

Architecture that Binds: A Place for Weddings and Funerals for a New Society

by

Yvonne Y. S. Lam

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I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

Weddings and funerals are some of the most universally profound events of our lives. Both acts, however disparate, ultimately celebrate life. This thesis draws on themes of life and regeneration in its reading of a neglected yet historically significant site in the port lands of Toronto. The changes that have occurred at the mouth of the Don mirror the changes that have occurred in Toronto from settlement to post-modernity. It is here that the thesis proposes a place that simultaneously reclaims its roots and creates a new identity for the port lands. As a means of reinhabiting this site, the design uses the power of weddings and funerals to generate a collective point of gathering that reflects the multicultural nature of Toronto today.

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For my family

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Introduction



1. The port lands of Toronto. Aerial view, 1997.

As part of a recent series entitled ‘The New Canada,’ the Globe and Mail conducted a study that painted a portrait of a changing nation.

¹ It revealed a generation of young Canadians who have radically diverse ethnic roots yet share remarkably similar social and ethical values. Uniting young Canadians today is a deeply rooted sense of tolerance. They believe in a Canada where multiculturalism is celebrated and where people of different backgrounds live together in harmony. With an increasing number of cross-cultural unions, weddings and funerals are becoming moments that celebrate the emerging cultural dynamic. Within this context, Canadians seek places of ceremony that accurately reflect the mosaic that is ‘the New Canada.’

This thesis proposes the design of inter-faith and cross-cultural ceremonial spaces in Canada’s largest and most diverse city. As Toronto’s population continues to grow, its contemporary identity becomes increasingly linked to its multicultural disposition. Still, there is little physical evidence of the city’s complex social makeup. The banality of the constructed environment is especially apparent in civic ceremonial spaces. To accommodate people of different faiths and cultures, these spaces are often neutral and bland; failing to capture the transcendent sacredness of life-celebrations.

The chosen site occupies an area of vacant post-industrial port lands stretching from the mouth of the Don River to the Toronto Outer Harbour. The design takes form in a series of ceremonial spaces scattered throughout a linear park that reinhabits neglected industrialized land. This particular site is appropriate for reasons both pragmatic and symbolic. Historically the Don River has played a central role in the city’s development, but has been displaced and desecrated over time. Its natural wetland mouth has been reshaped by the man-made port lands. The unhealthy state of Don’s mouth and the river’s historical significance makes it a highly charged place for the city. At this critical juncture, the parallel narratives of the city and the people converge. The creation of the park rejuvenates the site and is a fitting location for events that celebrate life. This project seeks to rectify the river’s displacement by restoring its identity and meaning. The process creates “place” – a fertile ground for ceremonial spaces that reflect the city’s cultural diversity.

1.1

Scope of Work

Focusing on both analysis and design, the purpose of the work is to present an engaging architectural proposition in response to intersecting themes and conditions in the immediate social and physical climate of the contemporary city. As part of our built environment, architecture simultaneously affects and responds to its physical and intangible situations. Similarly, while the final proposal mainly employs tools from the fields of architectural, landscape and urban design, it nevertheless demands an investigation across multiple disciplines. Research includes an anthropological overview of the traditions and rituals of weddings and funerals, and their respective architectural and design precedents. Statistical and factual data of the people and ecology of the site has been collected and reviewed along with the area's official development plans. While these research findings play an indispensable role in the development of the thesis, the objective is not to provide a definitive historical account of the subjects at hand but rather to illuminate and gather the relationships, and intersections that shape the final proposal. There are undoubtedly limitations to what architecture can do in the context of larger cultural conditions, but it nonetheless has the power to stimulate and provoke. Therefore, the architectural proposition is ultimately the method of academic exploration and critical analysis.

1.2

Sources

The thesis is equally shaped by facts and personal observations. Publicly available data from Statistics Canada and the City of Toronto, as well as current newspaper articles provide social context. Seminal writings on rites of passage support the program for ceremonial spaces. Wedding and funerary customs share common themes and symbols that are significant in the final design proposal. Recent personal experiences as a member of numerous wedding and funeral parties also seem to confirm the appetite for interdenominational ceremonial spaces. Site-specific data was gathered from reference material at the Toronto Urban Affairs Library, and published documents from the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, the Toronto Port Authority, the Task Force to Bring Back the Don and other urban regeneration groups. In addition to statistical data, observations and images were shaped by many on-site visits. The design proposal is also influenced by urban precedents like Central Park and various architectural precedents for sacred spaces.

Structure of Document 1.3

Part One of the thesis is presented as a collage of foundational ideas. Two interweaving stories of the people and the city emerge.

Part Two encompasses the research and analysis portion of the thesis. It takes an analytical look at our current social and physical landscapes. Two parallel stories are structured into coinciding themes of ‘*displacement*’ and ‘*alienation*’ of the people and the Don River site, and their respective ‘*moments of crisis*’ represented by weddings and funerals and the mouth of the Don.

Part Three outlines the design’s ambitions in response to the examined conditions. Design objectives are structured into corresponding themes of ‘*identity*’ and ‘*place*’-making. The form and meaning of the design is explained based on principles of ‘*Grounding, Binding and Differences.*’

Part Four presents the design using diagrams, drawings, and images.



RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

PART 2



2. Dusk at the Mouth of the Don.

Moments of Crisis:



3. *The Entry* from the M1 installation "the River."

The Search for Identity and Place

*So we are caught stumbling
in between, longing for home.*

....

*Only in fairy tales,
or given freakish luck, does the wind
rise suddenly and set you down where everything
is safe and loved and in its place. The mind
does not expect it. But the heart,
the heart —
the heart keeps looking for itself.
It knows and does not know
where it belongs.*

Jan Zwicky

*“Transparence”
in Songs for Relinquishing the Earth*

‘Placelessness’ is often seen as symptomatic of the post-modern condition. The desire to situate oneself in the world and the intrinsic human need for home and belonging seem ever more urgent; perhaps because we live in a place of “expanding horizons and dissolving boundaries,”² where the idea of citizenship becomes more complex as nationalities overlap and change. Globalization intensifies the sense of rootlessness. Westerners live nomadic yet interiorized lives, where we can easily travel across continents and virtually connect in an instant. The banality of North American cities further detaches their citizens from any sense of local particularity. No small wonder that even the most global-savvy long for a taste of home. As Jennifer Welsh writes:

“Today, as a professor of international relations, I have made a career out of studying and commenting on global issues. But underlying all of my experiences there has been a nagging question: where do I really belong? Floating around the global arena may be exciting, but it is also difficult to reconcile with a sense of roots. World citizenship is a nice concept in theory, but it doesn’t factor in the human need to feel connected to a real, as opposed to a virtual, community.”³

Displacement:



4,5. Two contrasting conditions of the Don River: a more natural stream in the upper reaches of the river and the channelled Lower Don.

Recovering Personal and Civic Identity

*Always becoming, will never be
Always arriving, must never land*

*Between back home and home unfathomable, is me –
By definition: immigrant.*

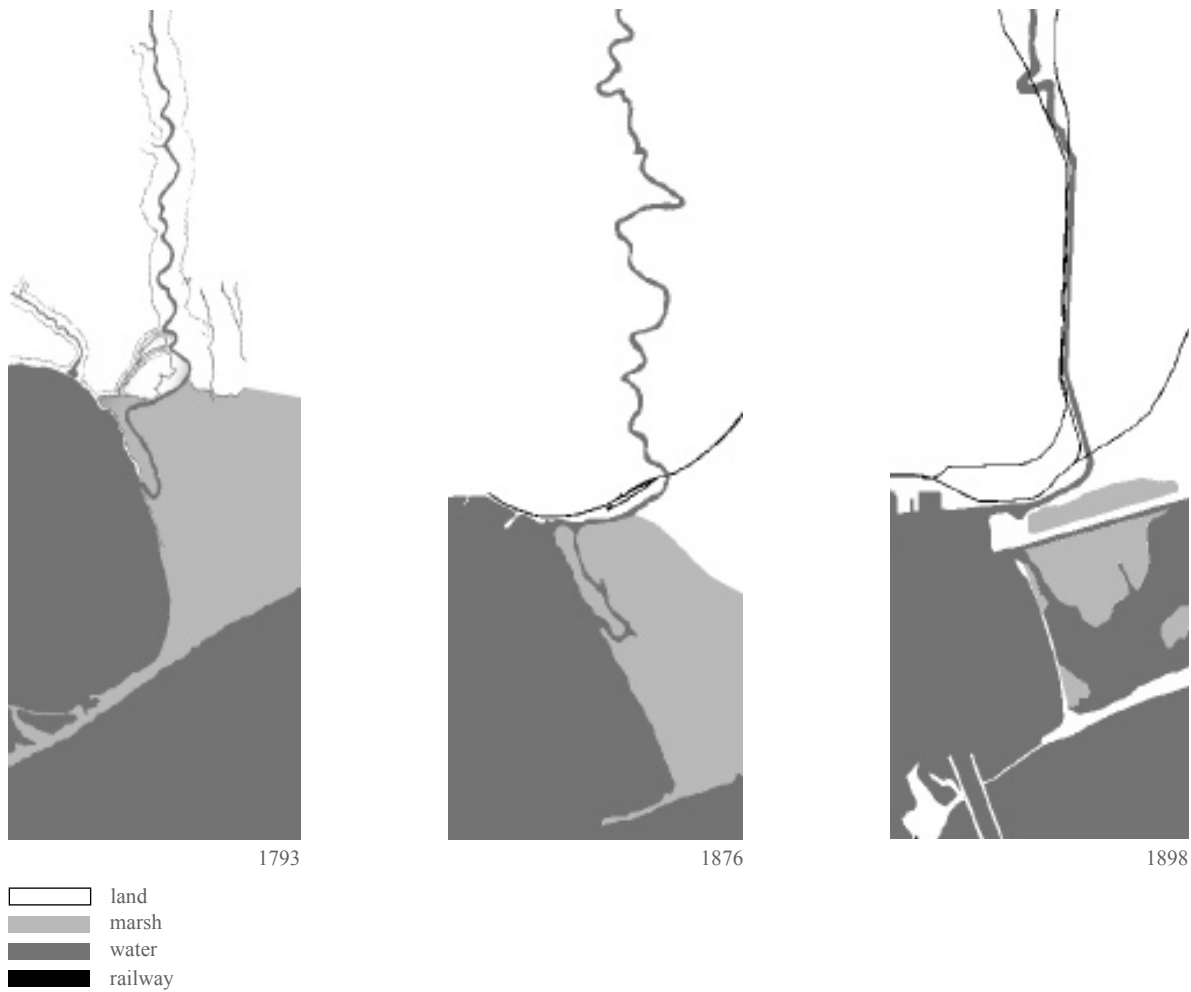
Shani Mootoo

*'Mantra for Migrants'
in The Predicament of Or*

In the age of globalism and mass human migration, Canada has emerged as a society built on tolerance and multiple values.⁴ It has over 200 ethnic groups and the world's second highest proportion of population born outside the country.⁵ In Toronto, 44 per cent of the population is foreign-born.⁶ Displaced from their birthplaces and disconnected from ancestral ties, people from all backgrounds re-identify themselves in their adopted country. Toronto's diversity manifests in its multi-ethnic neighbourhoods and cultural institutions that support the city's remarkable social dynamic. The idea of ancestry and identity is even more complex for the emerging generation of Canadians who have compound identities that defy physical and national boundaries. In the past decade, cross-cultural marriages have increased by almost 40 per cent in Toronto, significantly furthering the cultural complexity of the present and future Canadian population.⁷ Likewise, inter-faith marriages are on the rise, as are same-sex marriages. Because of the "intermixture and hybridization of cultures,"⁸ today's generation resists the homogeneity of modern universalism. Their personal identities are "shaped by embodied and embedded narratives, located in particular places and times."⁹ The desire to reconnect with one's cultural origins is on full display at significant life events like marriage and death. These important occasions allow individuals to explore their self-identities through traditional customs and rituals. While proud to be Canadian, many still seek unique identities that transcend categorization. In the words of Salman Rushdie, "sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures, at other times we fall between two stools."¹⁰ It is through this tension "that we might begin to construct more meaningful, more complex, identities."¹¹

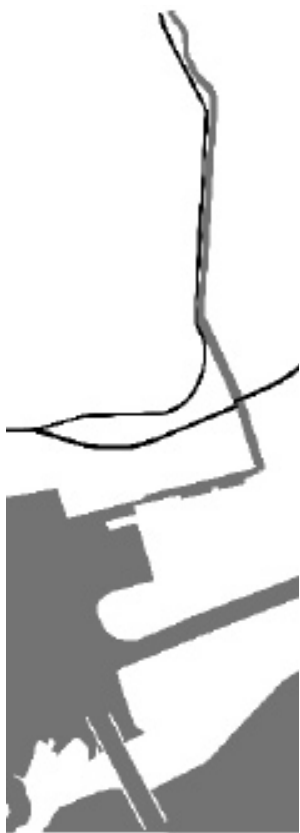


6,7. Two wedding ceremonies for a marriage between a Catholic Philipina bride and an Indian Sikh groom.



8. Evolution of the Lower Don and the Portlands.

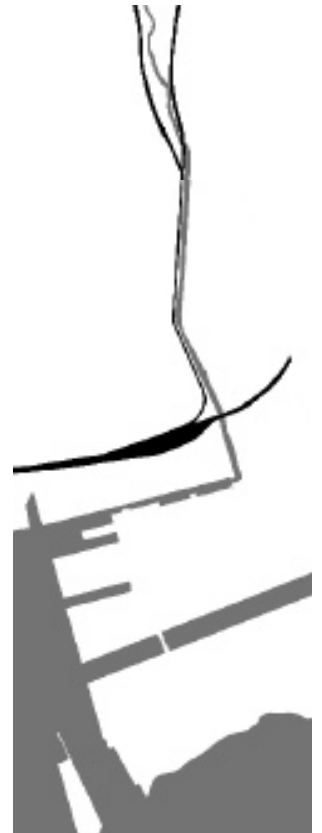
Like its displaced citizens, Toronto's physical topography is a historical register of natural and artificially displaced earth, rock and water. Grooves and ridges carved by retreating ice sheets millions of years ago created a web of streams and river valleys that flowed into Lake Ontario. Along the waterfront, 7000 years of drifted sand and rock created a thin peninsula enclosing a natural harbour wherein the city now lies. Within the harbour, sediment from the river's banks once emptied onto marshlands at Ashbridges Bay, creating a thriving ecosystem that supported a large bird and waterfowl population. Since European settlement two centuries ago, dramatic alterations have been made to the mouth of the Don River. Recent history has seen the lower Don River transformed from a natural serpentine stream into a hard-edged concrete channel. Civic infrastructure now borders



1930



1949



1997

its banks and industrial pollutants have obliterated once-abundant fish stocks. Pre-industrialization, the river filtered through two mouths before exiting into an extensive wetland. Today it terminates in a right-angled bend at the Keating Channel. The construction of the port lands completely eradicated the Ashbridges Bay marshes and in the process, over 20 million cubic metres of material from the harbour floor was dredged and relocated. Throughout, the river has remained physically and symbolically important to the city. Its physical transformation directly reflects civic perceptions and the city's evolution. With the decline of industrial activity in the 1990s, the Don's increasingly vacant landscape, as well as the neglected port lands, suggests little of its iconographic significance to the city.



9a. Ashbridges Bay at its original state, circa 1860.



9b. "Former outlet of the Don River before diversion to Keating Channel, looking west from Cherry Street to Gooderham and Worts elevator, October 2, 1915."



9c. "Hydraulic dredges deepen Keating Channel as dockwall construction progresses, October 31, 1914."



9d. The port lands at its working days, shown in 1976.



9e. The port lands today.

“Past and place are inextricable.”¹² Just as we construct identity through narratives, the city’s history forms the basis for a meaningful civic consciousness. On a deeper level, these seemingly parallel narratives intersect and overlap. Over time, humankind has become tightly entwined with the natural and built environments. Historian Simon Schama believes that culture and landscape are intrinsically linked. “Landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock.”¹³ Writing through a compendium of history and mythology, Schama contends that every landscape is psychologically framed by cultural constructs. Hidden beneath the surface of everyday perceptions are cultural myths that are simultaneously inspired by, and actively shape the landscapes we inhabit. Rivers, forests and mountains supply ample imagery for the basis of mythology and cultures. Since ancient times, particular topographies of both natural and built environments have often been invoked for various agendas, ranging from social propaganda to product marketing.

The idea of national identity, in particular, is heavily tied to the enigma of the cherished ‘homeland.’¹⁴ The abundance of landscape images in travel brochures is just one example of the inherent cultural associations they embody. Local evidence confirms this; when asked what best symbolized Canada in a recent survey, 89 percent of respondents chose ‘the vastness of the land.’¹⁵ Despite differences in age, religion, and race, we instinctively project an image of nature and wilderness onto our idea of Canada. This is particularly intriguing considering almost 80 percent of Canadians live in an urban area with a population of 10,000 people or more.¹⁶

The post-industrial landscapes of our cities are no less a part of our contemporary topographies. Abandoned city brownfields are a new kind of wilderness. Much like the sublime beauty of mountains and waterfalls, remnants of industrialization are a stoic reminder for the modern city.

At the individual level, personal stories directly shape how we conceive our environments. A series of “walks” created by Canadian artist Janet Cardiff play with the ambiguous nature of memory and perception. Visitors follow recorded directions from an audio CD or video camera through various spaces or neighbourhoods, becoming simultaneously involved in the unfolding stories of the recorded narratives while experiencing the actual environments. The sensations of the real spaces blur with the visitors’ mental projections. Similarly, our personal and cultural memories affect our everyday environmental experiences. In forging a new and complex personal and civic identity, it is imperative to recover the narratives and landscapes of our lives and city.



10. A relic of the past: the Victory Mills silos on Cherry Street, in the port lands.



11. Post-industrial landscapes as a new kind of wilderness in our contemporary topographies.

Alienation:



12. An example of a 'non-place.' A view down Commissioners Street in the port lands.

The Absence of Place

Alienation and the modern city are metaphorically intertwined. From the Marxist association of alienation with capitalism to the post-Nietzschean world of “desertion” and “abandonment”¹⁷, the theme has become entrenched in the human condition. In recent times, the issue of isolation has surfaced once again in tandem with globalization and the rise of information technology. In his survey of the ‘topographies’ of contemporary art and architecture, the Spanish architect and theorist Ignasi de Sola-Morales clearly articulates the current cultural situation:

*Ours is a media culture where distances are reduced to the point of being virtually instantaneous, and where the reproduction of images by mechanisms of every kind has meant that an image is no longer linked to any one place but instead floats unattached across the length and breadth of the planet. While this ubiquitous society, this global village, generates experiences of simultaneity, multiple presence, and the constant generation of new stimuli, it has also produced feelings of profound estrangement. We are strangers in our own land, as Julia Kristeva has suggested, acknowledging the paradox that our modern universality simultaneously engenders expulsion and exile. Our art and literature return time and time again to the contemporary individual’s experiences of loneliness and isolation.*¹⁸

With the rise of the internet, more than ever we find ourselves in a world where time and space have collapsed. As we become more virtually connected, we are paradoxically growing more detached and isolated from the world. Western culture has become ‘capsular’¹⁹ and disconnected from the immediate physical and social environment. The universalist culture of globalization has brought an abstract neutrality to our urban settings. Malls, offices, airports and highways: we move anonymously from one ‘non-place’ to another, to “places which are both everywhere and nowhere.”²⁰ Even profound experiences like birth, marriage and death are often set in banal institutional spaces like hospitals, civic centres and funeral homes. In effect, we are living in ‘generic cities’ that address neither identity nor history.²¹



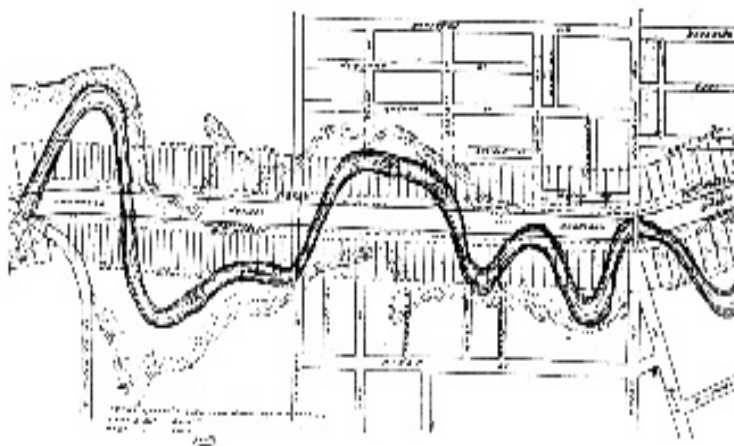
13. A view from the port lands, looking north towards the mouth of the Don River. Disjointed from the rest of the city, a sense of placelessness permeates throughout the brownfields of the port lands.

As with other urban centres, global corporations have left their mark on Toronto's physical fabric. From coffee shops and books stores to fashion outlets, a branded sameness saturates stores from downtown through to the suburban GTA. The apparent anonymity of the city's physiology has allowed it to make frequent appearances in films and other media production as a stand-in for other western cities. While the city has distinct neighbourhoods and iconic architecture, recent development has mostly taken place in the suburbs, drawing the population farther away from the city's core. With the exception of a few prominent cultural institutions²², recent urban construction reflects a strong sense of detachment. The succession of disjointed hotel, offices and condominium towers built along the central waterfront in the past decade provides a clear example of such trends.

