

**The charrette gets its name** from an expression that can be traced back to the practice of architecture in the mid-19th century: *faire charrette* (literally, “get on the wagon”). In France at the time, the École des beaux-arts in Paris was the only institution training architects. Aspiring architects would form groups in *ateliers* in the city, under the supervision of an architect in private practice. The École provided the theory instruction and assigned exercises to be completed in a studio setting under the direction of the master architect. On the morning of the evaluation, the École would send a wagon round to each of the studios to pick up the projects—boards, cartons, drawings and models—and deliver them to the jury, made up of renowned professors and architects.



The looming evaluation deadline—*la remise*—would lead to feverish activity in every studio as the days and hours remaining before the **charrette's** arrival. The project had to be ready at all costs, and everyone would pitch in.

A century and a half later, in architecture schools and studios, **the expression *faire charrette*** is still used to refer to the intense activity in the last hours devoted to a project by an aspiring architect before finishing and submitting it in time. And by extension, it also refers to the design workshops organized by gatherings of architects to generate new ideas or effect a re-reading of issues in a situation that appears to be at a standstill.

Seasoned professionals, trainee architects and students gather at

these events to practice their craft freely, freed of the constraints of an agency, the stringent requirements of a client or the limits of a budget. All who take part share in the conviction that creative architecture can play a significant role in solving societal problems, because it has a direct and very real impact on the environment and on citizens' quality of life.

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**Reference :**

Text written by Luc Noppen for the Charrette «*Les églises du Québec, un patrimoine à réinventer*», Septembre 2004.