

A Landscape Promenade

Landscape Comprehensive Studio

An **'abandoned'** linear Landscape, its tectonic statement, its ecological significance, its performance and its contextual insertion, formed the core of this comprehensive studio. While leveraging the knowledge and experience acquired in the previous core studios, the Comprehensive Landscape studio is designed to challenge students in a territory of design consideration which has not previously been fully explored, in core studios. While the studio invites students to once again engage with solving programmatic opportunities and challenges through spatial thinking and design, this studio challenges students to think about questions of constructability.

Students are expected to engage precise questions of connectivity, sustainability, materiality, scale, and detail resolution through a process of design extending from initial ideation to realization of the landscape as a whole. The studio presents typical landscape challenges ranging from planning to the selection and design of structural elements, dealing with environmental issues, material, and detail. In this regard, how the landscape performs and facilitates reduction of, graywater runoff, creates biodiversity, and addresses issues of climate change are questions of design research that the studio invites students to pursue through their work.

Building the edge

In Landscape Architecture an edge can be defined as the intersection between ecotones¹ in natural systems; the interface between land and building; the duality between humans and nature; or the divide between the natural and the manmade. An edge, by nature, defines sides and sides inherently deal with tension. Edges vary in width, they thicken and thin, reappear and disappear.

With the constant growth of post-industrial cities and the expansion of their supporting infrastructure, the edge as an underutilised interstitial space is on the rise. They have always presented both challenges and opportunities for landscape architects, architects and urban designers.

Linear parks and promenades have been a frequent landscape design solution for these sites. What made a narrow and [**abandoned**] site a critical subject for a comprehensive studio is that linearity means an elongated and varied edge condition which provides a necessary conflict and complexity that would challenge the design of the park. At the same time narrowness of the site forced students to deal with economy of space and accuracy of detailing.

Background

As a post-industrial metropolis, Toronto is a city laced with interstitial, underutilized and sometimes problematic sites, and consequently, is no stranger to linear parks as its remedy; namely 'The Bent way' (underneath Gardiner expressway), 'The Rail Deck Park', 'The Meadow Way', 'Beltline Trail' and finally 'West Dundas Railpath'.

"Linear strips of space are overlooked, underappreciated, and marginalized. [...] Chunks are thought to be the best commissions. [...] Yet this belies the reality of much landscape architectural production, which is increasingly devoted to exploring what happens in the margins—in left over spaces, in-between areas, and along-side conditions. (Smith 1999: 77)." Even though the interstitial places had always been there, it was not until the saturation of modern infrastructure (e.g., freeways) and the decline of industrial infrastructure (e.g., railways), that design began to re-establish its relevance."

Karul Kullmann, *Journal of Landscape Architecture* Autumn of 2011

Abandoned 'landscape'

a-ban-doned

/əˈbænd(ə)nd/

we define Abandoned as;

1. An overlooked, underappreciated, leftover piece of land in an over developed post-industrial city.
2. An interstitial space
3. An urban edge
4. Intersection between two ecotones

School

Daniels School of Architecture, Landscape and Design
University of Toronto

Program

Landscape Architecture

Course Number

LAN2014

Studio Coordinator:

Behnaz Assadi

Instructor team:

Megan Esopenco

Francesco Martire

Running along the western edge of Toronto's downtown core 'West Toronto Railroad' has been connecting Toronto to Southampton and Owen Sound since 1968. The first portion of the land between Cariboo Avenue to Dundas street was purchased in 1997 after seven years of negotiations between, rail operators, the City of Toronto Economic Development, Parks Committee, Evergreen Foundation and Toronto's Community Bicycle Network². Scott Torrance Landscape Architects and Brown and Storey Architects were the design team in charge of the construction of the first phase of the path, which began in 2008 and completed in 2009.

The site for this studio was the second phase of West Dundas Railpath which is currently pending coordination with several other ongoing projects in the city, namely; the Georgetown South Project, a planned expansion of rail capacity along the line for GO Transit and the Union Pearson Express².

The Site

Located at the heart of a post-industrial neighbourhood in Toronto's west end, the site spans from Dundas Street West at Sterling Road all the way to Sudbury Street.

With recent exhibitions like Banksy and the arrival of Toronto's Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) last fall, what once was mostly 'artists and bohemian types, for better or worse, is now opening up to future development'³. This consequently put more emphasis on the significance of the site as an urban node along the rail way corridor.

The Project

Throughout the course of the studio the students attempted to design a comprehensive linear landscape in a non-linear manner. Given that design disciplines are inherently collaborative, each of the three projects will be done either in groups or pairs.

The studio consisted of three projects ;

Project 1; Study of a Linear Park
Precedent study

Project 2: Documenting the Site
Site visit, and research of Dundas West Rail path was an introduction to the design portion of the design project.

Project 3: From Site to screw
Having documented the site's current condition as well as its historic past, the students ventured into designing a future vision for the park and developed a programmatic and design approach for the second phase of West Dundas Railpath promenade.

1
An ecotone is a transition area between two biomes.[1] It is where two communities meet and integrate.[2] It may be narrow or wide, and it may be local (the zone between a field and forest) or regional (the transition between forest and grassland ecosystems).[3] An ecotone may appear on the ground as a gradual blending of the two communities across a broad area, or it may manifest itself as a sharp boundary line. The word ecotone was coined from a combination of eco(logy) plus -tone, from the Greek tonos or tension - in other words, a place where ecologies are in tension]

2
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Toronto_Railpath

3
In Toronto, an Industrial Stretch Has Its Break-out Moment, by, By Michael Kaminer he New York Times, Jul 5th, 2019

The work that you see is 4 out of 13 student pairs we had in this