Toronto's natural features have equally suffered. Constrained by concrete banks since the "Don Improvement" plan of the late nineteenth century, subsequent development has further isolated the Don River and its valley from the urban fabric. The addition of the Belt Line Railway (now part of the Canadian National Railways) in the early 1900s, along with the construction of the Don Valley Parkway and the Bayview Avenue Extension in the 1960s have created barriers on both sides of the Lower Don. Polluted from sewage and surface run-off, the murky water at the mouth of the Don languishes amidst the web of infrastructures: the railway viaduct, elevated highway interchange and heavy vehicular arteries. There is no indication that marshlands ever existed in the port lands. Even the industrial structures and storage tanks that defined the early modern industrial landscape have, for the most part, been demolished. Vacant lands now sit as an appendix - neglected and estranged from the city at large.



14. The polluted waters of the Lower Don River.



15. "The Straightening of the Don," 1888. A sketch showing the original windings of the Don River overlaid with the streets and proposed channel according to the 'Don Improvement.'

A picture of disjunction at a personal and civic perspective emerges. Estranged and isolated, people and spaces are segmented and detached from their greater contexts. The resulting atmosphere of isolation and loneliness is, in many ways, both a cause and a symptom of a greater banal urban environment. It is increasingly more important that active measures should be taken to confront blandness and create places of meaning. “If places are no longer the clear supports of our identity, they nonetheless play a potentially important part in the symbolic and psychical dimension of our identifications. It is not spaces which ground identifications, but places.”²³ Places situate us in the world by representing and generating networks of relationships. They are the physical manifestations of our ties to the past that also connect us to one another and propel us into the future. As Solà-Morales say, “places are physical, but they can also be mental.”²⁴ They enable us to establish cultural and personal meaning within natural and artificial environments. By creating meaningful places, we move closer to re-engaging ourselves with the world.



16. The current state of the mouth of the Don River, isolated amidst a web of infrastructures.

Moments of Crisis:



17. The junction at the mouth of the Don River, rail lines, and highway interchange

Weddings and Funerals and the Mouth of the Don

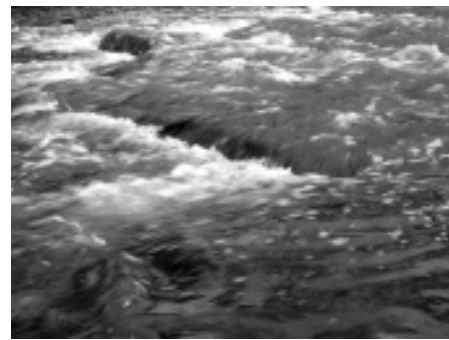
Displacement and isolation of contemporary social and urban landscapes has triggered an intertwined crisis of identity and place. Within this context, the resulting longing for identity often manifests in ceremonial events marking marriage and death. Weddings and funerals provide a rare lifetime opportunity to visibly connect with one's societal customs and traditions and publicly recognize the transition to a new personal and social identity. The willingness of friends and family to travel long distances to attend weddings and funerals is indicative of their social importance. These rites of passage, both joyous and sad, are critical moments of communal recognition and social binding even in our electronic age.

Just as ceremonies of marriage and death serve as markers for critical transitions in the journey of life, so a river's point of termination also marks its union and transformation into a lake, sea or ocean. The mouth of the Don River is a multifaceted symbol for both Toronto's people and the city. In this respect, the Don is not an anomaly: river mythology has a rich past. Ancient societies related the circulation of rivers to the body's bloodstream and mythologized rivers like the Nile, Tigris and Euphrates as sacred symbols of fertility and providence.²⁵ Life-giving qualities of great rivers gave rise to great civilizations like Egypt and Mesopotamia.²⁶ Ancient and modern cities are built along water courses and their mouths.

Rivers also make frequent literary devices. They can represent boundaries or passageways into, or away from civilization. "To go upstream was...to go backward"²⁷ into a primordial and mysterious source. In *the Heart of Darkness*, "Joseph Conrad's imperial stream, the road of commercial penetration that ends in disorientation, dementia, and death"²⁸ can also be read as a journey into a more primeval subconscious. Rivers' unremitting flows are also a commonly used metaphor for the irreversible passage of time. Today's lower Don has been tamed, reshaped and obscured. If the river is indeed a lifeline, then the mouth of the Don ought to serve as a moment of release, death and rebirth. In this way, we also need to ask a similar series of question about the place of weddings and funerals in the flow of our lives.



18. "Jewish Stages of Life." A drawing illustrating the various important transitions of life.



19,20. Images of the varying nature of the Don River, 2004.

Why weddings and funerals?

The symbol of the river carries composite meanings that traverse multiple cultures. This transcendent source of meaning mirrors the universal significance of weddings and funerals. While other rites of passage are still celebrated, participation in them is often limited to specific narrower circles determined by age, familial or religious ties. Birth and naming rites like baptisms and baby showers, and coming of age celebrations like bar-mitzvahs and graduations, while significant, do not entail the same kind of transition that marriage and death create. In a consumerist Western culture, new rites, like the celebration of a first car or house, are often replacing more traditional transition events.

Across all ethnic and religious backgrounds, however, weddings and funerals are still consistently observed. These events retain the power to draw heterogeneous and otherwise unconnected people together. In most instances, the ceremonies are still decidedly communal and highly public occasions. While seemingly disparate on the surface, they in fact share similar traits. In his seminal study, *The Rites of Passage*, anthropologist Arnold van Gennep identifies weddings and funerals as rites that mark the transition from “one situation to another or from one cosmic or social world to another.”²⁹ Both can be broken into three stages. They begin with a period of separation, where rites like washing or ‘purification’ and crossing thresholds symbolize a departure from previous conditions. This is followed by a liminal stage, or period of transition where transformation from the old self into the new happens. The final stage is that of incorporation, where the inductee is reintroduced into the social group under a new identity, often accompanied by acts of eating and drinking.³⁰

Like rivers, marriage and death also involve symbols of fertility and affirmation of life.³¹ Both events typically involve some kind of procession, a solemn ceremony, and the sharing of food and drink. In everyday practice, weddings and funerals are often held in the same places, namely churches, mosques, synagogues or civic centres. Both frequently use the services of florists, caterers, banquet halls and car rentals. From Greek mythology to Shakespeare, the juxtaposition of marriage and death has been exploited for its inherent drama and serves as a fascinating source for creative crisis.³² In dream interpretation, funeral and wedding symbols both represent the death of a certain trait and the birth or acquirement of a new identity. Ultimately, both are life-affirming celebrations that carry immense social import.

21. A typical wedding banquet hall.



22. A chauffeur of a car service company, hired by a wedding party.

How do Our Public Institutions and Consumerist Culture Make Us Different?

Forces beyond our control, which operate at the level of the urban spaces we inhabit, can shape our behaviour as well as the places we live. In the twentieth century, large scale political and economic forces were the drivers of the industrialization of the lower Don River. Today, civic and commercial entities, large and often corporate, have similar effects in shaping how we celebrate marriage and death. Legalities of registration and social documentation, including birth and death certification, marriage licenses and mortuary regulations encompass the rites of passage in an industrialized society. In addition to our need for communal and public recognition, we seek legal confirmation that we are indeed born, married, or deceased.

But civic affirmations of status are more than mere bureaucratic procedures. For those who have no religious affiliations, civic institutions provide the authoritative sanction for their altered social identity. The controversy over the nationwide legalization of same-sex marriage is an example of the importance placed upon the institution of marriage. In July, 2005, Canada became the third country in the world to extend equal marriage rights to same-sex couples. During the preceding years of political debate, numerous American couples took advantage of provincial court decisions permitting same-sex marriages and traveled to Ontario to be wed. Although their marriages are not legally recognized by the United States, their actions are indicative of the perceived socially affirming power of the event.

Like marriage, legal definitions of birth and death are also evolving. Fetal rights and euthanasia are two issues that involve institutional involvement. Scientific advances like artificial insemination and embryo freezing have introduced clinical intervention in previously natural life processes. Views and attitudes towards life and death have also been altered by the dependence on the medical profession. Often, births and deaths are carefully monitored and controlled by professionals inside city hospitals.

There is similarly a “professional” presence in weddings and funerals. Intimate acts traditionally performed by close family and friends are now typically the responsibility of third parties. Food preparation is the caterer’s job. In industrialized societies, washing and dressing corpses is the mortuary professionals’ responsibility. In her book, *Representations of Death*, Mary Bradbury suggests that our dependence on public and private institutions has played a part in creating the taboo associated with death and inert bodies.³³ As Bradbury says, in a sense, “the doctor becomes God and ... the funeral director the ‘knight in shining armour’.”³⁴ Because of our detachment from the natural processes of death and decomposition, the corpse has become objectified and feared as a source of pollution.

23. The visitors' lounge at a funeral home.



24. A funeral director.



25. Behind the scenes -- equipments and machines for cremations at a crematorium.

As a result, the industry has advanced post-mortem practices like refrigeration and embalming, both of which are reasonably recent developments.³⁵ With western society increasingly adopting cremation,³⁶ the expedited process of decomposition often happens behind closed doors and the body disappears relatively instantly. Distanced from the mortuary process, the funerary period for the bereaved is reduced to a few dramatic moments including the visitation, ceremony and wake that are almost theatrical in nature, “carefully controlled and staged by the professionals”³⁷, and assisted by “props”³⁸ such as flowers, dress, lighting and hymns.

Similarly, weddings are often meticulously planned and orchestrated, at times by outside professionals. The drama and intrigue of the behind-the-scenes aspects of these events have even spawned a host of “reality” television programs.³⁹ The wedding industry raises peoples’ expectations and feeds their obsession with the perfect, romantic memory. By exploiting the desire for a special event, the wedding and funerary businesses have developed into robust, multi-billion dollar industries⁴⁰ that continue to flourish.



26. A product showroom at a funeral home.

Can We Search for a Meaningful Experience?

Although weddings and funerals have not escaped the influences of consumerist culture, they still manage to hold existential meaning for those involved. Many continue to search for the ‘perfect’ place for their special moment. People with religious affiliations can locate these ceremonies in their places of worship, but the options for inter-faith or non-denominational ceremonies are more limited. In an attempt to cater to all religions and cultures, existing institutional and commercial ceremonial spaces are neutral but lack any sort of authentic character. Some of these spaces are representations of traditional scenarios. For instance, the funeral parlour is named after what it replaces – the front parlour where bodies were traditionally laid out. Other spaces are less ambitious, decorating big-box banquet halls with classical columns and arches. There are also fast alternatives like the Las Vegas style drive-thru wedding or inflatable chapels. The same applies for memorials. A loved one’s ashes can be formed into a diamond, mixed into a ‘memorial reef’ and set on the ocean floor, or be loaded into firework shells and shot into the sky.⁴¹

There is an instinct to personalize weddings and funerals. Not only do we want these occasions to reflect who we are, but also personal touches of things like our favorite music and special decorations, are conceivably ways of dealing with the banality of these commercially influenced spaces. In the search for an accessible and meaningful place, some choose a natural setting. From June to November (the most popular season for weddings), city parks and gardens become hugely popular photographic destinations for wedding parties.⁴² Similarly, funeral services are often performed at gravesides. It is understandable that urbanization and cultural conceptions of nature have made pastoral and picturesque parklands all the more appealing. Yet nature, be it wild or re-created, holds an attraction beyond the nostalgic. The material experience of forests and water and their multilayered symbols of life transcend all cultural differences and reconnect us to the physical world.

With renewed interest in holistic attitudes, natural birth and death movements are gaining in popularity. People are revisiting traditional practices like homebirths and midwifery, and are choosing to spend their dying days at home or in a hospice. There are now also environmentally conscious alternatives for the rites themselves. In eco-weddings, everything from wedding gown to food is organic and environmentally friendly. Woodland cemeteries are also becoming favoured. At these ‘green burials,’ the untreated body is placed in a simple pine or cardboard box, and interred in an existing woodlot. The body naturally decomposes, creating fertile ground for future plant growth. Graves are located according to



27. An uninspired space currently serves as the Wedding Chapel at the Toronto City Hall.



28. A Las Vegas drive-thru wedding chapel.

29. An inflatable church.

30. A memorial reef being placed into the ocean.



31-33. Three different wedding parties at the Edwards Garden, Toronto, observed within an hour on a Saturday afternoon in June.

the natural topography of the land and simply marked by rocks or a planted tree. Directors from one British woodland cemetery even reported several requests for wedding ceremonies to be held on their grounds.⁴³ Clearly, some are eager to embrace natural alternatives. People want to reclaim meaningful life experiences from the established institutions upon which they have grown to rely.

Beyond weddings and funerals, Toronto's citizens are generally becoming more environmentally conscious. There is interest in alternative energy - the city's second wind turbine will soon be installed at Ashbridges Bay following the success of the first at the Canadian National Exhibition grounds.⁴⁴ There are also considerations for bigger wind farms along the Great Lakes.⁴⁵ More recently, Toronto Hydro launched the city's largest industrial solar power generating system from its service centre in the port lands. More pioneering development is also taking place. Recently opened, the Deep Lake Water Cooling project is the first of its kind in North America. The system draws cold water from the lake to cool downtown buildings in the summer. In the past decade there have also been significant efforts to regenerate the urban brown fields in the lower Don area and the port lands. Citizen groups like the Task Force to Bring Back the Don, and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority are both actively working to renaturalize the lower Don River. Environmental assessment for the Lower Don River West Remedial Flood Protection Project is currently underway. The implementation of a naturalized delta and flood protecting berms at the mouth of the Don River is also scheduled and numerous projects to create a network of green spaces at the city's waterfront and port lands are in the planning process. All indications point to an increasing interest in adopting natural processes and practices, not only as purely practical considerations, but also as part of a larger search for a meaningful place.

A Moment of Crisis?

With a renewed interest in rehabilitating the built environment, the mouth of the Don River is the appropriate point of departure for a thesis project dealing with points of personal and social transition. The fluvial dynamics of the river's mouth affect both environmental conditions and personal perceptions. To re-naturalize the Don's mouth is to restore its identity. By recovering its ecological and historic significance for the city, we can begin to reinstate the river's life-giving spirit, and such renewal of life is also the underlying essence of weddings and funerals. Such moments define new identities while drawing diverse people together and can attach another layer of meaning to the site itself. In creating a meaningful urban place where diversity can share common ground, fertile ground is also laid for a new society. It is a place that can ground and bind distinct narratives and identities, and intertwined in this moment of crisis is the mythology of the people and the city. Such a place can simultaneously represent both the origins of Toronto, and the complexity of the new Canadian identity.

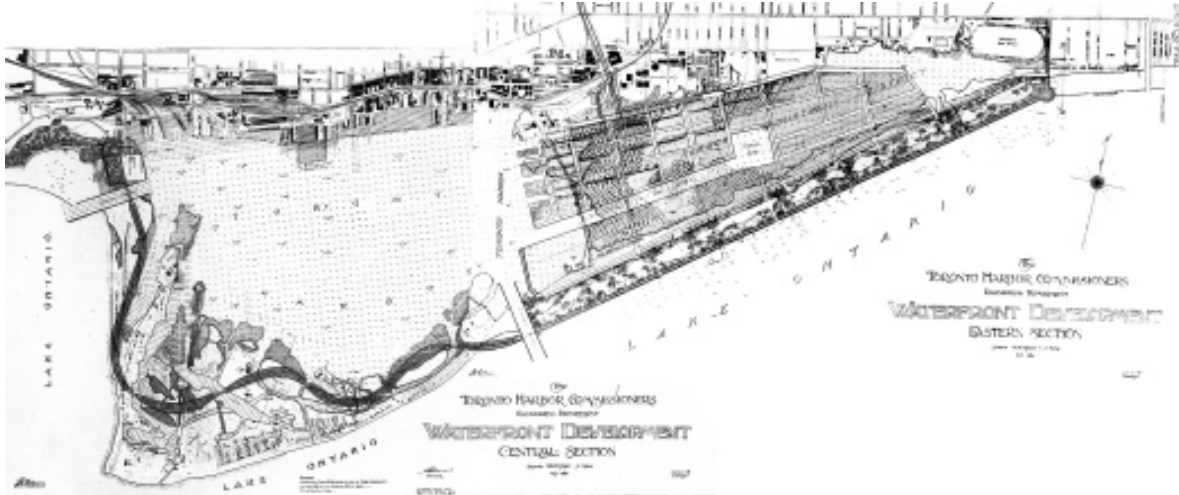


DESIGN PRINCIPLES

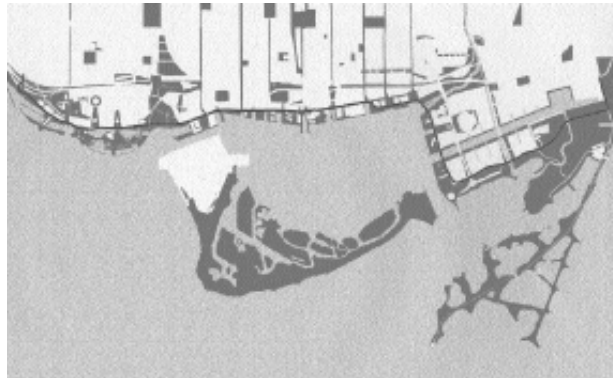


34. Detail of the M1 installation, *Binding*.

Fertile Grounds:



35. "Plan of Future Development of Ashbridges Bay drawn over existing conditions in 1912."



36. The "Fung plan". Our Toronto Waterfront: Gateway to the New Canada, 1999.



37. Central Waterfront Public Space Framework, TWRC, 2004.

Creating Toronto's New Mythology

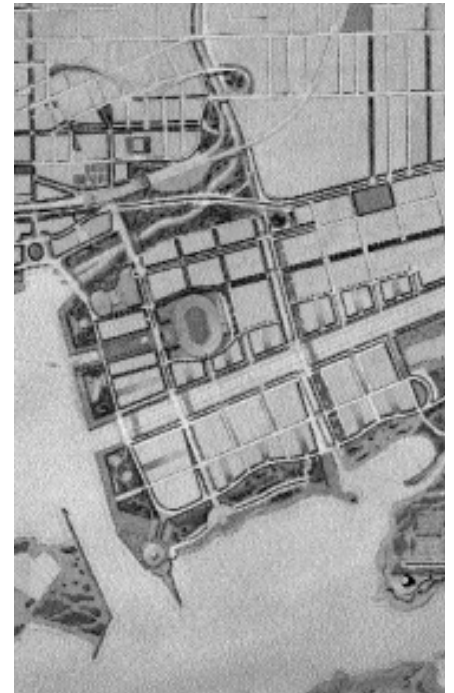
I believe the future of our country is going to be set in our communities, large and small. In a world where people can live and work wherever they want, a country's success depends on the degree to which our communities are the places where people want to plant their roots and raise their families, where they want to invest their energies, their hopes, their dreams and their ambitions. They are where Canadians live their lives, where critical social and economic decisions are taken; and where in many respects the national interest is made or unmade.

Paul Martin

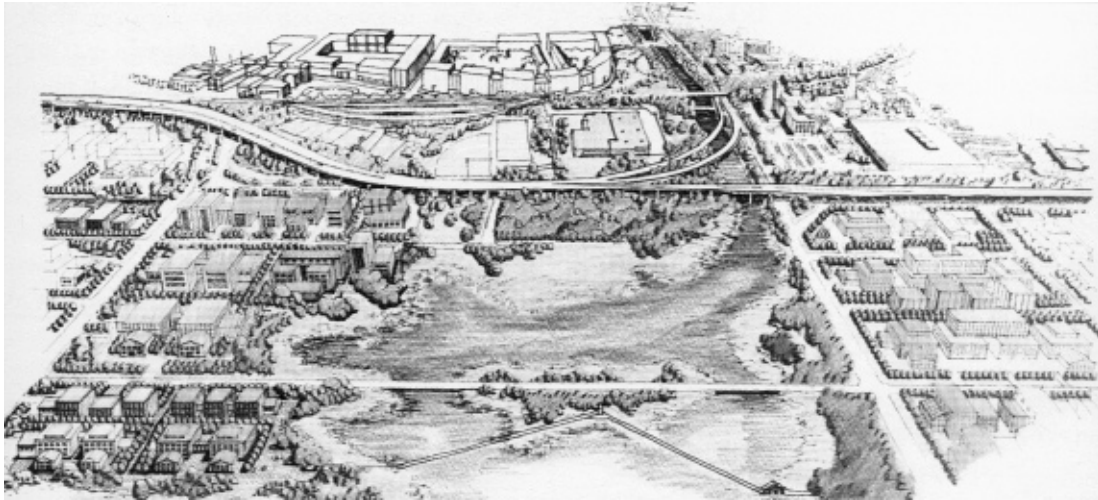
For nearly a century, Toronto's port lands have been considered fertile grounds for new communities to develop. Beginning in 1912, the Toronto Harbour Commissioner's Waterfront Development Plan proposed a series of narrow parks that ran alongside the port lands' southern shore. The scheme called for beaches, lagoons, green spaces and a cottage community to be constructed just south of a new set of industrial docks and sorting yards.⁴⁶ The vision was ambitious, calling for a lakefront boulevard and a new thoroughfare that connected the central islands with the western harbour front. As construction began, it quickly became clear that there was a more pressing need for industrial and commercial development, so the residential and recreational portions of the plan were set aside. Driven by a manufacturing-based economy, industry continued along for much of the 20th century.

Almost a century later, with port activities subsiding in the shifts of Toronto's economy, a new series of plans called for the revitalization of the now polluted Lower Don River and the port lands. The most comprehensive plans were submitted by the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Task Force in 1999. Known as the Fung Plan, the proposal used the programmatic requirements for Toronto's 2008 Olympic bid as the driving force behind a systematic renewal of the waterfront. Incorporating strategies from earlier initiatives like the Task Force to Bring Back the Don and Waterfront Regeneration Trust, the plan proposed a linked public park system along the waterfront and a restored river mouth. The scheme envisioned a number of new neighbourhoods in the port lands, including a media and high-technology centre, as well as live-work communities that would reinhabit the Athletes' Village and other Olympic sports venues. However, the plan lost much of its urgency when Toronto failed to win the Olympic bid. Nevertheless, out of the defunct Olympic bid sprang the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation (TWRC) which formed in 2001.

