

Monster

by

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I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis.
This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final
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Abstract

451 Manning Avenue, home to an architect and an artist, has generated an adverse reaction within its community. The property is maintained as a testament to the Rao family history in Canada, but most visibly, Villa Rao stands in advocacy of diversity within our built environment. The recently proposed addition is a monstrosity by one hundred and twenty accounts.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my supervisor Donald McKay for your encouragement and critique throughout this work. Marie-Paule Macdonald, Rick Andrighetti and Scott Sørli for joining the conversation with insight and sincerely—thank you.

To Jasmine, my family, and friends, thank you for being part of this, I am incredibly grateful.

Gaetano, I am indebted to your spirit and kindness. I'll be carrying both forward.

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Monster

Reception

Read the following, with no context, as I did in July 2016.

You are a resident of this community - let's stand together as one in defeating this monstrosity to your century old neighbourhood. We need your help! Protect your community and the city plan so we can all enjoy our homes and community . . . If this resident is permitted to build this, what stops your next door neighbour from adversely impacting your home life every day? This sets a negative precedent that will continue to impact the rest of this community for years to come. Others can use this a precedent to build their own monstrosity, next to you!¹

I received this call to action with humour. I was taken back by the battle cry of a cranky neighbour—the mythical, hands-on-hip, cochair, cane-or-garden-hose-yielding kind perpetuated in movies and TV today. It was due to the tone of the notice, “outlining changes that will affect your [my] neighbourhood.”²

It was probing, and even, cinematic in a paid-programming kind of way. “How would you feel if your next door neighbour built this?”³

In credit to the author of the notice, I *was* lured into a response. Flipping back to the graphics included with the notice, I asked, and imagined the rest of the neighbourhood asked of themselves too, how would I feel if my next door neighbour built this? I was uncertain of my response to this hypothetical proposal. Does it provoke fear, tears, laughter or dismay? Would it be a positive or negative contribution to our neighbourhood?

I don't sit in the window next door and I have not invested in

1 Anonymous Author, Public Flyer delivered to residents of Toronto's Little Italy in late July 2016

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

property nearby. I just might be the least qualified to weigh in on this. But, as a neighbour, and student of architecture, I'm curious, at odds, and if I spin this right, inspired.

The notice arrived last night at my door. It was sneaky, possibly also, irritating and spineless. I assumed guilty hands were all over it, but what did I know? Regardless, I have committed to tell you so much, even if it turned out the hands had a spine.

Notice and Notoriety

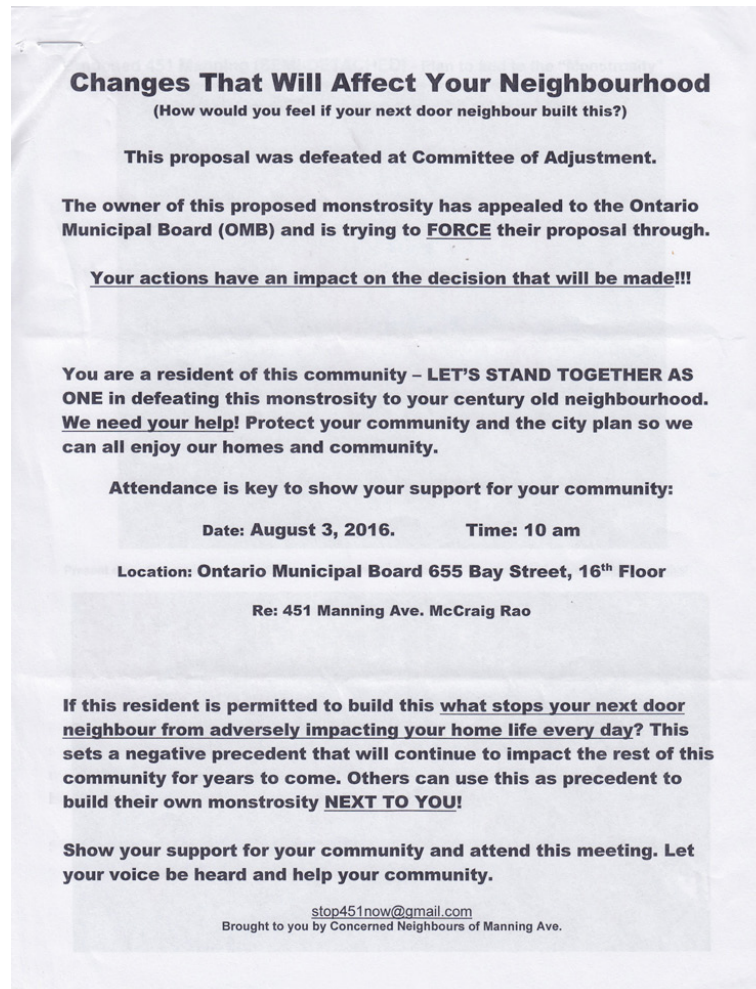
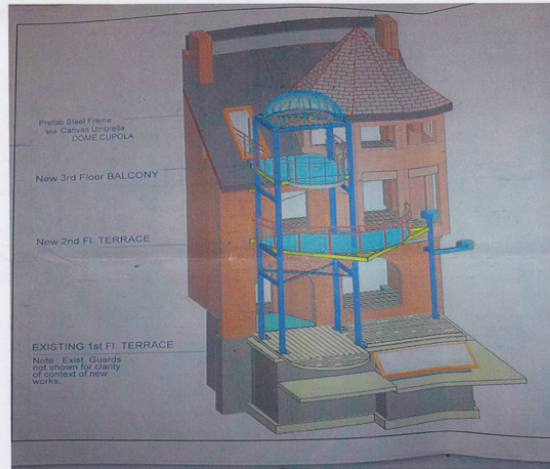


Fig. 1 Notice (first page)

Community notice delivered to residents of
Little Italy in July 2016

Proposed 451 Manning (SEMI-DETACHED) - Plan to add to the "Monstrosity"



Present day – Owner plans to add a 2nd floor terrace and 3rd floor balcony – nothing like it in area. [Help us stop this!](#)



Fig. 2 Notice (second page)

Community notice delivered to residents of
Little Italy in July 2016

Sorry it didn't work out

This study of Villa Rao follows three pursuits. The first was with suburban Toronto, the second with Newfoundland, the third with Carnival.

Reflecting on these three, I imagined this book could open with “sorry it didn't work out”. But, with the contents at hand, it might be a fitting sentiment for this story's end.

Reflecting on the three pursuits it becomes clear I was in search of difference. By foot I crossed the fourth largest city in North America, walking transects through ex-urban Toronto, following the footsteps of solitary walkers before me with hopes of finding something I could ask you to look at a little closer. Coincidentally, the fourth largest island in North America, I crossed that too, thumbing across Newfoundland fueled by a desire for experience outside of my everyday and like nothing I'd seen before. I found it. But, reflecting on the contemporary architecture of Newfoundland, particularly the new builds on Fogo Island, I also found disappointment. Settled back in into my everyday, I dreamt of carnival.

An Itch

Everyone telling a story has an itch: deep down, something they wish to convey. As they write, tell, discuss, put something out there, everything builds up to some truth that deepens our understanding of our place in the world. My itch is to show, while Villa Rao, and its most recent proposal, is non-adherent, insensitive, and monstrous—it has merit.

I'm going to borrow Susan Sontag's opening remarks in *Notes On Camp*. Not to suggest that 451 Manning is Campy, although that is a conversation we can have, but, so I can share in the same endeavour, to draw the contours of Villa Rao and to recount its history.⁴ I have a deep sympathy, and it's modified by revulsion I am strongly drawn to Villa Rao, but almost as strongly, offended by it.⁶

At the end of this book it will become clear that 451 Manning does not offer a blueprint solution to the problem of a contemporary lack of provocative aesthetic experiences. I don't claim to offer one either. Other people are more qualified to, and have written extensively on the subject. What I can do here is support a project with good intentions and provide an account of my own, asking us to take stock of our surroundings.

⁴ Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp," in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. New York. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 1966, 276. For Sontag, this was for public edification, but she also reveals to us is another intention, self edification, in an effort to come to terms with a sharp conflict in her own sensibility.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

Who's Who

I wasn't able to attend the OMB meeting listed on the community notice. I stayed close though, routinely looking for municipal case files to show up online, digging up contacts, and deliberately walking past Villa Rao on the off-chance of running into someone involved.

I sent a message to the e-mail contact on the notice. No reply. I took to the street, but was unable to find the responsible party, or anyone up for discussing the matter at length. "Yes, we received one of those too", was the response. It ended there. I did get the feeling people didn't like it. Several neighbourhood residents sent an email to stop451now@gmail.com in support of the notice. I learned that the notice had drawn support all the way from Dundas to Dupont.

The main entrance to 451 Manning is to the side of the house, set back significantly from the street and behind a locked gate. The gate displays signage, notifying those who venture into the front yard that visiting is "by appointment only." I tracked down a phone number corresponding to the address. It belonged to Guy Rao an architect, located in Toronto with a business address at 451 Manning. I was surprised to learn that an architect had, at the very least, an affiliation with the address. I rung the number as I waited for my laundry to dry at the Harbord Coinwash, just a five minute walk from 451.

On the receiving end of the phone was a polite woman, who identified herself as a resident at the property. She inquired about the motivation of my call. They had received considerable attention over the years and it was evident that complaints and telephone harassment were customary. I shared my intentions. As an architecture student, in

addition to my identity as a curious neighbour, I was well received. The phone was set down for a couple minutes and returning to the other end was the enthusiastic, distinctly Italian voice—Gaetano Rao

We spoke for 45 minutes. I listened to a brief history of the house and property. This included its age, the house built over 140 years ago and belonging to his family for the past 60 years. As Rao described, the home is a testament of his family history in Canada. His father was a carpenter, an all-round handyman who kept things in great condition. Rao has continued in these efforts. The stone planter out front at the sidewalk, he noted, still standing to this day, was built by his father and happens to be one of the nicest on block.

I also discovered who dropped the notice at my door. I was not surprised to find out they were the immediate neighbours, one house to the south and the attached house to the north. I was invited to e-mail him if I wanted to discuss anything further. There was good intention behind this invitation, and it seemed, behind the work too.

The City

For all the diversity of experience the city promises, everything is increasingly similar. Many would say this promise is long gone, no longer one we can uphold. In 1994 Rem Koolhaas provided a new promise, telling the story of the Generic City, shrouded in a blanket of homogeneity and hell-bent on standardization. Decades later, this is the story of the city we still tell.

As we travel from one city to another, we not only encounter replica settings, we now seem to crave them. We seek out and celebrate similarity as much as we do difference. This is odd, because when we talk about homogeneity we use the voice of a victim. It is happening around us and to us, we say. But how can we be so sure, now that we have this curious craving, it is not happening because of us.

In an essay for the American tech website The Verge, one writer locates this craving in the “affluent, self-selecting group of people moving through spaces linked by technology”⁷, such as Airbnb and Yelp. As this happens, the blank aesthetic proliferated by these companies, what the author calls Airspace, slowly takes over. Spaces begin to resemble one another - “minimalist furniture; craft beer and avocado toast; reclaimed wood; industrial lighting; cortados; fast internet.”⁸ This is a recent update to Koolhaas’ story, with companies such as Airbnb reaching popular consumption only over the past several years.

While we may become restless or bored with this blank aesthetic, it is even more likely that we will feel comfortable. As creatures of habit, we slowly become insecure in the face of difference. The city as we want to know it, diverse and complex, ceases to exist.

⁷ Kyle Chayka, “How Silicon Valley helps spread the same sterile aesthetic across the world.” Accessed January 14, 2017. (<https://www.theverge.com/2016/8/3/12325104/airbnb-aesthetic-global-minimalism-startup-gentrification>)

⁸ Ibid.

Demeanour

The city has its appearances, one of which is the blank aesthetic, but along with this, it has standardized actions, or blank actions. Waiting for the bus, crossing the street, opening a door, ascending and descending staircases, sitting on a bench, etc. Our lives in the city are composed of these actions. They are normal.

Occasionally we are met with regulations and intolerances in the form of safety measures or private interests. We are conditioned with requests to cross only with signal, no loitering, slow down, seating for 15 minutes only, do not enter, enter to the right, please remove hats, no photography, no skateboarding, do not climb fence.

One of the conditions to being a normal member of society, something philosopher Mark Kingwell often discusses, is that we carry ourselves with a certain posture by adhering to social conventions, but also very directly, by maintaining an upright bodily state. Although we won't see posted signs, there is a general understanding and request, that one does not lay down in the city. We would think, if there was anywhere difference is accepted, it's the city. But looking at something so inherent to us, such as the upright posture, suggests that we aren't tolerant. As Kingwell notes on the "remarkable narrative of the upright posture", a disruption of the upright posture—the fall—is a substantial challenge to our sense of self, and losing our uprightness abruptly is unsettling.⁹ If someone else does it, even to themselves, it creates commotion. The act of being horizontal, sleeping in the city for example, is incredibly offensive, even a punishable offense, presumably because it affects whatever sense of order we think the city is supposed to have.¹⁰

⁹ Mark Kingwell. "Rites of Way: The Politics and Poetics of Public Space" (lecture presented at the Hope for the City Symposium, Cleveland, Ohio March 15, 2016).

¹⁰ Ibid.

Difference

My first encounter with Villa Rao was before receiving the neighbourhood notice. During a weekend visit, I took a photo of Villa Rao in passing. It caught my attention with its difference. Referencing Kingwell, I now say it was sleeping in the city. I was presented with something extraordinary in a setting where I didn't expect it. A setting where we have come to accept that everything will be the same.

I recorded it with the simple intent of jogging my memory. Shortly after, I included it in an archive of images sharing in a particular spirit. The growing archive has never held a title. The images themselves are titled, for the most part built work and paper architecture from recent years. Amongst the images of buildings are images of steel contraptions belonging to North American travelling carnival and colourful embellishments of traditional carnival festivities. While the folder has no title, its spirit is unmistakable, having to do with amusement, colour, things that move, but are also welded, items that might look at home on a playground, but are equally appropriate seaside, shapes that are not serious but ideas that might be, assemblages appearing as if they have been in or would be the cause of an accident, constructions that are unfinished or accidental, items that would inspire a workout, composed of linear filigree, topsy-turvy, knobs and buttons.

My first impression was positive. This was something I liked. In the stripped down, lifeless, very early spring, the colour alone was a welcome site. Later on, with the notice before me, I wanted to know more.

Association



Fig. 3 Main Access Stairs by Ateliers Jean
Nouvel at the Art & Design Atomium
Museum



Fig. 4 Europa Opera Stage by Ada Collective at Bedford Square, London.



Fig 5. 451 Manning Avenue



Fig. 6 Old Street Roundabout Proposal
by Alma-nac Collaborative, London



Fig. 7 Vesterport Arch by Ernst Lohse, Copenhagen



Fig. 8 Coastal Geometry by Aleksandr Smirnov



Fig. 9 Urban Spa, Student Design-Build at the Institute of Architecture and Design Chihuahua

Little Italy

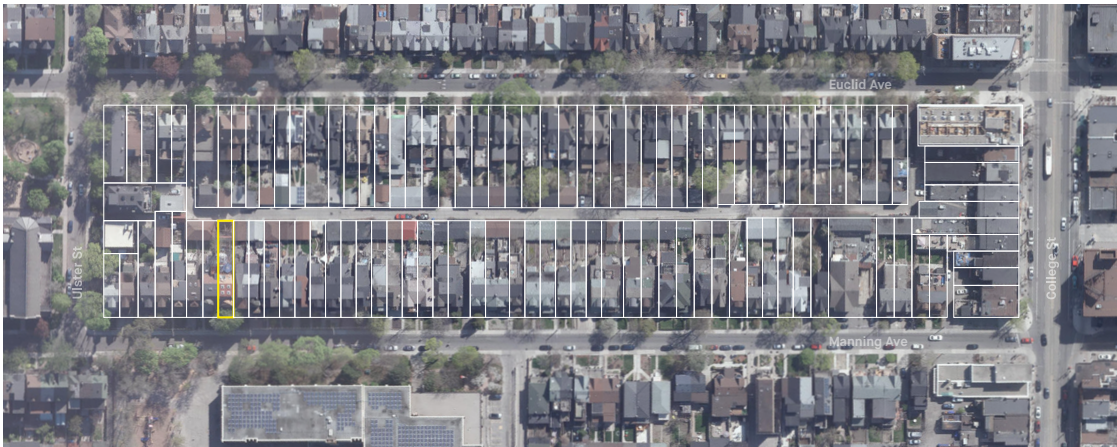


Fig. 10 Manning Avenue, between
College Street and Ulster Street

Villa Rao in yellow



AT HOME: Gualtiero (Guy) Rao sips a drink at Corso Italia with owner Fabio Flumana. "To me this is not Little Italy, this is Little Canada," says Rao.



LOVES THE ENERGY: Originally from Rosedale, Ted Sankey plays Cuban music in College St. clubs. He says he just can't get enough of the neighbourhood's vitality.

