



SECOND WAVE OF MODERNISM III: LEADING WITH LANDSCAPE CONFERENCE

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PRESENTED BY: **THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE FOUNDATION**

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Abstracts

A Second Wave of Modernism in Design Yields a Framework for Managing Toronto's Shared Landscape Amenities

Charles A. Birnbaum, FASLA, FAAR, *President and CEO*, The Cultural Landscape Foundation

Setting the stage for this third in our series of *Second Wave of Modernism* conferences, these opening remarks will encapsulate the trends outlined in our two similarly themed conferences held at the Chicago Architectural Foundation (2008) and the Museum of Modern Art in New York (2011). However, this conference differs in that it will drill deep in its discussion of landscape architecture's role in Toronto's growth and evolution.

The speakers – from Canada, the Netherlands and the United States – collectively bring a global perspective to this discussion, and will tackle sensitive, intricate and interwoven issues – both opportunities and problems. We'll begin by looking at the co-mingled and complex human and natural systems – including the world's largest ravine system – that are the city's foundation. Then the present and former city planner will look at 21st century Toronto as an emerging global city with historic roots, and lay the foundations for the discussions that follow on how best for the city to evolve.

Two afternoon panels will cap the day: the first, about several current waterfront projects that have helped to establish the city's reputation as a leader in landscape architecture; then a final panel discussion will frankly look at innovation and failure. An underlying theme throughout the conference, that will also provide the narrative thread for this opening presentation, will be the stewardship of the city's shared cultural landscape assets – natural, cultural, scenic and ecological -- and the responsibilities to be borne for that by the city and city officials, residents, commercial enterprises and non-profits.

Setting the Stage I: A History of Coupled Human & Natural Systems in Toronto

Nina-Marie Lister, *Principal*, PLANDFORM.com and *Associate Professor*, Ryerson University, School of Urban & Regional Planning

Brendan Stewart, MLA, OALA, *Landscape Architect*, ERA Architects Inc.

Jane Wolff, *Associate Professor*, Daniels Faculty of Landscape, Architecture and Design, University of Toronto

This opening session will introduce the story of the place that is Toronto: through revealing Toronto as what journalist Robert Fulford termed the "accidental city" (in his 1995 book *Accidental City: The Transformation of Toronto*) and its layered landscape, we will explore how the city's landscape evolved, its inextricably intertwined cultural and natural contexts, and how we have come into "the second wave of modernism" that is the conference focus. Importantly, we will explore significant historic moments in the city's landscape chronology such that we reveal the nuances of context (both physical and historical), difference, and identity, and from this, illustrating with examples of place and features, we will emphasize the importance of legibility as a precursor to identifying values and engaging meaningful



stewardship — in policy making, in design intervention, and in civic engagement (e.g. advocacy and education).

Nina-Marie Lister will begin with a focus on the city's "blue and green" arterial network, its ravines and rivers, through which we peel back the topographic and physiographic layers to explore ecological processes at work, and the broader cultural implications these imply. The evolution of Toronto's natural landscape is presented as a framework for the city's historical and contemporary spatial patterns—from the glacial formation of the landscape to its present-day condition as a network of manicured parks, recreational and natural areas. Indeed, Toronto now ranks among the world's "greenest" cities in terms of the area of its parks and open spaces. Due largely to the "accidental foresight" of protection given to the city's ravine and river valleys following the destruction caused by Hurricane Hazel in 1954, the city's extensive system of ravines, stream and valley corridors, and the associated natural heritage system has become a significant natural and cultural asset, giving rise to provocative questions about the quality and experience of urban nature. This presentation concludes with some reflection on the nature of Toronto's landscape, challenging ideas of identity and legibility—or "whose nature" is represented in place—making and stewardship initiatives.