Making History -- the Politics of Achievement: a framework of Prime Minister Paul Martin's broad visions and ambitions for the country (November 2003)



38. Detail of the port lands in The "Fung plan".



39. "A Resotred Ashbridge's Marsh." Bringing Back the Don: the Task Force to Bring Back the Don, 1991.



40. Renaturalizing the mouth of the Don. Bringing Back the Don: the Task Force to Bring Back the Don, 1993.

The TWRC continues to pursue and develop elements from previous proposals. Its stated purpose is “to transform the Toronto waterfront into a series of sustainable, mixed-use, urban precincts integrated with parks, institutions, and open space that greatly expand the city’s capacity for urban living, employment, and recreation.”⁴⁷ One of the identified precincts is the West Don Lands just north of the CN rail lines at the mouth of the Don. Here, a development plan called the Ataritari project was proposed but abandoned when economic recession hit Toronto in the early 1990s. More recently, however, a revived economy and the restored Gooderman Worts complex have spurred renewed interest in developing the lands around the river’s mouth. Another of the TWRC’s projects is the renaturalization of the river’s mouth. Current plans call for the transformation of the Keating Channel into a re-naturalized delta. The proposal aims to alleviate some of the river’s ecological impurities but fails to fully address the associated flood risks. Recent environmental assessment reports have found that sizable berms and special culverts are required to fully protect the West Don Lands from periodic flooding. As such, the only immediate plans for the port lands consist of revitalizing Cherry Beach and the designs for Commissioners Park, which is adjacent to the Keating Channel. What has become clear is that the redesign of the port lands require more preparation, vision and funding in order to realize comprehensive urban renewal.

In light of the site’s obvious potential, Toronto can find both vision and precedent in the form of New York’s Central Park. Created on undeveloped land beyond the city’s urbanized area in the 1850s, it was “the first major park intended entirely for public use” in the United States.⁴⁸ Covering more than 800 acres, the park and its environs have become some of the most prized park and urban real estate in the United States.⁴⁹ Insulating occupants from the commotion and busyness of the city, the park is a pastoral haven that has helped to spur the growth of highly desirable dense residential neighbourhoods around its perimeter. For New York’s citizens, it has become “a special place and going there a special occasion.”⁵⁰ Transverse roads beneath the park’s surface separate urban activity from the park’s leisurely pursuits. Built structures and recreational grounds were carefully sited among the scenic landscapes. Intended as more than a recreational retreat, the park’s aim was to “make



41. Detail of the mouth of the Don. Central Waterfront Public Space Framework, 2004.



42. “Camouflage Park,” the chosen concept for Commissioners Park.



43. Monuments in Central Park.

44. Vehicular overpass at Central Park.

money, to display the city's cultivation, to lift up the poor, to refine the rich, to advance commercial interests, to retard commercial development, to improve public health, to curry political favor, and to provide jobs."⁵¹ In addition to initiating economic and urban growth, the park's social ideals have become entrenched in the city's mythology. Today, the park functions as a truly democratic public space -- one that draws people and begins to dissolve cultural and socio-economic distinctions. Its accomplishments help to affirm that as a typology, the large public park has the power to transform both the physical and mythological landscapes of the city.

Recognizing the desire on the part of Toronto to regenerate the mouth of the Don, the design portion of the thesis proposes a new linear park that spans the length of the port lands. Intertwining the narratives of the river and people, the design creates a pragmatic and mythological foundation for re-inhabiting the vast, post-industrial site. The narrative of the displaced river is a strategic starting point, and the design seeks to find a motive to shape the form and identity of the port lands. As a first move, the river is rerouted through the centre of the port lands to establish a location for urban communities and public life. Within the park itself, weddings and funerals are to be housed in a series of ceremonial pavilions and landscapes that celebrate our individual and collective ideologies. Simultaneously looking ahead while acknowledging the past, the thesis design restores significance to the mouth of the Don by restoring its life-giving spirit for the community. It articulates where we came from as a city and people, and where we are headed. The creation of this new mythic landscape of transitions for a cosmopolitan population is guided by three principles, *Grounding*, *Binding* and *Differences*, all of which will be examined in the next chapter.



45. Central Park, with the Midtown Manhattan skyline as a backdrop.

Grounding:



46. Proposed re-aligned Don River and wetlands.

Fabricating Identity Through Landscape



Grounding refers to the symbolic and pragmatic re-creation of the Don's mouth as a place of life and significance within the city. Presently terminating at the Keating Channel, the Don's mouth is re-naturalized as a wetland delta in the thesis design. Its course is re-routed south through the port lands' post-industrial brown fields. A public park around the realigned river serves as a foundation spine for new communities, much as Central Park has shaped its adjacent neighbourhoods in New York. Using the organizational and mythic power of landscape, the thesis design establishes a meaningful contemporary identity that readily acknowledges foundational histories, both personal and civic, as a way of bringing meaning to the here and now.

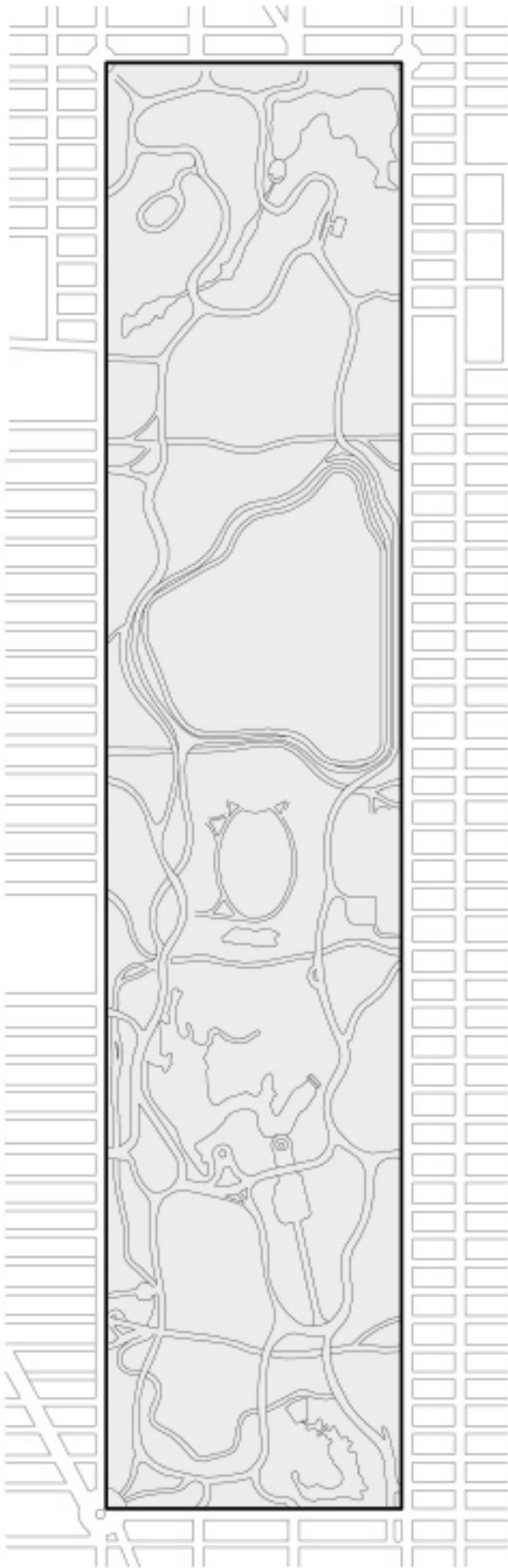
Today, exiting just south of the Gardiner expressway, the Don River ends abruptly at the concrete-banked Keating Channel. Dedicated to industrial use since the turn of the 20th century, the river's mouth is neglected and largely unoccupied. Once considered a foundation junction of the original Toronto settlement, the site has continuously evolved, serving a vibrant ecosystem, a crucial transportation route, and a mythological birthplace for the city. A number of design proposals have been introduced over its history, most recently by the TWRC. The current plan draws from a number of ideas established by previous design efforts. Similar to all the predecessors, this plan maintains the Don River at its present course, while the river's mouth is restored to a marsh-like habitat. These new wetlands serve as a flood plain, hopefully, preventing the land north of the site from periodic flooding, as in 1953's Hurricane Hazel. The TWRC plan is an extension of the Don Valley park network and also addresses the immediate needs for new residential communities that would form at the port lands' northwest tip. The plan balances issues of housing, public space, and the environment. The TWRC initiatives form the foundation for the thesis design, which when combined with a landscape for weddings and funerals of an increasingly global city, becomes a richer and deeper landscape.

Alienation reveals itself in uneasiness, in a restless search for roots in the past and for directions to the future to give meaning to the here and now. Re-establishing ties with the ancient dwelling place, the Home Place, is a largely unrecognized but widespread preoccupation. 'Getting back to Nature' or better, growing by 'Going forward to Nature,' has level upon level of meaning that runs the gamut from the most superficial exercises in recreation to the most profound explorations of re-Creation.

Stan Rowe

Home Place: Essays on Ecology. (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 2002), 69.

47. Don River Park as a green corridor that connects the Don Valley and the waterfront green infrastructure.



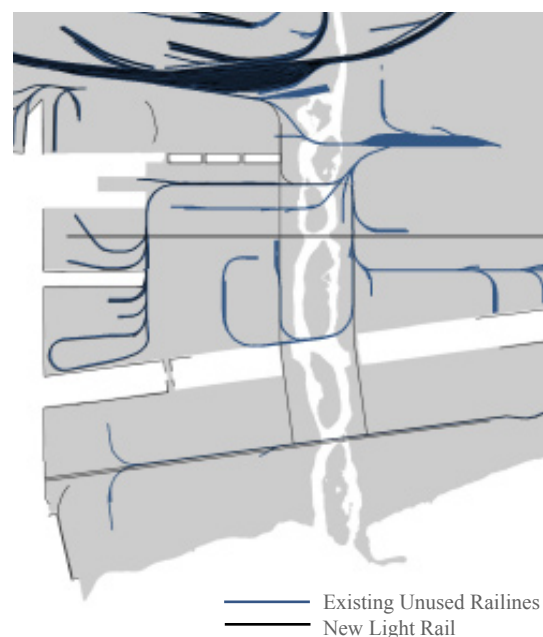
48a,b. Plans of Central Park and Don River Park, drawn at the same scale.

As an expansion and a new variation on these ideas, the thesis design calls for the creation of the Don River Park: a realigned and re-naturalized river mouth that ascribes broader purpose and meaning to the river as well as to the port lands.

The Don River's mouth is redirected south through the port lands, aligning with Cherry Street and Toronto's rectilinear street grid. A new wetland park is formed around the new river course and spans approximately 220 metres in width and is almost two kilometres in length to the river's new mouth. (See Figure 46.) The park's perimeter is partially predefined by existing rail lines on the site. Previously used for industrial and cargo transport, the tracks are retained in the project and updated to allow for a new light rail transit system. Comparable in shape to Manhattan's Central Park, the new Don River Park of the design thesis similarly serves as a central natural armature that anchors future urban growth. Retaining most of the existing streets of the port lands, a typical street grid is established and connects into the long, narrow park. Scaled approximately to the size of Toronto's Cabbagetown street grid, each new block is developed according to pedestrian-friendly principles of mixed use programming and high to mid-density housing. New neighbourhoods will, over time, develop on the east and west sides of the park based on an urban model of perimeter block morphology. As the district's collective green space, the new river park offers an alternative lifestyle to the lower density suburban developments that proliferate throughout the rest of the new residential lands of the Greater Toronto Area. The park offers a complete vision for development in contrast to fragmented speculative development. Looking beyond the simple superficial act of urban re-creation and development, the park further establishes a contemporary metropolitan place where river, land and people find cosmological and ritualistic harmony; first in the recreations of daily life and then in the rituals of weddings and funerals.

The park acts as both an antithesis and catalyst for a newly re-inhabited port lands by addressing the river's present physical and ecological estrangement. It becomes an important link to the past -- a place where the unseen is revealed, and where the narratives of people, history, time and space are played out on a daily basis.

The Don River's channel connects into the realigned river course of the new park just north of the Gardiner expressway. Oscillating and intertwining, there are two distinct streams flowing through the park: a hard-edged channel and a soft-edged marsh. New wetlands begin to re-naturalize the new Don channels, creating a slow moving stream that filters the river water before it exits into Lake Ontario. The new marsh are repopulated with a variety of flora and fauna. At high water levels, the water fills the breadth of the



49. Existing rail lines and the proposed light rail system.

wetlands, helping to alleviate the threat of flooding to adjacent land. The secondary intertwining channel, approximately nine metres deep, is faced with pre-cast concrete dock walls. That channel moves swiftly and acts as a counterpoint to the softer wetland stream. In *Topophilia*, Yi-Fu Tuan intimates that “the appreciation of landscape is more personal and longer lasting when it is mixed with the memory of human incidents.”⁵² By re-creating both marsh and channel, the history of the Don River is revealed, its dual character acknowledged and its narrative extended to the present day. By cutting into the artificial ground of the port lands, the nature of its manufactured construct is exposed and its man-made identity reaffirmed. Through this equally violent act of displacement, we can begin to reconcile previous manipulations of earth and river at the Don’s mouth.

The northern and southernmost ends of the park are particularly significant, especially as a location for key events of passage in people’s lives like marriage and death. Marking a beginning and an end to the park’s river flow, both points serve as physical and metaphorical moments of transition for the river and its people. Both ends are demarcated with ceremonial monuments that recognize these transitional events. The south is marked with a tower, celebrating passage to the lake and the conclusion of life. In contrast, the north end is anchored with a raised building and a grassy mound representing birth. Sitting between the Gardiner expressway and the CN railroad tracks, the northern site is a crucial but difficult junction, connecting the existing Don River park system to the new river mouth park.

Today, the northern mound site is noisy and confusing; a space that exists amongst a web of transportation infrastructures. As a means of introducing the park’s narrative, a new office for the civic registrar is created. The long, raised building functions as the place where Toronto’s births, marriages and deaths are certified and recorded. Home to digital archives of records and certificates, the building also acts as an entry marker into the site. The long, narrow building projects out of this green grassy mound, and rests on a series of columns above the river’s new wetlands. Composed of concrete, glass, and metal screens, the building’s form parallels that of the river’s. It hovers between, and above the web of infrastructure, overlooking the site where the Don River previously met the Keating channel. Physically, the registry building is sited as a pedestrian gateway to the park, marking the transition from river valley to structured park. The office serves as a metaphorical gateway to the past -- a place that reveals fragments of historical personal narratives.



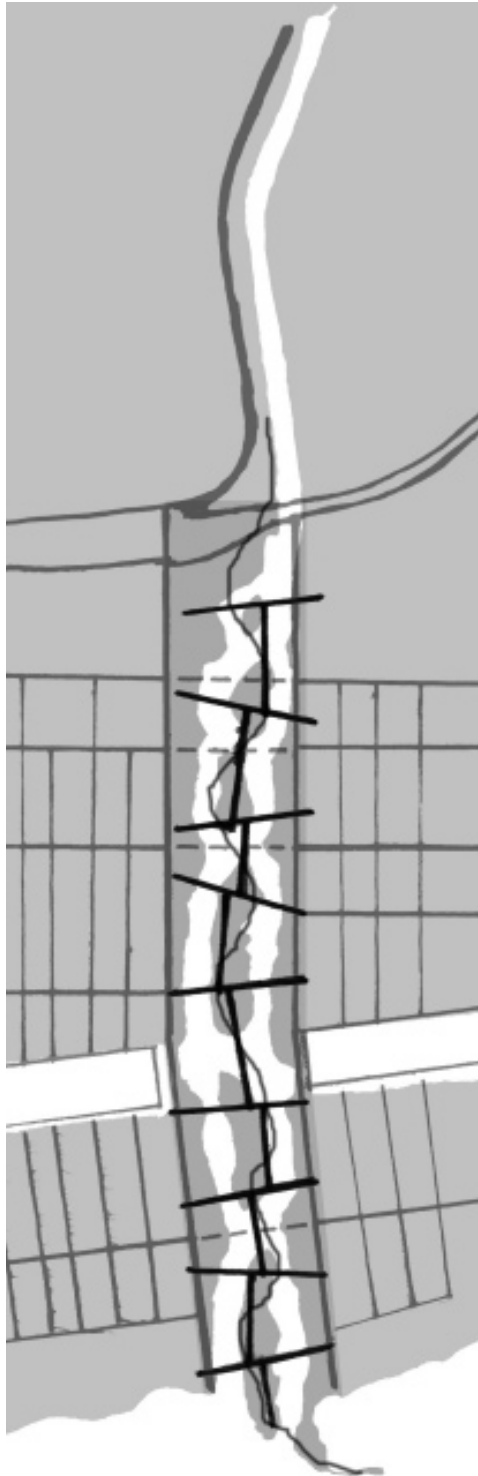
50. The monuments -- The Mound at the North and the Tower anchoring the Southern end of the park.

A tower stands at the new mouth of the Don on an existing jetty at the park's southern end. Using the same material composition as the registry building, the concrete core of the tower is wrapped in a translucent metal mesh screen that catches the changing light and forms a shimmering skin of ice in the winter. The tower's cylindrical form is reminiscent of the industrial silos and storage tanks that once defined the landscape of the port lands. By extension, vacant existing structures scattered throughout the port lands can be adapted for similar use in the future. Here, a crematorium occupies the tower's base, while the height of its shaft serves as a columbarium. An observation platform on top of the tower provides a lookout point to the park and the city. This site marks the river's final release into the Outer Harbour. Its exit embodies a sense of transition and passing. At the same time, it is also the mouth and entry to the river, signifying rebirth. The tower is a monument to the dead and a beacon for the future. A dock for small boats sits along the base of the tower. Visitors can journey on from here by water to the outer reaches of the Leslie Street Spit. Created from demolished building materials, the man-made Tommy Thompson Park is now regarded as a natural haven for a diversity of wildlife. Continuously evolving, new zones here can be relegated as scattering grounds for cremated remains, and becomes an extension of the funerary ritual at the new Don River Park.



51. Image of the Registry Building and mound.
52. Image of the Tower and dock.

Binding:



53. The connections -- bridges and pathways.

ReCreating a Meaningful Place

Place is, rather, a conjectural foundation, a ritual of and in time, capable of fixing a point of particular intensity in the universal chaos of our metropolitan civilization.

Ignasi de Sola-Morales

Differences: Topographies of Contemporary Architecture.



Rites of passage straddle yet a third paradox: that the subject, the initiate, in these rituals is at once alone and yet never entirely independent. For biological reasons, we are creatures achingly vulnerable to the emotions, opinions, and physical care of others. We cannot endure the experience of living in an incomprehensible world, so, as often as not, we trade our freedom and creativity for the assurance that life is meaningful. We are born and die alone, ultimately unique and separate, yet we are unable to survive without our fellows and the web of symbols and activities that bind us one to another.

Victor Turner

Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual, 112.

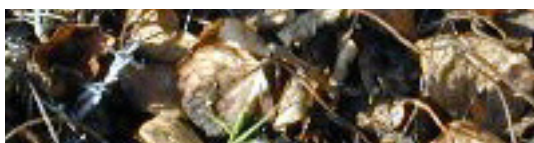
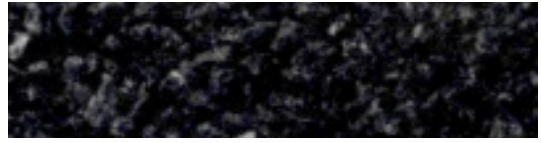
54. Image of a typical park entrance through an opening in the berm.

Binding refers to the creation of a place that connects people and landscape together through everyday rituals. In the new Don landscape of the thesis design, these occur especially at the edges of the park and in the interconnection to the surrounding neighbourhoods. Acknowledging the social dimensions inherent in the contemporary city, binding crafts an urban space that addresses the psychological and cultural-historical disconnectedness, and the alienation of the capsular modern city. Surrounded on either side by high-density neighbourhoods, the new Don River mouth park encourages inhabitation and the daily rituals of urban life by not only serving as the port lands' principle green space, but also as its main public space. In fostering human contact, the park becomes a vessel that unites people in a collective understanding of their place. Given the contextual nature of the design, the park enables and affirms a sense of rootedness to the site and its historical narrative. As such, the park functions uniquely as a space where time is transfixed and cycled through the rituals of everyday occupation.

Like the oscillating channels of marsh and concrete, the outer edges of the park alternate between a wide, soft-edged berm and a solid, hard-edged floodwall. The soft berms are comprised of compacted material removed from the new river course and are planted with a variety of trees, shrubs and groundcover similar to those in the valleys of the lower reaches of the Don River. The berms slope towards shallow wetlands and form a picturesque landscape. The hard floodwalls, by contrast, are composed of a series of cast-in-place concrete platforms that measure one metre in height and step down to the water's edge. The platforms are connected by staircases varying in both steepness and length, depending on site and placement. Functioning as pedestrian walkways, the platforms act as a contemporary counterpoint to the softer and more traditional landscapes found on the berms. Regardless of surface treatment, both edges are raised approximately four metres above street level and collectively re-create the sloping valley conditions found throughout the Don. In combination with the wetlands, the landforms serve to protect the rest of the port lands residential areas from flooding. The marshes help retain surface runoff from the port lands while filtering out pollutants. Re-establishing a native ecological habitat, they act as a cultural reminder of the site's origins.



55. The 'soft- edged" berm.
56. The "hard-edged" floodwall and boardwalk.



57 a-e. A palette of 'soft' materials.

