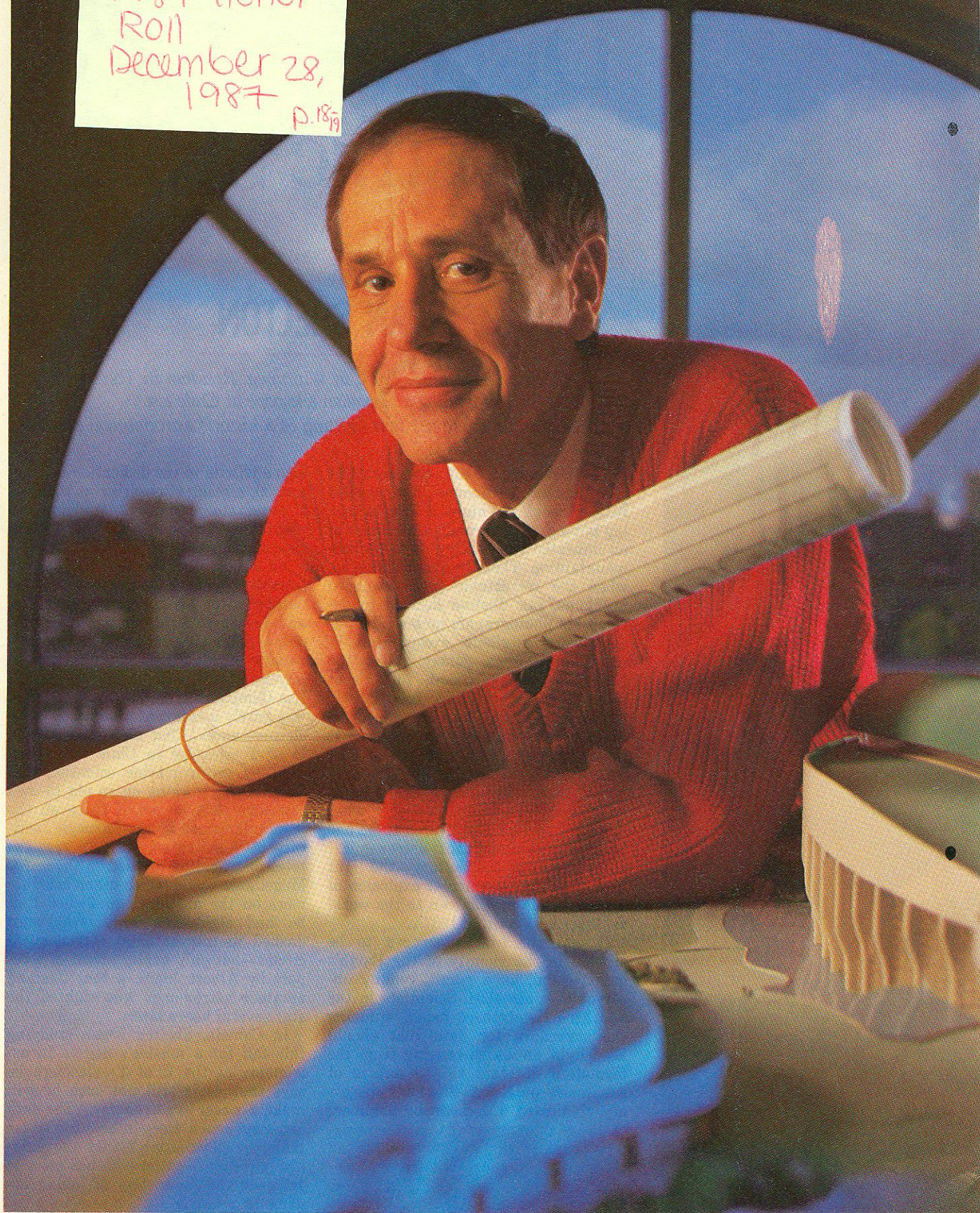


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# Building Beyond Limitations

## DOUGLAS CARDINAL

*Born March 7, 1934, in Calgary. Resident in Ottawa. A highly praised and often controversial architect, Cardinal has created a stunning new museum for Canada's capital region.*

As a student at the University of British Columbia in the 1950s, the young Métis was shocked when an official said that he did not have "the right family background" to be an architect. Douglas Cardinal has never forgotten that insult. But he has more than disproved the official's bigoted assessment. In Hull, Que., facing the Parliament Buildings from across the Ottawa River, Cardinal's most ambitious architectural statement is emerging as work proceeds on the curving structures that will house the new Canadian Museum of Civilization. For Cardinal, the project is far more than a massive architectural challenge. "What these buildings say," said Cardinal, "is that if you can put your identity and your limitations aside, almost anything is possible."

Cardinal's own achievement supports that conviction. As a Métis who has won international recognition for his architecture, Cardinal is a symbol of hope for Canada's native peoples. At the same time, in designing a museum to house Canada's historical and archaeological treasures, he may well have created a new architectural treasure for the nation's capital region. "I think this is going to be a very popular building," said Trevor Boddy, an assistant professor at Carleton University's School of Architecture. "It is a building with strong emotional, sculptural and sensual qualities."

Still, the project has been dogged by controversy, with the estimated price

soaring from \$80 million five years ago to a projected \$143.8 million by the time the museum opens—two years behind schedule—in 1989. Cardinal himself became an issue when federal officials chose him for the project in 1983. Some critics objected to the selection of an architect whose fondness for sinuous, curvilinear designs is at odds with the prevailing fashion for rectilinear forms.

His vision is rooted in the western soil—and in his native blood. Raised in Red Deer, Alta., where his father was a game warden, Cardinal earned an architecture degree from the University of Texas in 1963 and early in his career won international praise for the design of St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church in Red Deer. During the late 1960s and early 1970s Cardinal campaigned for native rights and in the process immersed himself in traditional native culture. "It's a very intensive thing," says Cardinal, 53, who moved to Ottawa with his second wife, Marilyn, and two of his six children in 1985. "You learn to live in a world of infinite possibilities."

As the museum takes shape, Cardinal has been forced to fight against bureaucratic cost-cutting. In September he won a victory by persuading officials not to overrule his decision to install costly windows that will provide natural lighting in the museum's exhibition halls. "We simply will not compromise our original vision," insists Cardinal, "even when it seems almost impossible to carry it through." □