

Eberhard Zeidler
In Search of Human Space

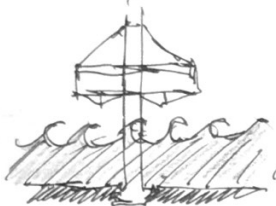
Ernst & Sohn

Ontario Place, Toronto, Ontario, 1968-1971. First conceptual sketches outlining design concepts: to develop an exhibition building expressing the possibilities of current technology, to create an urban park for the city and to recapture for the pedestrian Toronto's shore-line, lost to transportation and industry.

Design Concepts for Ontario Place 69

① CREATION OF EXHIBITION BUILDING.

To suspend 5 exhibition pods from pylons set symbolically into Lake Ontario. Precedents: Giffel tower - Oilrigg.

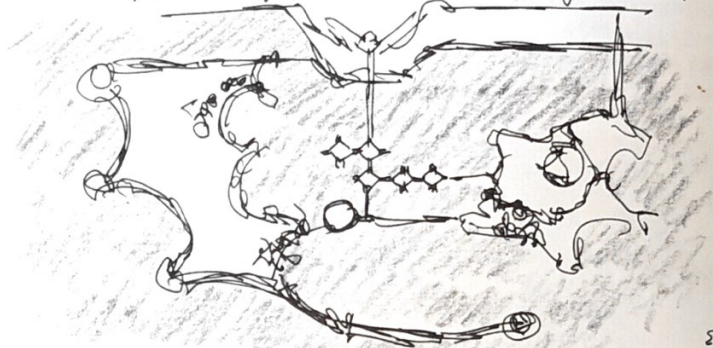


Due to leave over action too costly. With to borrow island (Bahamas) to stop collection, waves calm behind under water island.



② CREATION OF URBAN PARK LAND.

The idea of wave protection through land fill leads to the addition of ISLANDS that can be used as urban parks like villages for shops and restaurants, canals, performance places, children's play areas etc.



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Aerial shots demonstrate the creation of new islands in front of the existing expressway. The sinking of the three lakers as breakwaters created immediate protection for the foundation and steel work of the exhibition pods, and also a final protection for the yacht harbour.

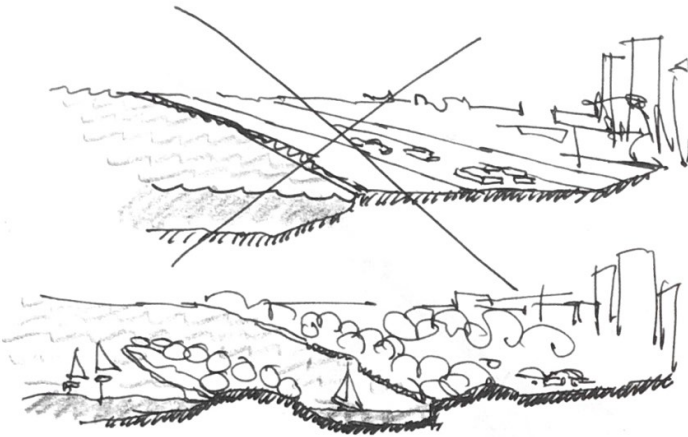
Ontario Place

Lothar Späth, the then Prime Minister of Germany's High-Tech province Baden-Württemberg, its capital Stuttgart being the home of Mercedes and Porsche, visited Toronto in the early summer of 1990. When he was shown Ontario Place he was quite enthusiastic and when he was told it was designed in 1968 and opened in May 1971, he flatly refused to believe it. What this episode proves is at least threefold; namely, that the search for architec-

tural meaning was thoroughly successful here, that Ontario Place as a facility managed to stay alive and adapted to changing needs for at least the two decades it has now existed and that the combination of technological images with nature works very well. Time also proves that the pervading note of scepticism which one encounters when reading through all the criticism written around the opening time in 1971 was largely based on ideology. It was dominated by the 60's generation's social criticism, which protested that something more

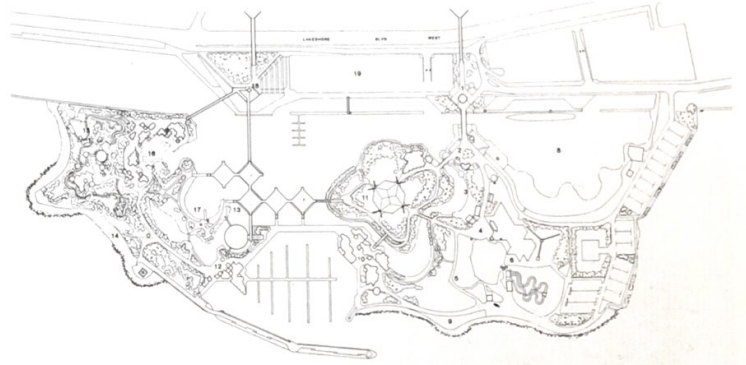


③ RECLAIMING SHORELINE FOR PEOPLE



The meeting of sea and land brought to a poetic awareness

En.



useful could have been done with the \$25 million it cost to create that park, for instance the financing of 3000 units of housing or "to send Ontario towns such as Thorold or Napanee firmly into orbit."⁶ Apart from the question of what on earth the people of Napanee should do in space and whether perhaps they would enjoy their leisure time more at Ontario Place, and apart from the guilt-ridden WASP-conscience which forbids itself to confess that adults, among them architects, can acknowledge entertainment, play and fun as basic hu-

man needs, a reaction like this, even from architectural critics, shows that Zeidler's design at that time was really avantgarde. If not, it would not have survived so many years. And art - it is the same in architecture as in any other artistic field - is something that puts obstacles in our way, uncommon images, something that refuses to ingratiate itself with us and mollify our mental and emotional make-up.

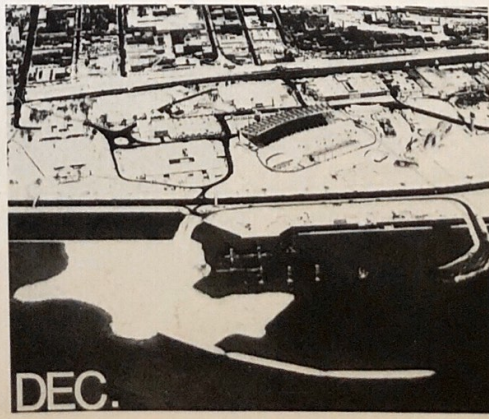
Many sources have flowed into the technical image of the five modular steel pods which form the central image of Ontario Place: the

bold utopias of Archigram, Expo '67 at Montreal, Japanese and American modular designs, science-fiction motifs speculating on extraterrestrial space age architecture, deep sea oil rigs, etc.