58 a-e. A palette of 'hard' materials.

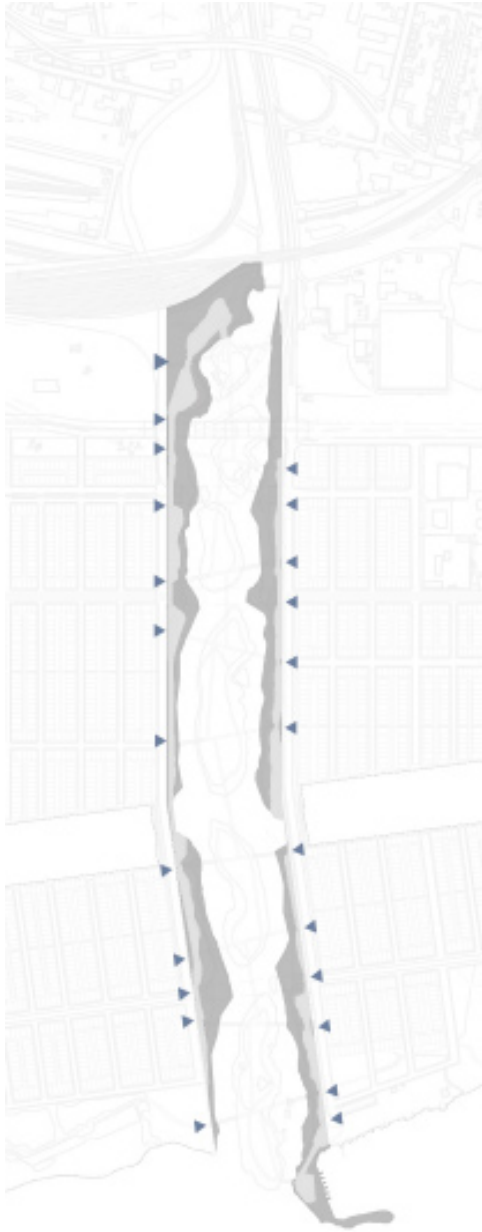
Defined by light rail transit lines on its periphery, the street-facing edges of the park are ringed with a series of modular shop fronts nestled into the park's berms. Home to typical city programs like cafes, florists, bars, laundromats and convenience stores, and much like New York's Central Park's bordering avenues, the spaces help to animate the immediate streets and introduce the park's outer edges. Pedestrians enter the park beyond this commercial zone through various incisions intermittently punctuating the berms. These gateways bisect a series of winding pedestrian trails that run north and south along the park. Accommodating cyclists, in-line skaters, and pedestrians, the trails, in combination with the shop fronts and public transit, form a pleasant public space that serves many functions and meets the every day requirements of the average city dweller. Locals have a place to walk their dogs, meet friends, bird-watch, picnic, or to simply get fresh air. Urbanistically, the new park edge offers an alternative to the privately owned green spaces found in suburban developments and helps to foster a genuine sense of community based on the shared ownership of place.



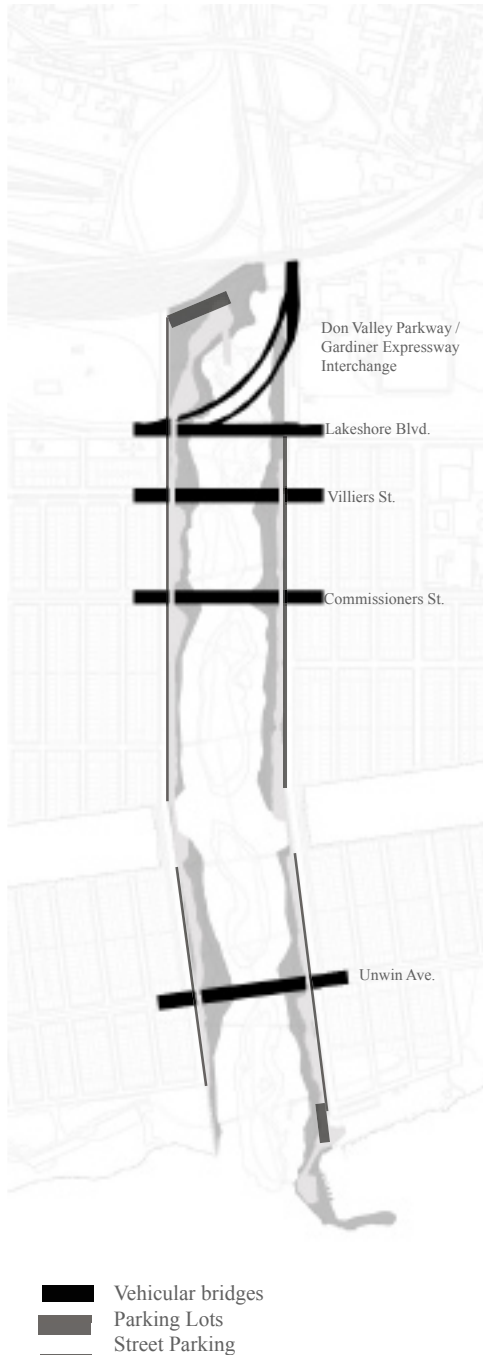
59. An entrance opening in the bermed edges, viewed inside the park.



60. Entrance gateway to the park, viewed from the street, where shop fronts line the raised berms to animate the street.



61. Openings cut intermittently along the raised berms provide access into and through the park. Pedestrian and bicycle trails wind along the two edges of the park.

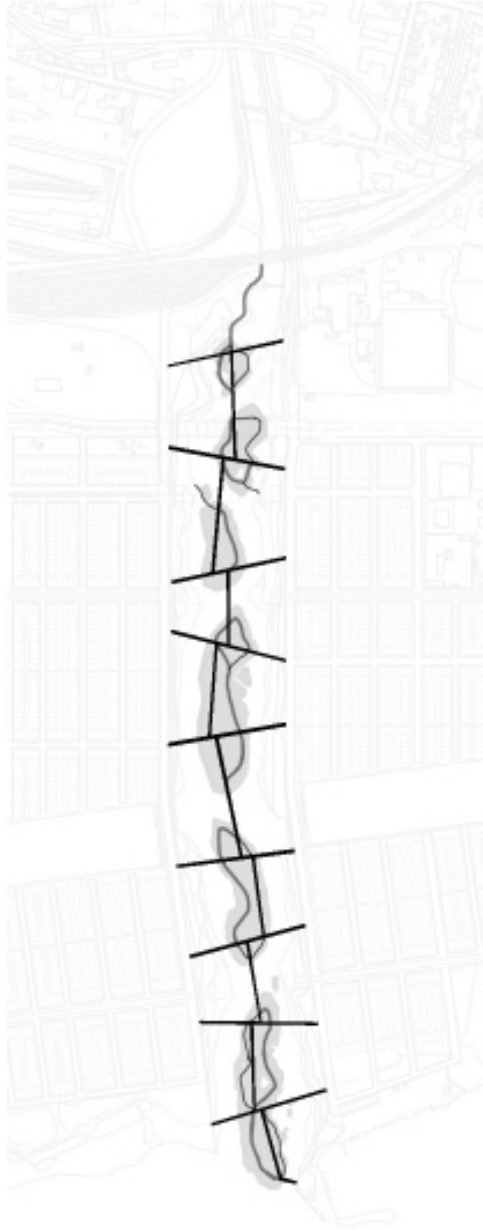


At the centre of the park, a series of islands separate the marshes from the river channel. Sediments from the river continuously shape and extends them towards the Leslie Street Spit through the Outer Harbour. More densely vegetated than the berms, the islands are planted with a variety of native trees and shrubs. Newly planted coniferous and deciduous trees take root and help to regulate the shape and size of the islands. Within the artificial framework of the park, landforms and vegetation begin to evolve through natural process.

A series of vehicular and pedestrian bridges and pathways connect in and to the park so that it remains an indispensable part of the city fabric. Four existing major cross streets running east-west in the port lands span the park's width: Lakeshore Boulevard with the raised Gardiner Expressway above near the top end of the park, Villiers and Commissioners Streets north of the Ship Channel and Unwin Avenue just south of it. Echoing the overpass structures at Bloor and Queen streets, the cross streets are replaced by bridges that arch over the valley and allow pedestrians and the river to continue unimpeded. To preserve the serene atmosphere of the park, vehicular access is restricted to the outside. Two parking lots at the north and south end of the park can be used by visitors arriving by car. Alternatively, there are street parking along the length of the east and western edges.

A subset of pedestrian bridges run in various directions and allow for pedestrian access to the islands. Concrete bridges span over the faster moving river channel, while simple wooden bridges hover just above water level over the marshes. The bridges help to divide the park into smaller, more usable portions. A network of paved and soft surface pathways connect to these bridges throughout the park. Together, the bridges and pathways allow pedestrians to create unique circuits or loops that lead them to and from their destinations.

62. Vehicular bridges span across and over the park to connect the east and west neighbourhoods of the port lands.

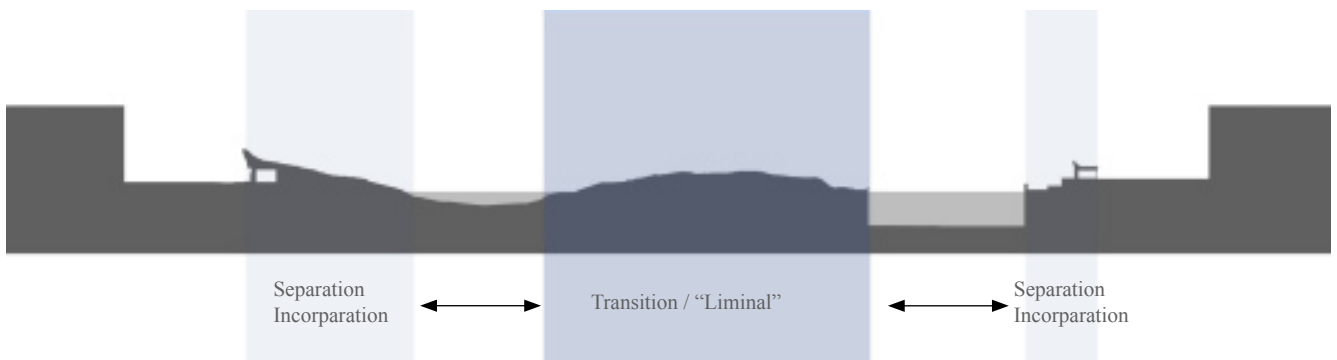


64a,b. Pedestrian bridges connected the outer edges and the islands.

63. A network of bridges and pathways provide pedestrian connection between the east and west side of the port lands, and access onto the islands in the centre of the park.

At just 220 metres wide, the park is relatively small, roughly a quarter of the width of Central Park. At an experiential level however, the park is rich with different types of landscapes, built forms, programs and means of occupation. Starting at the street fronts, each portion of the park operates as a unique and self-contained environment. The built berms and raised platforms at the edges of the park, along with the layers of vegetation act as visual and auditory buffers from the immediate urban environment. As people progress through the park, they are continually separated from the sights, smells and sounds of the city. Like Central Park, this layered separation offers a unique sense of at once being outside of the city, while at the same time being very much rooted within it.

In the Don River Park, however, the islands are reserved for life celebrations in the form of the weddings and funerals of Toronto's diverse and cross-cultural population. Moving beyond the edges and their neighbourhood public space, the park's cross-sectional configuration mirrors the tripartite structure of weddings and funerals found in Arnold Van Gennep's *The Rites of Passage*. Van Gennep dissects these rites of passage into three layers or stages. The initial phase consists of separation from existing circumstances, followed by a "liminal" stage of transition that ends with a new identity and phase of life. Within the park, the outer berms and floodwalls form an initial zone to accommodate both arrival and exit. Amongst the shops situated in these zones are weddings and funerals related businesses like flower shops, limousine companies and taxi stands. Rites of incorporation such as post ceremony banquets and gatherings can be also be accommodated in restaurants and reception halls located in these outer zones. In the centre of the park, the islands form the liminal zone, in which the individual makes the transition from one state of life to another. Here, weddings and funerals take place.



65. Sectional organization of the park, in relation to Arnold Van Gennep's idea of the three stages in rites of passage.

Differences:



66. Sites for ceremonial spaces.

Celebrating Diversity

Canada lives with a unique, if sometimes uncertain, national identity. Relatively young on the global stage, in Jennifer Welsh's words, it is a country born from "a partnership between diverse societies that conquered the challenges our climate and geography presented."⁵³ As the *Globe and Mail's* "The New Canada," study illustrated, the country's identity is in transition from one that is loosely associated with the iconic wilderness image of the Canadian landscape to one that is more aligned with its emerging urban cultural dynamic. Simultaneously proud of their heritage and proud to be Canadian, young people conceive of the New Canada as inextricably linked to its tolerance and acceptance of people of different cultures and values. A study participant said poignantly, "being Canadian ultimately just means you're from somewhere else and you've made Canada your home and that's the case for most people here...the idea is to celebrate the differences, work together."⁵⁴ Within this new paradigm, Canadians are looking for places that articulate and give meaning to this increasingly collective ideology.

Scattered between the two large city scale monuments anchoring the north and southern ends of the park, a series of smaller inter-faith ceremonial pavilions occupy the Don River Park's individual islands. Not restricted to any particular form or aesthetic, each pavilion is unique and site-specific. At the scale of the park, these buildings act as built artifacts that inhabit and give place and scale to the landscape. They are each designed in relation to the immediate natural surroundings, but are orientated geometrically with the city grid outside the park. The pavilions and the spaces around them are open and varied, designed to accommodate a diverse group of people and values. Allowing for weddings, funerals and other life-celebrating events, their architectural diversity mirrors the city's own complex, social makeup. Addressing deeply felt ideas of ancestry and identity, the new buildings and spaces engage an emerging generation of Canadians whose compound identities defy traditional boundaries. In celebrating our moments of crises within these constructs, we not only reconnect with our cultural origins, but also begin to situate ourselves within our chosen home.

How then does space become place? By being named: as the flows of power and negotiations of social relations are rendered in the concrete form of architecture; and also, of course, by embodying the symbolic and imaginary investments of a population.

Erica Carter, James Donald, and Judith Squires

"Introduction," Space and Place: Theories of Identity, and Location, xii.



67. Image of the Wetlands Pavilion in the landscape.

68. Image of the Edge Pavilion.



69. Memorial tree groves on the islands.

A network of pedestrian bridges and pathways connect into and away from the individual islands. Instead of imposing a linear narrative, each pathway is adaptive and allows the site to be accessed in a number of ways. In permitting these subjective exploratory passages and experiences, pedestrians have the opportunity to add to the complexity and the diversity of the park's narrative.

In groves and clearings interspersed throughout the islands, families are able to contribute a living memorial to the park. Dedicated to loved ones who have celebrated a birth, wedding or funeral, the memorial is composed of newly planted native trees and shrubs selected and planted by the family. Instead of fixed memorial plaques and structures, the plantings change and grow over time. The seasonal fluxes of the vegetation provides a changing backdrop that coincides with the that of the life celebration events. From June to September, the peak months for weddings⁵⁵, deciduous native trees and shrubs like the Black Cherry and Red Maple flowers, blooms, and turns colour, providing a joyous, festive environment for the event. By contrast, in the winter months when the number of deaths is highest throughout the year, the colours of the summer and fall are replaced by the more solemn tone of the conifers.

The new landscape inscribes the site with meaning, allowing personal narratives to take root in physical ground. Actively encouraged, the planting becomes a collective ritual and an act of cultural regeneration. The memorials act as a system of reforestation that add diversity and stability to the newly restored ecosystem. The variety of plant species directly reflects the cultural diversity of the people. Because of the ever-evolving nature of plant life, the park's form and identity is relatively fluid and will change over time and with occupation. As such, the park's design is not a fixed, unchangeable idea; instead its complexity is derived from the emotional and imaginative input of its occupants.



70. Contrasting tones of the seasons:
 a. A Red Maple in full fall colours
 b. A White Pine in the snow during winter



Seasonal changes of native plants (from top to bottom):

- 71 a-d. Black Cherry (*Prunus serotina*)
- 72 a-d. Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*)
- 73 a-d. Eastern Cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*)
- 74 a-d. Tulip Tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*)

3.4

Conclusion

“There are places on the planet we belong and they are not necessarily where we are born. If we are lucky – if the gods are in a good mood – we find them, for whatever length of time is necessary for us to know that, yes, we belong to the earth and it to us. Even if we cannot articulate this intense physical sensation, even if language fails us, we know what home is then, in our very bones.”

Isabel Huggan

Belonging: Home Away from Home, 4.

In a recently published memoir, the Kitchener born author Isabel Huggan recounts a life spent living largely outside of Canada. For almost two decades, her husband’s work with an international agency called for her family to relocate steadily from continent to continent. Looking back on the various places she lived, her memoir reflects on the nature of home and what it means to belong within a certain place. While agreeing that home is indeed, where the heart is, she speaks of a distinct longing for a particular home -- the landscapes of rural Ontario, where she grew up as a child, and where she inadvertently returns to visit the graves of her parents.

“If a year goes by without my managing to get to the cemetery, I feel oddly bereft and out of sorts, as if something important has not been done, as if something is missing. It surprises me beyond all measure that I attach deep feelings – memories, love, loss – to this place and to this polished slab of granite”⁵⁶

As her story progresses, Huggan discovers first hand that the feeling of home and belonging that she feels in rural Ontario can also be found in other places. Now retired, she and her husband chose to settle in a small farmhouse in the South of France, one of the many stops in their journey together. When Ballou, their pet cat and long time traveling companion dies from old age, she feels compelled to perform a small burial ritual in his honour. Along with a few personal mementos, she lays him to rest in French soil, marking the grave with a tombstone. In performing this small but meaningful act, she finds the bond with her adopted home takes on another level; growing more intimate and profound. Through the act of burial, a physical plot of land transforms into a place of significance, now tied with deeply felt personal memories. The southern French landscape becomes a second home, not replacing the one she had left -- merely different and of equal importance.

Like Huggan, many Canadians struggle with questions of belonging, having been transplanted from their places of birth. Immigrating to Toronto from Hong Kong at the age of eleven, I too have been forced to ask myself where I belong, what I identify with, and what place I call home. In the Globe and Mail’s exploration of the “New Canada”, a young Canadian poignantly described his adopted home as a place that allows individuals “the freedom to be who you are and still belong.”⁵⁷ These sentiments mean a great deal to me, describing a tolerant, diverse nation that encourages its people to embrace both their inborn heritage and their adopted citizenship.

To truly feel at home though, argues Huggan, we need more than just a mental construct, or an understanding of our place within society. We also require physical spaces that we can subjectively inhabit and make our own. As such, she describes belonging as “partly landscape and partly relationships.”⁵⁸ These landscapes are in many ways the missing

or incomplete element within Toronto's post-modern narrative. The architecture of cities invariably tells stories about its people, culture and history. The strength of these stories stirs our imagination and helps us to identify with and fall in love with certain places. When we adopt them as our own, they become the backdrops in which we play out the narratives of our lives.

As Toronto enters the twenty-first century, its population, borders and cultural configurations continue to expand both in size and diversity. The nature of the spaces we erect however, rarely reflect the societal mythology to which we claim to adhere. A product of a highly commodified environment, our architecture seems unwilling or incapable of granting us places of heightened significance that draw us together and allow us to meaningfully express our individual and shared identities.

This thesis then, can be understood as an attempt to imagine what place might look like within Toronto's contemporary landscape. It is an attempt to craft iconographies, programs and public spaces that engender a sense of personal belonging by allowing its inhabitants to subjectively make them their own. What emerged out of this exploration are two parallel narratives of the landscape and the people of Toronto.

The landscape narrative characterizes the mouth of the Don as a foundational point within the city. Marking the transition between the river and lake, the mouth has been historically understood as a source of life and the city's place of birth. Existing today obscured and unseen, Toronto's geographic and mythological origins remain nevertheless deeply embedded within its banks. The narrative of the people depicts a multi-cultural population that has come to know Toronto as a second home. Arriving to Canada from various parts of the world, each person's cultural and personal histories come to light most clearly at rites of passage celebrated in the form of weddings and funerals.

The Don River Park becomes the place where the narratives intersect. Physically manifesting the stories of people and land, the mouth of the Don becomes a metaphor for our individual and shared moments of crisis. As a living expression of the things that we treasure, the park nurtures a richer and more complex understanding of our city, and our place within it.

Throughout the length of this thesis, both the scope and the direction of the work have undergone numerous revisions. One of the constants, however, was the title: "Architecture That Binds." These words remain particularly meaningful because they express the hope that place can help us find common ground and connect us to the land we now call home.



