

Editor/Videographer

Asian-Canadian writer, outsider art filmmaker, and multimedia producer from east side Montreal. He specializes in exercising lo-fi maximalism as protest against an entertainment industry suffocated by oligarchy, trends, and systemic discrimination/bias. The works’ goals are to narrow the gap between outsider art and the mainstream, along with reshaping who the mainstream represents and champions. Terry’s recent volunteer commitment to social justice / community activism—Chinatown Working Group, Justice for Ronny Kay, Progressive Chinese Quebeckers, Chinatown Roundtable, and JIA Foundation—Informs his interest in exploring and contributing to cultural representation.

Diamond Yao

Editor

Diamond is an independent writer/journalist who focuses on contemporary social and environmental issues. Based in Montreal/Tio'tia:ke, she aims to bring underreported stories and perspectives into the open to add to important conversations. Much of her work focuses on marginalized voices, intersectionality, diaspora, sustainability and social justice. Her work has been featured in many outlets that include Toronto Star, Washington Post, CBC, The Canadian Encyclopedia, and Le Devoir.

Walter Chi-Yan Tom

Walter Chi-Yan Tom is the principal partner of a law firm specializing in immigration and business law as well as the coordinator of a university legal information clinic. But his real passion is community activism. Among his numerous volunteer activities, he has fought against racist practices affecting Asians and other ethnocultural Canadians in Quebec, challenged governmental policies that systemically discriminate against visible minorities, advocated the cause of community economic development in Montreal, campaigned for redress and justice for Chinese-Canadian head tax payers and their families, and helped free wrongfully jailed protesters at the 2001 Summit of the Americas in Quebec City.

Walter has been an executive board member and advisor for more than a dozen community and professional organizations, such as the Federation of Chinese Canadian Professionals (Quebec), the Montreal Chinese Community United Centre, the Federation of Filipino-Canadian Association of Quebec, Pinay Filipino Women's Association, the Nigerian Association of Canada, the Centre for Research Action and Race Relations, the Canadian Bar Association (Quebec Immigration section), the American Association of Jurists (continental section), the Montreal Mayor's Foundation for Youth a City of Montreal advisor on municipal policies on economic development, immigration and integration of ethnocultural communities.

As a lawyer, businessperson, parent of three young children and long-time social activist, he has managed to blend and balance the daily demands of his professional life and family life with his volunteer community work.

Timothy Chan

A guardian of Chinatown's collective memory, Timothy Chiu Man Chan remains a source of wisdom and a symbol of resilience. Recognized as the de facto historian by his community, Chan has devoted more than half a century to documenting and preserving the stories of the lo wah kiu (old overseas Chinese) for future generations.

Day's Lee

Day's Lee is a Montreal author and documentary filmmaker. She produced, directed and wrote the documentary Meet and Eat at Lee's Garden which was nominated for a Canadian Screen Award in 2022. As an author, Lee has written stories about the Chinese-Canadian community. She has published a children's picture book, a young adult novel and a collection of short stories. Her website is www.dayslee.ca.

Settlement

When one's home becomes a stage for profit, we lose sight of community. Chinatown was once a community hub. While some institutions and iconic restaurants may still exist, most institutions built that catered to its residents have disappeared or are on the brink of disappearance. Prior to Chinatown being known as Chinatown, the area was a prominent Jewish neighborhood that had its own institutions that catered to them. Synagogues, restaurants, schools and stores were well and alive. This occurred during the 18th century, when a migration of Jewish folks from Eastern Europe arrived, and settled around the streets of Saint-Laurent and Dorchester (now René-Lévesque) in Montréal.

To put into perspective how big the community was, Yiddish was the third most spoken language in Montréal at the time (French was primary, and English secondary). In 2023, the third most spoken language in Montréal is Arabic. Mandarin comes in 5th place.

When the Chinese came after building the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1885, those who stayed in Montréal were placed together with the Jewish community on the southern part of Main Street of Montréal - today known as Saint-Laurent boulevard.

