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builds with
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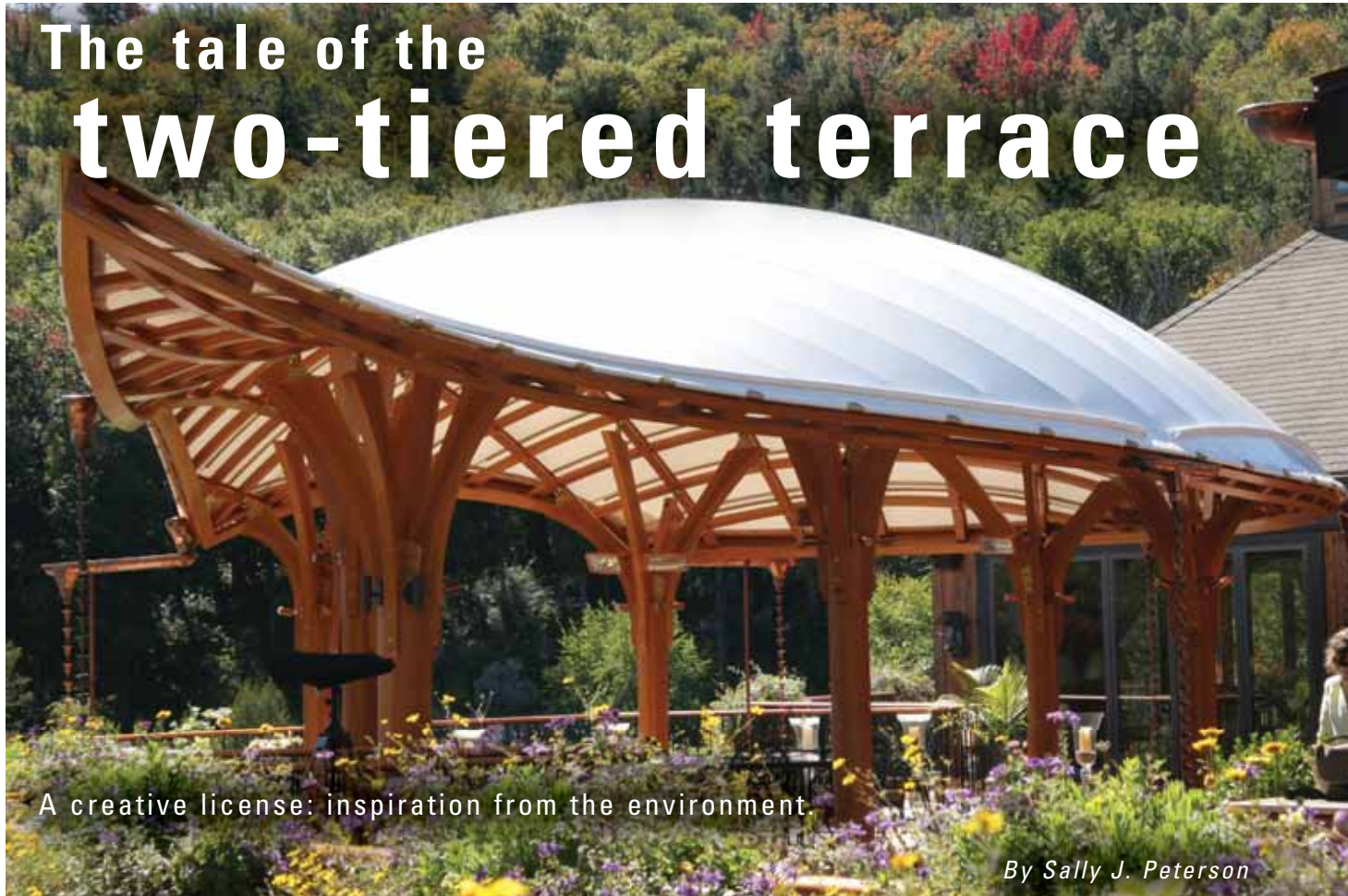
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The tale of the two-tiered terrace



A creative license: inspiration from the environment.

By Sally J. Peterson

Montreal, Quebec, Canada-based Sollertia headed this two-tiered terrace design-build project.

Once upon a time (about a year ago), the resident of a stunning lakeside lodging in the Laurentian Mountains desired a stunning two-level terrace from which to savor the artistry of the natural landscape. To that end, in his retreat 40 minutes' drive north of Montreal, the owner decided to employ the Canadian company Sollertia Inc., after word of the company's ingenuity and expertise had spread throughout the land. And so it came to be that Sollertia (Latin for "know-how") found itself involved in an intensely interesting, and intensely difficult, design-build project.

