



Maxwell Residence for seniors in Baie-D'Urfé consists of 100 units, 60 for independent seniors and 40 for those in assisted living. PHOTOS COURTESY OF FARZAD SHODJAI

A Q&A WITH FARZAD SHODJAI

LORRI BENEDIK

Farzad Shodjai is the developer of Senneville sur le Parc, and general director of the Maxwell Residence for seniors, in Baie-D'Urfé. He is the second of four siblings born in Tehran, Iran. His father worked as a government clerk and wanted better career options for his children so he encouraged higher education. All four obtained university degrees. Farzad completed a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering in Tehran, and came to Montreal in 1977 to do a master's in civil engineering at McGill.

We met at the Maxwell Residence.

What happened after university?

I had intended to return to Iran, but in 1978 the country was in the midst of a revolution. My family is of the Bahá'í faith — a group that was being persecuted severely — so my father urged me not to come home.

The immigration process was challenging; what I experienced was paradoxical, like the chicken-and-egg causality dilemma. Companies wanted to hire me but required immigration status, while the immigration department required me to have a job offer to issue a work visa. It took some creativity, but I was finally able to secure an offer and obtained landed immigrant status. In the interim, I married and started a family. Decades later, my parents joined us here. I am now a Canadian citizen.

How did you get into real estate development?

Initially I worked as an engineer for a few companies, including Canatom — a consultant for Atomic Energy Canada. I was creating buildings as part of installations for Candu reactors. In 1983, the demand for reactors diminished so I was laid off.

My father-in-law had always wanted me to pursue entrepreneurship. When I lost my job, he said: "This is your best day; now you can work for yourself." He knew that I liked construction and suggested I build a family home.



Farzad Shodjai, developer of Senneville sur le Parc and general director of Maxwell Residence.

I purchased a lot in Beaconsfield and took his advice.

What happened next?

The mid-1980s were not ideal for real estate. I received a job offer from Pratt & Whitney, a leader in aerospace, accepted and commuted from Beaconsfield to Longueuil for a couple of years. By the end of 1986, the economy had improved so I left my job and got into development with my father-in-law. We acquired a 60-acre property in Hudson and created 55 subdivisions. We built 15 homes and sold the remaining lots.

How did the Maxwell Residence come to be?

In 1989, my wife and I built a new home in Baie-D'Urfé. For the next decade, I focused on developing small revenue properties. Along the way I learned that West Island seniors' residences had long

waiting lists. I saw this as a great opportunity, acquired a piece of land in Baie-D'Urfé, and built the Maxwell Residence: 100 units — 60 for independent seniors and 40 for assisted living. We opened in 2004.

Tell me about Senneville sur le Parc.

In 2014, a real estate agent contacted me about a property in Senneville. It was the previous location (1950s to 1980s) of a veteran's lodge — 12 buildings and a nine-hole golf course. After the new Ste-Anne's Veterans' Hospital opened, the lodge was abandoned, fell into disrepair and was demolished in 2007. The property is home to more than 1,000 mature trees. The city provided subdivisions but locals opposed development. The agent had heard there would be a public bid for the land. It was a long process, but I eventually acquired it.



A pool for residents of Maxwell Residence in Baie-D'Urfé.



Senneville-sur-le-Parc's concept is that of a park into which housing is introduced. As this bird's-eye view shows, green space is the focus.

What happened to the trees?

We did "reverse development," which means that we created green spaces first and established housing lots with the balance. Concentrations of trees became small parks, while most lots are on what was previously the golf course fairway. We connected green spaces to create 1.7 kilometres of trails.

Developers are required to give 10 per cent of their land to the city, for parks; we gave them 30 per cent, including stunning waterfront property on Lac des Deux-Montagnes.

Phase 1 of Senneville sur le Parc is 36 lots; at this time, 27 have been sold. Phase 2, an additional 48 lots, will be available in 2021.

And when you are not working?

My wife, Leyla, is a pharmacist.

When we have time off, we enjoy travel — mostly to visit family.

Our son, Payam, lives in San Francisco and works for Google. Our daughter, Lydia — also a pharmacist — lives in Seattle with her husband and two daughters. Although my siblings and their families are scattered far and wide, we organize frequent reunions.

What puts the spring in your step?

In the Bahá'í faith, work is considered a worship. I awake each morning, energized with the goal of being productive and giving back to my community.

The fundamental tenet of Bahá'í is to make the world a better place. We believe there is only one race — the human race — and that we are all equal.



An artist's rendering of the modern farmhouse-style home that would suit the Senneville-sur-le-Parc development, whose lots range from 1,000 to 1,400 square metres. The home combines the clean lines and modern practicality of contemporary design with the warmth and cosy esthetic of country living. ARTIST'S RENDERINGS (3): COURTESY OF FARZAD SHODJAI



An artist's rendering of the Senneville-sur-le-Parc home's "great room" concept, its warmth and simplicity characterized by incorporating natural textures and materials.