

## **Colin Davidson, Professor, dies in Montreal**

He reinvented himself several times. He was an architect, an inventor of construction systems, a writer, and an international development activist. But above all, Colin Davidson was a Professor. During his sixty year-career, he embodied what being a University Professor truly means.

Colin Davidson always argued. He always contested. But he was happy when someone managed to prove him wrong. Challenging students, friends and colleagues was just another aspect of his professorship. So it was comforting the student in tears, caring for the weakest, encouraging the stressed researcher. The Professor was convinced that academia was not only for talented people. Anyone could do academic work, if provided with the right support. And anyone can learn, he thought. He thus made his responsibility to teach and supervise the weakest students, the university outcasts, and those who were at the margins of learning standards.

His role was to teach, always teach. In his latest days in the hospital, he took time to teach project management to an African Geographer. He could learn many things too. He spoke four languages. He learned to design construction systems, punch computer cards, write software, conduct ethnographic studies, code information, create websites, organise libraries. That was what professors needed to do. When the word “app” didn’t exist in popular culture, he designed an Internet application. He wrote a thesaurus, a dozen books and IF journals, and hundreds of articles and book chapters.

In 1976, Davidson created the IF Research Group to study complex systems and project processes. And the group became his own system—another tool to expand the frontiers of architecture and redefine his professorship. For ten years, he was the Dean of the Université de Montréal’s Faculty of Environmental Design. There he invented the Graduate Programs in Project Management for design professionals. In 2002, the Professor co-founded i-Rec, an international network of specialists in vulnerability, disasters and reconstruction. His legacy is enormous. Davidson was one of the first scholars to classify and study construction procurement systems. He also pioneered the study of decision-making processes within construction projects. His graduate students (including Avi Friedman, Costas Katsanis, Cassidy Johnson, and Tarek Meguid) became themselves successful professors in the best universities in Canada, England, Egypt, Brazil and many other countries.

Always an Englishman, he was kind and generous. He was never a mainstream architect. For Davidson, architecture was not about creating form or space. It was about understanding social systems, imperfect and unpredictable humans brought together in space. Architecture was also a way to avoid people’s suffering. He deplored that scholars and practitioners were not doing enough to avoid pain. The Professor called his art “Invisible Architecture”. During his career, he received several recognitions. But none fitted better the man than the 1996 Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture’s “Distinguished Professor Award.”

**Gonzalo Lizarralde, PhD**

Member of the College of New Scholars, Artists and Scientists. The Royal Society of Canada.  
Professeur École d’architecture, Université de Montréal.  
Titulaire de la Chaire Fayolle-Magil Construction en architecture, bâtiment et durabilité.  
Directeur du Groupe de recherche IF (grif) et Œuvre durable.