

CANADIAN

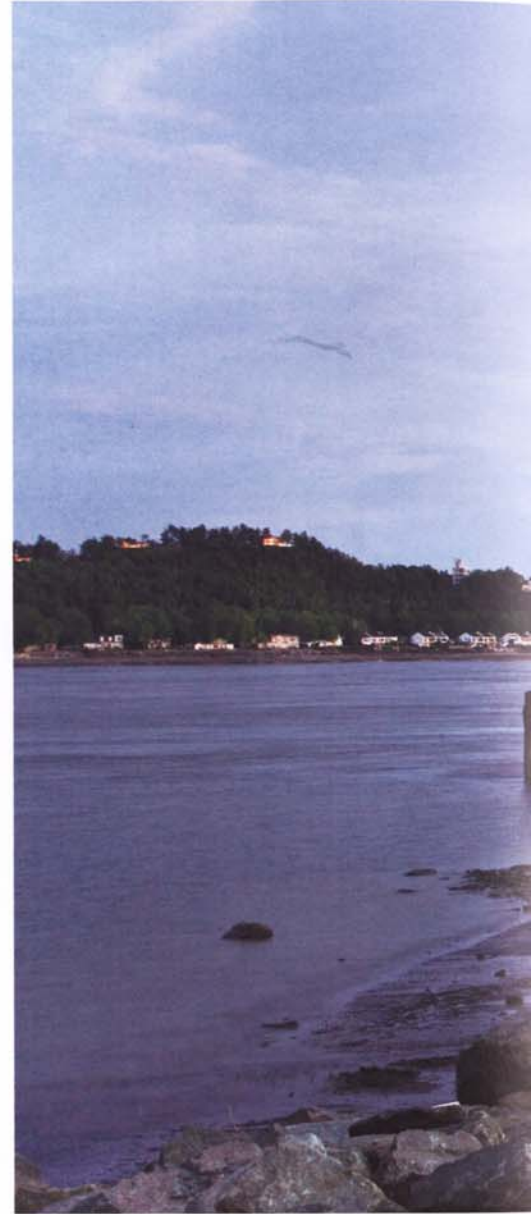
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ARCHITECT

PROMENADE SAMUEL-DE-CHAMPLAIN
VENICE BIENNALE



A SHORE THING



ALONG THE ST. LAWRENCE RIVER, A NEW VISION FOR A HISTORIC CITY HAS BEEN CREATED THROUGH AN EXCEPTIONAL EXAMPLE OF CONTEMPORARY LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE.

PROJECT PROMENADE SAMUEL-DE-CHAMPLAIN, QUEBEC CITY, QUEBEC
URBAN DESIGN DAOUST LESTAGE INC., WILLIAMS ASSELIN ACKAOU AND OPTION AMÉNAGEMENT, IN CONSORTIUM
TEXT ODILE HÉNAULT
PHOTOS MARC CRAMER

It is hard to imagine what this stunning site was like just a few years ago! Quebec City, like many other North American and European cities, turned its back on its waterfront during the better part of the 19th and 20th century while the lumber trade, followed by the petroleum industry, gradually took over the shores of the St. Lawrence River. By the turn of the century, the 12-kilometre shoreline that extended westward from Old Quebec to the landmark bridges of Pont de Québec and Pont Pierre-Laporte was being used in ways that were totally incompatible with a leisurely bike ride or the simple appreciation of this important landscape.

In planning the 2008 celebrations for Quebec City's 400th anniversary, steps were taken to rehabilitate the shoreline. The newly christened

and internationally recognized Promenade Samuel-de-Champlain was inaugurated in the summer of 2008 after an amazingly smooth two-year construction period. It constitutes the first phase of a major linear park project that will eventually extend eastward from Quebec City's two bridges to the already restored area in the Old City, just beneath the Chateau Frontenac.

