

# Globe Life & Arts



TELEVISION

## Watch and learn

**John Doyle** explains  
what he'll miss about  
What Not to Wear

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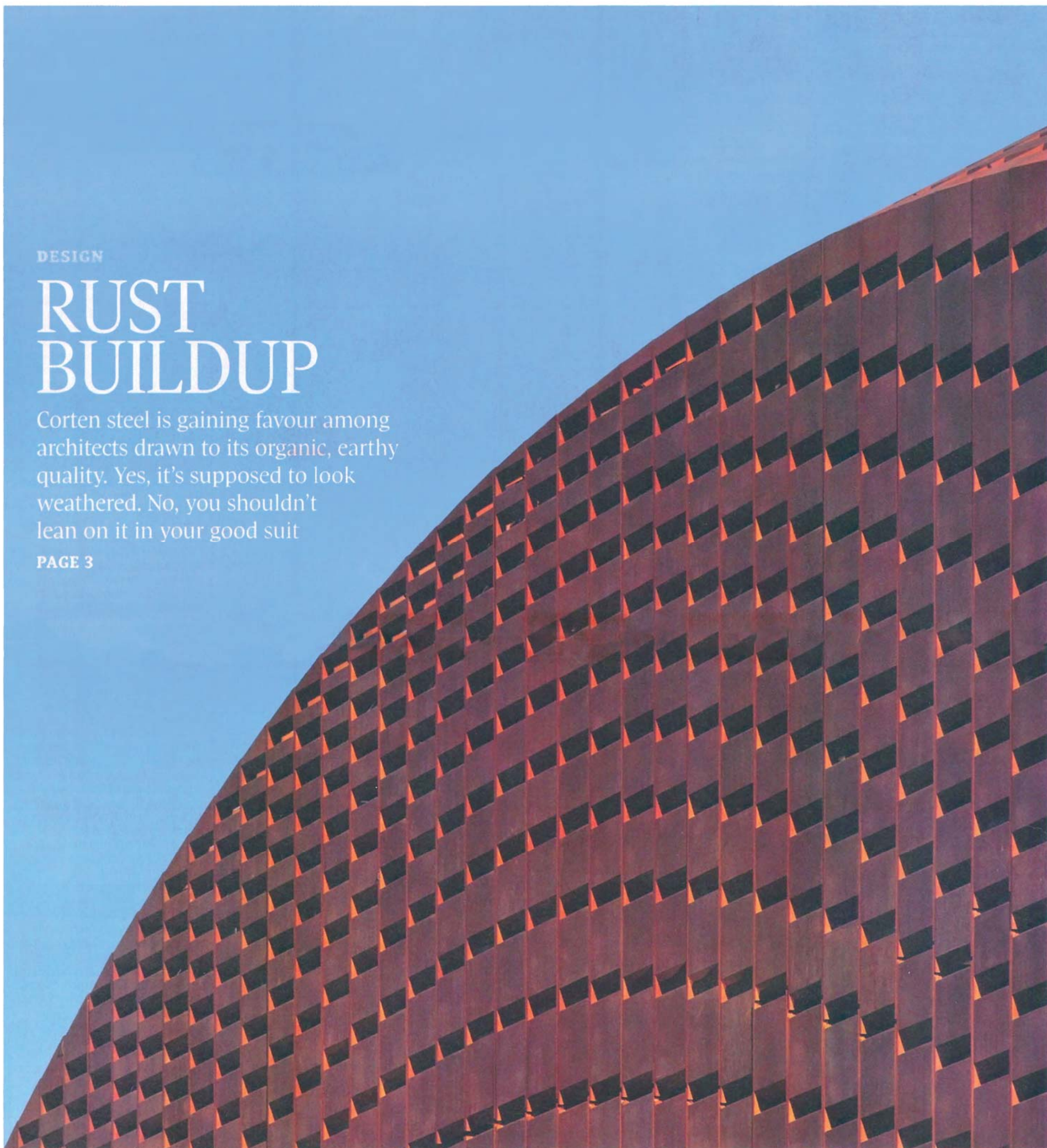
EDITOR: GABE GONDA • SECTION L

DESIGN

# RUST BUILDUP

Corten steel is gaining favour among architects drawn to its organic, earthy quality. Yes, it's supposed to look weathered. No, you shouldn't lean on it in your good suit

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BRUCE DAMONTE



## MATERIALS

# Rust never sleeps

For more and more architects, that's the beauty of it. From house cladding to gardens, weathering steel is popping up everywhere

DAVE MCGINN

Cindy Rendely recently completed her first residential project using Corten steel, although some people weren't sure she was actually done.