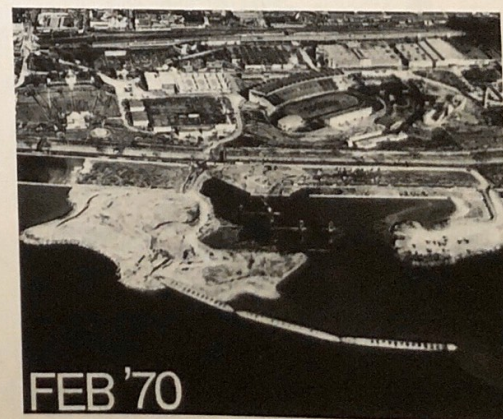
The difficulty and the secret of original design in an age of inauthenticity, where there are models for virtually everything that can be seen, thought and felt, is to distill known forms into a new image which is then recognized as a valid expression of a given time. As such it has to be aesthetic, functional, attractive, mys-



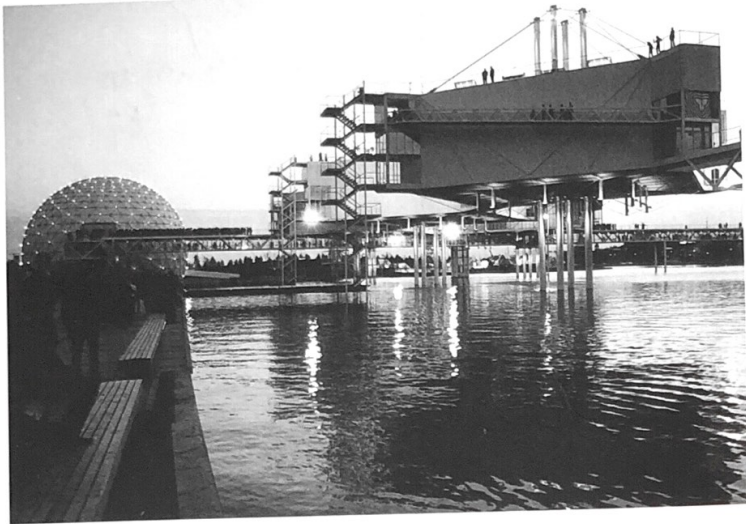
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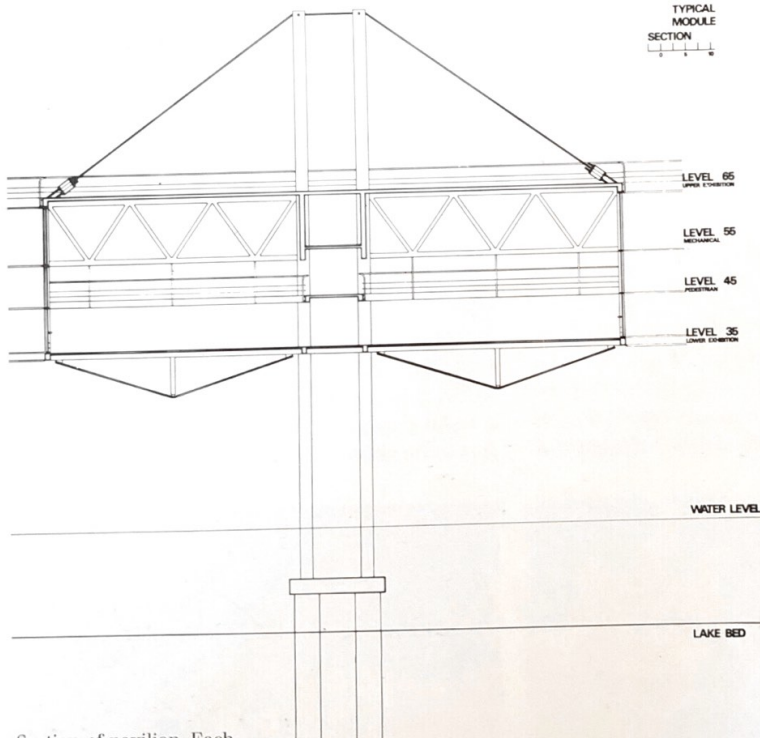
FEB '70



Left: View of the four pods towards the shore, Imax sphere at the left. The line-up along the bridge to the theatre proved to be an attraction in itself. Right: Fire stairs are independently supported by a filigran structure to indicate clearly they are not support for the pavilion structure.

terious, ambivalent, has to carry multiple layers of meaning. This is what Eb Zeidler achieved with the exhibition pavilions of Ontario Place, built into the water of the lake, thereby indicating that they represent the province of Ontario, too, and not just the city of Toronto. In the design process he asked himself:

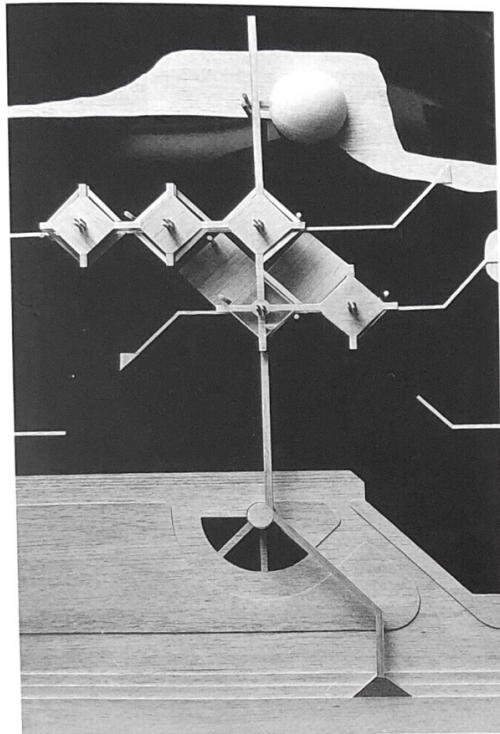
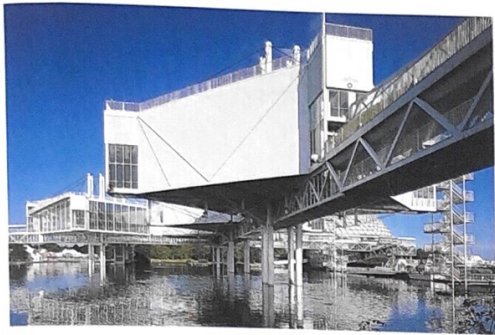
“What were the principles of great exhibition buildings in the past? What was it that led us not to forget them? What made Paxton’s Crystal Palace in London still exciting to our



Section of pavilion. Each exhibit pod is an 8,000 sq. ft. exhibition shed, suspended above water, a vision of cities in the future. Steel in tension is used throughout to explore optimum poten-

