

Harbour of our dreams; The eclectic finalists in a \$20 million international design competition took refuge in no safe harbourfronts

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Cynicism comes cheap in this town, a place where many are content with the breezy comfort of ignorance. This is nowhere more prevalent than on the waterfront, where, ironically enough, after decades of neglect, there are \$800 million in projects underway.

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For the record, work underway on the waterfront includes the recently completed dragon boat racecourse, the engineering of the new berm at Don Valley Park, the Cherry Street Beach clean-up, the John and York Quay promenades and the HtO urban beach park. That doesn't include detailed planning for the East Bayfront, the West Donlands, Lake Ontario Park and Commissioners Park.

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Next is a program to knit the central waterfront from Bathurst to Parliament Sts. into a unified whole. To this end, a \$20 million international design competition was launched several months ago from which five finalists have been chosen. Their submissions will be on display at the BCE Place Galleria, Harbourfront Centre, Eaton Centre, Sherway Gardens, Fairview Mall and Scarborough Town Centre for two weeks. Teams will present their work at BCE Place on Monday at a public forum that starts at 6 30 p.m.

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Though the entries vary in quality, there's no shortage of great ideas. According to Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects, New York, and Martinez Lapena-Torres, Barcelona, we need a new man-made island in Toronto Harbour, connected to the mainland by pedestrian bridges at York and Simcoe Streets.

In the Wasaw Project, Stan Allen Architect, Sarah Whiting and Ron Witte of Princeton feel the answer is a series of pavilions and overhead arbours that extend the length of the waterfront.

Foster Architects of London suggests a number of extended piers that would climax in dramatic eight-storey teardrop buildings that could have different uses, from a boutique hotel to restaurants and shops.

More interesting was the submission from PORT, an international group of architects including Snohetta from Oslo, Joe Lobko, Toronto, and a gaggle of New York firms. "We didn't want to create one overarching scheme," explained Craig Dykers of Snohetta, "but find unity through diversity. We didn't want to make another east-west obstacle" - like the Gardiner Expressway, Lakeshore Blvd. and the railway embankment. "We were looking to find north-south connections."

Their plans include a row of 100-metre tall "light masts" that would sway gently in the water and change colour with the temperature. They also envision extending a pier south from the foot of Yonge Street to become the new island ferry terminal. Floating wooden platforms would bridge the slips, providing greater access and a much-needed measure of elegance.

Of all the offerings the most ambitious and convincing perhaps came from West 8 of Rotterdam and du Toit Allsopp Hillier and David Dennis of Toronto. They saw the task not just as an exercise in aesthetics, but also as an opportunity to bring the city into the 21st century.

They looked at the waterfront not simply as the space along and around Queens Quay, but as a part of the city that has been cut off and isolated. They propose the Gardiner be torn down - as called for by the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corp. - and that Lakeshore Blvd. beneath become the Champs-Elysees of Toronto.

Down by the waterfront, a wooden boardwalk would extend out over the water, much as it does now at the recently completed John and York Streets water's-edge promenade, only farther. They also float the idea of building two or three more urban beach parks like the brilliant HtO, now under construction at Maple Leaf Quay. Each slip would have a wooden bridge and a grotto-like feature where it joins the land, lighted at night from beneath.

Queens Quay would be reduced from four lanes to two and a streetcar line would run along the southern edge, most of which would be set aside for pedestrians and cyclists. Thousands of trees would be planted to re-establish the "green foot" of the city.

Hidden from view, well underground, is a large "interceptor tunnel," which would clean wastewater before it enters the lake. Because the tunnel is bored, not dug, it can be started even after the cosmetic flourishes above are complete. The filters that clean the water would be housed in the old silos at the foot of Bathurst.

The winner will be announced May 31 and work will begin this fall. 5 Waterfront Visions From Bathurst to Parliament

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