College St. a stage for 'walking theatre'

Fig. 11 Toronto Star, December 15, 1997

Residents of Little Italy comment on the diversity and vitality of the neighbourhood

Manning Avenue



Fig. 12 Manning Avenue 1
Fig. 13 Manning Avenue 2
Fig. 14 Manning Avenue 3



Fig. 15 Manning Avenue 4
Fig. 16 Manning Avenue 5
Fig. 17 Manning Avenue 6

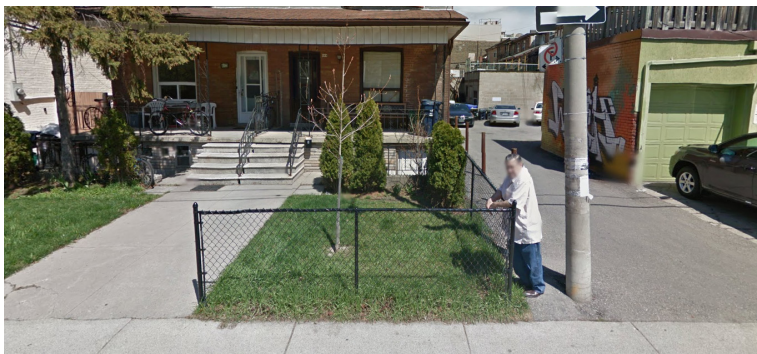


Fig. 18 Manning Avenue 7
Fig. 19 Manning Avenue 8
Fig. 20 Manning Avenue 9

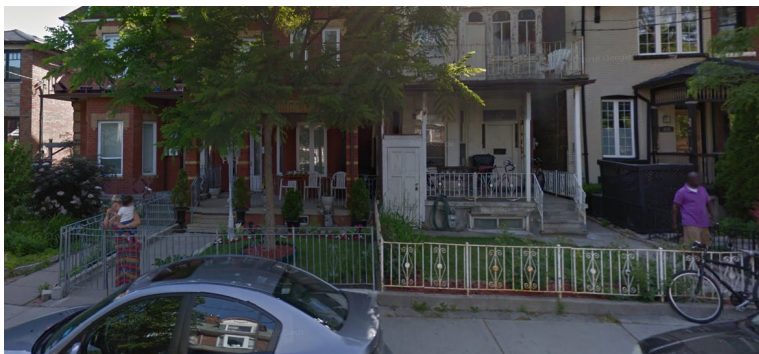


Fig. 21 Manning Avenue 10
Fig. 22 Manning Avenue 11
Fig. 23 Manning Avenue 12

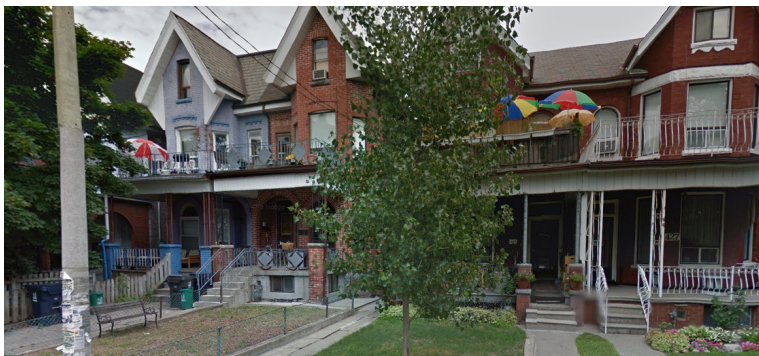


Fig. 24 Manning Avenue 13
Fig. 25 Manning Avenue 14
Fig. 26 Manning Avenue 15

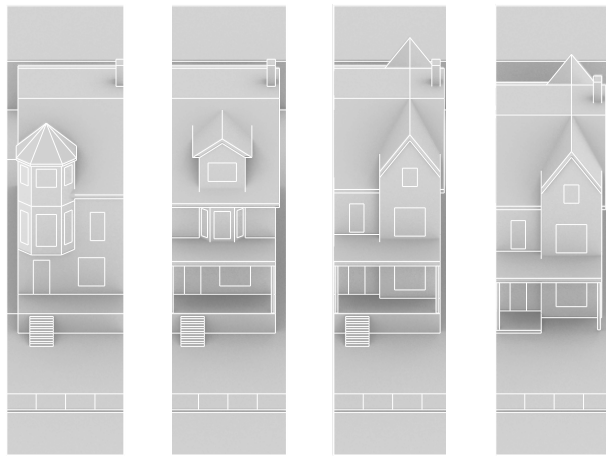


Fig. 27 Four Typologies

The semi-detached homes of Manning Avenue are the product of a Victorian era Sears home-builder catalogue. The typologies pictured above account for the majority of housing on Manning Avenue

Front Yard



Fig. 28 Front Yard

The typical semi-detached house and lot in the Little Italy neighbourhood. Residents can build up the property line and have restricted use of the Public Right of Way, even within their lot. The Easement is usually what causes feud amongst neighbours

2007



Fig. 29 2007

Villa Rao is only recently notorious. The above photo was included in a City of Toronto staff report and is the first front yard structure, dated 2007

The Architect



Fig. 30 Frank Lloyd Wright

While the iconic photo of Mies van der Rohe standing over a model of Crown Hall may best capture public perception of the architect's ego, pictured above is Frank Lloyd Wright. For Rao, Wright is the image of the architect—calm, collected, and always in control.

The Neighbour



Fig. 31 Neighbour

Neighbourhoods, and 'Not-in-my-backyard' communities particularly, have their own stereotypes. The mythical character pictured above, hands on hips and full of angst, is who I imagined was responsible for the notice I received at my door.

Bylaws

Bylaws are regulatory measures. With regards to buildings they can be divided into two broad categories, design codes and building codes. The building codes are construction guidelines, setting up provisions for safety and usability. Design codes, on the other hand, are regulations dictating the appearance and form of building.

Building codes we understand; they uphold safety and health. Design codes we understand less. They are far more flexible and open to change, sometimes it would seem without any reason or logic. But these design codes are also about health—well-being, to be exact. If we believe that the way in which buildings are designed can improve the quality of life, the design codes become as crucial as the building codes.

The adversity surrounding Villa Rao is less about right or wrong; should we let this be built or not; instead, it's about the conditions we might blindly follow today. The city ruled on a basis of bylaw adherence, suggesting that a break from the design code would not benefit the community. We are fearful that this monstrosity, and the particulars of its design, will negatively affect our well-being.

Committee of Adjustment

What follows is a description of the Committee of Adjustment (COA), collected from information made available to the public on the City of Toronto COA website on May 21, 2017, so as to familiarize yourself with the proceedings that held Villa Rao at bay.

The COA is appointed by the Toronto City Council; it consists of citizen members operating as a quasi-judicial body to adjudicate matters related to minor variances to zoning by-laws and land severance. 451 Manning was not granted any by-law variance by COA. Gaetano Rao's appeal to this decision: his wish to fight the decision based on the merit of his proposal, is what resulted in the distribution of the flyer, the community coalition, and the eventual Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) case.

The COA has four panels, corresponding to the service areas of the four Community Councils: Etobicoke York, North York, Toronto East York, and Scarborough. 451 Manning falls under the jurisdiction of the Toronto East York panel. Each panel comprises five members, including a chairperson.

As a quasi-judicial body, the COA has abilities and procedures resembling those of a court of law. They are obliged to objectively examine facts and draw conclusions so as to provide the basis of an official action.¹¹ Such actions are able to remedy the situation at hand or impose next steps for specific parties.

All meetings and hearings are open to the press and public discussion, therefore the COA is considered transparent. Transparency allows us to hold individuals accountable and fends off corruption.

¹¹ Jeffrey Lehman. West's Encyclopedia of American Law, 2nd edition, "Quasi-judicial body", Volume 8. Gale Group, 2004.

Although the COA may appear to operate as a fully transparent design review panel, this is not always the case. The official hearing procedure asks that the Chair requests parties to meet outside the hearing room in order to discuss concerns. This request is in the interest of time and smooth proceedings. It also helps fulfill the COA's purpose to facilitate, what Rao has called, on-the-spot deal making.

Anyone may attend the hearing as an interested party, either in support of or contesting the variances in question. After a five minute presentation by the applicant, you are invited to speak, addressing the Committee first by clearly stating your name and address. You may then explain how the variances or consent being requested will positively or negatively impact the enjoyment of your property and neighbourhood. As the COA chair said during one of my hearing visits, "we deal with impact of construction and built form; we are not the design police."

The Committee uses four tests in order to determine a variance worthy of request. [1] Is the variance requested minor? [2] Is the proposal appropriate for the development of the land and/or building? [3] Is the general intent and purpose of the City's Zoning By-law maintained? [4] Is general intent and purpose of the Official Plan maintained?

There are items that, although they may come into play at a hearing, are not supposed to be considered by the Committee: aspects of a proposal that do not require variances (ex: If building height is not listed as a requested variance then it is not a matter that the Committee can consider); noise, pollution, property maintenance, construction and engineering concerns; prosecution for illegal construction (the

Committee is required to view all cases as if the construction has not been started or completed), and personal comments about neighbours, agents, or applicants.

As a Toronto City Council committee, the COA is a well supported, having recently been granted two new support programs: the Mediation Pilot Program and the Toronto Local Appeal Body.

As announced on the City of Toronto COA website, in 2016 the Toronto City Council approved a trial, city-wide Mediation Pilot Program aiding minor variance applications. The Mediation Pilot Program is intended to evaluate the benefits of mediation in resolving disputes related to minor variance and consents applications. Mediation sessions forming part of the Pilot Program are at no cost to the applicant or other affected parties disputing an application. Participation in the mediation process is voluntary and mediation cannot proceed without the consent and involvement of the applicant.

Mediation is offered either before the COA has made a decision or after the COA has made a decision. The program is not intended to replace informal discussions between parties as a means to resolve disputes. Applicants are still encouraged to speak to neighbours and other interested and a elected parties to address issues prior to making their formal applications.

All mediation sessions are conducted privately. They do not adhere to any template, and it is up to the mediator to determine the style of mediation best suited to a particular dispute. If a settlement is reached, Minutes of Settlement will be drafted by the mediator with a

planner and the signed by all affected parties.

Regardless of a session occurring before or after a COA hearing, a COA hearing must take place after mediation. The COA has no obligation to accept the mediated outcome and makes their own decisions based on the mediated application. The benefits of this program therefore reside in reduced costs in settling disputes, access to neutral professional expertise, a collaborative process with neighbours, and an increased likelihood of settlement.

Also announced on the City of Toronto COA website, in early 2017 the City of Toronto established the independent Toronto Local Appeal Body (TLAB) to rule on appeals of decisions of the Committee of Adjustment and provide quick and efficient hearings. It replaces the function of the Ontario Municipal Board, where Gaetano took his COA appeal in August 2016. “We can anticipate this will remove hundreds of cases a year from the Ontario Municipal Board, providing significant relief to the current scheduling pressure.”¹² The Ontario Municipal Board remains responsible for appeals related to Official Plan and Zoning By-law amendments, site plan applications and decisions related to subdivisions.

The TLAB Chair and members were nominated by an impartial citizen-member nominating panel and recommendations for appointments were submitted to City Council for a 2017 start. Their mandate is to make decisions about local planning matters affecting Toronto neighbourhoods in a fair, consistent, fact-based and informed manner.

12 Annik Forristal. “What to Expect from Toronto’s Local Appeal Body: Knowns and Unknowns.” McMillan, accessed April 27, 2017 (http://www.mcmillan.ca/Files/197935_What_To_Expect_From_Torontos_Local_Appeal_Body__Knowns_And_Unknowns.pdf)

Different from the OMB, the TLAB will hold its public meetings, make minutes available to the public, and accept written or oral submissions to proceedings. The impact of this more public format is unknown, however, it introduces an interesting potential for public participation to shape the LAB's daily operations. For example, draft rules of practice and procedure for the LAB were considered at the LAB's meeting in March 2017. With this open meeting format, submissions regarding these rules were able to be put forward by members of the public. Therefore, unlike at the OMB, the public may be able to directly shape the policies and procedures that govern the LAB's operations on a day to day basis.¹³

According to the City of Toronto COA website, on December 13, 2016 City Council appointed the first seven TLAB members, to a 4-year term. Ian Lord, an experienced planning and development lawyer will act as Chair of the TLAB. As at the OMB, the TLAB's members come from a variety of experience and backgrounds and include a former civil litigator, Susan Bryson, a former Committee of Adjustment member, Sabnavis Gopikrishna, and a professional planner, Laurie McPherson. "It is expected that one TLAB member will preside alone over each hearing."¹⁴ Of the eight members, six are lawyers and one is a planner. None are architects.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Minor Adjustments

It was not until the OMB that the case was discussed in length. Gaetano sought three minor variances from the older By-Law N0.438-86 and six from the city's new comprehensive Zoning By-law No. 569-2013. They are as follows:

1. Chapter 10.5.40.50 Decks, Platforms and Amenities (3), By-law 569-2013. A platform located at or above the second storey of a building may be no higher than the level of the storey from which it gains access. In this case, second floor deck and third floor terrace are higher than the level of the storey from which they gain access.
2. Chapter 10.5.40.60 Permitted Encroachments (1), By-law 569-2013. A platform with a floor higher than the first storey of the building above established grade may encroach into the required front yard setback the lesser of 1.5 meters or 50% of the required front yard setback (2.28m) provided it is no closer to a side lot line than the required side yard setback. In this case, the second floor terrace will encroach into the required front yard setback 2.95m.
3. Chapter 10.5.40.60 Permitted Encroachments (2)(A), By-law 569-2013. A canopy, awning or similar structure, with or without structural support, or a roof over a platform which complies with regulation 10.5.40.60.(1) may encroach into the required setback to the same extent as the platform it is covering. In this case, the roof will cover the second floor platform, which does not comply with regulation 10.5.40.60.(1).
4. Chapter 10.10.40.10 Height (1)(A), By-law 569-2013. The maximum permitted building or structure height is 10.0 m. In this case the altered dwelling will have a height of 11.27 m.
5. Chapter 10.10.40.10 Height (2)(B)(ii), By-law 569-2013. The maximum permitted height of all side exterior main walls facing a side lot line is 7.5 m. In this case, the side exterior main walls of the altered dwelling will have a height of 11.27 m.
6. Chapter 10.10.40.30 Building Depth (1)(A), By-law 569-2013. The maximum

permitted building depth for a semi-detached dwelling is 17.0 m. In this case, the altered dwelling will have a building depth of 23.39 m.

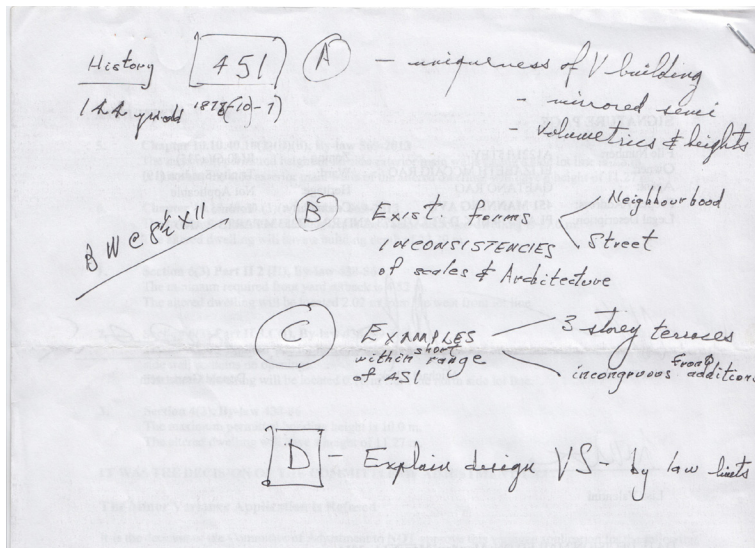
7. Section 6(3) Part II Setbacks 2 (II), By-law 438-86. The minimum required front yard setback is 4.52 m (the average of the shortest distances by which the front walls of the adjacent existing buildings are set back from their front lot lines). In this case, the altered dwelling will be located 2.02 m from the west front lot line.

8. Section 6(3) Part II Setbacks 3.C(I), By-law 438-86. The minimum required side lot line setback of a semi-detached or row house dwelling is 0.45 m where the side wall contains no openings. In this case, the altered dwelling will be located 0.18 m from the north side lot line.

9. Section 4(2) Height Limits: Buildings and Structures, By-law 438-86. The maximum permitted building height is 10.0 m. In this case the altered dwelling will have a height of 11.27 m.¹⁵

¹⁵ City of Toronto. "Public Hearing Notice A1221/15TEY", Councillor Mike Layton's website, accessed September 25, 2016 (<http://mikelayton.to/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/451-Manning-Ave-Public-Notice.pdf>)

Response



History 451
144 years old 1878-10-7

BW @ 8 1/2 x 11

- A Uniqueness of V(ictorian) building volumetrics & heights
- B Exist(ing) forms - neighbourhood, street inconsistencies of scales & architecture
- C Examples within short range of 451 - 3 storey terraces, incongruous front additions
- D Explain design vs. by-law limits

Fig. 32 Gaetano's Notes

Written in advance of the Ontario
Municipal Board Hearing

Nearby Front Additions

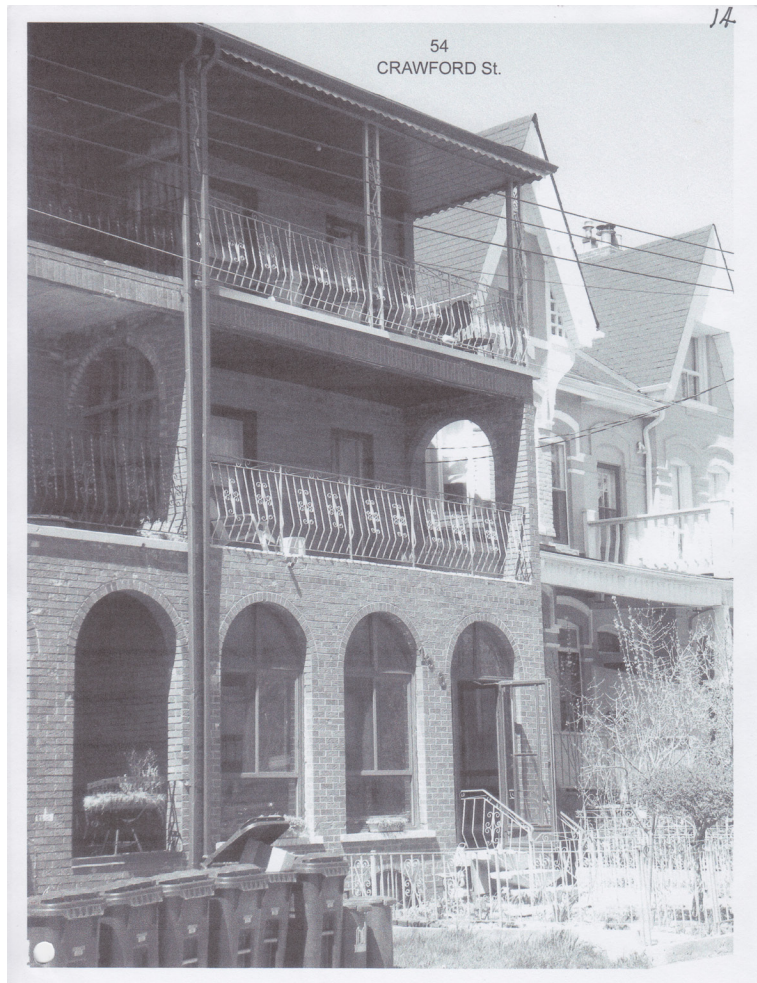


Fig. 33 54 Crawford Street

Front addition, as presented to the OMB.



