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WZMH Architects is a global architectural practice based in Toronto doing large scale, mixed-use projects around the world. Idea Workshop works with the senior management team to build profile and PR for their projects through media relations, event planning and execution, speaking engagements and social media strategies.



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Media Highlights



POSTHOMES



THE NEW URBAN SPIRIT
The century-old concept of garden-city planning gets an update to meet today's more nuanced approaches
By Martha Unacke Breen

POSTHOMES
NATIONAL POST SATURDAY OCTOBER 17, 2014
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The Swiss-French architect and philosopher Charles-Edouard Jeanneret-Gris, better known as Le Corbusier, is credited with some of the most influential ideas in urban planning of the 20th century. Close to 100 years after his philosophy first came into vogue, though, many of his views about housing have come to be generally viewed with disdain.


Le Corbusier saw the crowded inner-city Paris slums as a blight, and held that the solution was to raise them whole and replace them with clean, sparsely designed high-density buildings surrounded by green space. The result, named "Le Corbusier's towers," was a series of high-rise towers built atop acres of underground parking, lawns and driveways — a concept much of the new housing of the '50s and '60s, particularly for public housing and automobile-oriented suburban developments, was based on.

But far from fulfilling Corbusier's predictions of happy, healthy living environments, many of these communities, sadly, became just the opposite. (One example is St. James Town, just north of Cabbagetown; it was a classic Corbusier-style high-rise community that replaced a neighbourhood of single-family housing, but which has itself become somewhat of a public housing problem.) It's unfair to say all garden cities are failures, but many communities built on the model are today ripe for a different notion of urban planning.

Last week, WZMH Architects principal Len Abraham took a group of architects and others around the recently "redefined" neighbourhood of Parkway Forest, a 32-acre, mid-rise, mid-century modern development by a few unwalkably wide roads. The revitalization is the result of a 12-year collaboration between developer Elad Canada, for whom the Emerald City condominium complex is the jewel in the crown, and WZMH Architects, which has been responsible for many major Toronto landmarks, including the CN Tower and Royal Bank Plaza.


The City of Toronto, particularly local councillor Shelley Carroll, was so involved with the planning and negotiations that it might fairly be thought of as an unofficial, uncredited third partner.

The Emerald City complex, at Don Mills Road and Sheppard Avenue East, is a mix of five condominium towers mostly on the west side of the neighbourhood (three are built, a fourth is under construction and the fifth has just opened for sale). Elad also built several mid-rise buildings to the south.



Following North York's Yellow Brick Road: Micallef

Emerald City, a large-scale infill project woven into the community of Parkway Forest, is the kind of development Toronto will be seeing a lot more of.



VIEW 2 PHOTOS

DEVELOPMENTS

Urbanizing the 'burbs at Sheppard and Don Mills

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Parkey Forest at Sheppard and Don Mills is one of the three sister-city developments that you see all over suburban Toronto. Last week, it was much like the others: a new apartment building and brick townhouses stood far back from the main streets, surrounded by parking lots and empty lawns. There were few streets at ground level. The streets were built for cars, not people.

"Typically, what you get in the suburbs was these big buildings surrounded either by surface parking or just undeveloped green space that didn't really belong to anybody," says Lorne.

New walkways and new streets with proper sidewalks and shade trees aim to make the neighbourhood more welcoming for pedestrians, eliminating the blank, no-man's-land that residents had to cross to get anywhere.

The development will boast a new place at the southeast corner of Don Mills and Sheppard and new public art — a series of colorful cones and cylinders by Vancouver artist Douglas Coupland. "This revitalization project tackles the unique challenge of transforming a 'suburban' development of suburban towers into a denser, more urban and integrated community," says the architect's website.


Its fact sheet on the plan overflows with buzzwords of the new urbanism. New buildings flash with the roadway will create "eyes on the street" and make for a safer neighbourhood, an insight borrowed from Jane Jacobs. The buildings and landscaping are being arranged to



The buildings and landscaping are being arranged to give the area new "spine" and "local points," says architect.

Whether Parkway Forest can answer those questions will not be clear for a few years yet. The phased development, planned as far back as 2004, will be under construction for another eight to 10 years. In the meantime, the neighbourhood will have its problems. There was a shortage in an underground garage of one of the original apartment buildings this week.

Whether it can serve as a template for rebuilding other suburban apartment complexes is an open question. Len Abraham, WZMH's principal, says the Sheppard subway, which has an entrance just below the new



Bridges linking Air Canada Centre to waterfront opening this month



Bridging the Gap
WZMH Architects

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Parliament Data Centre Plans for a Changing Streetscape

We spoke with the architect behind Corktown's new computer centre to find out how the building was designed for a street in transition.


BY KELL KORDOGLIO



How does an architect design a building for a streetscape that is both rich in historical context and set to change dramatically in the near future?

"It's kind of like if you have a backyard knowing that one day there will be a street beside it," says Nicole Caston, a principal at WZMH Architects. "You'll probably have to design the back of your house differently."

Cascadia's firm was tasked with the design for the new Parliament Street Data Centre near the city's historic Distillery District. The five-storey, 22,000-square-metre development was designed to accommodate its existing mid-block placement, but also with attention paid to waterfront renewal plans that will re-contextualize the building's facade. In other words, the design would have to be sympathetic with the existing structures and with future planning schemes.



TORONTO LIFE

The 10 biggest moments in Toronto architecture in the last 50 years

To celebrate Toronto Life's 50th year, we're counting down the biggest Toronto moments of the last half-century. This month, the buildings and builders that mattered most. Disagree with our choice for number one? Have your say at the bottom.

BY TORONTO LIFE | FEBRUARY 20, 2014 AT 10:30 PM



(Image: Getty Images)

