



DINNER IN THE STREET

DINING SAFELY and SOCIALLY in the Pandemic City and Beyond

AS THE WINTER OF 2020 TURNED TO SPRING, and spring to summer, a series of crises overlapped and influenced the social life of people everywhere. Some were victims of the health crisis in the most immediate way; others suffered economically. Still others were caught in the malaise of isolation and loneliness. “Dinner in the Street” is located at the intersection of social health, physical health and economic health, and addresses ways in which providing public venues for dining can serve all three of these goals.

The urban practice of dining *en plein air* has provided joy and strengthened community for centuries. “Dinner in the Street” proposes that we expand this tradition, appropriating roadways in the Canadian capital city of Ottawa.

JAN

As the Coronavirus spreads across the world, there is a realization that daily life is about to change.

FEB

MAR

March 13. The Ontario State of Emergency declared.

March 20. France's homeless fined for not staying indoors during lockdown.

“We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now.”

Martin Luther King Jr., 1963

RESEARCH & DESIGN in a YEAR OF CRISIS

2020: PANDEMIC, PROTEST, PRECARIITY

APR

Initial concept for “DINNER IN THE STREET”

APR

April 10. Schoolchildren in China Make Creative Social-Distancing Hats Inspired by Ancient Headwear.

MAY

Fast-tracked program announced for COVID-related research: Grant Application for “Dinner in the Street” submitted on May 10

MAY

June 8. “Ottawa Moves to Stage 2 of Reopening”

JUN

Grant approval received on June 8. Students begin research activities

JUN

June 9. How Ottawa's Restaurants Will Have to Radically Change Post-Lockdown.

JUL

Series of meetings with neighborhood organizations, in parallel with design explorations.

JUL

June 16. “Black Lives Matter Murals cover Streets across the Country”

AUG

August 10. “Berkeley Will Fully Close Its Streets to Create Giant Outdoor Dining Rooms”

SEP

“Second wave” confirmed in Canada.

SEP

September 18, “Ottawa Officially in 2nd Wave, says City's Medical Officer.

OCT

Design work focuses on how to keep restaurants open in winter.

OCT

October 22, “Open Letter: Stop Systemwide Restaurant Closures

NOV

Community partners express frustration that the city does not move more quickly to assist the restaurant industry.

NOV

DEC

In a time of global pandemic, economic urgency and social malaise, “Dinner in the Street” asks this central question:

Can challenges of public health and spatial justice be served, literally, through dinners in the public realm?

... leading to these more specific questions:

How can design contribute to saving the restaurant industry?

How can ‘dinner in the street’ serve the underserved, during the pandemic and beyond?

How can transforming our streets into dining rooms enhance neighborhood identity?

How can designing in the public realm bring together neighborhood activists, policy makers, and industrial designers?

How can the post-COVID city better support public life?

The context for ‘Dinner in the Street’ is the intersection of the pandemic’s effect on the restaurant industry, our heightened awareness of the precarious situation of the city’s most vulnerable people, and recognition of the design opportunities that can have lasting impact on the social fabric of the city. The location is the capital city of Ottawa, with a focus on its diverse neighborhoods. The client is the City, its restaurants and their employees, and its most precarious citizens. The theoretical foundation of the research is the premise that analysis does not precede design. Rather, the two operate in tandem and in constant dialogue.

The following hypotheses about the post-pandemic city are a foundation upon which this proposal is built:

- Many of us will continue to work from home, relieving city streets of much daily traffic.
- Even after we reach herd immunity, people will be inclined to maintain greater physical distances between themselves and others.
- This period of crisis will engender a more lasting spirit of collaboration between industry, academic and policy sectors.

timeline at left:

Left of the line, the general benchmarks of the past year, and the relevant moments in the grant application

To the right, a selection of the year’s headlines

“Behind every piece of paper lies a human situation.”

--Edward T. Hall

“Food served is always more than just food served.”

--Maya Angelou

FOOD AS A CATALYST: INTERSECTIONAL RESEARCH FRAMEWORKS

PRECEDENT, POLICY, COMMUNITY, & DESIGN

CONTENTS

VISION, GOALS, HYPOTHESES

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PRECEDENT & INNOVATION

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RESEARCH meets DESIGN

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DESIGN as RESEARCH

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WE BEGIN with a vision of cities weathering hard times by pulling together around the shared experience of dining in the public realm. TAKING TO HEART Maya Angelou’s pithy observation that “food served is always more than just food served,” we begin with a vision of urban communities weathering hard times by dining together in the public realm. The goal of “Dinner in the Street” is to use our resilience during the crisis of 2020 to advocate for more long-term policies that will enhance the post-pandemic city. Three important hypotheses are:

- we are moving away from reliance on privately owned cars.
- the habits of working from home will carry over into our post-Covid lives.
- even post-Covid, people will be inclined to maintain greater physical distances between themselves and others.

We studied past practices of communal dining in urban streets and rural settings, as inspiration for some of the design proposals. More importantly, the ‘real-time’ innovative responses to the pandemic in restaurants around the world offered ideas for Ottawa’s neighborhoods. In parallel, artists and activists responding to Black Lives Matter invested urban design with a collective voice, offering ideas about how to occupy public space in more equitable and active ways.

Recognizing the limits of ideas gathered from past practices and from around the world during the current crisis, we reached into the heart of Ottawa’s diverse neighborhoods, discovering unique attitudes to food culture, and special opportunities to serve those suffering the most from food scarcity and economic precarity. We began with 12 streets as case studies, and went on to develop design concepts for six of them. Community leaders and restaurant owners were a key part of this process.

We propose that six selected streets be closed or partially closed to traffic according to several different temporal models. Communities will ultimately develop their own proposals; the proposals in this handbook assume the following: George and York will be permanently closed to traffic, and repaved. The cul-de-sacs off Preston Street will reduce the width of their traffic lane, and develop community gardens as dining rooms. Argyle Avenue and Daly Avenue will be periodically closed, for benefit dinners and weekly communal feasts. Hazel Street will be planted as a wheat field.

Research into past practices, recent innovations and public health guidelines generated two kinds of design elements: those contributing to the permanent infrastructure of the city, and those that are mobile. Some elements reflect the ‘2 meter’ dimension of safe physical distancing, others introduce playful components into the dining experience. Still others support neighborhood food production. Recent experiments with robotic birds at a Canadian airport leads to the design of the server birds.

Outdoor dining rooms proposed for the six selected streets are rendered to honor both the research premises and the anticipated community spirit. In general, the design process does not lead or follow, but is in constant dialogue with the several research frameworks, and is a framework of its own.

Research through PRECEDENT

PUBLIC STREETS & PUBLIC HEALTH



top left:

Perhaps the most famous of all dinners-in-the-street, the annual Contrada dinners in each of Siena's 17 neighborhoods honor the annual Palio horse race in the city's *Campo*. Storerooms and communal kitchens open directly on to the street, giving an aura of domesticity to these outdoor events. (see pages 10ff)

middle left:

Street paving in cities like Rio de Janeiro and Barcelona lend a spontaneous choreography to the rhythms of the daily life. Such patterns inspired the 'physical distance' paving designs for George and York Streets. (see pages 13 and 14)

bottom left:

This example of dining in a vineyard in California, between the rows of vines, is an inspiration for the 'farm-to-table' proposal for the cul-de-sac "Preston Streets." (see page 12)

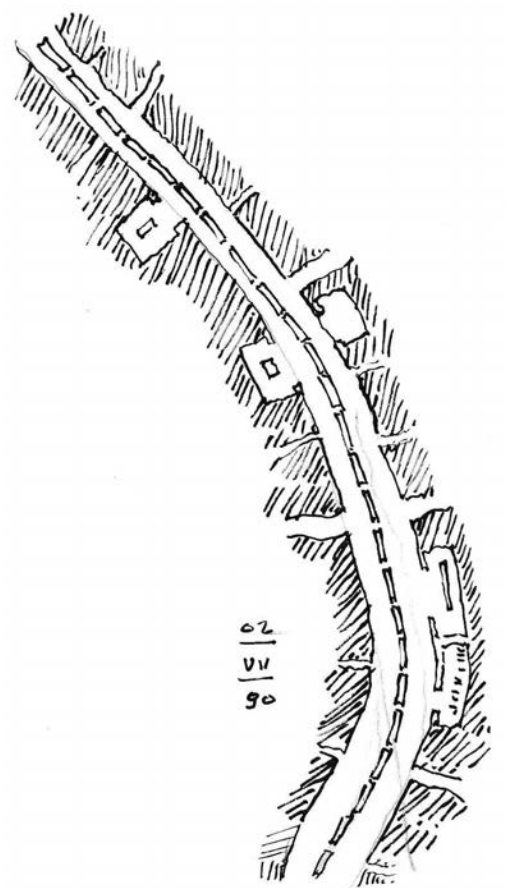


below:

Nurses wash up at a communal sink. Archival photo tweeted by Johnson & Johnson pharmaceutical company on May 5, 2020. (see page 7)

right:

At the annual Palio dinners in Siena, Italy, tables in each contrada follow the winding path of the streets. (author's sketch from 1989)



“The inhibition of free expression can also serve as a means of social distancing. Thus, the higher ranks can constrain themselves to preserve a certain kind of deportment or dignity.”