Fig. 34 207 Crawford Street

Front addition, as presented to the OMB.

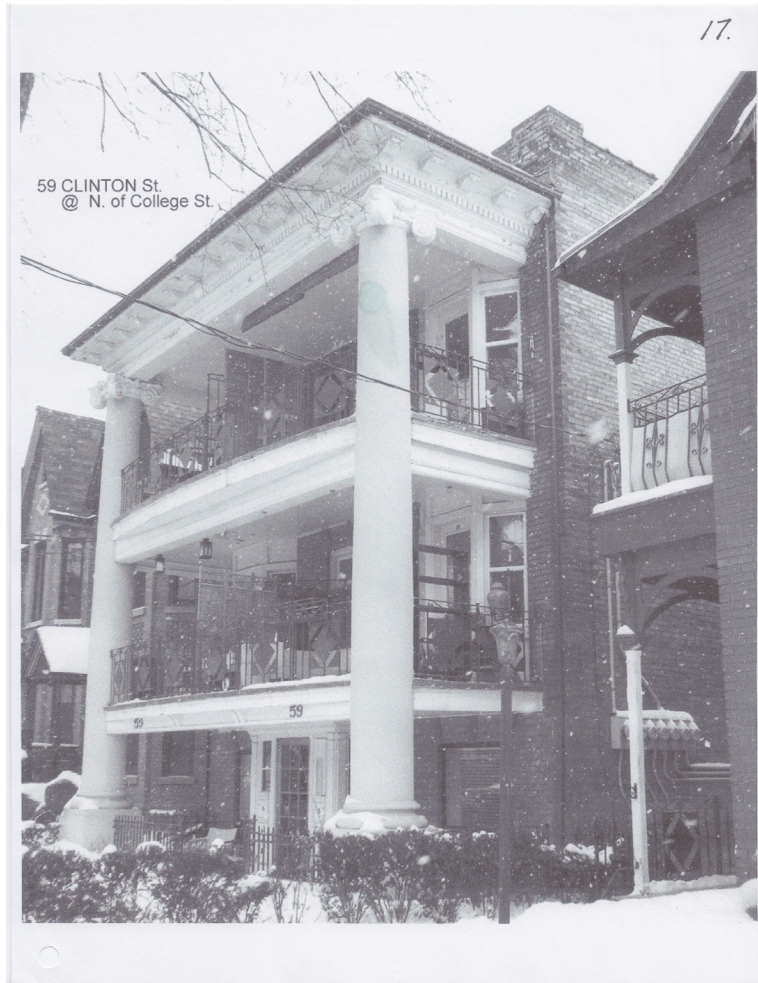


Fig. 35 59 Clinton Street

Front addition, as presented to the OMB.

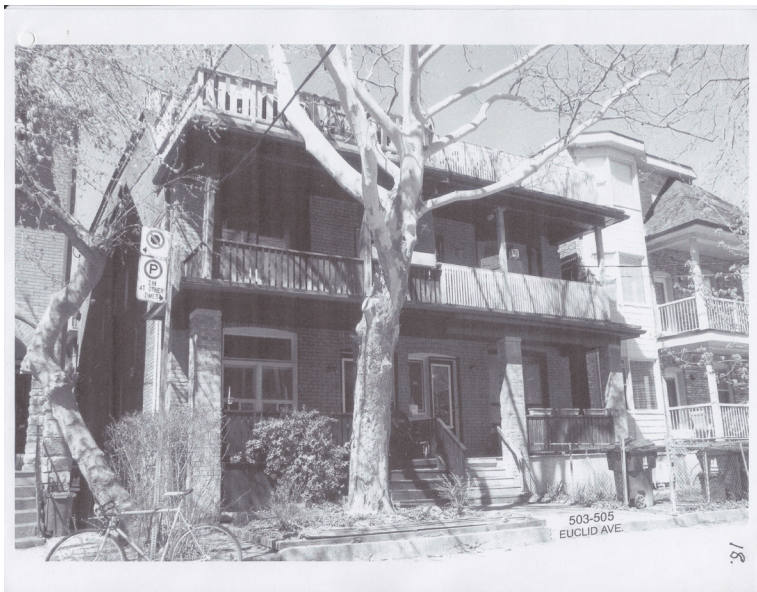


Fig. 36 503-505 Euclid Avenue

Front addition, as presented to the OMB.

19



Euclid Av. @ Harbord St. -----
595 one street east and half block north of 451 Manning Ave.

THREE STORIES of FULL-FRONT TERRACES flush to side walls

.....that didn't destroy the "tight-knit community" !

Fig. 37 594 Euclid Avenue

Front addition, as presented to the OMB.



Fig. 38 337 Palmerston Avenue

Front addition, as presented to the OMB.

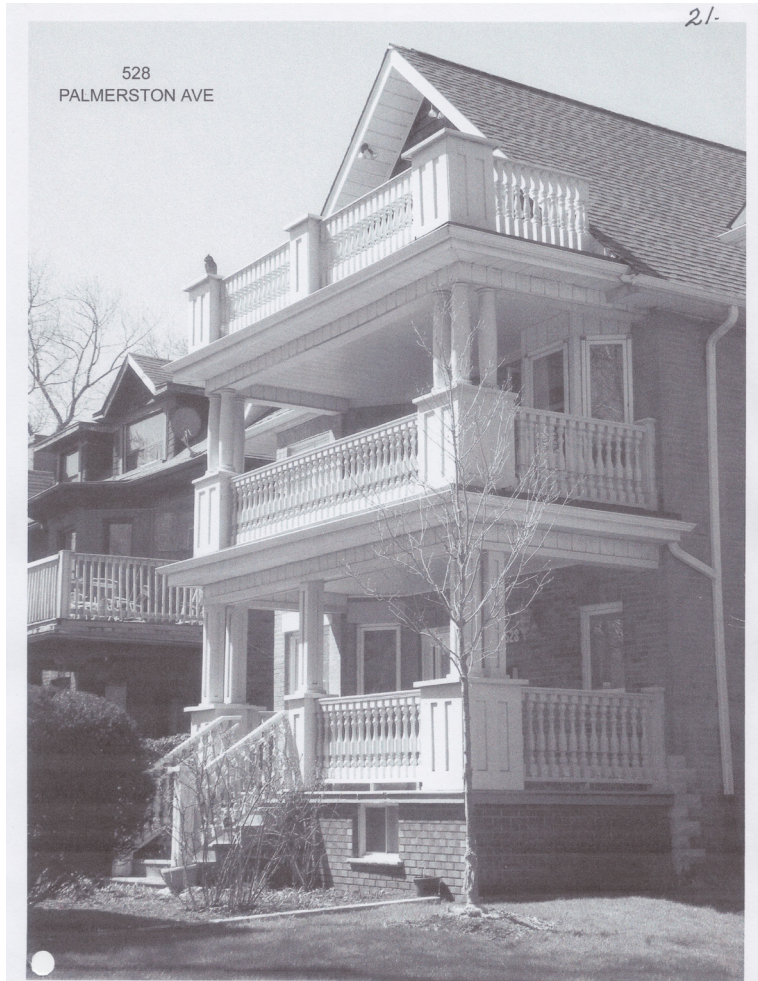


Fig. 39 523 Palmerston Avenue

Front addition, as presented to the OMB.

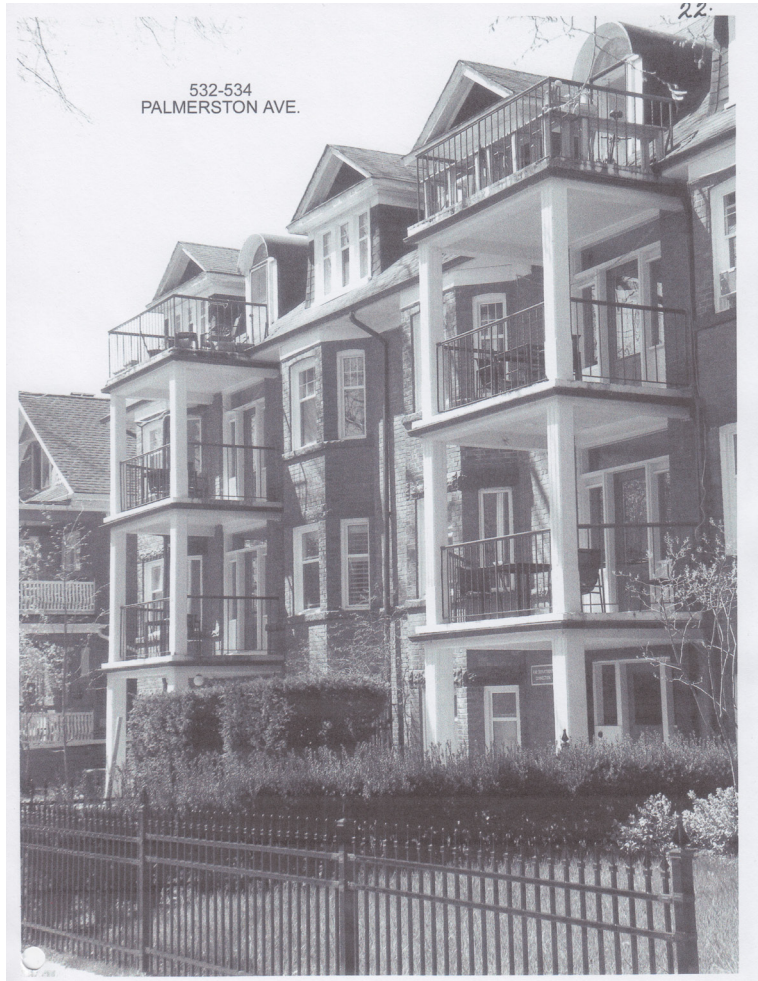


Fig. 40 532/534 Palmerston Avenue
Front addition, as presented to the OMB.

23.



EXAMPLE
of 3-storey balconies built to edges of masonry walls 378 Markam St south of Ulster St.
GUY (Gaetano) RAO TORONTO
ARCHITECT

Fig. 41 378 Markam Street

Front addition, as presented to the OMB.



Fig. 42 441/443 Manning Avenue

Front addition, as presented to the OMB.

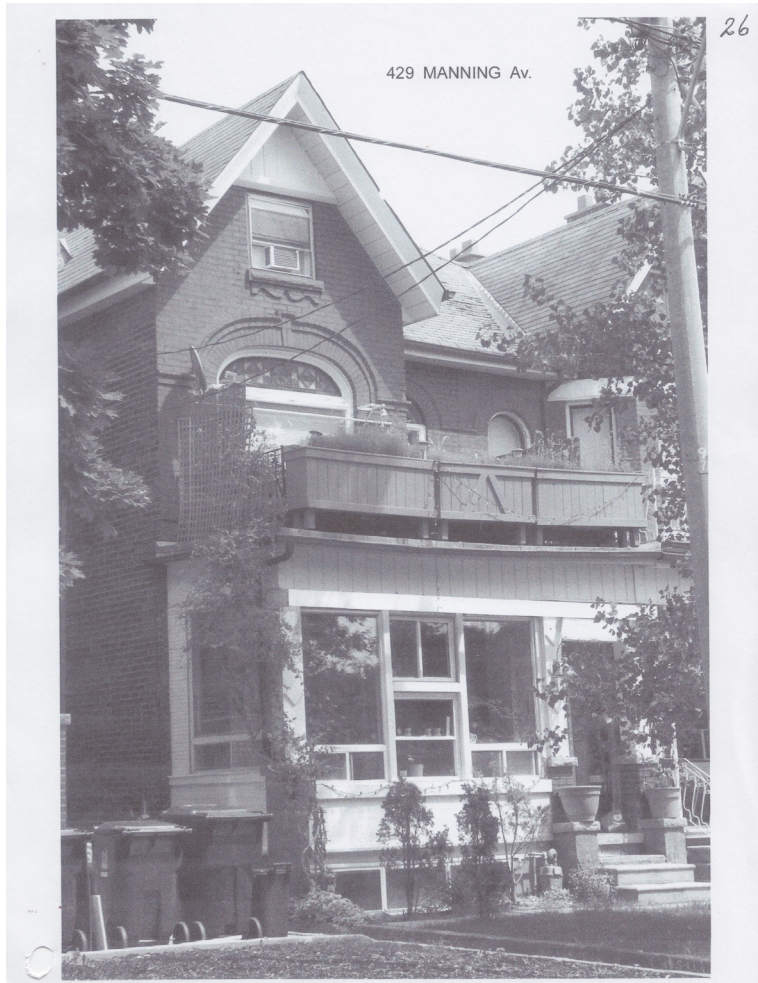


Fig. 43 429 Manning Avenue

Front addition, as presented to the OMB.

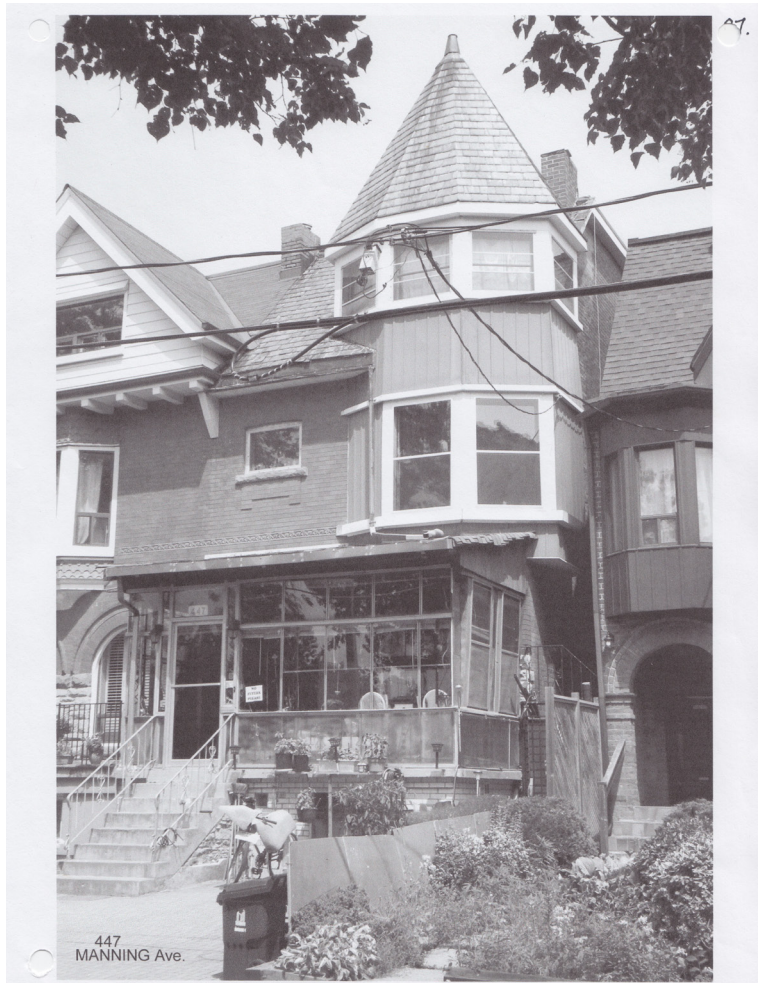


Fig. 44 447 Manning Avenue

Front addition, as presented to the OMB.

Victorian Patina



Fig. 45 453/451 Manning Avenue

New second floor terrace and third floor balcony respecting the 'Victorian Patina' of 451 Manning. As presented to the OMB.

The Hearing

I was not able to attend the hearing, but can account for the following from the detailed case file, number PL160352, on the OMB website. The board heard evidence on behalf of the applicant, officially Gaetano's wife Elizabeth McCraig Rao, from Gaetano. The Board also heard from Martin Rendl, qualified as a land use planner, regularly providing expert planning evidence to the OMB on behalf of the city. The city, received legal counsel from Mark Crawford. The case is Gaetano vs. the city, and not Gaetano vs. the neighbours.

The following four participants also testified against the applicant: Jim, former tenant and son-in-law to Rita (neighbour immediately south); Ingrid, resident of a neighbouring street and conceded member of the community; Luis, resident of the adjacent use to the north of the subject property; and Marcel, the son of Luiz, translating for his father, but also testifying on his behalf.

The hearing began with the a testimony from the applicant. Rao presented his evidence to the judge. Minimizing the gravity of the proposal, Rao made it known that the number of variances, officially 9, was really 7 instances requiring variance from the bylaw. Variance 2 and 3 were the same request. The same could be said for 4 and 5.