DESIGN DRAWINGS

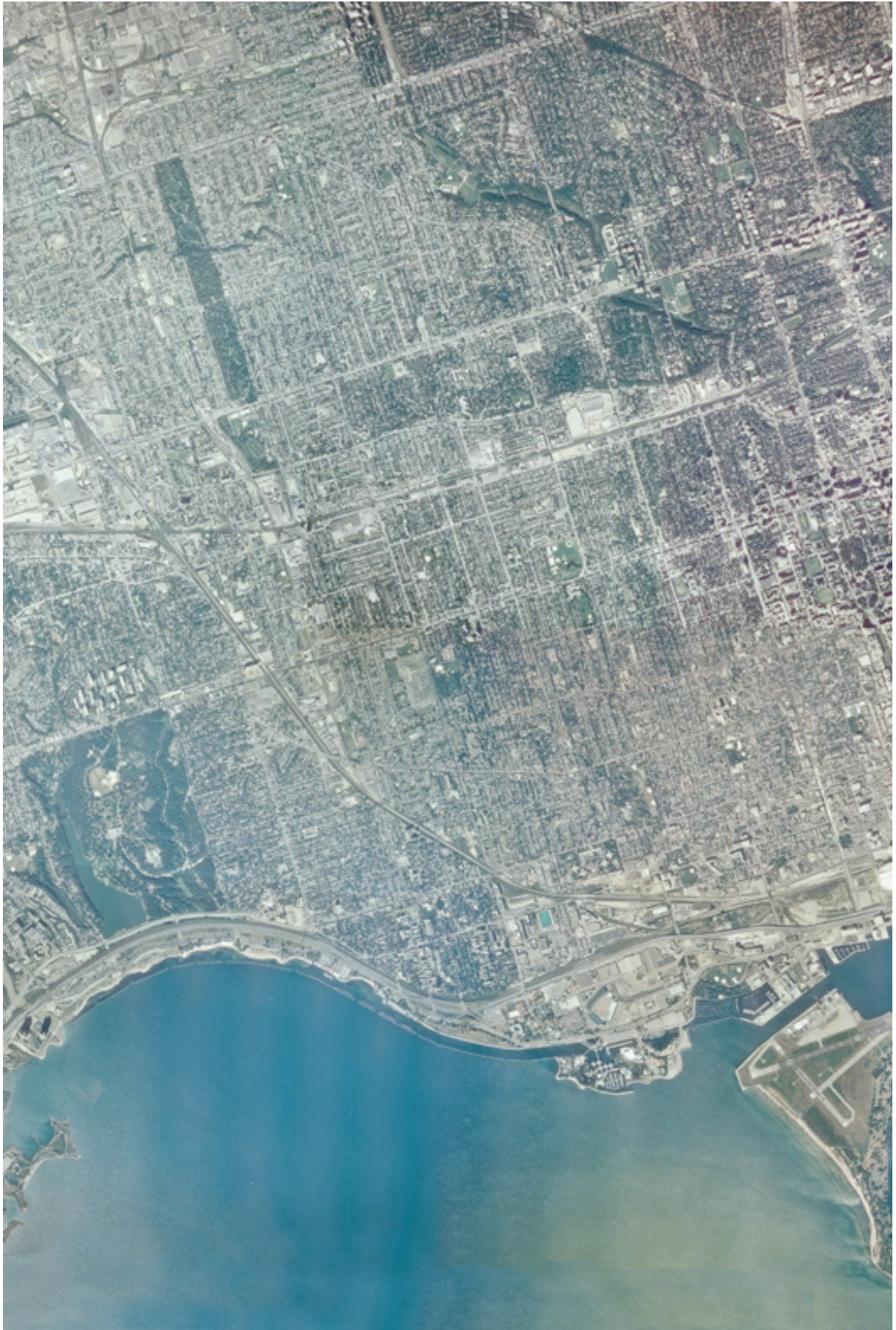


70. Detail of sculpture, *Silenced Wound*, 2003.

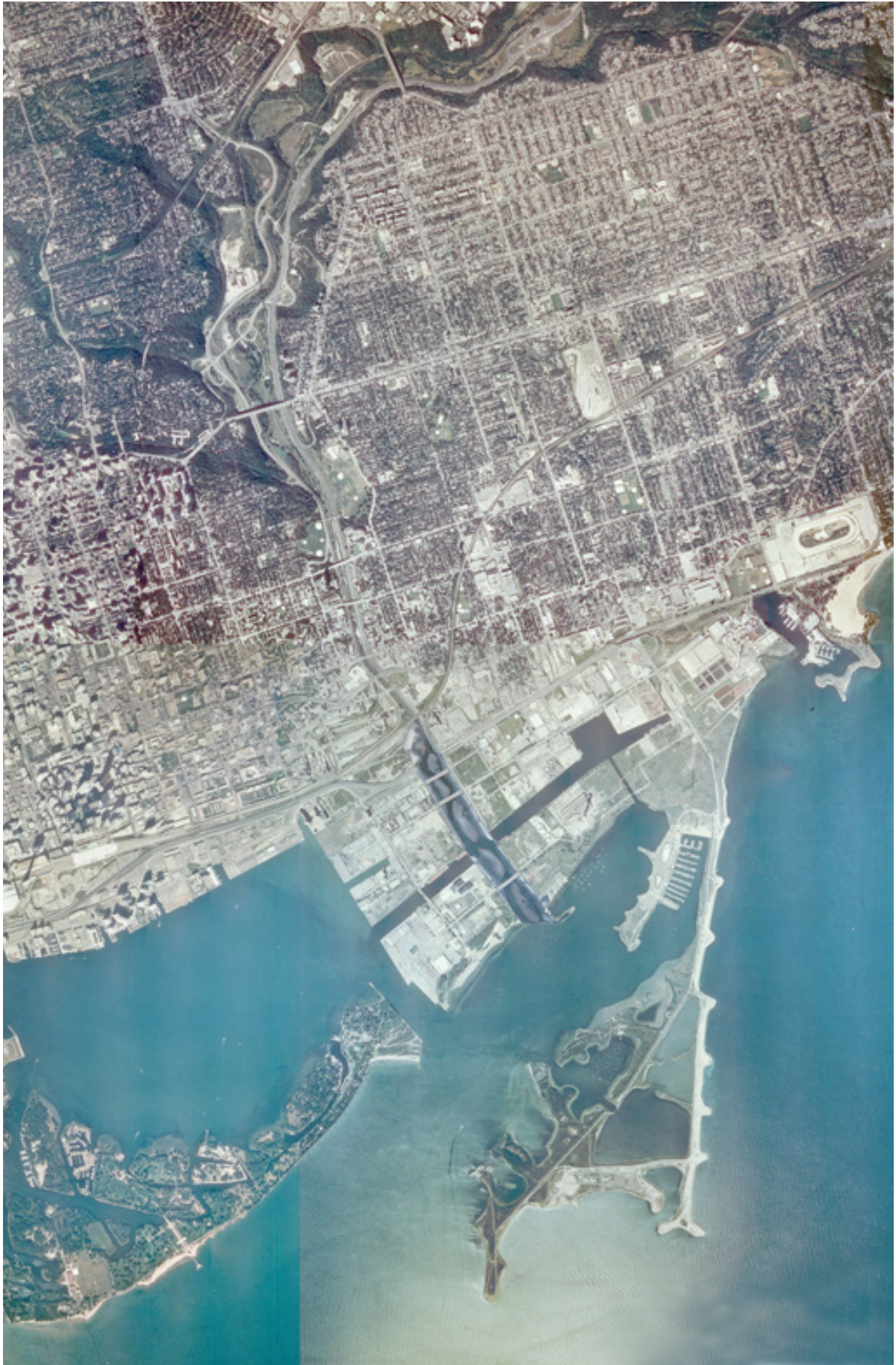
Don River Park: A Place for Weddings and Funerals for a New Society

4.0

The City



Aerial image of Toronto, with Don River Park superimposed.



4.1

The Park

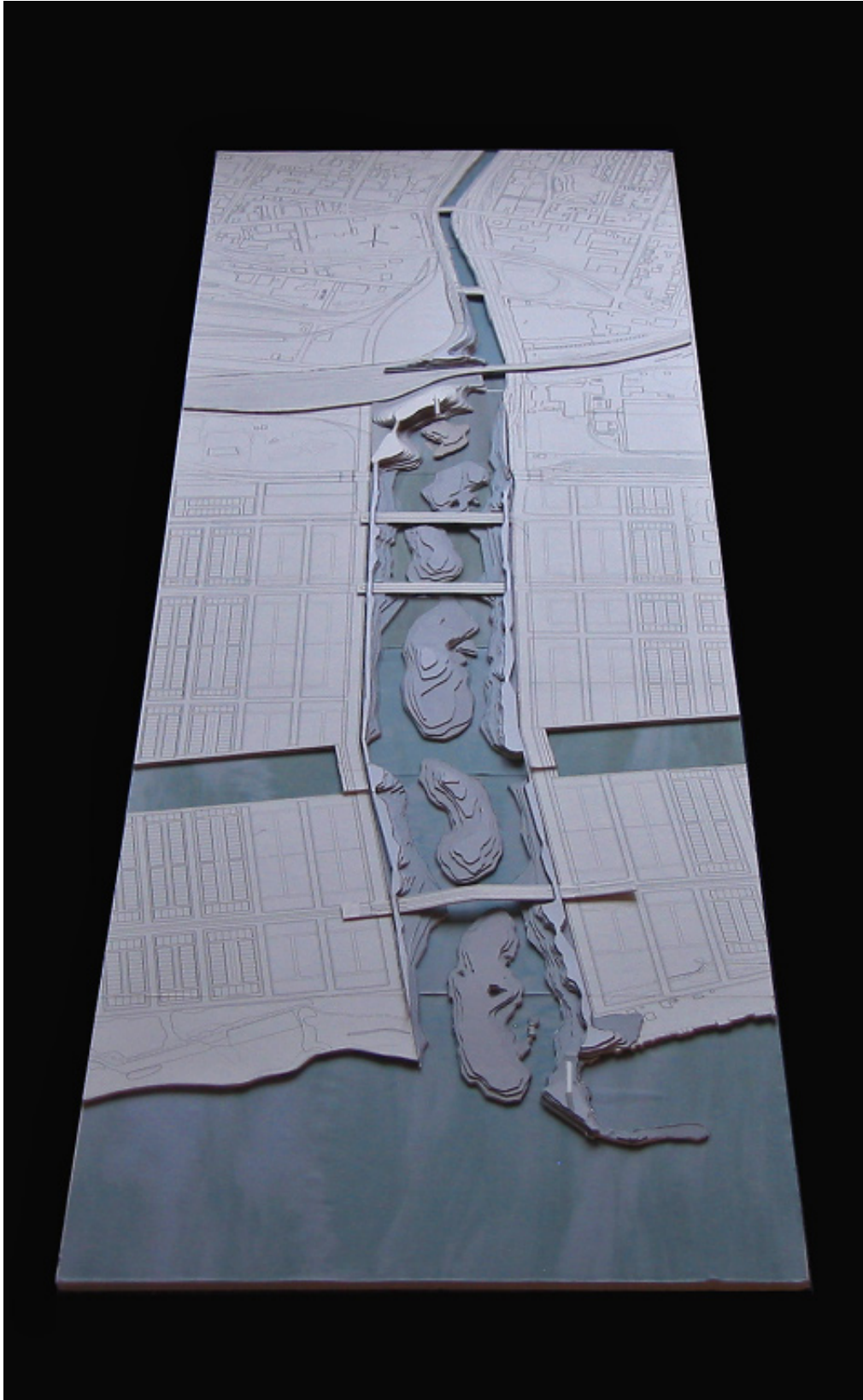
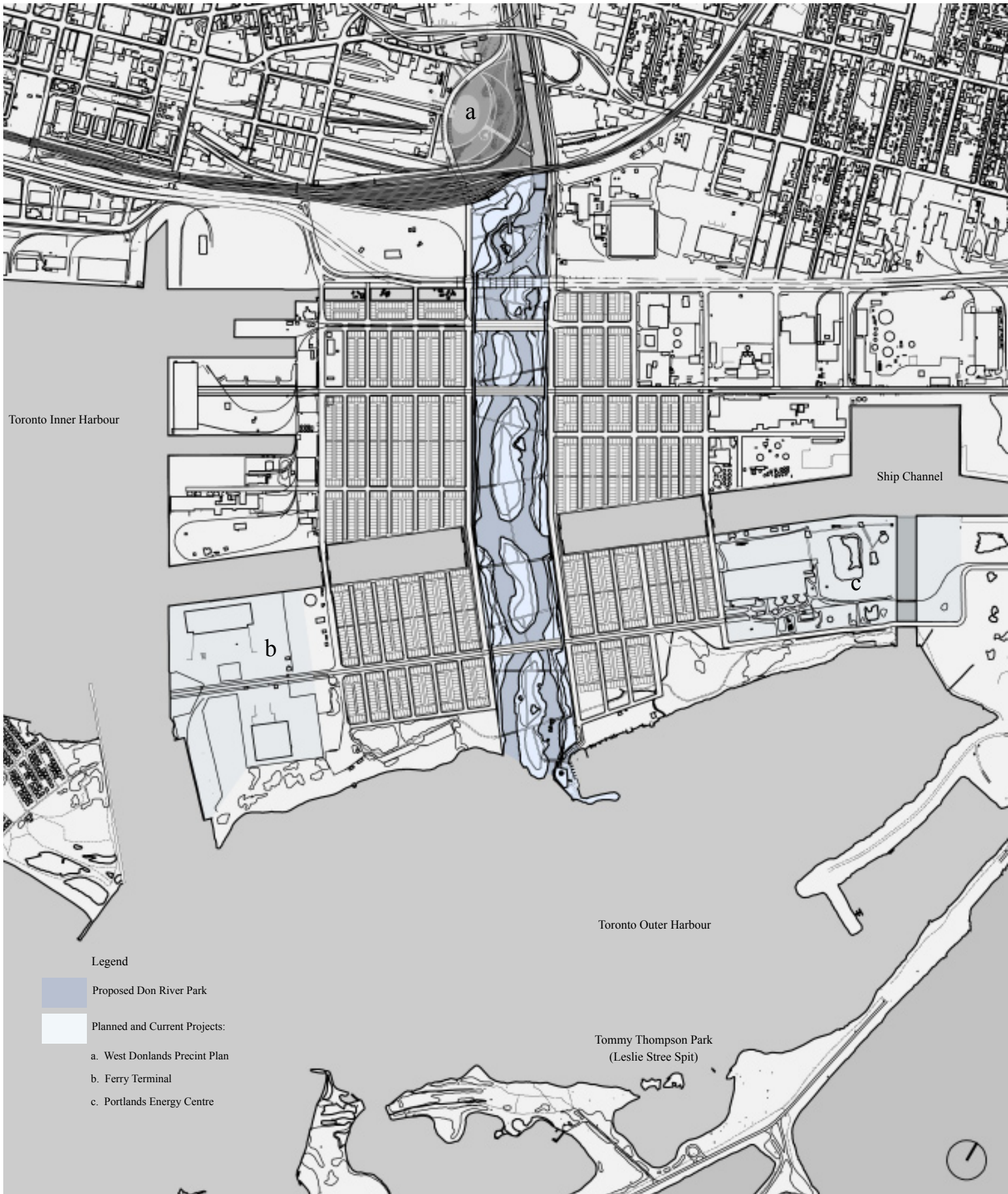
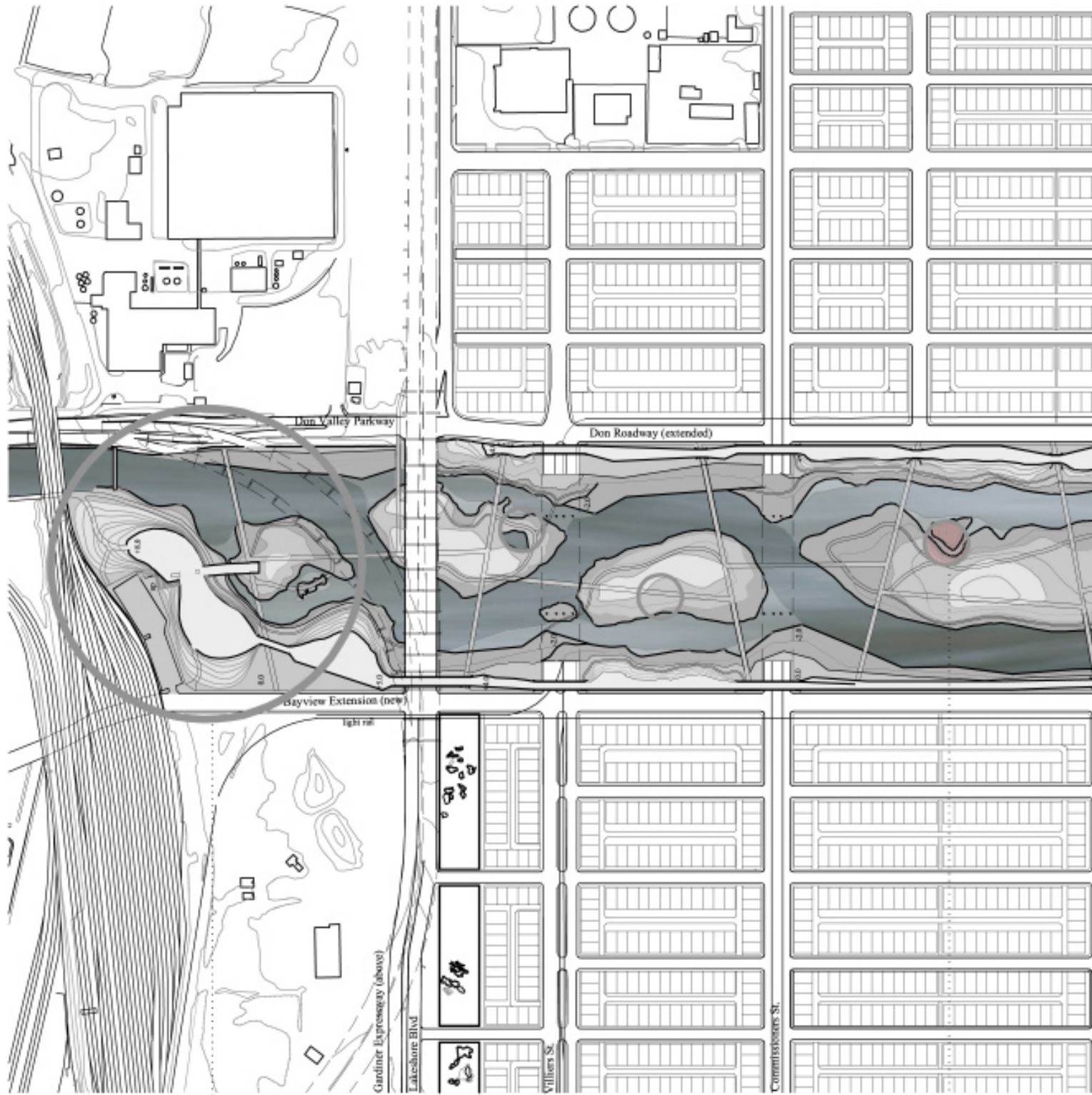


Image of model.





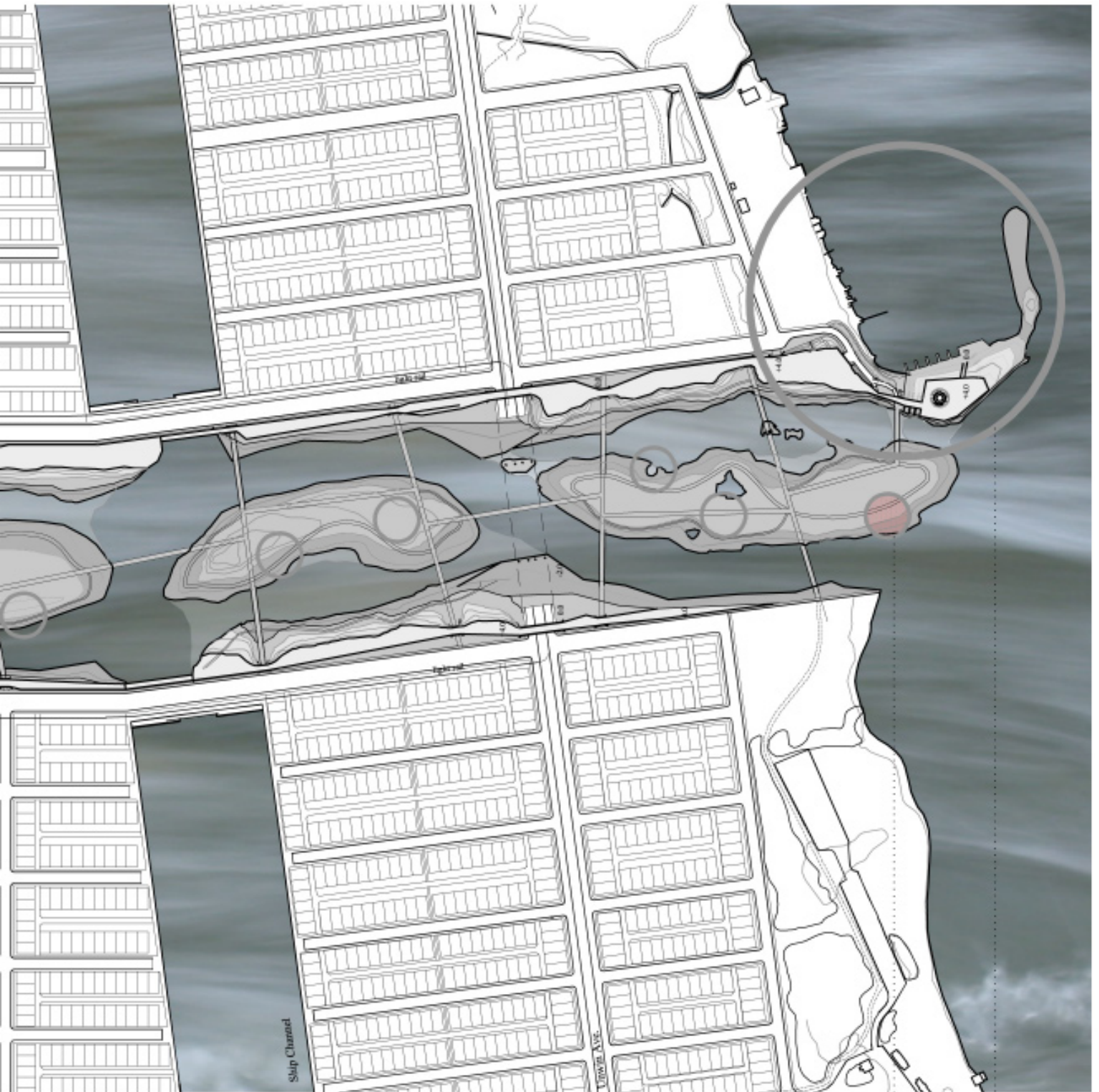
pg. 76
 The Mound
 and the
 Registry
 Building

pg. 98
 Wetlands
 Pavilion

4.1.2 The Park



Plan
Scale 1:5000



Legend

- pavilion sites
- pedestrian bridges and paved boulevards
- unpaved pedestrian / bicycle path
- footpaths