The concept

According to Claude Le Bel, Sollertia president and founder, the first order of business in a design project is to determine from *Sally J. Peterson is a freelance writer based in Black River Falls, Wisconsin.*

the client how he intends to use the space and what mood he wants to create. In this case, the client gave Sollertia creative license to "let loose,

Sollertia Inc.



Working from original drawings, Sollertia constructs a scale model of the terrace roof.

have fun and let [their] creative juices flow," says Nathalie Lortie, Sollertia's principal designer.

Sollertia presented the client with a variety of proposals, from simple structures to more complex realizations. Designers explored different materials for their concepts, including a structure made of ETFE foil. Another of the proposals called for moveable panels that would allow the terrace to be bathed in full sunshine when desired. But in the final analysis, the team revisited an initial inspiration and pursued that. "This concept, clearly inspired by the natural elements of the surroundings, was one that, in the end, most charmed our client," Lortie says.

The success of the project, with its considerable design and implementation challenges, relied heavily on the unity of the participants. "All the players involved—the architect who designed the terrace, the master wood craftsman,



Most of the painstaking woodworking for the structure involved laminated double curves.



The 50-foot-long structure is moved by crane from the workshop to its final destination.

the site operations director, the project manager, etc.—were enthusiastic and completely on board with the project,” she notes.

The construction

Of those many complex issues, perhaps the most challenging among them involved the woodworking for the project. “Most of the woodworking for the structure involved laminated double curves, which are very difficult to do,” Le Bel says. In fact, Sollertia employed an actual stringed instrument maker who, serendipitously, was already on the site as chief craftsman of the terrace. “When we met Raymond Morin, we immediately recognized his unquestionable expertise and astounding talent,” says Le Bel. As chief craftsman, he made and supervised the

laminating and bending of all the pieces for this 50-foot-long structure.

Housed in a workshop located about 500 feet away from the place where the structure would ultimately reside, the crew worked for about four and a half months

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gluing the wood for the project. After all the pieces were assembled, a process that took another six weeks, the crew used a crane to relocate the framework from the platform to the second-level terrace. According to Le Bel, the job took nine months from conception to completion.

The fabric

All of the woodworking was underway at the same time the textile for the wooden structure was being created.

While Sollertia handled the pre-engineering, the conception of the structure connection details and tensioning hardware, two French companies, Asteo and AB2CS, handled, respectively, the engineering of the structure and the fabrication of the textile, working from Sollertia’s original drawings. “For aesthetic reasons, all the hardware for tensioning the fabric was custom-designed, made of anodized aluminum and put in place by us,” Le Bel says.

The fabric used was Ferrari Pre-constraint 702, translucent white. “We chose it because we’ve worked with Ferrari products in the past and know they are good. Also, we didn’t want stretch in the fabric, and knew Ferrari fabrics wouldn’t give very much,” Lortie says. The lumber used for the project was laminated British Columbian fir. Each piece of the overhead wooden lattice was made up of quarter-inch x 3½-inch strips glued together on homemade jig tables to the specified radii and thicknesses.

The mission

Sollertia is a fairly young company, founded by Le Bel in 2000 on two spokes: event planning and fabric architecture.

Le Bel started out as a technician for Cirque du Soleil in ’84. In ’85 he became tent master and trained himself on tent structures. He also worked with Cirque du Soleil on various events, touring with them around the world. (Designer Lortie joined the company in 2003.)

“I founded Sollertia in 2000 to make use of all that expertise. The dual focus turned out to be perfect for us. At first we focused more on events; now we’re doing more fabric structure design, installation and maintenance.”

Sollertia has offices in both Canada and the United States, with approxi-



Nancy Cormier, photographer

Translucent white fabric by Ferrari tops the roof constructed of laminated British Columbian fir.

mately 25 people on both sides of the border, ready to fly anywhere there is a project.

Asked whether Sollertia has a basic company philosophy or mission, Le Bel offered up the following:

- Imagination has no boundaries.
- Create architecture that provokes rich sensory experiences.
- Listen to intuition.
- Pay close attention to client needs, sensibilities and preferences.
- Success lies in the close collaboration of all the players involved.

“Our idea is not so much to make money as it is to make exciting, thoughtful projects that appeal to all our senses,” Le Bel concludes, while conceding, “of course, we have to live.” While no one can guarantee “happily ever after” in any business, all the indicators seem to be pointing that way. **R**