Brendan Stewart will continue this theme, talking about how, in the midst of remarkable development pressure and growth, a new cultural idea about Toronto as a big, messy, complex and dynamic city is emerging, and challenging older, romantic notions of a smaller, simpler and more modest place. Unlike major American cities like New York, Boston, Detroit, Chicago and Buffalo, or Montreal in Quebec, contemporary Toronto does not inherit a bold, consciously planned 19th century urban legacy of parks and open spaces to build upon. Instead, Toronto was known as a polite city of houses, where high density housing was feared, and civic life happened largely in the privacy of living rooms and back yards, rather than in public streets, squares and neighborhood parks. Today, a burgeoning park movement, frequent press coverage, and constructed projects that embody a new set of urban values and bold ambitions, speak to this seismic shift. Building upon Professor Lister's overview of Toronto's natural landscape history, this presentation will provide an impression of Toronto's cultural landscape history, explored through the lens of seminal and influential historic designed landscapes that range from Picturesque to Modernist. Forged through a cultural attitude of modesty, as described in Fulford's *Accidental City*, Toronto has emerged to be the fourth largest city in North America. Through insights and examples, we explore how thinking about the design of the public realm has evolved over time and what an understanding of where we've come from can tell us about how to design for the future.

Finally, Jane Wolff will conclude by offering a framework for looking at and thinking holistically about Toronto's cultural landscapes. These landscapes have taken shape because of different forces and at different moments in the history of the city. Most of them were created in part by designers and in part by forces beyond design. They all demonstrate complex relationships between the human and non-human processes that have shaped Toronto, and they all need to be understood in relation to multiple contexts, including infrastructure, cultural production, policy, politics, economics, ecology and public education. Learning to recognize the invisible dynamics behind these places begins with careful observation and continues with the drawing and documentation of tangible examples. The ambition of this presentation—and of the morning's panel—is to examine ways in which particular cases and places offer useful stories about the relationships between cultural intention and ecological processes in the built fabric of the city. It is through these stories that we learn to recognize and ultimately value the landscapes that define our city, and from these, create informed strategies for stewardship of these special places.

Setting the Stage II: Toronto's Emerging Urban Public Realm

Jennifer Keesmaat, *Chief Planner*, City of Toronto



in conversation with

Paul J. Bedford, *Urban mentor and former Chief Planner, City of Toronto*

The city's current Chief Planner and her predecessor will discuss three interrelated themes concerning the city's unprecedented growth and development: What is it about Toronto that all this activity is happening at this time? What role does landscape have in leading change? What are the tools for change and community engagement?

Toronto is undergoing unprecedented transformation. The city is a unique mix of form, history and raw urbanism with North America's most extensive streetcar network, an overlay of the world's largest ravine system and a 29-mile lakefront. While many of its older neighborhoods may look like America they feel more like Europe. Demographically, more than half the population is foreign born; the population has increased by 500,000 in the past fifteen years to 2.8 million, and is expected to hit 3-3.5 million by 2031. There has been explosive growth in the city with 160 projects comprising 22,000 units approved and 10,000 units completed in 2014 in addition to 700,00 square metres of non-residential space. A total of 205 new development projects have been proposed in 2015.

Its evolution from a provincial capital to an emerging global city requires new ways to think, act and plan. The potential for urban landscape to be the engine of city building has been embraced by the Waterfront Toronto Development Corporation—a joint city, provincial and federal model created to invest \$1.5 billion of seed money into public realm. Over the past 15 years it has created a variety of signature public spaces that treat the waterfront as the front porch to the city and have generated massive payback of \$10 billion of direct and indirect private sector investment.

Change involves perceptions and expectations, along with actions – how do Torontonians balance a higher-level vision with one that also addresses local needs? To what extent are we seeing “revitalization” – which is a city building exercise – vs. “redevelopment” – which is just a real estate exercise – a philosophy of design excellence versus just very good? Is Toronto perceived – internally and externally – as a provincial city or an emerging global city? What is the public's role? How does the public get involved? What are the advocacy tools?

Lastly, is the investment in growth being met by a complementary investment in infrastructure and transit? Are there innovative financing models to address infrastructure and transit? Is the City Planning “Growing Conversations Initiative” to promote an ongoing dialogue effective? When it comes to issues of “fixing Toronto” do the answers always involve the public realm? How do we measure success?