69

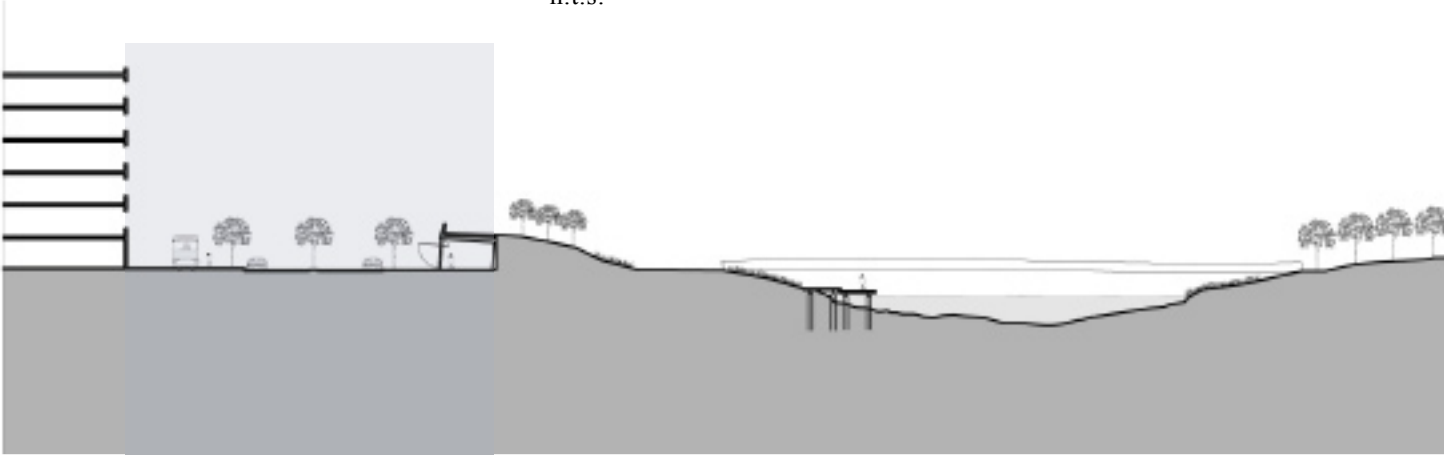
pg-90
Edge Pavilion

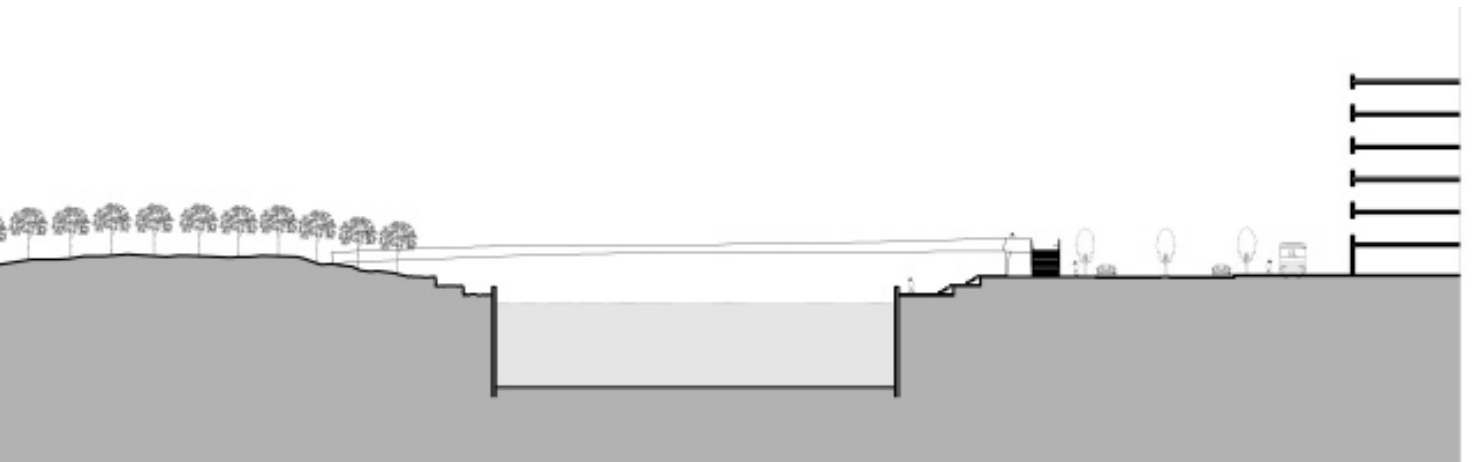
pg-80
The Tower

4.1.3

Typical Cross Section

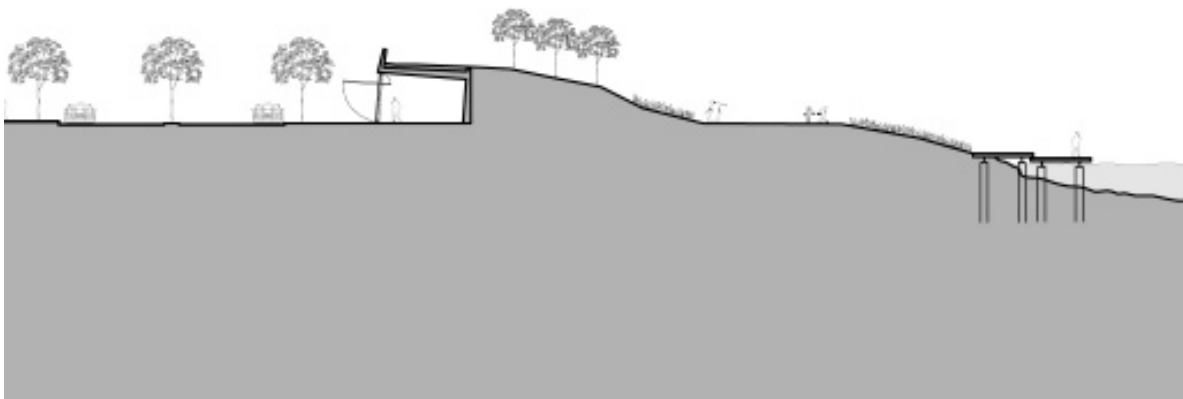
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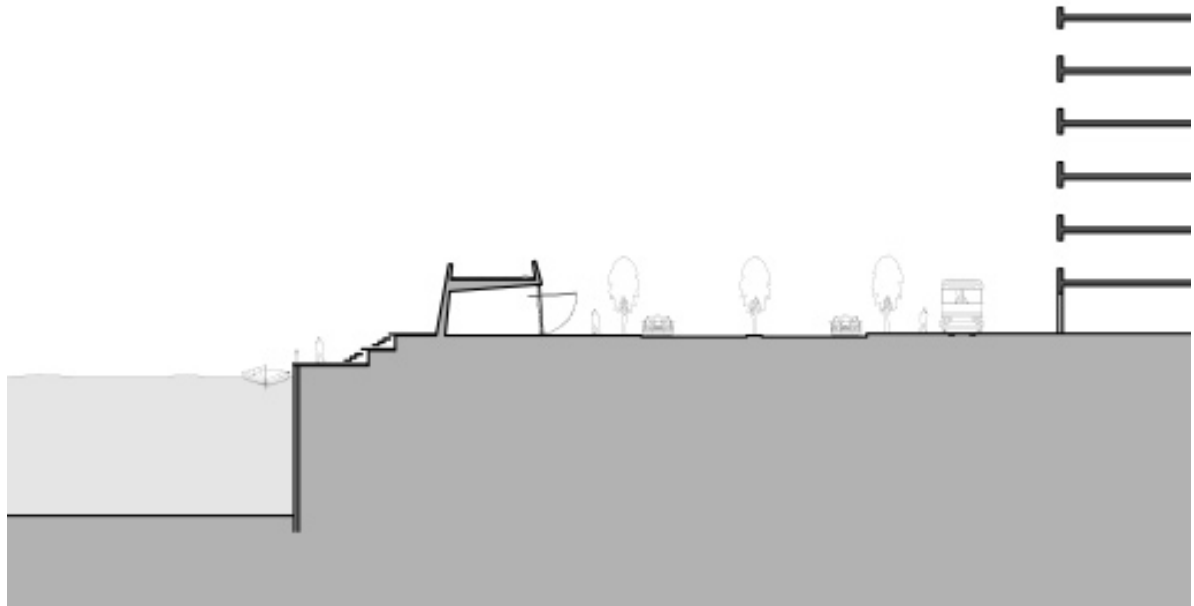
4.1.4 Edge Conditions

Sections
Scale 1:500



“Soft-edge” berm and marshes.





“Hard-edged” river channel and boardwalk.



The Monuments

4.2.1 The Mound and Registry Building

Ground Plan
Scale 1:1250

The Mound

The mound has the highest elevation among the landscape elements of the park. It insulates the registry building from the noise of the CN Rail lines adjacent to the site.

Legend

- a. Entrance from parking
- b. Service entry
- c. Stairs to roof and top of mound
- d. Stairs to entrance below
- e. Drop off and Delivery
- f. Visitors and Staff Parking
- g. Light Rail stop
- h. Pedestrian and cyclist path to Don Valley



Lower Don River

Don Valley
Parkway

The Registry Building

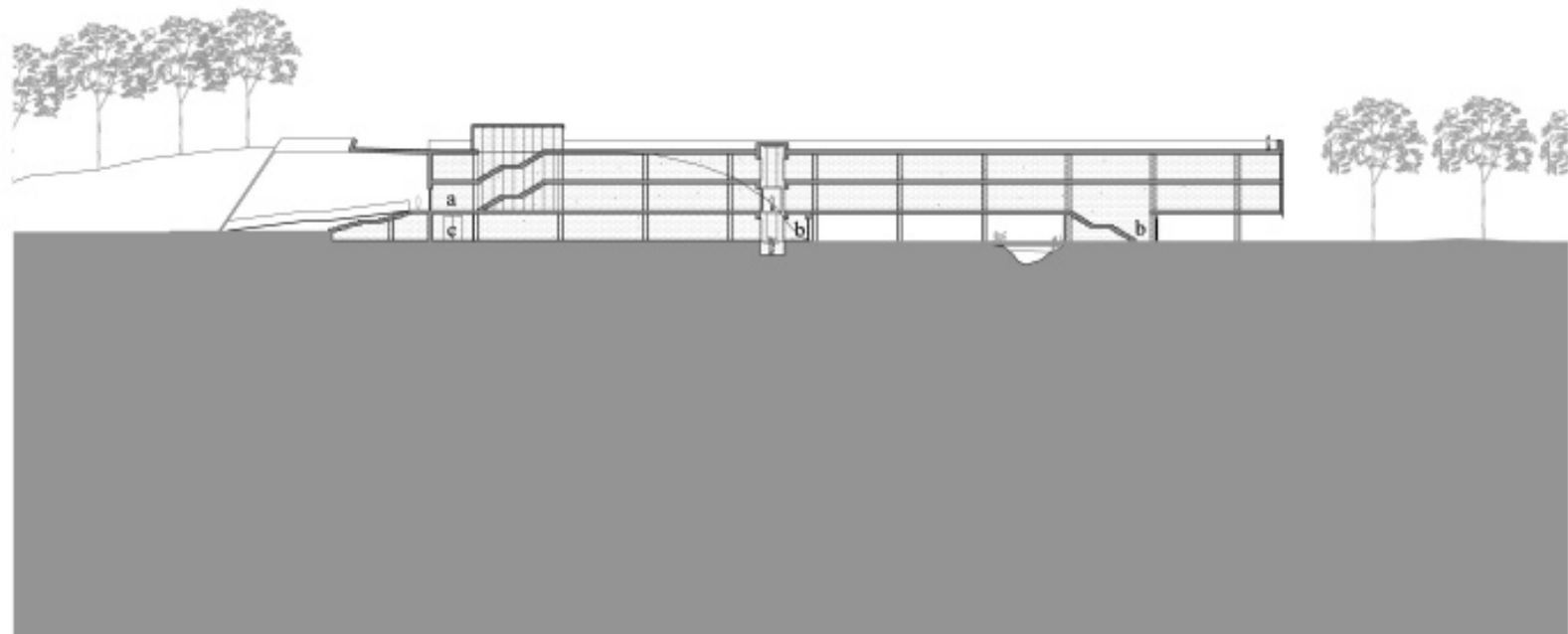
The registry office provides services for marriage license applications, and issues birth, marriage, and death certificates.

It also contains archived records of these documents. A digital library of these records can be accessed at the building.

The building is nestled within the mound. The building extends out into the landscape, and the roof top provides a lookout point for the park. When the building is closed, the roof remains accessible via external staircases and foot paths on the mound.

Legend

- a. Entrance from parking
- b. Pedestrian entrances
- c. Service Entry







Approaching the Registry Building.

4.2.2 The Tower

Ground Plan
Scale 1:1250



The Crematorium:

The Crematorium is situated within the podium structure underneath the tower.

The crematorium houses 4 cremation furnaces. Each cremation takes approximately 2.5 to 3 hours to complete. During an 8 hour day, the facility can accommodate up to 12 cremations.

A short ceremony can be held at the crematorium hall at the start of the cremation. Extended ceremonies are held at the individual pavilions.

The 'edge pavilion' is located on the island, within 5 minutes walking distance from the crematorium.

Legend

- a. Entrance to crematorium
- b. Elevator and stairs to tower
- c. Cremation chamber
- d. Cremation hall
- e. Skylight above
- f. Entrance to / from dock
- g. Preparation room
- h. Carport for hearses and service entry
- i. Stairs to top of podium
- j. Pedestrian bridge from berm above
- k. Vehicular / pedestrian bridge to "Edge Pavilion"
- l. Dock for boats and water taxis
- m. Visitors and staff parking
- n. Stairs to top of berm
- o. Pedestrian path to top of berm

The Columbarium:

The Columbarium is housed in the tower structure.

The structural concrete core of the tower also doubles as the elevator core and exhaust chimneys.

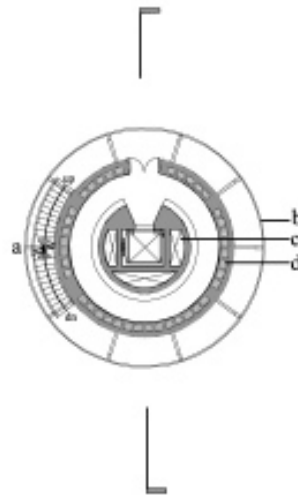
The outer wall is a honey-comb like concrete structure that provide up to 300 niches for cremated remains. When a niche is occupied, it is closed off with a memorial plaque. As the tower fills up, the translucency of the structure changes as it becomes more solid.

Attached to the concrete structure is a light-weight metal deck and outer screen. An external staircase is housed within this space. The stairs allow access to the observation deck on the top of the tower when the columbarium is closed.

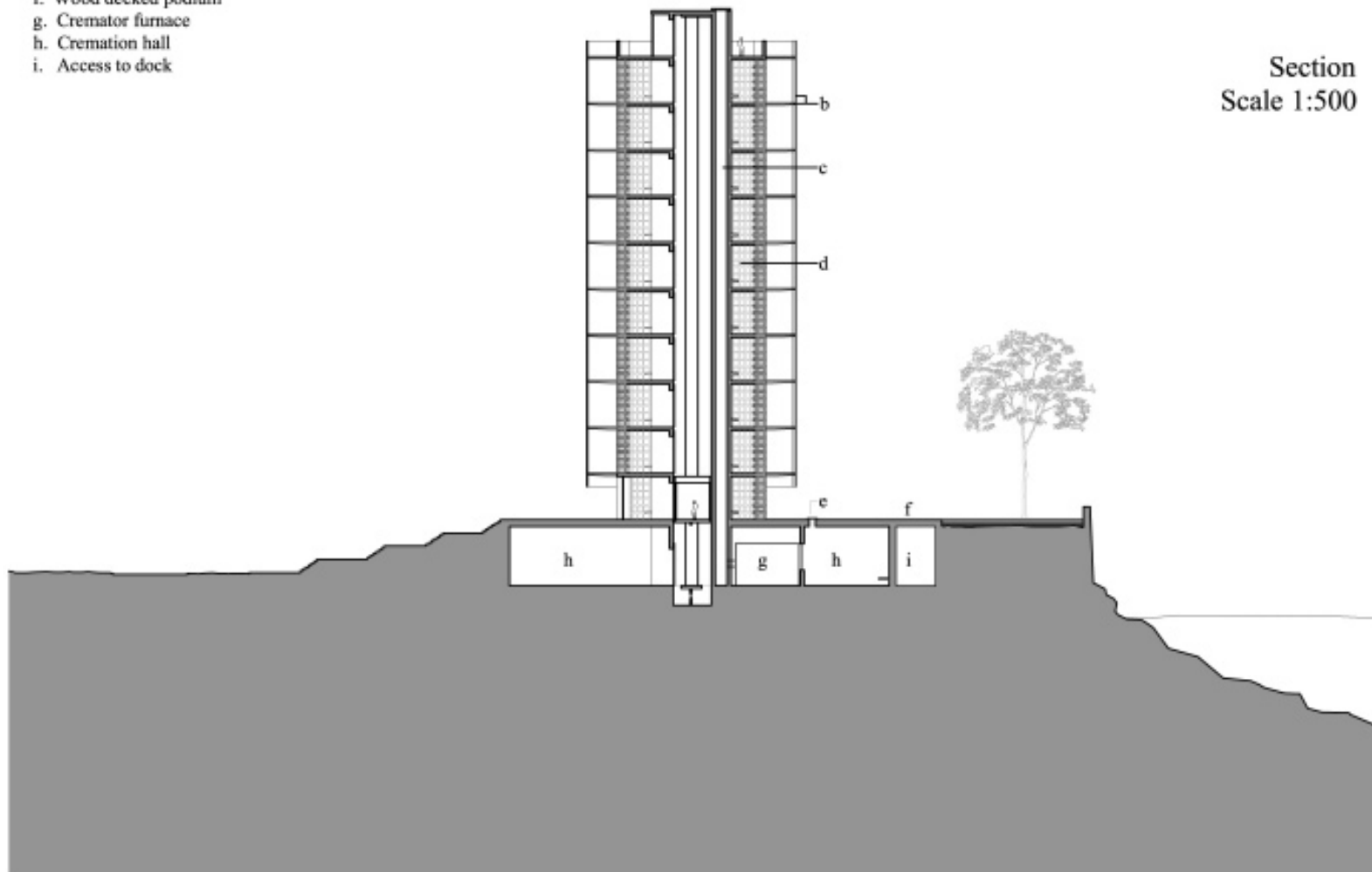
Legend

- a. External access stairs
- b. Metal screen and decking
- c. Filtered exhaust stack
- d. Columbarium niches for urns
- e. Tempered glazing skylight
- f. Wood decked podium
- g. Cremator furnace
- h. Cremation hall
- i. Access to dock

Plan of Columbarium Tower
at podium level
Scale 1:500



Section
Scale 1:500



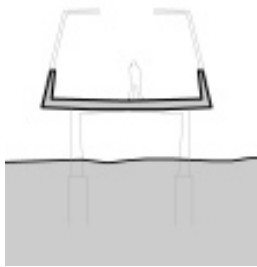




Approaching the Tower.

The Connections

4.3.1 Bridges

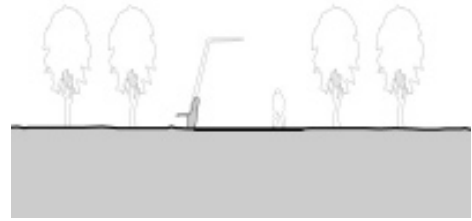


Typical section of pedestrian bridges.
Scale 1:500



Image of pedestrian bridge, crossing through marshes.

4.3.2 Pathways and Tree Groves



Typical section of paved boulevard.
Scale 1:500



View of paved boulevard amidst memorial tree groves.