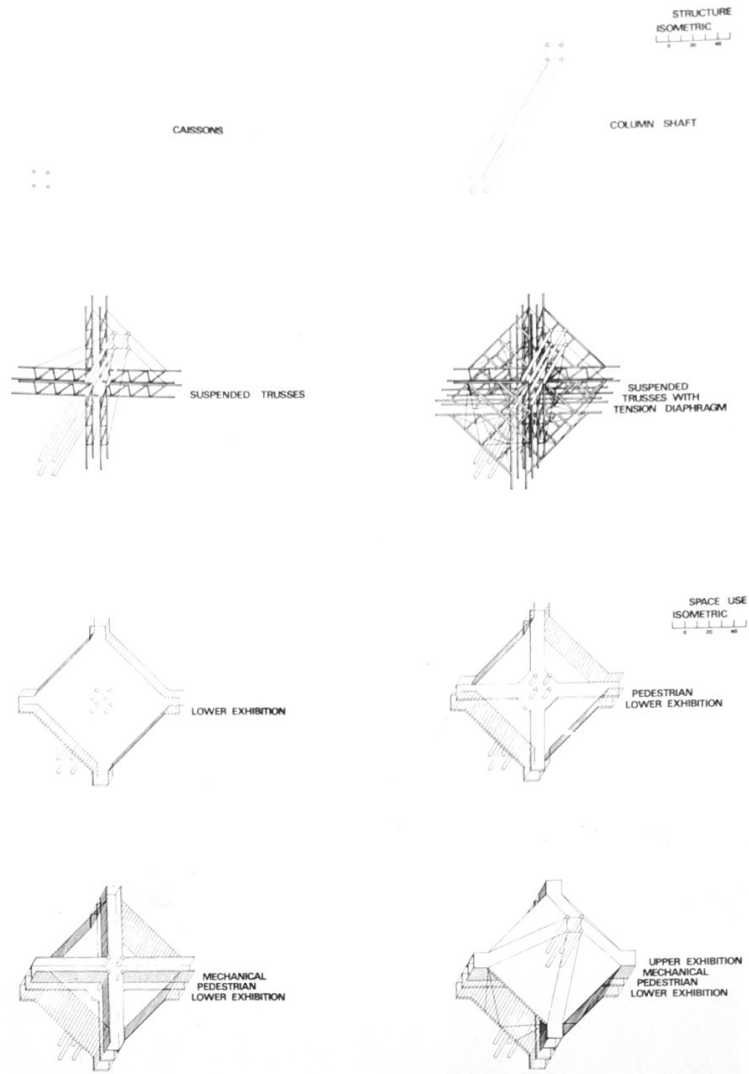
tial: trusses hang from tension cables; walls are strengthened by rods (see opposite); king trusses are in tension.





Top: Bridge connecting the "floating" pavilions.
Bottom: Initial design model.

Framework of two pavilions during construction.

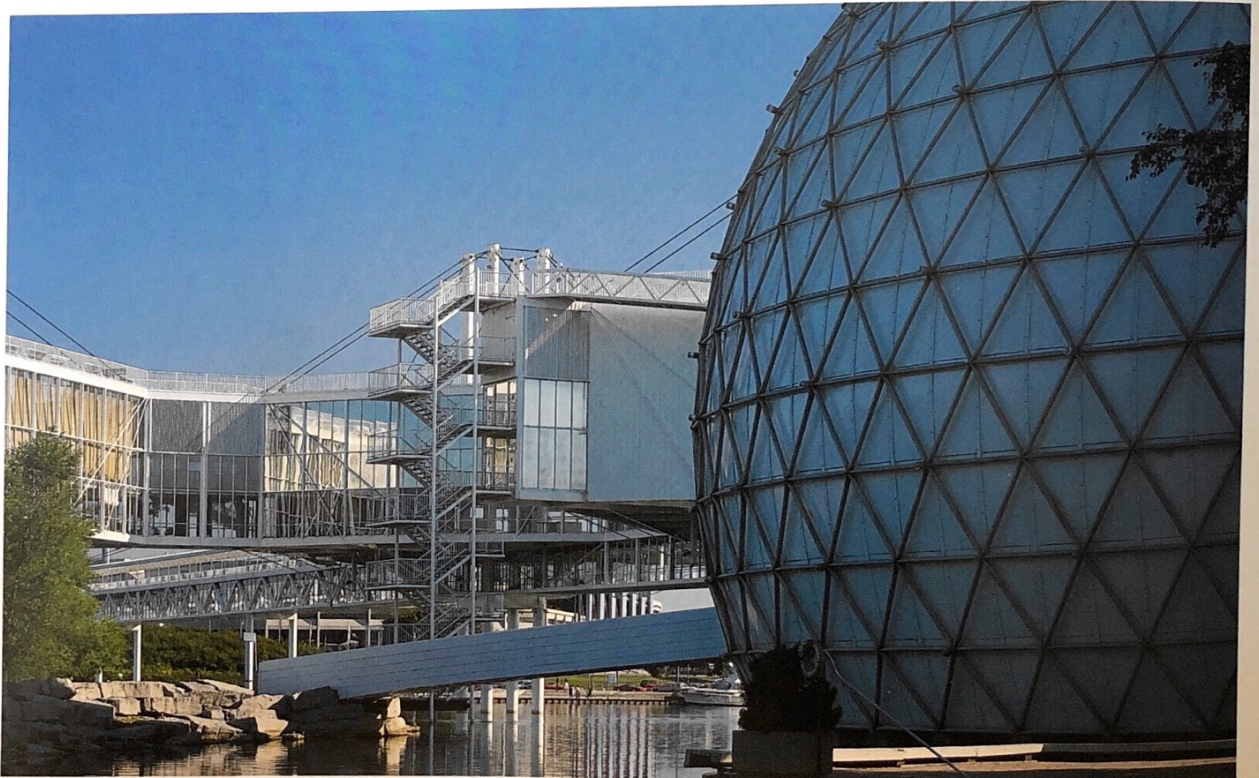
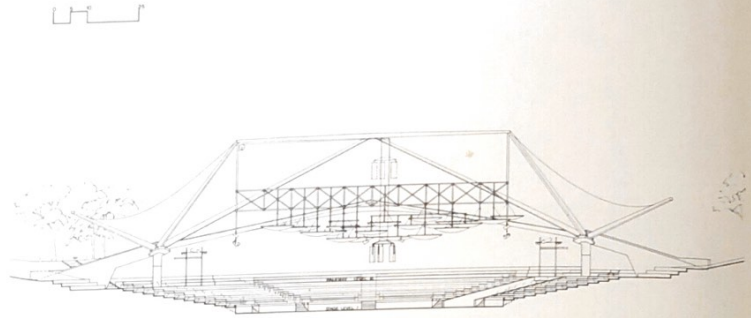


The principle of the structure: built up column shafts, wire hung trusses and tension diaphragm walls.

Organization of spaces: the lower exhibition floor, mezzanine exhibition spaces, mechanical spaces and the roof exhibition space.



Left: Night performance under Forum roof.
Right: Space frame roof which covers seating for 2,000. Surrounding hill accommodates additional 10,000. However, at performances when Ozawa conducted, up to 16,000 enjoyed music under the stars.



Imax theatre exit bridge to islands. Restaurant pavilion to left.

View from restaurant pavilion towards the west village. Three villages, as well as one for children, provide eating as well as entertainment throughout 50 acres of islands.



costly than buying existing land in this area. And third came the idea of responding to the social and psychological needs of a growing metropolitan area, by creating a new kind of urban park which would actively involve people in elements of the natural and city environment alike. So the purpose of the exhibition was to show Ontario's development from the past into the future, thereby to integrate futuristic architectural elements such as the five exhibition pavilions - three and two arranged in a geometric pattern. The Imax dome, its structural frame a new invention, simplifying the complex triodetic structure of Buckminster Fuller. Inside, Zeidler developed the first megascreen for Imax, actually the space was designed for a film technology that still has not been realised. But the islands and newly created waterways are filled with a multitude of additional recreational facilities.

High Tech which has been emotionalized into romantic functionalism, a grand multi-

Children's village provides creative and exploratory play areas for children of all ages. A high bridge with slides can only be entered by

small children. Protective netting makes it safe and allows the thrill of height. "Our three year old squealed with delight at me from above."