Settlement was not easy as the Chinese community was adapting and creating its own spaces by opening laundromats and restaurants. Systemic discrimination through licensing fees and other discriminatory

Chinese labourers working on the Canadian Pacific Railway in the mountains of British Columbia, 1881. The railway from Vancouver to Craigellachie consisted of 28 such sections, only 2% of which were constructed by workers of European origin. - Wikipedia

legislations, such as the Chinese head tax and Chinese Exclusion Act, fueled Sinophobia throughout the nation.

Similarly, the Jewish community were often faced with segregation through the education system that affected their religious practice and integration, which also ended up segregating them from other social services as well. By default, this meant that these two communities had to bring forward their own social services.

By the early 1900s, Chinese folks had occupied most of the area now known as Chinatown (see map on next page), while the Jewish population ended up moving north of Saint-Laurent boulevard. As shown on the map, most storefronts are Chinese. By the 80s and 90s, Chinatown became distinguished by its erected arches. Yet simultaneously, the construction of Highway Ville-Marie (1970s), Guy-Favreau Complex (1983), and Palais des Congrès/Montréal Convention Centre (1977-1983) drove many Chinese folks to leave Chinatown. Despite the construction of the highway and buildings, the erection of the arches was ironically commemorating them at the same time. Through these arches, the municipal government's idea was to commodify the area into a tourist hub. Thus, it shifted Chinatown from a space for families and multiple communities to thrive and exist to a space for more businesses, restaurants and commerce.

SEE SHEET No 17
DUFFERIN SQUARE

DUFFERIN SQUARE

96

97

WATER WORKS YARD

LAGAUCHETIÈRE WEST

CHENEVILLE

ST LAURENT

93

BOOLE ST

94

95

ISAAC ALLEY

CLARKE

VITRE WEST

Education

Most of what shapes our community and society is our education system. The education system plays a prominent role in how we shape our future generations and landscape. What we currently see in our education system through redlining within Quebec, particularly in Montréal, is the aftermath of all these policies.

The education sector in Quebec was segregated. Because Quebec was a religious province, schools were divided between two religions: Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. The Roman Catholic schools were francophone and only accepted other French Roman Catholics, while the Protestant schools would allow Jewish and Chinese students to register. If you wanted to be part of the French education system, you had to be Catholic. Protestant schools were accepting Jewish and Chinese students to increase their registration numbers, which allowed them to gain more funding. Given that tax dollars from homeowners determined which school boards you paid your taxes to, the Jewish community began feeling resentment, as some Jewish homeowners were still obligated to attend Protestant schools despite their religious affiliation.

The education system was not fully developed in the 60s. Just after WWII, the education system in Quebec was abysmal - only 13% of Francophones and 11% of Anglophones graduated high school (grade 11). With such a low graduation rate, there was interference from the provincial government to implement better policies to ensure a stronger and better equipped workforce of French Canadians. Those efforts became known as the Parent Commission, a three volume text with 500 recommendations. Part of the recommendations was to continue separating the Catholic and Protestant schools, resulting in 55 Catholic school boards and 9 Protestant school boards.

An article published in The Canadian Encyclopedia, "Jewish School Question", lays out the educational hardships that the Jewish community faced. It explores the Pinsler Case and the Education Act of 1903, which puts into perspective how difficult it was to gain systemic religious recognition and acceptance. The Pinsler Case was about Jacob Pinsler who won a scholarship to attend a Protestant high school and the ensuing backlash as Pinsler was Jewish and his family were renters. Their lack of home ownership meant that they did not financially contribute to the education system, because they didn't pay land tax. The trial ended with Pinsler's scholarship being revoked.

To this day, there is little acceptance for the equal right to representation in provincially funded education for the Jewish community. At best, what came out of this strenuous fight was the demand for secularism within the education system. This does not mean that discrimination in hiring and other factors evaporated when the Quebec education system became secular. Tensions still remain; with a rise in the number of anglophones, francophones began fearing the idea of bilingualism becoming the norm in Quebec. The education system that favoured French Catholics failed to incorporate the Jewish community into their education system. This failure allowed English Protestant school boards to incorporate the Jewish demographic, which furthered the linguistic divide.

