

85 Spadina Road

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Eric Arthur's letter (Scraping the Bottom of the Toronto Barrel?—March 11) criticizing the conversion of 85 Spadina Road raises several questions that must be answered. The preservation and conversion of this house to contain the entrance to the new Spadina subway station must be viewed in the context of efforts to preserve the Annex neighborhood, a goal with which I believe Professor Arthur would agree.

Before plans were made to preserve and re-use the house, it was slated for demolition and replacement by the standard one-story box-like subway entrance that is familiar to Torontonians. In the context of the streetscape of Spadina Road, which is closely built in two-and-a-half-story brick houses, such an entrance would have been an insensitive if not destructive element. In

the discussions surrounding the conversion of the house, it has never been claimed to be an architectural gem or to have stirring historical associations. What has been stressed was the value of the building in the streetscape and the intrusive effect of any other sort of station entrance into the context of the Annex. For the context and streetscape of the Annex are what give the area its character, not the small proportion of houses that are verifiable architectural gems.

Professor Arthur also raises the related question of whether spending on the Spadina Road conversion diverts funds from the preservation of other notable buildings. As far as the subway station is concerned, much of the money would have been spent to provide an entrance in any case. Whether the difference between the original figure for a standard entrance and the final cost of the conversion, the so-called Preservation Differential, would have been better spent on other work is debatable, as it has acted as seed money to prevent the opening of a hole in the fabric of the Annex, money which must be among the first ever spent by a government agency toward the preservation of one of the city's more architecturally important neighborhoods. To bank such money and reserve it for the preservation of major monuments (and it is probable that such would not have been the case), would be to ignore the fabric of the city which is the backdrop for such monuments.

Monuments must be preserved but the value of a bank or a post office, preserved alone without an appreciation of its surroundings has, like Chopin played on a synthesizer, a rather different effect and mean-

ing, however much the notes or the bricks and mortar remain the same.

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