

his own theatres as well. But, in spite of his entrepreneurial skills, none of his films have been able to reconcile commercial and artistic aspirations. Like *The Disappearance* and more than a few other Canadian films, the full potential remains untapped.

J. Paul Costabile ●

**THE DISAPPEARANCE** d. Stuart Cooper p. David Hemmings (U.K.), Gerry Arbeid (Canada) exec. p. Garth H. Drabinsky, James Mitchell (Canada) p. exec. Gavrick Losey (U.K.) asst. d. Terry Marcel, David Wimbury, Ian Whyte (U.K.), Tony Thatcher, Ken Goch, John Caradonna (Canada) sc. Paul Mayersberg, from the novel *Echoes of Celadine* by Derek Marlowe cost. Monique Champagne d.o.p. John Alcott cam. op. James Devis add. photog. Monianne sd. camera Bill Baringer ed. Eric Boyd-Perkins (original version), Fima Noveck (revised version) creative consultants Niko Elmaleh, Mel Maron sd. rec. Robin Gregory boom Norman Mercier, Terry Sherratt sd. ed. Alain Beil sd. ef. ed. Chris Greenham re-rec. Gerry Humphreys music Robert Farnon (original version) Craig Hundley (revised version) p. des. Anne Pritchard art d. Glenn Bydwell, Brian Thomas p. man. Garth Thomas (U.K.) Bob Presner (Canada) loc. man. Richard Green (U.K.) Duane Howard (Canada) key grips Tony Gundrie, John Daust visual ef. Dick Hewitt, Alan Whibley firearms handler Joe Elsner cost. Milena Canonero ward. Tom Dickinson makeup Anthony Clavet titles Trevor Bond p. asst. Sally Shewring (U.K.), Carlos Ferrand, Jon Goodwill, Terry Last, Josh Nevsky, Bill Smith (Canada) p.c. Trofar (London), Tiberius Film Productions (Montreal) 1977. Color Eastmancolor, 35 mm. running time 102 minutes (original version) 84 minutes (revised version) dist. Pan-Canadian I.p. Donald Sutherland, Francine Racette, David Hemmings, John Hurt, David Warner, Christopher Plummer, Virginia McKenna, Peter Bowles, Michelle Magry, Duane Howard, Christina Greatrex, Robin Sachs, Maureen Beck, Norman Ensley, Patricia Hodge, Mark Cogman, Robert Korne, Dick Irwin, Danny Gallivan.

## Atom Egoyan's **Open House**

Combining linear narrative plotting with experimental filmmaking techniques is a dangerous game. Like walking on a greased tightrope, at any moment you may slip off. Atom Egoyan's short film *Open House* is on that tightrope, and the only reason it does not fall into the abyss is due solely to Egoyan's maturing as a filmmaker.

The tightrope almost gets the better of Egoyan on many occasions, but his combination of linearity with experimentalism is logical for the story he wishes to tell. His use of highly stylized camera movement is *bona fide* experimental cinema, but Egoyan uses it very effectively to give the audience some much-needed information.

The story he tells is paper thin, and

like Egoyan's most recent 16 mm shorts (the badly flawed *After Grad With Dad* and the obscure *Peepshow*), the unspoken, unseen motivations of his characters are everything. Frank (Ross Fraser), a seemingly incompetent real estate agent, is taking a young married couple (Michael and Maureen, played by Michael Marshall and Sharon Cavanaugh) to see a dilapidated home in downtown Toronto. It is obvious from the beginning that Frank is not going to sell the house, and at the end he does not.

This slight story is not what concerns Egoyan. He uses this framework to drape a cast of characters who not only cannot communicate with one another, but there is aggression and hostility hidden just below the surface of each conversation. Open hostility is revealed only once when a man (played by Bruce Bell in a funny/scary cameo) chastises Frank for almost running him over. "You know why you're a stranger?" the man yells through Frank's car window. "It's because you're strange."

A theme Egoyan has used ineffectually before, but is picked up ingeniously in *Open House*, is subjective reality. Subjective reality fascinates Egoyan and it forms the core for this film. The young couple, when apart, spin different tales of what each other does for a living; Frank hides under a half dozen facades; and the owners of the house are convinced their home used to be a castle. The audience is never told what is real and what is imagined reality. That is the beauty and the flaw of *Open House*.

In his attempt to be subtle Egoyan almost loses his audience. In fact, at the critical moment he will lose an inattentive audience. The justification for Frank's peculiar behaviour and incompetence is on the screen, but if you are not paying attention you will miss it. Being too obscure is as inexcusable as being too obvious. At times *Open House* is too obscure.

Atom Egoyan has learned much in the last three years. With each successive film he demonstrates a firmer understanding of the filmmaking process and to what limits he can push it. Thus, even with its flaws, *Open House* is a smooth and logical progression that leads to his next and more ambitious film.

David Churchill ●

**OPEN HOUSE** p./d./sc. Atom Egoyan d.o.p. Peter Mettler ed. Atom Egoyan sd. David Rokeby sd. rec. Michael Ruehle asst. cam. Bruce McDonald gaffer/grip Aidan Cosgrave crane op. Bill Heintz stills Philip Newton p. asst. Shelley Tepperman, Mark Battle, David Fraser l.p. Ross Fraser, Michael Marshall, Sharon Cavanaugh, Alberta Davidson, Hovsep Yeghoyan, Bruce Bell. p.c. Ego Film Arts with the assistance of the OAC. running time: 27 min. colour, 16mm dist.