--Karl Mannheim, 1957

Understanding Research as INNOVATION

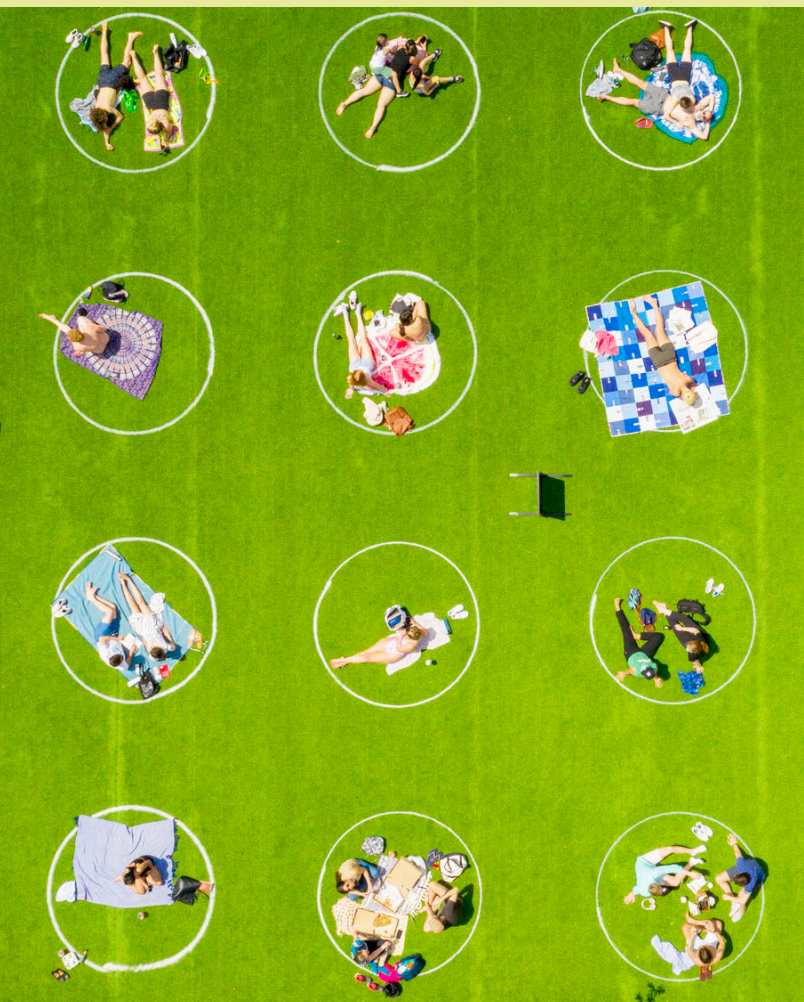
PHYSICAL DISTANCE & SOCIAL FABRIC

THERE IS DEBATE about the almost universal use of the term ‘social distancing.’ The phrase was used in the 1950s by sociologist Karl Mannheim to describe a class consciousness manifest in the ways that people in ‘higher ranks’ maintained distances from those they perceived were of a lower class.

For the purposes of this study (and in general) the term ‘physical distancing’ is a much more accurate description of the standard guideline of 2 meters between people. In fact, we argue that some responses to physical distancing can even enhance the social experience and sense of community. One of the goals of “Dinner in the Street” is to deepen the social fabric while establishing healthy, recommended physical distances in the public realm.

below:

Almost immediately cities across North America enforced physical distancing in public parks by inscribing chalk circles onto the grass.



above:

The first glass dining cabins to gain world-wide visibility were these, set up along a canal in Amsterdam. in April 2020. These are the direct inspiration for the ‘winter cabins.’ (see pages 13 - 15)

middle right:

In the early days of the pandemic, restaurants across Europe and North America brought whimsy to physical distancing requirements by occupying some seats with sophisticated mannequins, like at this high-end restaurant in Virginia. Other restaurants used large stuffed animals at sidewalk cafes. (see ‘dining companions’ at the Daly Avenue benefit dinner, pages 08 and 10)



lower right:

The street murals painted during Black Lives Matter protests were a quick way to establish a public voice in public space. These may well inspire more permanent street re-paving. For more impromptu dinners in the street, paint is an excellent way to establish physical distancing, and at the same time add color and pattern to the neighborhood.

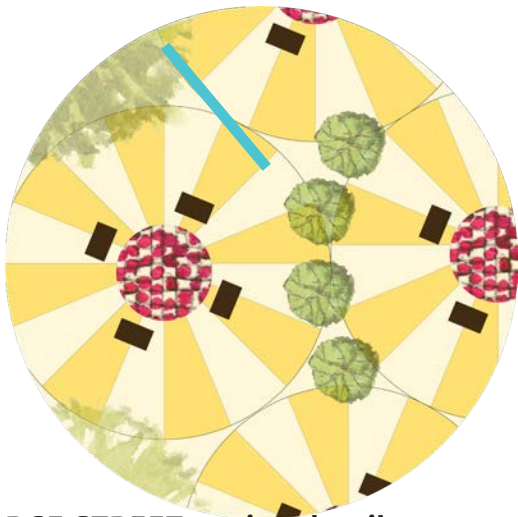


“Our greatest asset is space. We have so much space.”

-- Manager, Ottawa Markets, July 2020

Research in OTTAWA’S UNIQUE NEIGHBORHOOD COMMUNITIES

LOCAL ASSETS & OPPORTUNITIES

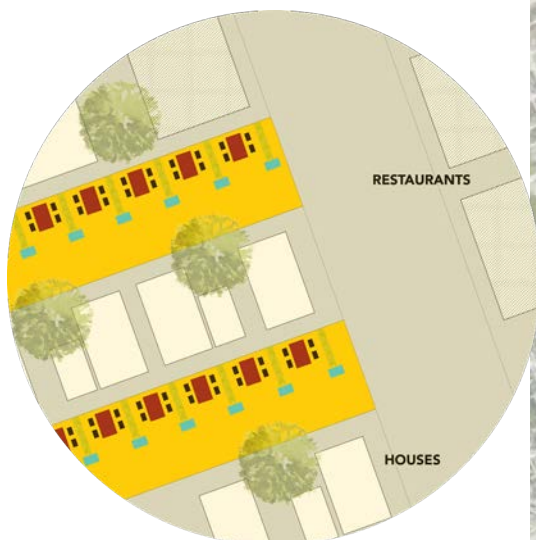


GEORGE STREET paving detail

Public water for handwashing, paving patterns to maintain safe physical distances, and trees on wheels are some of the design elements on George St. (pages 07 - 08)

ARGYLE AVENUE in Centertown

A concentration of social and immigration services makes Argyle Avenue an ideal street for weekly lunches and dinners that serve the underserved. (page 11)



The “PRESTON” STREETS in Little Italy

Preston is the main street in a neighborhood thriving with Italian restaurants and culture. A series of cul-de-sacs perpendicular to Preston offer the opportunity for food-intensive gardens framing outdoor dining rooms. (page 12)



GEORGE & YORK STREETS in the Byward Market

These two main streets of the Byward Market have incredible assets: a concentration of restaurants and farmers markets, and a location near Parliament. Eliminating most vehicular traffic, repaving with patterns to establish physical distancing, and introducing new infrastructure and mobile elements makes this an outdoor dining venue that can accommodate hundreds of people in any season. (pages 13 - 16)



DALY AVENUE in Sandy Hill

This block of Daly Avenue is home to the Ottawa Art Gallery and three fine-dining restaurants, making it an ideal street for the philanthropic community to gather for benefit dinners. (page 10)



HAZEL STREET in Old Ottawa East

A block of Hazel Street across from the Green Door vegan cafe and adjacent to a large new planned development is ideal for an urban wheat field with tables for solitary diners. (page 17)

“Avoid crowds and sit at tables spaced at least 6 feet apart from people you don’t live with, both indoors and outdoors. If you are standing, stay at least 6 feet apart from those who do not live with you.”

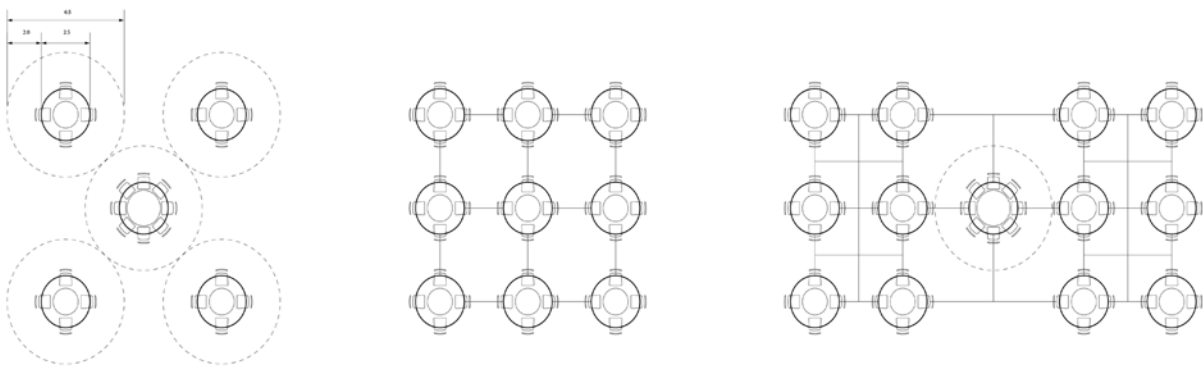
--Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Research through DESIGN

