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The Gardiner Expressway: Give It a Rest

by Stephen Otto

In the New Year's Day edition of the *Globe and Mail*, 2010, architecture critic Lisa Rochon said of the newly-chosen design for the Fort York Visitor Centre, "Once Torontonians accept that the Gardiner Expressway is here to stay for years (perhaps decades), the possibilities for its reinvention are endless. That's why the winning scheme for the new visitor centre at Fort York National Historic Site, designed by Patkau Architects Inc. of Vancouver with Kearns Mancini Architects Inc. of Toronto, is worth celebrating."

And now that this impressive and exceedingly handsome building has opened in the shadow of the Gardiner, infusing the fort's nemesis from the 1950s with new relevance, The Friends of Fort York call upon Torontonians to set aside their criticisms of the portion of the expressway between the north side of Exhibition Place and Lakeshore Blvd. Accept that the new Visitor Centre has given it purpose as an arcade over the front of the building and the adjacent parking areas. Concede that the vistas formed by the structure's piers have opened the possibilities of acres of sheltered walks along Fort York Blvd., warmed year-round by the sun because of its inclination. And allow that this section of the Gardiner has become a shining example of something Torontonians do well: self renewal. As the *Star's* Chris Hume remarked recently, "It has never been shown to better advantage than here in the shadow of the Gardiner Expressway."

Continue to advocate taking down the section of the Gardiner east of Jarvis Street. Consider plans for humanizing and beautifying the middle section for the tens of thousands who must endure this styx of an experience every day. Recognize that while we may never be rich enough to replace the Gardiner with a US \$24 billion tunnel like Boston, we must never again let the maintenance budget for the structure fall so far behind that chunks are falling from the deck above.

But let's resolve to give rest to criticisms of the Gardiner where it passes Fort York, and put our energies to better use.

Stephen Otto is a founder of The Friends of Fort York and the current co-chair of its board of directors.

"Melting Point", 2014, by LeuWebb Projects with Jeff Lee and Omar Khan, Toronto.



People Are Saying . . .



Matt Blackett, publisher and creative director of *Spacing* magazine, says in his Fall issue editorial that the opening of the Visitor Centre is one of two events that will contribute to the rebirth of Toronto after four years of mayoral chaos.

Catherine Osborne in *Azure Online*, Sept.:

An iconic battleground of the War of 1812 finally gets the museum it deserves."

Richard Rooney, president, Burgundy Asset Management, after touring the building then being prepped for opening, Sept. 17:

"I'm pumped!"

Christopher Moore, *One for the Good Guys*, blogpost, Sept. 19:

"It's a terrific building, but more it's a display of smart civic planning, in which heritage and historical values are actually shown to work hand in hand with housing development, recreation, and even traffic needs. Go see."

Urban Toronto, Sept 19:

"The vision for Fort York is spectacular. . . . The concept artfully references Fort York's historic context on the bluff of Lake Ontario in its inspired form and use of materials, while bringing the site into striking, contemporary focus."

Canadian Architect, Sept. 17:

"Simultaneously bold and discreet, the building is distinctly Canadian in its forthrightness and simplicity."

Alex Bozиковic, architectural journalist, the *Globe and Mail*:

"The Visitor Centre . . . is a sensitive and powerful work of architecture. It skilfully opens up the Fort site to the city, and also sheds light on its past – speaking to the layers of history embedded here from 1793 onward, and adding an artful new layer of 21st-century city-building."

Janet Rosenburg, landscape architect, writing to John Patkau, Oct. 2:

"Bravo on Fort York. It is probably one of the most beautiful and poetic building this city has in it. . . . The spirit of the building is so strong that it was hard to take my eyes away from the perfection of site planning and robustness of the space."

Michael McClelland, a principal with ERA Architects:

"The Fort York Visitor Centre is Toronto's best building of the decade. It is a beautiful and significant new addition to Toronto's cultural scene. The design . . . neatly fits into the cultural landscape of Fort York, knitting together and engaging the Fort with its many new neighbours."



Photos from left to right courtesy of Nathan Ng, Patkau Architects & Kearns Mancini Architects, Kathy Mills, Sid Calzavara, Charles Pachter and Stephanie E. Calvet.

Remembrance Day



Fort York National Historic Site and the Toronto Municipal Chapter IODE (Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire) are proud to present one of this City's most evocative Remembrance Day Services at the Strachan Avenue Military Cemetery on Garrison Common. Commencing at 10:45 am on Tuesday, 11 November, from the west gate of Fort York, a processional led by period uniformed military staff and standard bearers of the IODE will make its way to the adjacent Strachan Avenue Military Cemetery where the public will be gathered. There, at the eleventh hour, all soldiers of the Toronto Garrison who fell in the War of 1812, the Rebellion Crises, the Crimean War, Northwest Rebellion, South African (Boer) War, the two World Wars, and recent conflicts around the globe will be remembered and honoured.

Please join us.

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Regular Admission to Fort York (all prices include taxes)
Adult: \$9.00, Senior (65+) & Youth (13-18): \$5.50,
Children (6-12): \$4.25, Children (5 and under): FREE

The Fife and Drum is a quarterly publication of the The Friends of Fort York and Garrison Common