

Yorkville Park an obviously successful people place

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ARCHITECTURE CRITIC

They say you get what you pay for. In the case of the Village of Yorkville Park, that's a fair amount. On one hand, the park cost a hefty \$3 million, but on the other, we got a lot for our money.

Located on the site of the once infamous no-limit parking lot on Cumberland St., the equally infamous park is an obvious success and an entirely positive addition to Yorkville, Toronto's tony but tired boutique and gallery district.

Pass by any weekday at

lunchtime, and the place is jammed with people, eating, talking, sitting, lying down, reading. Even those strange inner-tube-like planters at the east end of the park have turned out to be quite usable. I saw a man fast asleep on one, literally curled up on it.

Despite much bad press, occasioned by the fact the park includes a granite outcropping installed at great expense, \$283,000, and a design that tends to be overly self-conscious, Yorkville accomplishes everything it set out to do.

Architecture

On one level, the park is simply a place to spend a few spare minutes. On another level, however, it's an exploration of the physical and social history of the city. Divided into 17 strips, each the size of the original lots, Cumberland includes examples of Southern Ontario flora. There's a marsh, a small wooded area, a mini-meadow and, of course, the notorious rock.

Designed by Oleson Worland of Toronto in collaboration with a firm of San Francisco land-

scape architects, the scheme was selected from 169 entries submitted to an open competition. Certainly it represents a radically new approach to the issue of creating open public space downtown. The idea of building another green desert wouldn't have made sense, regardless of what most city politicians say.

Seeing as how the land is sit-

ting on top of the Bloor subway line, grassy knolls would be no more "natural" than what's there now.

Recognizing, perhaps, that it had an unqualified success on its hands, City Council even approved the purchase of 50 portable chairs for the park. They appeared last month during the jazz festival and are yanked out daily for everyone to use.

On Friday, Circle Ball Fair '94, a 10-day festival of street performers, gets under way at Yorkville Park, or as it's more commonly known, "The Rock". A series of lectures has also been arranged for the park, to be given Saturdays at 2 p.m. until Sept. 3.

Clearly, money isn't everything, especially now that it has already been spent.