Rao addressed the issue of scale, providing photographs of other homes nearby, which have second and third floor balconies, some of them large, adjacent to other dwellings. He indicated that many of these balconies have existed for decades with the older Victorian houses in the Neighbourhood. Whatever truth this evidence could have provided, it was washed out under cross-examination, where Rao acknowledged

that some of his examples were a significant distance from the street and that he was not aware of the setback distances in the specific cases.

Rao's second significant piece of evidence was the proposed design, presented in a set of drawings including plan, elevation and axonometric views. Rao described two approaches for dealing with, what he called, the "Victorian patina" on a home such as his. Either one stays with the exact language, or delicately brings in modern materials. Rao stated the proposed addition, borrowing from both approaches, would be in harmony with the original home. He directed attention to the unique exterior arches above the window and entry on the main floor. Examining the proposed addition, one can see the language of the arch carry over into the cupolas, particularly in elevation. The proposal complements the existing front yard work, also following the language of the arch.

This was all the evidence Rao provided.

The Proposal

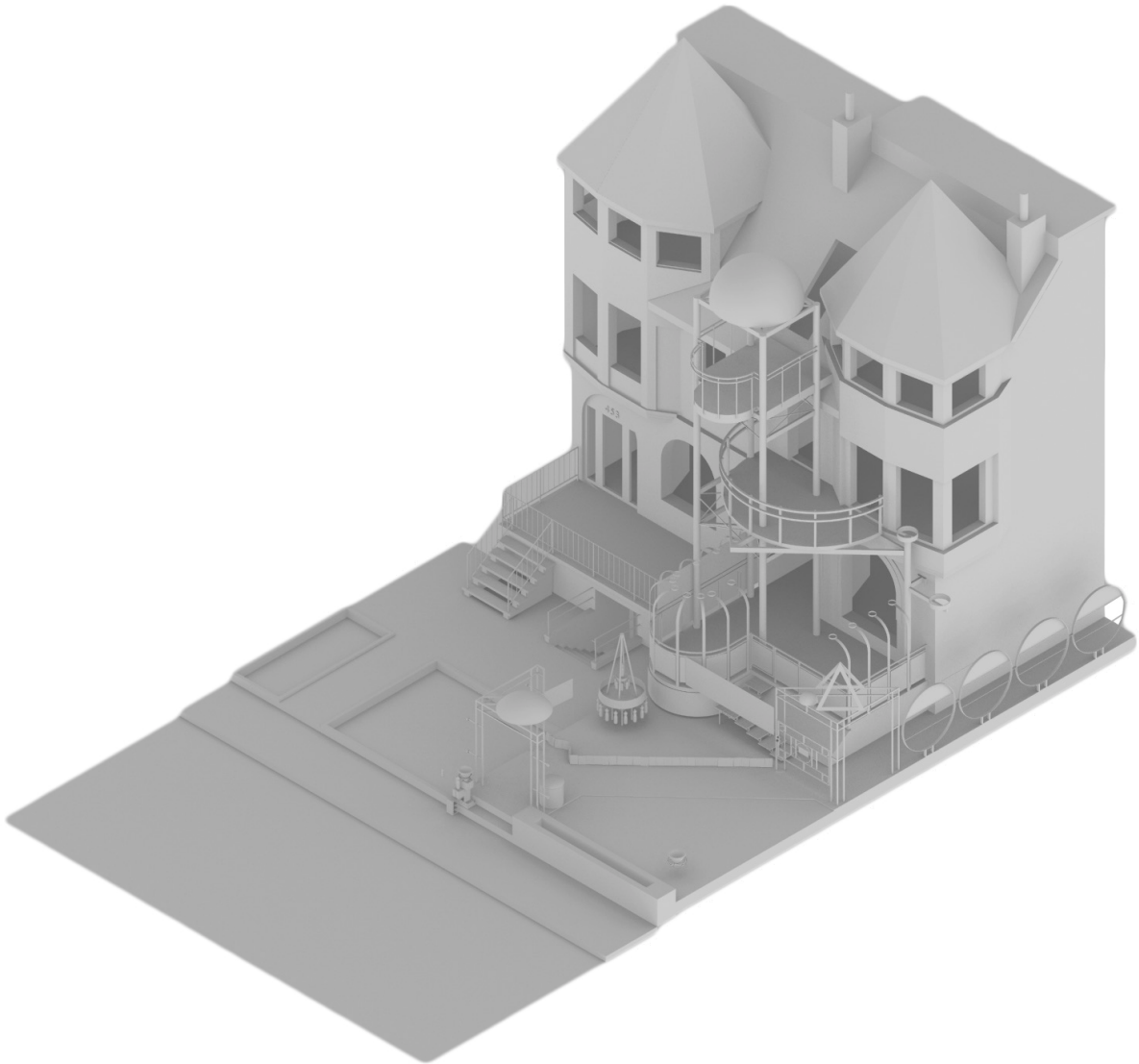


Fig. 46 Proposal

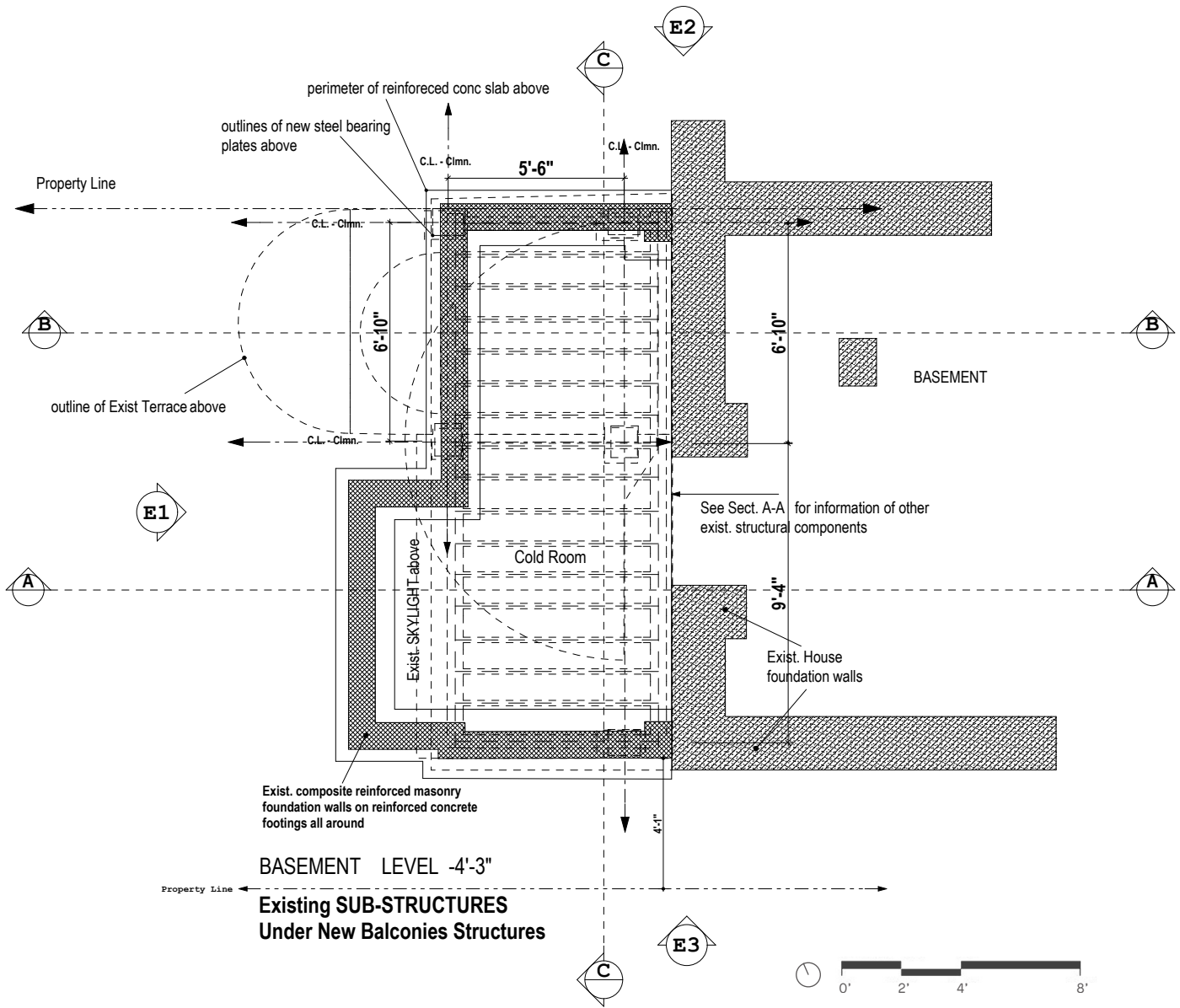


Fig. 47 Existing Basement Plan

Showing cold storage and foundation walls beneath proposed addition

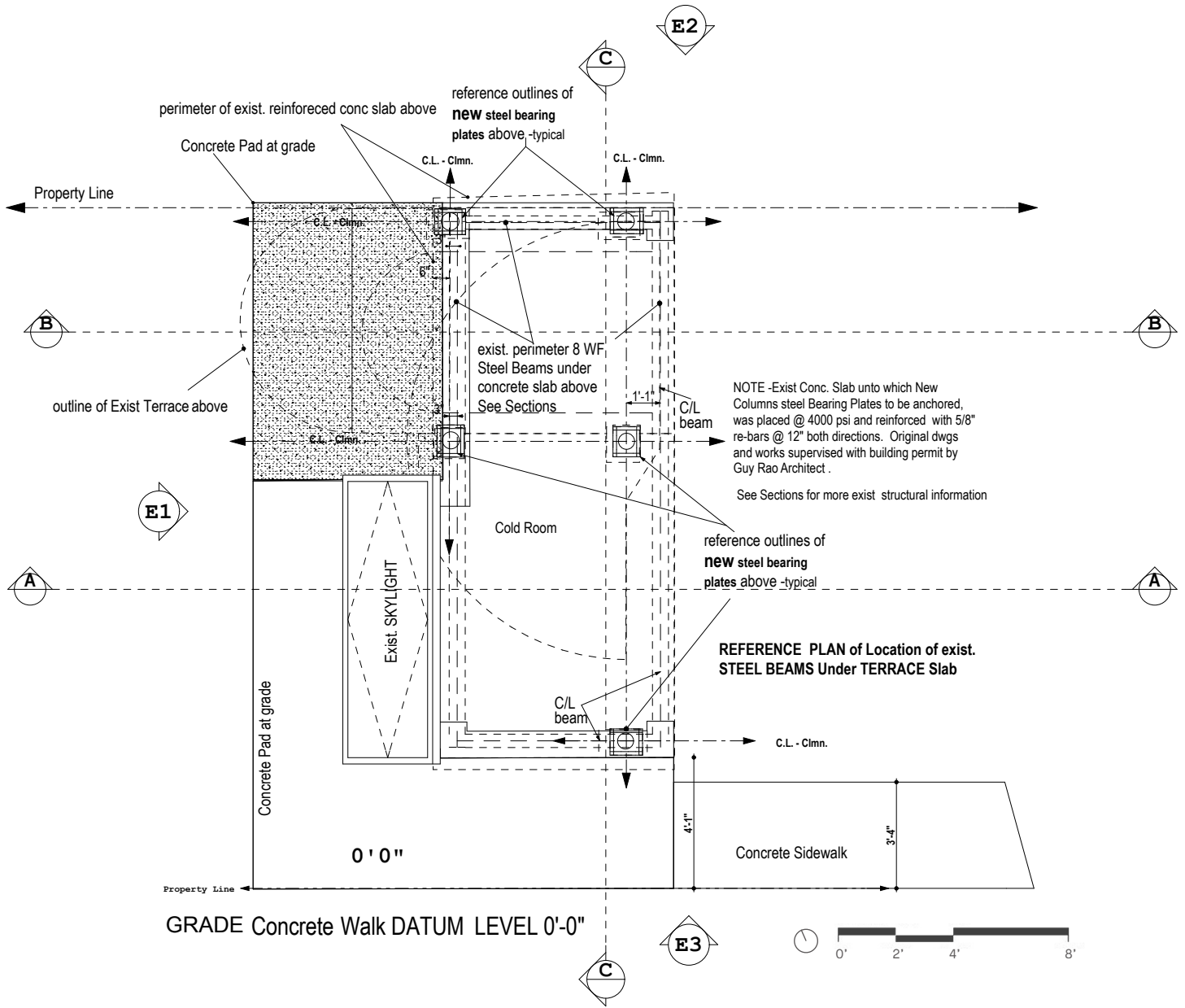


Fig. 48 Ground Level Plan

Showing new steel bearing plates on top of existing foundation wall

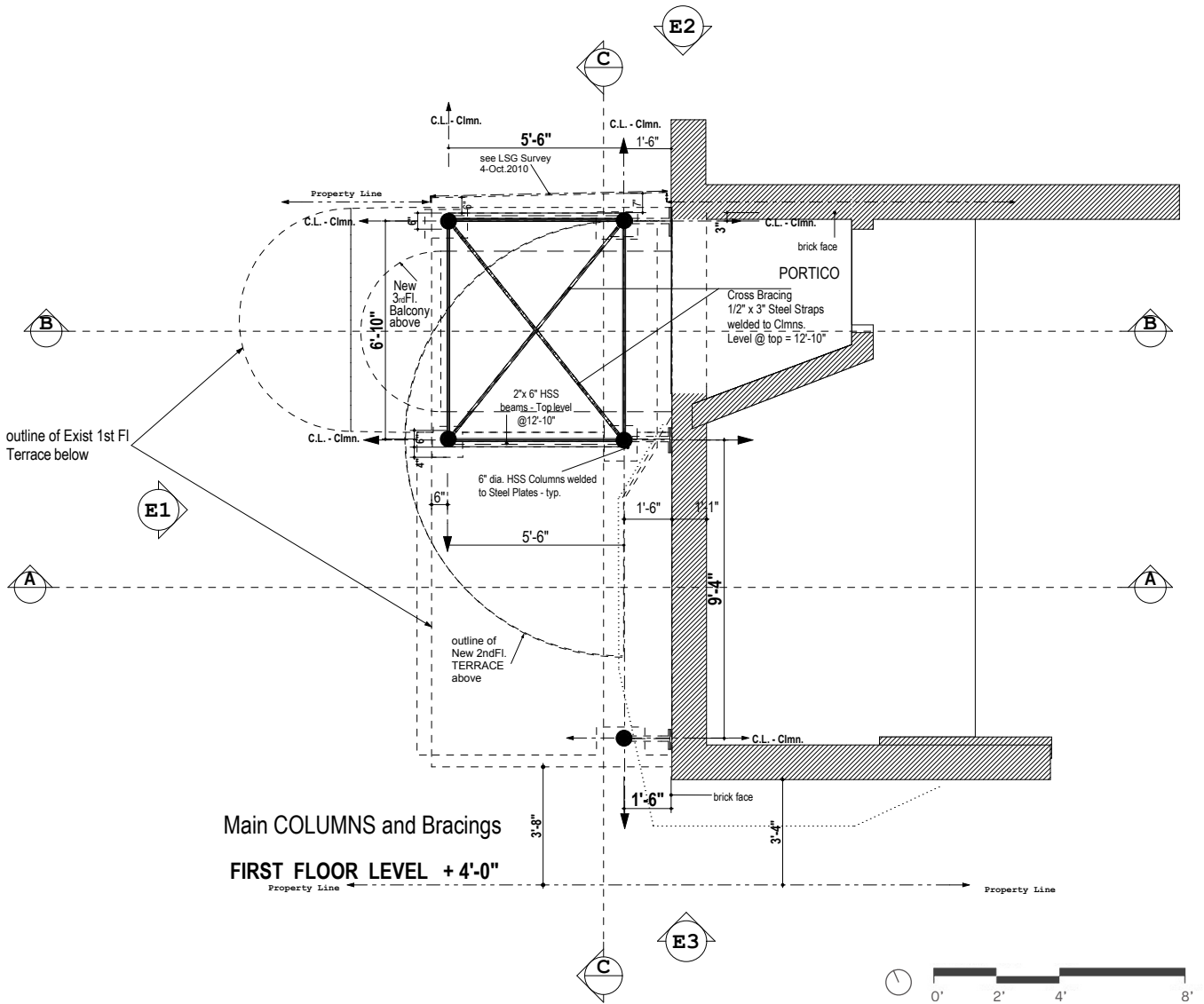


Fig. 49 Ground Level Plan 2

Showing columns and bracing of new construction

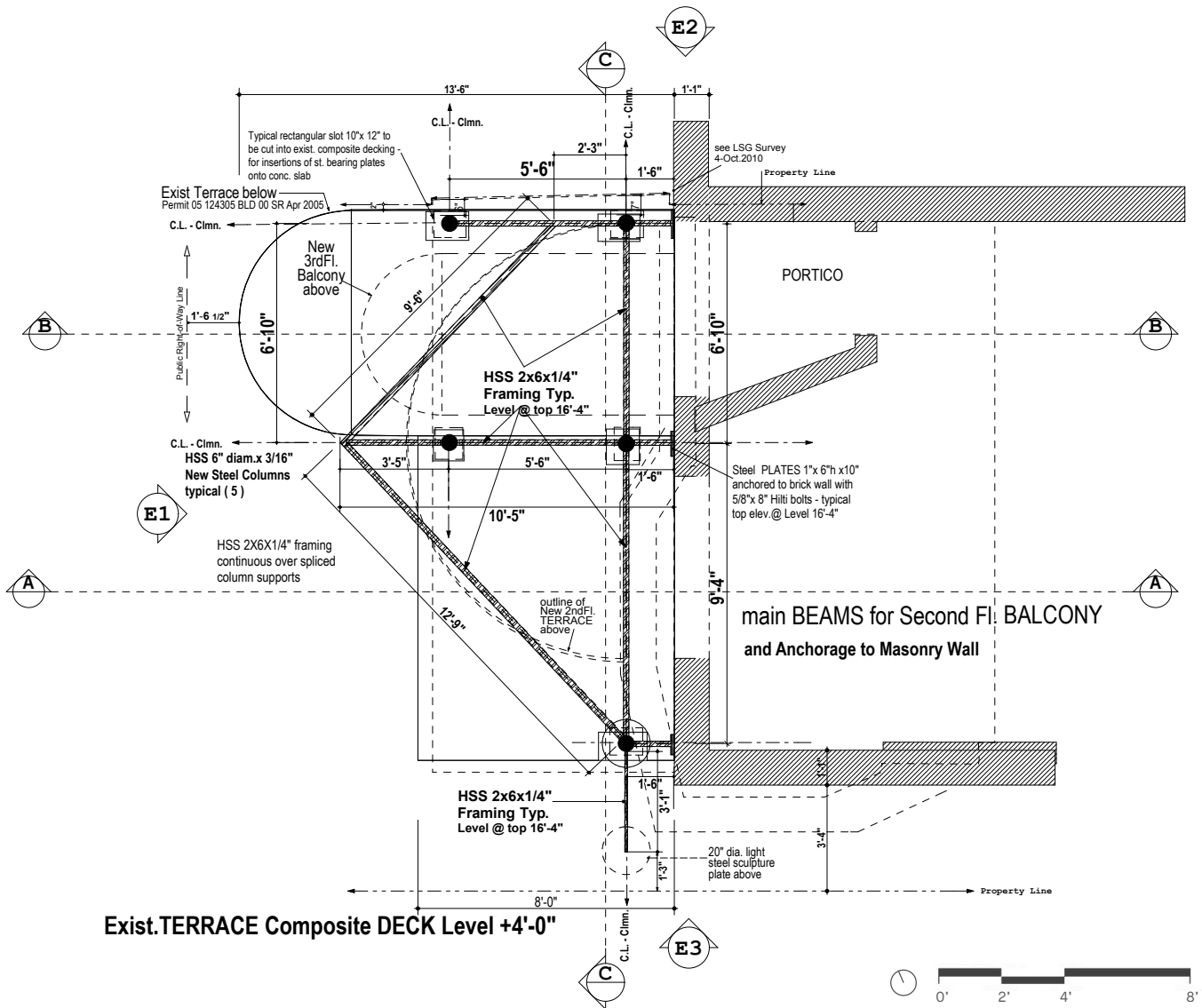


Fig. 50 Ground Level Plan 3

Showing existing terrace

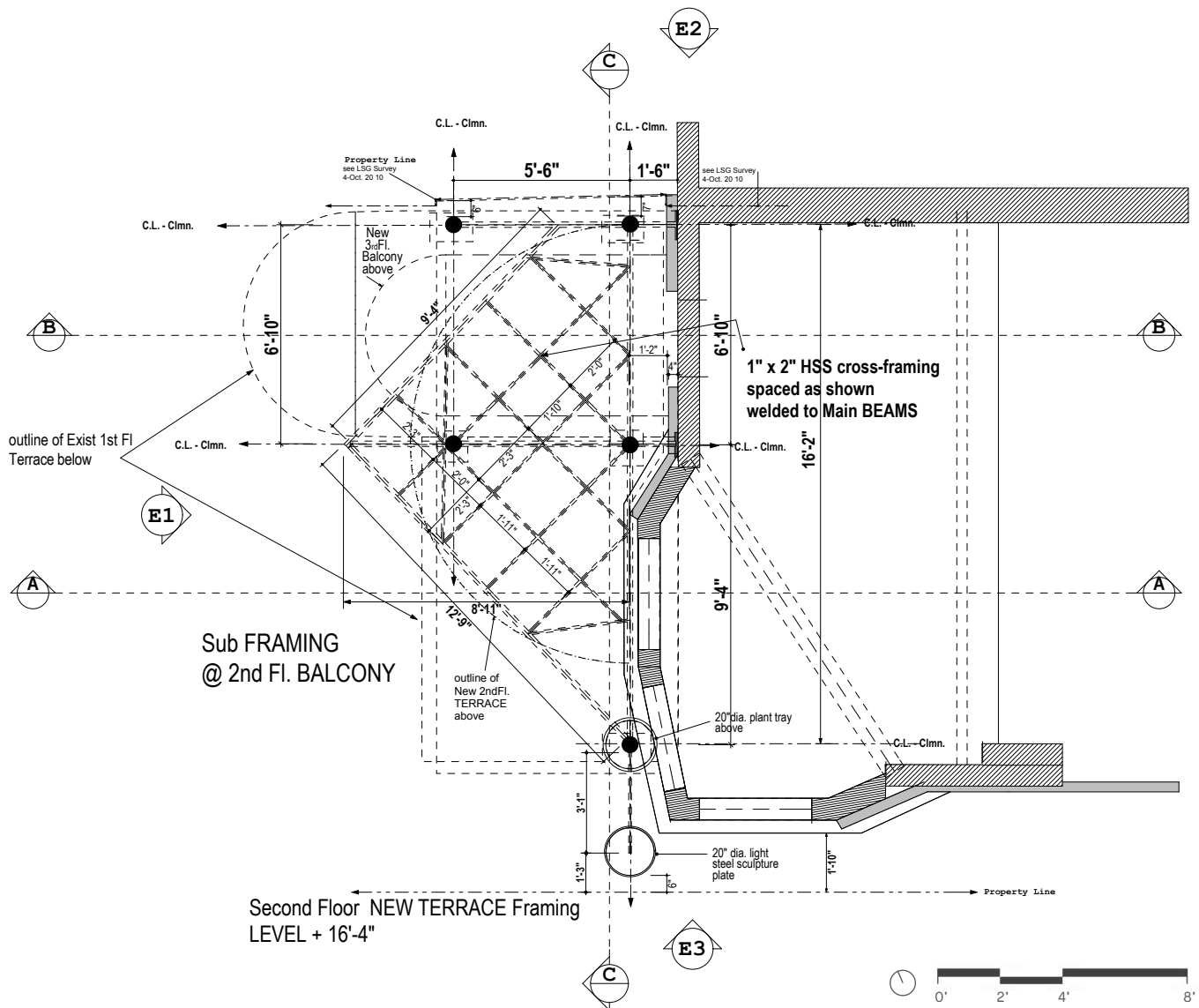


Fig. 51 Second Floor Plan
 Showing new terrace framing

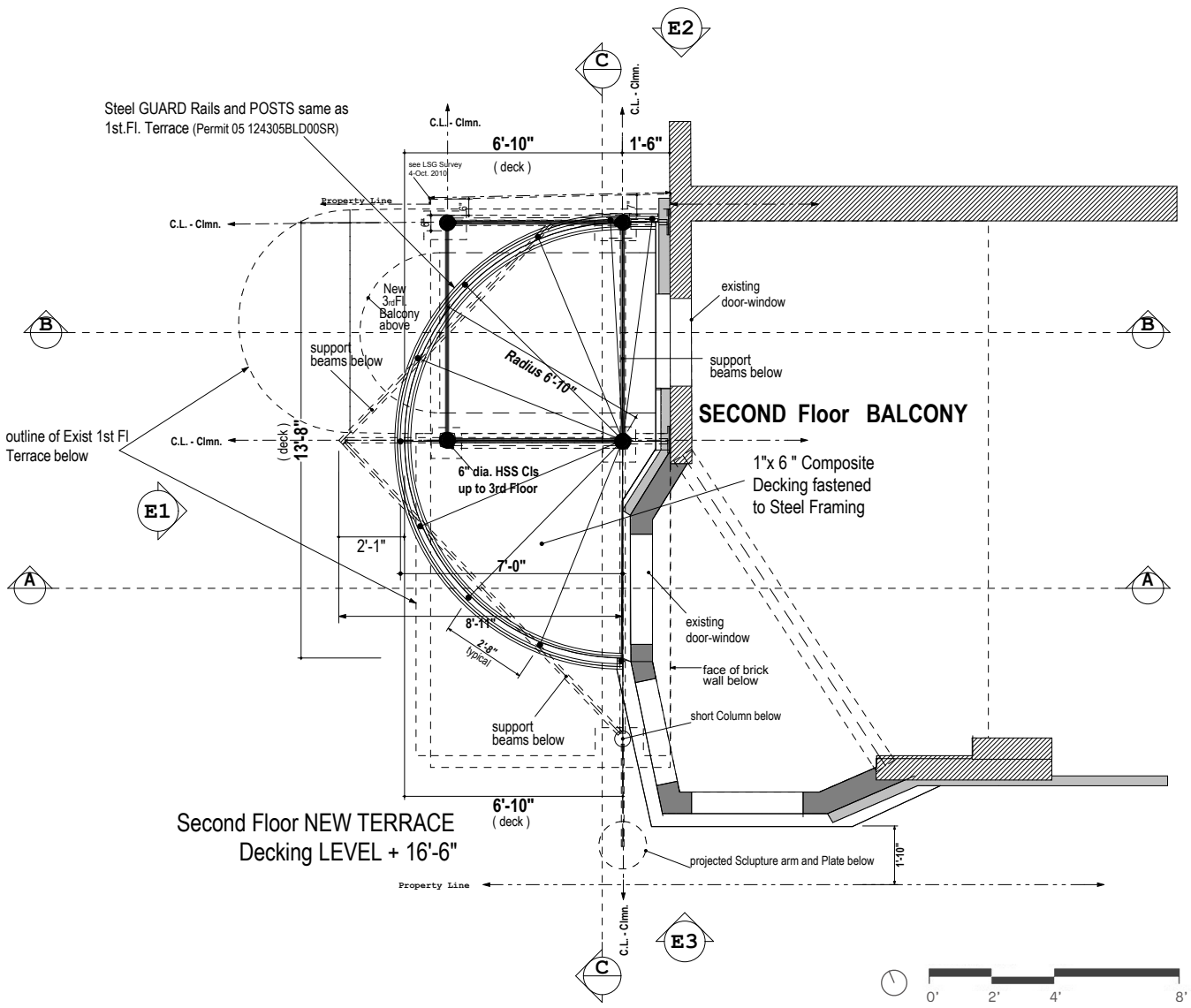


Fig. 52 Second Floor Plan 2

Showing new terrace

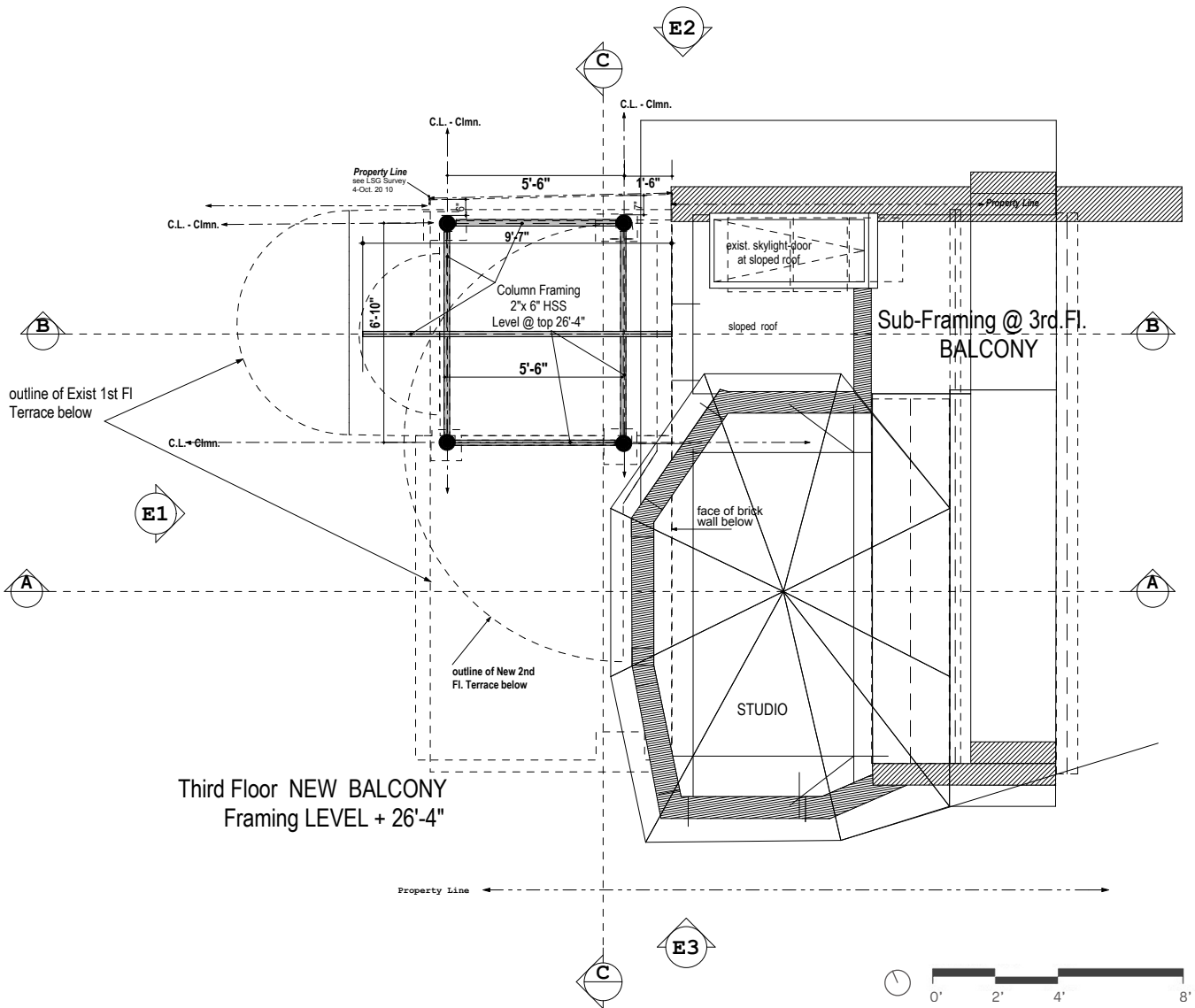


Fig. 53 Third Floor Plan

Showing new balcony framing

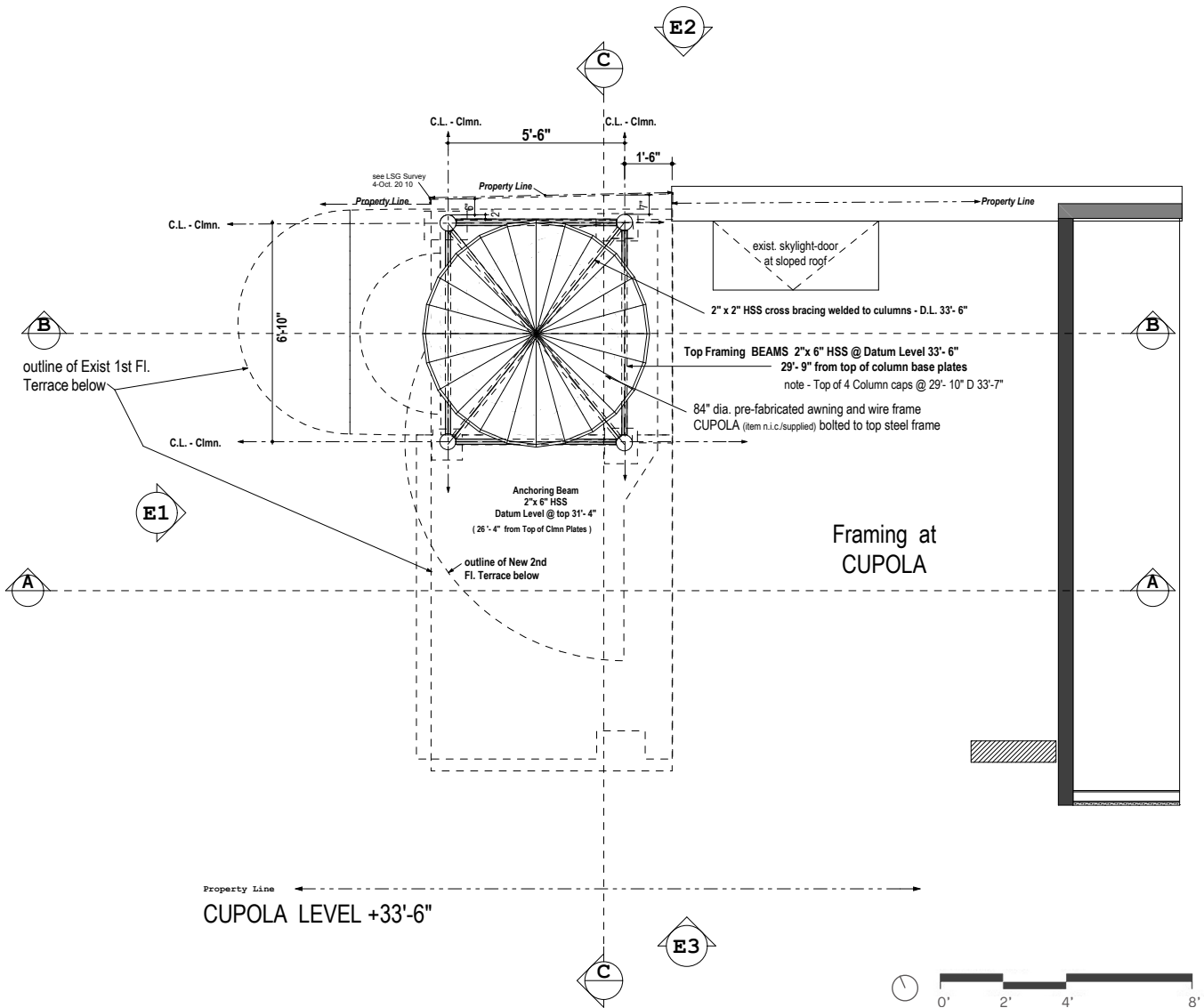


Fig. 55 Roof Plan
Showing Cupola above
third floor balcony

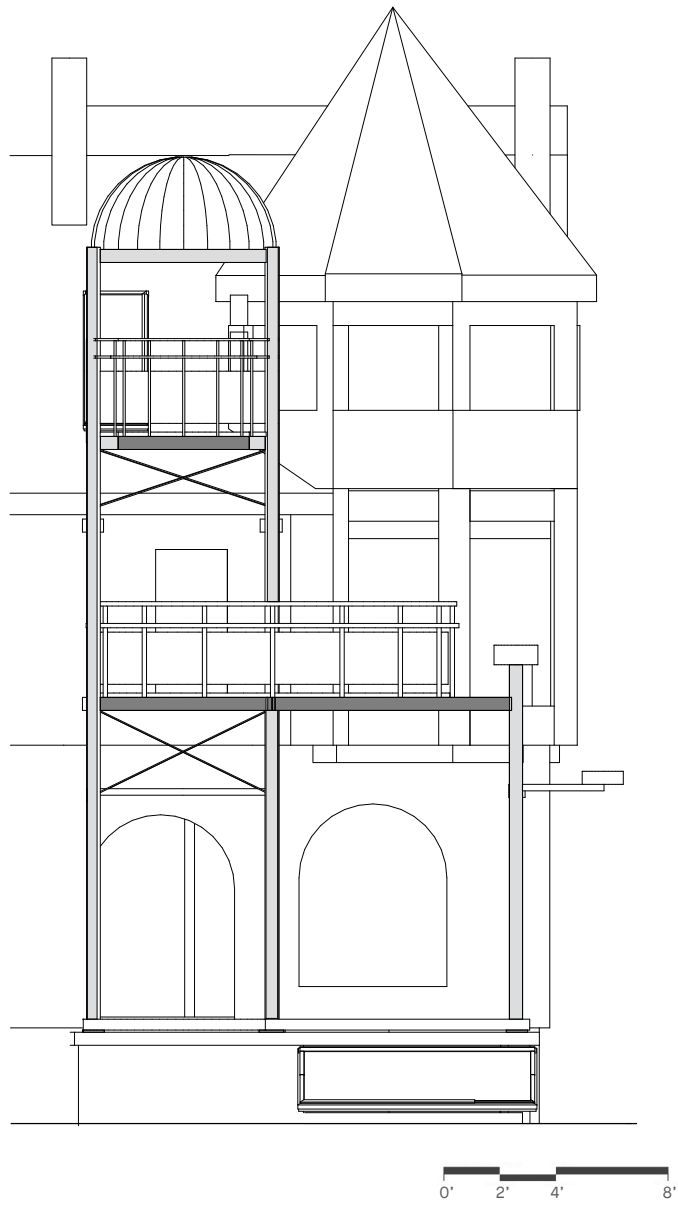


Fig. 56 Front Elevation

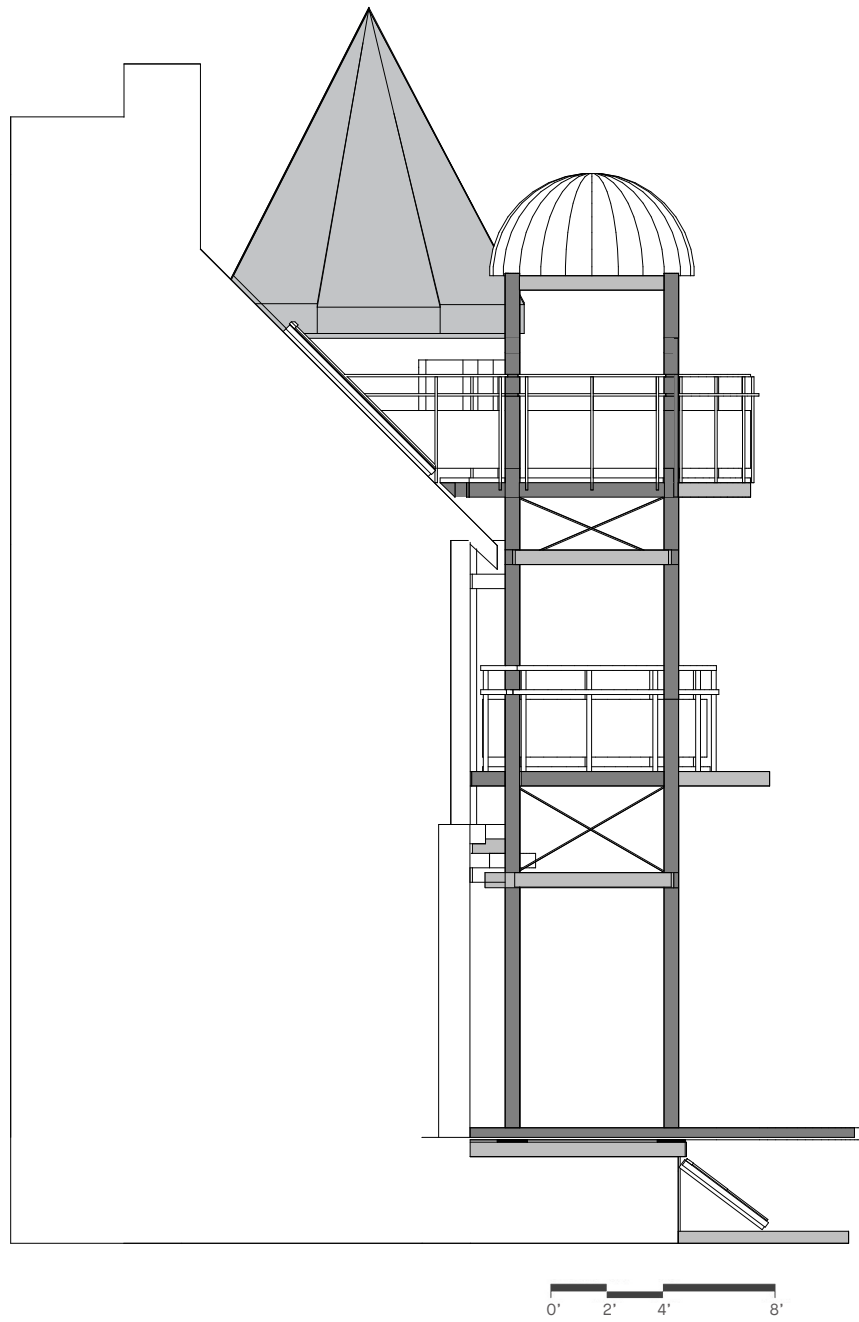


Fig. 57 North Elevation

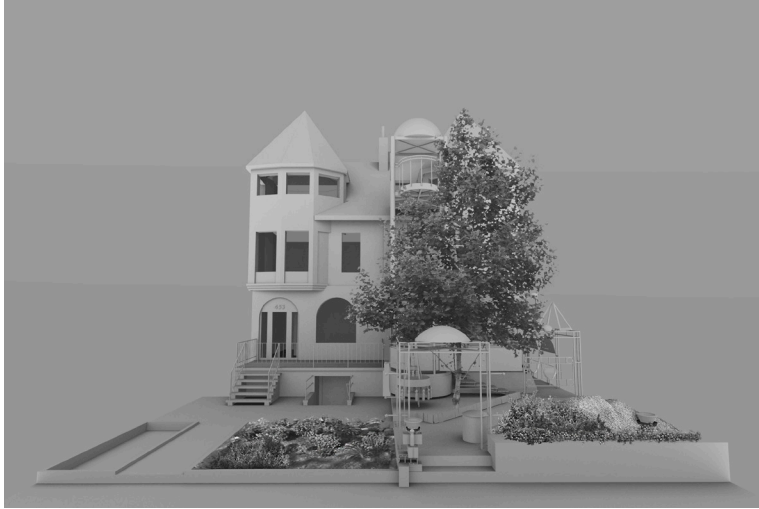


Fig. 58 Summer Visibility
Fig. 59 Winter Visibility

Opposition

The opposition and the planner were provided several opportunities to offer their grievances. The following are verbatim statements against the proposal during the hearing.

“It would not maintain the general intent and purpose of the City’s Official Plan . . . would not respect and reinforce the existing physical character of buildings’s streetscapes and open space patterns on Manning Avenue . . . would not respect and reinforce the existing physical character of the neighbourhood in relation to: the heights, massing and scale of nearby residential properties . . . would not be compatible with the physical character of the neighbourhood . . . would not achieve a degree of consistency in development in the neighborhood . . . would not be consistent with the streetscape and degree of openness to the front yards . . . would have a negative impact on the prevailing physical streetscape; would not make a positive contribution to the established visual character, shape, and feel of the neighbourhood . . . would not be desirable for the appropriate development or use of the land, building or structure . . . would not achieve the expected degree of visual symmetry and similarity as expected with semi-detached dwellings . . . would interrupt the visual rhythm of the line of semi-detached dwelling . . . would create an undesirable contrast to the prevailing character of facades and porches . . . would add clutter in the front yard . . . would further isolate the house from the streetscape . . . would not keep with the form of the balconies that exist on another houses . . . would be at the expense of others; would block views to the north... would impede light by creating a wall three floors high . . . would not respect the rights of the neighbours or community . . . would erode the character of the street over time . . . would negatively impact the visual streetscape.”¹⁶

