

## Feature

### **An Unusual Story: Guarded Support for Demolition**

by Albert Warson, photos by Cylla Von Tiedemann

*Preservationists are obviously more inclined to save heritage structures than to support their destruction; but sometimes, as in the case of Toronto's Guild Inn, a partial conservation project can result in guarded support for demolition.* For nearly a century the Guild Inn, overlooking Scarborough Bluffs and Lake Ontario in Toronto's east end, bustled with an eclectic social mix. It hosted wealthy and socially prominent individuals, struggling artists and craftspeople, wedding parties, service club luncheons, art shows and small business conferences. But by the time the city closed it in late 2001, the inn's buildings were showing signs of serious neglect. Walls were buckling. Roofs drooped. It might have been renovated and brought back to useful life, but the price of its recovery at that point was acknowledged to be high. The Guild Inn, once charming and glamorous, was boarded up and bolted shut. The local Scarborough Community Council and subsequently the full Toronto City Council approved its replacement in June. They agreed that the buildings' heritage designation—which originally had more to do with the Guild's artistic and cultural spirit than its physical presence—should be removed to facilitate demolition. The demolition permit, however, is contingent upon the proposed replacement plan being in place—an agreement that is unlikely to come together until next spring. There was little opposition from neighbourhood residents, Scarborough preservationists or the Toronto Preservation Board. Most agreed that the city and Ottawa's Windmill Development Group should proceed with a partnership on a \$40 million redevelopment including:

- a 167-room hotel/spa overlooking Scarborough Bluffs and the lake;a culinary school;a management training centre;a gallery for the defunct Guild of All Arts collection;artists-in-residence cottages; and
- an amphitheatre for live theatre and classical/jazz music festivals.

On the preservation issue, Glenn Garwood, the city's manager on this project, agreed it was a bit unusual. "We were stuck with the optics of the city agreeing to tear down one of its own (heritage) designated structures, but people came here for the art (which had dwindled to nothing) and when that was gone it left a pretty ugly hotel," says Garwood. A neighbourhood organization, the Guildwood Village Community Association, was solidly behind the demolition and proposed development, as was the Guild Renaissance Group of local arts enthusiasts. Opposition seemed to manifest itself in resignation and indifference.

As Toronto Preservation Board chairman Patrick Gossage observes, demolition was the only sensible course "when a building is so badly deteriorated and there are so few truly valuable heritage features worth preserving." Most of the original fabric had been significantly altered and was in poor condition.A heritage assessment, undertaken by Philip Goldsmith and Company Ltd., identified the main staircase, library millwork, some period furniture and artwork as worth preserving. The proposed plan includes incorporating them into the scheme.

### **Redevelopment**

The city will spend \$7.5 million for garden, streetscaping and amphitheatre improvements and park entrance gate restoration. The city has already sunk nearly \$600,000 (at the rate of about \$150,000 a year) to secure and maintain the property, without any return from property taxes or other income. Jonathan Bowman, Windmill's project manager and partner in the project, claims the new development will be the only one of its kind in Canada, not only on its merit, but because of its public-private collaboration and artistic co-programming.

The Windmill proposal is pointedly low-rise, says project designer Peter Pascaris, a principal in Toronto's Queen's Quay Architects International. Many years ago a developer proposed a 400-room hotel and neighbourhood residents objected. Nothing will be higher than four storeys. "(It will) respect the original scale and the history, as well as pay homage to the landscape, gardens and sculpture," say the

designers. They say they will respect the image of the original white stucco, Arts and Crafts style mansion, built in 1914. The natural beauty of the site overlooking the lake and a waterfront trail at the base of the bluffs has inspired another possible use. Garwood reports that Toronto harbour tour boat operators would like to see a dock and funicular to the top of the bluffs so they could deliver boatloads of visitors to enjoy the site. *Albert Warson is a Toronto-based freelance writer specializing in architecture and real estate development-related subjects. He contributes to The Globe and Mail, Toronto Star, National Post and magazines in Canada and the United States.*

### **History of Guild Inn**

The Guild Inn was built in 1914 as a summer home for a retired American general who played polo on its sprawling grounds. It then became home to a Kentucky businessman, a Catholic school for China-bound missionaries, a Depression-era artist and artisan colony, a Second World War military school and a postwar recovery resort for traumatized veterans. The Guild Inn's most consistent characteristic was its dedication to arts and crafts, beginning in 1932 when the property was sold to Kitchener, Ontario shoe manufacturing heiress Rosa Breithaupt Hewetson, niece of the 18th Lieutenant Governor of Ontario. She bought the property shortly before she married Herbert Spencer Clark, an engineer. That year the Clarks founded the Guild of All Arts, a co-operative arts and crafts community based on what they saw at Roycroft in East Aurora, New York. They turned stables and garages into a studio which housed the craft workshops of the artists and artisans who lived and worked there. They also ran a private elementary boarding school in 1935-1936, emphasizing education with an artistic focus. Visitors came in growing numbers to watch and buy arts and crafts. They also came to take tea or dine inside or on the terrace, basking in the tranquil beauty of the grounds. The Clarks added more dining facilities and guest rooms in the early 1940s. During the Second World War, the federal government requisitioned the Guild Inn turning it into "HMCS Bytown II", a training school for the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRENS), and in 1945 it became a military hospital. Craft facilities became part of the therapeutic rehabilitation for service personnel undergoing treatment. Two years later the property was returned to the Clarks and they revived the Guild of All Arts. The Guild Inn was an artists colony in the 1950s and later became a hotel with an artistic flair. The Clarks, widely known as patrons of the arts and as preservationists, amassed a huge art collection. They also preserved architectural fragments from a number of demolished buildings. The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority bought the property as a public park in 1978. Spencer Clark continued to manage the property until 1983 when a board of management took over. In 1996 the city's culture division assumed responsibility for the sculpture and architectural fragments. The city's parks and recreation division became responsible for the Guild Inn and the parkland. But the city isn't in the hotel business and couldn't make a go of it. The once charming and glamorous Guild Inn declined further and the city gave up and closed it in late 2001.

### **Guild Inn Grounds**

Although the Guild Inn was closed in 2001 the grounds were not abandoned. On the contrary, the city—which has a long-term lease on the entire 88-acre Guildwood Park site with the owner, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority—is a conscientious groundskeeper. The grounds are attractive, made all the more compelling by the pieces of nineteenth and early twentieth century Toronto landmark buildings rescued from demolition and arranged, sculpture garden fashion, on the manicured grounds. Columns from a demolished Bank of Toronto building, for example, are incorporated into an amphitheatre on the back lawn. Other architectural fragments are free-standing and still others are buried or otherwise stored, awaiting exhumation and display on the grounds. There are more architectural building parts buried around the site — from government, newspaper, social club and publishers' buildings, private homes, banks, insurance companies, hospitals, churches, department stores—as there are above ground. The collection includes the Tyndall limestone of the Eaton's College Street facade, columns from the Imperial Oil Building, pieces from the Bank of Montréal, original steps into Osgoode Hall, some blocks from the Toronto Star building and a black marble arch from the entrance to Toronto General Hospital.

This collection and an artist's cottage will be all that will remain in the new redevelopment.

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