

The St. Lawrence Un-project

Toronto, Canada

by Alan Littlewood

In 1976, there was virtually no visible city fabric left in St. Lawrence—this was as close as a Modern Movement architect would get to a clean slate (photo 21); however, the plan we made did not embrace the visions of a brave new world but rather sought to incorporate the best characteristics of the existing one. Surrounding city streets were extended into the new community in an attempt to make it part of the city and new streets were added—a kind of invisible mending of the city fabric. Houses would relate to streets the way they did in the older neighbourhoods.

There was a mix of building forms, accommodating different household types with a variety of incomes. Parks, shops, community facilities and schools were all part of the mix. Our objective was to create an un-project—to make a place that was ordinary enough so it would not distinguish itself by being that different. It was new—there was nothing we could do about that—but we respected what the past offered us in order to make a place that met the needs of the people we served (Photos 22 & 23.) In many ways it was a leap of faith; there was no way we could have predicted the outcome. The greatest success of St. Lawrence, I think, is that it continues to surprise me.

Editor's Note: St Lawrence is a successful downtown Toronto housing development built in the late 1970s which, at the time, was the largest urban initiative of its kind in Canada. It was based upon principles of integration with the surrounding city, providing housing for people from a wide range of income groups and household types as well as creating different building forms along with a variety of uses supporting the new neighbourhood, such as parks, schools, shops, restaurants and health care facilities.



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