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*LANDSCAPES | PAYSAGES* is published by the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects to provide a national platform for the exchange of ideas related to the profession. The views expressed in *LANDSCAPES | PAYSAGES* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of CSLA. Guest editors and contributors are volunteers, and article proposals are encouraged. Articles may be submitted in either English or French.

*LANDSCAPES | PAYSAGES* acknowledges that the head office of the CSLA is in unceded Algonquin, Anishinabe territory, and that this magazine is developed, distributed, read and enjoyed by people from coast to coast to coast, on the lands of First Nations, Inuit and Métis people and their governments. On behalf of LJP magazine and the members of the CSLA, we are thankful to work and live on these lands. We recognize the harms inflicted on Indigenous peoples by colonialism and the residential school system and we are all working to reconcile the damage done.

*LANDSCAPES | PAYSAGES* est publiée par l'Association des architectes paysagistes du Canada pour servir de plate-forme nationale destinée à l'échange d'idées sur la profession. Les opinions exprimées dans *LANDSCAPES | PAYSAGES* appartiennent aux auteurs et ne reflètent pas forcément celles de l'AAPC. Nos rédacteurs invités contribuent bénévolement. Nous attendons, en français ou en anglais, vos propositions d'articles.

*LANDSCAPES | PAYSAGES* reconnaît que le siège social de l'AAPC se trouve en territoire Algonquin et Anishinabe non cédé, et que ce magazine est conçu, distribué, lu et apprécié par des gens d'un océan à l'autre, sur les terres des Premières nations, des Inuits et des Métis et de leurs gouvernements. Au nom du magazine LJP et des membres de l'AAPC, nous sommes reconnaissants de travailler et de vivre sur ces terres. Nous reconnaissons les préjudices infligés aux peuples autochtones par le colonialisme et le système des pensionnats, et nous nous efforçons tous de réparer les dommages causés.

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A.R. MCDIARMID PLAZA, BRANDON, MB (SEE PAGE 42)  
PHOTO ARCHITECTURE 49



**MICHELLE TUSTIN + KYLA TULLOCH-KOWULA**  
GUEST EDITORS | RÉDACTRICES INVITÉES

## JUMPING ON THE WIND'S BACK

**LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS OCCUPY** a unique niche among design professionals. We are a community of individuals committed to the dream of Neverland, to the ongoing practice of imagination, curiosity and wonder. We share a fascination with the complex communities within the natural world, exploring them to create art through markers, pencil crayons and drafting paper. We embody the bravery needed to think of others before one's self, exercising our inherent perceptiveness to be creatively ignited by our own communities, cultures and *genus loci*.

As Kyla and I think of the trajectory that led us to landscape architecture, we both found that it began in play, but not necessarily the playground. It was in family forts in the forest and cooking over a tipi fire; in watching tadpoles transition to frogs in the dugout ecosystem; and in exploding cattail "hot dogs." The curiosity and awe of our little worlds were piqued. In winter, large mazes would be shoveled in knee deep snow to play a ferocious game of "fox and geese," once a staple prairie winter game. Getting lost in the strangest adventures without being troubled by them, creating "sticky" memories that bonded our senses of belonging, something that remains inseparable from our senses of self. Of course, this could only be nurtured by feelings of ownership and freedom, safety and risk, in a world made of faith and trust.

It is here we observe how our experiences and histories manifest. Yet, prioritizing a design approach that encourages interaction, play and whimsy in our profession can feel confounding under the microscope of budgets, "value engineering," and client / consultant relationships. What may be considered fluffy and frivolous to others, we know to be the magic, the *pixie dust*, that awakens inanimate objects or spaces, springing them to life.

All of us can remain playful, even as we become adults and professionals. Landscape architecture is in an exciting era of playground design, research and theory, which has expanded our understanding of childhood developmental needs, inclusive play components and generational play. Playground design in the last decade has undergone dramatic upgrades, with an unwavering momentum of taller towers and epic slides, warm materials, accessible topographies and endless customizations. And yet, play design within the profession remains routinely compartmentalized, bound within set play edges and pre-determined locations.

This issue explores the essence of playing out in the (figurative) wild. Based on shared wisdom and learnings, built works, ideas and inspiration, in national and international environments, the contributors of this issue open a compelling discussion around the art and dance of play. What does play look like outside the sandbox? How has centering play in dynamic, community-based public spaces created lasting positive social impacts? Our contributors offer perspectives of scale, permanence, process and how policies shape play.

Landscape architecture has this incredible power to design for all stages of our lives. Play, like memories, must get *more sticky*, forming a glue that binds us to place and each other. In a time where unity feels beyond reach, this issue a call to action – to give ourselves permission to design somewhere between reality and dreams, and to practice play seriously. We hope this issue provides valuable examples, tools and motivation to rethink conventional approaches, to jump on the wind's back, and fly! **LP**

## S'ENVOLER AU GRÉ DU VENT

**LES ARCHITECTES PAYSAGISTES** occupent une place unique parmi les professionnels du design. Nous sommes une communauté qui avons prêté serment au pays imaginaire du rêve, de la curiosité et de l'émerveillement. Nous partageons une fascination pour l'univers naturel, que nous explorons pour en reproduire l'essence à coup de marqueurs et de crayons sur du papier calque. Nous incarnons la sagesse de penser aux autres avant soi-même, nous savons écouter les collectivités et les cultures que manifestent l'esprit des lieux que nous aménageons.

Lorsque Kyla et moi réfléchissons au parcours qui nous a menées à l'architecture de paysage, nous constatons qu'il a commencé par le jeu, mais pas dans une aire de jeux fermée, mais bien dans une cabane en forêt, en cuisinant sur un feu de camp, en observant les têtards devenir grenouilles dans les étangs, et en faisant exploser des « queues » de quenouilles. La curiosité et l'émerveillement de notre petit monde s'éveillaient. En hiver, nous creusions de grands labyrinthes dans la neige jusqu'aux genoux pour jouer au « chasseur chassé », un jeu hivernal autrefois incontournable dans les prairies. Nous nous perdions en conjecture sans souci, en forgeant des souvenirs qui renforçaient notre sentiment d'appartenance, un élément indissociable de notre identité. Bien sûr, seul un profond sentiment de liberté et de sécurité pouvait soutenir la prise de risque dans un monde fondé sur la foi et la confiance.

C'est ainsi que nous observons comment nos expériences et notre histoire se manifestent. Pourtant, privilégier une approche conceptuelle qui encourage l'interaction, le jeu et la fantaisie dans notre profession peut sembler déroutant dans une optique « d'optimisation des coûts » et de relations client-consultant. Ce qui peut paraître futile et frivole aux yeux des autres est pour nous une *poudre ludique* qui anime les objets et les espaces en leur donnant vie.

L'enjouement peut se manifester la vie durant. Notre profession connaît actuellement une période d'éveil sur le plan de la conception, de la recherche et de la théorie ludique. Notre compréhension du développement infantile et du jeu inclusif et intergénérationnel a grandement évolué. Depuis une dizaine d'années, la conception ludique a fait un bond de géant, et des tours plus hautes, des glissoires plus épiques, des matériaux plus chaleureux et des aménagements plus accessibles et adaptés ont fait leur apparition. Et pourtant, la conception ludique demeure compartimentée, limitée à des aires de jeux clôturées dans des emplacements prédéterminés.

Ce numéro explore l'essence même du jeu dans la nature (au sens figuré). En s'appuyant sur la sagesse et les apprentissages communs, les œuvres construites, les idées et l'inspiration puisées ici et ailleurs, les articles du présent numéro ouvrent la discussion sur l'art et la danse du jeu. À quoi ressemble le jeu hors du bac à sable? Quelles ont été les répercussions sociales des aménagements ludiques au centre de l'espace public? Nos rédacteurs proposent des perspectives sur l'échelle, la permanence et les processus ludiques, et sur la façon dont les politiques façonnent le jeu.

L'architecture de paysage a ce pouvoir incroyable de concevoir des espaces adaptés à toutes les étapes de notre vie. Le jeu, à l'instar des souvenirs, s'ancre en nous et forge des liens entre les citoyens et les lieux. À une époque où l'unité semble hors de portée, le présent numéro est un appel à l'action : concevoir, entre la réalité et les rêves, le jeu avec sérieux. Nous espérons qu'il sera vous inspirer et vous fournir les outils et la motivation nécessaires pour revoir les approches conventionnelles, et vous permettre de vous envoler au gré du vent! **LP**





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## OUR GUEST EDITORS | NOTRE RÉDACTEUR INVITÉES



### **MICHELLE TUSTIN**

Michelle Tustin, ENV.D, M.L. Arch, SALA, CSLA, is an Associate at Crosby Hanna, in Saskatoon, SK. Michelle's design practice stems from her desire to create meaningful, immersive landscapes that celebrate the poetics of place. With a dedication to empathetic landscape design principles, she strives to understand deeper emotional and physical needs to better create landscapes that are inclusive, multi-functional, healing, sensorial and sustainable. Michelle's strong conviction towards wildlife advocacy and landscape ethics remains a driving force for delivering environmentally responsible design strategies and solutions in both her practice and volunteer efforts. In her off time, you can find Michelle (with cats in tow) expanding her pollinator garden, restoring her home, and fostering her creativity through other facets of design.



### **KYLA TULLOCH-KOWULA**

Kyla Tulloch-Kowula, B.F.A, M.L.Arch, SALA, CSLA, is an award-winning landscape architect in Regina, SK. She is passionate about ecologically integrated design and combining the quantitative with the qualitative from concept through project fruition. With a love of the prairies she calls home, Kyla celebrates Saskatchewan's beauty and diversity by showcasing native plant use in unique ways. She strives to build climate-resilient landscapes, including her yard at home that is built for bees, butterflies, birds, and her two boys. Kyla is also a member of the editorial board for *Landscapes* | *Paysages*.

## OUR WRITERS | NOS COLLABORATEURS



### **INGRID VAIVADS**

Professionally trained as a landscape architect, Ingrid Vaivads, BLA Hns., DGD, has been designing environments that charm, amuse, soothe or are exhilarating, edge of your seat, breathtaking experiences for over 30 years with an award winning international experience design firm, FORREC, based in Toronto, Ontario. Ingrid is committed to community sport as an athlete and a volunteer serving on Boards, Associations and Committees for Sailing And Sprint Canoe/Kayak clubs in Oakville, Ontario. Ingrid's reverence for nature and appreciation of *genius loci* is rooted among a playground of lakes, rivers and rocks in and around 44°34'26"N Latitude and 75°52'59"W Longitude.



### **LUCIA BLANCO**

Lucia Blanco, MLA, BCSLA Intern, is a Vancouver-based landscape designer from Veracruz, Mexico, with experience spanning placemaking, street murals and editorial projects. Her work includes playful temporary installations, the transformation of streets into permanent community parks and participatory projects with children and First Nations communities. In 2018, she co-authored Mexico City's first public play space design guidelines and has since published on themes centred on outdoor play design. Lucia is a strong advocate for embedding playful experiences in the public realm and deeply believes in the power of communities to drive meaningful change.





### **LUCAS CONAN**

Architecte paysagiste français établi et formé au Québec, Lucas Conan, AAPQ, CSLA, explore les liens entre paysage et humain, en portant une attention particulière aux relations sociales et conviviales que les paysages peuvent générer. Il travaille aujourd'hui à la firme Ateliers Ublo, Montréal, et enseigne à l'Université de Montréal. Ancien étudiant-chercheur associé à la Chaire de recherche du Canada en urbanisation durable dans le Sud global, il articule recherche, pratique et pédagogie pour concevoir des paysages résilients, vivants et conviviaux. Lucas est également membre du comité de rédaction de *Landscapes | Passages* | French landscape architect, established and trained in Quebec, Lucas Conan, AAPQ, CSLA, explores the relationship between people and landscapes, with a particular focus on the social and convivial interactions that landscapes can generate. He currently works at the Montreal firm Ateliers Ublo and teaches at the Université de Montréal. A former student-researcher affiliated with the Canada Research Chair in Sustainable Urbanization in the Global South, he combines research, practice and pedagogy to design resilient, living and convivial landscapes. Lucas is also an editorial board member for *Landscapes | Paysages*.



### **BHAVANA BONDE**

Bhavana Bonde, OALA, AALA, BCSLA, MALA, APALA, CSLA, LEED AP, serves as National Practice Leader of the Landscape Architecture and Urban Design group at Architecture49. She has over 30 years of experience in landscape architecture, site studies and master planning through her work in India, Singapore, Mexico and across Canada. Originally trained as an architect, Bhavana brings a unique perspective in the integration of buildings and landscape. With a strong commitment to design excellence and a holistic design approach, she brings critical experience in the delivery of integrated design, planning and sustainable solutions.



### **LESLIE MORTON**

Leslie Morton, OALA, CSLA, is a Senior Associate at DTAH and landscape architect with 15 years of experience transforming existing spaces into playful, memorable environments and delivering revitalization parks and playgrounds in Toronto. Leslie is currently the project manager of the public realm and open space design for Lake Shore Boulevard East and Gardiner East Realignment and serves on the Mississauga Urban Design Advisory Panel.



"WOODEN PLANK WALKWAYS" LOCATED IN ELEPHANT PARK, LONDON, UK (SEE PAGE 17)  
PHOTO JENNA FRIZZEL





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# PROLOGUE

## 01\_BLOOM A CHAIR

NING HUANG

**AS SHAKESPEARE WROTE**, “*All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players.*” Sometimes, we landscape architects are stage designers – crafting environments where even adults feel compelled to take on new roles, to step out of routine and to escape, even just for a moment.

That stage can be as vast as Disneyland – or as modest as a single chair.

