

What Stands Behind “Magazine on the Drive”?

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Creating a town landmark for a community requires investigation into the inner workings of that area to acquire an understanding of its people, history, and culture. For a landmarks success lies in its ability to create an accurate identity for the area, providing a space for residents and people passing through to gather and learn something about the area and themselves. Located at the intersection between a thriving commercial district and

an industrial park in Vancouver, British Columbia, “Magazine on the Drive” is a Landmark that displays the work of an eclectic community whose cultural diversity is evident in every part of the Commercial Drive district; in its artwork, variety of foods, and its people who stem from all corners of the globe. This exposition garden was created as a medium to encourage community activity and create a unified identity for the area. The exterior blank “canvas” space encourages community ownership and respect for the site while allowing for creative expression. The site also provides space for those who enjoy gardening, and an open-air theatre for outdoor performances. Its interior exhibition space allows for varied uses in conjunction with the outdoor spaces such as a rotating exhibitions as well as some permanent displays about the history of the area. “Magazine on the Drive” acts as an archive for the Commercial Drive area, accumulating the thoughts and emotions of a vibrant neighbourhood. Looking for inspiration for a varied space such as this required a number of different outlooks and perspectives about community as well as the meaning of a landmark. Vigeland Park in Oslo, Norway, by Gustav Vigeland; the Brion-Vega family Cemetery by Carlo Scarpa; drawings and treatise’s by Hugh Ferriss, famed art deco architectural illustrator; and the character of Commercial Drive community itself were the primary precedents used in composing this outdoor urban gallery.

Vigeland Park is a public outdoor sculpture museum, created by the artist, Gustav Vigeland, to display his art for the viewing pleasure of the public. In the design for the museum, there was a great deal of thought put into how the works were to be viewed and interacted with by the visitor. Several were placed along the balustrade of a one hundred meter long bridge while others were displayed in fountains or as centrepieces to a space.





The park also responded to those who would be less interested in the artwork and more interested in enjoying the small river that ran through the site. The park had appeal for every type of person. For example, Gustav Vigeland would allow children to play in the waters and use a small ferry to move from dock to dock as well as use the grounds as they pleased (*fig. 3*). That is what remains fundamental to the idea behind an open-air museum or gallery; its appeal and sensitivity to all people and classes.



Placing works of art in an outdoor, accessible venue became a popular idea in Europe around the turn of the century and aided a great deal in dissolving the

barrier between classes in terms of enjoying artistic interventions. It was also important in that it limited the separation between the work of art and the viewer by placing the work in a setting that did not restrain the viewers experience, as a gallery may (Worpole, 99). This theory of accessibility remains relevant today. This was one of the main reasons that it was decided that the proposed gallery would be predominantly an outdoor space, where



the public could access it at any time, to either view the work or to contribute to it by placing his or her mark on the bare wall (*fig. 4*). Vigeland Park is an excellent example of a cultural installation that displays exhibits in an effective manner while still being accessible to the entire population, as every park should.

A Master in the use of building materials in a sensitive and powerful manner, Carlo Scarpa's design of the Brion-Vega family Cemetery used concrete and various other materials with a great deal of sensitivity and grace. The use of heavier looking materials helped to evoke a sense of connection with the landscape that the cemetery was built into as well as a texture (*fig. 5*) and quality that would, in his words, tend to "get better over time" (Nover, 17-18). Also, due to the nature of the cemetery in that it should be sensitive



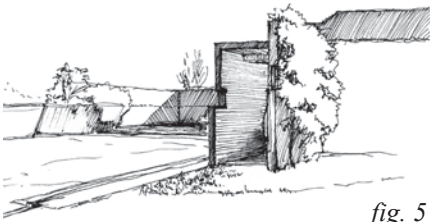
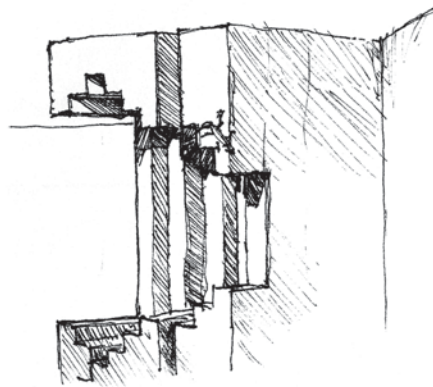