It is clear that the city, the planner and the neighbourhood opposition used their opportunity, attacking the proposal on multiple grounds.

¹⁶ City of Toronto. “OMB E-Case File PL160352,” accessed November 19, 2016 (<http://www.omb.gov.on.ca/e-decisions/pl160352-Oct-21-2016.pdf>)

The Verdict

Gaetano failed to identify the merit of the proposed addition. The opposition not only brought more evidence, but 120 signatures against the proposal. Gaetano's support was a part of two. After considering evidence from all parties,

the board found that the requested variances would not be minor or desirable as they would have a negative impact on the visual character, rhythm and symmetry of the neighbourhood. The Board further found that the proposed additions would have a negative impact on the neighbours of the subject property in terms of their enjoyment of their own properties, exacerbating the impacts they have already experienced due to structures that are currently present on the subject property.¹⁷

With a strong recommendation from the board, the judge ruled against the proposal, stating the proposed addition

would not respect, reinforce, or be compatible with, the existing physical character of the buildings, streetscapes and opening space patterns on Manning Avenue, particularly in relation to the heights, massing, scale and front yard setbacks of the neighbouring properties.¹⁸

The appeal was dismissed and the variances were not authorized.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Mr. Rendl

City planner, expert opinion to the OMB, and based on my instinctual first impression, the bad guy. But it turns out, Mr. Rendl has a history of being the good guy.

Mr. Rendl, a planner in private practice, is qualified as a land use planner to provide evidence to the OMB, and often does so on behalf of the City. Adding to his qualifications, he was formerly commissioner of planning and development for the old borough of East York.

I came across a 2007 Toronto Star article, titled “Bylaw Breach turns costly”, that mentioned Rendl. In 2007 Rendl represented a couple in front of the OMB. The couple had hired a custom homebuilder whose miscalculations caused a predicament to unfold. The couple had obtained a building permit for a second storey addition and a two-storey rear addition to their existing house. The plans were approved showing that the height of construction could not exceed 8.6m from the “established grade”. Construction finished, the city building inspector came to inspect the construction and concluded that the height of the roof was 9.45m, exceeding what was permitted under the zoning bylaw.

The couple was ordered to remedy the situation. They applied to the Committee of Adjustment for a minor variance to allow for the taller roof, but were turned down. Appealing the decision, they ended up in front of the OMB. They were successful at the hearing and granted a zoning variance to permit construction to a maximum height of 9.0m. However, the current construction was still .45 over this new allowance.

Instead of reducing the height of the roof, the couple sought another solution, which involved a liberal interpretation of the bylaws