In the lush “Kingdom of Plants” – Xishuangbanna, China, known for its subtropical climate and rich cultural diversity – a vibrant yellow chair blooms within a newly developed sojourn community. Shaped like the elegant moth orchid, the Phalaenopsis Chair is more than a seat – it is an invitation to play, to imagine and to find meaning in the everyday.

For adults, play is often a forgotten language, overshadowed by responsibility and repetition. Yet this chair gently calls it back. It serves as a stage for playful

moments, encouraging people to step outside themselves, to embrace lightness and to make colorful memories – those fleeting highlights that linger long after ordinary days have faded.

One of the most powerful forms of play is the act of pretending – to try on a new identity, even if only for a photo or a shared laugh. Children do this instinctively. Adults, however, often need permission. This chair offers it. With its bold form and welcoming presence, it’s easy to imagine oneself as the ruler of a plant kingdom, the centerpiece of a whimsical story, or simply a joyful participant in something shared and spontaneous.

Whether people pose beside it, climb onto it, or simply sit and smile, the chair welcomes performance. And within that performance, something deeper unfolds: a quiet reconnection with imagination – and with each other.

As landscape architects, one of our greatest rewards is shaping spaces that spark these moments. The Phalaenopsis Chair is a small gesture with a lasting impact – a reminder that delight is a legitimate design goal, and that memory often begins with play.

Ultimately, this chair is a celebration of joy, a tribute to the living landscape, and a gentle declaration that beauty, whimsy and imagination belong to everyone – at every age.

And yes – although the developer still teases me for designing what he calls “the most expensive chair in Xishuangbanna” – it’s worth every cent. Because it blooms not only in the plaza, but in the memories of the people who sat in it and smiled. **LP**

**Ning Huang**, *CSLA, OALA, ISA Certified Arborist*, is the author of *Mastering Bare Branches: A Practical Guide to Winter Tree Identification (2025)*, a field-tested guide built on the *One-Eye Method* for rapid learning and instant winter recognition. His design work ranges from public parks, urban plazas and trails to playful public art that brings joy and meaning to everyday places.

**1** A RESIDENT EMBRACES THE SPIRIT OF THE PHALAENOPSIS CHAIR. NESTLED IN A FLORAL ARCHWAY, THE SCULPTURE INVITES PERFORMANCE, PHOTOS, AND MEMORY-MAKING. **2** THE STAINLESS-STEEL ORCHID PETALS UNDER CONSTRUCTION – CAREFUL WELDING WORK BEGINS TO BRING THE PLAYFUL FORM TO LIFE. **3** FRAMED BY A FLORAL TUNNEL OF FILTERED LIGHT AND CLIMBING VINES, THE PHALAENOPSIS CHAIR GLOWS AT THE END OF THE PATH – DRAWING VISITORS TOWARD A MOMENT OF WHIMSY AND REST. **BACKGROUND** THE MOTH ORCHID (PHALAENOPSIS), CHERISHED FOR ITS ELEGANT FORM, SERVED AS THE PRIMARY DESIGN MUSE FOR THE SCULPTURAL CHAIR.

**PHOTOS** 1 DENGUE ZHOU 2 JUN ZHAO 3 NING HUANG



2



3



## 02\_NOTES ON PLAY FROM ABROAD

JENNA FRIZELL

**THE GENERAL PUBLIC** and professional designers often associate “play” solely with young children, but play can encompass broader concepts such as “movement,” “activity” and “exercise,” to extend to all users. Integrating play equipment seamlessly into landscape design can be challenging due to aesthetic concerns, yet it’s possible to maintain both functionality and visual appeal. Since COVID-19, we have seen people spending more and more time indoors, in isolation from their peers and a lack of freedom and socialization. Given this, how can we encourage people to reconnect with the outdoors and each other?

Consider incorporating “play” equipment that appeals to an older audience, along with sports and exercise amenities such as outdoor workout equipment and sports courts. I have previously worked on projects that include timber play for inclusive spaces with dual-use play equipment, such as jumping beams, pull-up and balance bars and climbing nets, which can offer adventurous play for children and fitness opportunities for adults. Introducing versatile equipment can enhance the functionality and overall interactivity of a public space with more imaginative play.

Materiality is important. Timber playgrounds offer an organic integration with the natural surroundings, providing a more environmentally friendly and sensory experience. Exploring Switzerland on a trip overseas, I noticed the use of natural materials within their public spaces and a focus on nature-oriented playgrounds (Fig.1). I was reminded of my favourite playground to visit as a child, the “Dream Park,” in my hometown on Prince Edward Island, built entirely with wood and featuring unique castle structures and inclusive play opportunities for all ages and abilities.

I encountered another intriguing play area in a residential neighbourhood in Amsterdam. The design sparked my interest as visitors of all ages actively utilized the space. On one visit, I observed two older men thoroughly



1

enjoying the “social swingset” (Fig.2). This swing set, reminiscent of the old “Glider swingset,” was designed for interaction and socialization, where movement on one side influences the other. While individual use is possible, the equipment was built for interactive play and enjoyment across all age groups. This kind of play equipment is proof that all ages can enjoy play spaces.

Psychologist James J. Gibson’s “Affordance Theory” explores how we interact with our physical surroundings and the potential for action and engagement with nature ([monoskop.org/images/c/c6/Gibson\\_James\\_J\\_1977\\_1979\\_The\\_Theory\\_of\\_Affordances.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/c/c6/Gibson_James_J_1977_1979_The_Theory_of_Affordances.pdf)). In the context of landscape design, the theory prompts us to consider the spatial and visual opportunities of site features and the potential for play and engagement. Design that incorporates “affordance” prioritizes enabling the *possibility* of action rather than dictating it. This is accomplished by integrating versatile play equipment, natural landforms and unconventional site elements to foster activity, exploration and social interaction. This perspective encourages designers to envision landscapes as environments conducive to activity, thereby creating engaging spaces. The theory considers people psychologically in a space to promote healthy lifestyles and positive visitor experiences.

“Elephant Park” in London, UK, is another example that left a lasting impression on me due to its inclusive and diverse public spaces. The park’s unconventional and organic pathways encourage exploration and exploratory movement. By simply incorporating wooden planks into planting beds, the designers created a playful element that encourages interaction with nature and other park features (Fig. 3, see page 13). I had the privilege to gain professional experience and intern at a



2

design firm in London, and I commuted through this park daily. I observed its popularity among the community, used by people of all ages, with an abundance of natural play features for children. The park stood out because of its thoughtful and sustainable design, considering environmental impacts and the local people redefining it as a landmark and gathering hub for the community of South London.

To foster more empowering and inclusive spaces, particularly for underrepresented groups, we must actively work to dismantle social and physical barriers. A critical step in ensuring cities are accommodating all genders and ages is to include females in leadership and decision-making positions. We hold the unique opportunity and privilege to craft public environments that are inclusive and accessible to all by speaking to the community and underrepresented groups. This enables landscape architects to dismantle social barriers and set new benchmarks, ultimately redefining the concept and broadening the perception of “play.” **LP**

**1** “TIMBER PLAYGROUND” IN MEGGEN, SWITZERLAND. **2** “SOCIAL SWINGSET” LOCATED IN ZAAANSTRAAT, AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS. **PHOTOS 1,2** JENNA FRIZELL



## 03\_2025 STUDENT AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE RECIPIENTS

EN\_

**THE STUDENT AWARD** of Excellence Program is based on the best work of: a) a thesis or practicum; and b) a studio project.

The Program is intended to recognize and promote excellence in the profession's educational institutions and recognize excellence in work by students in CSLA's LAAC-accredited programs. The Awards program replaces the CSLA Student Award of Merit.

This program is administered in cooperation with each accredited landscape architecture program in Canada.

Thank you to this year's jurors, Nastaran Moradinejad, Matt Williams and Tracey Hesse.

### THESIS OR PRACTICUM CATEGORY



**Jamie Coverini**  
(University of Manitoba, MLA)  
**Liminal drift; revealing the human hand in shaping the untouched Great Lake**

Lake Superior is often perceived as a pristine body of water, as the "untouched" or "least spoiled" of the Great Lakes. The rugged coastline of this vast inland sea has become a

symbol of the untamed North – a persisting wilderness in a world increasingly shaped by humans. While Lake Superior's northern geography has enabled it to escape much of the development of the lower Great Lakes, this does not mean the basin is unshaped by humans – just that the traces are harder to see.

Download the full executive summary here: [www.csla-aapc.ca/sites/csla-aapc.ca/files/jamie\\_20coverini\\_csla\\_20student\\_20award\\_20of\\_20excellence\\_submission.pdf](http://www.csla-aapc.ca/sites/csla-aapc.ca/files/jamie_20coverini_csla_20student_20award_20of_20excellence_submission.pdf)

### STUDIO PROJECT CATEGORY



**Francisco Labastida**  
(University of Calgary)  
**3lys1um: Reconnecting Suburbia for a Sustainable Future**

This project addresses the fragmentation of suburban land by focusing on the restoration and maintenance of ecosystems to support biodiversity. It seeks to enhance the quality of life for both residents and wildlife through thoughtful ecological design. The project also emphasizes the creation of small green corridors within neighborhoods, enabling

a more dynamic coexistence of human and natural systems. Revitalizing underutilized laneways forms another vital component, aiming to attract diverse demographics while fostering a sense of community and encouraging suburban densification.

Download the full executive summary here: [www.csla-aapc.ca/sites/csla-aapc.ca/files/20250117\\_csla\\_labastida\\_uncompressed.pdf](http://www.csla-aapc.ca/sites/csla-aapc.ca/files/20250117_csla_labastida_uncompressed.pdf) **LP**





# LAURÉATS DES PRIX D'EXCELLENCE ÉTUDIANTS 2025



FR\_

**LE PROGRAMME DE** Prix d'excellence pour étudiants est attribué aux travaux qui se démarquent dans le cadre de : a) d'une thèse ou d'un stage; b) d'un projet de studio.

Le programme vise à promouvoir l'excellence au sein des établissements d'enseignement et à souligner l'excellence des travaux d'étudiants des programmes agréés par le CAAP de l'AAPC. Le programme remplace le Prix du mérite étudiant de l'AAPC. Ce programme est administré en collaboration avec chaque programme d'architecture de paysage agréé au Canada.

Merci aux jurés de cette année, Nastaran Moradinejad, Matt Williams et Tracey Hesse. Le Prix d'excellence des étudiants est basé sur le meilleur travail d'une thèse ou d'un stage, et d'un projet d'atelier.

## CATÉGORIE THÈSE OU STAGE

**Jamie Coverini**

(Université du Manitoba, MAP)

**Dérive marginale ; révélation de la main de l'homme dans le façonnage du Grand Lac intact**

Le lac Supérieur est souvent perçu comme une masse d'eau vierge, comme le plus « intact » ou « le moins abîmé » des Grands Lacs. Le littoral accidenté de cette vaste mer intérieure est devenu un symbole du Nord sauvage – une nature encore sauvage dans un monde de plus en plus façonné par l'homme. Si la géographie septentrionale du lac Supérieur lui a permis d'échapper à une grande partie du développement des Grands Lacs inférieurs, cela ne signifie pas que le bassin n'a pas été façonné par l'homme, mais simplement que les traces sont plus difficiles à voir.

Télécharger le résumé complet : [www.aapc-csla.ca/sites/csla-aapc.ca/files/jamie\\_20coverini\\_csla\\_20student\\_20award\\_20of\\_20excellence\\_submission.pdf](http://www.aapc-csla.ca/sites/csla-aapc.ca/files/jamie_20coverini_csla_20student_20award_20of_20excellence_submission.pdf).

## CATÉGORIE DE PROJET DU STUDIO

**Francisco Labastida**

(Université de Calgary)

**3lvs1um : Reconnecter les banlieues pour un avenir durable**

Ce projet s'attaque à la fragmentation des terres suburbaines en se concentrant sur la restauration et l'entretien des écosystèmes pour soutenir la biodiversité. Il vise à améliorer la qualité de vie des habitants et de la faune grâce à une conception écologique réfléchie. Le projet met également l'accent sur la création de petits corridors verts au sein des quartiers, permettant une coexistence plus dynamique des systèmes humains et naturels. La revitalisation des allées sous-utilisées constitue un autre élément essentiel, visant à attirer des populations diverses tout en favorisant un sentiment d'appartenance à la communauté et en encourageant la densification des banlieues.

Télécharger le résumé complet : [www.aapc-csla.ca/sites/csla-aapc.ca/files/20250117\\_csla\\_labastida\\_uncompressed.pdf](http://www.aapc-csla.ca/sites/csla-aapc.ca/files/20250117_csla_labastida_uncompressed.pdf) LP

1 LIMINAL DRIFT. 2 SPECULATIVE TIMELINE.  
PHOTOS 1J. COVERINI 2 F. LABASTIDA



# 04\_ HEART HANGOUT: DESIGNING PLAY SPACES FOR EVERYONE (ELSE)

ALEX WAFFLE



**IN THE HEART** of downtown Kitchener, a vibrant pink sculpture stands out in the pedestrianized Gaukel Street Parkette. The Hangout Heart isn't just a piece of art; it's an iconic play structure designed by Earthscape Play with teenage girls in mind.

## The Genesis of the Hangout Heart: A Response to Teen Park Use

The idea for the Hangout Heart emerged from a simple observation: when teenagers

use traditional play structures, their presence can create tension with families of younger children, making them feel unwelcome. This realization led to a deeper investigation into how adolescents use – or don't use – public spaces.

Research from organizations such as Make Space for Girls in the U.K. ([www.makespaceforgirls.co.uk/](http://www.makespaceforgirls.co.uk/)) reveals a striking gender gap. While boys and girls use parks in nearly equal numbers before age eight, this balance shifts dramatically in adolescence. By age 13, boys account for 80% of adolescent park users, and as much as 92% of the users of multi-use game areas and skate parks. The research cites four major barriers that affect girls' use of public parks:

- Safety concerns;
- A lack of belonging;
- Poor aesthetic appeal; and
- Discomfort due to weather conditions or lack of thermal comfort.

