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# LANDSCAPE “MAGIC”

## Tribute to Landscape Architect Don Graham

by WENDY GRAHAM

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**LA « MAGIE » DU PAYSAGE \_ Tribut à l'architecte paysagiste Don Graham**

This article was first commissioned by *ARQ* magazine, to run in French. *ARQ* will be distributed to all landscape architects in Quebec. With the kind permission of *ARQ*'s publishers, LP prepared an English version, which is presented here.

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**DONALD W. GRAHAM**, FCSLA, AAPQ, OALA, ASLA was a key member of the pioneer generation of Canadian-born landscape architects who brought modern design to Canada in the post war years. He left us Nov. 5, 2017, just shy of his 87th birthday. He was and will be remembered as a gentleman: passionate, curious, and kind to others. He led a life inspired by landscape, learning and adventure that resulted in many lasting achievements of environmental and social value. He was also my father and a true hero.

### THE SPARK

Don was born in Montreal, 1930, at the onset of the depression as Frederick Todd was shaping Beaver Lake on Mount Royal. While he grew up in the Notre-Dame-de-Grace neighbourhood, it was Quebec's Laurentian Hills, where he enjoyed his boyhood summers at the family country place on Lac Quenouille, that made a deep and lasting impression on him. He said that it was here, apprenticing with his engineer father, Walter, on innumerable building projects on the property that he first discovered the 'magic' of landscape. It was a notion he nurtured throughout his life and shared generously.

IMAGES: PAINTINGS BY A YOUNG DON GRAHAM

2 VIEW OF LAC QUENOUILLE FROM THE FARM HOUSE 3 THE LAURENTIAN LANDSCAPE

1) SOMEONE TOOK THIS PICTURE OF DON, IN THE TIME BEFORE THE LAST WORLD WAR, HE IS ABOUT 10 YEARS OLD AND IS HOLDING OUT A STRING OF PERCH OR SUNFISH THAT HE MUST HAVE JUST CAUGHT IN THE LAKE. RIGHT BELOW IS A CAT BENDING BACK, HER NOSE UP AND AWFULLY INTERESTED. THIS PHOTO CAPTURES HIS SPIRIT WELL.



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*Don felt that part of the “magic” of landscape related to the way landscape architects can make sense of the disparate parts that are brought together through the design process. For him, Landscape Architecture was a creative profession that promoted developing appropriate solutions to create liveable, lasting and enjoyable environments.*

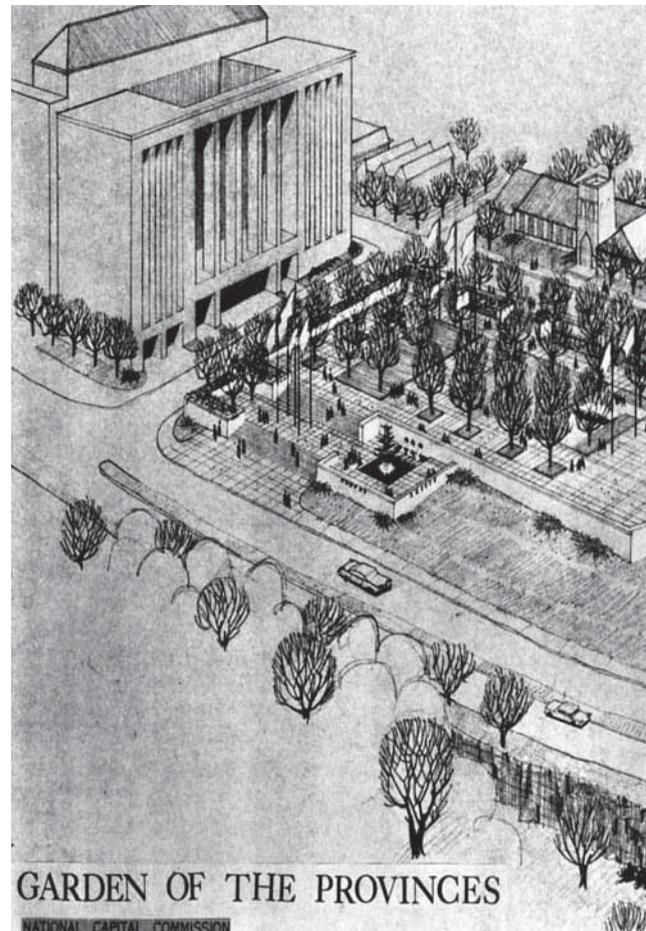
*Don viewed Expo 67 as a once in a lifetime, never-to-be-repeated experience.*