fig. 5



fig. 6



fig. 7

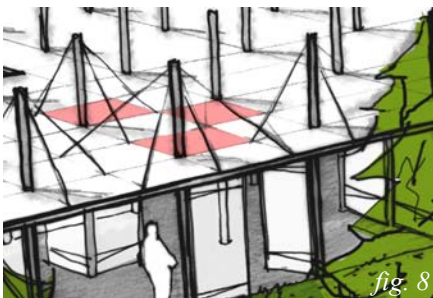
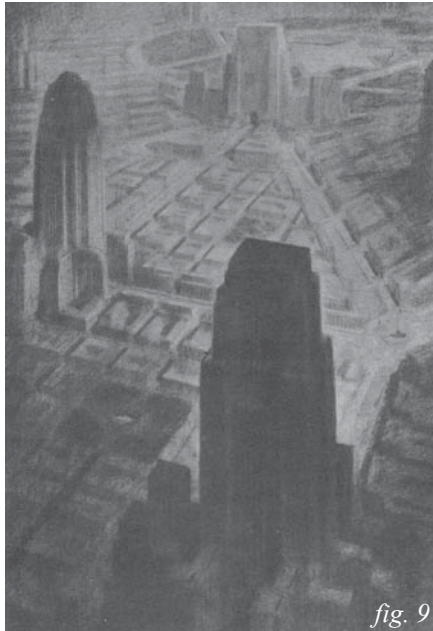


fig. 8

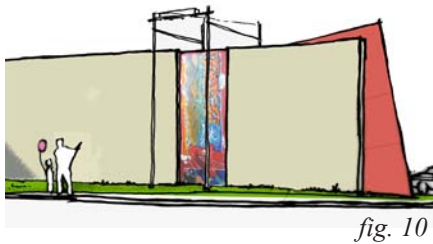
to the needs of the family who had it commissioned, Scarpa was careful in choosing specific heights of walls and where he cut openings through spaces. The walls surrounding the site for instance are placed at eye level, allowing the visitor to both be contained within the space but also encouraged to look beyond the confines of the cemetery to the landscape beyond. It was this attention to detail and use of concrete in a simple and concise way that helped to lead us into creating a garden of human scale concrete walls (fig. 6). Arranged in a manner that controls views as well as creates some intimate and some open spaces, these walls are the blank canvases on which the inhabitants of the area would create works of urban art. Being of robust construction, this graffiti garden will withstand all manner of abuse over the years and will still look good in the future as visual representation of the history of the area.

Scarpa also used a great deal of reflective tile throughout the cemetery which created site lines as well as brought colour and light into the space (fig. 7). In the covered exhibition space of “Magazine on the Drive”, different types of glazing was used to create different lighting effects as well as control the amount and type of light coming into the space, protecting any long term exhibits (fig. 8). Carlo Scarpa’s expert use of materials, in the Brion-Vega family Cemetery, creates a strong connection to the landscape and to the sensitivity of the cemetery itself and so is an excellent guide for material use in a space that is also culturally important to the city of Vancouver.



During his career as one of the leading architectural illustrators and theorists of his time, Hugh Ferriss created a plethora of images which sold projects for architects to clients, synthesized many critical images examining present day theories about the world of tomorrow, and created many of his own. In his utopian vision of “The Metropolis of Tomorrow”, Ferriss illustrates a city divided into sections of business, art, science, technology, and industry interacting with one another on a grand scale. He envisioned structures of monumental proportions; spanning city blocks in their foundations and heights soaring far into the clouds. His was a vision of a

city connected not only through roads but through sheer visibility as the large “city centres would be impossible not to see from great distances (*fig. 9*). Though his work was intended as a model of a powerful metropolis, it is in his illustrations that there is the most beauty, in the notion that monumentality is often well suited for the proposal of an urban landmark.

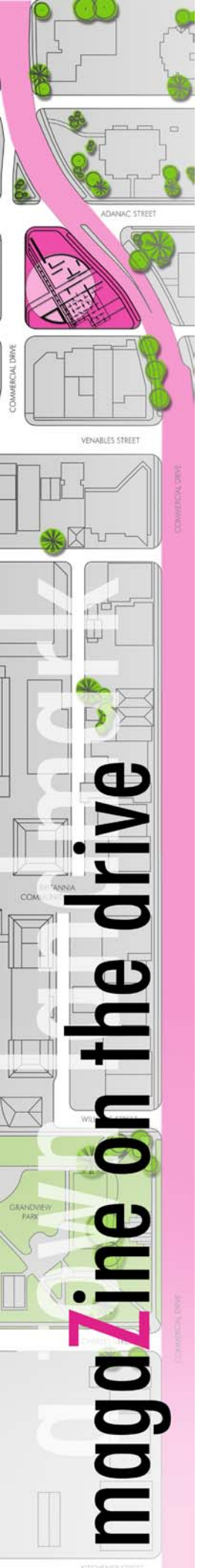


With Ferriss’ work in mind, we wanted to create an aspect of the “Magazine on the Drive” which would stand on its own and attract attention from passers by and citizens alike. The wall that stands at the far North of the site acts as that particular marker. Large in scale, it acts as a beacon advertising the urban gallery’s existence.