These insights formed the design foundation for the Hangout Heart. The mission of the

Earthscape team was to create an inclusive space that directly addresses the needs and wants of teenage girls, offering them a place where they feel welcomed and empowered.

## Designing for Teens: Key Criteria and Features

Based on research, a focus group comprised of teen girls, and internal observations – our design team established key criteria for the design, including:

- Spaces for small groups (2–5 friends).
- Seating that allows face-to-face interaction.
- High vantage points for safety and a sense of empowerment.
- A balance between enclosure (privacy) and openness (security).
- Comfortable and clean materials that feel good to the touch.
- Play opportunities, especially climbing and swinging.

The result is a bold, bright and distinctly feminine structure. The Hangout Heart consists of three interlocking segments,





creating cozy nooks for teens to gather. It also incorporates play opportunities, with surfaces designed for climbing. As with all Earthscape structures, wood was the primary building material, providing a pleasant hand feel that remains comfortable to the touch at a wide range of temperatures. Wood also sets the Hangout Heart apart visually from traditional play equipment, further promoting engagement from teens.

Other key design elements include:

- **Inclusivity:** Openings at accessible heights ensure wheelchair users can interact with the structure or transfer into the lower segments.
- **Functionality:** Inset cupholders and storage nooks provide practical touches, allowing teens to stash backpacks or hold their drinks.
- **Safety and Privacy:** The circular arrangement offers a sense of enclosure without compromising visibility, ensuring teens feel secure while maintaining a connection to their surroundings.

#### Lessons and Impact

Since its installation, the Hangout Heart has become a popular hub for teens of all genders. Beyond the success of this specific project, three additional lessons can serve as a powerful blueprint for the creation of more compelling and inclusive spaces:

- Appropriate amounts of risk and graduated challenges are key to engaging diverse ages and skill levels.
- Abstract forms invite imagination and prevent the perception of a single, definitive way to engage with the equipment.
- Incorporating strategic lighting is crucial, as it extends the hours and usability of a space while also promoting safety.

Ultimately, the Hangout Heart proves that thoughtful and intentional design can diversify public spaces and make them genuinely welcoming to everyone. **LP**



**Alex Waffle, MLA, OALA, CSLA,** is a landscape architect and Partner at Earthscape Play. He has been involved in all aspects of playground design, development and installation for hundreds of playground projects across North America and now, around the world.



1

## 05\_COOL GARDENS 2025: FANS, FLOWERS + FLAMINGOS

JAYA BEANGE

**DURING THE SUMMER** of 2025, installations dazzled visitors across Winnipeg with recycled soda cans shimmering in the sun, a giant fan spinning to the rhythmic cycling of passersby and urban gardens inviting visitors to harvest directly from the street. This was Storefront Manitoba's *Cool Gardens 2025*, the tenth and largest iteration of Winnipeg's international design competition and festival of landscape art and design.

Nine installations (including five winners and four invited projects) from local and international designers were situated at five key sites across the city. Curator Abigail Auld led this year's festival with a focus on sustainability, asking design teams to consider environmental impact and the afterlife of their construction materials.

At Assiniboine Park, *PAIRIDAEZA*, by Yasaman Kashani, Madeleine Dafoe and

Calvin Tan, assembled a geometric canopy of aluminum cans inspired by Persian gardens. *Petals in Perspective*, by Petal Design, installed simple shapes that used anamorphic perspective, requiring viewers to move their bodies to assemble composite images of the Prairie Crocus and the endangered Western Spiderwort.

In Osborne Village, *OSBO* by SKHLD reimagined the social life of a forgotten alley, creating a playful community living room from elements reminiscent of lava lamps.

On Graham Avenue, *Anything for a Breeze* by Halifax-based OSO Planning+Design, invited visitors to hop on a bicycle to power a giant fan. *The Living Shore* by Nyta Design (New York/Washington DC) repurposed straw wattle, typically used for erosion control, to create a serpentine garden bed suggesting the curves of Winnipeg's rivers. *Tawnday pe' oototayan?* by representatives from the Manitoba Métis Federation explored relationships with the land and language, integrating plant species from regions that

**1PAIRIDAEZA PRINT.**  
**PHOTO KAREN ASHER**





2



3

many Métis call home. Art City contributed a playful and interactive castle-like structure, the *Downtown Art City Street Sculpture*, designed and built by local youth.

Nearby at the Forks, *Woven Relations*, created by faculty and students from

**2** PAIRIDAEZA PRINT. **3** WOVEN RELATIONS PRINT. **4** ANYTHING BUT A BREEZE. PHOTOS KAREN ASHER

the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Architecture, explored the idea of weaving, of cultures and ecosystems, through built and organic forms.

Across the bridge at La maison des artistes visuelles francophones, *berdie* by derdie of Saskatoon, entertained visitors with a disc golf course in the outdoor sculpture garden where the targets were the necks of whimsical pink flamingos.



4

Through fans, flowers and flamingos, Cool Gardens 2025 proved that sustainability can be playful, poetic, and profoundly human, while inviting everyone to participate in imagining a greener future. **LP**



**Jaya Beange**, is the Executive Director of Storefront Manitoba and a Sessional Instructor at the University of Manitoba Faculty of Architecture and School of Art. She is interested in the dynamic relationship that exists between ethics and aesthetics, in how our shared aesthetic experience can serve as a foundation for communities that are happy, healthy, equitable and sustainable.



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INGRID VAIVADS

# FOREVER CAREFREE + 4-YEARS-OLD

THE ORIGIN OF PLAY IS ANYTHING BUT FUN.  
PLAY HAS EVOLVED FROM OUR FIGHT TO SURVIVE.

1

&gt; FR\_LP+

SANS SOUCI POUR TOUJOURS

Pourquoi, où et comment nous jouons remonte au début de notre existence. Le jeu est puissant.

**WHENEVER MY OLDER** brother got out of our dad's motorboat, he raced up to the ice-age rock at the top of the garden, started his imaginary outboard on his imaginary one-seater boat (no life jackets required). Propelled by his soaring imagination he blasted off.

He was the captain of his own ship – Master of his destiny – Land Ho!

This was 1965, during the early days of the Astronaut program. As kids, we were lightly supervised at the cottage. That same boy, with his big, powerful black and yellow checkerboard Martian Firecrackers, the most powerful you could get, would gang them together to make rocket motors for the rocket shells he fashioned from silver duct tape.

These early carefree adventures helped shape my brother's future adult self in both engine combustion research and as a pilot.

Why, where and how we play goes back to the beginning of our existence. Play is powerful.

Through ancient rituals and rites of passage to games of skill, make believe

**If we didn't play, we wouldn't be who we are today"**

– Idris Elba, Narrator **HUMAN PLAYGROUND**, Netflix 2022

and the business of sport, play happens everywhere. We play in our backyards, in our neighborhoods and at global destination attractions. We play for purpose, entertainment, leisure and simply for fun.

## What goes on behind making the ordinary extraordinary

In its purest form, play is live entertainment.

Unrehearsed in the backyard sand box, mischief-making through a spooky Halloween walkthrough – whether organic, gritty or staged and sociable, play is intensely joyful. The value of carefree play experience is priceless.

Whatever or wherever the playscape concept:

- a public waterfront on the Persian Gulf,
- a science center on the Canadian Shield,
- a kids club at a resort on the Red Sea,
- a waterpark resort deep in the forests of northern France,
- a flagship resort in Macau,
- in global theme parks based on the Intellectual Property of branded products, books and movies
- a curious mischievous journey through a mountain arboretum in Southeast Asia.

How we program, plan, design and layer vivid detail into each unique play place vision – ensuring imagination, spontaneity, freedom and emotion – is deeply rooted in quantifiable metrics, compelling storytelling and serious creative expression.

## Getting it right by the numbers

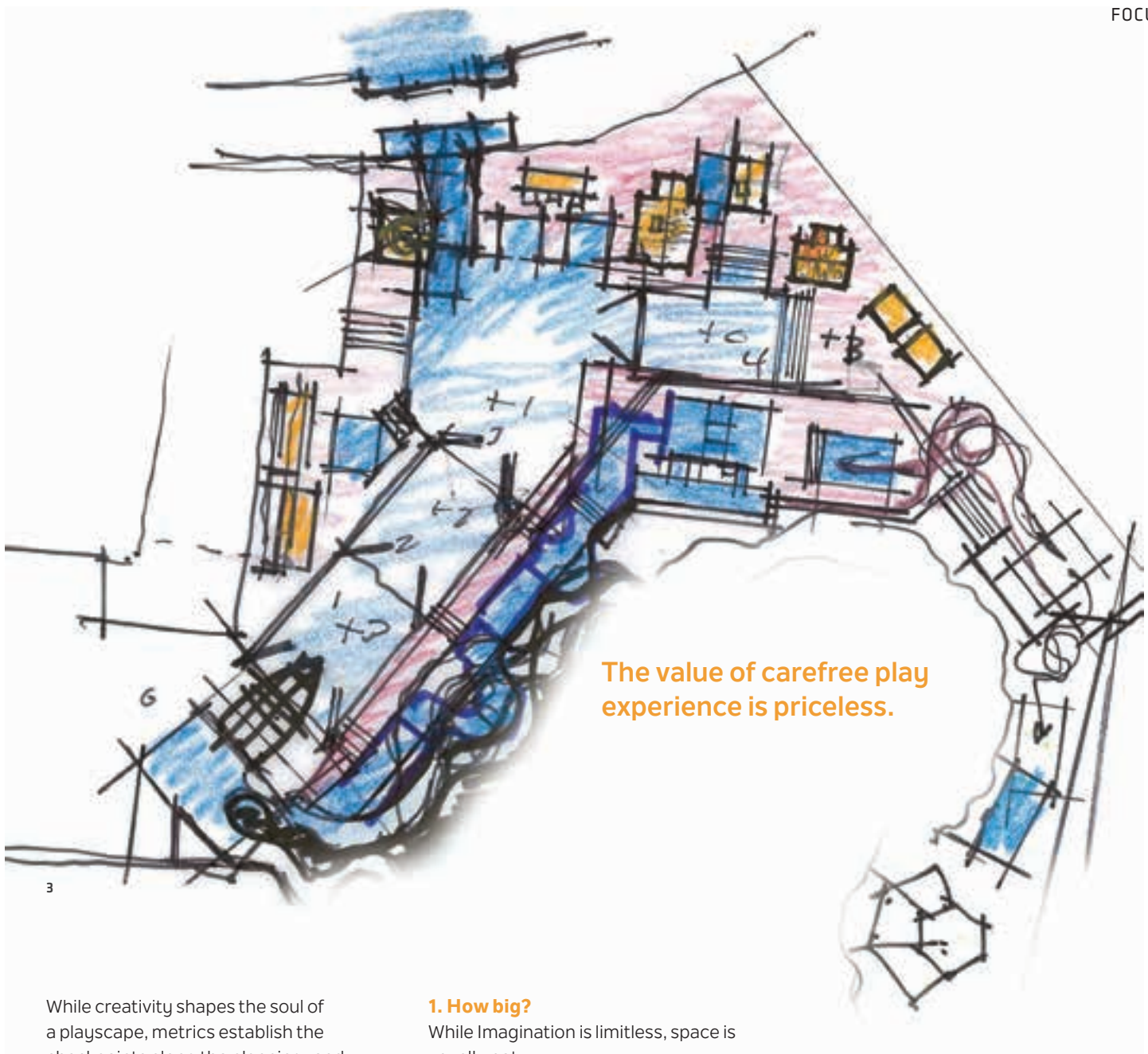
How big, what kind of activities and how much is enough?

As a young designer and early bird to the office, I gathered endless pages of daily attendance reports from a global entertainment powerhouse spilling out of the fax machine, delivering them to the entertainment expert for review. Within those curious lines of data lay the mysteries of quantifiable entertainment metrics.



2





The value of carefree play experience is priceless.

While creativity shapes the soul of a playscape, metrics establish the checkpoints along the planning road. Just like a great story needs structure, a great play environment needs a carefully considered framework – one that ensures the elements forming the experience are magical and measurable.

Years of experience in the art and science of entertainment programming have shown us that a successful experience is guided by quantifiable metrics. Having this deep understanding is a niche specialty. Consider the following metrics:

### 1. How big?

While Imagination is limitless, space is usually not.

- Based on attendance projections, we plan for Instant Capacity: Design Day Peak in Park (DDPIP) – the number of guests expected in an attraction at a peak time
- The overall project size is determined by proxemics and project type. How many square meters per person are needed to support the desired experience and operations
- Spatial planning considers target percentages of built forms, attractions, hardscape, softscape elements, proximity relationships and walkable distances.

**Key Insight:** Sizing metrics establish a basis of design such that all the physical elements forming the play experience have the just right scale, just right fit and provide a comfortable just right amount of space.

### 2. What activities?

Variety contributes to interesting play experiences for all.

- A balanced mix of play type activities is proportioned according to age demographics, emotional experiences and performance targets for skill, thrill and story-driven content

**Key Insight:** Chart based evaluation matrices inform the what, the who and the why – while the designer develops “the where” all tied together within the arc of the story.

1 MY BROTHER & HIS MOTORBOAT, GRAHAM LAKE. 2 PORTAL GUARDIANS. 3 SEAPORT STORY-BEAT SKETCH STUDY. 4 CAPTURING THE SPIRIT OF AMANDA'S SWINGERS.

PHOTOS 1 FAMILY COLLECTION 2,3,4 INGRID VAIVADS





### 3. How Much?

How we pace an intentional pulse of place.

