



09004



Architecture of the Land
Toronto's New Civic Temple
The Rebirth of First Nations Design
and... Alias Research, Agoras and The Guggenheim

"The impulse remains to respect the integrity of the earth, to find truth in it and, beyond dying, to shape a community with it for the common good." Vincent Scully, *Architecture, The Natural and The Manmade*

Ask the question "What is mankind's relationship to the natural world?" and be the most unpopular guest at a dinner party. Vincent Scully, a long-time humanities professor at Yale University, has spent some 45 years and a dozen books dedicated to finding an appropriate response. His latest book, *Architecture, The Natural and The Manmade* (St. Martin's Press: 1991) charts humanity's response to the threat or challenge of nature and the ways that symbols of a community are embraced by building form. (To boot, eight films on the vast subject are in the making by Scully.)

Past generations and prominent thinkers, from cavemen to the Greeks to Walt Whitman to Maya Lin, have contributed significance to the meaning of architecture and the land. Closer to home, new eloquence comes from an unlikely set of circumstances: a community centre in north Toronto born out of a public sentiment that an open space is better than a building.

Eglinton Park is a pastoral place in a well-heeled neighbourhood. Hoopla is measured by the number of kids shooting — not drugs or other kids — but the park's toboggan run. A new community centre, went the popular critique, might damage the peaceful texture of the space. The 50,000 sq. ft. centre would replace a modest facility. And it was free to the general public. There was no knowing who might gather under its eaves.

When a small resistance was mounted by some of the area's neighbours, the city's Parks and Recreation Department launched its own public relations offensive: a single-stage limited competition in 1987 that gathered designs from some of the city's best and brightest. Planner Ken Greenberg, former director of Toronto's Urban Design Group, sat on the jury, as did architect Raymond Moriyama and representatives from city departments. George Baird served as the professional advisor. The design brief called for a clear integration of the building with the park, and the participants responded in kind. A scheme by A.J. Diamond, Donald Schmitt and Company treated the building as a contemporary bunker and nearly buried it underground. It stirred real interest but failed on the apparent technical impossibility of trees surviving such an upheaval. The scheme by Oleson Worland Architects, a hybrid of Miesian transparency and Frank Lloyd Wright sensibilities, was unanimously chosen by the judges.

David Oleson and Wilfrid Worland are sympathetic designers, who have worked on public buildings and non-profit housing, often for disenfranchised clients — a network of Older Women, a group of politicized Filipino nannies and the homeless. Oleson and Worland, more of the talent to emerge during the 1970s from the shipwrecked partnership of Barton Myers and Jack Diamond, eventually formed their firm in 1984. Alive with an intellectual energy and serious interest in fun, the firm presented its work as an exhibition and street projection at Ballenford Architectural Books. Their interest in trying on new ideas played an important part in landing Toronto's new Cumberland Park, a provocative Canadian garden (complete with a huge and hugely controversial rock) that won an international competition for the firm in joint venture with San Francisco's former Schwartz/Smith/Meyer Landscape Architects Inc.



The main east-west axis of Toronto's new flagship community centre houses a gym, kitchen, multi-purpose room, central lounges, meeting rooms and seniors' room. Birch wood is used on handrails and millwork. The lower floor is pre-cast concrete.

THE NEW TORONTO COMMUNITY CENTRE UNDERSTANDS THE NORTH AMERICAN LOVE AND FEAR OF THE METROPOLIS. A MIX OF CITY AND COUNTRY, IT CELEBRATES THE MIDDLEGROUND.

A CIVIC TEMPLE
in a Park

CLIENT:

CITY OF TORONTO DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

ARCHITECT:

OLESON WORLAND ARCHITECTS

PRINCIPALS-IN-CHARGE:

DAVID OLESON AND WILFRID WORLAND

PROJECT ARCHITECT:

MARK MICHASIWI

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT:

FERRIS + QUINN ASSOCIATES INC.

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER:

YOLLES PARTNERSHIP LTD.

MECHANICAL AND ELECTRICAL ENGINEER:

RYBKA SMITH AND GINSLER LTD

CONSTRUCTION MANAGER:

EASTERN CONSTRUCTION COMPANY LTD.

BUDGET:

\$18 MILLION

PHOTOGRAPHER:

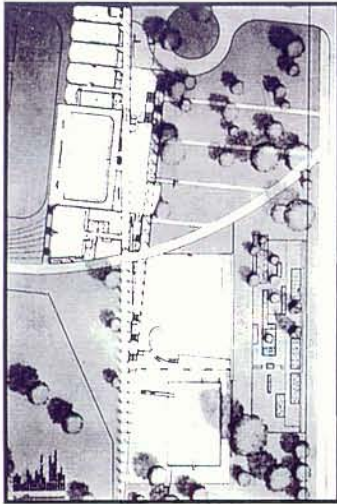
STEVEN EVANS

(Right) The custom millwork, designed by project architect Mark Michasniw, and the elliptical elevator shaft recall the organic undulating curves of the park's topography. The shaft is constructed from pre-cast concrete; running bond lends mass and solidity to the shaft. (Below) The building's permeability encourages easy access to those passing by on Eglinton Avenue or strolling in the park. Douglas fir columns front the southern facade while a gridded black glass wall (with an emphasis on horizontal mullions) lends a weightlessness to the building.