INFRASTRUCTURE for PHYSICAL DISTANCE

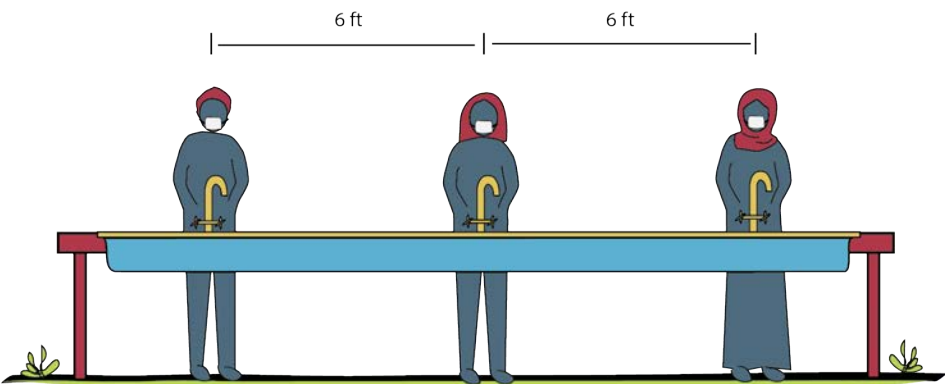
PATTERNS FOR PHYSICAL DISTANCE

Inexpensive paint, or more permanent new paving, graphically adds a pattern that respects physical distancing guidelines. Patterns are inspired by such diverse references as the street and boulevard paving found in Barcelona and Rio de Janeiro, the expedient but powerful street painting for Black Lives Matter protests, and the chalk picnic circles painted in parks in the early months of the pandemic. (see pages 13 - 17)



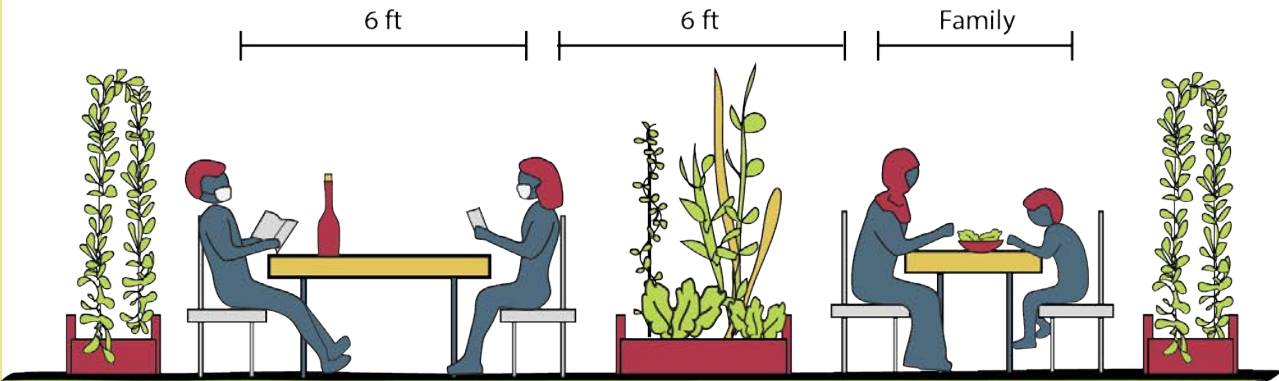
PUBLIC WATER for PUBLIC HEALTH

Public water is familiar urban infrastructure around the world. Fountains have long been places of social gathering, sources of drinking water, and sites for public sculpture. (see pages 12 & 13)



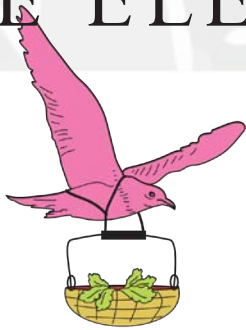
FARM-TO-TABLE GARDEN ROOMS

Along certain streets, particularly dead end streets with only a few houses in neighborhoods with small family owned restaurants, part of the roadway can be given over to growing vegetables and dining outdoors. These additions to the public realm serve both the restaurants and the residents. (see page 12)



Research through DESIGN

MOBILE ELEMENTS for SOCIAL DELIGHT

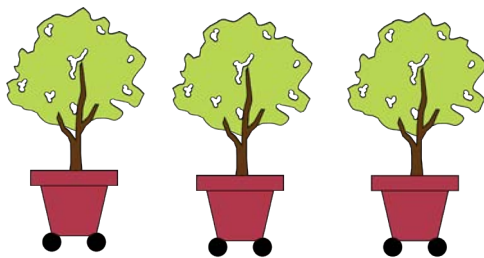


SERVER BIRDS

Server birds are drones modeled after Canadian avian species.

Such robo-birds are already being used at Canadian airports, to keep the real birds from flying into airplane engines. Here, they are deployed for a new form of contactless delivery-- delivering food to tables in specially engineered baskets. For this project, we developed a Tundra Swan to represent Nova Scotia, and Gyrfalcon for Alberta. (see page 9, 12 & 17)

--George Street 'Winter Tents' the Preston Streets



TREES-ON-WHEELS

Mobile trees in large planters help to reinforce distances between tables, and create a seasonal landscape along the street. Configurations can change frequently, shifting the public spaces to be more open, or more intimate.

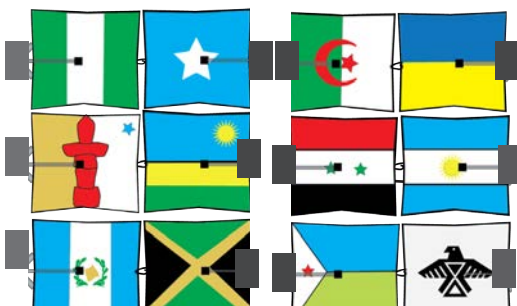
--George Street, York Street



DINING COMPANIONS

Whimsical companions at the dinner table help to establish physical distancing, without leaving conspicuously empty seats. This practice became common in several European cities in the early months of the pandemic, using various creatures from fancy human mannequins to oversized plush bears.

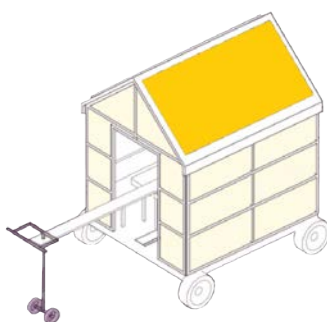
(see page 10)
--Daly Avenue, Preston Streets, Argyle Avenue



PATCHWORK CEILINGS

Designed for inclement weather or to protect from the sun, these colorful umbrellas can be joined together to make a continuous ceiling. The patterns are inspired by flags from around the world and across the Canadian territories, in celebration of Ottawa's incredibly diverse immigrant and Indigenous communities. (see page 11)

--Argyle Avenue



ANYWHERE CABINS

Glass cabins, in three sizes, allow 'Dinner in the Street' throughout the winter.

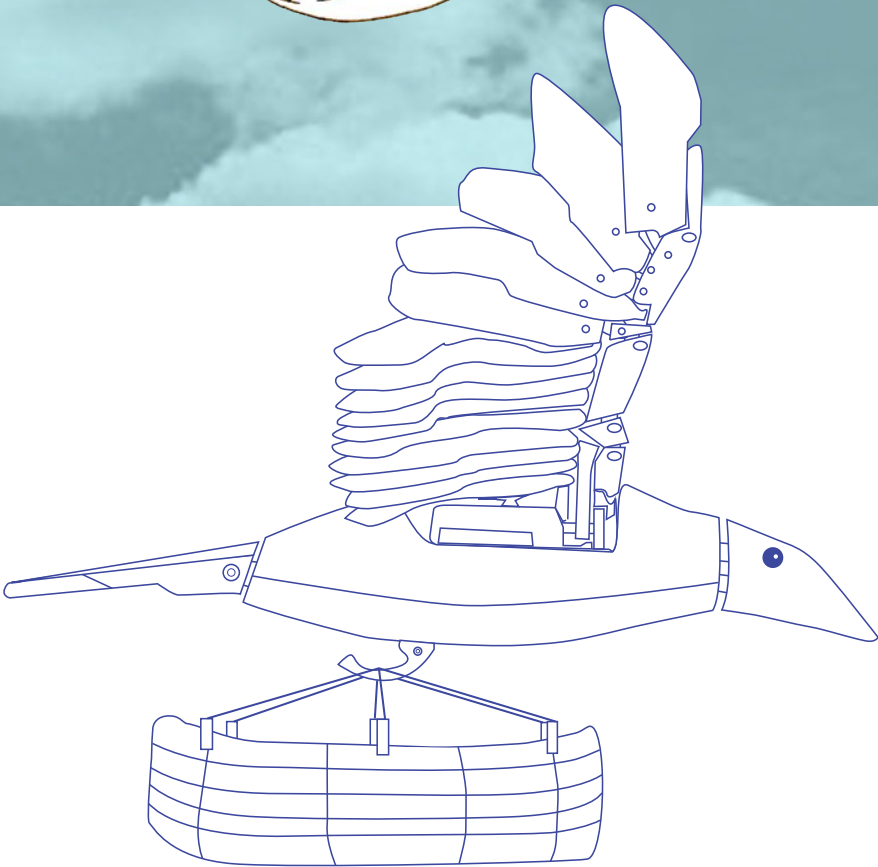
Inspired by cabins set up along a canal in Amsterdam in the early weeks of the pandemic, the cabins are produced in three sizes: 'Date Cabins' for 2 people, 'Social Cabins' for 3-4 people, and Family Cabins' for 5 - 8 people. The tents are in 8' segments, and can be configured for any length. (see pages 13 - 17)