- The Theoretical Hourly Capacity (THC) measures how many people can be entertained or engaged per hour to achieve the appropriate Entertainment Units per Hour.
- Do we have enough Entertainment Units per Hour (EUH) to meet the program goals and experience expectations? EUH calculations are dependent on the projected Instant Capacity and projected dwell time. These metrics are one key in rationalizing the scale of capital expenditure as how much play can be higher for a dense area, and lower for a pastoral rural setting.

**Key Insight:** Ensuring the participants have enough to do, are not waiting too long for an activity or the place does not feel empty and abandoned.

Getting that balance right for community spaces or global destination experiences is guided by fundamental and fascinating

metrics. Metrics, are the entertainment math driving creation. When we “get it right by the numbers,” create an interesting story and, finally, filling a special magical play place with people.

#### Getting seriously creative

With a spreadsheet of facts and figures, a compelling creative concept, a budget-conscious program and clear planning goals, the design process begins – with springy markers onto the softness of trace paper.

It is a magical, playful and deeply personal process to explore what is “just enough play” as the story unfolds into a vivid concept plan. Not too big, not too small – just right. Calling Goldilocks!

#### Telling new stories

Whether crafting a new fantasy playscape or bringing a well-known Intellectual Property (IP) to life, every project requires a quantifiable program, a clever narrative, a deep understanding of place and some serious creativity.

From characters and landscape forms to spatial arrangements and material details, we compose the arc of a story. We choose light, shade, texture, scale and sound to heighten emotional connection.

When narrative is expressed through careful attention to the sensory and stylistic qualities of space, participants immerse themselves in every layer of the experience.

Play is often inventive and non-linear. As is design.

Creative playscapes expand the ordinary with unusual elements and activities in unexpected settings.

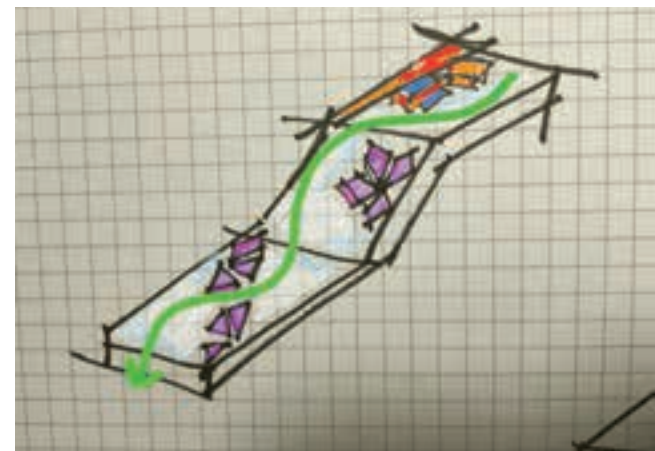
These environments invite intuitive exploration. Participants co-create their own stories within the framework of an imaginative backstory.

#### Ageless imaginative play

Set on the Red Sea coast, a seaport-themed Resort & Kids Club is under construction to bring to life a unique backstory: a trio of seafaring animal Guardians with a special place in ancient seaport culture, each with a personality and an ethos rooted in environmental and social goodness.

Guests of all ages are welcomed by a peaceful turtle, a protective lynx and a helpful dragonfly, who are hosts of distinct play habitats woven throughout the resort.

Every generation may connect with each Guardian, who reflects aspects of our own personalities and with their playful antics. As we see ourselves in these characters, we take a step deeper into the story.







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**With a spreadsheet of facts and figures, a compelling creative concept, a budget-conscious program and clear planning goals, the design process begins – with springy markers onto the softness of trace paper.**

#### **A hero-centric extraordinary playful experience**

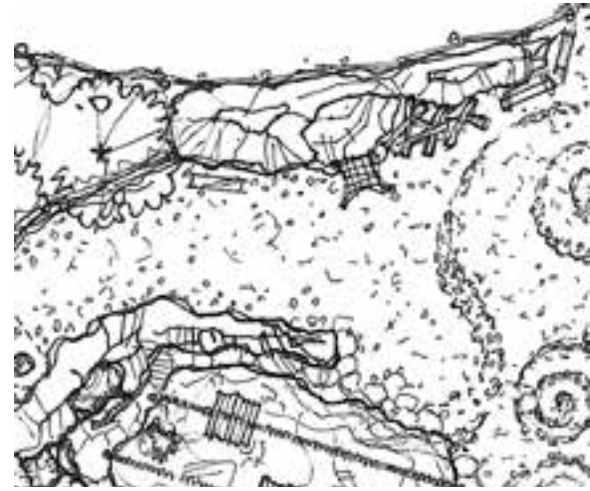
In landmark mountainous terrain – a snail shell-inspired experimental arboretum and wonder garden had to be spectacular and original.

The concept: a multilevel, experimental biodome where a playful flower-child eco-engineer creates and displays interactive botanical amusements for her visitors.

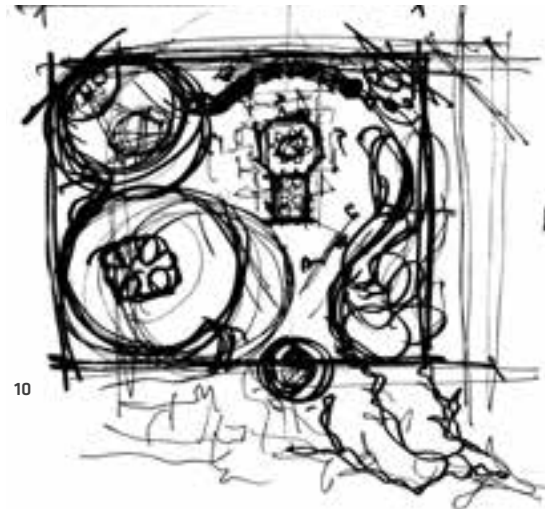
Your walk-through journey begins when crossing a threshold of strange vegetation to traverse high into a lush forest canopy, crossing a precarious tangled vine bridge and zipping along a suspended track. Wherever you look – around, up or do you dare look down(?) – are inspiring vistas and out-of-this-world scenes.

Evocative theatrical effects, kinetic botanical curiosities and vibrant scenes

**5** A LIGHT TOUCH OF WHIMSY ON CLASSICAL ELEMENTS. **6, 7** ICY THEME IDEATION "PART I". **8** BOTANICAL CURIOSITIES CONCEPT. **9** TEXTURE & MATERIAL EXPRESSION OF A NATURE-BASED PLAYScape. **10** CAPACITY AND SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT OF STORY DRIVEN PLAY ELEMENTS. **PHOTOS 5-10** INGRID VAIVADS



9



10

are staged to surprise and delight. Every twist and turn reveals a new show set, mixing nature, technology and storytelling in a thoroughly original and entertaining way.

#### **Bringing intellectual property & brands to life – seriously creative**

Bringing the Intellectual Property of beloved entertainment brands of play products, books and movies to life is nirvana for creators and participants.

Expressing the magic of an IP lies in understanding the deep DNA, characters, narratives, stories, themes, "do's and don'ts" of scale and design style guides. Applying these rich resources in the creation of new deeply immersive play experiences in our physical world is magical.

Whether it's a "build your own" experience or a fully immersive "be the hero" environment, these worlds come to life with props, vivid sets and theatrical effects that reflect the heart of the brand into your own experience.



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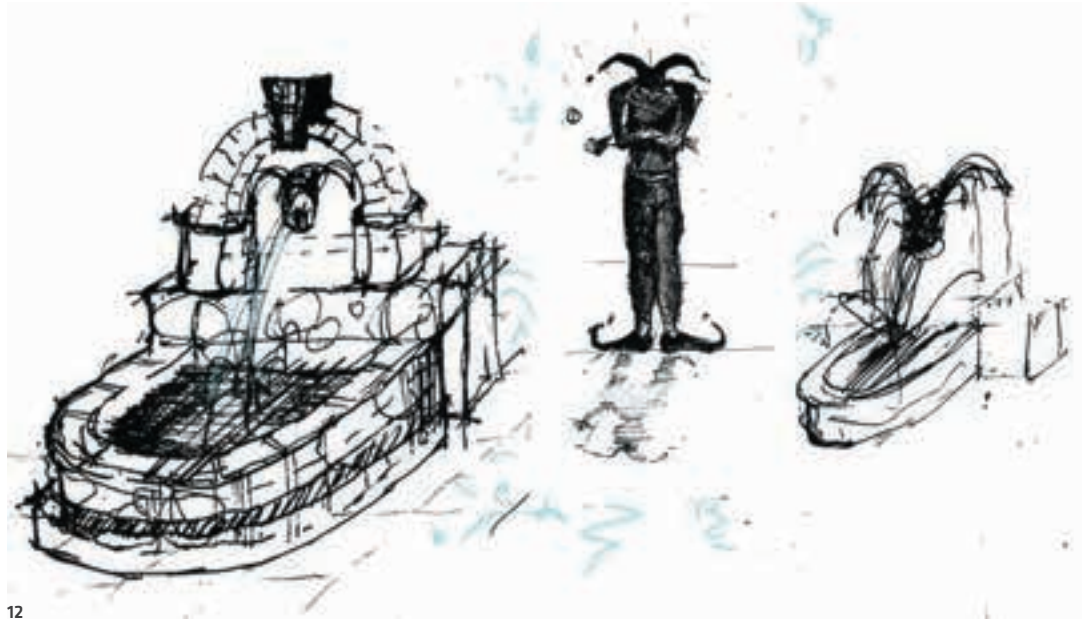
### Evaluating community play: It's their stories

Storytelling, a constructed narrative, entertainment quality, quantity and performance metrics all provide a complete creative and programming framework to guide the design process of deeply engaging unique play experiences.

When play environments in our communities are assessed, the process often focuses on one vector of objective measurable data: visitation patterns, dwell time, maintenance records, injury rates and was there a theme perhaps to celebrate a significant moment in their history or unearth a hidden story from the past?

A data-driven checklist is necessary, but metrics alone won't capture the full picture – most of all when it comes to inclusive, meaningful play experiences. To see the full story – especially when it comes to the lived experiences of those using these spaces – how do we truly understand the *value* of a play place or experience?

To gain deeper insight into how play is valued by experience – particularly by people who engage with play in very unique ways – I spoke with expert Amanda Bernier, a Community Participation Facilitator at Developmental Services in Leeds & Grenville. Amanda supports a very special group of individuals – adults with developmental disabilities.



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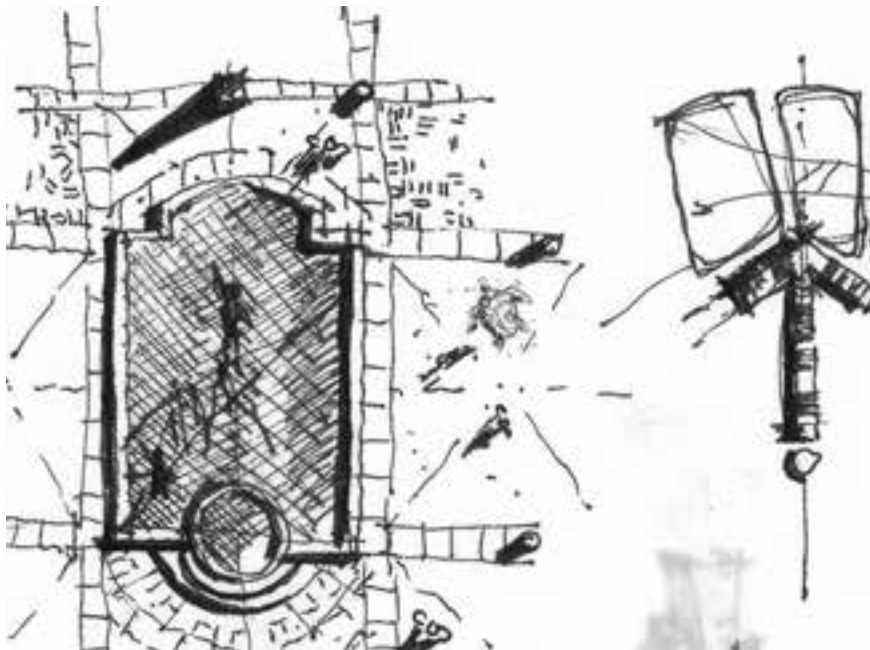
Through their stories and preferences, we begin to understand that the value of play environments is founded in both the application of the tools we use in the complex design process and day-to-day observational insights.

Amanda shares that the most valued play experiences and environments for her group are often rich in choice, sensory value, creativity and nature-based stimulation. Amanda considers how well a place is equipped with the experiences that are of interest to her group:

- **The excitement of choosing where to go:** Her clients love the freedom to choose the day's outdoor destination.

Whether it's nature-based crafts or into a park for a spontaneous basketball game played in their own game style and rules, or both.

- **Diverse play choices and experiences:** A participant may ride down a slide a few times and then move on to wander about or watch the dogs in the off-leash park.
- **Sensory-rich experiences:** Swings are an absolute standout and not only for a few minutes. It's the stimulating motion, a calming rhythm, feeling the summer sun and the enjoyment of the apparent wind created by movement when everyone swings all together.
- **Art and expression:** At Laurier Hill, it is often a "do what you want kind of day." Under the shade of a pavilion, some in the group paint rocks inspired by the Kindness Rock Movement. One participant "... wants to keep them, so we paint two rocks – one to leave behind and one to keep." This simple act reveals the deep personal meaning of creative expression for her.
- **Nature:** A favorite destination for the group is the Mac Johnson Conservation Creek Area. Nature is the star with pond hikes, an open field to kick around a soccer ball and to listen to the sounds of nature, with just the right amount of stimulation for everyone.