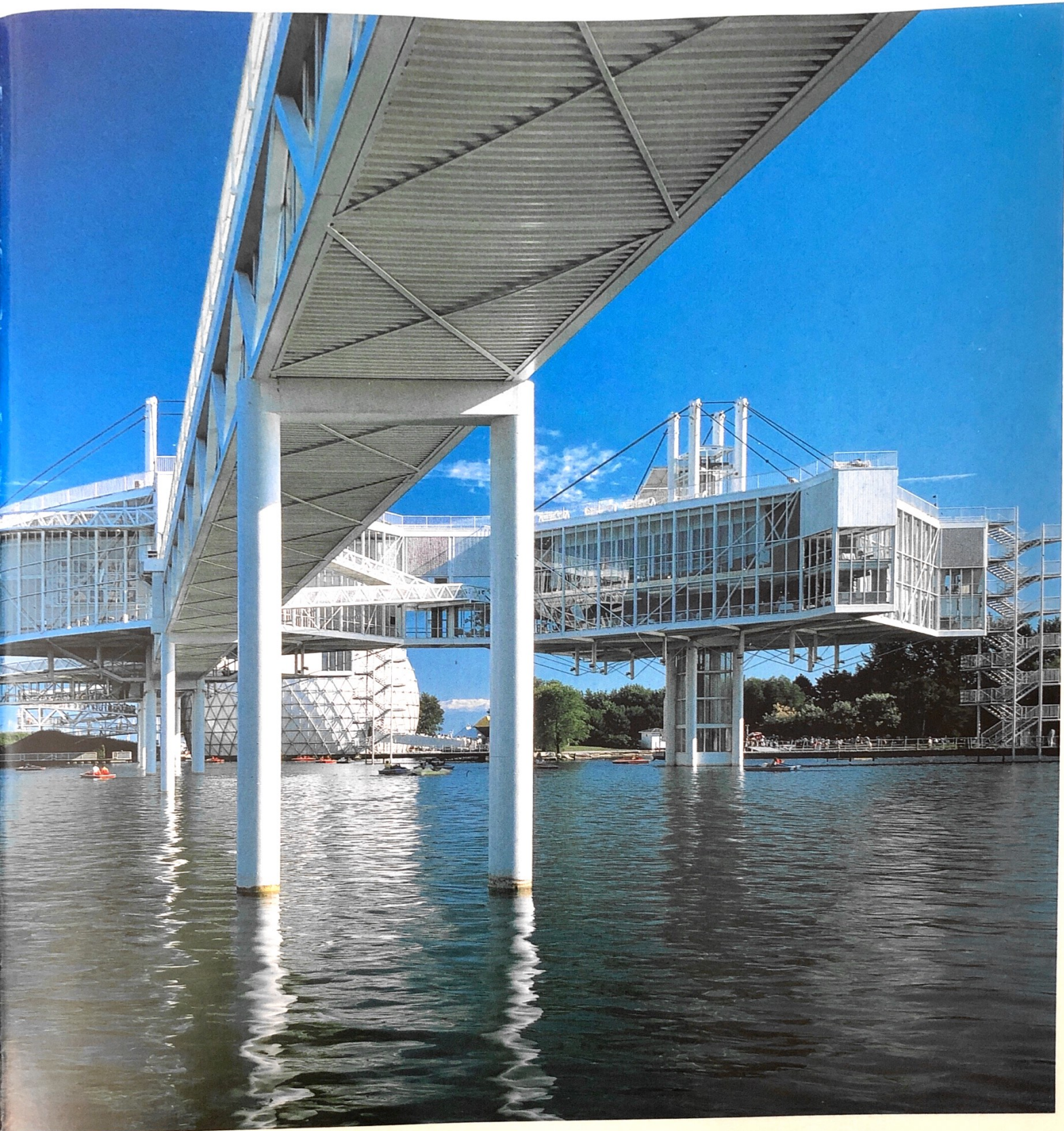
imagination, the Eiffel Tower in Paris, Fuller's Dome at Expo or Frei Otto's German Pavilion in Montreal? All these buildings had one thing in common - the technological possibilities of their day were used with a clear understanding of their potential and were crystallized in a form that finally became an expression of their time.⁷

There were, of course, political reasons behind the provincial government's decision to replace the outdated Ontario Exhibition Building in the Canadian National Exhibition grounds. But that had no influence on the architectural design process. There was the rivalry with Montreal's immensely successful Expo '67. There was the desire to show what Ontario could achieve technologically as well as the intention to provide an urban park for the citizens of a quickly growing metropolis in an age where nature for the city dweller was becoming more and more a second-hand, man-made affair. La Villette in Paris is a typical example of an eighties' conception of such a park, in which nature has rapidly been relegated to the role of a mere accessory.

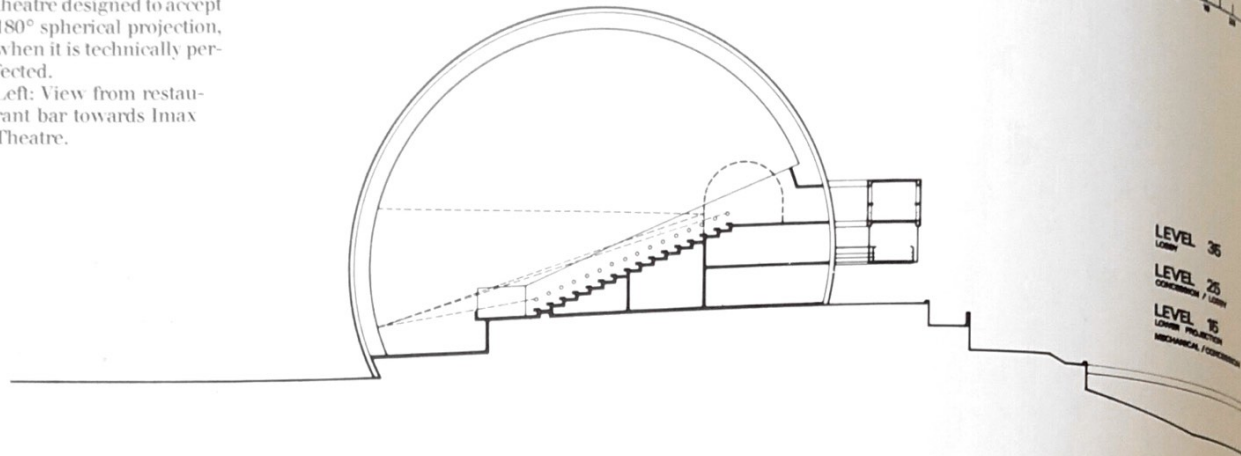
Richard Brautigan's novel *Trout Fishing in America*, which was to become a cult novel for the hippy generation, had been published for the first time in 1967. It bemoaned, satirized, made fun of the American Nature Cult, all that scenic advertising in a country where nature had already been thoroughly exploited and largely destroyed, where trout could only be bought, or fished only in the streams of artificial exhibition grounds. Such aspects of second-hand nature are part of all modern theme and exhibition parks and it would be a false pretence to deny that on all continents modern man is no longer a specimen of wildlife but predominantly a city creature. The guiding principles for Ontario Place were flexibility, so that changing demands of exhibitions could be fulfilled over the years; secondly, the intention to give new life to Toronto's waterfront which had been cut off from the city by expressways. It was Zeidler's happy idea to create artificial park-like islands beyond the expressway and so give the use of the waterfront back to its citizens. Furthermore, to create new land through land-fill was less

View of exhibition pavilion from lakeshore. The pavilions are connected by transparent glass links to provide a rhythm of change when visiting the exhibition. Gertrude Stein wrote: "I like museums. I like to look out of their windows." Restaurant pavilion is to right, bridges connect to islands.