Walter Chi-Yan Tom, an activist for the Montreal Chinatown community, provides a brief history of his educational experiences which offers a framework on how the education system ran during the 70s.

> "One of the things that really brought the two communities closer together was the educational system. Because we know that prior to 1977, it was an educational system that was based on religion. So if you were not Catholic, the only way to get into the French system was to become a Catholic. So in other words, if you were not Catholic, you were put into the Protestant-and-everything-else educational system, which happened to be English-speaking. So this created a whole divide of communities, such as the Jewish community and the Chinese community, who were for the most part neither Catholic nor Protestant, being joined together in the same English language educational system. And you have several generations of older immigrants doing their education in English and forming a greater part of the English-speaking community. Because when we talk about the English-speaking community in Quebec, it's not a question of 'These are English from England, White Anglo-Saxon Protestant or whatever.' The English-speaking community in Quebec—because of the confessional education system—really became more people who weren't allowed into the French Catholic system, which explains why once again there's a lot of solidarity between the Jewish community and the older Chinese community because of their anglophone upbringing in Quebec.

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Growing up in Quebec city and Montreal as an English-speaking Quebecer, there were many instances of similar experiences of xenophobia and unfortunately discrimination, as well as very positive points, that produced solidarity between the Jewish and the Chinese communities. On a personal level, growing up as a kid, because I went to the English language school system, many of my friends were Jewish. And so we'd be on the same sports teams. They'd invite me to their events; I thought it was really natural. When you're a kid, you don't necessarily think about the differences. You're just thinking 'This is neat, this is fun. [...] They're wearing this yarmulke, what's it for? They can't eat certain meals, it's all right. You have all these other foods.' Jewish people have an affinity for many Chinese dishes. My Jewish friend would come to my dad's restaurant and we'd have a good time and stuff like that."

Cross Section of Saint Laurent and de la Gauchetiere

August 12 1945

Language Laws

The power of the language laws in Quebec are increasing to the point that it's continuing the othering of minority groups in Quebec. Language laws have a significant history in Quebec as Quebec is the only province in Canada that has a francophone majority. In the 1960s, the founding of the *Office de la langue française* was as a way to legislate the Official Languages Act and ensure the dominance of French in the province. This confluence of factors made it difficult for minority groups of different religious backgrounds to live or be educated in their chosen religion and language.

Fast forward to the 70s, Bill 101 was enacted. It "stipulates that French must be the language of legislation and the courts, administration, work, and business as well as education." Many of us can feel the aftermath of Bill 101. From the 90s to now, Bill 101 was revised, amended and reformed to what is now Bill 96.

Without getting into too much detail, Bill 96 feels like the worst of Bill 101. The fear of Quebec being bilingual makes Quebec elected officials continue to decry anglophones' right to be offered services in English. In an article by The Montreal Gazette written on June 13 2022, the Jewish Group B'Nai Brith have announced that the bill could lead to another "exodus" of the Jewish population. According to Marvin Rotrand, the spokesperson from the B'Nai Brith and a former Snowdon city councilor, around 30,000 Jewish people left Montreal in the 80s, right after Bill 101 was passed in 1977.

What's interesting in today's language climate, with a quasi-fascist movement towards language laws and the preservation of French, is the long history of linguistic segregation between minorities and French Catholics in Quebec. Quebec's othering and refusal to accept people from all origins continues to fuel the desperate cry to save

French while simultaneously, proper resources are not allocated to the aid of the non-francophone population.

The Chinese community has long been affected by Bill 101. Chinatown is a nice target for the *Office de la langue française*. Most recently, an opinion article written by Josh Freed in the Montreal Gazette titled "Freed: Quebec's language cops stripped character from my favourite Chinese eatery", shows how the Office de la langue française continues to monitor Chinatown stores to ensure Chinese characters are not shown prominently to their customers.