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11 TESTING GEOMETRY, SPACE & SCALE. 12 EXPLORING A CHARACTER IN WATER PLAY. 13 BACK POND (MAC JOHNSON CONSERVATION AREA). 14 EARLY PLAYSCAPE CONCEPT CHARACTERISTICS AND SPATIAL STUDY.

PHOTOS 11-14 NGRID VAIVADS



## ... the true value of play lies in the stories people create for themselves in these spaces.

Amanda's experience shows us that the true value of play lies in the stories people create for themselves in these spaces. Whether it's painting rocks, a spontaneous game or the hours spent swinging, the smiles, giggles and laughter reveal the emotional core of great play experiences as that something special which happens. When we embrace these deep insights, guided by quantitative entertainment metrics, and a good supply of trace paper, we have powerful tools to begin the process of achieving places for "something special" to happen.

### Final thoughts

Creating imaginative and social play environments that stand out and provide long-term value for participants, communities, owners and operators alike that are fun, IS FUN!

The magic of expressing an idea, line by line, into a whimsical experience often yields very unexpected results. Playful sketching has the power to shape a unique concept.

Designing for imagination, emotion, spontaneity and freedom is a complex magical evolution. It aligns strategic goals, big and little expectations, user aspirations, function, cultural relevance, beauty of the environment, market dynamics,



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entertainment capacity, activity programs and, above all, a compelling creative vision.

When that vision is rooted in a "just right" story expressed through the master plan, characters and thoughtful detail, the possibilities are limitless.

This is true, especially when a child's imagination is sparked, as simply as when Bill Watterson's Calvin said to Hobbes: "Look! A trickle of water running through some dirt! I'd say our afternoon just got booked solid!"

Whether a staged play attraction or found play in a simple muddy puddle, play has the power to change us all. **LP**



LUCIA BLANCO

# REFLECTIONS ON DESIGN APPROACHES FOR OUTDOOR PLAY



&gt; FR\_LP+

RÉFLEXION SUR L'APPROCHE  
CONCEPTUELLE DU JEU

Passer en revue d'anciens projets d'aménagement révèle comment les lieux évoluent et vieillissent, leurs utilisations et leurs formes de jeu parfois inattendues.

**PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAYS OFFER** a powerful way to reflect on past work, particularly in landscape architecture. Revisiting built projects through images

reveals how spaces evolve and age, how people engage with them, and how unexpected forms of play emerge, or do not. This kind of retrospective not only documents the ephemeral qualities of play but also helps to accentuate its role in public life. These collections invite us to pause and observe quiet narratives that unfold in play spaces, moments of improvisation, joy, companionship or absence that reveal how a space can be used.

*Landscapes of Play: A Collection of Imaginative Spaces in Japan* will be a self-published book available this winter and will explore Japan's unique and influential approach to outdoor play design, beginning with Mitsuru Senda's pioneering of the "play apparatus" concept of the 1960s and extending to more contemporary play environments at the Showa Memorial Park in Tokyo. Through a combination of photography, research and personal reflections, it documents

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how these environments invite children and adults to play in ways that transcend conventional designs.

The book also features a conversation with Norihiro Kanekiyo from Takano Landscape Planning – the office responsible for several of the projects in the book – which offers deep insight into their design approach to play and the role of nature in the conceptualization of these spaces. More importantly, it reflects on how the socio-cultural values and design trends around play have evolved over the past decades in both Asian and North American contexts, providing readers with a broader perspective to understand play spaces as social infrastructure for building healthier and more connected communities.

### A Visual Study of Play Spaces

In 2024, the idea of creating a visual study of collected play space images started during my first visit to Japan, as a way to document inspiring designs and explore new materials, concepts and scales of play. The goal of the project was to advocate for embedding diverse play typologies into the urban fabric, taking lessons from the spaces I would observe in my walks through the streets of Kyoto, Tamano and Tokyo. My hope through this book is to encourage the creation of more context-specific and unique play experiences that support communities in imagining, creating

and connecting with their surroundings. With luck, it will invite designers to uncover new opportunities for play in the public realm – looking specifically at residual spaces, overlooked corners or any site with

the potential to catalyze social interaction and playful connection.

Designing for outdoor play demands a continued curiosity and an experimental mindset from landscape architects – ideally grounded in a participatory process that invites dialogue, shares authorship and deepens our understanding of place. Leaning into our curiosity allows us to thoughtfully introduce new playful dynamics, with the objective of fostering healthier social interactions that can emerge naturally. It is important for landscape architects to consistently prototype and rethink conventional collaborative approaches for play design.



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**1** COLOURFUL TEXTILE HAMMOCK DESIGNED BY TAKANO LANDSCAPE PLANNING. **2** WATER PLAY: CHILDREN'S VILLAGE DESIGNED BY ERIC MCMILLAN. **3** FOG FOREST DESIGNED BY TAKANO LANDSCAPE PLANNING.

**PHOTOS 1,3** JAPAN, LUCIA BLANCO  
**2** CANADA, TORONTO CITY ARCHIVES





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Continued research, reflection and experimentation within the practice can help uncover new ways to introduce play into our daily life. In this way, photographic essays and similar forms of sensory-driven observation can become vital design tools, helping us learn from, and build upon, the often overlooked moments of play that shape the public realm.

### Play Apparatuses

One of the images presented in this book features one of the aforementioned “play apparatuses,” a concept introduced by Mitsuru Senda, founder of the Environment Design Institute in Japan in 1968, to describe a toy or structure that stimulates free play. At first glance, the apparatus resembles a familiar playground element: a slide. Yet a closer look reveals how familiar symbols can be reinterpreted to create something unexpected. The only way to reach the starting platform is by climbing up the slide itself, adding a twist that re-contextualizes entirely how one interacts with the object. The thinking

behind this design builds on Senda’s observation that “children are extremely interested in any kind of slope and soon compete with each other on one”.<sup>1</sup>

Children learn from each other to define their own rules through experimentation and improvisation, and this added challenge to “enjoying” the slide can be a conduit for development. This example demonstrates how traditional play equipment, such as slides, swings and seesaws (play components that are recognizable across all generations), can be reimagined and reintroduced in new ways. By reframing their use, they could become bridges between past and present, honouring familiar forms while inviting new playful possibilities. In doing so, they foster intergenerational learning, collaboration and reinforce a sense of shared memory and belonging within communities.

Another set of projects presented in this book is the visionary environments





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of Showa Memorial Park, developed by Takano Landscape Planning in the 1980s in collaboration with a number of local Japanese artists. These spaces, featuring climbable colourful textile hammocks, fog-filled forests and bouncing domes function as much more than enclosed playgrounds. Over the decades, they have become cultural landmarks that inspire creativity, nurture empathy and cultivate a strong sense of community.

### “Risk” in Play

Beyond showcasing their unique designs, the book also highlights different maintenance and funding models that have supported these spaces, as well as the emblematic collaborations between landscape architects and artists that made them possible. Most importantly, these projects reflect a cultural understanding

of “risk” in play, not as something to be avoided, but as an essential element of the play experience that is fundamental to children’s development.

In the North American context, between the 1950s and 1980s, landscape architects and designers such as Richard Dattner and Robert Royston in the United States, Cornelia Hahn Oberlander and Eric McMillan in Canada, and Mario Pani and Fabian Medina Ramos in Mexico created bold and innovative forms of outdoor play, many of which would be difficult to imagine being built today. Currently, CSA standards and overprotective tendencies towards play design, along with the practical constraints of many projects such as tight deadlines, limited budgets and the need to fulfill equipment “checklists,” have significantly impacted the time and creative freedom available to designers.

To move play design forward, it is helpful to look back and examine how play cultures have evolved. What might we learn, for example, by revisiting old Canadian play designs that could not be built under the present day “safety regime”? What insights could we gain from the massive climbing nets, dynamic water play areas, and other experimental structures designed by McMillan for the Children’s Village in Toronto? Or from the nature-based structures with integrated trees and loose parts envisioned by Hahn Oberlander in Montreal? Rediscovering these examples may offer valuable lessons for reimagining what play can be in our current urban

landscapes and provide insights into the social and cultural conditions that once allowed such visionary spaces to emerge.

Going forward, we must collectively adopt a new way of thinking about the design of outdoor play spaces, one that values collaboration, experimentation, inclusivity, creativity and long-term cultural impact. Landscape architects, design-build playground companies, municipal decision-makers, developers, educators and all those with the authority to fund, approve, maintain or integrate play into public and private projects must recognize their profound role in shaping healthy, inclusive and socially connected communities. These are not secondary amenities, but essential civic infrastructure that supports lifelong well-being and social connection. At the same time, landscape architects must be encouraged to push norms and engage in research that can inform our design process. This includes critically evaluating past and current practices, learning from them and adapting strategies to contemporary needs and concerns. By embracing interdisciplinary collaboration and a deeper intercultural understanding of play, we can reclaim its role as a transformative force in shaping our built environments. **LP**

### References

1. Senda, M. and Ichinowatari, K. (1982) *Process Architecture No. 30- Playgrounds and Play Apparatus*. Tokyo: Process Architecture Publishing Co.

**4, 5** SLIDE: PLAY APPARATUS DESIGNED BY MITSURA SENDA. **6** NET: CHILDREN’S VILLAGE DESIGNED BY ERIC MCMILLAN. **7** ROTATING STRUCTURE: PLAY APPARATUS DESIGNED BY MITSURA SENDA. **8** TOWER: CHILDREN’S CREATIVE CENTRE PLAYGROUND DESIGNED BY CORNELIA HAHN OBERLANDER. **9** WATER PLAY: CHILDREN’S VILLAGE DESIGNED BY ERIC MCMILLAN.  
**PHOTOS 4, 5** JAPAN, PLAYGROUNDS AND PLAY APPARATUS - PROCESS ARCHITECTURE PUBLISHING CO. **6** CANADA, TORONTO CITY ARCHIVES. **7** JAPAN, PLAYGROUNDS AND PLAY APPARATUS - PROCESS ARCHITECTURE PUBLISHING CO. **8** CANADA, CANADIAN CENTRE OF ARCHITECTURE. **9** CANADA, TORONTO CITY ARCHIVES.



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LUCAS CONAN

# PLAY, A FRAGILE SPARK OF CONVIVIALITY: WHEN HANOI COMES TOGETHER

**HANOI OVERFLOWS.** ITS streets are a constant stream of scooters; the narrow alleys are filled with shouts, smells and colors; buildings are pressed tightly against one another in almost suffocating density. But behind this vibrant energy lies another, more discreet reality: that of a city fragmented by social segregation.

Since the **Đổi Mới** reforms in 1986, the Vietnamese capital has seen the arrival of hundreds of thousands of migrants from rural areas, whether temporarily or permanently. Their presence is now an

intrinsic part of the city. Yet this massive migration has been accompanied by a persistent divide. Residents considered “permanent” enjoy the status of being “civilized” and a certain stability, while migrants, often relegated to precarious jobs and temporary housing, are perceived as a homogeneous group with an inferior, “uncivilized” status. They are tolerated rather than accepted, sometimes blamed for contributing to the “social ills” of the capital. In public space, these two populations cross paths but rarely meet.

Neighboring relations are often reduced to superficial exchanges, and there are few places capable of fostering genuine connection.

It is in this context that, in the southern district of Tan Mai, an open-air laboratory emerged. In 2019, a small 718 m<sup>2</sup> vacant lot was transformed into a playground and community garden through the collaboration of local governance,

PHOTOS 1,2 LUCAS CONAN



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# LE JEU, ÉTINCELLE FRAGILE DE CONVIVIALITÉ : QUAND HANOÏ SE RASSEMBLE



**HANOÏ DÉBORDE.** DANS ses rues, la circulation est un flot ininterrompu de scooters, les ruelles se remplissent de cris, d'odeurs et de couleurs, les immeubles se pressent les uns contre les autres dans une densité presque suffocante. Mais derrière cette énergie foisonnante se cache une autre réalité, plus discrète : celle d'une ville fragmentée par la ségrégation sociale.

Depuis les réformes du *Đổi Mới* 1986, la capitale vietnamienne a vu affluer des centaines de milliers de migrants venus des campagnes que ce soit de manière temporaire ou définitive. Leur présence est aujourd'hui constitutive de la ville. Pourtant, cette migration massive s'accompagne d'un clivage persistant. Les habitants dits « permanents » bénéficient d'un statut de « civilisé » et d'une certaine stabilité, tandis que les migrants, souvent cantonnés à des emplois précaires et à des logements temporaires, sont perçus comme un groupe homogène associé à un statut inférieur « incivilisé ». Ils sont tolérés plutôt qu'acceptés, parfois accusés de contribuer aux « maux sociaux » de la capitale. Dans l'espace public, ces deux populations se croisent, mais sans vraiment se rencontrer. Les relations de voisinage se réduisent souvent à des échanges superficiels, et rares sont les lieux capables de susciter un véritable rapprochement.

C'est dans ce contexte qu'au sud de la ville, le quartier de Tan Mai est devenu un laboratoire à ciel ouvert. En 2019, un petit terrain en friche de 718 m<sup>2</sup> y a été transformé en aire de jeux et jardin communautaire, grâce à la collaboration entre la gouvernance locale, UN-Habitat, ThinkPlaygrounds!, organisation

vietnamienne pionnière dans la création d'espaces participatifs, HealthBridge, ONG internationale Canado-vietnamienne œuvrant pour des environnements urbains plus sains, et une cinquantaine d'habitants. La conception a été aussi originale que le résultat : les habitants ont été invités à imaginer l'aménagement à travers des ateliers participatifs utilisant notamment le célèbre jeu vidéo Minecraft. Les enfants, plus à l'aise avec le jeu vidéo, apprenaient aux parents et aux aînés à manipuler l'interface pour co-dessiner le futur parc. Cette scène, où les hiérarchies d'âge s'inversaient, a transformé la co-conception en un premier jeu collectif, une expérience sociale avant même l'ouverture du lieu.