Imax theatre. The viewing space for 800 was independently suspended in the sphere to create a sense of realism. The Imax screen is one of the largest in the world; theatre designed to accept 180° spherical projection, when it is technically perfected.
 Left: View from restaurant bar towards Imax Theatre.



psychology of children playing in such an environment. They love to be watched, love to perform, and love to be imaginative. All these things I tried to incorporate here. I still remember how my youngest, three at the time, was able to walk over a 30 foot high bridge which I was not allowed to enter. It was wildly exciting for her to explore these heights, yet I know she was perfectly safe. There were jumping platforms, a foam jungle, king of the castle, and other adaptations of children's games."⁸

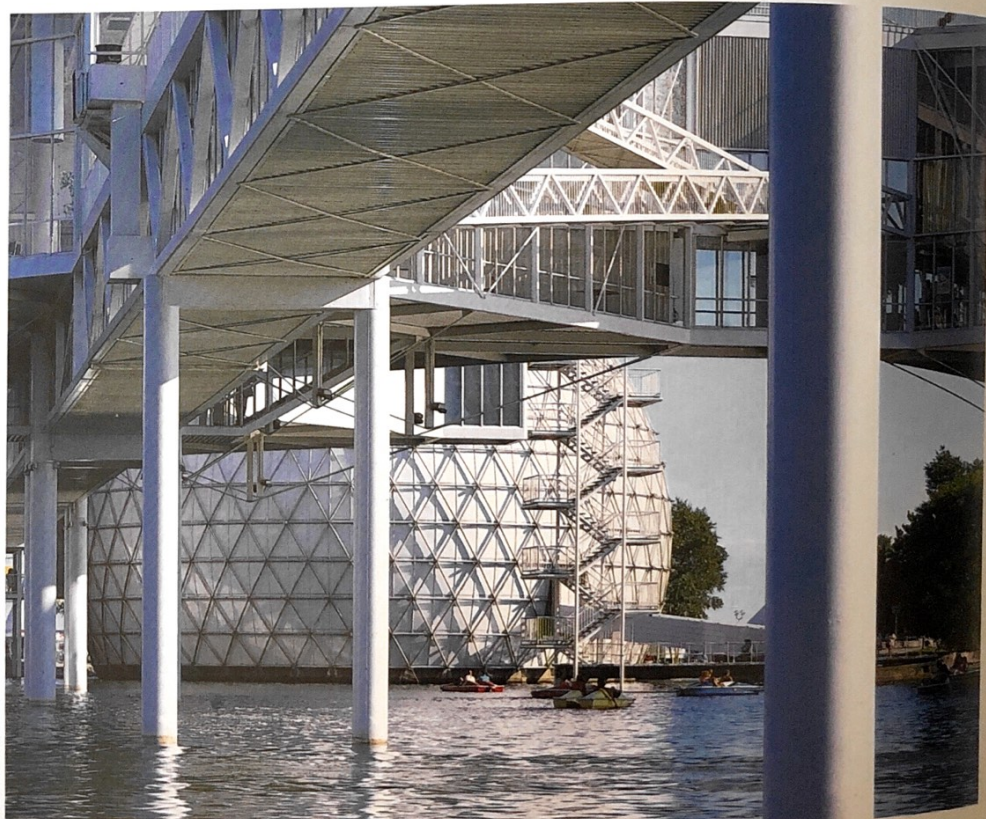
Ontario Place has now outlasted more than two decades. "Its pristine white tautness", Zeidler writes, "still looks as if it had been just opened yesterday and not 20 years ago. The trees have grown and created a wonderful park with spaces and vistas, canals and views over the lake, boat harbours and secluded areas."⁹

That it was designed in a period when the architect was hectically involved with his megastructure project at the McMaster's Health Science Centre is indeed remarkable.

layered technical image, is the enduring photogenic impression of Ontario Place, but that alone would not have been sufficient to guarantee lasting success. The cultural centre of the park, the forum, an outdoor amphitheatre with a seating capacity of 8000, 2000 under a plastic transparent space frame and additional accommodation for 10,000 on the sloping hill-sides surrounding the stage, received unanimous applause even from those critics who were sceptical about the exhibition pods. For Zeidler, one of the most delightful design tasks of Ontario Place was the Children's Village which was completed in 1972 when sufficient grants were received.

"We designed new play equipment for children. My experience of watching my children at Expo '67 helped me to understand the

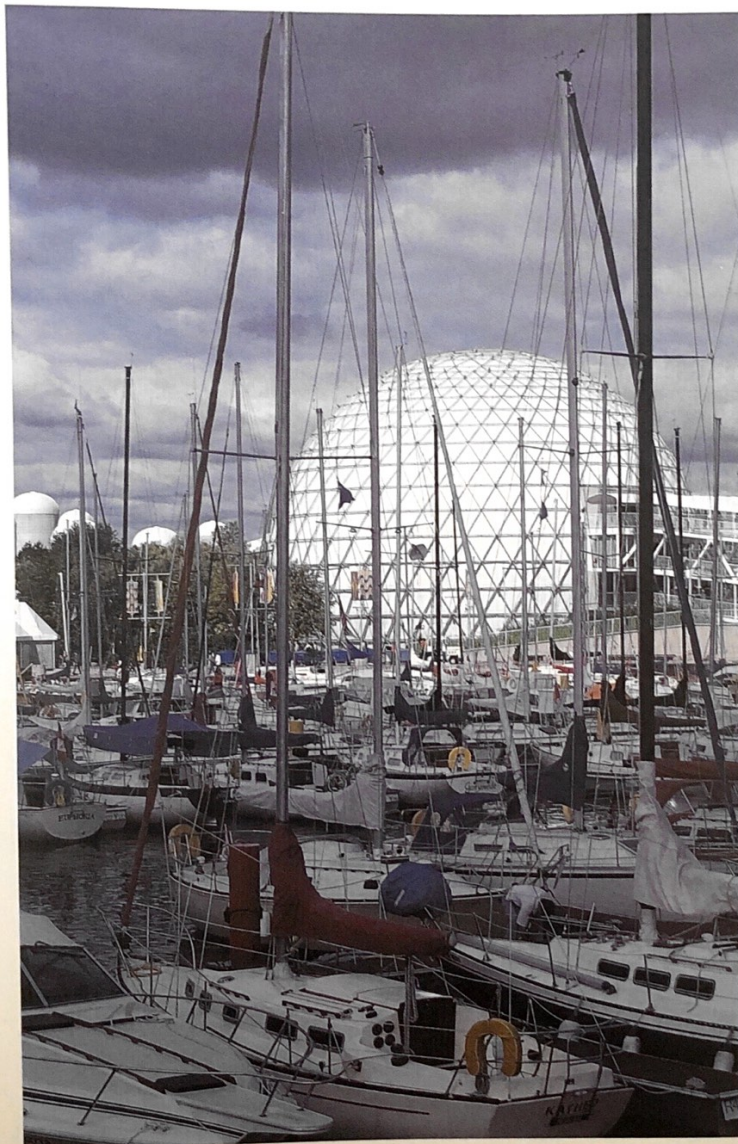
Main pedestrian bridge to shore. Imax and ramps to roof exhibition spaces are visible.