Before the project could be implemented, major physical and institutional obstacles had to be overcome. When the idea to restore this landscape first emerged in 1999, the decision-making process involved, amongst other stakeholders, 13 municipalities, Quebec's Department of Transport as well as the federal government's Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Like many waterfront landscapes, the site conditions were com-



plicated. Much of the soil was contaminated and some of the land was privately owned. Public access to the water was next to nil. According to urban planner Serge Filion, who then led the project while at the Commission de la Capitale nationale du Québec (CCNQ)—one of the city's major planning authorities—priority was given to acquiring the land, convincing the various politicians and departments involved, listening to the public, and, most importantly, encouraging people to dream about a new landscape.

The first studies to evaluate the site's potential were established early on in the process with a series of visual concepts that were quickly set aside. In an unusual move, the University of Montreal professors associated with the UNESCO Chair in Landscape and Environmental Design

were called in and asked to provide their own sketches and ideas as to what a linear park along the shores of the St. Lawrence River should look like. Eventually, the consortium—comprised of Daoust Lestage Inc., Williams Asselin Ackaoui and Option Aménagement, with Genivar/SNC-Lavalin as the engineers—were given the mandate to develop an overall concept, which was eventually submitted in 2002.

By 2005, as the project was beginning to take shape (on paper at least), costs had been initially estimated at \$200 million. Quebec's newly elected government announced that no more than \$70 million would be allocated to the project. Politicians expected this budget to be spread evenly over the 12-kilometre park. CCNQ's Serge Filion flatly refused and proposed phasing out the pro-

OPPOSITE TOP SITED ADJACENT TO A NEWLY DESIGNED RIPPLING LANDSCAPE, QUAI DES HOMMES IS TERMINATED BY A MEDITATIVE VERTICAL ELEMENT OFFERING AN INTIMATELY FRAMED VIEW OUT TOWARD THE ST. LAWRENCE RIVER. **ABOVE** THE AMBITIOUS NEW PROMENADE SAMUEL-DE-CHAMPLAIN TERMINATES HERE, AT THE POETIC AND CELEBRATORY QUAI DES CAGEUX.

ject altogether. A 2.5-kilometre-long site was eventually selected for the first phase, nearest to the bridges on the outskirts of the city. With precious little time left during which public consultations had to be held, several modifications were made so that the project could be ready for Quebec's 400th anniversary.

The site was broken down into three distinct



zones. From west to east, the Station des Cageux is sited closest to the bridges, followed by the Station des Sports and finally, the Station des Quais. The existing highway was redirected away from the shore and redesigned in the spirit of American parkways. Lanes were narrowed and long curves were introduced which freed up land for recreational purposes—nearly 40,000 square metres of usable space to the west and 25,000 square metres to the east. Parking lanes, an essential part of the project, had to accommodate close to 300 spots, and were subtly integrated

into the boulevard's design. A pedestrian pathway and a parallel bike lane further strengthened the project's connecting spine.

Located in Station des Cageux is one of the project's signature interventions, Quai des Cageux, whose name recalls the intrepid men—Jos Montferrand being the most famous among them—who in the 19th century would assemble the lumber logged along the Ottawa River in large rafts and float them down river. Logs would then be piled up on the shores near Sillery (now part of Quebec City) where they would be left to dry,

waiting to be loaded on English ships. The 20-metre-high observation tower on the Quai des Cageux recalls these carefully assembled wood piles, and the tower's roof is a metaphor for the sails used by the Cageux to move their huge lumber rafts downstream.

Quai des Cageux, the gateway segment of the Promenade Samuel-de-Champlain, is the only portion of the riverfront to have a substantial architectural component. The rest of the Promenade is mostly treated as a landscape and urban design project. The Station des Quais, which lies to the





east of the project, is an 80,000-square-metre grassy area dotted with contemporary art pieces produced by some of Quebec's most remarkable sculptors. The Quais concept encompasses four gardens that lay perpendicular to the St. Lawrence and constitute another major focal point on the Promenade. Quai des Brumes (named after the eponymous Marcel Carné movie), Quai des Flots, Quai des Hommes and Quai des Vents are each inspired by the river's moods and history.