and official ruling. Rather than lowering the height of the house, they raised the level of the surrounding land. A retaining wall was built, packed with fill and the grade was brought up in the front of the house. The new measurement, grade to peak, was under 9.0m. Did they raise the “established grade” and become bylaw complaint? Decide for yourself, but when the case was put one again in front of the OMB, Rendl argued in support of the owners and their interpretation of the bylaws.

In the end, the judge ruled against Rendl and the owners, declaring no ambiguity in the bylaws definition of “established grade”. Rendl might have been offering expert opinion *against* Villa Rao, but he’s a forward thinking planner, willing to engage in a liberal conversation about bylaws and regulations

Gaetano Rao

From the moment he arrived in Canada, he was met with a pressure to assimilate. Not a pressure that was hell-bent on getting everything to look and sound the same, but one casually making it clear, if you don't look or sound like the rest, you'll have a hard time. When young Gaetano arrived in Canada he was given an Anglo-Saxon name. In all of his immigration papers, his name was written Guy. It has stuck with him to this day. His Business card reads Gaetano (Guy) Rao. He is registered with the Ontario Association of Architects under both names. What has perhaps stuck with him most, is everyone else's fear of difference.

Growing up in Toronto, Gaetano would frequently attend dances at neighbouring high schools. It became clear to him, the girls would dance with a Guy, but they wouldn't with a Gaetano. Some time later, practicing as an architect, he had the same difficulties. If he wanted to land work as an architect he had to ensure that his services were offered as Guy, rather than Gaetano, which had a negative impact on bidding.

When I first spoke to Gaetano, I could sense someone more disappointed than angry. I would later learn of Gaetano's career as an architect in Toronto. The adversity surrounding his home, neighbourhood battles and circulating notices, serve as a small part of his experience practicing as an architect in Toronto.

In the late 70s, working for the firm Dunlop-Farrow, Gaetano was the lead architect for design of TTC's Dupont Station. For the station design, he had to put up a fight just to include artists in the proposal. Eventually, he was successful. Their work, consisting of colourful mosaics and sculpted doors, would give character to a station that stands

as a perennial favourite amongst TTC riders.¹⁹

The station's success is in large part also due to the architecture, for which Gaetano was responsible. The interior walls are clad in orange tiles, the same used for the mosaics. The large circular light fixtures, filleted corners and curved benches are cheerful. The station's two entrances are often described as metal framed glass bubbles. As Gaetano would describe to me, "someone for whom the design doesn't appeal might think I'm obsessed with bubbles. This has nothing to do with bubbles. There's a very simple reason for the entrances. Going up the stairs you can see the sky. Going down into the station, it's a subtle passage, nothing abrupt or unsettling. The entrances let in light."

We have Rao of Dupont Station and we have Rao of his own Villa. Maybe one has the hand of Guy and the other Gaetano, but both still carry the same intention—a delightful experience.

¹⁹ Derek Flack. "The best and worst TTC stations in Toronto" BlogTO, accessed May 12, 2017 (http://www.blogto.com/city/2016/05/the_best_and_worst_ttc_subway_stations_in_toronto/)

Dupont Station

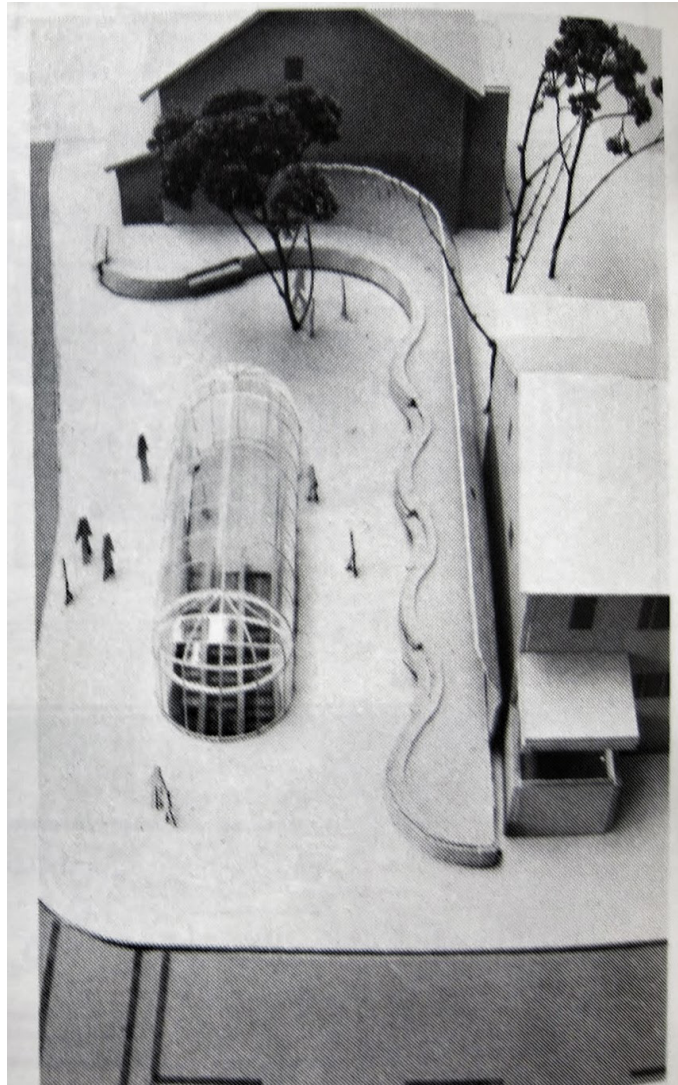


Fig. 60 Dupont Station Proposal



Fig. 61 Dupont Station Today



Fig. 62 Dupont Station, Public Seating
Fig. 63 Dupont Station, Sconce



Fig. 64 Dupont Station, Exit



Fig. 65 Dupont Station, Mezzanine



Fig. 66 Dupont Station, Wall/Ceiling Detail
Fig. 67 Dupont Station, Platform

Forever Lenten

While I have saved my infatuation with carnival for future work, it does offer here a rich metaphor for our current “problem”—a contemporary lack of positive aesthetic experiences within the built environment.