Ontario Pavilion, Expo '86, Vancouver

Exhibition architectures follow rules of their own, logical and illogical ones. They are pieces of showmanship, objects of prestige. They are thought to respond to the identity of the site as well as to that of the particular client, and also to functional and technical necessities. They are meant to create excitement, wonder, en-

joyment. Unlike Expo '67 at Montreal, Expo '86 at Vancouver was a Class B World Exposition which means that only the host nation, its provinces and institutions, are allowed individual pavilions, whereas all the other participating nations have to accept standard pavilions, which at Vancouver could at least be arranged differently due to the modular form Bruno Freschi had designed.



View into yacht harbour.

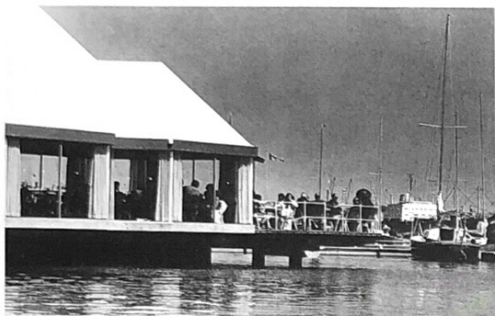


The small 50-acre islands were designed to create a diverse visual experience, never revealing its entirety, and offer a change in mood between solitude and crowded activities. Here the west shore, with view of Lake Ontario.

Small channel emerging from tunnel under west islands to be explored in paddle boats.



Left: Restaurant views from Marina village. Right: All buildings in the villages are constructed of a series of folded plywood plates, creating crystalline forms.

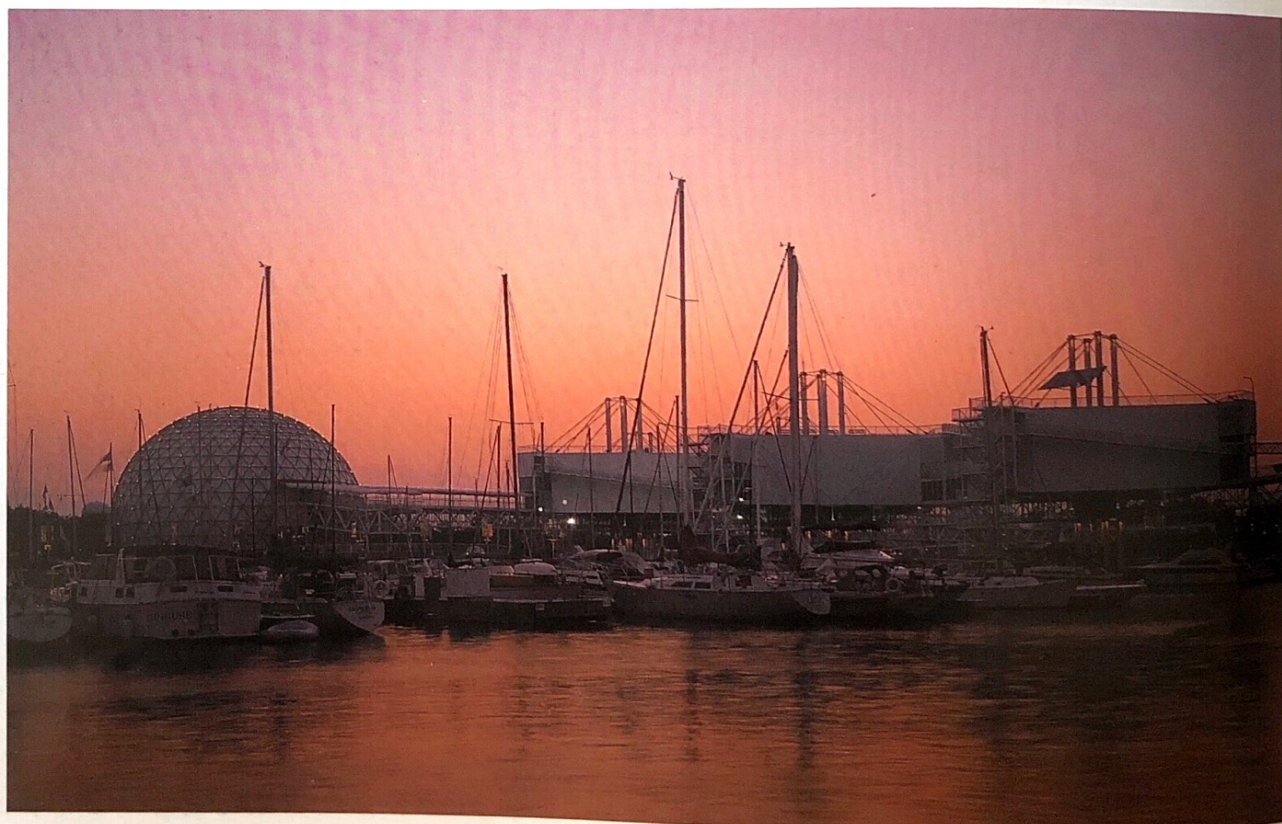


There were some remarkable pieces of exhibition architecture among the pavilions of the Canadian provinces, like Bing Thom's iceberg-glacier representing the North West Territories, Arnold McPhail's Saskatchewan Pavilion, Waisman/Dewar/Grout's pavilion of the host province British Columbia or Peter Cardew's High Tech icon for CN, the Canadian railway company. Eb Zeidler was the only

architect represented by two major pavilions – the Canada Pavilion at Canada Place and the Ontario Pavilion. McDonald's, of course, had five but they did not stand out as particular achievements in architecture. BC and Ontario Pavilions were the two most popular ones, Ontario Pavilion very likely having the best design. The requirement was to provide a dark exhibition of 9,000 sq. ft. with clear heights up

to 26 ft., 11,500 sq. ft. of daylight exhibition, a 5-D cinema for 750 people with an appropriate waiting room, a bar and restaurant, a demonstration and sales area for potential buyers or VIP's, and library and dining facilities.

The visitor's path through the pavilion was visually orchestrated like a ballet score, allowing, however, the visitors to change the viewing sequence at any time. The form of the pavilion followed the curve created by the main promenade of the Expo grounds. The roof of the dark exhibit area was used as an amphitheatre, which created a magnificent view over False Creek with its boating activities, the exposition buildings along its north shore, the city skyline and the mountain ranges on the horizon. The concept of the amphitheatre was not to create a performance space, but an active public space in which unprogrammed events could take place. An area in which one could sit, eat a picnic lunch, and watch what was going on. A reflecting



Sunset on pavilions.

