



## Village of Yorkville Park, Toronto

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*A small linear park in mid-town  
Toronto is an overtly artificial  
catalogue of notional landscape types.*

For an example of the high degree of inventiveness presently displayed by landscape designers, we need only look to Toronto's Yorkville (formerly Cumberland) Park. This park is a catalogue of many of the compositional elements currently available in the vocabulary of the "avant garde" landscape. This idea of an assemblage of disparate parts is a central intention of this competition-winning scheme.

The park has caused its share of controversy, much of which has been centred around the expense of the large granite rock installed at the west end of the site. The philistine attitude of the populist critics is matched by their disapproval of the park's overtly artificial appearance. I would argue, along with the designers of the project, that the park is completely contextual and an appropriate response to the fashionable Yorkville shopping district in which it is situated. Describing the project as a series of "landscape boutiques" or "Victorian collection boxes," the designers encouraged the often uneasy juxtapositions of spaces and materials.

The stock of novelties employed includes mist emitters mounted above purple neon light columns, black concrete "inner tube" benches, and a stainless steel water curtain which becomes an ice sculpture in winter. These self-consciously synthetic elements are counterpoised by the planting program for the various parterres. The vegetation, heavily framed by the park's geometric order, provides miniature tableaux of a variety of notional landscape types—meadow, marsh, prairie, Canadian Shield, etc.—which become interactive, museum-like elements. At the west end of the park, a relic wall related to the history of Yorkville makes this idea of an open air museum explicit.

Like the Bay-Adelaide park (page 22), Yorkville Park owes much to the compositional possibilities opened up by the earthworks artists. Both are small urban spaces awarded through competition, and both had to contend with particularly difficult sites. In Yorkville, the challenge was to reconcile the conflicting scale of Bloor Street high-rises with three-storey Victorian houses on Cumberland. The park had to be built over an existing subway line and accommodate ventilation shafts, a subway entrance and truck access to existing buildings. The designers achieved all of this with seeming effortless, at the same time finding ways to further unite the edges of the site through a series of pedestrian walkways.—RA

Left: a stainless steel frame is the armature of a seasonally transforming fountain. Its summer character is that of a vertical water wall which screens the adjacent rock formation, a huge chunk of Canadian Shield granite dismantled and reassembled on site. In the winter, it functions as an icicle fountain.