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Baraness, Marc and Larry Richards, eds. *Toronto Places: a Context for Urban Design*. Photographs by Geoffrey James and Steven Evans. Essays by Barry Callaghan, Austin Clarke, Katherine Govier, M.T. Kelly and Josef Skvorecky. Toronto: University of Toronto in association with The City of Toronto, 1992. Pp. 107. Black and white and colour plates. \$50

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In 1929 Toronto's Civic Advisory Planning Commission, composed of prominent businesspeople and professionals, submitted a grand plan for Toronto's downtown to complement the rash of office buildings then going up. Like three earlier plans between 1905 and 1911 this too would fail to persuade most politicians and electors. Grandeur had never been Toronto's long suit. Grand designers were foiled again. A practical plan of modest street widenings and jog eliminations followed in 1930, because, as the Commissioner of Works, R.C. Harris, asserted, "the utilization of ideal principles ... would be an unnecessary extravagance." Thus, he argued, the new scheme would make "no special attempt ... to create vistas or sites for the display of architectural features that are characteristic of cities aiming at aesthetic pre-eminence."

After the Great Depression Toronto began to take planning seriously with several city, Metro and provincial plans beginning in 1943. These postwar plans were designed for growth rather than grandeur in a practical city. Until the reform era of the mid 1960s a consensus on growth prevailed among a generation who remembered the deprivations of the 1930s. Although the next generation objected to what appeared to them unbridled development, it also remained practical for a time. Aspects of reform resistance were small-scale design, an impulse to historic preservation and mixed land use. A legion of planners was hired.

But then the reform impulse turned into the nostalgia industry of the 1980s with lessening interest in social or economic issues. Yet at the same time, the developers largely had their way in the heady undisciplined 1980s. Architects turned to post-modern "grandeur" gussying up "modern" buildings. As in the late 1920s they and their banking creditors could not resist more and more extravagance. Suddenly, in 1989 overbuilding was recognized.

Planning in the 1980s had marginal influence on this commercial excess, negotiating a day care centre here, land for social housing there. In fact, planning seemed to fall more and more into sentimentality. While the developers built, the planners and professional citizens talked and talked extravagantly in a process called Cityplan 91. That led to a host of recommendations in June 1991—with much of the same qualities as the Meech Lake and the Charlottetown accords. It is without the forward-looking quality let alone the grandeur of the 1929 plan.

Toronto Places is one result of the process that involved Cityplan. It tries to make something of the mundane appearance of a city not interested in "aesthetic pre-eminence". From 200 places listed by a group of professionals and gathered into six categories, an expert jury selected twenty-five items worthy as winners of urban design. Many are nice. Most are downtown, and indeed, the first and last photos, are distance shots of the CBD, as if to bracket the line of vision.

Interestingly, no street was selected, as if people in action did not count in design. Strikingly, most photos do not show people, or if they do, only accidentally so (or they are underground in Mt. Pleasant Cemetery). Indeed, Kensington Market was dismissed as "anti-design". "The jury felt that the city's great streets have either been ruined, left unfulfilled in rela-

tion to the original vision, or only recently begun a stage of urban design development." Good grief: what do they expect? Do they want a Baron Haussman to come in tear everything up? I doubt it. The strongest sense of purpose one can gather from the hodgepodge of projects and sentimental texts is that of "relief" from the maelstrom—to oases, to peaceful spots. While partially praising St. Lawrence Neighbourhood, they fail to note that, like the ill-fated Ataratiri nearby, it would not have been built given today's environmental restraints.

Befitting the soft side of 1980s extravagance, this volume fosters nostalgia. It is a taxpayer-supported coffee-table book by a group of elite professionals who seem to have little to do and for an affluent audience who will give it as presents to be browsed through, then laid down to gather dust. Do Toronto's citizens have a "great interest" in "the past and future of their city," as is asserted in the preface? Not likely given the amount of attention that the press and the design elite pay to Toronto's historical social and economic dimensions (including articles on Toronto in this journal) without a hint of stress or conflict or an acknowledgment that anything went wrong. Design as expressed in this volume is for an elite that seems to pursue escape not living.

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Hughes, Gary K., *Music of the Eye: Architectural Drawings of Canada's First City 1822-1914*. Saint John, N.B.: NBM Publications MNB, The New Brunswick Museum, 1992. Pp. iii, 136. Black and White Illustrations, black and white photos, Colour Plates, bibliography. \$19.85 (Cdn) paper.

Like the Amazonian rain forests, the Canadian stock of late nineteenth and