Urban Planning

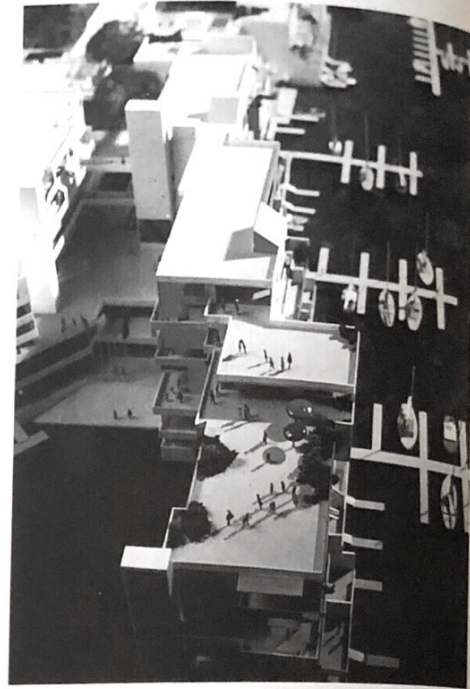
Chapter 8

"The problem that we face in Canada is that we have neither an urban nor a suburban tradition, that we just throw buildings in the landscape and try to evaluate them in isolation forgetting that architecture today is an urban phenomenon and only can exist within a texture which must be created through urban design."¹



Harbour City Plan, Toronto, Ontario, 1969.
Aerial view of Toronto with Harbour City superimposed. Ontario Place can be seen to the west.

This firm belief in the urban future of Man is one of the main reasons why Eb Zeidler so passionately adheres to the interconnection of architecture and urban planning. The combination of creative imagination, positive utopian concepts, an experimental spirit and the demiurgic voluptuousness of being able to plan not only isolated buildings but larger components of a city, even entire new city structures, very often runs into an almost masochistic pain when even the best designs are torn to shreds, mutilated, trampled down by pressure groups, political rivalries, economic priorities, or different theoretical conceptions. Reading and looking through Zeidler's manifold urban planning projects, frequently carried out over a number of years, and then seeing how many of them are finally castrated or turned into black frustration, one becomes aware that only a very committed addict can survive in the business of architecture. Urban planning, of course, has friendlier aspects, too. The planner actively participates in the growth and change of that organism called a city. He becomes aware of the multi-dimensional complexity of a city. He has to interconnect historical, sociological cultural and aesthetic considerations, such as traffic, ecology, economy, and above all city politics, because his own architectural design quite naturally must incorporate these dimensions. Urban planning, for those who delight in such exercises, is also a first rate battleground for theoretical controversies. Eb Zeidler soon became aware of this during his studies at the newly-opened Postwar Bauhaus and in his last two university years at Karlsruhe. He was intro-



Same building from above shows organization. A deck would be built at level three connecting to the nodal point street by a horizontal elevator. This would allow residents to walk either two storeys up to their unit or two to three storeys down. This inner mall would create an

active urban life yet each apartment would open its view towards the water. The inner volume below the deck would be space for commercial use.

View from the water of a horizontal apartment building. Most buildings were to be two and three storeys in height, with the exception of nodal points that would rise to a maximum height of 8 storeys. This building type would be 700' from the next unit to maintain a feeling of openness. The idea came from Zeidler's Beaumont house, which sits in a 700'-wide valley.



duced to the canon of Modern architecture and planning from a Marxist point of view at Weimar, through his teachers Küttner and Hassenpflug. However, a year later Professor Schweitzer at Karlsruhe looked at his prize-winning urban design and told him that such a plan was exactly how one should not do it.

Zeidler began to mistrust and question all theory. He even came to feel that urban planning was executed in an arbitrary fashion. There seemed to be little in it that was truly founded on genuine, definable needs. The information on which planners and architects then based their designs, seemingly verifying it, was by no means complex enough to un-

derstand the reality of a city and its rules. He was also shocked by the length of the planning process. There were so many different forces acting on urban planning which influenced each other and changed so quickly that the original design had little lasting value, and therefore eventual decisions seemed to be based more on political accident than on logical thought and the results of planning.

In retrospective the thoughts of the young Zeidler have all been verified many times in his later practice. The fact that, with a certain stubbornness, he nevertheless got involved with issues of urban planning whenever he could, proves his deep theoretical and emotional concern for the problems to be debated there. Committed, like most true sons, to a violent opposition towards his father figures, Zeidler got interested in the purely visual approach of Camillo Sitte and even in the East Berlin Stalin-Allee design by his old teacher Henselmann and Egon Hartmann, which also Aldo Rossi later called the best urban planning done in Europe at this time. Zeidler interprets it as perhaps the first step into Postmodern-

ism, in the sense of discovering the continuity of historic influences in our architecture, a connection that the Moderns had tried to break. And this is exactly the point where he is writing his own ticket, at least since the late '60s.

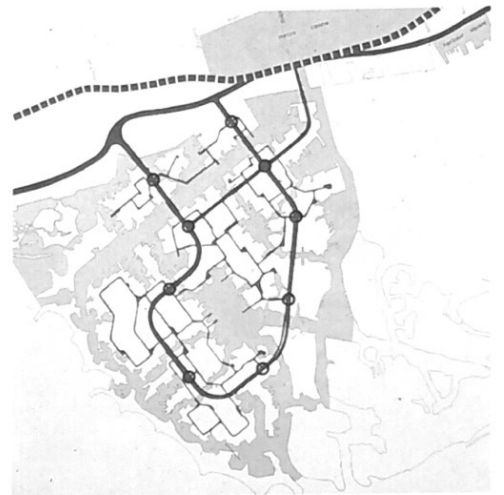
In his early Canadian years there was little chance to play an active role in urban planning, Toronto being totally controlled by Modern theories which dictated planning according to functional uses and transportation requirements. The urban space as such was not considered. In Corbusian fashion architecture was seen as sculpture in a two-dimensional urban plane. Hence Zeidler's resigned statement: "So, I took the urban environment as a given."²

It was Jane Jacobs who opened his eyes with her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* and brought back his fighting spirit. She showed him the city as it could be seen from an individual standpoint, the way in which people live in it and with it, rather than from the single perspective of a god-like Modern planner, to whom the individual human