--Any street



Research in ROBOTIC TECHNOLOGY

SERVER BIRDS



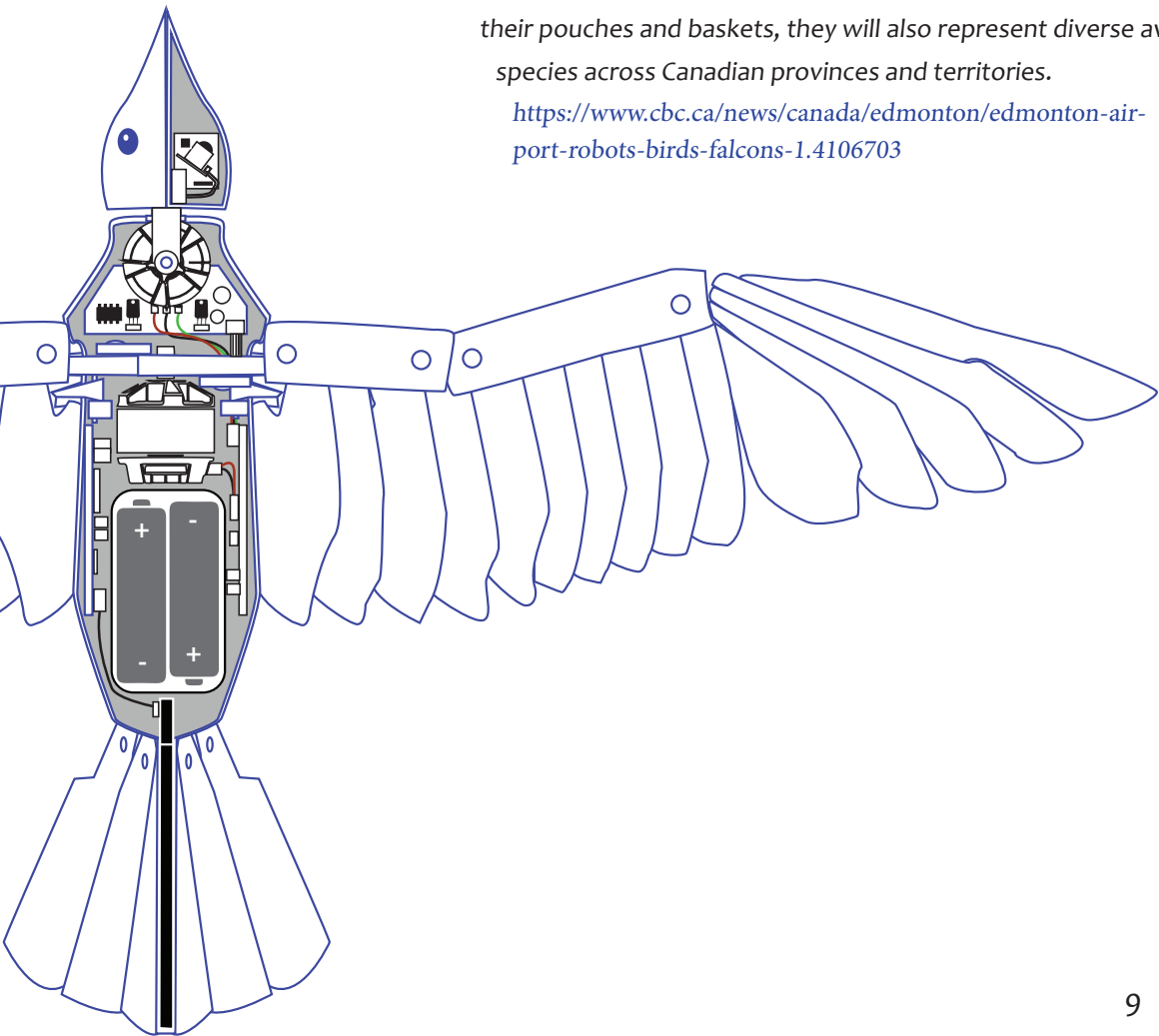
IN 2017, THE CANADIAN CITY OF EDMONTON began a three-month trial experiment, releasing robotic Peregrine Falcons to circle their airport, scaring real birds away from encounters with dangerous airplane engines. Beautifully designed and astonishingly realistic, these birds are the inspiration for the 'server birds' pictured here. In the capital city of Canada, these birds can not only deliver food safely to table in their pouches and baskets, they will also represent diverse avian species across Canadian provinces and territories.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/edmonton-air-port-robots-birds-falcons-1.4106703>

Banner Inset Left:
Falcon at Edmonton Airport

Left:
Sketch notes for server birds --
Tundra Swan, Gyrfalcon & Osprey

Right:
Preliminary working drawings for Gyrfalcon

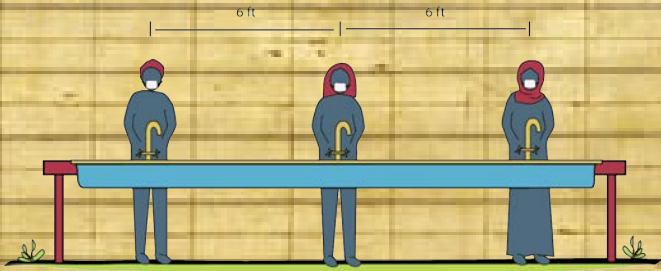
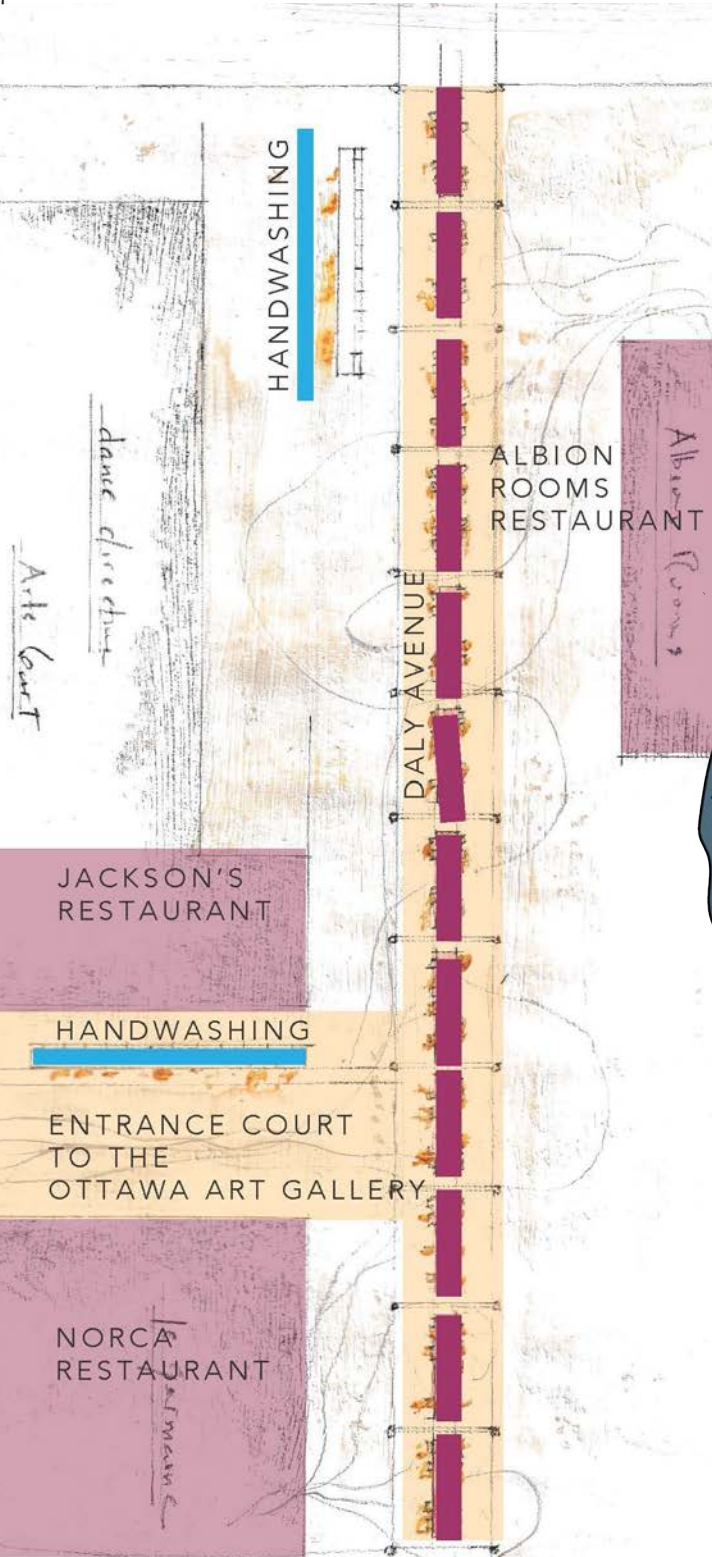


