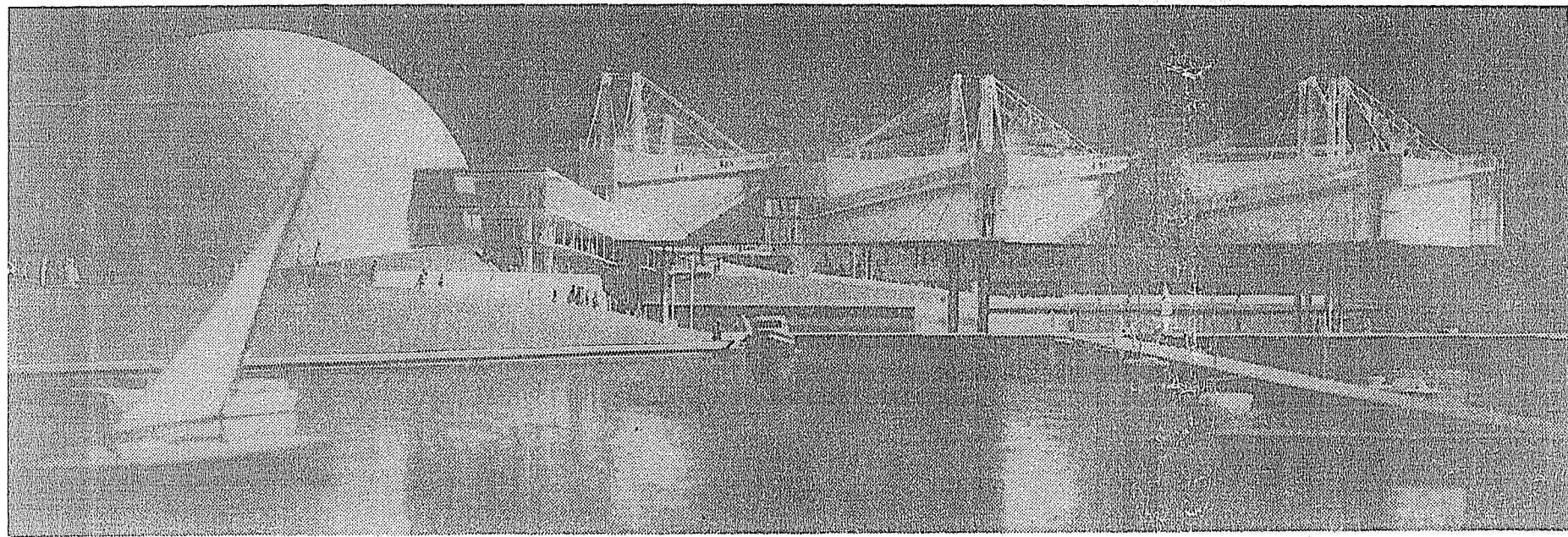


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Your business



Ontario Place at the CNE . . . the work of architects Craig, Zeidler and Strong.

Breaking the building mould

By PAT JOHNSON
Telegram Staff Reporter

In some ways, architecture is like acting — potentially brilliant architects starve in garrets while certain fashionable names get all the big commissions.

Like acting, merit isn't always the criterion that decides who gets the job. The key is often who you know, the old game of politics.

Being colorful and quotable can also go a long way. Naturally, the more publicity an architect generates, the more chance his name may come up when a plumb commission is about to be doled out.

This being the case, odds weren't really all that good that the medium-sized, unflamboyant firm of Craig, Zeidler and Strong would be called on to do Ontario Place and Harbor City — two Ontario government jobs that are among the more challenging commissions going.

Image lacking

The firm is in the top dozen in size, but it's far from the top dozen. More significant, it doesn't have the top dog image of the Parkins, the Bregman and Hamans, the Webb, Zeyafa and Menkes.

Nevertheless, the partnership of Jim Craig, Eberhard Zeidler and William Strong did get tagged for the provincial Exhibition Park exhibit buildings, Ontario Place, and then later for the design concept of the province's Harbor City.

Their work on Ontario Place — five multi-level pavilion buildings rising from the water on stilts — has been lauded by fellow architect Jerome Markson, who himself had hopes of the commission, as "a delightful complex that will re-vitalize Toronto's C.N.E. as well as the waterfront."

It also won them an award by the Canadian Architect magazine as one of 12 projects showing best design excellence for 1969.

Their work in planning the proposed \$500 million Harbor City, like Ontario Place a scenic landfill project, earned similar praise. Planning expert Jane Jacobs predicts it will probably be "the most important advance in planning for cities that has been made anywhere this century."

So how did the firm shoot out of the ranks of the comfortably busy into the rarified strata of the could-be trend-setters?

Jim Craig, an easygoing, comforta-

ble sort who prefers to live in Peterboro and head operations there, leaving the hurlyburly of Toronto for Zeidler and Strong, attributes it, unspectacularly, to methodical evolution.

Not all that facile with instant explanations, Mr. Craig figures his firm's work on McMaster University's mammoth Health Sciences Centre in Hamilton was the turning point in the firm's image.

The \$60 million, 420-bed teaching hospital, still under construction, has already earned a reputation for being years ahead of medical school buildings anywhere in the world. Architects have received 50 letters from around the world seeking information on it.

Economy and flexibility are features particularly noted.