It also acts as an ordinance and hinge point between the industrial and commercial area of this part of Vancouver, providing a sense of place and identity to the community as well as connecting it to the rest of the Commercial Drive area (*fig. 10*).

Ferriss had asked the question relating to the overly dense cities of his time where massive buildings were being constructed almost one on top of the other,

“What is the relation between these two (people and buildings)? Are those tiny specks the actual intelligences of the situation, and this towered mass something which, as it were, those ants have marvellously excreted? Or are



these masses of steel and glass the embodiment of some blind and mechanical force that has imposed itself, as though from without, on a helpless humanity?" (Ferriss, 15-16).

It is in answer to this question that the monolithic wall is separate from the rest of the site, allowing for space and setbacks so that its large size does not wholly encroach upon the rest of the garden elements and the people who move through the space. Although Hugh Ferriss' treatise on "The Metropolis of Tomorrow" speaks of far loftier goals and of a city that by today's standards could never exist, his illustrations still evoke powerful meaning and can help to focus the attention of a community.

The Commercial Drive area by itself has a very strong influence on the town landmark. It was from the streets and alleys nearby that we found some of the most beautiful urban artwork or graffiti which inspired us to create a space where the people of the community



could come to leave their mark, free of worry of prosecution and restriction (*fig. 11*). The idea was to engage the residents and allow them to realize that this type of artwork is in need of being acknowledged in a place suitable and appropriate for display. There was another example of this already occurring. A schoolyard's street entry had been transformed from a simple courtyard



to a public garden where decorative arts are left on display and the community is encouraged to interact with one another in a new public square. It was also in that space that we acquired the inspiration for the use of reclaimed sidewalk fragments as a natural looking form of pavement (*fig. 1, 12*). In a nearby park where community festivals often take place, there was a simple band shell (*fig. 13*) that encouraged us to provide space for theatrical performances, where different backdrops could either be painted by local artists or projected on screens for a variety of displays (*fig. 14*). Lastly, along an abandoned train



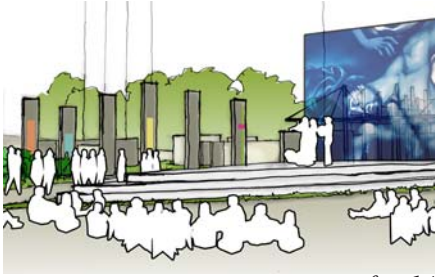
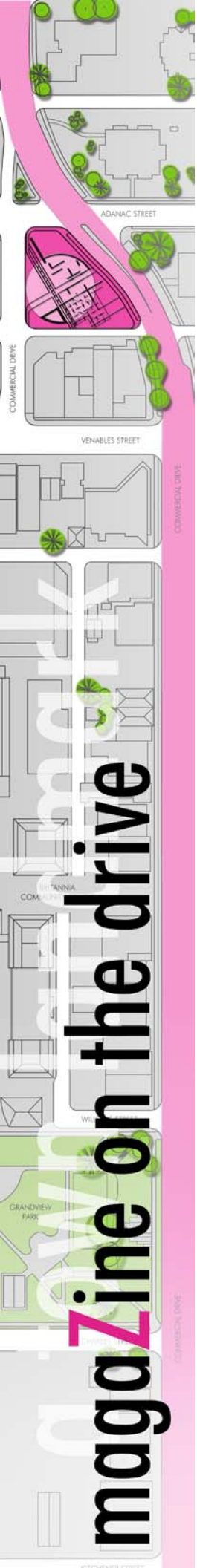


fig. 14

track running near the intersection of Burrard St. and 6th Avenue, there was a large expanse of community run gardens. Garden space in any city is a very precious commodity and so it was a responsible move to provide space within our site to accommodate such a garden (fig. 1). The Commercial Drive town landmark is very much a collage of the surrounding urban fabric, painting a picture of the community and creating for it a true identity representative of its multicultural inhabitants.

Looking toward projects of the past as well as recent urban interventions is an important process in order to make educated decisions when creating any new construction. A town landmark's functionality and its success lies in the spaces ability to be accessible to the public, detailed in a manner which connects people to the architectures materials and organization, maintains a sense of monumentality without overwhelming the immediate area, and remains connected to the surrounding area, evoking a sense of belonging within the urban landscape. These are the conditions that we have implemented within the design of "Magazine on the Drive" in hopes to achieve a space that brings together a community through art, theatre, and education as a cultural hinge point, providing the area with its own character and identity.

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Note: *fig. 2 & 3* were both taken from the Vigeland Museum website. All others were produced by Reggie MacIntosh and Christina Chow.