(Bottom) A study sketch, by Mark Michasniw for 1987 design competition, expresses the transparency of the building's main east-west, beyond, the north-south building that houses indoor adult and children's pools. (Following Pages) An interior view of the main lounge and lounge, finished in all natural wood, and gym that features exposed steel trusses.

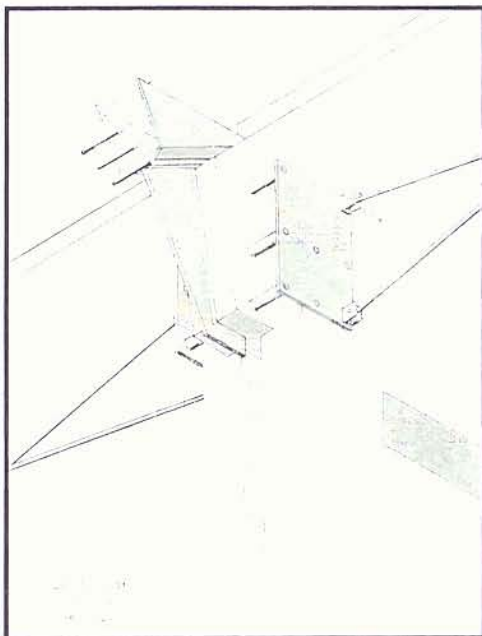




(Left) An upper level floor and site plan of the North Toronto Memorial Community Centre, designed for the 1987 competition to allow for the preservation of all elms and other major trees. A long tapering wedge cuts horizontally between the two buildings that comprise the centre. It follows the alignment of Eglinton Ave. to the south, and the siting of an old arena to the north.



(Right) On the exterior southern facade, an arcade of natural wood extends the length of the building to reinforce the major circulation route.



(Left) A sketch details the capital of the Douglas fir columns that front the building. Cross bracing gives structural and aesthetic rigidity to the columns.

For Eglinton Park, Oleson Worland imagined a community centre that would celebrate something Canadians have got over the Americans: a respect for the collective. There is as much in the design that builds on a profound understanding of the forces of nature. The unwieldy character of this hinterland has been reflected in the paintings of Jean-Paul Riopelle or Paterson Ewen and powerfully expressed in Arthur Erickson's early works and the Patkau's contemporary built forms. The North Toronto Memorial Community Centre is important because it reminds many that the city is about more than the Toronto Maple Leafs and the Blue Jays. For a long time (and for good reason) the consensus was that architects from Vancouver held the monopoly on architecture of the land. Oleson Worland's design goes a long way in upsetting that axiom. Rustic and urbane, the design successfully understands the North American love and fear of the metropolis. Knowing that, it settles comfortably into our preference for the middleground, reassuring us with an inspired mix of the country and the city.

Priorities for the building became clear at the outset of the design competition: the need to capitalize on the park's panoramic views and natural lighting. That meant finding a solution other than one that dug the building under, or on top, of the site. "Our choice was to be of the landscape," says Oleson. "It's a *both and* building, as compared to being *either or*."

Powerful ideas and clear lines won the community centre competition for the firm: a main east-west axis houses a skylit corridor, main lounge, lobby, gym, changerooms and community rooms; a footpath curves through the parti, running parallel to a second, north-south building with indoor and outdoor pools. The undulating topography of the park inspired the architect to nestle the lower floor into the sloping grade, with the going clandestine with the section. The existing landscaped features of the park dictated the wheres and hows of the program: the stand of elms is an effective match for the phallic of Douglas fir columns.

nearly military in their powerful ordering — that front the facade near the trees. The verticality of the columns is emphasized by the lack of horizontal cornice and tough steel detailing at the capitals of each totem where skippers also guide rainfall into large gutters below. Behind them, a sublime counterpoint: a gridded black glass wall that lends a machined weightlessness to the building. Permeability. Accessibility. The toboggan run can be easily viewed from the senior's community room. For bored joggers, the indoor running track in the gym looks over the action as it unfolds on tennis courts and rinks.