In our interview with Walter Chi-Yan Tom, he discusses a controversy in 1997, when the motivation to preserve French took off in a harsher direction:

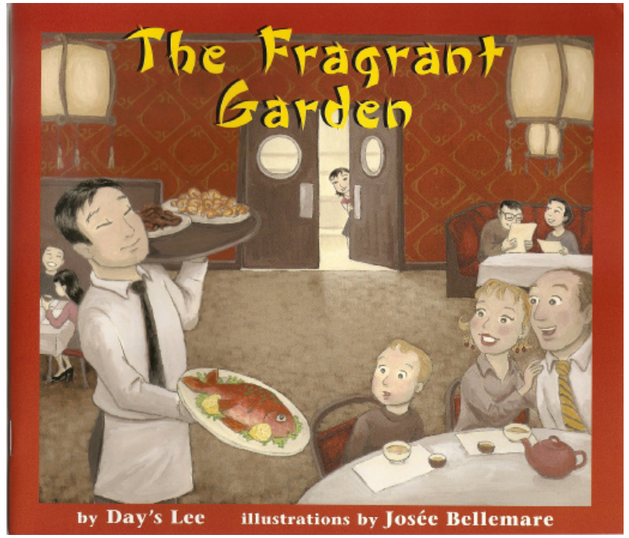
> "One last incident I want to bring forward as well was the French language sign controversy in 1997. In around December 1997, the French language police who were in charge of the enforcement of Bill 101 had issued fines against businesses in the Jewish community as well as the Chinese community on the basis that their language signs are in their own ethnic languages. For example, Hebrew with the Jewish community and Chinese characters for the Chinese community in Chinatown were not in conformity with Bill 101. So these signs had to be at least half the size of the French signs. So that was quite problematic because the reason Bill 101 was established was to protect the French language particularly from the English language. But to what extent did Chinese characters or Hebrew—to what extent were they a menace to the French language? It was ridiculous."

Food

Food is an integral part of bringing communities together. With food, people can enjoy meals and quality time; from families to friends, a good meal is always something that unites people together. When discussing food in the context of Chinatown and the Chinese and the Jewish demographic, we want to highlight how the segregation they suffered food was able to band these communities together.

It is generally known across Turtle Island that Jewish people often eat at Chinese restaurants during the holiday season, i.e. on/around Christmas. This seemed to gain popularity in New York City, where the Chinese and Jewish population were also in the same spaces and segregated due to having non-Christian traditions. Food became a cultural connector that brought these groups of people together despite the systemic isolation they both felt.

In Montréal, this was true as well. During the pandemic, the Montréal Jewish community continued the tradition of eating Chinese food,



watching movies, and continuing community activities online. This tradition is exemplified by the group Mile End Chavurah, whose mission is to bring together Jewish folks who don't have family in the city to celebrate the holidays. You'll read a short interview we had with Day's Lee, whose first documentary is about Chinese and Jewish bonding over eating at her father's diner: Lee's Garden. The documentary, titled Meet and Eat at Lee's Garden is free to stream on CBC Gem.

Here's a short interview with Day's Lee about her father's restaurant:

1. *To your knowledge, what do you know about the relationship between the Jewish and Chinese communities?*

> From my research, the connection between the Jewish and Chinese communities goes back a long way, especially in the U.S. From personal experience, I remember our Jewish customers who loved egg rolls, spare ribs and other dishes made with pork.