Corten has a rusty appearance that is just about the opposite of the slick, shiny materials that many people associate with contemporary architecture, so it is understandable that some passersby weren't sure what to make of the Toronto home Rendely clad it in.

"People said, 'What are you going to clad over that? It's not finished yet, right?'" said Rendely, the founder of Cindy Rendely Architecture, a Toronto-based firm.

Corten, the brand name for what's also called weathering steel, may still be unfamiliar to some, but over the past few years the material has been gaining in popularity among architects and landscape designers who are drawn to its organic, earthy quality. Though it will eventually develop a richly-textured patina, its constantly changing appearance makes it a unique choice for designers looking for a material that's a bit outside the box.

Although it is not new – Eero Saarinen used it for the John Deere headquarters in Illinois in the 1960s – weathering steel has really only begun to enjoy wide popularity over the past several years. Most recently, New York-based SHoP Architects used Corten for the facade of the Barclays Center, the stadium that opened in Brooklyn late last year and the site of the MTV Video Music Awards this week.

"What's beautiful about Corten, and why I was chomping at the bit to work with it, is because it changes with the elements, it changes over time, it changes with the weather," said Rendely. "You don't have full control over it, which is why I haven't had a lot of opportunity to work with it ... people are afraid of it."

While Corten will eventually develop a stable patina, it can streak and the coloration is hardly guaranteed to be consistent, features which are essential to discuss with clients beforehand, says Rendely.

The British architect Will Alsop has included Corten steel in his design of a new subway station and bus terminal to be built in Toronto, as well as a 19-storey block of flats he is currently working on in London. "My usual warning to the client is don't lean against the wall in your best suit," he said.

The material, Alsop says, is certainly more popular than it used to be. "It has an inbuilt warmth



Albert Mondor's Garden of Glass and Metal. Mondor says Corten 'has almost the same colour as the soil, which is great. It highlights your plants.'



Corten changes with the elements and over time, says Cindy Rendely (at left, a house she designed). At right, Canadian sculptor and early Corten adopter John McEwen's Search Light, Star Light, Spot Light.



to it that is a very attractive quality."

As well, its earthy brown colour can offer a striking contrast with other items. It fits especially well in older parts of downtowns where there are brick buildings, and especially in gardens, where it helps to highlight brightly coloured flowers, Alsop said.

Indeed, if there is any place where Corten is at risk of being

overused, it is in landscape architecture. At the Interior Design Show in Toronto earlier this year, the landscape architect Joel Loblaw joked that the world might actually run out of the material given how much it is now being used in landscape design.

Albert Mondor, one of Canada's most renowned garden designers, began working with rusted steel, a close alternative, three years ago. He saw a pile of

it while he was working on a project for a recycling company and was inspired to work with it. Earlier this summer, he used it for his Garden of Glass and Metal, created for Montreal International Mosaiculture, a horticultural exhibition in its fifth iteration this year. "It has almost the same colour as the soil, which is great. It highlights your plants," said Mondor. And yet it is also very modern. "It

gives a really contemporary look."

Still, not everyone is hopping on the bandwagon just yet.

"There's still a division about what's shiny and new and modern and contemporary," said John McEwen, a Canadian sculptor who was an early adopter of Corten. "[It's] different because it's rusty, it's organic in a very particular way." McEwen first used it for a piece he created for the University of Lethbridge in 1980. He also used Corten for a steel conical sculpture unveiled in 1998 outside of Toronto's Air Canada Centre entitled *Search Light, Star Light, Spot Light*. It is certainly becoming more popular, but many clients still reject the idea of anything with such a rusty appearance.

"The first meaning it evokes is that it's not finished," said McEwen.

Yet for some people, that's precisely the appeal: steel will change over time, perhaps streaking here and there but eventually developing a rich patina. And with more people becoming familiar with it, look for Corten to appear in more projects, at least if architects and designers have their way.

"I'd love to do a whole house in it," Rendely says.