Panel I: Current Work in Toronto

Jane Amidon, *Professor of Landscape Architecture and Director of the Urban Landscape Program, Northeastern University School of Architecture*

North American cities have experienced a double paradigm shift, economic and ecologic, that distinguish this generation's challenges from preceding eras. Economically, global imbalances have set the stage for contemporary design practices to focus on strategic resource allocation instead of singular solutions in order to maximize a city's fiscal, spatial and infrastructural assets. Ecologically, current design approaches are adaptive and multi-scalar. Of primary interest is how landscape and urban designers create frameworks for - and respond to - change, and how the act of designing urban spaces allows historical and future conditions to be both acknowledged and anticipated within the contemporary landscape.



In Toronto, a distinctive urban evolution has been driven by cultural and natural systems that are a fusion of economic and ecological forces. In this panel, the design approaches of three firms are explored that express Toronto's unique qualities as well as introduce innovative design techniques. Through the lens of projects designed and built by Claude Cormier Associates, PUBLIC WORK office for urban design & landscape architecture, and Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, Toronto's 21st century landscape is examined. What is unique about current work in Toronto? How have the city's "citizen designers" helped forge new levels of landscape literacy? Through the re-making and management of its public realm, can Toronto be regional and global at the same time? What landscape design ideas are allowing the city's future to emerge today?

Claude Cormier, AAPQ, OALA, FCCLA, ASLA, *Principal*, Claude Cormier + Associés
Urban Desire

The buzz around public space is a barometer to measure and observe the emerging values of Toronto's citizens. The metropolis has witnessed a dramatic tipping point towards a bold new urban attitude, reflecting the will of its inhabitants to be part of the story unfolding through their daily lives. As the city becomes bigger and brighter as well as pricier to live in, the residents are increasingly savvy and sophisticated. More than ever before, the public is informed, involved, committed and vocal about their city, wanting the public realm to be a mirror of their individualities.

This sense of entitlement means that a "good enough" solution isn't even remotely sufficient in the making of the public space. The primary challenge of the emerging Toronto landscape is to democratically identify a threshold that fulfills everyone's wishes and expectations. But this is no longer being enough, successful public spaces are now those that dramatically surpass their expectations to also provide surprise and discovery through shared enjoyment as well as individual fulfillment. The future will be universal AND specific, boldly engaging conflict through the phenomenon of human desire, to give people more than they expect or imagine.

Marc Ryan, *Principal*, PUBLIC WORK office for urban design & landscape architecture
Shaping New Futures in a City of Layers

The future city is not a distant possibility, but rather the subject of design that we can begin to establish today. With an increasing awareness of the importance and sustained role of public spaces in the city, every new project in Toronto should be a speculation on how that particular landscape can contribute to the future form, vitality, experience, performance, and resiliency of the city—the city that we ultimately want to inhabit.

At PUBLIC WORK, we are often working with the link between the past and future—using the design of a site to activate a renewed future from an existing context. This presentation will provide examples of some of our current Toronto-based design projects that reflect this ambition and advocate for the role of landscape and the public realm in shaping the quality of the contemporary city. With an emphasis on combining a progressive outlook with an understanding of the past in the context of today, these works explore an approach to projects for the city that build upon what came before. With Toronto undergoing astonishing densification, we are motivated to find ways to build the highest quality public environments that enhance new layers of public experience in which the past can be more fluidly connected with revisions to the future.

Elizabeth Silver, *Senior Associate*, Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates



Corktown Common: Toronto's emerging position on 'The Commons'

A landscape embodies the social, political and economic values of its inhabitants over time. By tracing a city's history, one can glean shifts in attitudes toward the purpose of the environment, socio-political divisions, and a stance on land ownership. In the case of Toronto, Corktown Common, a public park, is inextricably linked with an outlook towards the role of the Don River for industry, its eventual deterioration and pollution, and finally, the filling of the riverbed and Ashbridge's Bay Marsh. This talk will examine how the design of Corktown Common in the context of Toronto's waterfront redevelopment reflects the city's changing philosophy about the value and role of public spaces today.