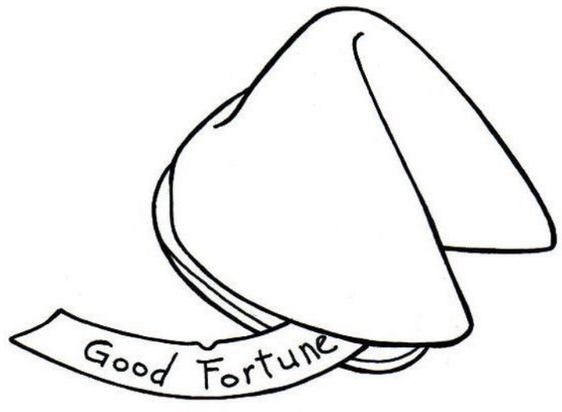
2. *What are your personal experiences with witnessing Jewish and Chinese community engagements?*

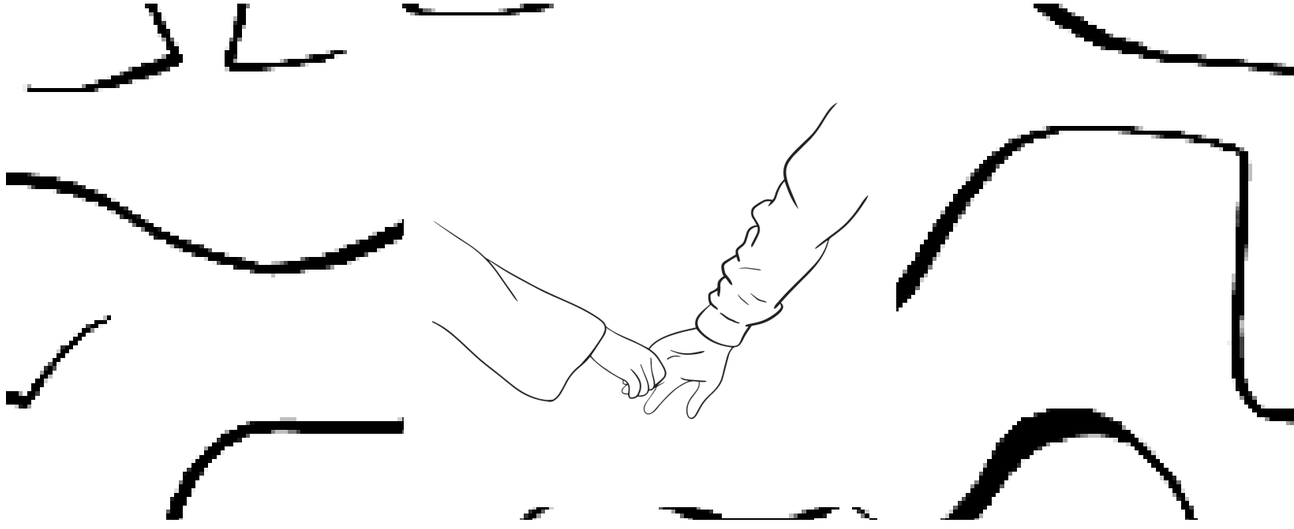
When I worked in my family's restaurant as a young girl, I noticed that Sundays were always busier than Saturdays. I thought it was a little odd given that going out on Saturday nights, from what I understood, was supposed to be a bigger deal. It was only when I was an adult that I realized it was because of the Sabbath. Jewish families stayed home observing the Sabbath, so Sunday was their day to go out to supper with their families.

Before the law was changed in the 1970s, all businesses and restaurants closed on Sundays, except for Chinese restaurants and businesses in Chinatown. Our restaurant would start to get busy at around 5pm on Sundays when families arrived for supper. Many were regulars and my dad would greet them, and show them to a booth.

Chinese businesses have often tried to leave Chinatown, but were not as successful. It wasn't until the 1950s that Lee's Garden moved out of Chinatown. It was one of the first Chinese restaurants to do so. They moved their restaurant to Parc avenue, which was close to where most Jewish folks moved to as well. Because Chinatown was once deemed a ghetto, when one would leave Chinatown for housing or business, it was considered a success.