DESIGN RESEARCH

BENEFIT DINNERS
on DALY AVENUE, in Sandy Hill

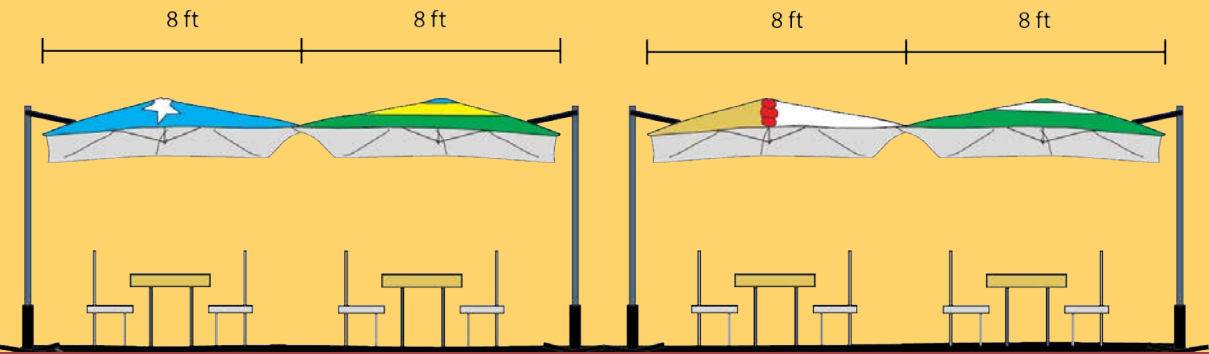
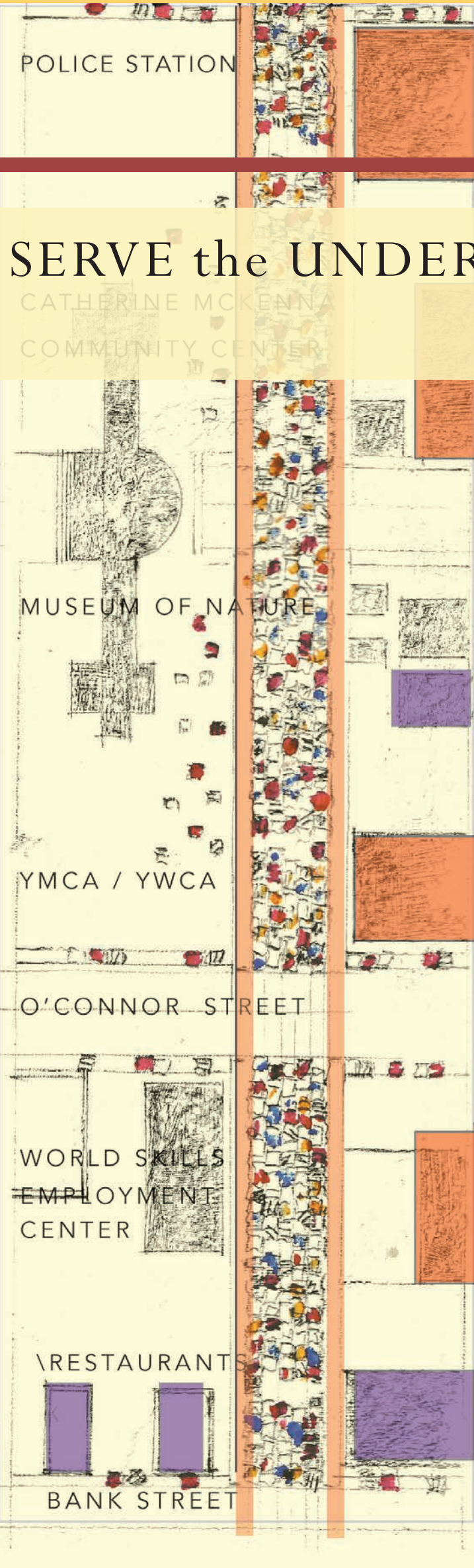
‘Dining Companions’ are designed by local artists.

This strategy for establishing physical distancing in restaurants began with mannequins and plush animals introduced in European restaurants and cafes, in the early days of the pandemic.



THIS BENEFIT DINNER to support Indigenous artists is sponsored by the Ottawa Art Gallery, and coincides with an exhibition by Haida printmaker Glen Rabena. It is catered by three restaurants on Daly Street. “Dining Companion” Agnes Martin greets patrons as they arrive, while waitstaff complete the table settings. She will later join them at the table. The linens are inspired by one of her paintings.

DESIGN RESEARCH



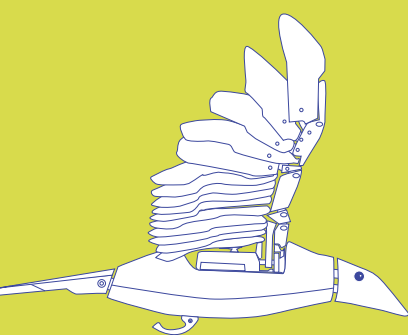
SERVE the UNDERSERVED, CELEBRATE DIVERSITY
on ARGYLE AVENUE, in Centertown

HOSTED BY THE CATHERINE MCKENNA COMMUNITY CENTER and other social service organizations in Centertown, the weekly dinner on Argyle Avenue serves over 500 people. Umbrellas link together to provide a continuous canopy, so dinner is served even in inclement weather.

below:
The “patchwork ceiling” is inspired by flags of immigrants’ countries of origin, and of Indigenous nations.



DESIGN RESEARCH

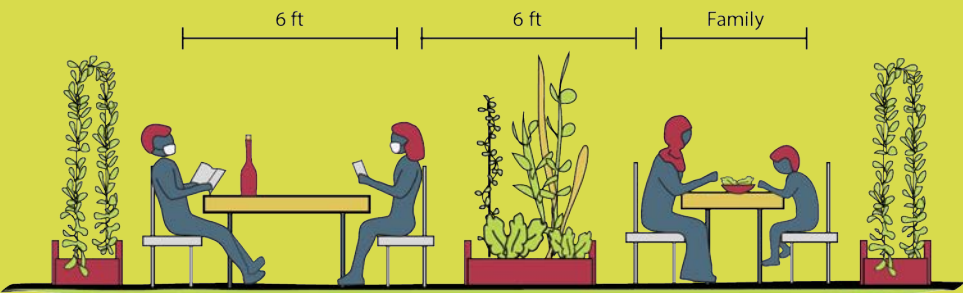


“FARM-TO-TABLE”

along the ‘PRESTON STREETS’ in Little Italy

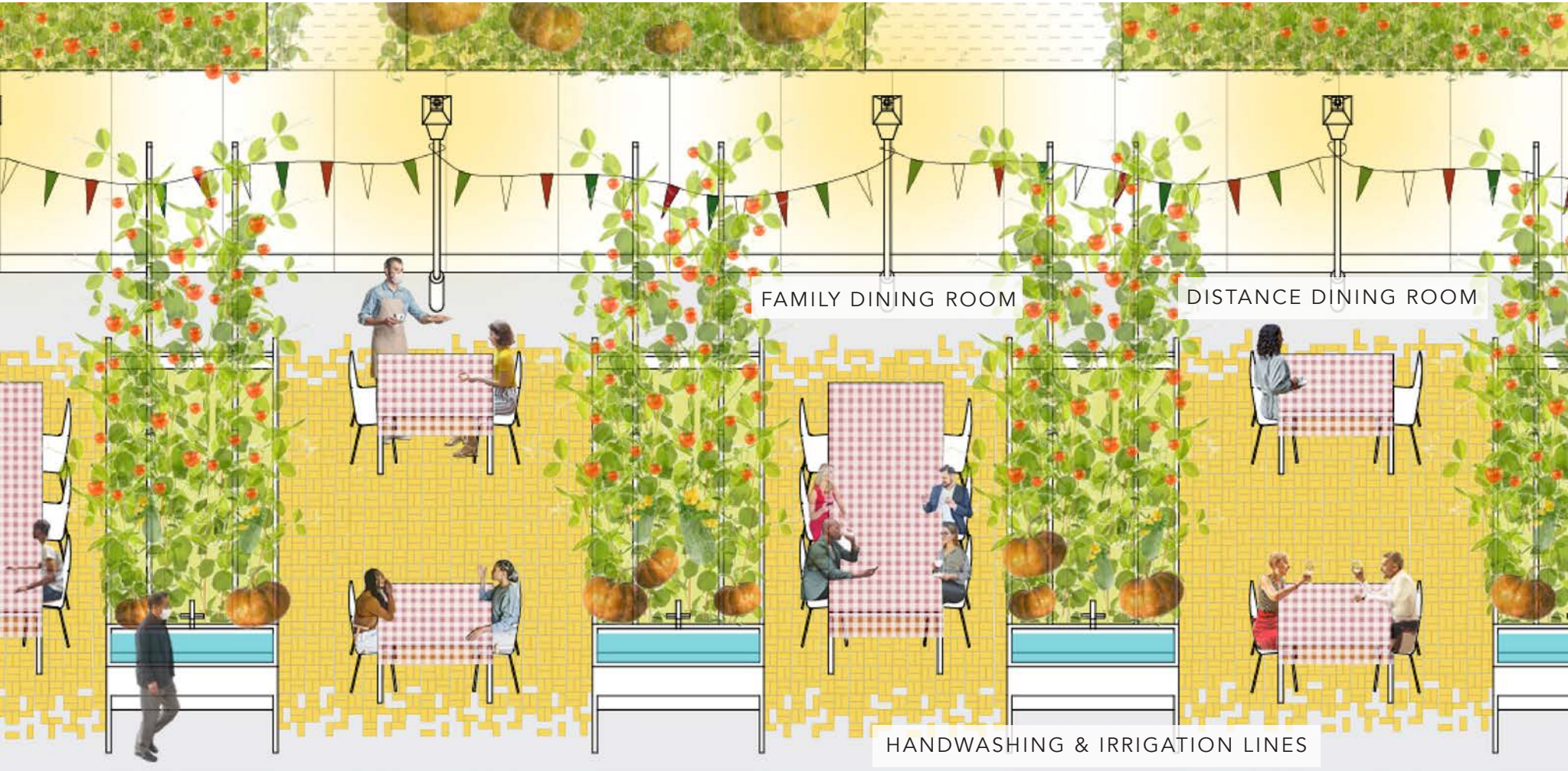
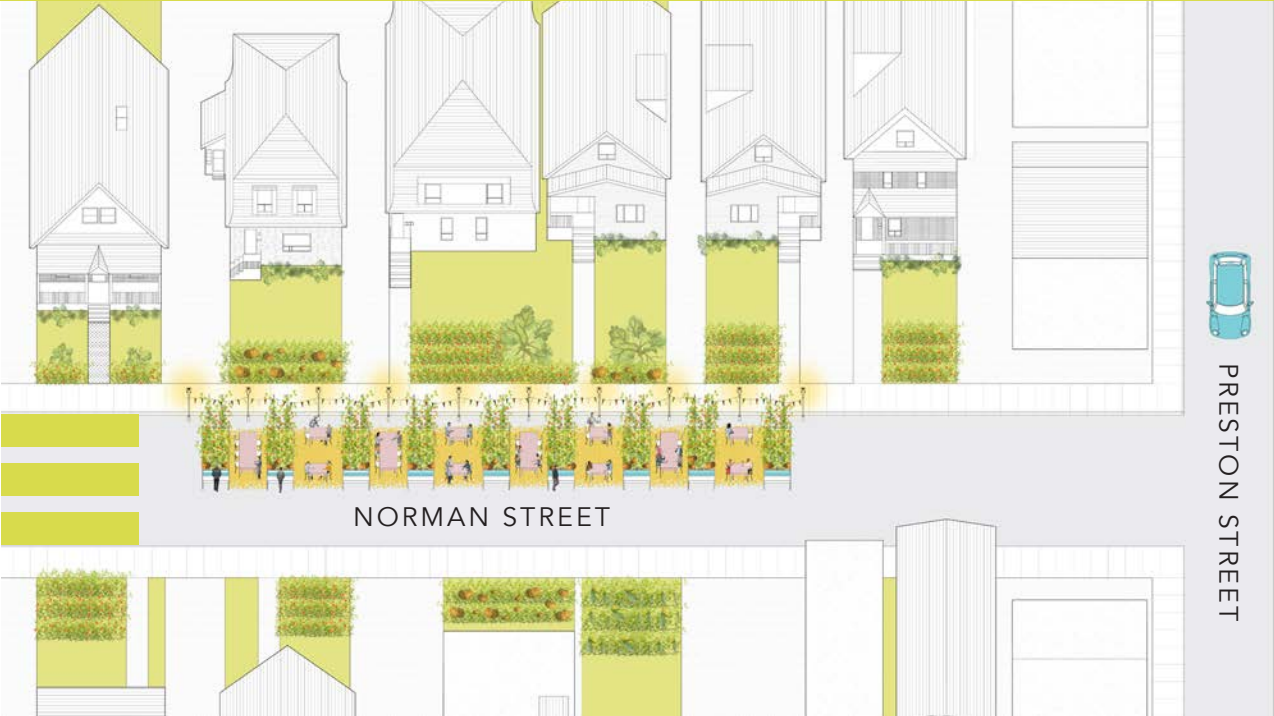
“Preston Street, known for its close-knit community and local restaurant economy, is feeling the stress of the COVID crisis.”