The Pavilions

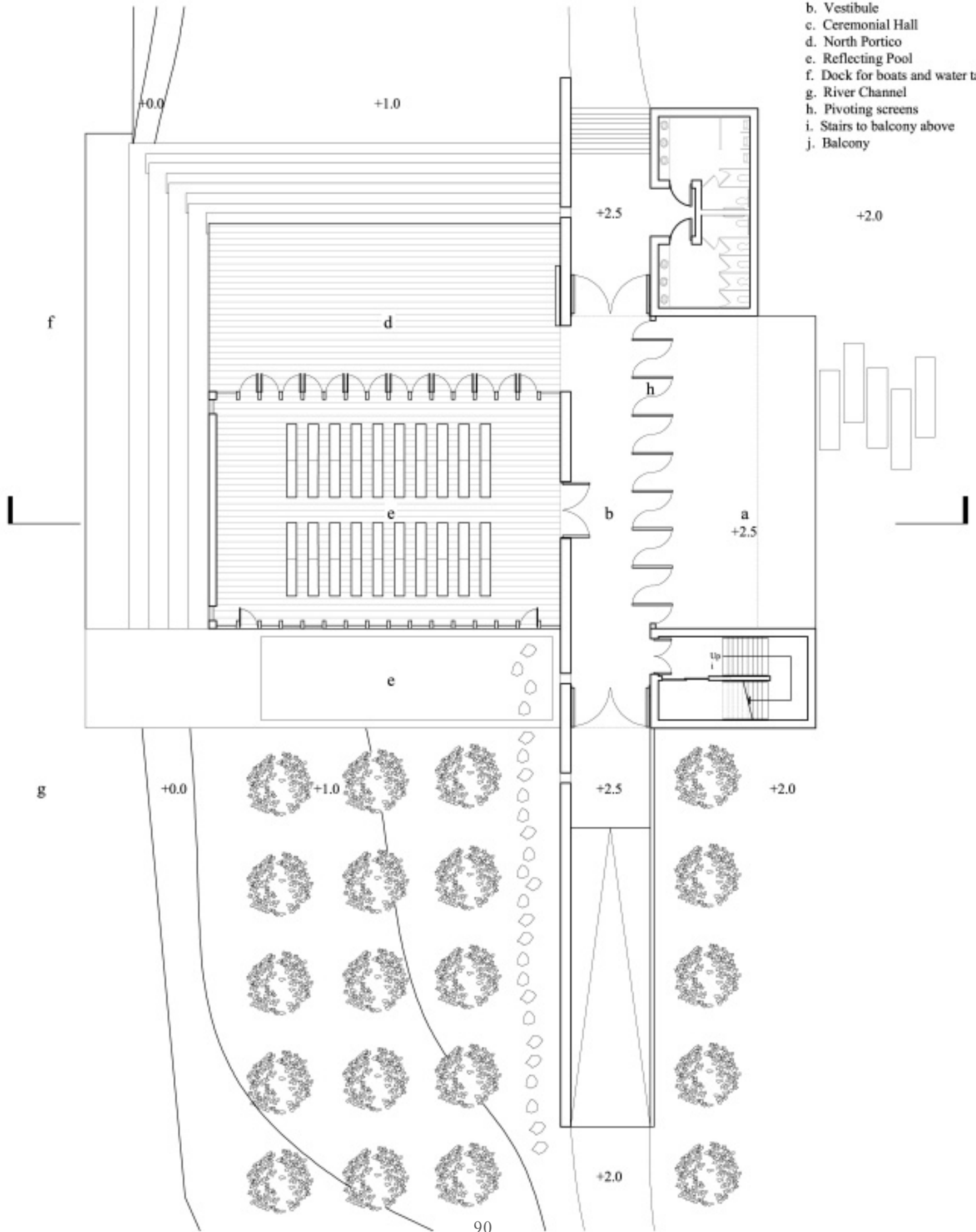
4.4.1 Edge Pavilion

Ground Plan
Scale 1:250



Legend

- a. East Portico
- b. Vestibule
- c. Ceremonial Hall
- d. North Portico
- e. Reflecting Pool
- f. Dock for boats and water taxis
- g. River Channel
- h. Pivoting screens
- i. Stairs to balcony above
- j. Balcony



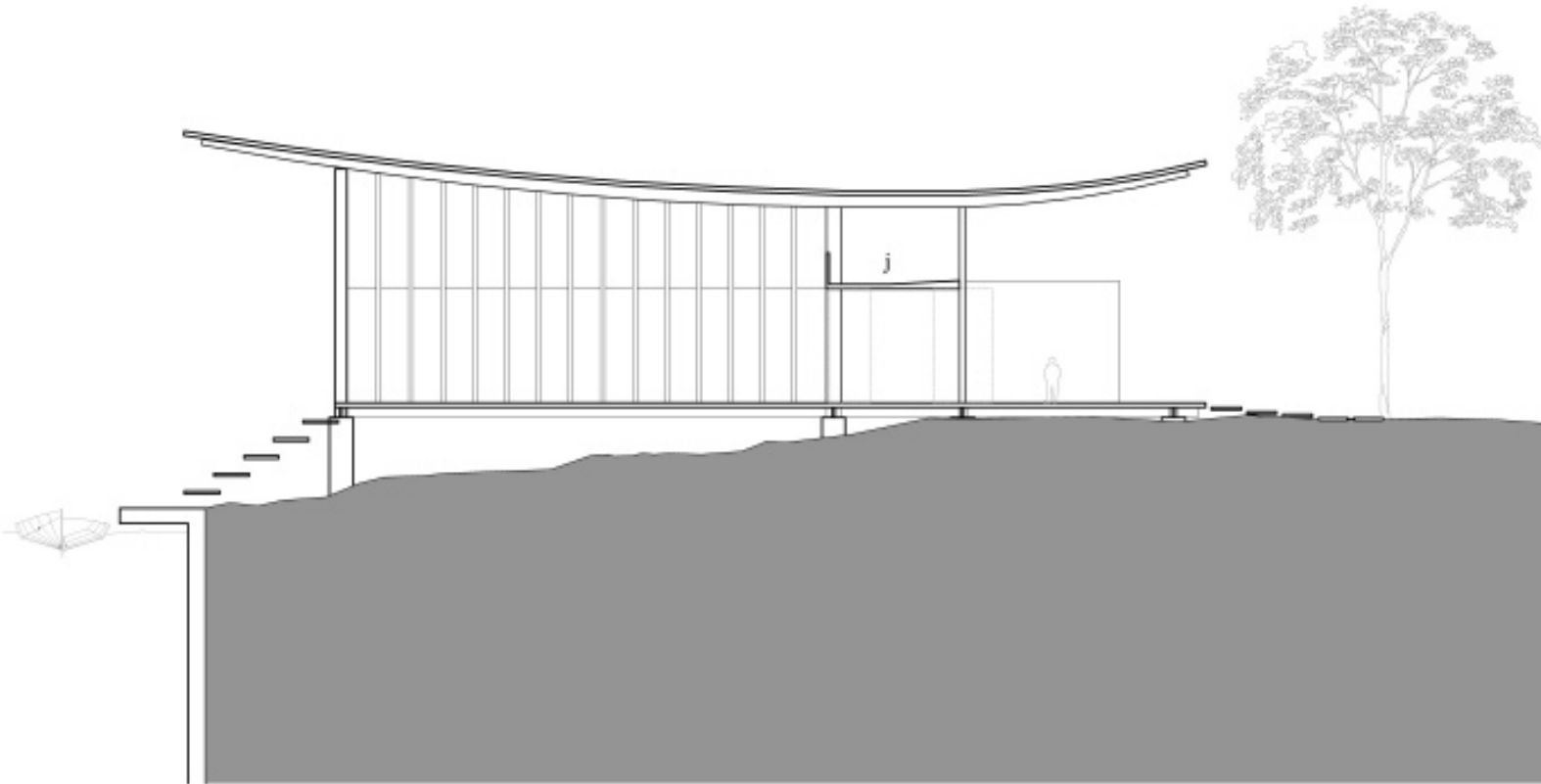
The Edge Pavilion

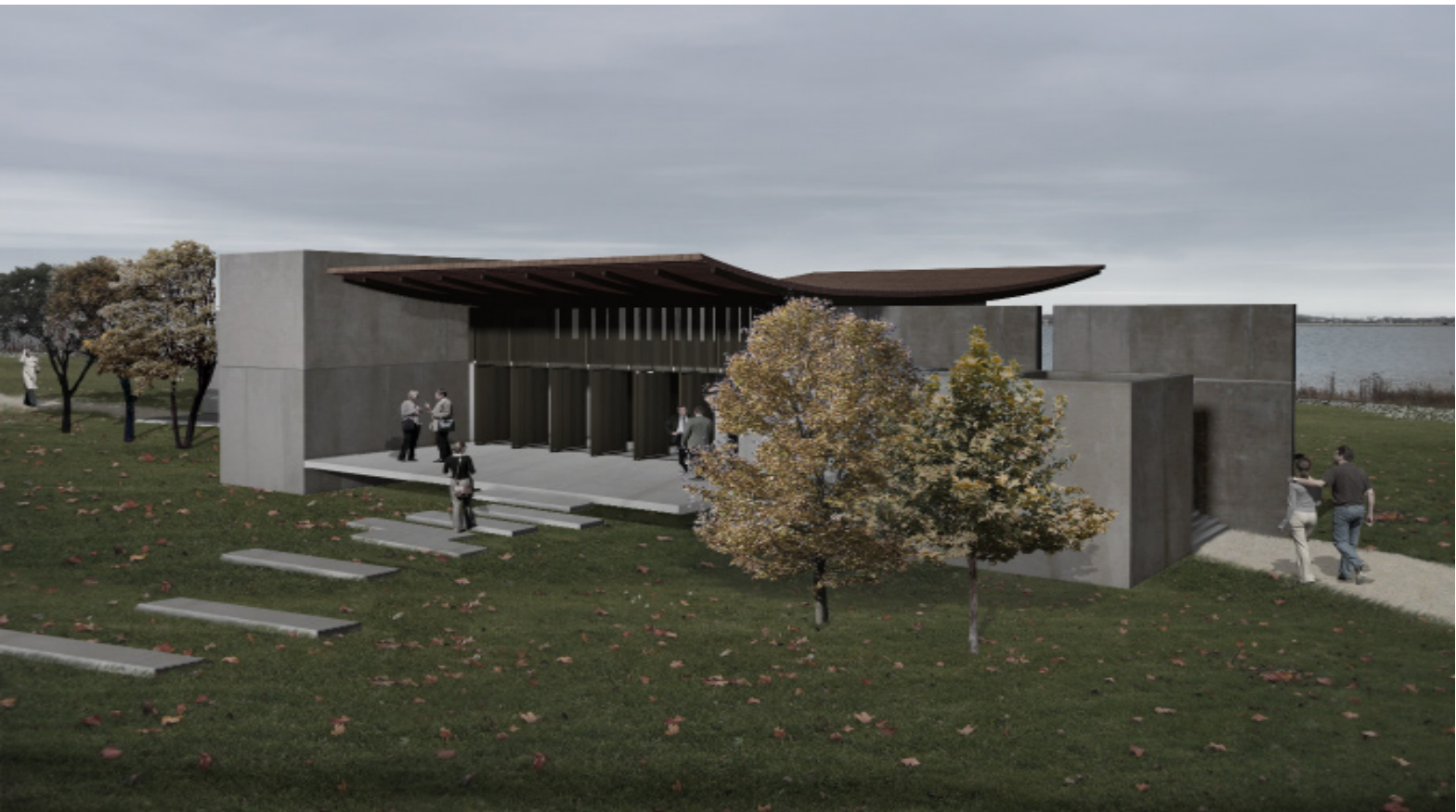
Cross Section
Scale 1:250

The Edge Pavilion can accommodate up to 250 guests. The seating are moveable and can be arranged to suit individual needs.

The balcony provides extra seating and space for photographers during wedding ceremonies. The stepped North portico and raised East portico also provide a good setting for post-ceremony photographs.

For large gatherings during warmer seasons, the North portico can be used as a stage, and seating can be arranged on the north lawn accordingly.





Approaching the east portico.

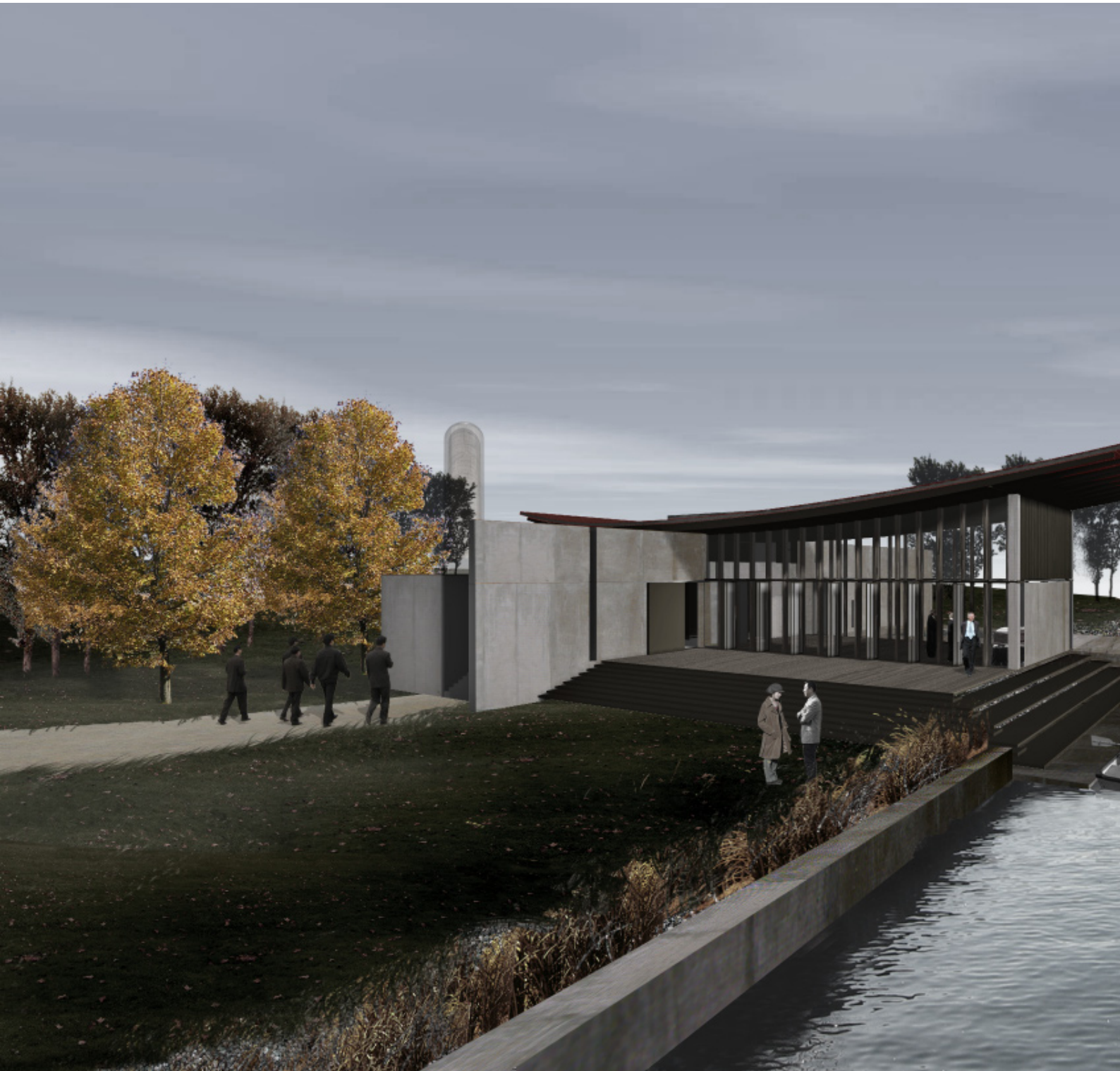


Entering the pavilion through the ramp.





A funeral service at the pavilion.





View of pavilion in the landscape, looking south towards the Outer Harbour and Leslie Street Spit.