Chinatown currently offers an array of food options that people can choose from. From 10 bubble tea shops to now two dim sum places, it became the commercial and tourist hub that city planners supposedly wanted. The role of food is particularly interesting as it represents a double edged sword for Chinatown. On one hand, there are Asian mom and pop shops. But on the other hand, without proper regulation, there are chains of bubble tea shops popping up competing with these mom and pop shops. Furthermore, the community in Chinatown has dissipated, with relatively few members of the Chinese community residing in Chinatown. What's left are memories and a few surviving storefronts that have not only survived gentrification from the state and the condos, but also made it through the pandemic.





Conclusion

History shows the connectivity between the Jewish and Chinese communities. As they initially stayed in a similar area and then branched out to other parts of Montreal, it is doubtless that both communities faced similar systemic hardships. From education, language laws, and connections through Chinese food, it's interesting to see the challenges each community faced while settling on Turtle Island. Those challenges highlight how common experiences from systemic barriers were able to bring these communities together.

It also must be stated that this relationship was not entirely kumbaya. Some altercations were documented to not be pretty. However, above all, there were so many uniting factors that make it increasingly clear that despite their differences, they stood together in solidarity, through redlining, linguistic discrimination and educational segregation.

Despite the struggles, the ongoing problems Chinatown is now experiencing is not only lack of community, but resources to help the existing community.

While Chinatown is seemingly a designated space for the Chinese community, it has opened its gates to many other Asian communities as well. Chinatown is a place for all. Without the cultural symbolism Chinatowns have, not only on Turtle Island, but across the world, lies a union of diaspora and familiarity. That is why we must come together as oppressed communities to fight against gentrification, racism, and colonialism. We should come together to save Chinatowns that are currently undergoing these threats.

I want to end with some remarks from our interview with Walter Chi-Yan Tom about how the two communities continue to support one another:

> "And as I grew up and became an adult, my Jewish colleagues also became allies in terms of some of the struggles that we went through. For example, when we were fighting to build the Chinese cultural center here in Chinatown, one of the groups who supported us was the Canadian Jewish Congress. We saw how organized the Jewish community was in Montreal and we saw all the cultural institutions that they had. And so obviously you try to look towards: what are the best practices? How did they get there? What were the lessons that we could learn in our communities in order to have these same kinds of institutions? So they were very open to share with us their experiences and even gave us their support. And every time there was xenophobia or discrimination towards the Chinese community on which I was asked to intervene because I'm an immigration and human rights lawyer, I would turn towards the Jewish community and Jewish organizations to gather their support because they also faced similar challenges in their communities, such as the sign language issue. So once again, it's a question of taking a look at what we have in common. There's a lot of common history and common solidarity.
>
> We got tremendous support from the Jewish community and Jewish organizations during the recent pandemic and all the anti-Asian crap that was happening. Because, once again, when we're talking about discrimination, racism and xenophobia, that's something the Jewish community can very much identify with. So when there was vandalism that was happening in Chinatown, the Jewish Canadian Congress was one of the first organizations that came forward and denounced that kind of anti-immigrant, anti-Asian discrimination. And even, for example, on a very basic level, when we were trying to fight for the survival of Chinatown from real estate developers and gentrification was happening with that, we looked at the Jewish community and at how they were dealing with some of these issues. And so one of the things that we wanted to capture was the history of Chinatown and how Chinatown was not just about stores. It was about people. It was about the whole neighborhood. So one of the things that the Jewish community, and particularly the Museum of Jewish Montreal, was really great at was providing tours of their own community organizations and neighbourhood. In fact, we're looking at the examples of what the Museum of Jewish Montreal were doing at the time to see how we could emulate that in order to educate and sensitize people about Chinatown and make them realize there's a history here. There are roots here, there's a neighbourhood here. So that there could be valorization of the neighbourhood. It's not just about shiny buildings and shiny people. There's an existing neighbourhood here and an existing ecosystem. We can learn from other communities and have their support. In fact, they were really supportive in helping us with that."

For more content, or to view the interviews that took place at Ruby Rouge in Chinatown, please visit our Medium blog, Instagram, and Youtube channel at @mychinatownmtl

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Settlement

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Food

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