Chair, Little Italy Neighborhood Association



PRESTON STREET in the vibrant Ottawa neighborhood of Little Italy is lined with family restaurants. Several small cul-de-sacs to the west of Preston are here referred to as the ‘Preston Streets.’ Reducing the width of the street makes space for a set of outdoor dining rooms, framed by vegetable beds, and sized for either family dining or ‘physically distanced’ dining among strangers.

Neighbors establish vegetable beds at the end of the cul-de-sac and in their front yards, to augment food production. Meals can be delivered from Preston Street restaurants to tables by flocks of server-birds.





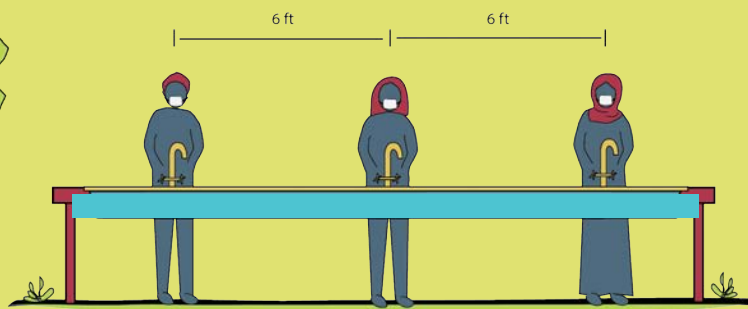
DESIGN RESEARCH

“COVID 19 will have a lasting effect on consumer behaviour.”

--Owner, Moscow Tea Room, Byward Market

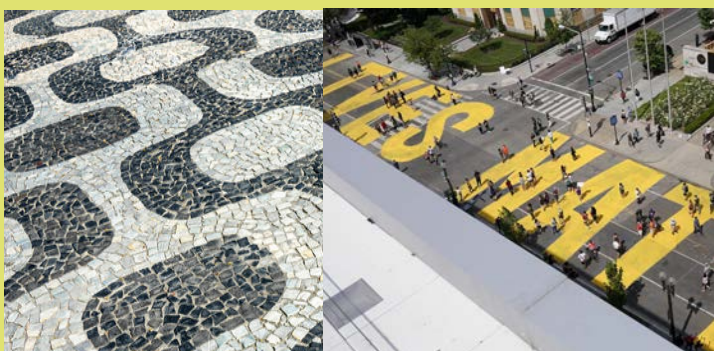
A SPIRIT OF FESTIVAL

on GEORGE & YORK STREETS, in the Byward Market



STOREFRONT KITCHENS, PUBLIC WASHROOMS & STORAGE

As more patrons are able to dine outdoors, some interior space of larger restaurants can be given over to storefront kitchens, public washrooms, and seasonal storage of tables and chairs. Street paving patterns extend into the interior space, chefs are on display to passersby, and washrooms become easily accessible to all members of the public from the street.



PAVING & PAINTING PATTERNS

Repaving streets like George and York is an effort well worth the investment, and anticipates the decreasing need for wide streets with acres of adjacent parking. Modeled after the exuberant patterns found in cities like Barcelona and Rio de Janeiro, the patterns help to choreograph urban daily life, and might inspire dancing in the streets as well as dinners.

A more immediate and temporal version is the painted pattern, which might serve neighborhoods who gain permission for temporary street closures to hold dinners on the street. As with the Black Lives Matter street murals, these might be initiated by local, unsanctioned action, and then be adopted through municipal policy amendments.

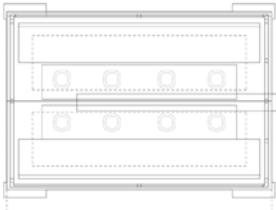
*“If this continues through the winter,
70% of our locally owned restaurants may not survive.”*
--Chair of the Byward Market Neighborhood Association, August 2020

DINING in WINTER: CABINS & TENTS

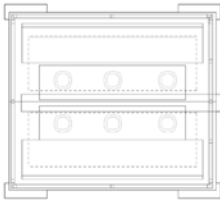
“WINTER STREET” is anywhere you want it to be



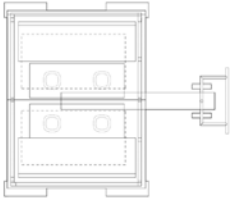
The WINTER CABINS are designed in three sizes. The ‘date cabin’ accommodates two people for an intimate dinner. The social cabin is for a small group of friends: 3 - 4 people. The family cabin is large enough for eight. Cabins have solar panels on the roof, and a sliding board that allows waitstaff to serve food from a safe distance.