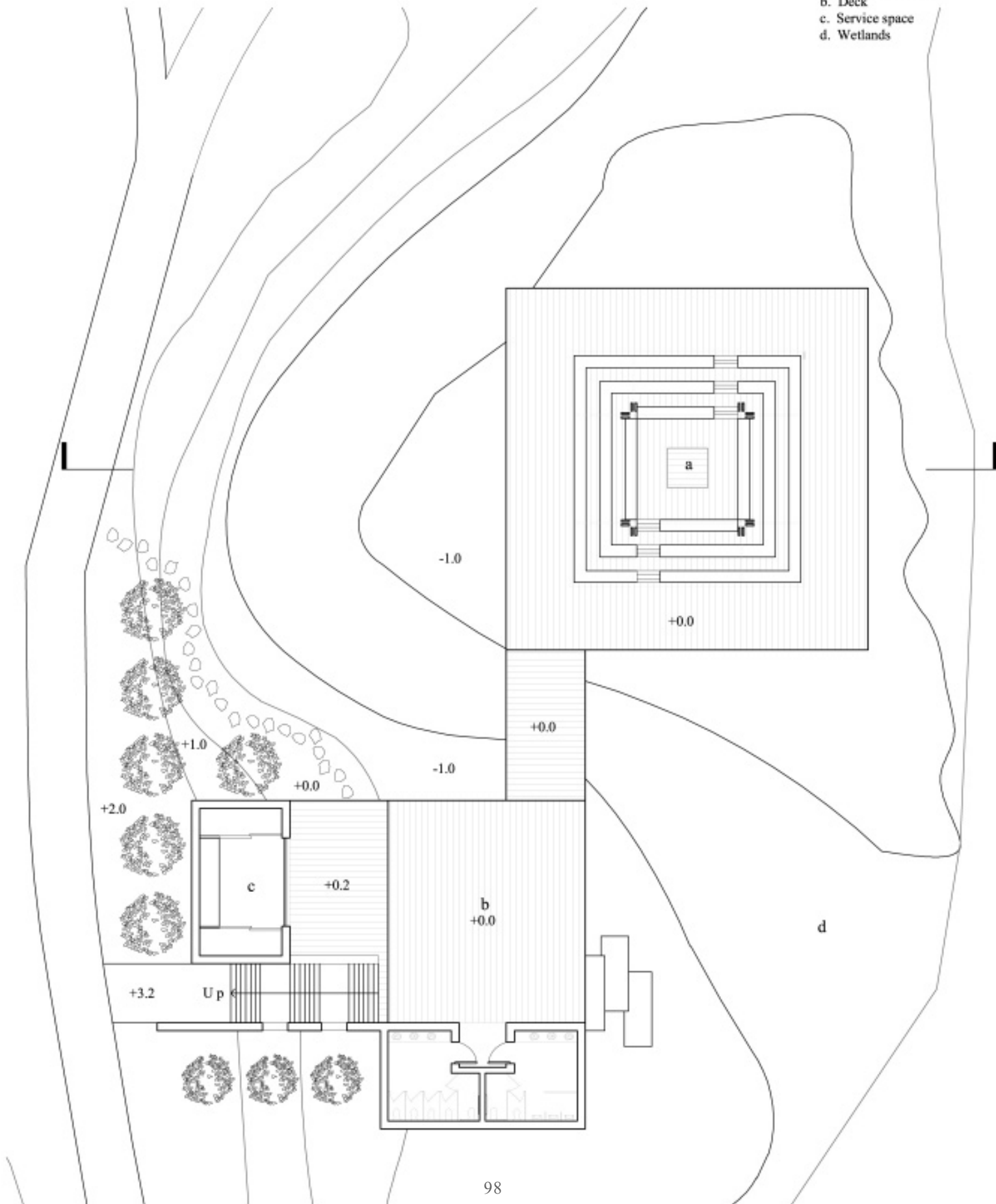
4.4.2 Wetland Pavilion

Ground Plan
Scale 1:250



Legend

- a. Ceremonial Space
- b. Deck
- c. Service space
- d. Wetlands



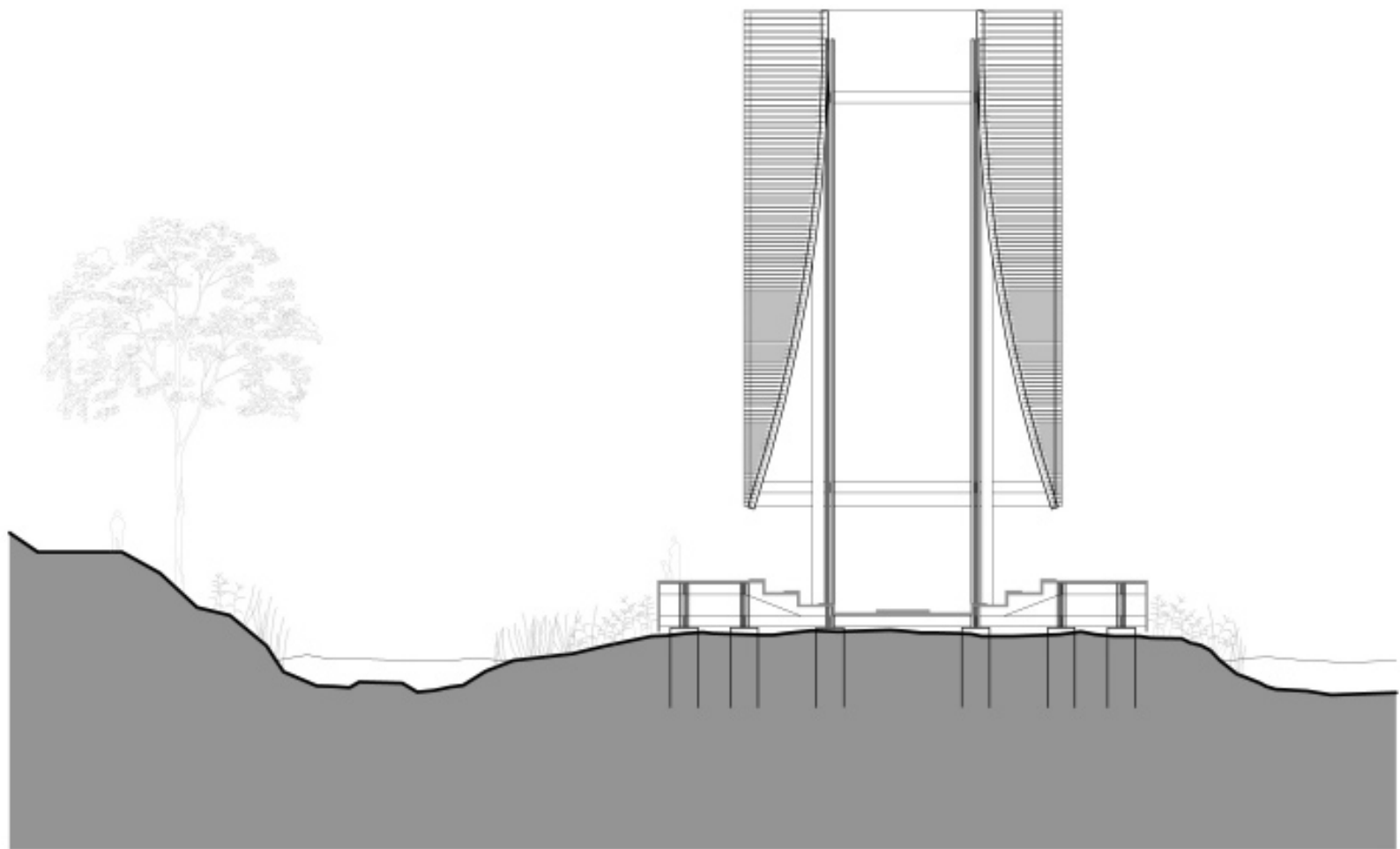
Cross Section
Scale 1:250

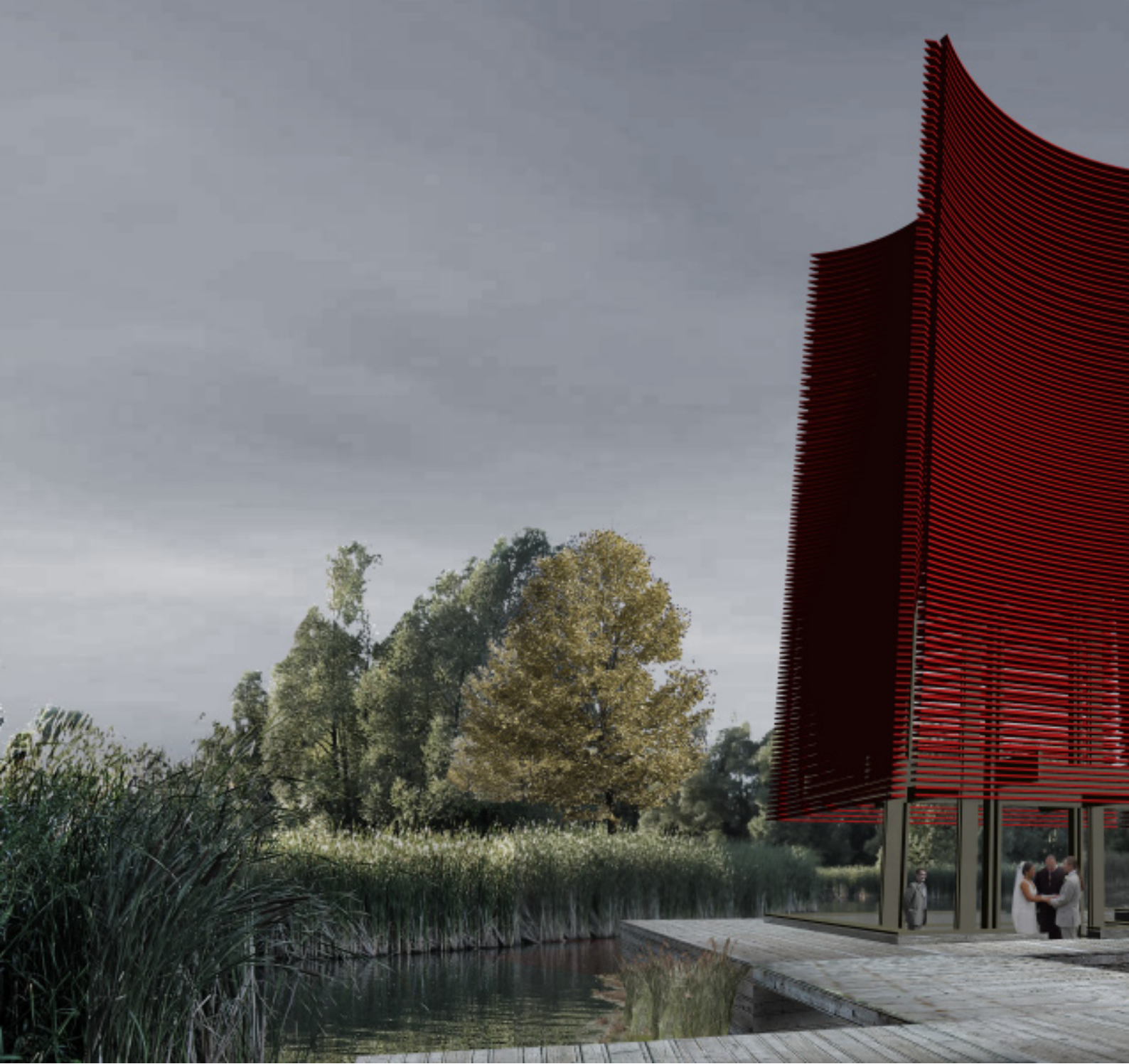
The Wetland Pavilion

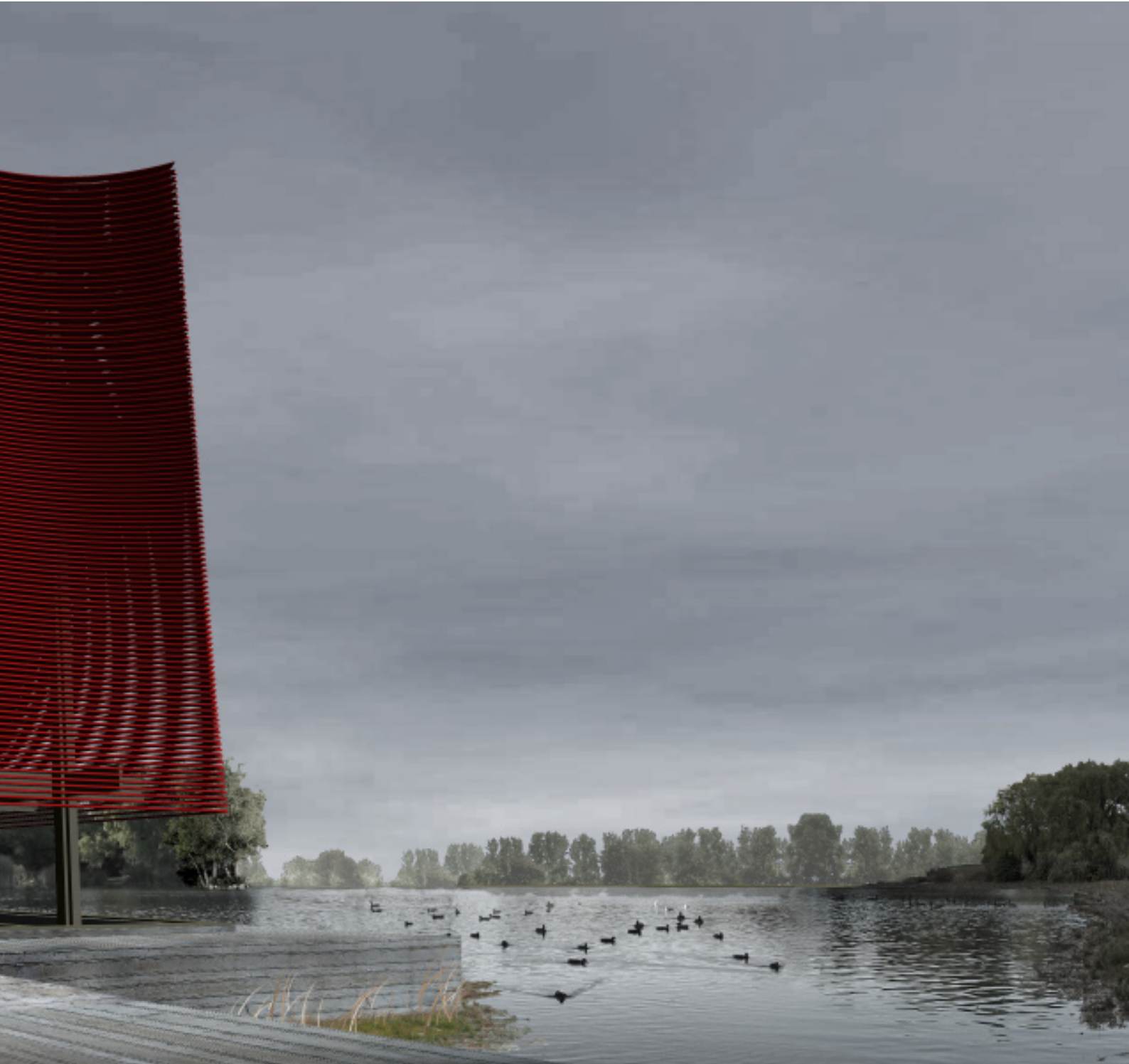
The Wetland Pavilion is an open air structure designed for seasonal use. Its ceremonial space can accommodate up to 100 guests. Larger gatherings can expand onto the surrounding decks.

The service structure includes a small kitchen to facilitate catered-reception type gatherings. Moveable seating can also be stored in this space.

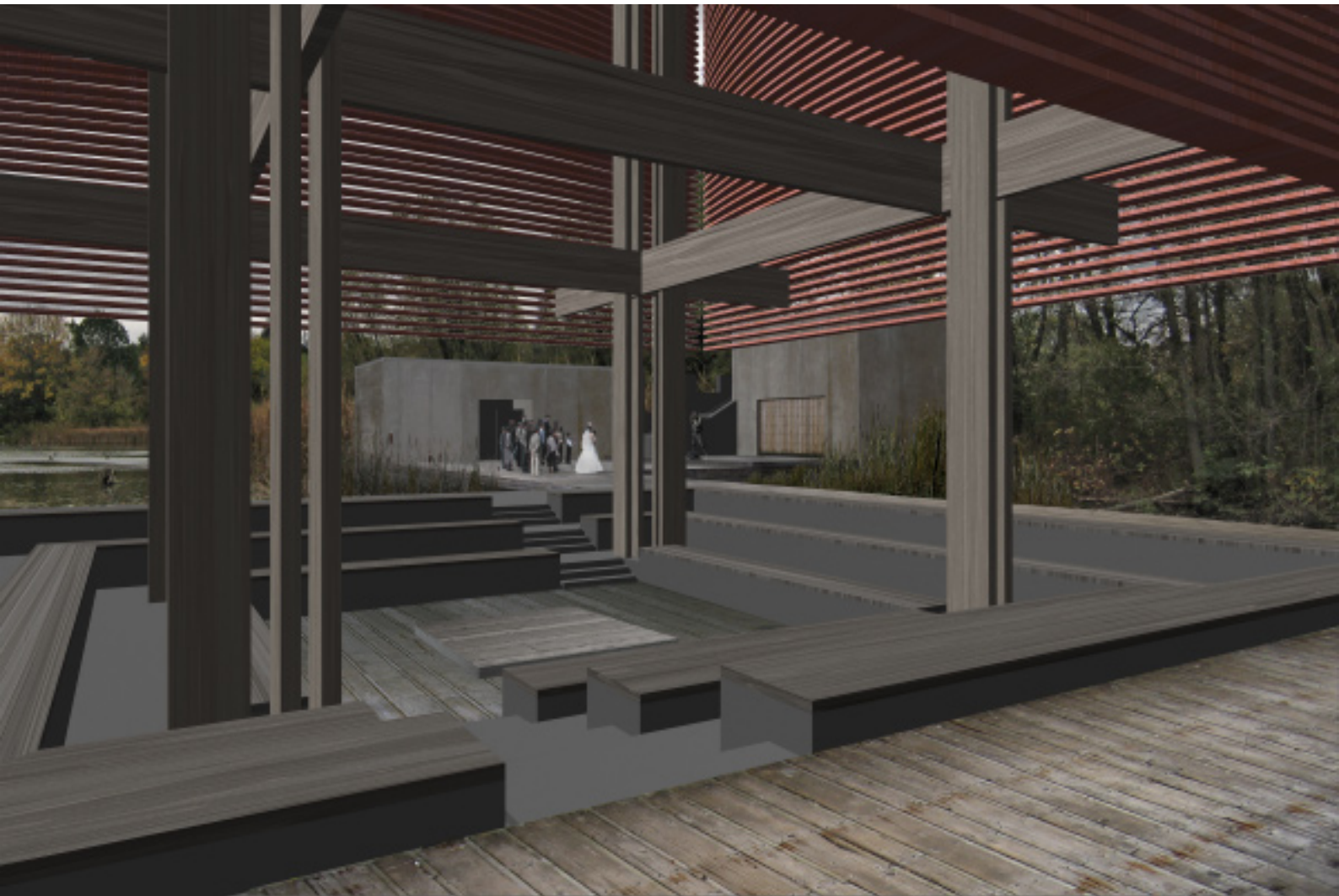
The upper deck (+0.2) can be used as a stage for musical performers during ceremonies.



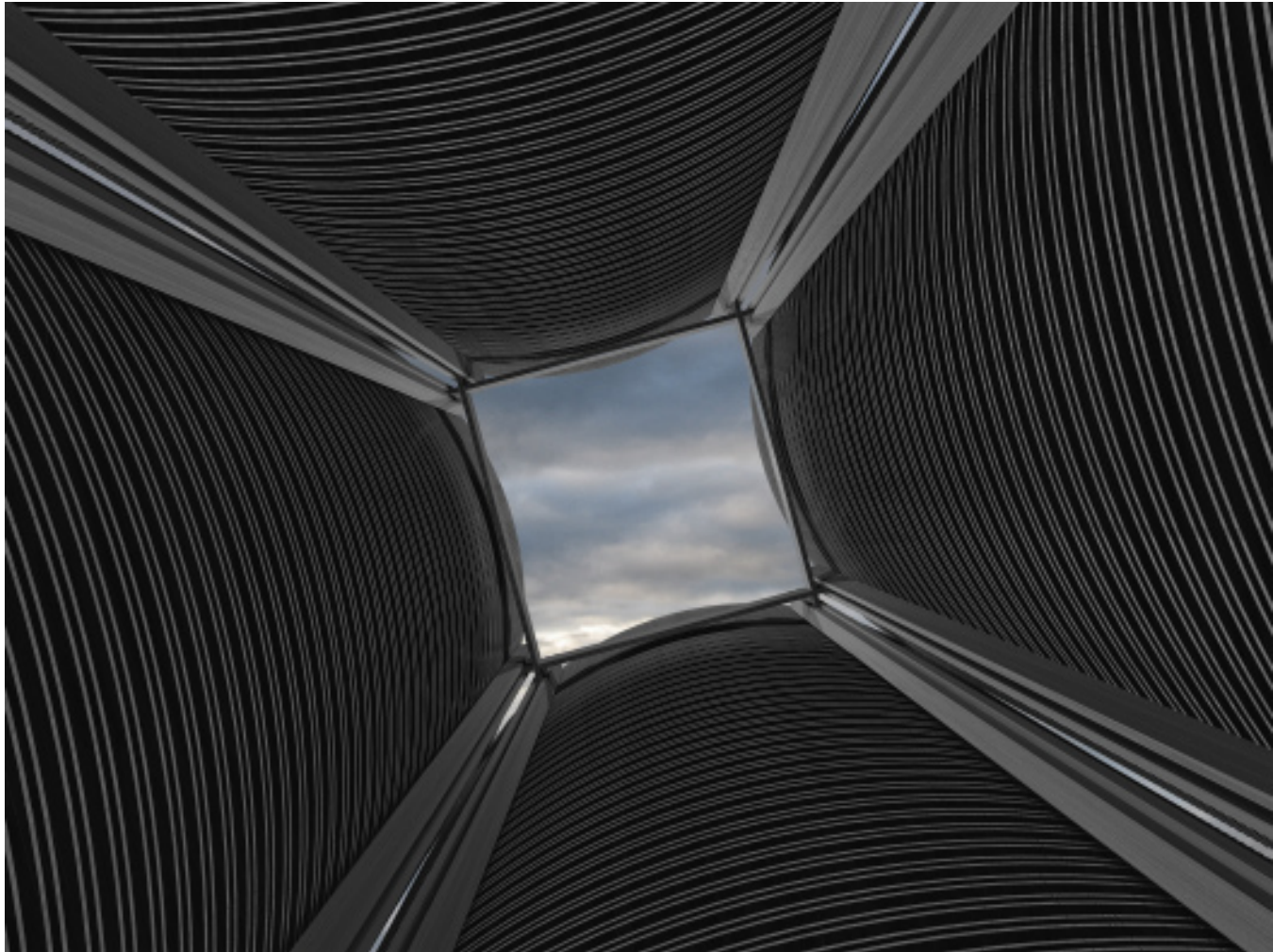




Approaching the pavilion.



Looking back towards the platforms. After the ceremony, the wedding party gathers for photographs.



Looking up inside the pavilion.





The pavilion in the landscape.

Notes

Part 1

¹ The poll was conducted by Ipsos-Reid, and commissioned by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada in conjunction with the Globe and Mail. See *The CRIC-Globe and Mail Survey on "The New Canada"*.

Part 2

² David Morley and Kevin Robins, "No Place Like *Heimat*: Images of Home(land) in European Culture", in Erica Carter, et al, ed. *Space and Place: Theories of Identity, and Location*, 5.

³ Jennifer Welsh, *At Home in the World: Canada's Global Vision for the 21st Century*, 7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁵ Statistics Canada. *Canada's Ethnocultural Portrait: The Changing Mosaic, 2001 Census*, 12.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷ "The concept of ethnicity is fluid and is probably the most complex concept measured in the census. Respondents' understanding or views about ethnicity, awareness of their family background, number of generations in Canada, and the length of time since immigration can affect the reporting of ethnicity from one census to another. Increasing intermarriage among various groups has led to an increase in the reporting of multiple origins, which has added to the complexity of the ethnic data." *Ibid.*, 16.

⁸ Morley, 5.

⁹ Erica Carter, et al, ed. *Space and Place: Theories of Identity, and Location*, x.

¹⁰ Salman Rushdie, 'Imaginary homelands', London Review of Books (7-20 October 1982), 19.

¹¹ Morley, 26.

¹² Source unknown.

¹³ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 61.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁵ "We may be the most urbanized society in the world, yet when a survey conducted for The Globe and Mail's New Canada series asked what best symbolized the Canada, 89 per cent across all generations said the vastness of the land." Roy MacGregor, "Part 12: The Great Lone Land, in *The Globe and Mail, The New Canada*.

¹⁶ "In 2001, 79.4% of Canadians lived in an urban area with a population of 10,000 people or more." Statistics Canada. *A profile of the Canadian population : where we live*, 2.

¹⁷ Ignasi de Solà-Morales, *Differences: Topographies of Contemporary Architecture*, 59.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁹ Lieven de Cauter, "The Capsular City," in Neil Leach, ed. *The Hieroglyphics of Space: Understanding the City*, 275.

²⁰ Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, 77.

²¹ Rem Koolhaas, "Generic Cities," in OMA & Bruce Mau, *S, M, L, XL*.

²² Examples of such are various recently constructed University of Toronto buildings, like the New College residence and the Centre for Cellular and Biomedical Research, and the major additions to the Ontario College of Arts, Art Gallery of Ontario, and the Royal Ontario Museum.

²³ Carter, xii.

²⁴ Solà-Morales, 6.

²⁵ Schama, 250.

²⁶ Yi-Fu Tuan. *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*, 85-91.

²⁷ Schama, 5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁹ Van Gennep, Arnold. *The Rites of Passage*, 10.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

³¹ Mary Bradbury. *Representations of Death: A Social Psychological Perspective*, 121.

³² Rush Rehm, *Marriage to Death: The Conflation of Wedding and Funeral Rituals in Greek Tragedy*, 3.

³³ Bradbury, 186.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 187.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 186.

³⁶ Data shows a 10% increase in the numbers of deaths resulting in cremations for Ontario, between 1996 and 2004, from 36.9% to 47% respectively. (See Cremation Association of North America. "Canadian Cremation Figures", from *2004 Data & Projections to the Year 2025*.)

³⁷ Bradbury, 187.

³⁸ Ibid., 187.

³⁹ Examples of such are 'reality'-type programs such as, 'A Wedding Story,' 'Monster Weddings,' 'Bridezilla,' 'Family Plot' and drama programs like 'Six Feet Under'.

⁴⁰ "In Canada, the wedding industry's annual revenue totals over \$3 billion. Media expenditures by the industry amount to almost \$2.5 million in 2001." (See Television Bureau of Canada, *Wedding Industry Report*, 2003.)

Average weddings cost almost \$20,000. (See CBC, "Wedding Bills," from *Market Place*.)

⁴¹ See Angels Flight Inc, <<http://www.angels-flight.net>>.

⁴² In one June afternoon, more than five separate wedding parties were observed within the same hour at the Edwards Garden.

⁴³ BBC News. "Cemetery asks for wedding licence."

⁴⁴ Anthony Reinhart. From *The Globe and Mail*.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Wickson, Ted. *Reflections of Toronto Harbour*, Pg 41.

⁴⁷ Urban Design Associates. *West Don Lands Precinct Plan*, pg4.

⁴⁸ Central Park Conservancy. "150 + Years of Park History." from *Central Park's History*.

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⁴⁹ Clarence C. Cook, *A Description of the New York Central Park*, 18.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 13.

⁵¹ Ibid., 18.

⁵² Tuan, 53.

⁵³ Jennifer Welsh, *At Home in the World: Canada's Global Vision for the 21st Century*, 5.

⁵⁴ Ken Wiwa, "Part 11: One Long Billboard to Tolerance," in *The Globe and Mail*, *The New Canada*.

⁵⁵ "About three-fifths of all marriages in 2002 happened during the summer months. Over 29,000 couples got married in August 2002, representing 20% of all marriages that year. About 14% of marriages occurred in July, 13% in

June and 12% in September. In 2002, 71% of marriages occurred on a Saturday, with Friday and Sunday far behind." Statistics Canada. *Marriages 2002*, 15.

⁵⁶ Isabel Huggan, *Belonging: Home Away from Home*, 101.

⁵⁷ Edward Greenspon, "Letter from the Editor," From *The Globe and Mail*.

⁵⁸ Sandra Coulson, "Author appreciates Canada," in the *London Free Press*.

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