Lorsque je suis arrivé sur place, j'ai découvert un espace modeste mais vibrant, une poche de respiration au milieu du béton. Très vite, le rôle du jeu s'est imposé comme une évidence : il devenait un langage commun. Un père migrant me dit : « *Mon enfant joue avec des enfants du quartier, qu'ils soient migrants ou Hanoïens.* » Dans une ville où les trajectoires sociales restent habituellement parallèles, cette phrase illustre la capacité du jeu à effacer, ne serait-ce que temporairement, les frontières sociales. Les enfants abolissaient spontanément les distances, et derrière eux, les adultes trouvaient à leur tour un terrain de rencontre. Une mère migrante confiait : « *Grâce à l'aire de jeux, je fais la connaissance d'autres personnes du quartier. Je discute souvent avec elles quand je fais de l'exercice.* » Ces échanges, simples mais réels, sont





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UN-Habitat, ThinkPlaygrounds! – a Vietnamese organization pioneering participatory space-making – HealthBridge, a Canada-Vietnam NGO advocating for healthier urban environments, and about 50 residents. The design process was as original as the outcome: residents were invited to imagine the space through participatory workshops that used, among other tools, the famous video game Minecraft. Children, more comfortable with the game, taught parents and elders how to use the interface to co-design the future park. This scene, where age hierarchies were inverted, transformed co-design into a first collective game, a social experience even before the space opened.

When I arrived on site, I found a modest yet vibrant space – a pocket of breathing room amidst the concrete. Very quickly, the role of play imposed itself as obvious: it became a common language. A migrant father told me: *“My child plays with the neighborhood children, whether they are migrants or Hanoians.”* In a city where social trajectories usually run in parallel, this phrase illustrated the power of play to erase, even if only temporarily, social boundaries. Children spontaneously dissolved the distances, and behind them, adults found a ground for meeting. A migrant mother explained: *“Thanks to the playground, I get to know other people in the neighborhood. I often talk with them when I exercise.”* These simple yet real exchanges became the first bricks of a shared social fabric.

Interviews conducted in the neighborhood show that the site not only consolidated existing ties but also, in some cases, shifted perceptions between migrants and non-migrants. Three years after its inauguration – and despite a period marked by the global Covid-19 pandemic, strict lockdowns, and the return of some migrants to their home villages – a majority of users reported improved social relations. Sociability took multiple forms: distant observation, greetings, prolonged conversations, advice passed from elders to younger generations. A migrant explained: *“I come to the site to talk with older people. Our conversations bring me useful advice.”* The park, initially conceived for children, thus became a stage for intergenerational sociability.

### Multifunctional, Accessible & Safe

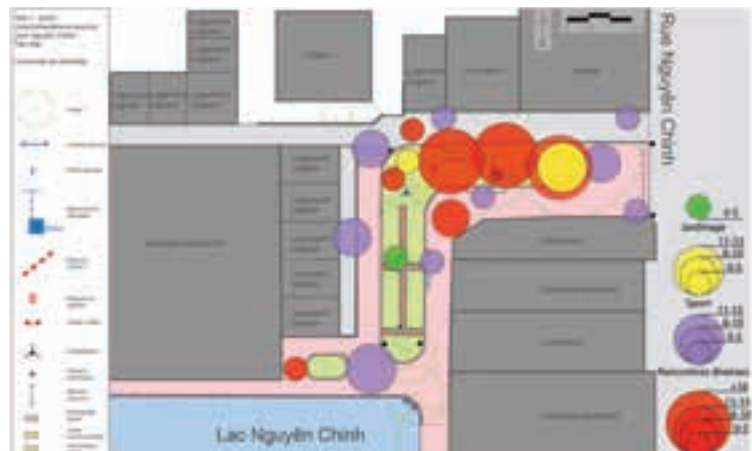
The site's success lies largely in its multifunctionality. Play equipment, sports facilities, shaded benches, resting areas, and the community garden coexist in a compact layout. This plurality attracts diverse profiles and multiplies opportunities for contact: parents chatting while watching their children, young adults interacting while exercising, older people conversing on a bench. The site's accessibility, located at the heart of the neighborhood like an unavoidable passage, further strengthens this diverse attendance. These observations led me to formalize a pyramid of factors that shape opportunities for interaction.

At the base of this pyramid are essential conditions: safety, accessibility, and material comfort, which ensure the space is used. Next come programming

PHOTOS 3-8 LUCAS CONAN

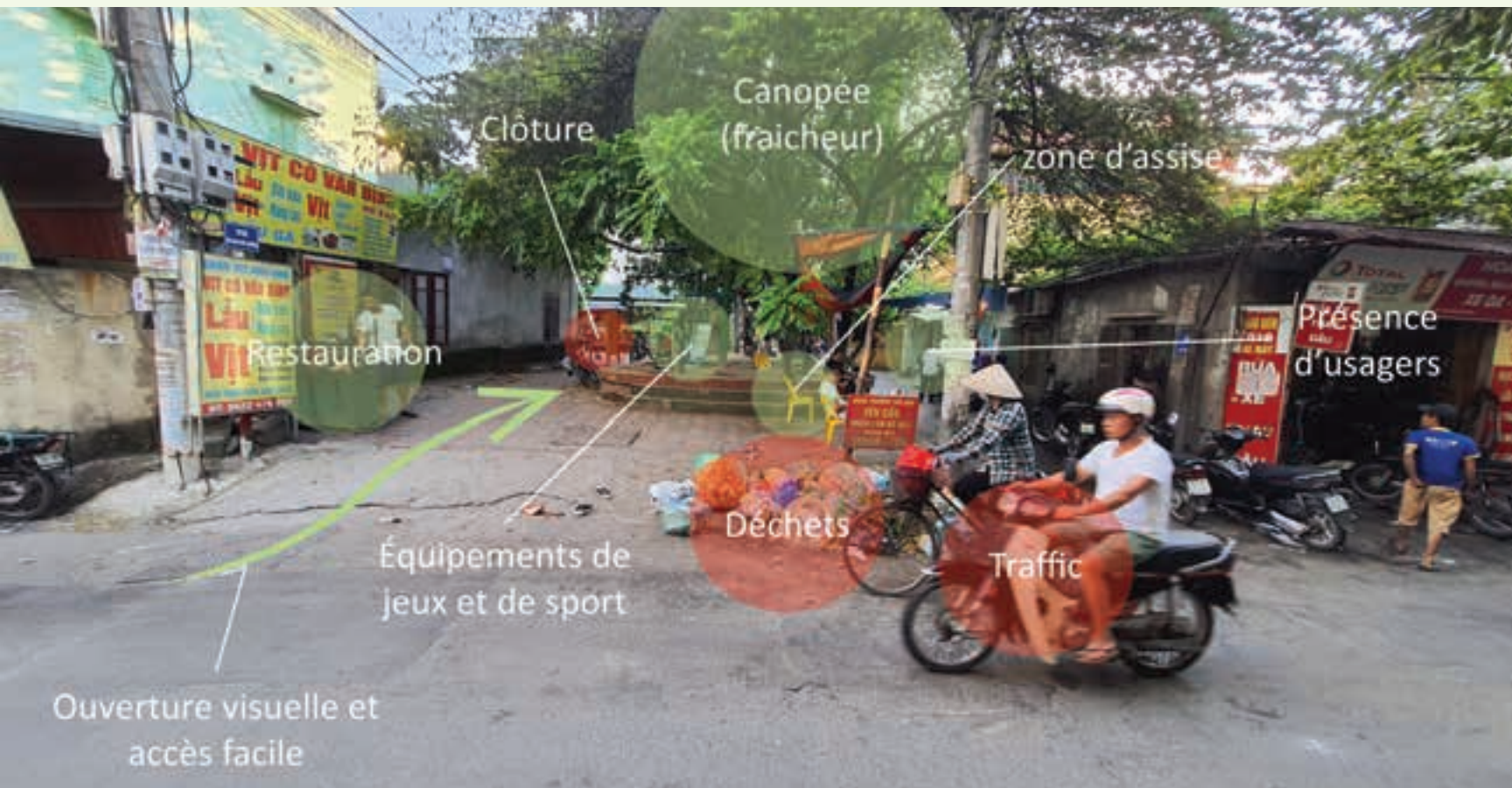


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devenus les premières briques d'un tissu social partagé.

Les entretiens menés dans le quartier montrent que le site a non seulement consolidé des liens existants, mais qu'il a aussi, dans certains cas, changé les perceptions entre migrants et non-migrants. Trois ans après son inauguration, et malgré une période marquée par l'épidémie mondiale de Covid-19 et un confinement stricte et des mouvements de retour de certains migrant vers leurs lieux d'origine, une majorité d'usagers constataient une amélioration des relations sociales. La sociabilité prenait des formes variées : des observations distantes, des salutations, des conversations prolongées, des conseils prodigués par des aînés à des plus jeunes. Un migrant racontait : « *Je viens sur le site pour parler avec des personnes âgées. Nos conversations m'apportent des conseils utiles.* » Le parc, pensé pour les enfants, devenait ainsi une scène de sociabilité intergénérationnelle.

Le succès du lieu tient beaucoup à sa multifonctionnalité. Les jeux, les équipements sportifs, les bancs à l'ombre, les espaces de repos et le jardin



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and multifunctionality: the diversity of activities – from sports to rest, from children's play to gardening – encourages co-presence and multiplies occasions for encounter. Finally, at the top, social and cultural dynamics influence whether these encounters are realized: the individual willingness to engage, the habit of using collective spaces or the openness toward others. The articulation of these levels determines whether interaction occurs. Naturally, the mode of design, governance and ongoing maintenance profoundly influence the strength of these environmental factors as a whole.

At Tan Mai, the playground combined these conditions. Accessible and safe, it attracted diverse residents. Multifunctional, it offered differentiated uses that encouraged co-presence. Finally, it tapped into a local dynamic where children, true social mediators, drew parents and grandparents into sharing the space. From this perspective, the site can be described as a regenerative space of sociability: one that revives conviviality where it had been weakened by urban fragmentation and pre-existing social dynamics.

### Connection Encouraged

Of course, not everything is uniform. Some individuals chose to limit their interactions to peers. Others, particularly among migrants, seldom or never frequented the site, either due to lack of time or because they considered their presence in the city temporary and saw no need to build lasting sociability. These absences remind us that connection cannot be forced. Play opens a possibility, but it does not cancel out the social logics that maintain distance.

Nevertheless, the site has produced tangible effects. It multiplied opportunities for conviviality and generated precious micro-events: a laugh shared between migrant and non-migrant children, a mother discovering her neighbors while exercising, a migrant chatting with an elder. These fleeting instants form sparks that, accumulated, reignite the possibility of living together.

When I left Tan Mai, I did not hold the illusion that this small 718 m<sup>2</sup> park had transformed the city or erased its fractures. But I knew it had lit something: a space where social barriers soften in exceptional ways, where people discover one another differently, where play becomes a bridge. Perhaps it is there, in that simplicity and fragility, that its true magic resides. **LP**

PHOTOS 9,10 HEALTHBRIDGE  
11 LUCAS CONAN 12,13 HEALTHBRIDGE



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communautaire coexistent dans une disposition compacte. Cette pluralité attire des profils variés et multiplie les occasions de contact : parents discutant en surveillant leurs enfants, jeunes adultes échangeant en s'exerçant, personnes âgées conversant sur un banc. L'accessibilité du site, situé au cœur du quartier, comme un passage obligé, renforce cette fréquentation diversifiée. Ces observations m'ont conduit à formaliser une pyramide de facteurs qui conditionne les opportunités d'interaction.

À la base de cette pyramide, on trouve des conditions essentielles : la sécurité, l'accessibilité et le confort matériel, qui garantissent que l'espace soit utilisé. Viennent ensuite la programmation et la multifonctionnalité : la diversité d'activités – du sport au repos, du jeu enfantin au jardinage – favorise la co-présence et multiplie les occasions de rencontre. Enfin, au sommet, les dynamiques sociales et culturelles influencent la concrétisation des échanges : la volonté individuelle d'interagir, l'habitude d'utiliser un espace collectif, ou encore l'ouverture envers l'autre. C'est l'articulation de ces différents niveaux qui détermine si la rencontre a lieu. Évidemment le mode de conception, la gouvernance et l'entretien au fil du temps influence de manière déterminante l'entière de ces facteurs environnementaux.

À Tan Mai, l'aire de jeux a su combiner ces conditions. Accessible et sûre, elle attire des habitants variés. Multifonctionnelle, elle offre des usages différenciés qui favorisent la co-présence. Enfin, elle s'inscrit dans une dynamique locale où les enfants, véritables médiateurs sociaux, entraînent leurs parents et leurs grands-parents dans le partage de l'espace. De ce point de vue, le site peut être qualifié d'espace régénératif de sociabilité : il ravive des formes de convivialité là où elles avaient été affaiblies par la fragmentation urbaine et les dynamiques sociales préexistantes.

Bien sûr, tout n'est pas uniforme. Certains individus choisissent de limiter leurs interactions à leurs pairs. D'autres, parmi les migrants, ne fréquentent pas ou peu le site, faute de temps ou parce qu'ils considèrent leur présence en ville comme transitoire et sans nécessité de construire une sociabilité durable. Ces absences rappellent que la rencontre ne peut être



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imposée. Le jeu ouvre une possibilité, mais il n'annule pas les logiques sociales qui maintiennent la distance.

Il n'en reste pas moins que le site a produit des effets tangibles. Il a multiplié les occasions de convivialité et engendré ces micro-événements précieux : un rire partagé entre enfants migrants et non-migrants, une mère qui découvre ses voisins en faisant de l'exercice, un migrant qui discute avec un aîné. Ces instants fugaces forment des étincelles,

qui, cumulées, ravivent la possibilité d'un « vivre-ensemble ».