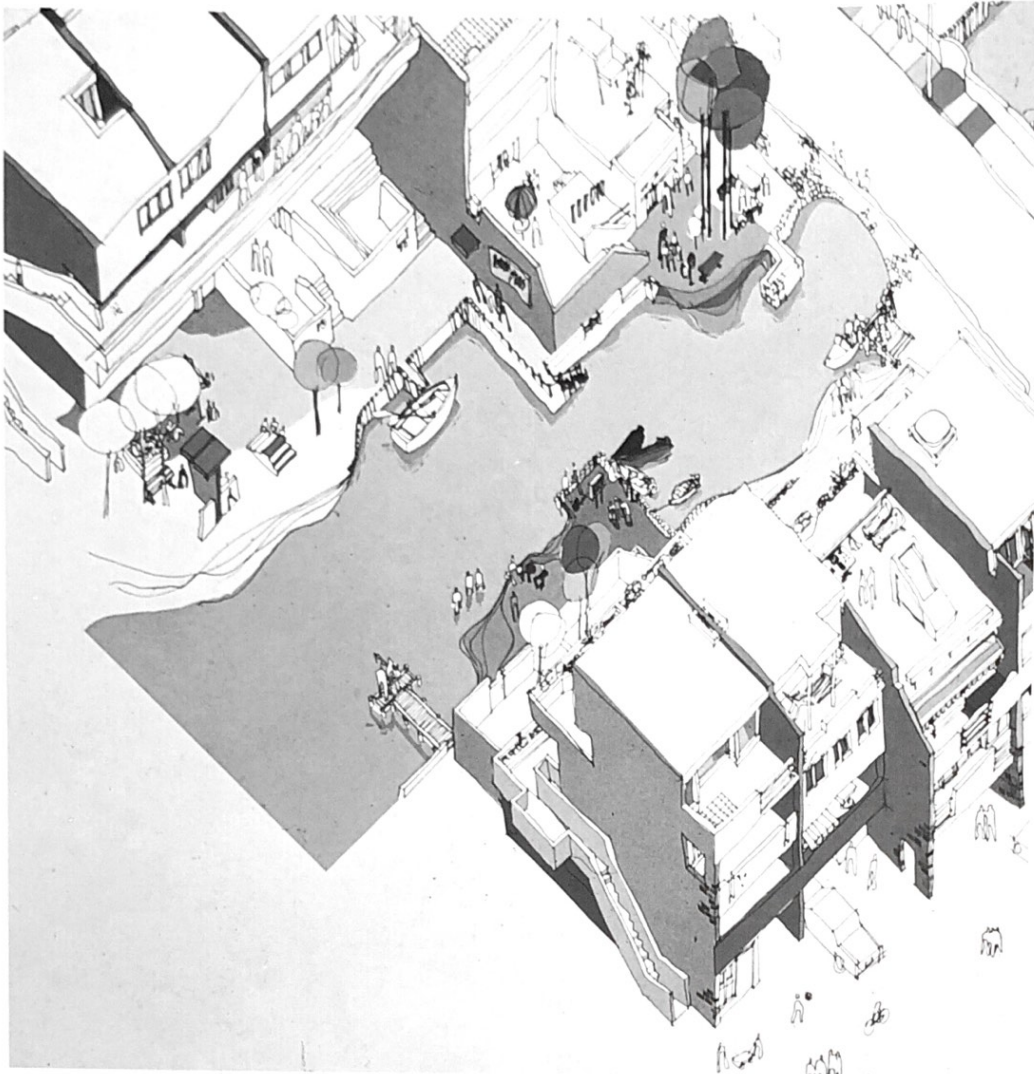
Top: Vehicular connection into Toronto's road net would be via a major artery that connected the interior road net.

Middle: The public transit system would follow the artery road. Nine stations would serve as nodal points so that no housing unit would be further than five minutes walking distance

from any station. Higher density housing, however, would only be located within a three minute radius. Nodal points would have a mixed use of commercial and residential occupation.



Model of Harbour City. Outside parks protect the inner water ways, similar to Ontario Place. The proposal added some 30 kilometres of new public park shoreline to Toronto's waterfront.



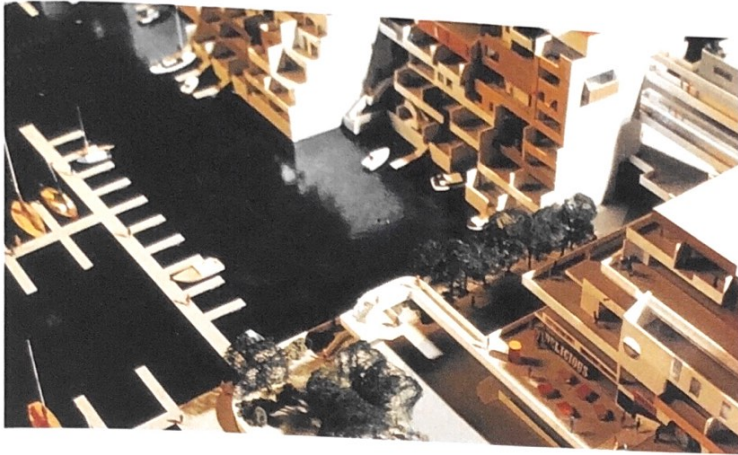
Minor neighbourhood centre showing townhouses with corner stores and limited commercial and industrial uses.



being shrivels into insignificance. Urban planning suddenly made sense for Zeidler and a few years later (1969), in close connection with Ontario Place, the opportunity arose to design a really major urban project – Harbour City. Harbour City was Eb Zeidler's dream of giving Waterfront Toronto an identity which originated from a combination of Venetian and Amsterdam planning principles.

The debts the Harbour Commission had run up could not be covered by operational income and so they were looking for new sources of income, which they saw in the sale of infill-created land to developers. According to a Cabinet decision Zeidler was to conduct an investigation into the question of who actually owned such land, newly claimed from the underwater shelf in front of Toronto's shoreline – was it Provincial, Federal, or City holdings? –, and they were asked, under the guidance of Jim Ramsay, to prepare a report on this issue. There was an advisory board with such noted people as Jane Jacobs, Hans Blumenfeld and John Murray, the former Metro Planning Commissioner. Heated arguments arose over the question whether or not a community built on a ring of new islands

Top: View from waterway to townhouse square.
 Left: View of townhouse square.
 Far left: End view of horizontal apartment piers.

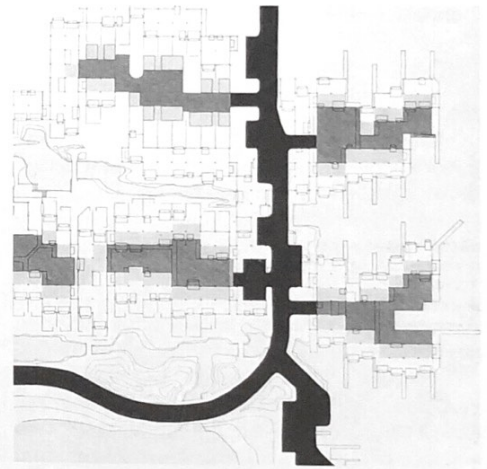
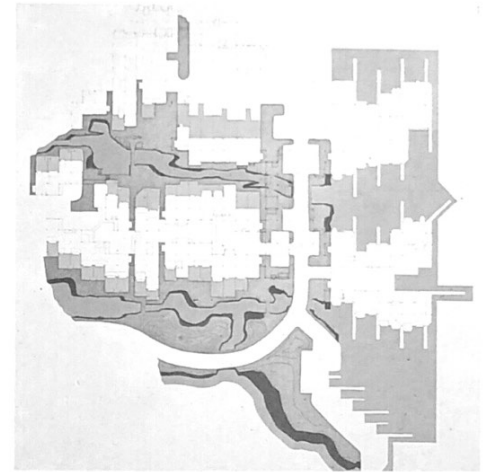


Left: Section through a nodal point, showing transit station and road interchange.

extending from Ontario Place towards the city should be mixed or stratified according to income, whether it could be a community free of cars, whether it should have exclusively low-rise houses or not. Zeidler suggested basically low-rise buildings, not higher than four storeys, with some nodal densifications no higher than eight storeys. They also decided to discourage the use of the car but not to eliminate it, which they thought would have been unrealistic. Water was seen as a key element,

hence the mixture of canals and streets, and the creation of nearby 20 miles of new shoreline for Toronto.

The next decision they made was to clearly separate the Harbour City land from the other islands, to maintain the Toronto Islands as a pedestrian environment that can only be reached by boat, to give the feeling of seclusion that such a situation offers. The key planning issue for Harbour City was to create an urban, dense environment that responded to



Top: Town-housing concept. Continuous public walkways follow the canals. The townhouse terraces would be three feet higher to afford privacy for the owners and a view into the canal parkland.

Middle: Vehicular access from secondary roads into inner courtyards. Garages open into these yards and would be supervised from the kitchen areas above. The area would become a play space for children. These urban models are

adaptations of successful Toronto housing prototypes. Left: View of high-density housing.