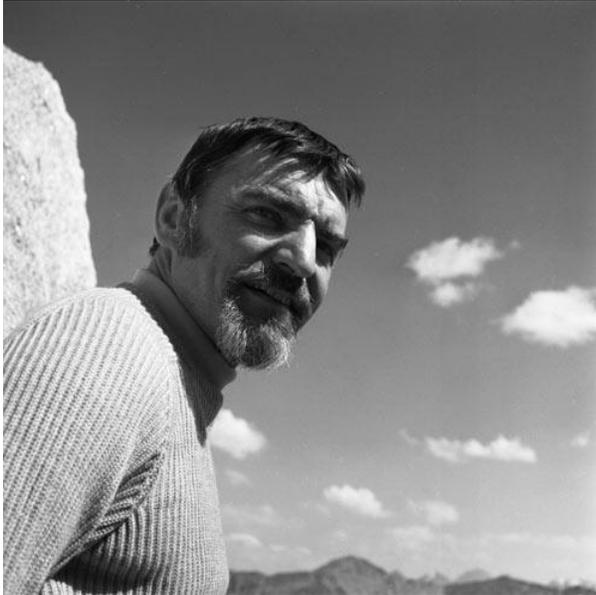


2011 SUMMIT OF EXCELLENCE AWARD

PHILIPPE DELESALLE

ARCHITECT AND MOUNTAINEER



Courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies

It was while being on staff at Sunshine Village during the winter of 1952-53 that Philippe Delesalle put his mind to solving one of the Canadian Rockies' greatest problems . massive and relentless snow accumulation that threatened to collapse the roofs of buildings.

After arriving from France and becoming part of a legendary group of Bow Valley mountaineers . many of them recent immigrants from Europe, like himself . and making first ascents on the east face of Banff's Mount Edith and on Wasootch Tower in the Kananaskis Valley, Delesalle went to McGill University to study architecture. He returned to Alberta to launch an acclaimed career that has included designing some of the most remote structures in the mountains of western Canada. Philippe Delesalle will receive the 2011 Summit of Excellence Award at this year's Banff Mountain Film and Book Festival.

The most difficult site presents opportunity for the most interesting building, says Delesalle, a resident of Canmore, Alberta. And some of his buildings . like the celebrated CMH Bugaboos, Adamants, Bobbie Burns, and Cariboo lodges, the lodges at Sunshine Village, early Alpine Club of Canada huts on the Wapta Icefields, and the Sapphire Col Hut above Rogers Pass . are in extremely difficult and remote sites. Delesalle would see them as prime problem-solving terrain. Then, he implements a three-prong approach.

First, the building needs to function . it has to work, says Delesalle, which in the mountains means it has to provide shelter and comfort. Next, the structure has to have integrity, to be built solidly to sustain the weather and time. Third, it must have a sense of harmony, to fit well to the site.

After witnessing so many roof failures due to snow loads and icing conditions, demanding constant roof shovelling, Delesalle followed the lead of other alpine countries and pioneered locally the method of double roof whereby the snow-bearing roof is separated from the standard roof by a crawl space. It has been a huge success wherever climate conditions demands it.

Besides being co-founder one of Canada's most successful architectural firms, Delesalle is also widely-respected as an alpinist and adventurer. His world travels began in his youth when he struck out from his home town in the north of France to cross the Sahara Desert on foot, sail the Atlantic Ocean, fly a light plane the length of the Americas, travel the Arctic with the Inuit, climb great mountains in Peru and the Yukon, and ski the icefields of the Canadian Rockies. In 1959, he joined a team led by Hans Gmoser that walked 135 kilometres from Kluane Lake to Mount Logan, achieving the second ascent of the mountain's east ridge, then rafted out the Donjek Glacier and River to the Alaska Highway. In 1960, he and Gmoser pioneered the first half of the Great Divide Ski Traverse from Kicking Horse Pass to the Columbia Icefields, inspiring a generation of ski mountaineers.

At 82 years of age, Philippe is still active and can be found regularly skiing the Cascade Fire Road near Banff. He has lived in Canmore for over 50 years, in a home along Policeman's Creek. He and his wife, Mireille, who is also an avid cross-country skier, have raised three children, Bruno, Nathalie, and Marco.