

PLAYING FIELD



A RECENT EXHIBIT AT THE YORK QUAY CENTRE IN TORONTO EXPLORED THE POTENTIAL OF A HIGHLY INTERACTIVE AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT FOR VISITORS.

TEXT GABRIEL FAIN
PHOTOS DUBBELDAM DESIGN ARCHITECTS

The exhibition *Building Partners* at Harbourfront's Architecture at York Quay Centre began with three questions: What is the relationship between architect and client? Is a building a compromise or collaboration? Can the client/architect relationship lead to a better building?

Of the four exhibits on display—including projects by Ian MacDonald Architect Inc., Moriyama & Teshima Architects and Jeff Goodman Studio—it was the installation by Dubbeldam Design Architects which offered the most provocative response to these questions. Entitled *pull.push.slide.pivot.lift.tilt.turn*, the piece explored the role of both client and user within the architectural design process. By transforming a gallery space into an architectural playing field of dynamic components, visitors were able to have a direct influence on the spatial, acoustic, material and light qualities of the installation.

Once inside the exhibit, a wide space could be

converted into a narrow corridor or smaller and more intimate spaces could be created simply by rotating or sliding a wall. Selective openings in these moveable walls would alter one's sense of depth as they aligned with painted planes and mirrors on the fixed perimeter walls. Each element in the exhibit, therefore, became a didactic tool from which visitors could learn about the consequences of their own design choices on the experience of the space.

In fact, the ambition of the installation was to bring awareness to the idea that the architect sets up a design framework but it is the client who has a great deal of control over the quality of spaces within that framework. For example, one of the pivoting walls was painted white on one side and grey on the other. Depending on how visitors positioned the wall relative to the existing light fixtures, the wall would either reflect or absorb light. Another moveable wall was entirely covered in grey felt so that in certain configurations it would provide acoustic isolation from music being played elsewhere. The most playful elements within the framework were the orange felt cubes which could be stacked to form precarious columns or arranged side to side to form a vibrant seating environment.

ABOVE A SERIES OF IMAGES ILLUSTRATES HOW VISITORS TO THE EXHIBIT COULD ASSUME THE ROLE OF A CLIENT, THEREBY COLLABORATING ON A DESIGN PROCESS THAT HAS MANY POSSIBLE OUTCOMES.

The active engagement on the part of the gallery visitor was intended to represent the often complex working relationship and exchange of ideas between clients and architects. Whether or not the decisions made within the set of controlled movements could lead to better design was open to interpretation. The point was that the architect set up the possibility for each user to organize the space in a manner which best suited their desires.

Ultimately, what distinguished this installation from the other works on display was the fact that the gallery space became a highly social environment. It also gave visitors the rare opportunity to apply their own creative thinking within a conventional exhibition context. **CA**

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