Corktown Common strives to reimagine the waterfront for purposes of public recreation, ecological restoration, and climate resilience. It acknowledges the site's industrial history, absorbing remnants of its past such as railroad tracks and gigantic hydroelectric towers. It enhances the recently built flood protection infrastructure that addresses changing water levels and protects the West Don Lands for the future. Most importantly, it provides a vibrant and inviting public space that is strategically sited at the edge of the city's growing downtown. This is only the latest step in the history of how Torontonians inhabit their city's landscapes. What is the next permutation of these environments? The answer is closely linked to our current set of cultural priorities.

Panel II: Toronto Lessons – Exporting Innovation & Failure

Bruce Kuwabara, OC, OAA, FRAIC, AIA, RIBA, *Founding Partner*, KPMB Architects
Leading with Landscape and the Public Realm

Torontonians felt a measure of pride but also skepticism when *The Economist* recently ranked Toronto as the “best place to live.” Now the fourth largest city in North America, Toronto is experiencing the greatest growth spurt in its history. With approximately 100,000 new immigrants arriving per year, it is also thriving as one of the most multi-cultural cities in the world. But the growing income gap between rich and poor has redefined the urban geography, with the most affluent concentrated in the downtown and the poorly paid pushed out to the suburbs, without convenient access to public transit. No longer “Toronto the Good” or “New York Run by the Swiss,” our structural and management challenges are immense, particularly in the chronic lack of vision and funding for public transit and infrastructure.

David Crombie, Toronto's “tiny, perfect mayor” from 1972 to 1978 declared that the future of the city is the public realm. Emerging from the recent volatility of the Ford era and entering a period of new civic leadership supported by John Tory, there is opportunity to reset urban thinking in the city, mobilize Crombie's vision, and leverage positive initiatives such as Waterfront Toronto, the publicly funded agency leading with landscape to create a vibrant social, environmental and economically sustainable urban model.

What does it mean to lead with landscape? This session will examine recent exemplars and lessons through three different perspectives: Geoff Cape, a leading thinker on connecting people to people, and people to nature through his acclaimed Evergreen Brick Works; Adriaan Geuze of West 8 who, in association with Toronto-based firm DTAH, is leading the transformation of the Central Waterfront and Ontario Place Park; and Thomas Woltz, owner of Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects known for environmentally sensitive, high performance landscapes as well as processes of community engagement.

Adriaan Geuze, Ir., RLA, OALA, *Principal*, West 8 urban design & landscape architecture, Rotterdam



Three Elements for Successful Public Space: Identity, Cultural Villages and Civic/Urban Leadership

Urban metropolises like Toronto, Houston, Detroit and Los Angeles are defined by a landscape dominated by the automobile and have long struggled with a lack of identity and a generic public realm. Toronto's Central Waterfront, which extends 3.5 km along Lake Ontario and is in close proximity to the city's central business district, is one of the city's most valuable assets. Despite decades of planning and patchwork development projects, the city and its waterfront lacked a coherent vision for linking the pieces into a greater whole.

West 8's vision supported by DTAH and led by Waterfront Toronto, sought to transform this urban leftover by using a powerful design language. Drawing from the iconic and idyllic Canadian lakefronts, with valley systems and resplendent natural environments, the design team was able to create a new identity for Toronto's Central Waterfront. Instead of focusing on condominium-based development, the award-winning masterplan prioritized connectivity between the vitality of the city and the lake, and it emphasized a continuous, publicly accessible waterfront. Inspired by the legacy of urban leaders like Jane Jacobs and Ken Greenberg, the design expresses a vision for the Central Waterfront that brings a sustainable, ecologically productive "green foot" to the rich culture of the metropolis. The realization of the masterplan, now well underway, has established a language for the waterfront that captures the spirit of Toronto and its people: it is public, it is diverse, and it offers a multiplicity of experiences and program.