Each quay has its own special character. Quai des Brumes evokes the intimate atmosphere of

OPPOSITE TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT NEW LANDSCAPE FURNITURE, LIGHTING AND PATHS HELP REDEFINE THIS HISTORY-LADEN SECTION OF THE ST. LAWRENCE; A BEAUTIFULLY UNDULATING LANDSCAPE ECHOES THE WAVES OF THE ADJACENT RIVER; AT QUAI DES VENTS, THE LANDSCAPE PAYS HOMAGE TO THE REGION'S PREVAILING WINDS—THE DESIGN FOR THE NEW LIGHT STANDARDS ARE INFLUENCED BY WIND TURBINES. **OPPOSITE BOTTOM** ONE OF THE FOUR SHELTERS IN THE STATION DES SPORTS THAT SYMPATHETICALLY RELATES TO THE OVERALL MATERIAL PALETTE OF THE LANDSCAPE INTERVENTIONS. **BELOW** THE LONG SCULPTURAL BENCH PROVIDES RELIEF FOR WEARY ROLLERBLADERS AND CYCLISTS, AND THE RECONFIGURED VEHICULAR PARKWAY CAN BE SEEN IN THE DISTANCE.

the river's shoreline when veiled in mist. Blocks of granite break out of the pebbly ground like moraines from the glacial era and the ambiance—particularly evocative at night when the lights are

turned on—is reminiscent of Montreal's Place Jean-Paul Riopelle, also designed by Daoust Lestage. Quai des Flots is organized around a long jagged element of white concrete—alternatively



used as a stair or seating area—which simulates the river’s ice formations during springtime. Five alignments of water jets emerge from the ground, reminiscent of waves lapping the shores of the St. Lawrence. Quai des Hommes features a long narrow wood boardwalk that bends upwards, allowing a framed view of the landscape. Thin stylized metallic structures refer to the *fascines* still in use today for catching eels in the St. Lawrence. Finally, the last garden, Quai des Vents, closest to Quebec City, pays tribute to the ever-present prevailing winds along the St. Lawrence. Articulated aluminum structures, designed by Réal Lestage, allude to the large migratory movements of the geese that fly overhead. A small sandy area along the shore recalls a time when swimming was a popular activity in the area.

Incorporating more community-oriented programmatic requirements, the Station des Sports, situated in the middle of the project on the northern side of the boulevard, was designed to accommodate two soccer fields and a more utilitarian sports area. A small service building, as well as four rest shelters strategically sited throughout the Promenade, were also designed in the same architectural vocabulary as Quai des Cageux’s entrance pavilion and observation tower. Also treated in a similar fashion is a long wood staircase used to bring people up to Boisé Tequenonday, a nearby rocky cliff where rich archaeological discoveries have been made, attesting to the presence of First Nations people dating back several thousand years.

Apart from a few seating elements with outstandingly elegant lines, the attitude towards the urban furniture was to integrate maritime-inspired objects—wooden rafts, for example, or the stone and concrete elements used to define individual areas which encourage the public to sit, lie or play on them. This gives rise to delightful moments when people recline on rafts which appear to be floating on water, especially when the water jets are turned on.

As it now stands, the Promenade Samuel-de-Champlain constitutes an important statement in terms of contemporary landscape architecture.



NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF CANADA



QUAI DES CAGEUX



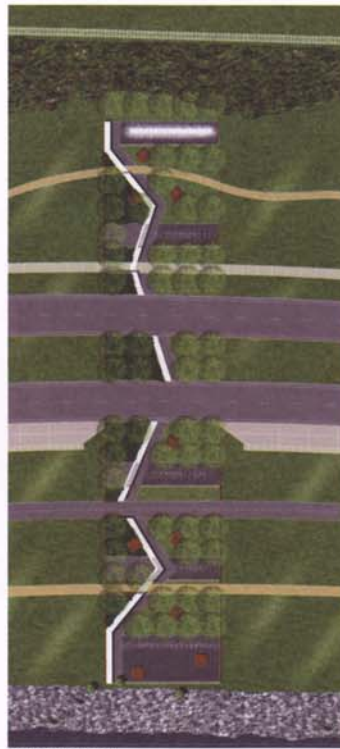
QUAI DES FLOTS—PAVEMENT DETAIL



OPPOSITE TOP COMMEMORATING THE QUEBEC CITY FORESTRY INDUSTRY FROM ANOTHER ERA, THIS HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPH WAS TAKEN AT SHARPLES AND DOBELL'S COVES IN 1891. THE IMAGE ILLUSTRATES HOW RAFTS OF PINE TIMBER WERE ONCE STACKED AND LOADED ONTO SHIPS FOR EXPORT.
ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT TAKEN AT ROUGHLY THE SAME LOCATION AS THE HISTORIC PHOTO, THIS IMAGE ILLUSTRATES THE SHIFT FROM INDUSTRIAL TO RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES; THE ILLUMINATED FOUNTAINS AT QUAI DES FLOTS.



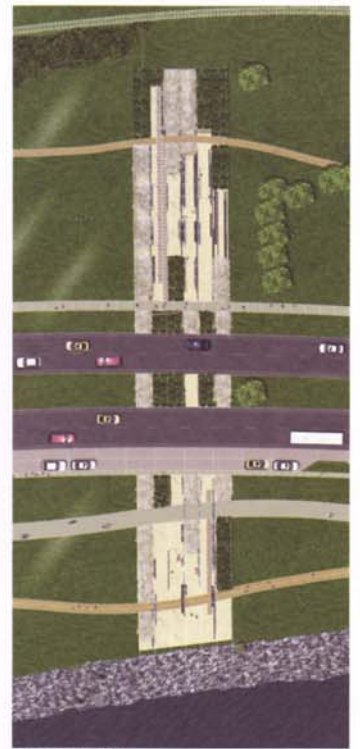
QUAI DES BRUMES



QUAI DES FLOTS



QUAI DES HOMMES



QUAI DES VENTS



MASTER PLAN



The project truly shows what can be accomplished when enlightened professionals manage to convince politicians to move towards the completion of a visionary concept. There was little public controversy around this project and the level of acceptance among citizens who are not normally accustomed to contemporary design exceeded the CCNQ's expectations. One can only hope this project will be a source of inspiration for professionals and politicians around the country as waterfronts and former industrial areas are being adapted to the 21st century's new realities. **CA**

TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT STATION DES CAGEUX'S FAMOUS TOWER PROVIDES INFINITE DELIGHT AND PANORAMIC VIEWS TO VISITORS; A WALKWAY ALONG THE PROMENADE; THE SKILLFUL INTEGRATION OF STONE, CONCRETE AND WOOD AS HARDSCAPE MATERIALS ENLIVENS THE MORE PROSAIC ASPHALT CYCLING TRAIL. **ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT** THE QUAI DES BRUMES AT DUSK; QUAI DES FLOTS—THE WOODEN RAFTS AND ICE FLOW-INSPIRED PAVING PATTERN BRING AN INFORMED AND WHIMSICAL NARRATIVE TO THIS LANDSCAPE.

Odile Hénault is an architectural critic, writer, professional advisor and occasionally teaches at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM).

CLIENT COMMISSION DE LA CAPITALE NATIONALE DU QUÉBEC (SERGE FILION, DIANE SIMARD)
DESIGN TEAM RÉAL LESTAGE, RENÉE DAoust, CAROLINE BEAUJEU, LUCIE BIBEAU, MARTIN ADAM, MARIA BENECH, ANDRÉ NADEAU, SIMON MAGNAN, RACHEL PHILIPPE-AUGUSTE, CATHERINE ST-MARSELLE, HUBERT PELLETIER, NELSON COUTURE, JACQUES MICHAUD
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