En quittant Tan Mai, je n'avais pas l'illusion que ce petit parc de 718 m<sup>2</sup> avait transformé la ville ou effacé ses fractures. Mais je savais qu'il avait allumé quelque chose : un espace où les barrières sociales s'assouplissent de manière exceptionnelle, où l'on se découvre autrement, où le jeu devient une passerelle. C'est peut-être là, dans cette simplicité et cette fragilité, que réside sa véritable magie. **LP**



BHAVANA BONDE

# A.R. McDIARMID PLAZA: WHERE PLAY MEETS PURPOSE



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## > FR\_LP+

### PLACE A.R. McDIARMID : JOINDRE LE JEU À L'AGRÉABLE

La place A.R. McDiarmid est un lieu de rassemblement, un «salon urbain», où les citoyens se retrouvent pour se divertir, se détendre et socialiser. Les concepteurs ont adopté cette vision et créé un aménagement aussi utile que ludique.

**“ONCE UPON A** time (okay, not *that* long ago), in downtown Brandon, MB, there was a plain old, deteriorated asphalt parking lot beside the A.R. McDiarmid Civic Complex, where cars came for a rest. Thanks to an innovative transformation in 2017,

this space now pulses with life, laughter, and play.

“It’s amazing to see how this place has changed. I used to park my car here, and now I bring my grandkids to play,” says Linda M., a longtime Brandon resident. “It’s like our own little oasis in the city.”

Instead of tearing up the old parking lot, which would have cost one-third of the project budget, the design team opted for an innovative and sustainable solution: recycled rubber paving, poured directly onto the asphalt. This not only reduced construction costs and environmental impact, but also repurposed over 1,000

tires, giving the plaza a playful, patterned surface that is both visually engaging and meets fall protection requirements – a thoughtful nod to the plaza’s active users.

The A.R. McDiarmid Plaza was envisioned as a central gathering space – a “living room” for the city – where residents and visitors could come together for recreation, relaxation and cultural exchange. The design team embraced this vision, creating a space that is as playful as it is purposeful. The plaza’s layout is organized around a series of circular “pods,” each with its own personality. These pods are the building blocks of a flexible, multi-functional space.





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They echo the architectural language of the adjacent Civic Complex, creating a visual harmony between old and new.

Some pods are for active play, with basketball hoops and open space for impromptu games. Others are for quiet reflection, with café-style seating perfect for sipping coffee and watching the world go by. A community garden pod and a fruit orchard pod are used as a living classroom for local “seed to plate” programs. Local youth can plant veggies, harvest them and even cook up delicious dishes in the Civic Centre’s kitchen.

The grassy berm pod is a gentle hill that doubles as a comfy seating area with panoramic views of the entire space. This isn’t just a place to lounge and soak up the sun. The berm transforms into informal seating for an outdoor theater, where movies are projected onto one wall of the Civic Centre. A pod of possibilities at the corner of the street acts as an

informal stage area and is perfect for pop-up farmers markets or community performances or impromptu dance-offs. The plaza is a canvas for community expression, ready to host whatever creative sparks fly.

Jared T., a local artist, shares, “The pods are perfect for pop-up performances. We’ve held poetry readings and music nights here – it’s got such a welcoming vibe.”

“The community garden is my favorite part,” says Amira S., a newcomer to Brandon. “It’s helped me meet people and feel connected. Plus, I’ve learned how to grow tomatoes!”

A.R. McDiarmid Plaza is the first project in Brandon to be created under the City of Brandon Greenspace Masterplan. The city held public consultations, open houses and an online questionnaire to make sure the plaza reflected the community’s needs and dreams. The result is a space that’s not just beautiful, but meaningful.



4



5



3

Whether you’re a parent enjoying a movie night on the berm, a gardener planting tomatoes, a teen performing spoken word, or a kid chasing a basketball, A.R. McDiarmid Plaza has something for you. It is a purposeful landscape that is as much about play as it is about placemaking, where every pod tells a story – all rolled into one rubber-paved wonderland. **LP**

**1** PLAYScape. **2** BERM AND ORCHARD POD IN BACKGROUND. **3** BERM/SEATING POD. **4** HERB/NATIVE PLANTING POD. **5** SPONTANEOUS EVENT POD.

**ALL PHOTOS** ARCHITECTURE 49



LESLIE MORTON

# PLAYFUL CITIES: WHY PLAYGROUNDS IN PARKS ALONE AREN'T ENOUGH

> FR\_LP+  
VILLES LUDIQUES :  
POURQUOI LES AIRES DE JEUX NE  
SUFFISENT-ELLES PAS

Toronto doit adopter une philosophie urbaine du jeu inspirée des exemples internationaux ...

**TORONTO IS IN** the middle of a playground and park renaissance. The city's Playground Enhancement Program and the delivery of new destination-scale parks, such as Biidaasige Park on the waterfront, represent significant capital investments into play infrastructure. Yet for all this progress, something fundamental is missing. Downtown Toronto's population is booming faster than new parkland can be acquired and equitable access to park space across the city remains uneven, and play – the heartbeat of urban life – is still mostly trapped behind the fences of traditional playgrounds. It's time to think bigger. Toronto's next leap forward isn't just about building more playgrounds – it's about building a more playful city.

The solution lies in expanding the public realm beyond park boundaries. Toronto needs to adopt a citywide approach to play inspired by international precedents, embedding joyful activity in streets, transit corridors, civic plazas and green infrastructure systems for everyone, rather than isolating it within designated play spaces. This shift would redefine urban public life, requiring a cross-divisional governance model that aligns Parks, Forestry & Recreation, Transportation Services, and City Planning alongside strong partnership building with Business Improvement Areas and stewardship mechanisms similar to the Bentway Conservancy. Because play isn't just for kids – it's for everyone.

## **The Original Play Pioneer: Aldo Van Eyck's Amsterdam**

Constructing playgrounds outside of parks is not a new concept. Back in 1948, long before "tactical urbanism" entered the planning lexicon, architect Aldo van Eyck filled postwar Amsterdam with over 600

tiny, fenceless micro-playgrounds. With so many sites of different sizes scattered across the war-ravaged city – in excessive roadways, vacant building lots and interstitial spaces – van Eyck created a modular, simple geometric design of play structures that would fit in any available space regardless of size. He turned leftover land into joyful micro-spaces, creating a network of lively places that were quick to implement and wove play into the city's DNA.

Van Eyck famously said that creating integrated urban playgrounds "breathe new life into a deserted street-corner or seemingly purposeless square. In this way the child discovers its city and the city its children." That's exactly the spirit Toronto needs now. Only a fraction of these playgrounds remains today – just 17 – as maintenance and operations fell short over time and most were removed and deemed unsafe. Yet the lesson endures: small-scale, distributed interventions can fundamentally transform how residents experience their city.



## International Models of Playful Urbanism

After the COVID-19 pandemic, several cities have put forward innovative, playful streets approaches into planning policy and city-wide implementation. In Paris, social distancing required several school streets to be closed to vehicular traffic to allow for people to gather for drop-off. The success led to the School Streets program, which mandated the transformation of 300 streets into pedestrian walkways; currently 180 are completely pedestrianized.

New York City, Montreal and Barcelona have each developed systematic frameworks that move beyond isolated experiments toward permanent transformation.

### Barcelona's Playable City Framework

Barcelona's approach to urban playability is distinguished by its rejection of traditional playground-centric thinking in favor of making the entire city playable for all ages over the long term. Instead of isolating play to designated spaces, the city adopts a three-layer framework: first, traditional playgrounds and schoolyards; second, school zones and plazas; and third, the entire city, including streets and public infrastructure. In Barcelona, play isn't decoration – it's infrastructure.

This vision is deeply integrated into broader urban transformation efforts, particularly through the Superblocks program, which reclaims 75% of car-dominated space within 400-meter-by-400-meter grids for pedestrians, cyclists and play. Beyond redesign, Barcelona also activates spaces through initiatives such as "Let's Play in the Plaza," identifying approximately 50 public squares as opportunities for programming playful and social activities. Barcelona treats play not as a separate activity for children, but as a fundamental part of city life – interwoven with mobility, public space and community well-being.

### New York City: Pioneer of the Pilot-to-Permanent

Eighteen years ago, Mayor Michael Bloomberg made a commitment that all New Yorkers would live within a 10-minute walk of open space. This initiative was not handed to NYC Parks and Recreation but rather to the Department of Transportation, spearheaded by



2

Janette Sadik-Khan. The famous pilot-to-permanent approach proved extraordinarily successful, converting 30 acres of roadway space into new vibrant public plazas.

The DOT Plaza program accepts proposals from nonprofit organizations through an annual competitive application process, with priority given to neighborhoods lacking open space, particularly low- to moderate-income communities. The city funds the design and construction of plazas and involves the community through public visioning workshops. In return, the nonprofit partner commits to conducting community outreach, participating in design meetings, formulating a funding plan, providing insurance, undertaking maintenance, and programming activities to ensure the plaza becomes a vibrant neighborhood destination.

### Montreal's Systematic Approach to Temporary Streets

Montreal is internationally celebrated as a fun and playful city, especially in the warm months. This reputation stems from developing a sophisticated tactical and temporary approach to street transformation refined over the past decade through experimentation with various methods for seasonal activation of public spaces. The city's *Temporary Street Design Project in Montreal: A Handbook for Best Practices for Design Quality* outlines its history with tactical design, including the Pedestrian and Shared Streets Program. Initiated in 2015, the city created

12 shared and pedestrianized streets by 2017 using a participatory and phased-design process that implements temporary measures in the first year, modified temporary installations in the second year and permanent measures in the third year, with continuous citizen feedback solicited throughout.

The handbook codifies lessons learned from observational data and stakeholder feedback, providing 125 best practices for quality vision and 70 strategies for implementation. Four typologies of temporary street design – Pedestrianized street, *Rue-place* (the street as public square), Shared street and Redistributed roadway – each have a set of requirements and design specifications. With this framework, Montreal has developed what is arguably North America's most systematic approach to temporary street transformations, with over 25 streets pedestrianized between 2020-2025 and a dedicated \$12 million funding commitment for 2025-2027. This system goes far beyond fun urbanism and a coat of paint – it indicates a serious commitment and permanent practice of temporary strategies. Seasonal pedestrian streets, flexible shared zones and pop-up plazas keep the city feeling alive, not static.

1 SIMCOE WAVEDECK, TORONTO CENTRAL WATERFRONT. 2 DETAIL OF THE CELEBRATED ALDO VAN EYCK'S SCULPTURAL MULTI-FUNCTIONAL PLAY PIECES ALONG THE STREET RIGHT-OF-WAY IN AMSTERDAM. PHOTOS 1 WEST 8 + DTAH IN JOINT VENTURE 2 OK-ALEXANDER/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



### Toronto's Playful Potential

Toronto has taken initial steps toward playful urbanism. While the city has distinct and playful spaces to celebrate along street corridors – the Wave Decks (West 8 + DTAH in joint venture) rippling along the waterfront, for example – more discreet parkettes and public art installations within the city's right-of-way are bringing new life and joy to previously underutilized spaces. Business Improvement Areas, in partnership with the City of Toronto, are behind the implementation of these innovative parkettes and public art installations. Implementing and maintaining these spaces continues to be a challenge for both BIAs and the city.

In contrast to New York's streamlined process, Toronto's approach to implementing a parkette is lengthier and varies across the city. BIAs identify potential parkette sites at least a year in advance, ideally based on a board-approved streetscape master plan that outlines long-term urban design improvements. Early discussions are held with the city's Capital Project Coordinator to test feasibility and determine whether the site lies within the municipal right-of-way or on city-owned land. Construction costs are shared by the BIA and City of Toronto in a 50/50 split – a partnership model that requires considerable coordination.

### CaféTO: Toronto's Untapped Opportunity

CaféTO presents an extraordinary opportunity for the City of Toronto. The program deployed over 1,500 permits for outdoor dining spaces. Some 279 curb lane cafés were installed, converting approximately 2,790 square meters using temporary barriers, planters and furniture across nearly 10 kilometers. This is proof-of-concept that justifies a much broader transformation, exactly as NYC's early plaza parkettes did.

Yet Toronto remains stuck in temporary limbo, treating successful pilots as one-offs instead of blueprints for transformation. Analyzing the map of CaféTO patio locations reveals how a new permanent solution for expanding the curbside could emerge and remain a permanent condition. The city must do what NYC did: stop treating successful experiments as temporary and start building the permanent placemaking streets infrastructure this city deserves – and consider programming beyond dining.

### Complete Streets as Foundation

Toronto's Complete Streets Guidelines, adopted in 2017, provide a citywide design manual that shifts the planning and engineering focus from solely prioritizing vehicle movement to balancing the needs of all street users – pedestrians, cyclists, transit riders and motorists – while

integrating green infrastructure, public realm quality and placemaking. The update lays important groundwork for flexible, community-led public spaces but currently treats play as an implied benefit rather than a primary objective. What's missing is a clear declaration that play is essential public infrastructure – just like transit, trees and bike lanes.

By naming play explicitly, creating a play streets typology, prioritizing equity and integrating play programming into partnership models, the policy could become a powerful tool for advancing Toronto's vision as a playful, joyful and child-friendly city. Toronto already has the foundation for a more balanced, people-first city – it needs to make play a named priority.

### From Quiet Experiments to Bold Identity

Today, new infrastructure investment across Toronto marks a pivotal moment to embed play as part of city-building. With over \$38 billion in planned investment across key infrastructure systems between 2025 and 2034 – with significant portions directed to climate resiliency through stormwater management, mobility improvement through roads and cycling infrastructure and transit modernization – this level of investment marks a considerable transformation of the public realm. Toronto has a once-in-a-







5

generation chance to bake joy, creativity and connection into the city's physical framework.