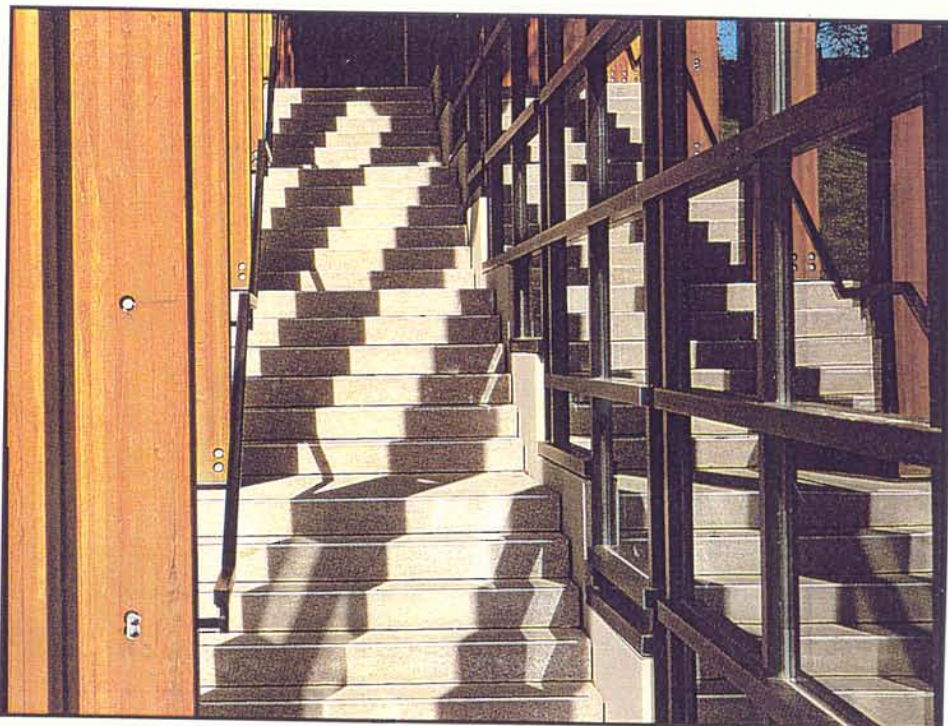
As the exposed wood begins to weather, a more subtle appreciation of the building will emerge. Oleson Worland, ever thoughtful, plans

for the kind of tricks and treats necessary to inspire new readings of the building over a long period of time. Tricks are played with the scale of the building; looking north from Eglinton Avenue, the pool room appears as a main floor when, in fact, it is merely the top of a double-height space. Inside, the fact that much of the pool area is submerged below grade is disguised by the glass blocks that dot the southern masonry walls — some pierce the massiveness of the building to receive natural light, while other, mirrored blocks fudge the building's relationship to grade by reflecting light even when the building is dug into the dirt. More tricks are found on the otherwise grim northern facade of the centre: fenestration patterns that work to compress the actual height of the building.

TO THE WEST, THE PHALANX OF COLUMNS RUN AWAY FROM THE BUILDING'S PERGOLA AND STAND WAITING, LIKE LONELY SOLDIERS.

The treats are enough to fill a pillow case. The rhythm, for instance, of wood deck ceilings, beams and supporting columns in the main lobby and then exposed steel trusses — as counterpoint — in the gym and pool area. The custom millwork is unpretentious elegance; the elliptical elevator shaft built with running bond gives the impression of a massive stone column. (The pity is the city's unsophisticated signage that gets plastered on it and everywhere.) The tiny red ceramic tiles in the change rooms and the indoor pool deck have been scattered like confetti. Outside, to the west, there is poetry: a phalanx of brick columns run away from the building and stand, lonely soldiers, as if they belonged to the skeletal temple of Athena. The other good news comes in the architect's happy relationship with Eastern Construction. The careful cobbling of the building reflects the fact that the foremen, typical in today's low-demand market, were laying the bricks.

Nobody at City Hall will admit it, but Oleson Worland's building is surely the flagship community centre for the City of Toronto. A fully-equipped kitchen will be used to cater to major social events that can be held in the adjoining gym. The centre boasts 150 parking spaces and, music to the ears of any city dweller, the parking is free. In short time, it will be hard to imagine how Eglinton Park survived without the community centre. Even the protestors will be sure to come and play. **IC**



(Above) A play of graphic shadows results from the thoughtful mirroring of the interior and exterior staircases. Toronto's Parks and Recreation Department deserves full marks for persevering with the building of a visionary community centre that integrates an impressive program with sensitive architectural form.



(Above) The indoor pool is handicap accessible with lanes for swimming laps and, elsewhere, sliding into the pool. A shallow children's pool sits to the east of the adult pool. The masonry wall is animated and lit by a play of glass blocks; mirrored glass blocks provide reflected light to disguise the fact that the building is partially dug into the ground.



Internally, circulation in the bi-level building is anchored to the east, by a vehicular drop-off and underground parking lot and, to the west, by the pool observation area.