from memory

OAA Headquarters Landscape Design Competition







from memory

The character and function of a landscape is often defined through the relationships between its components. These relationships create connections, form dependence, and define elements and communities based on context. Looking at the landscape surrounding the existing OAA Headquarters, we may ask, what is the building's relationship with its context? What is its place? Is it anchored to site? Can it be defined by its relation to it? Through examination we have concluded that there is a sense of dislocation and arbitrariness in the building's relationship to its site and the land. The site is missing many of the activities, elements, and processes that come together to create "place."

The proposed concept was borne out of a process of site memory recovery, with the goal of better relating the OAA Headquarters to its context. Before the area was parcelled for business and industry, it was farmland where soil was turned and tended to – the land was productive. And before this, the meandering contours of the Don River helped shape the settlement and movement patterns of the Indigenous Peoples who call this land home. The site was not adjacent to the river and valley; it was the river and valley. The weaving traces of the evershifting river supported – and continue to support – human and animal communities in a rich and robust way.

The site memory is a history of various traces. Lines of varying dimensions, undulating, curving, stretching out across time, with some memories stronger than others, but all currently buried and invisible. A trace can be the markings of those who have previously traversed the land, it can be a recording of a previous use, it is the genetic memory of animals who cross the nearby riparian landscape. Like the Don River and its changing valley, the traces of site memory carve a multitude of courses, dictated through seasons, storms, and life cycles.

The proposed design tells the story of this landscape from memory, its folds and channels weave through the OAA site, creating new spaces for gathering and growing. The memory traces are represented by materials and material change, providing demarcation where there is a change in programming or plant community. Experiential and ecological dynamics settle amongst its energetic spatial structure. Landscape processes are expressed legibly as a more complex planting plan shows growth and displays seasonal change, and where water collects, is cleaned and infiltrates. The trace pattern envelops the OAA building giving it a more rooted presence. The building will continue to provide a sense of stability and shelter but in a landscape that will better demonstrate the natural processes and placemaking gualities.





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How can we realize the memory of the site?

Traces and site details

Reminiscent of the geomorphology of the Don River, a series of walls and bands are a defining feature of the design. They provide a consistent architectural identifier across the site and trace the landscape as the fundamental pattern that ripples through the programmed spaces. Most prevalent are the bands of stacked stone, echoing deep geological memories and drawn from bedrock that is revealed on the surface as limestone embedded with fossils of the past; these features tell a story of solidity and craft. A secondary architectural feature is formed as a system of concrete walls and ribbons. These walls communicate plasticity, texture, and control, built of raw aggregates, exposed and visible, and representing a memory of raw materials in new form. The tertiary threads weaving through the landscape are made of weathering steel. They form edges and are a tool for defining circulation, providing another trace of site activities.

Site surfaces follow the pattern set by the bands and walls, the ribbonlike forms loop around the site, evoking traces of the site's history and framing a dynamic landscape. The changing surfaces function as passive wayfinding, leading to gathering spaces and new perspectives.

Vegetation and water

The proposed vegetation is a substantial change from the current landscape, increasing the site's ecological supports, enhancing stormwater capacity, and providing shade. Planting recalls the native trees and meadows that previously populated the area, as well as the wilder marginal lands that still exist in parts of the Don Valley. Organization of the vegetation follows the trace patterns of the walls and site circulation. Pockets and drifts of plant communities are realized as groves and meadows, making processes such as seasonal change, weather patterns, and the evolution of a landscape more legible to those within and outside of the building.

Site stormwater is re-organized around the vegetation and site forms. Beyond technical notions of capacity and infrastructure, some runoff is allowed to remain briefly and partially visible as ephemeral pools at the south end of the site, mixed in with the vegetation and river rock. Showing some of the stormwater process will help foster a more intuitive understanding of how the land absorbs rain and melting snow.





proposed site plan

- 1. concrete surface entrance gallery + seating
- 2. precast pavers
- 3. stacked stone
- 4. concrete ribbons
- 5. weathering steel
- 6. stone surface
- 7. rain garden
- 8. art installation + seating
- 9. stabilized decomposed granite surface
- 10. EV charging
- 11. accessible parking
- 12. existing lighting (bollards + poles)
- 13. asphalt surface
- 14. existing pavers

materials library conceptual art installation

The materials and methods of construction evolve and connect through time, with past approaches receding then reappearing in new forms and uses later on. Both natural/processed, and raw/human-made materials are commonplace throughout the landscape of the City.

The proposed installation is composed of six common materials used in architecture (contemporary and historic): concrete, steel, stone, clay, glass, and wood. Each material is presented as a uniform slab and as a sample to be drawn from, inspired by, or fondly remembered. As large, monolithic elements carefully

stacked and balanced, the materials can be seen from different perspectives, in changing lights, and as they weather in the landscape over time.

> *Materials Library*, 2024 Concrete, wood, stone, steel, glass, clay 1.9 x 1.2 metres x 6 pieces

> > Team Maple



overall site planting plan site planting planting zones Examples of plant species for each planting zone. trees rain garden perennial meadow poplar/mixed-deciduous thicket conifer massing canopy trees/perennial meadow existing vegetation to be preserved

From Memory envisions the OAA Headquarters site as a vibrant space welcoming new life, function, beauty, and productivity to the landscape. In the context of the Don River Valley, planting design responds to views into and through the landscape from within the OAA building, highlighting sightlines through the trees and allowing the building to float above a thriving understory. The planting also responds to the forms of the walls and pathways proposed in the site design.

The planting design follows a matrix planting approach that introduces a hierarchy of plant structure and a variety of zones that organize and allow species to thrive as part of a designed community. Each selected plant has a unique role in the landscape and can thrive in the context of the suburban site, helping to improve the landscape over time.

Through the planting design, five zones have been created that respond to different conditions in the proposed plans: rain garden, perennial meadow, poplar/mixed deciduous thicket, conifer massing, and areas of canopy trees/meadow. Several areas of existing planting have also been preserved to retain mature trees, established root systems, and beneficial soil ecologies.

perspective illustration - view 1



perspective illustration - view 2



perspective illustration - view 3