Projects such as the Lake Shore Boulevard East reconstruction, the Ontario Line and the LRT transit corridor expansions are opening unprecedented opportunities to think of infrastructure as a public realm network – where bridges, right-of-ways, utility easements and underpasses become stages for social and playful activity. Bridges, underpasses and utility corridors can all double as playful public spaces if designed with imagination. This requires systematic policy frameworks, collaborative cross-divisional cooperation, community-driven partnership models, along with aligning play with current infrastructure renewal investments.

Community enthusiasm exists. The scattered successes of BIA-led parkettes, the rapid uptake of CaféTO, and the vitality of projects such as the Wave Decks demonstrate that Torontonians are hungry for more playful, vibrant public spaces.

**3** IMAGE OF BLOOR ANNEX PARKETTE. **4** ONCE PAVED AND OVERLOOKED, THE REMANENT SPACES ALONG BLOOR-ANNEX HAVE BEEN TRANSFORMED INTO LIVELY PARKETTES, ANIMATING THE STREET WITH POLLINATOR GARDENS, ROCKS, LARGE CANOPY TREES, PUBLIC ART, AND INNOVATIVE SEATING. **5** JUST STEPS FROM PONT DES INVALIDES ALONG THE SEINE IN PARIS, AN UNEXPECTED PUBLIC CLIMBING WALL INTERVENTION IS EMBEDDED IN THE HISTORIC STONE EMBANKMENT ALONG THE PROMENADE. **6** REFLECTOR, THE MIRRORED STAINLESS STEEL PUBLIC ART PIECE BY FIGUREGROUND STUDIO INC (JHYLING LEE) ANIMATES THE CORNER OF QUEEN STREET WEST AND SOHO STREET, INVITING CURIOSITY AND PLAYFUL INTERACTION ACROSS ALL AGES. THIS PIECE WAS INSTALLED AS PART OF THE QUEEN STREET WEST STREETScape REVITALIZATION PHASE 2 (LED BY PMA LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS).  
PHOTOS **3,4** DTAH **5** LESLIE MORTON **6** ENG C LAU @ENGCLAU

What's missing isn't demand – it's the institutional commitment to move from pilot to permanent, from scattered to systematic, from implied to explicit.

### The Path Forward

Toronto needs more than fenced-off playgrounds – it needs a citywide culture of play. Imagine a city where laneways become skate routes, bus stops turn into game zones and plazas transform into stages. Building this vision requires several key shifts.

First, *play* must be named explicitly as a planning priority, not treated as a side benefit of other initiatives. Second, governance must foster cross-divisional collaboration – bridging Parks, Transportation and Planning. Third, partnership models should be streamlined and well-funded, drawing lessons from New York's annual plaza program and Montreal's dedicated funding streams.

Fourth, Toronto must normalize the *pilot-to-permanent* pathway. The city has proven that incremental strategies can improve safety and expand cycling infrastructure, yet each success is still treated as a one-off experiment rather than a model for systemic change. Finally, equity must anchor this agenda, ensuring playful investments reach neighborhoods lacking open space and serve people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds. Currently, the areas seeing the most progress are often those with active Business Improvement Areas or resident groups advocating for them.



6

Playful cities aren't just fun – they're more inclusive, resilient and human. They nurture child development and community connection, activate underused spaces, boost local economies and strengthen public health and well-being. By expanding play beyond park boundaries into the entire public realm, Toronto can transform how residents experience and connect with their city.

Ontario's Conservative government passed Bill 60, the Fighting Delays, Building Faster Act, on November 24, 2025. The act is framed to accelerate the construction of new homes and infrastructure, but it also introduces new prohibitions on reducing the number of motor vehicle lanes, in addition to undermining municipal green standards and climate initiatives. More broadly, the legislation makes it harder to rethink how city streets function, constraining opportunities for bike lanes, pedestrian-priority streets, school streets, play streets and parklets that depend on reallocating road space. Until there is a shift at the provincial level, advancing playful urbanism and people-first streets will require working within these constraints – pushing for creative use of parking lanes and other underutilized spaces in the right-of-way – while holding onto the hope that this legislation will not ultimately stall the broader movement toward more pedestrian-oriented public space. **LP**



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### 250 Things a Landscape Architect Should Know

B. Cannon Ivers (ed.).  
Birkhauser Press 2022

**1** JANE MAH HUTTON #100 'WHAT WILL BE HERE AFTER YOUR LIFETIME' IMAGE: DON RIVER ICE JAM AND FLOOD, TORONTO, 28 FEBRUARY 1918.  
**2** MARC RYAN #177 'OUR WORK IS NEVER FINISHED' IMAGE: NATIONAL HOLOCAUST MONUMENT COMPETITION, OTTAWA, ON, CANADA 2014.  
**PHOTOS 1** © CITY OF TORONTO ARCHIVES **2** PUBLIC WORK



1

## CARVING OUT SPACE FOR THE ART, AS WELL AS THE BUSINESS

REVIEWED BY VICTORIA TAYLOR

**AT VTLA WE** begin each week by reading aloud one entry from B. Cannon Ivers' collection, *250 Things a Landscape Architect Should Know*. The short statements that make up this book often spark conversations in our office that evolve into reflections on current projects, challenges or moments from the past week. What begins as the next reading inevitably becomes relevant – touching on a recent conversation, opening up a new way of thinking or pointing us toward an approach we hadn't considered.

As Ed Wall, Academic Leader for Landscape at the University of Greenwich, writes in the foreword: "...Cannon demonstrates his mastery in bringing landscape voices together, creating a true landscape list of lists."



2

Landscape architecture is a practice – a process of building, designing, observing, listening and imagining. It's an art form, but also a business. In private practice, my time and energy are so often consumed by the operational needs of running a studio and supporting a team. It takes intention to carve out space for the art itself – for studying, reflecting and reconnecting with the meaning of our work. It's important to make time to bring the two parts of our practice together: the art and the business. Inspiration must be nurtured. How can we continue to dream and envision new design possibilities if we don't return to our foundations – examining how we shape land, impact daily lives and design for the creatures and communities who we live with on the land?

The book features global contributors, including Canadian landscape architects Jane Mah Hutton and Marc Ryan. Jane Mah Hutton, associate professor at the University of Waterloo School of Architecture, in her contribution, "What Will be Here after Your Lifetime" (#100), prompts us to consider the longevity of our projects "after any awareness of authorship has disappeared." Marc Ryan, Partner at PUBLIC WORK, also explores the theme of time. In "Our Work is Never Finished" (#177), he discusses the design challenges of integrating constant





change, spontaneity and the unexpected moments of public life into his firm's design for the 2014 National Holocaust Monument Competition in Ottawa, ON. Each of the 250 entries, presented in both text and images, serve as a prompt for reflection, critique and imagination. Some entries jostle us out of habitual thinking, others quietly invite us to pause, reconsider or dream. Together, they form a kind of professional compass.

*250 Things* continues to serve as a weekly ritual for us at VTLA – a moment to ground our practice in meaning. Like reading a daily horoscope, our Monday morning sessions offer both insight and surprise. Sometimes they spark a fresh perspective on a design problem. Other times, they challenge us to question assumptions or bring new clarity to a client discussion.

More than anything, the book reminds us why we do this work. **LP**

---

**Victoria Taylor**, OALA, CSLA, is principal of VTLA, a landscape architecture and planning studio. Victoria brings decades of experience to her public, private and commercial projects, blending artistic expression with functionality, public safety, accessibility for climate resilience. Her work explores and reveals the unique potential of each site, creating spaces that are diverse, experiential and enduring. Victoria is also a member of the editorial board of *Landscapes | Paysages*. [vtla.ca](http://vtla.ca)

**“I always feel like, somebody’s watching me.”**

– Rockwell, 1983

**Hi there! It’s me. The one watching you. I’m the somebody watching you.**

– Kyla, fresh out of school and working at Crosby Hanna & Associates, 2019

## IT’S OK TO BE WHO WE ARE

KYLA TULLOCH-KOWULA

**I’VE ALWAYS APPRECIATED** the mentorship moments that happen without intent, those moments that stick with someone, even if the other person will likely have no recollection of what was – to them – a typical interaction.



There I was, fresh out of school and trying to understand the work world beyond design: emails (How long can it possibly take to write a basic response?), project management (Oh, that’s an actual requirement?), and professionalism (Where do we all stand on smiles? Was that one too big? Too many teeth? Was this not a smiling situation?). I found myself questioning basic interactions in the hopes that I would not only fit in, but be taken seriously as a burgeoning professional, despite my status as “new.” I watched how other professionals communicated and attempted to mimic the behaviours that seemed appropriate for the workplace.

Fortunately for me, my co-worker at the time, Christine Bachinsky, rolled in one day. I’ve always admired Christine as she is unapologetically herself; her passion for landscape architecture is apparent without compromising her own values. At one point she cc’d me on an email and, although it was a professional response, her personality was evident (think: exclamation point usage, even a smiley face). I asked her if that was “allowed” and she responded with something to the effect of, “I like to let my personality in.”

Until this occurrence, I hadn’t realized that I was suppressing my natural joy and enthusiasm for my dream job; I was too concerned about the image I was projecting. But here Christine was, a successful landscape architect working on projects I would like to work on one day, and she used a smiley face?? The metaphorical floodgates were open: I would be enthusiastic and maybe even a little bit odd, but I would be me!

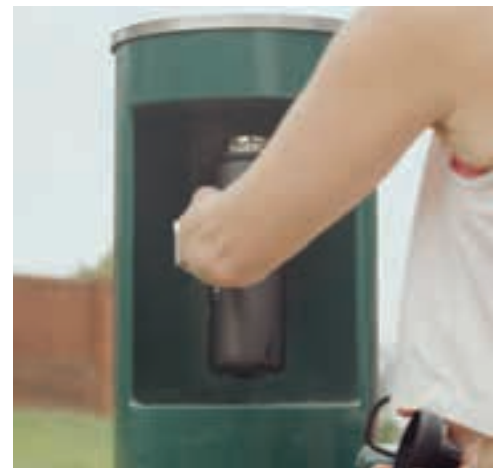
So thank you, Christine, for your simple reminder that our personalities aren’t a hindrance to our job; they not only make us who we are, but they are part of the passion that we bring to our jobs every day. **LP**

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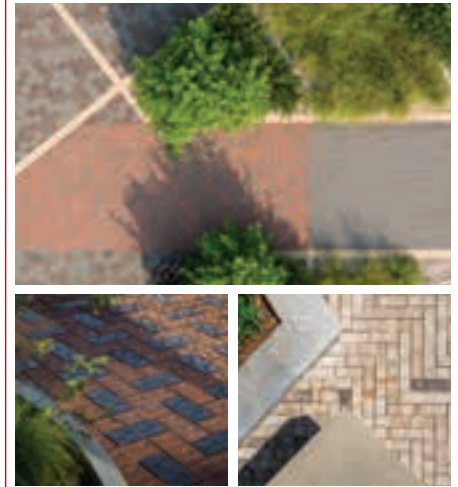
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## HOW TO BE “PLAY-AWARE”

MARGARET FRASER + STEPHANIE WATT

**HOW CAN I SUPPORT PLAY** in my community? Whether they’re researchers, educators or designers, people ask us this question a lot at Metalude. It’s also central to our play training for adults. Usually these adults are thinking of *children’s* play, but the basics of play span the generations. In these trainings, we only launch into the “how” of supporting play once we have taken the time to uncover what play means for us and how it shows up in our lives. Let’s start you down this path, so you too can arrive *play-aware* to your work, whether with children, youth or adults.

Play is not an activity, it is a personal process. This process can include contemplation, ideation, flow, negotiation, even destruction. Play has a beginning and an end, and the lines between them can swirl in a thousand different directions. There is no one right way to play – only the way you choose for that moment.

The process is influenced by external elements: our environment, our culture, the materials and people around us, and the time and permission to use them, with a reasonable expectation of safety.

When you seek to support play for others, especially in permanent designs, it is important to understand this: that play is

a process unique to each person, and play is the product of both external and internal factors. If we ignore the dance between these two sets of factors, we risk thinking that what seems amazing for play may in fact be amazing for *your* play.

How can you start recognizing how the personal shows up in play? By playing! You need to feel it, experience it, maybe struggle with it. Let go of your rational mind and connect to sensation, texture, movement, curiosity – the butterflies in your belly. If you stay connected to play – to your own play – you start seeing how your interests, preferences, and background show up in those moments.

Here are simple ideas for carving out playful moments.

- On your daily commute, avoid stepping on cracks!
- On hallway tiles, play “the floor is lava.”
- Stick your feet in the sand or grass. Stick your hands in soil, or pick up snow and see what happens.
- Run, don’t walk, down a hill.
- Try to make your sentences rhyme with those of your lunch partner.
- Tap a friend’s (or a stranger’s) shoulder while saying “you’re it!”

By recognizing play as a personal process, we resist projecting or romanticizing the experience. Instead, we meet others where they are, creating play invitations that allow each person to enter into their own authentic and meaningful play experience.\* **LP**

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*\*To help you think of all the ways you can plan and design playable public space, check out the recently launched tool A 360° View of Play: <https://metalude.ca/en/360-view-play>.*

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**Margaret Fraser and Stephanie Watt** are the cofounders

and codirectors of Metalude, a Montréal non-profit advancing child-inclusive cities through play and public engagement. Fraser previously cofounded *The Lion and the Mouse*, creating outdoor free play programs in urban spaces, while Watt served as a city councillor, leading projects on children’s play, mobility, and rights. Visit [metalude.ca](https://metalude.ca) **LP**



Rutherford bench  
in Burns Lake, BC



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