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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.

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

early twentieth century architecture is a rapidly shrinking resource that we suspect may have some value if we can only find it before it vanishes. Most Canadian cities still have some left despite the widespread destruction since the 1950s. What remains is highly valued because it projects an image of richness, craftsmanship, pride, care, and worth that speaks of civic virtues, and represents the kind of community we want to build.

These dear old, knobby relics, from the dawn of Canadian urbanism, possess wonderfully enjoyable features that seem no longer accessible either to our current construction industry or to our architects and designers. Recent attempts to apply similar forms in large scale commercial and civic buildings by conspicuous display of historically derived detail emerge as artificial and insincere despite, or perhaps because of, their largeness and their glitter. This particular brand of Post-Modernism seems to think that a few paste-on pediments can achieve instant historical and cultural continuity. But unfortunately, architecture has a relentless way of always telling the truth. No matter what we do, our buildings always show what we really believe, whatever we may intend.

The designers of the buildings presented in *Music of the Eye* probably did not have to wrestle with such thorny issues in the self-conscious way we must face them today. Perhaps this innocence is one of the qualities that endears their work to us and that we are inclined to envy. However it came about, whether by intent or inadvertence, their work has a ring of authenticity that we would sell our souls for, and a capacity to engender love that we can scarcely hope to gain. They were the first generation of Canadian architects. Twenty of their number, active in St. John from 1822 to 1914, are represented in this collection by 42

black and white drawings and 16 in colour. One of the designers is anonymous and three have no bibliographical information. Of the other thirteen, only three were immigrants, the other ten were all St. John native sons or at least New Brunswegans. None had formal, academic training in architecture. Nine of the thirteen became professional architects through some form of office apprenticeship. The others were able to establish themselves as architects based on credibility earned in a related field such as building, engineering, carpentry, or masonry. In other words, as Hughes emphasizes in his introductory text, these men contributed to establishing architecture in Canada by setting up themselves as architects individually, proceeding from a craft to a profession, in exactly the way that the profession itself had done somewhat earlier in Europe.

*Music of the Eye* is a catalogue written to accompany a travelling exhibition of architectural drawings. Each drawing is accompanied by a short essay concerning issues adhering to the graphic, its author, and the project. Subjects discussed are various, ranging from possible sources of stylistic influence to historic sketches of building types, and patterns of urban development in St. John. Some drawings are more or less everyday office products, but nearly all are satisfying merely as drawings, and some are very fine. It is difficult to avoid the inference that quality of drawing and quality of architecture may be related. Text references imply that many more such drawings have been preserved in various archives and suggest the possibility of a more comprehensive publication that would be very valuable indeed. Hughes' introductory essay focuses on architectural drawings as one of the means by which former builders, carpenters,

masons and engineers were able to acquire professional credibility as architects in the days before the establishment of current regulations. In nearly every drawing, architectural content is based on well-known stylistic conventions, though a few are freely interpreted. Initial establishment of an architectural profession in Canada is seen to have been deeply indebted to traditional forms and styles. At that time these were the traditions of the community, not just of the profession. Since then, the profession has lost this grounding in widely-shared formal conventions, and must somehow seek to regain it. *Music of the Eye* does not tell us how to do this, but certainly shows very clearly that it once did exist. The book is as deeply enjoyable as the architecture, an outstanding exhibition catalogue, rich in local knowledge. It is a pity that the colour plates could not have been printed at full page size, as the drawings deserve, and it is to be hoped that more comprehensive publication of such material will be possible in the future.

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**Richler, Mordecai. *Oh Canada! Oh Quebec!: Requiem For A Divided Country*. Toronto: Penguin, 1992. Pp. 277.**

"A man without land," goes the refrain of Mordecai Richler's satirical novel *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1959), "is nobody." After reading Richler's *Oh Canada! Oh Quebec!*, we can only conclude that a man who writes on his land is vilified. The book is a long essay on the state of the nation, an amplification of Richler's piece for *The New Yorker* in the fall of 1991. Richler's astringent account of the state of Canada, with its harsh picture