

Designs should be scrutinized not necessarily the designers

"Scale" as related to architecture, is not an easy word to define. When architects talk about scale they do not mean size. They have in mind the proportions of a building as well as how the building relates to other structures nearby, or to the landscape on which it is located.

Take the skyline of Toronto as an example. Forty years ago Toronto had a much more modest skyline than it has today. It's landmark buildings, the Royal York Hotel, the Bank of Commerce Tower, St. James Cathedral, to name a few, had been erected over many years and they related to each other, and to the lake in front of them, rather well.

When prosperity came in the 60's, and Toronto started to transform itself into a modern metropolis, I remember, that for several years, after the first two Dominion Centre Towers had been completed, Toronto's skyline was a mess. The two huge black towers looked alien and ominous if you sighted them from the island.

The whole skyline had been thrown out of kilter. Since then many towers have been added and a new and different skyline has been fashioned. Some of the towers are architectural masterpieces, but even the lesser ones are of the same scale. All together, and with the superb, soaring CN tower to one side, they make a grand ensemble. The present Toronto skyline is one of the most imaginative ones in North America. It's wonderful to look at in any weather and at any season.

Something similar happened in New York City at the same time, but with a different outcome. The gigantic twin towers of the World Trade Centre threw the New York skyline out of balance. This is not because they are so high, but because their design is so monolithic. The Empire State Building in New York is proof that a very high building can be as graceful as a church steeple. In the meantime, the Battery



Ideas and The Arts by John Sommer

Park Towers that have been built in front of the World Trade Centre have partly undone the damage, but it will take something else, I don't know what, to make the New York Skyline, as seen from the harbour, a pleasurable aesthetic experience again.

How are we doing here in Georgetown? The old Georgetown Main Street has, with a few, not very glaring exceptions, an admirable scale. The buildings lining the street relate well to the width of the street. The old builders had proportions in their bones and could do no wrong. We by comparison are so torn within ourselves that we only rarely manage to get things right. We have been lucky with the new Civic Centre. The building is beautiful and it sits well on its sloping lawn with the tall trees behind. We have to make sure now that any new building nearby will be of the same quality.

Other buildings in Georgetown did not turn out as well. People have a not unjustified fear of apartment towers, because they seem to be popping up in the wrong places. Yet, a tower or two, of the right design in the right place, can give great distinction to a small town's skyline.

I remember that Bill McNally wanted to build a rather elegant high tower where the squat and ungainly Silvercreek blocks are now. He should have been encouraged to build even higher and more slender. He would have

loved to do that. I know, because I talked to him at the time. With setbacks and a smart penthouse or sleeper, Silvercreek Towers could now be a Georgetown landmark, visible from afar, and not throwing a shadow on any homes nearby. Instead he was told to lower the design, to spread it out, with the result that the two blocks are intruding now, architectural, on the downtown, instead of enhancing it. Thanks to God they are standing in a valley.

Scale does not mean low. All the buildings on Guelph Street, between the Post Office and Norval Hill are low, but the street has noscale at all.

What can we learn from these examples?

We should not get ourselves bogged down in debating the merits and demerits of lowrises and highrises endlessly.

Highrise buildings are obviously neither a cheap nor a good way to pile poor people on top of each other. Highrise buildings work best as prestige buildings, to be occupied by rich people or by offices.

All the different types of lowrise buildings are best for homes, in particular if you have small children. What matters with any building is the design, and where design is concerned, a lowrise can be as flatfooted as a highrise, and vice versa.

Let's scrutinize and criticize the designs and drawings developers are putting under our noses, not the fact that they want to build something.

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WATERMAIN EXTENSION TO THE COMMUNITY OF GLEN WILLIAMS, TOWN OF HALTON HILLS, GEORGETOWN.
REVIEW OF PRELIMINARY DESIGN
A Public Information Centre will be held:
DATE: Thursday, August 15, 1991
TIME: 3:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.
7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.
PLACE: Glen Williams Town Hall, 1 Prince Street, Glen Williams
This Information Centre is being held to provide the public with an opportunity to review the preliminary design drawings for the proposed watermain extension. Interested persons are invited to drop in any time during the above hours to view and comment on the proposed works. Regional staff and Consultant will be available to answer your questions.

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CLIP & DROP OFF THIS BALLOT

This Weeks Question: Mookie Wilson was hit by a pitch in Monday night's (July 29th) game. Who was the pitcher?

Answer:

Name:

Address:

Phone Number:

Drop off this ballot at any of these merchants or at the Herald.