FAMILY CABIN: 3m



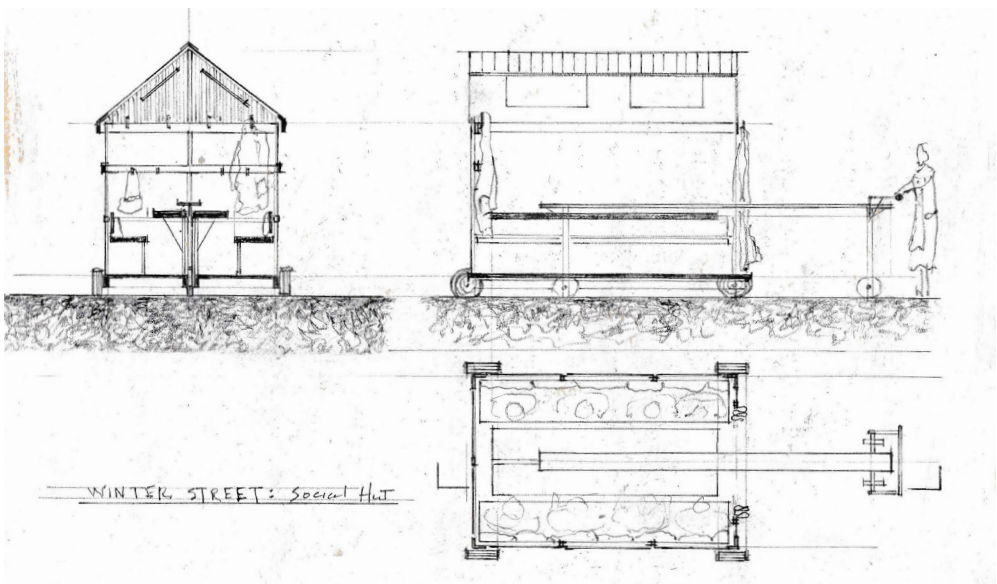
SOCIAL CABIN: 2m



DATE CABIN: 1m

WINTER CABINS

on SPARKS STREET and GEORGE STREET

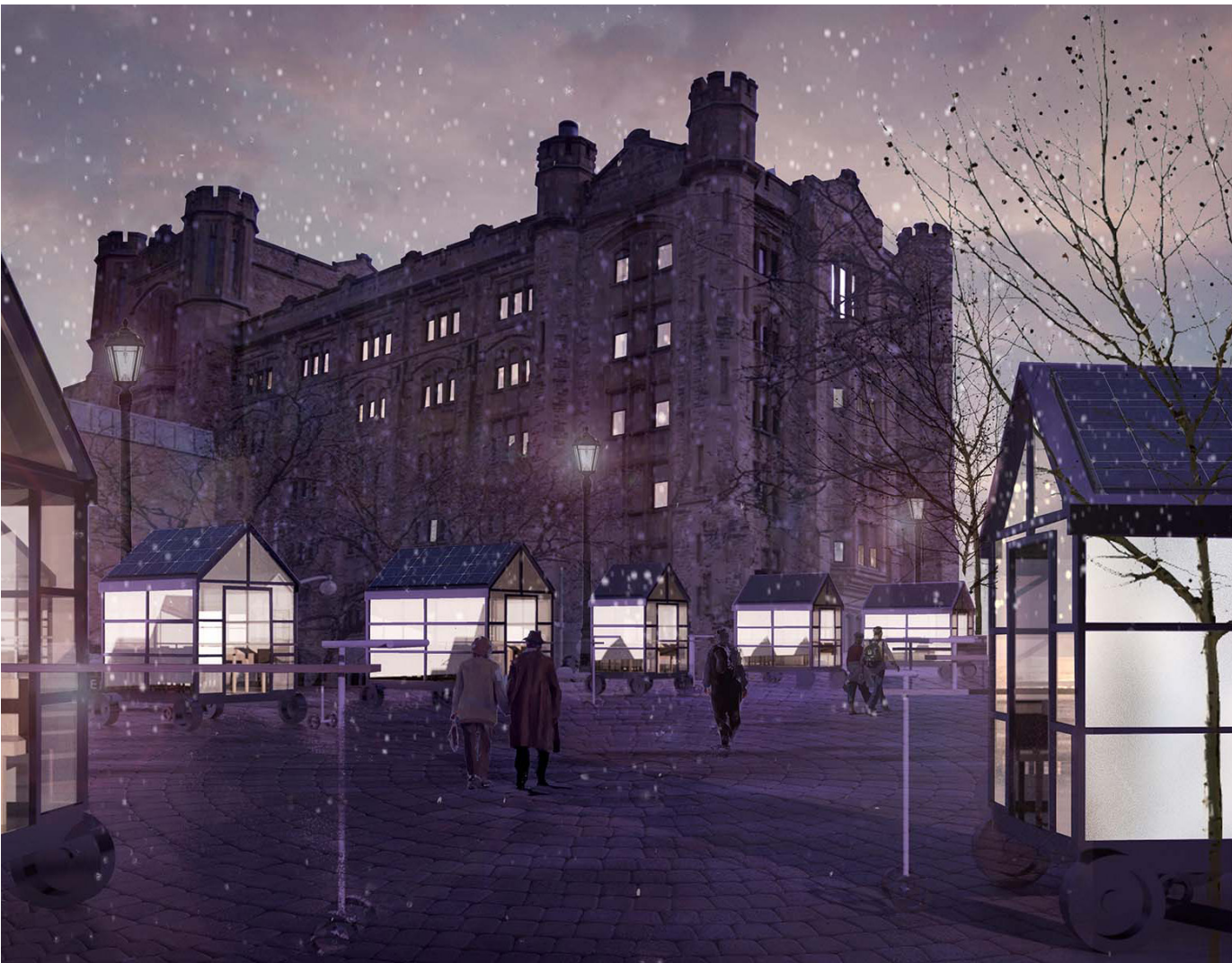
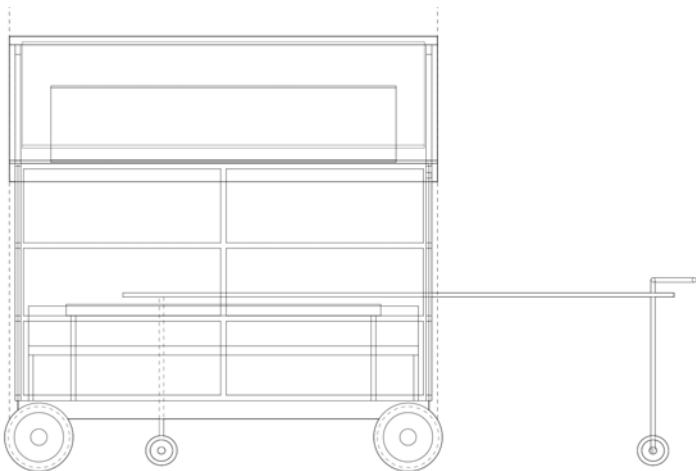


top left:
Sketch shows long sliding board, for safely distanced service.

top right:
Family being served in a dining cabin on George Street.

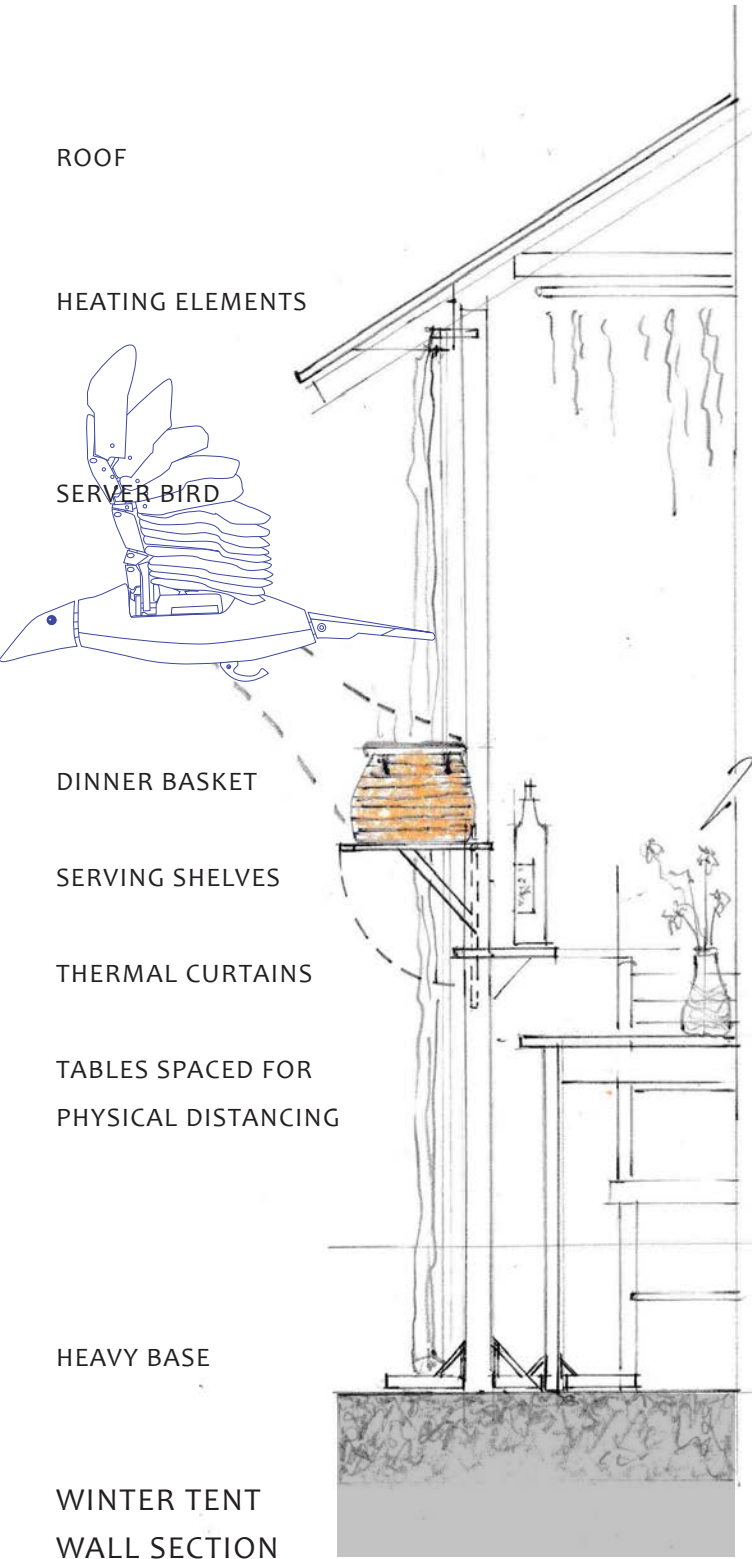
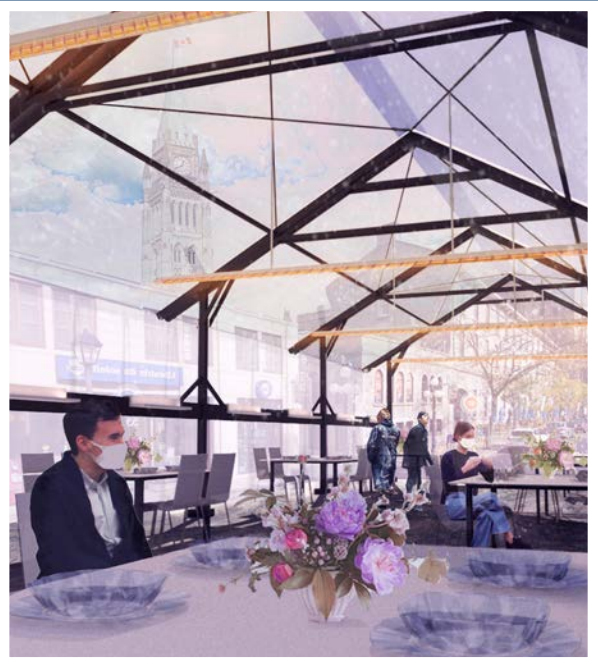
middle right:
Sparks Street in Ottawa is already a pedestrian-only street. Winter dining cabins provide economic viability for Sparks Street restaurants.

bottom right:
Dining cabins on York Street in the Byward Market.