Carnival is an annual festival held during the week before lent in Catholic communities, involving masquerades, processions, dancing, music, and debauchery. Social conventions are overturned. Peasants become kings, the quiet become loud, and all that is suppressed is given center stage. Carnival is a place where difference is accepted.

The literal translation is the ‘giving up’ or ‘farewell to’ meat (*carne leaver* or *carne vale*). In the days leading up to Lent all the fat in the house must be consumed, thus the name ‘Fat Tuesday’, or Mardi Gras.

Most anthropologists locate Carnival in pre-Christian ritual and especially in the Saturnalia - the period of license and excess, when inversion of rank was a central theme. Slaves were set free and given the right to ridicule their masters and often a mock king was elected. It is affinities to more distant traditions - the Jewish Purim or the Indian Holi - that suggest a structure deeply implanted in all of us which embodies a desire to loose inhibitions in the face of dominant structures and atmospheres.²⁰

The term carnivalesque serves to stand for actions stemming from this deep desire.

First used by Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian linguist and literary critic writing in the first half of the 20th century. He assessed literature, theorizing the characteristics of writing that depict the destabilization or reversal of power structures, albeit temporary, as it happens in traditional forms of Carnival.

²⁰ Timothy Hyman and Roger Malbert. *Carnivalesque*. London: Hayward Gallery Pub., 2000, 9.

The assumptions of the dominant style or atmosphere are subverted and liberated through the use of particular devices. Although this may take the form of writing about, or otherwise representing (in film, painting, sculpture, architecture etc.), actual or imagined Carnivals, it is important that the work itself should come to embody the spirit of Carnival too.²¹

It's important to note that carnival in medieval culture was allowed and sanctioned, even though it was still rooted in distant traditions and ritual practice. The powers of the church and king put forward provisions that enabled laughter and disorder to come out from the margins and assume centre stage. This took place under the premise that these activities, even if only for several days, like the modern day vacation, would enable the peasantry to work hard the rest of the year.

In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin cites a letter from the Paris School of Theology in 1444 in which the author has an explanation for carnival, suggesting it is imperative that

foolishness, which is our second nature and seems to be inherent in man might freely spend itself at least once a year. Wine barrels burst if from time to time we do not open them and let in some air. All of us men are barrels poorly put together, which would burst from the wine of wisdom, if this wine remains in a state of constant fermentation of piousness and fear of God. We must give it air in order not to let it spoil. This is why we permit folly on certain days so that we may later return with greater zeal to the service of God.²²

Carnival was oil to the bones of peasants. It was far from a trivial anomaly, and as serious a cultural practice as any other in its time. It was instrumental for the church and king and at the same time expressive for

21 Oxford Reference, "*carnivalesque*," (<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095550811>)

22 Mikhail Bakhtin, "*Rabelais and His World*," 1965, (https://monoskop.org/images/7/70/Bakhtin_Mikhail_Rabelais_and_His_World_1984.pdf), 75

the masses.

Carnival resonates with me in four ways. [1] Carnival is a festive setting, as depicted in the painting *The Fight Between Carnival and Lent* by Pieter Bruegel the Elder. Reflecting on this painting today, our environment is for the most part, forever-lenten. [2] Carnival is temporary. This is paramount to its success and perhaps most telling of Gaetano's struggles. It's important to note that carnival in medieval culture was sanctioned, even though it was still rooted in ritual and tradition. The church and king allowed these activities under the premise that a few days of debauchery would enable the peasantry to work hard and tolerate the rest of the year. Today we have the weekend. If the weekend is not enough, like I did, go to Newfoundland. [3] Carnival has cultural derivatives. For example, the North American travelling carnival, whose history offers a record of our transgressive desires. [4] Carnival is as much an idea as it is an event. Philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin's writings on the carnivalesque offer insight into methods and actions able to liberate the assumptions of dominant styles and atmospheres.

Community

The difficulty for Rao is that architecture is almost always a public construct. This is also what gives architecture such great promise. Even a home, the most intimate of architectural spaces, has a public face. And in this publicness, architecture belongs to a community and its collective aims and ideals. A residential community has its status quo—types of buildings, types of actions, and types of people.

There are curious cases, where communities will celebrate something outlandish in their backyard. Consider the Watts Towers, now a national historic landmark. The steel sculptures unmistakably rise above surrounding bungalows, and for the most part, are celebrated to this day. It might just be a Southern California thing, or perhaps Watts was a community that needed the towers. Funny enough, the Watts Towers were designed and built by an Italian immigrant, Sabato “Simon” Rodia.



Fig. 68 The Watts Towers

There are reasons our residential communities, and the buildings within them, resemble one another. Efficiency and economic viability are the drivers of development. It has always been the case. Little Italy is the product of a Sears Homebuilder catalogue. Garbage needs to be picked up, streets cleaned, dogs walked, and occasionally, mattresses have to be delivered. We can't have things standing in the way.



Fig. 69 Mattress Delivery

While it's clear 451 Manning does not have the typical front garden, and with the proposed addition, was striving for a front facade in the same taste, the house itself, even without the addition, is already a community outlier by name—Villa Rao.

The villa is an idea as much as a type, something Gaetano was well aware of. They are domestic islands, places of escape and repose. Regardless of style or location, the idea of a Villa has long stood as an “architectural expression of a peaceful setting for learned pursuits and spiritual withdrawal into a domestic retreat from the city.”²³

The original villas were grand country estates for Roman nobles to escape to from their day to day lives in the city. They were self-sufficient, often with substantial farmland and vineyards, expansive landscaping and intricate gardens. Hadrian's Villa, designed by the Roman emperor himself, is an example of this style of house.

Many of these monumental houses have become UNESCO World Heritage Sites, not only for their grandeur, but for their significant influence. It's not all an elitist tale. They had come to represent an idea of how we might live. Hadrian's Villa, for example, had a significant impact on renaissance architects. Villa Savoye, also a UNESCO site, is significant too for it stood as a manifesto for the modernist movement in architecture. The Villa, in this sense, serves to explore alternatives to the ways in which we engage with our social and physical environments.

23 Vanessa Bezemer Sellers and Geoffrey Taylor, “*The Idea and Invention of the Villa*,” In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000 (http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/villa/hd_villa.htm)

Reality

If you look a monster in the eyes, you'll see yourself. It's a bit of a paradox, but as we know from the most sophisticated monster narratives, think Frankenstein, "monsters provide searching commentaries about the way culture and ideology work."²⁴ Monsters are products of ourselves.

The monster is always understood as other: different, not normal, and alternative to what we consider reality. Dr. Thomas Mical, professor and architectural theorist, works within these characteristics. In a lecture, titled "Spatial Alterity: the importance of unusual and unfamiliar spaces in everyday life", he citing spatial alterity as unusual and unfamiliar practice, standing in contrast to everyday life. Spatial alterity is then the binary practice of creating these 'other' spaces in everyday life. Mical suggests that spatial alterity is like a clash between the Baroque and the Newtonian view of the world, where the Baroque is filled with sensory pleasure and spiritual excess, while the Newtonian is shaped by extreme rationalism. As something produced and measured against ourselves, the monster can open our eyes to such clashes, reminding us of "an unspoken understanding that the human may not, after all, be stable and coherent."²⁵

Investigating this clash, the theatrics of Villa Rao, is ultimately an aesthetic pursuit. And so, it is an architectural pursuit. Herein lies the central tragedy of this tale, for "all aesthetic philosophies are held in such low regard that, for us, an aesthetician is a hairdresser who also gives facials."²⁶ So, my question for all the hairdressers, actual ones and also those types interested in aesthetics, what makes Villa Rao so frightening?

²⁴ Andrew Ng, *Dimensions of monstrosity: theory, narrative and psychoanalysis*. 2002, 1

²⁵ Ibid, 5

²⁶ Mark Greif, *Against everything: essays, 2004-2015*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2016, 88

Taste

Those with good taste do not argue taste. While Gaetano Rao might advertise his bottled water preference, San Benedetto, and to many this is unsettling, he is, like the rest of us, led to consider choice is an exercise in self-identification. Our choice makes us unique, or our choice lets us align with values and aspirations. I choose, therefore I am. But Gaetano and I joked back and forth, it's all an illusion, now out of our control: my grandmother drinks Santa Fiora because her blood pressure is high.






Fig. 70 Bottled Water

While on topic of taste, specifically the use of San Benedetto bottles as ornament, not the actual taste of mineral water, more on that on the next page, I can't help but recall other practices of collecting objects for appreciation. Many of these practices began in 16th century Europe, where private collectors brought together the exotic, the everyday, and often the unnamed. These early Cabinets of Curiosities, or Wunderkammer as they were originally called, had both encyclopedic and aesthetic ambitions. The collections displayed, among other things, taxidermy, minerals, tokens from faraway lands, and man-made paraphernalia. Collections gave way to the modern day museum and bear a resemblance to the art practices of objet trouvé and the readymade.

In the spring of 1917, the unremarkable was made remarkable, in what is one of the most significant pieces of modern art. Marcel Duchamp dignified the urinal. Not only did it “sever the traditional link between the artist's labour and the merit of work, it opened up the bourgeoisie, high culture art world to low-brow imagery.”²⁷ For Duchamp, taste was irrelevant. Art could be bad, good or indifferent. “Whatever adjective is used, we must call it art - bad art is still art in the same way that bad emotion is still an emotion”²⁸. The unremarkable, can be significant. Trash can be treasure. And maybe, we may have a different idea about 451 Manning if we call it art.

27 The Independent, “*The loo that shook the world: Duchamp, Man Ray, Picabi*,” 2008 (<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/the-loo-that-shook-the-world-duchamp-man-ray-picabi-784384.html>)

28 Marcel Duchamp, “The Creative Act,” audio recording, 1957 (<http://www.openculture.com/2015/10/hear-marcel-duchamp-read-the-creative-act.html>)

Back to taste as it relates to the types of mineral water. Taste is linked to the body—the evolving body, the culturally informed body, the physical body, the spiritual body. Even taste in colour is related to the body, and there is an unmistakable use of colour in the work of 451 Manning. It's a common scheme of primary colours, but intentional nonetheless. Bauhaus tones of yellow, blue and red are used throughout the work, carefully following Kandinsky's recommendations: yellow for triangles, blue for circles, and red for squares [  ]. Colour theory, and Kandinsky's attempt to discover a universal correspondence between form and colour, is still practiced today. It's undeniable that colour carries physical and psychological affects.

With the choice colour at 451 Manning, one might assume the property owners are connoisseurs of art and design. They are playful through their mixing of colours, or even just expressive for using them in the first place. Thinking about colour theory, we might embrace the cheerful yellows, sincere blues, or energetic reds. Or, perhaps we are all together startled by this seemingly unnatural occurrence.

As we reflect on the psychological affects of colour, we start a conversation about an important aspect of architecture, atmosphere. The conversation usually goes like this: one may describe the energetic atmosphere of a children's birthday party, or leave a restaurant review titled Cute Diner, describing the nostalgic mood and inviting atmosphere of curved booth seating and parquet floor. Vitruvius, Frank Lloyd Wright, The Situationist International, Koolhaas, Zumthor and most recently, the 2017 Pritzker Prize winners, all deal in atmosphere.

Reading the 2017 Pritzker Prize citation, it seems that atmosphere might be the central objective of the architect today, even though it's so hard to pin down. The qualities are far from objective and the lessons are often not transferable. But, within this ambiguity, a characteristic can be pinned down: architectural atmosphere leans one way.

Google it—architecture atmosphere > images. The sublime, the gloomy, and everything dark and smoky dominate the atmospheric image we have come to affiliate with architecture. Why is atmosphere so serious? Can joy and amusement emerge from these shadows? Can we embrace primary colour powder coats in the discussion positive architectural atmospheres?

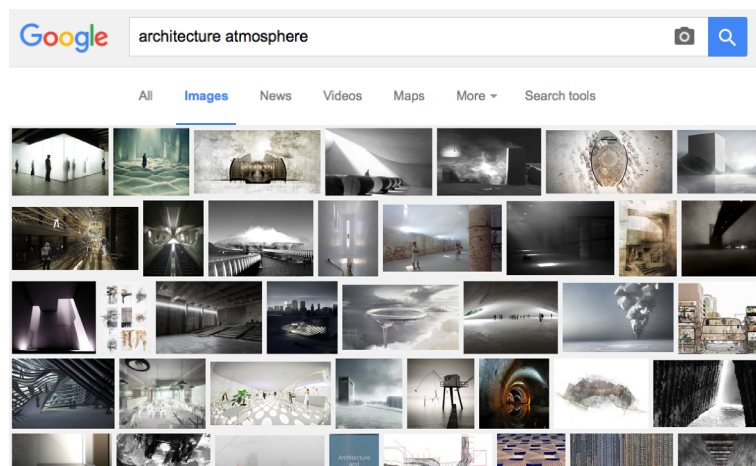


Fig. 71 Atmosphere

Screen capture from Google search
“architecture atmosphere”

Yes. Here is one place where colour is accepted:



Fig. 72 451 Manning
Fig. 73 Clinton Street Jr. Public School
Playground, approx 452 Manning

Transgression

The monster is always evidence of transgression, etymologically, a stepping across or going beyond boundaries. In one study of monsters in visual culture, it was brought to my attention that transgression provides us with the “concept of a ‘limit’ which differentiates one thing or way of being from another.”²⁹ Although I have routinely asked with regards to Villa Rao, how much is too much? where the limit lies is not as important as the role and capability of the transgressive act. As Alexa Wright reflects on Michel Foucault’s assessment:

Transgression performs a[n] ... interesting and complex role. He proposes that a ‘limit’ could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely caressed a limit composed of illusions and shadows. In this interpretation, transgression is a creative force that challenges established laws, limits and social structures and compels them to respond to modifications in human understanding, values and belief systems. Transgression is also a political force, in that it disrupts the existing order of bodies and cultures.³⁰

29 Alexa Wright, *Monstrosity: the human monster in visual culture.* London: I.B. Tauris, 2013, 17

30 Ibid.

Tectonics (let this be a description of fear)

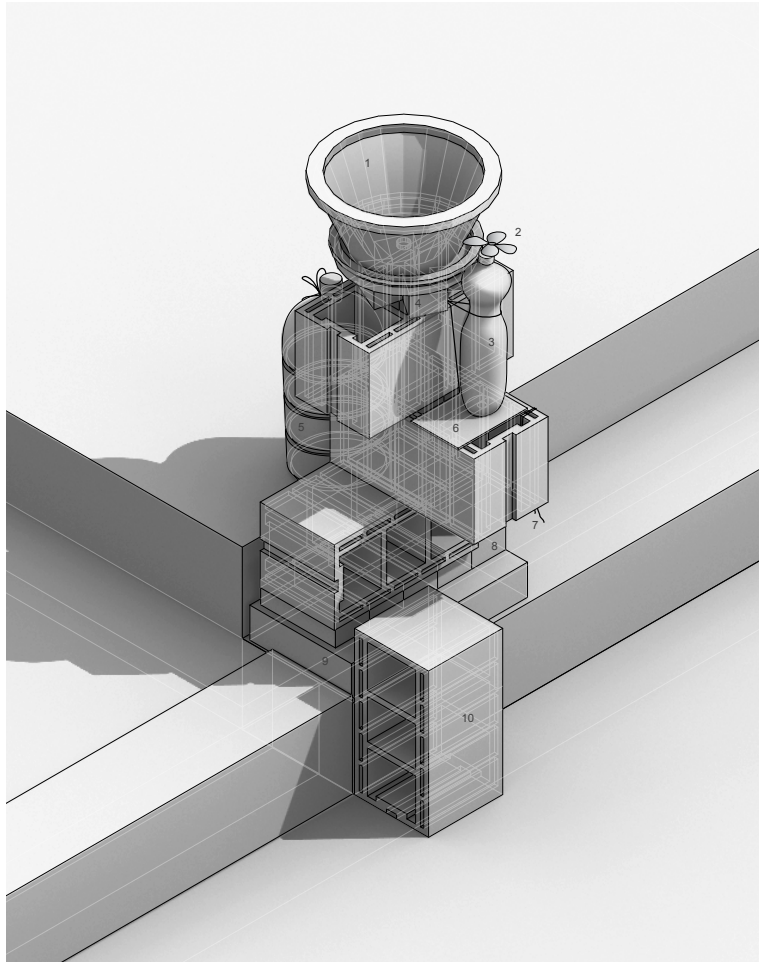


Fig. 74 A Monument to Passersby

[1] 10" Terra Cotta Clay Pot, saucer; [2] Faux Poppy, single stem; [3] 1.5L San Benedetto Bottle, label removed, filled 700ml; [4] X-Shaped Paving Stone; [5] 7.5L Water Jug; [6] 6x8 Ceramic Tile, white; [7] Synthetic Raffia, twisted; [8] Holland Paving Stone; [9] Concrete Patio Stone; [10] 8x8x16 3-Core Concrete Stretcher Block



Fig. 75 Curbside Arbor

[1] Rain Covering, for pedestrians; [2] Laundry Detergent Cap; [3] PVC Pipe; [4] Hollow Steel Section; [5] Steel Mounting Plate, welded to HSS