Because of long span construction and confinement of mechanical services to eight-foot high service areas between floors, unusually large open, flexible spaces are available in working areas.

"We planned the hospital to accommodate change," says Mr. Craig. "One of the biggest problems hospitals face is keeping their facilities up to date. Mechanical and electrical services account for something like 40 per cent of initial cost. We designed a building which wouldn't require major dismantling of these systems if the hospital wanted to re-arrange its interiors."

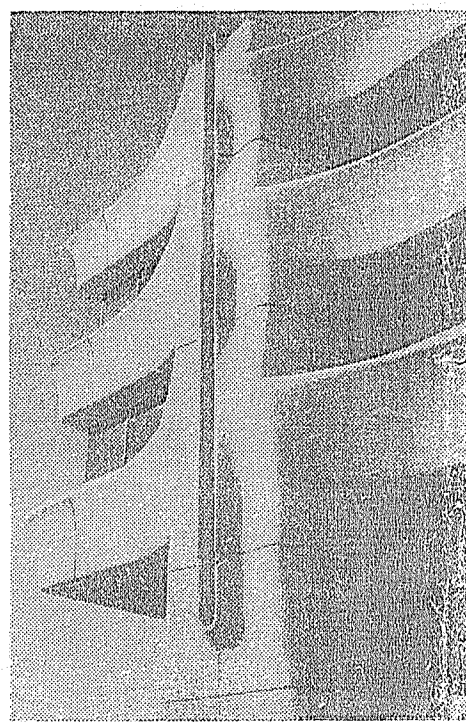
Another advantage is that interior planning wasn't frozen early in the construction stages as is usually the case. Often, as Mr. Craig points out, medical science moves so fast hospitals are out-dated before construction is complete.

Innovative

At the McMaster Health Sciences Centre, flexible interiors allow for changes to be made inside almost up to the last minute. What's more, truss construction rather than heavy horizontal steel beams provides the number of vertical beams necessary for support. Thus, structural costs are no more than in more conventional buildings.

But the health centre isn't the beginning of Craig, Zeidler and Strong's innovative approach.

As Mr. Craig tells it, it is just an extension of the smaller, modernistic Dr. Joseph O. Ruddy Hospital opened last week in Whitby. There, a long-span, poured-in-place concrete structure eliminates interior columns, again allowing extensive interior flexibility. Mechanical services are largely con-



Part of the sculptural theme at Dr. Joseph O. Ruddy Hospital in Whitby.

finned to shafts on the buildings exterior.

To keep it all aesthetically appealing, German-born Zeidler, 44, architect in charge of the project, called in sculptor Ted Bieler. Together, they came up with an idea of pouring concrete in fibreglass moulds to achieve a supporting structure of curved, non-geometric forms. Columns, beams, doors, windows, even heating and air conditioning ducts, became part of the sculptural theme.

As at McMaster, and an earlier unrealized project — an attention-getting circular office building, La Tour Laurier, proposed for Montreal — economy was a major factor in the design.

Whitby went ahead with the futuristic hospital only after the architectural firm proved it was not only as economical as a conventional building, but could easily be expanded from a 100-bed to a 500-bed hospital by simply pouring seven additional storeys on top.

"It's not so difficult to come up with a one-time architectural tour de force if you forget about budget," points out Mr. Strong, who was in charge of La Tour Laurier, and was in charge of La Tour Laurier, and was in charge of La Tour Laurier, and was in charge of La Tour Laurier.

"But aiming for excellence in architectural design and at the same time keeping within your budget is not so easy a matter."

While design and planning evolution is apparent in Craig, Zeidler and Strong's Whitby, McMaster and two Ontario government waterfront projects, the firm, unlike some, don't make a practice of merely duplicating a past success.

At an earlier project for example, the Ajax and Pickering General Hospital, the firm came up with a totally different concept. There, a paramount aim was to provide for future expansion. To do this, the hospital was built with all operating rooms, laboratories and the like on the main floor. Each area had an exterior wall which can be knocked down for expansion.

The nursing units, currently in a small tower rising above, can be expanded by simply adding additional floors above.

Philosophy

"Our basic philosophy," says Mr. Craig, 57, a Saskatchewanian who graduated with top honors from the University of Manitoba, "is very simple. I guess you might almost call it a negative approach. Basically, it's this — we're anti pre-conceived ideas."

"When you come down to it, all bad buildings are designed because of somebody's pre-conceived attitude. All good ones are a result of someone carefully thinking out needs, requirements, functions. Now what you may come up with may not necessarily be new or different, but it works."

As Mr. Craig explains it, what his firm's buildings have in common is that the building represents the function of the building. "We try to use materials and shapes that reflect the function to produce an aesthetic appeal," he explains. "We don't throw on a lot of junk to catch the eye."

But his interest doesn't begin and end with the building. When he has his way, he's involved with everything from landscape to interior decoration. "We like everything to be a part of the total design."

Buildings which exemplify his total approach are the steel-frame, brick-clad Thomas A. Stewart Secondary and Auburn Vocational Schools which nestle on a gentle slope beside a river in Peterboro.

Fellow architects commend the firm's careful use of the site, while students enjoy not only the setting, but the cheery interiors, planned by the firm right down to the bright pinks, yellows and blues on the corridor lockers.