Geoff Cape, *Founder and CEO, Evergreen Brick Works* ***Many Hands***

Toronto, like most great cities -- emerged from the ground. Marble buildings define Rome, while red brick defines London. Limestone defines Paris and wood timber defines San Francisco and Vancouver. Toronto is defined by red, orange and yellow brick -- quarried from our river valleys. Brick reinforces our sense of place because it comes from the landscape, but a "sense of place" is not a static idea locked in stone. Place is constantly changing as it is interpreted, reinterpreted and engaged with by the people. Here in Toronto I can highlight three active projects that are evolving our identity:

1. The first is the redesign of our children's school grounds. Hundreds of schools across the city are transforming asphalt "prison yards" into dynamic, natural learning spaces -- with and for the community. We are removing asphalt, planting trees, growing food gardens, and installing art and cultural symbols. The design of children's outdoor landscapes has become a powerful way to help develop a sense of place and inspire the next generations of leaders with the creativity and confidence to make Toronto better in the future. All that is required is a basic framework, some simple design principles and community leadership. The results are often magical. Toronto has become a global leader in this area of work.
2. In 2010 we opened Evergreen Brick Works -- a crazy collection of sixteen old buildings in the middle of Toronto largest river valley. This is the place that produced 44 million bricks each year and helped build our city. Today it is something different -- a place for people, a place where active community programming (markets, camps, theatre, exhibitions, conferences and office space) contribute to a unique experience. The design and development of this project was inspired by the landscape and the programming that brings this site to life extends that idea further. No two visits to this site are the same because the space is constantly changing as structures are moved, reorganized, or woven together. The design of this space began with a simple framework and it evolves through an active partnership with the community. It is working well for almost 500,000 visitors each year.



3. Last but not least, Toronto has a remarkable network of six river valleys, hundreds of tributaries and a web of over 44,000 acres of protected ravines that touches every neighbourhood across the city, rich and poor. Hidden from sight, this web of green modestly defines our city. Unplanned, unconnected and often unloved, these spaces are now the subject of an enthusiastic rethink. It will start with a vision for the system, and it will grow in partnership with the community. Master plans, design studies, art, programming, and quiet walks will all combine to build the narrative for this unique system that helps us to better understand ourselves as much as it helps to define Toronto globally.

Great cities emerge from the ground but they come to life when the community is actively engaged as co-creators in the process of defining their localized identity, and sense of place. The process is chaotic and the narrative that emerges is dynamic, but when it works it can often be beautiful, not always but often.

Thomas L. Woltz, FASLA, CLARB, *Principal*, Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects
Ravines, Rails and Rivers: the evolving ecologies of urban infrastructure

Landscape architects have the tools to realign urban environments to their dependent systems for better quality of life and financial and environmental resilience. Using research into the physical, ecological and cultural aspects of a site/city as supported by collaborations with allied disciplines landscape architects can steer public and political will towards the creation of a compelling framework for action. Seen from this panned view parks and a wide variety of public spaces can become connected to each other and to the greater ecologic systems. This approach provides efficiencies in everything from preparation for extreme weather events to stormwater management and maintenance and financial investment. The social and environmental ecology of Toronto makes it a perfect laboratory for developing this approach, which will ultimately lead to the betterment of its citizens.

Acknowledging the importance of connections, engagement and education in designing civic spaces.

1. Address the scale and ambition of the 1.8 million acres of the Toronto Greenbelt and the role of landscape architecture in contributing to its development. Explore a range of tactics from street design, and on-structure interventions to stormwater management and sustainable agriculture, implementable on a city-scale. Share proposed and built examples that address diverse conditions including agricultural, industrial and urban sites and note overlaps.
2. What happens when the largest parks of a region are restored leaving the smaller parks without funding? Discuss examples of political conflict that can arise and the perception of inequity.
3. Lobbying for and envisioning a model where private/public partnerships sustain and preserve a park network or greenbelt of connected sites from streetscapes to historic parks. Use well documented models of financial structures and support and expand to explore a possible city model:
 - a. BeltLine Atlanta
 - b. Bayou Greenways Initiative, Houston
 - c. The Ravine network, Toronto
 - d. Houston's Memorial Park, Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone structures and Parks Department and Conservancy funding
4. Compare and contrast the services and costs of the hard edge infrastructure of the Toronto Waterfront with those of Toronto's 44,000-acre Ravine Network. How can we monetize the services of the ravine network to stand up alongside the economic development potential of the \$25 billion spent on the Toronto Waterfront to make the case for expenditures for care and



maintenance of the network? How do we design resilience: can we balance new projects with the long-term maintenance and preservation of landscapes?