WINTER TENTS

on YORK STREET



WINTER TENTS are variations on models already produced for weddings and other outdoor events. Modifications allow attachments to the sides, where thermal curtains can help retain heat, and shelves that fold out from the frame allow server birds to safely deliver meals.

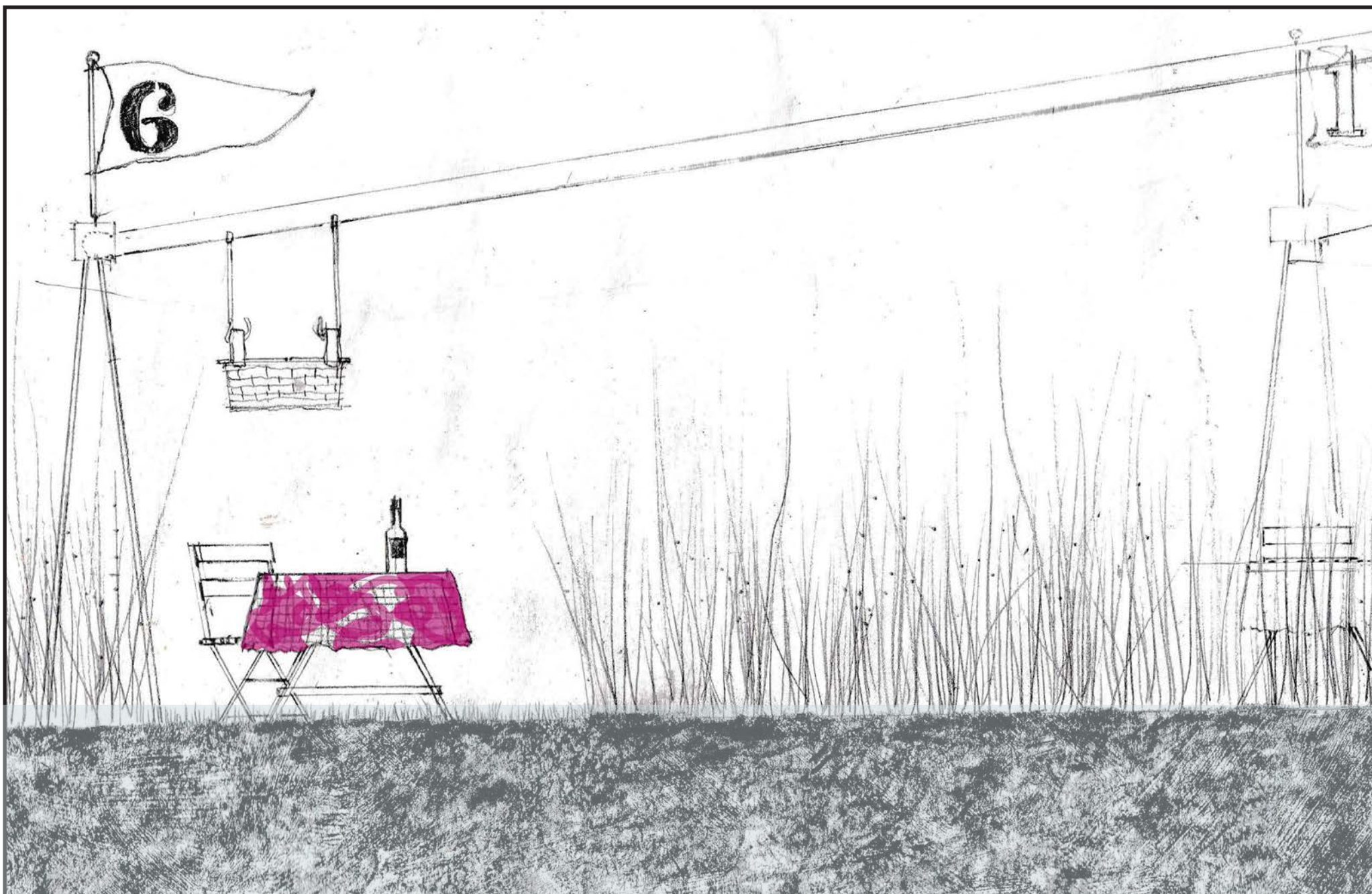
TABLES FOR ONE

on HAZEL STREET



“TABLES FOR ONE” is an annex of the popular Green Door Cafe on Main Street. Part of Hazel Street is planted as wheat field, creating an agrarian oasis in the middle of a rapidly developing neighborhood. Inspired by the whimsical ‘Restaurant for One’ in Sweden, this unusual dining venue takes the stigma out of dining alone.

Physically distanced tables are set each in a small mowed circle, within the field of wheat and a few fruit trees. Meals are delivered by a basket on a rope, or by server birds. The menu includes a selection of books to read while dining, and patrons are encouraged to take the book with them. With a policy of ‘bring a book, take a book’, literature cycles among local residents.





ADDITIONAL NOTES

page 2

The research frameworks for this project overlap and intersect like a complex Venn diagram.

Perhaps most importantly, the funding for the project is set up as a collaborative and intersectional model among Canadian universities, private industry sponsors, and government. Government funding is leveraged to bring matching funds from corporate sponsors. These combined funds are then used exclusively to hire graduate students in the design fields, in this case, two Master of Architecture students in their thesis year.

page 3

The primary author of this report had the privilege of joining a ‘dinner in the street’ in Siena in 1989, while living in the Chiocciola (snail) contrada. Our horse did not win the Palio race that year, but the experience became an indelible memory for her and her 7-year-old daughter, and has influenced the way that they share meals with family, friends and neighbors.

page 4

The grant for this project was written in early May 2020, as restaurant closures threatened the economic health of small business owners, and the people they employed. By June, when the funds were granted, cities across North America and around the world had begun adapting to the crisis. We saw our ideas deployed in real time, and gained inspiration from many innovative ideas published through web and social media. At the same time, we recognized the intersection between the health crisis, increasing economic disparity, and a systemic racism that made people of color the most affected group in a climate of food scarcity and risk of contagion. ‘Serving the Underserved’ became one of the primary goals of the project.

page 5

Originally the team identified 12 streets in 12 Ottawa neighborhoods. This report focuses on 6 of them, chosen to represent a diverse set of local characteristics, and to emphasize the different ways in which ‘dinner in the street’ can support local economies, capitalize on local assets, and serve the underserved.

page 8

We include this hypothesis of the robotic server drones to stress the importance of collaborations across disciplines, recognizing that STEM fields have their own important place in design research.

page 9

The Ottawa Art Gallery is located at the boundary of two disparate neighborhoods. Sandy Hill is relatively affluent, and many patrons of the arts live within walking distance of the museum. At the same time, a mission that serves the homeless is just across the street from the OAG, and within two blocks are two homeless shelters. The OAG has a reputation for fighting for social equity, and their sponsored benefit dinners will unite donor-patrons with those in need. The ‘dining companions’, in both human and non-human forms, are made by local artists, and thus support the art community as well.

page 11

The chair of the neighborhood association in Little Italy was a particularly involved partner in exploring possibilities for outdoor dining. Little Italy already has a tradition of closing parts of Preston Street for community dinners, and local leaders can potentially become champions in seeking municipal support for more permanent infrastructure changes.

page 13

The precarity of the approaching winter became more apparent in fall 2020, when the project was already well underway. Though many had been hopeful that the pandemic would be under control by the time freezing temperatures arrived, it soon became clear that the 2nd wave predicted by infectious disease experts was coming. There was of course no way to fund and build the dining cabins and tents in time, and works on paper do not keep businesses open. Thus this research is in service of future crises, or even as inspirations for more public life on the street in non-pandemic times.

page 14

The dining cabins have been designed to a high level of detail. Easily conveyed from street to street with use of a trailer hitch, the migrating group of structures can support many different communities over the course of the winter. In quantities of 10 or more, cost per cabin in in a range of \$6000 - \$8000. Though public investment would be wonderful, the cabins can also be funded through philanthropy, and each named for a donor.

page 15

As the wall section of the winter tents shows, flexible elements allow various levels of heat retention and distanced serving practices.

page 16

“Tables for One” is less about addressing economic needs, and more about providing a unique opportunity for people to dine alone in a ‘rural’ setting. The cost to develop this project is minimal, and the conversion of one block of Hazel street to a wheat field softens the architectural edge of the the large housing development just to the north.



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