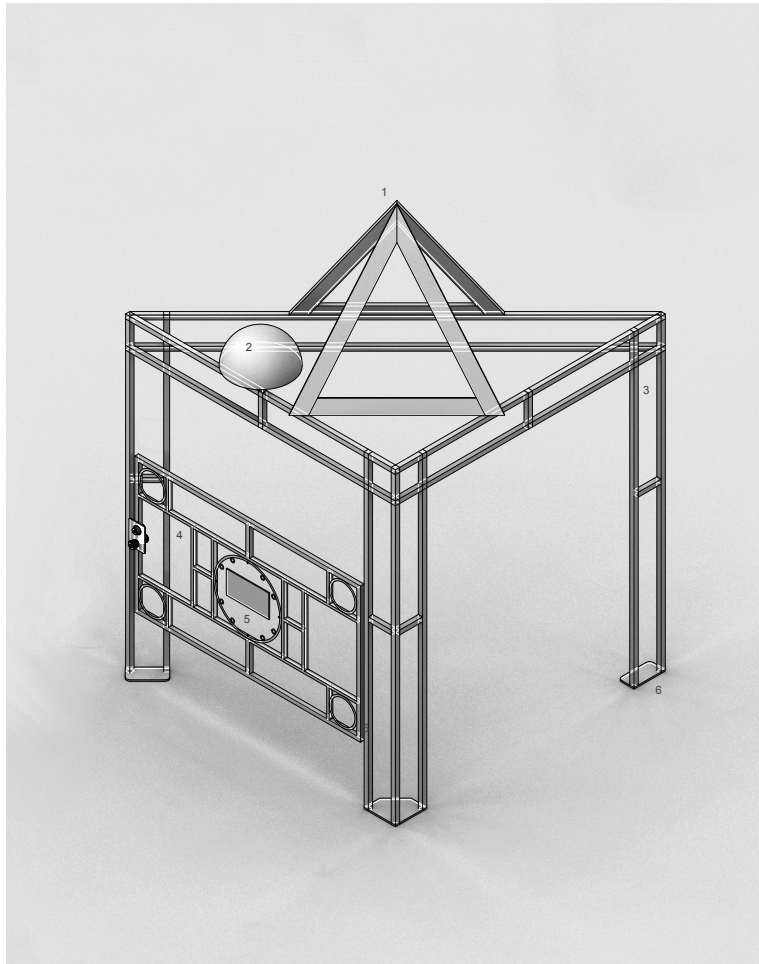


Fig. 76 Entry Arbor

[1] Drafting Board Supports; [2] Light Shade, Weather protection; [3] Hollow Steel Section; [4] Swing Gate, with lock; [5] Signage, “Villa Rao”; [6] Steel Mounting Plate, welded to HSS

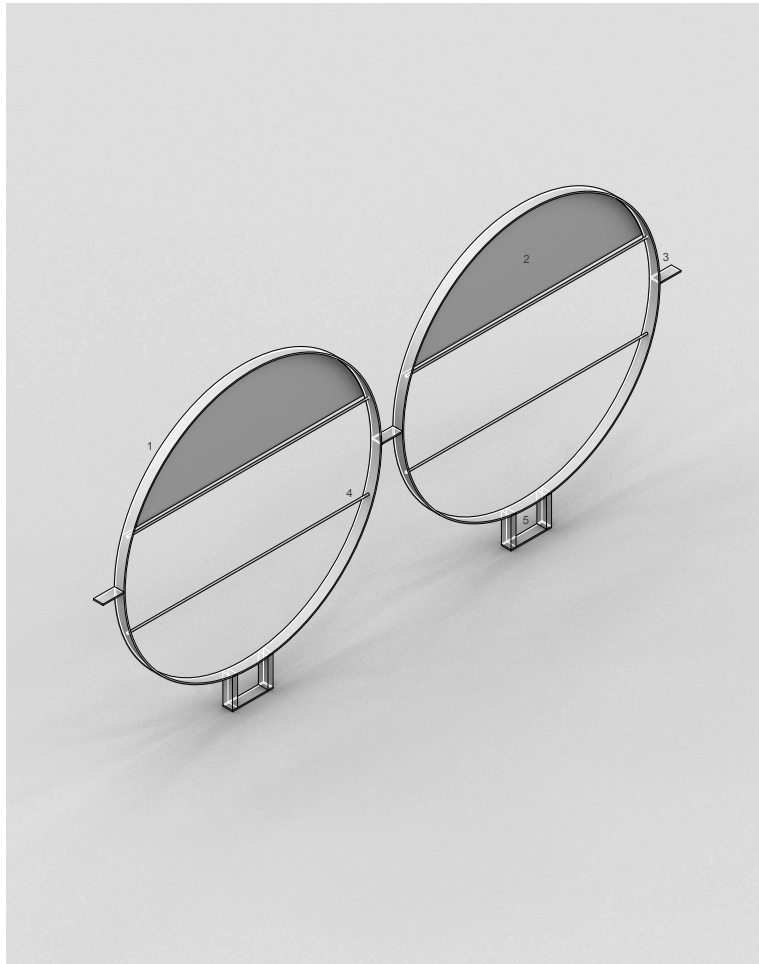


Fig. 77 Entry Arbor

- [1] Custom Steel Ring; [2] Translucent Polycarbonate; [3] Welded Steel Connections
- [4] Steel Rod, at one time holding a canvas privacy curtain

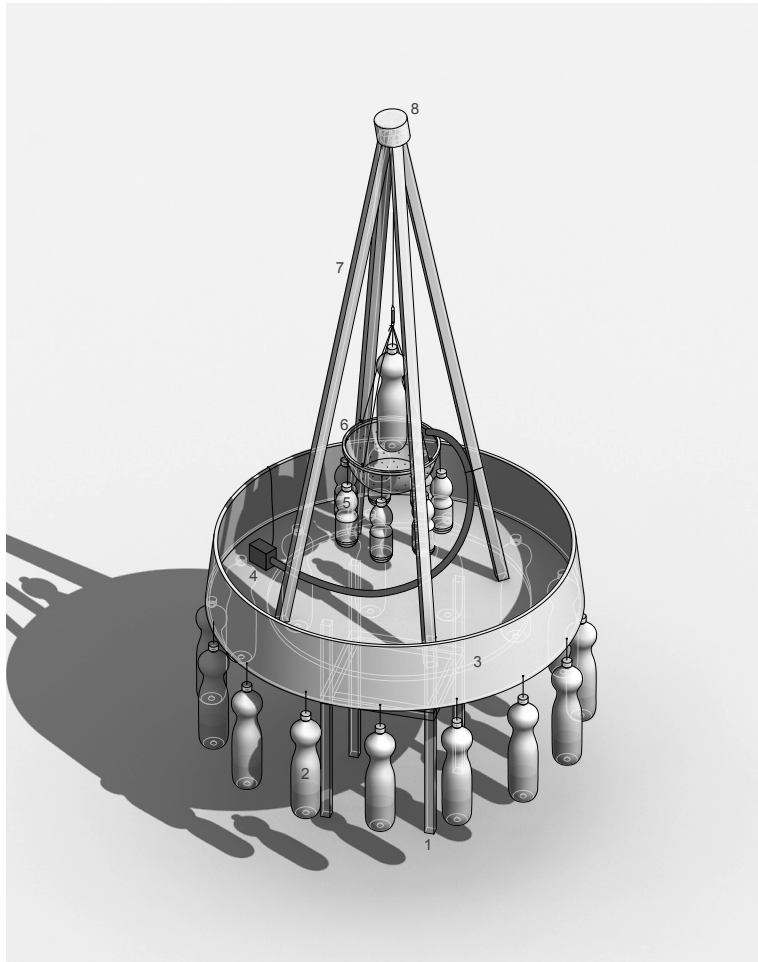


Fig. 78 Summer Fountain

[1] HSS Support Base; [2] 1.5L San Benedetto Bottle, label removed, filled 300ml; [3] Blue Kiddie Pool; [4] Submersible Electric Water Pump; [5] 500ml San Benedetto Bottle, label removed, filled 400ml; [6] Plastic Mixing Bowl with drilled holes (flow measurement unknown); [7] HSS Support; [8] Spray Paint Cap



Fig. 79 Tectonics 1
Synthetic Raffia Noose



Fig. 80 Tectonics 2

Double Overhand Noose in
Synthetic Raffia



Fig. 81 Tectonics 3

Zip-Tye, Purple Paper Clip, Fishing Line,
Blue Tape, Clear PVC Tubing



Fig. 82 Tectonics 4

Fishing Line, Yellow Paper Clip,
1.5L San Benedetto Bottle



Fig. 82 Tectonics 5

Synthetic Raffia, S-Hook, Uncoated
Paper Clip, Steel Wire, 1.5L San
Benedetto Bottle

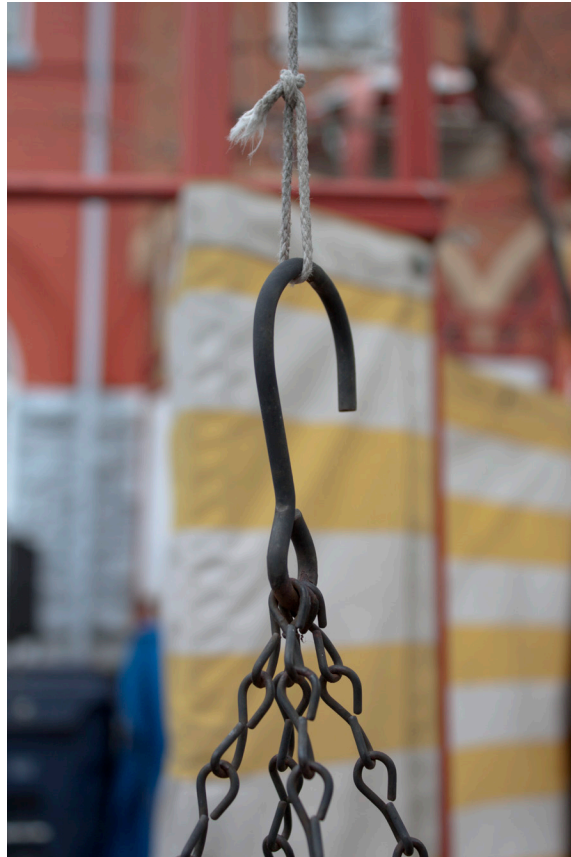


Fig. 84 Tectonics 6

Fibre Rope, Chain Basket with Hook



Fig. 85 Tectonics 7

Steel, Broken Brick Footing



Fig. 86 Tectonics 8

Raffia Loop Support for San Benedetto



Fig. 87 Tectonics 9

Canvas Privacy Screen, Plastic Carabiner



Fig. 88 Tectonics 10

Copper Wire Weighted Connection



Fig. 89 Tectonics 11

Drafting Board Supports, Rope



Fig. 90 Tectonics 12

Hollow Steel Section, Double-Walled
Plastic Board



Fig. 91 Tectonics 13

Privacy Screen at Entryway, weighted by
unmarked bottle

Delight

There is a value that is ambiguous, hardly upheld in the contemporary built environment, and at the same time, has existed for centuries as a core responsibility of the architect. The concept is delight, latin “venustas”, and it sits alongside the values of ‘firmitas’ and ‘utilitas’, to this day the most cited parts of the Vitruvian Treatise on Architecture.

This treatise was written for Vitruvius’ patron, the emperor Ceasar Augustus, as a basis with which to judge and guide works of Classical architecture. The three values were outlined in balance as the ultimate responsibility of the master builder. The whole treatise has survived in its entirety from antiquity. Even to this day, the three values are inscribed on the Pritzker Prize medallion. For centuries the triad has helped shape a built environment that is reflective of our needs.

The triad’s meaning has been a long standing debate - venustas particularly. Henry Wotton was responsible for the first translation of Vitruvius’ work. In 1624 he declared, “The end is to build well. Well building hath three conditions: firmness, commodity, and delight.”³¹ In 1826 Joseph Gwilt wrote of strength, utility and beauty.³² In 1914 Morris Hickey Morgan wrote of durability, convenience and beauty, to be directly amended by Rowland and Howe in 1999, writing of soundness, utility and attractiveness.³³ In 2009 Eric Inman Daum wrote of strength, function, and beauty.³⁴ Whether we speak of one translation or another, these values have come to represent “good” architecture.

So then, what is delight? As the most subjective value, it is not surprising venustas is misunderstood. A look around will also tell you it is frequently omitted from our built environment. Buildings must stand

31 Sir Henry Wotton, “The elements of architecture,” G. Kirkham, 1685, 201

32 Joseph Gwilt, “Rudiments of architecture, practical and theoretical,” 1826, 3

33 Tom Spector, “The Ethical Architect: The Dilemma of Contemporary Practice,” Chronicle Books, 2012, 35

34 Eric Inman Daum, “Commodity, Firmness, and Delight, or Toward a New Architectural Attitude,” presented at the Traditional Building Conference, March 10, 2009. Accessed (<https://classicistne.wordpress.com/2010/12/13/commodity-firmness-and-delight-or-toward-a-new-architectural-attitude/>)

up and we need them to work, however there is indifference towards *venustas*.

We have been taught that beauty and attractiveness is in the eye of the beholder. For Vitruvius, beauty was in the hand of the master builder, who exercised strict rules of order, proportion, and arrangement. In a time without classical ideals it seems fraught to suggest *venustas* stands for beauty. And attractiveness, far too subjective. Delight, the original translation of *venustas*, stands most fruitful as a value to guide a designer today.

Delight is both a positive and objective value. “Whereas *utilitas* and *firmitas* are both measures of architectonic potential, *venustas* resides in the dimension of the imagination.”³⁵ It is about the experience of architecture and its performance. Delight moves us, unconsciously. We feel that something is delightful, we don’t decide it. More so than any other discipline involved in the design of buildings, architects have the greatest capacity in dealing with delight.

Today, there is proof of renewed interest in this capacity beyond time-honoured tradition. At the Princeton School of Architecture in the Fall of 2014, a student organized symposium challenged the clear hierarchy of the Vitruvian triad. They asked, what would happen if we were to flip the order? What happens when delight is given priority? They explored the potentials of delight as a point of origin. The goal was to define an aesthetic category without a predefined formal tendency, rule set, or proportion; contrary to the Vitruvian ideals of beauty. They brought together “presenters whose work might be considered flagrantly

35 Tadao Ando, “Ceremony Acceptance Speech,” The Pritzker Architecture Prize, , accessed March 17, 2016, (http://www.pritzkerprize.com/1995/ceremony_speech1)

formal, insincere, frivolous, and maybe even silly.”³⁶ What became clear, and best described by one participant, was a collection of work that suggested “an invitation to use, a strange utility of popping buttons, turning knobs, and climbing.”³⁷ Delight was cast in a light both serious and fun.

The symposium signals a significant inquiry. Critics today are noting the lack of delight in the contemporary built environment. Hidden behind the colourful work is a concern grounded in a sense of loss. The built environment no longer lifts us up, it brings us down. The Canadian Centre for Architecture fuelled a body of research in 2016 titled “Take Care”, solely guided by the notion that our built environment can make us sick. The path to this current diagnosis is well traced by Alberto Pérez-Gómez in his book *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science*. He roots the “dominant technical and functional practices of building today in the divine and mystical practices of using number and geometry during the height of classicism.”³⁸ “It’s tempting to believe that architecture or urban planning could make us better—cure or soothe our bodies, help us get in shape, alleviate our stress”.³⁹ Give in to temptation.

36 Symposium Description, “*Firmness, Commodity, and Delight*”, Princeton University School of Architecture, (<https://soa.princeton.edu/content/delight-symposium>)

37 Laurel Consuelo Broughton, “*Firmness, Commodity, and Delight*”, Princeton University School of Architecture, (<https://soa.princeton.edu/content/delight-symposium>)

38 Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Attunement: architectural meaning after the crisis of modern science* (Cambridge (Mass.): The MIT Press, 2016)., 6

39 Canadian Centre for Architecture, “Take Care - Demedicalize Architecture,” Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA), (<http://www.cca.qc.ca/en/issues/23/take-care/40346/demedicalize-architecture>)

Contact

If Villa Rao is asking us to participate in the world, it's suggesting we do so with contact. Contact is collision, the kind you find on the playground, as opposed to a participation that is built on observation and absorption. In the face of technological advances that insert mediums between the body and the physical world, where we no longer participate, instead, we operate, an architecture of contact has a vital role in our contemporary cognitive environment. It gets in our head and in our face, but in a positive way. The architecture of contact is not smooth; it sticks out, it's discontinuous, and sometimes, dangerous.

Increasingly nowhere in the public realm do we experience physical or cognitive challenge. Our primary sensation is normalness and we find comfort knowing the city does just fine without us. "We live in safety nets shaped by civil liability and social responsibility, rarely encountering our physical limits and perhaps not even knowing the edge of our own emotions and abilities."⁴⁰ We may not even know where dangerous boundaries lie, but then again, how would we know? When were you last truly scared?

We come in contact with "so few direct challenges to our bodies and emotions that two new fears are born: a fear of risk more profound than risk itself, and a dread of spontaneous emotional expression."⁴¹ The monster stands against this condition.

40 Bruce Caron, *A History of the American Traveling Carnival: From Inside the Live Reptile Tent*, Chronical Books, 2001, (<https://lightblueblog.wordpress.com/article/a-history-of-the-american-traveling-carnival/>)

41 Ibid

Epilogue

Since first meeting with Gaetano I knew he planned to work with the little traction he had and redesign the proposed addition. Like we had discussed, it was never a matter of right or wrong, good or bad taste, winning or losing. While Gaetano was not the most successful at the OMB, he stressed there was no loss, he simply did not win. He shook the tree. With all his efforts, and Gaetano spoke of this as our greater responsibility, he was hopeful to make an impact, but at the very least arrive at some conversation with the community, even a non-verbal one.

In one meeting, which turned out to be our last, he roughed out the new proposal. I went back for the sketch, eager to include it in the closing of this book, and I received the news of Gaetano's sudden passing.

The redesign would use the same primary colour powdercoats, terraces, and cupola, but this time with fluted steel columns blossoming into arched railings. Acrobatics to remedy the minor variances. Like petals, in bloom, I was told. And it turns out, the one thing that was always missing, some difference everyone could rally behind—a temporary monstrosity, theatrics, a festive event—he had that figured out too. The whole addition would be prefabricated off-site. The building permit camouflaged amongst San Benedetto. Standing out front, calm and collected, Gaetano would crane the whole thing in. It would take no more than a few hours.

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