● Strange strangers: Michael Marshall and Sharon Cavanaugh in *Open House*

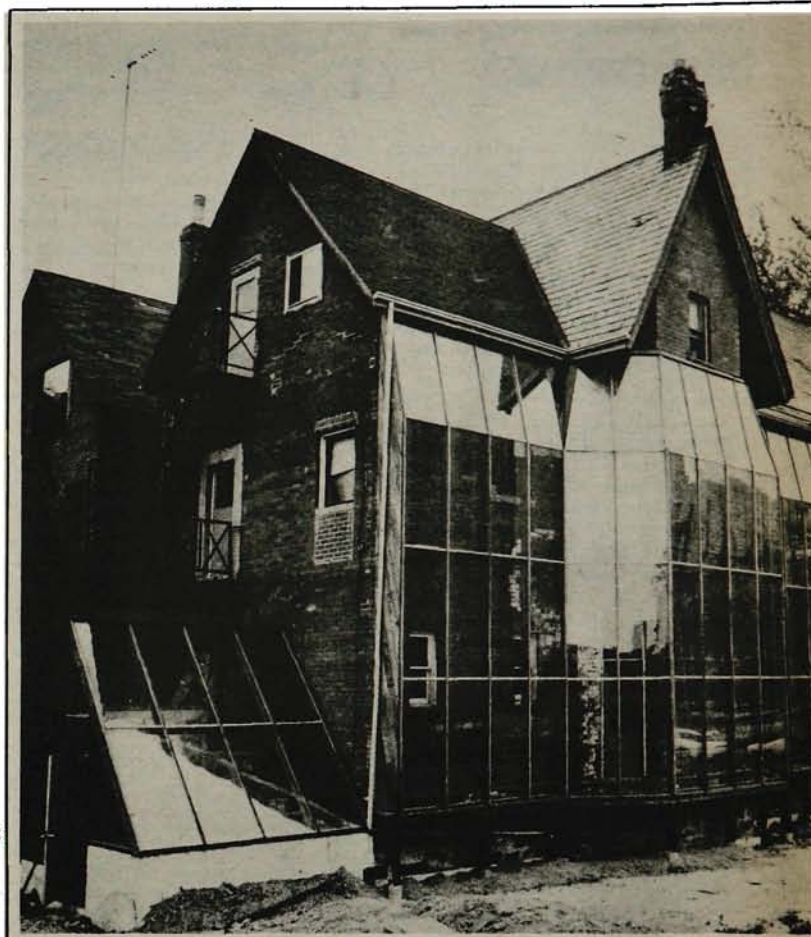


Photo: Ecology House

● Building the Trombe wall was a major challenge in this informative film

## Barbara Sweete's **Old House / New House**

Over a period of two years, eighty Pollution Probe Volunteers transformed a drafty, but attractive Victorian house in downtown Toronto into a model of energy-efficient and ecologically-sound living space. The result, *Ecology House*, is a popular energy conservation showcase which attracts close to 1,000 visitors each month. This film, *Old House/New House*, documents the transformation step-by-step. We see a 90-year-old rooming-house gradually become a working demonstration of conserver living, with a heating bill reduced by 85 per cent.

The film is informative and straightforward, following the volunteers at work and explaining how each change to the house will be effective. We see various methods for reducing air leakage in the home, for installing insulation, and for making use of passive and active solar technology. By filming the inexperienced volunteers at work, *Old House/New House* shows that "retrofitting" (thermal upgrading) can be done by almost anyone. This in itself makes a viewing of the film a valuable experience. Techniques like weatherstripping, caulking, installing insulation, and the making of thermal shutters are "demystified" and shown to be easily done.

Other retrofitting procedures are more challenging and cause some interesting moments of tension in the film. The building of the large Trombe wall - a

1300 square-foot glass and wood frame that covers the south-facing wall of the building - is a major construction job that challenges the volunteers. We see the necessity for smooth cooperation and patience in the erection of this massive solar collector. The fitting in of the third-floor greenhouse cover, a heavy glass frame hoisted by several workers, is another slightly anxious moment in the film where a mistake could mean the ruin of much work. As the cover slides into place, there is a palpable sense of victory in the film. Such moments are nicely placed to personalize the material and involve us in the project.

*Old House/New House* also gives the viewer practical information on waste recycling, gardening and hydroponics. In fact, this is a very informative film - more than just a record of one retrofitting project, it tries to convey to the viewer as much information as one might get by visiting Ecology House itself. Thus, the film is useful for any group interested in public education and urban conservation issues. A French version, *La Maison Écologique*, is also available. *Old House/New House* was a Red Ribbon Winner at the American Film Festival in 1982. Like Ecology House itself, the film is "a starting-off point for thinking about the way we live."

Joyce Nelson ●

**OLD HOUSE/NEW HOUSE** p. David Springbett, Larry Weinstein d. Barbara Sweete sc. John Bemrose cam. Richard Stringer ed. Niv Fichman sd. Danilla Fingstein re-rec. George Novotny mus. Jim Montgomery narr. Don Franks 16mm., colour, 28 minutes. 1981. p.c. Energy Media Associates Available from: NFB, or Ecology House, 12 Madison Ave., Toronto, Ont. (416) 967-0577.

Photo: Philip Newton