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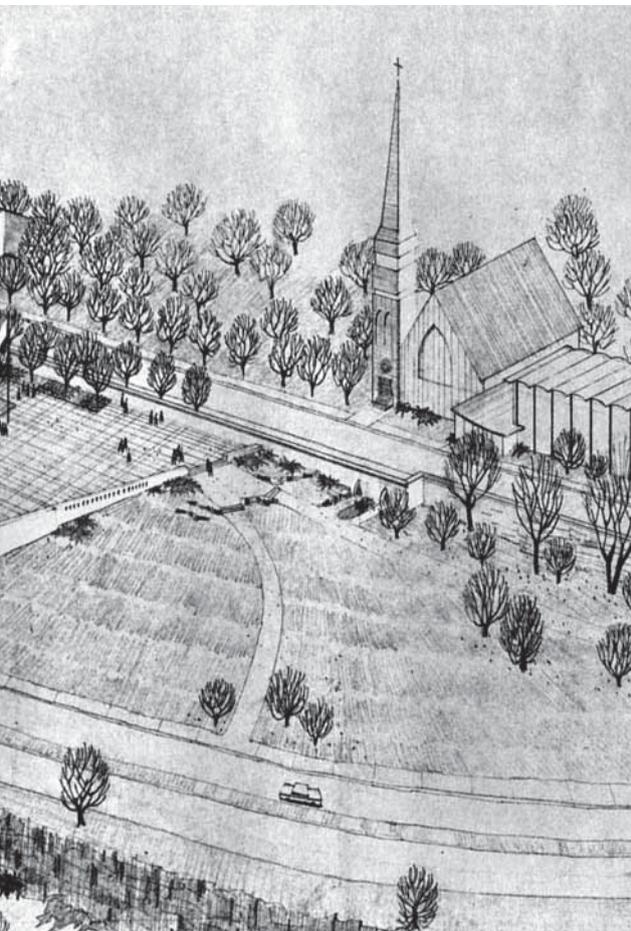
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GARDEN OF THE PROVINCES

NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMISSION

***He attributed the success of Garden of the Provinces to a dynamic and talented multidisciplinary team.***



## EDUCATION

After Don received a BSc in Agriculture from McGill University, he joined the Federal District Commission in Ottawa (now the National Capital Commission \_NCC). It was his supervisor, Edward I. Wood, a landscape architect himself, who encouraged Don to attend the Harvard Graduate School of Design. Harvard's MLA program exposed Don to the significant influence of renowned professors such as: Hideo Sasaki, Norman Newton, Sigfried Gideon, and Garrett Eckbo. He returned to Ottawa and his NCC position in 1958 with a high standard of excellence and a strong desire to put his learning into practice.

## THE OFFICE

In 1964, Don established the office of DW Graham and Associates Ltd., Landscape Architects in Ottawa. It was the first landscape architectural consulting firm in the nation's capital and over a span of more than two decades, he surrounded himself with talented people and successfully completed many prestigious commissions, both in the city and beyond.

Examples of notable projects include: the Ottawa River Parkway, the Garden of the Provinces, Andrew Haydon Park, University of Ottawa and Carleton Master Plans and the Health Sciences Centre. Projects executed further afield under Don's supervision and design leadership included the Charlottetown provincial buildings in P.E.I., Cape Breton Park Master Plan in Nova Scotia, the Macdonald Campus in Ste. Anne-de-Bellevue and Forillon National Park in Gaspé. The firm's considerable body of work represents an important contribution to the profession, while enhancing the public's enjoyment and appreciation of both urban and natural landscapes.

## EXPO 67 - IT WAS AN EXCITING TIME.

In the '60s, Don played a major role in what was the most significant landscape architecture project yet carried out in Canada, namely Expo 67. Under the direction of Macklin Hancock and Project Planning Limited, the recently established Montreal office D.W. Graham and Associates, in consortium with Georges Daudelin and Otis Bishopric, was commissioned to develop plans for the newly created Notre-Dame Island as the primary public green space for Man and his World. The sprawling state-of-the-art parkland recalled Quebec's natural landscapes and featured a network of lakes and ponds, densely planted wooded glades and rolling hills. The firm also realized site plans for the Canadian pavilion and Indians of Canada exhibit. Their work was considered an unqualified success and met with broad public acclaim.

Don would recall that there were great expectations that Expo 67 would put landscape architects in the spotlight and launch the profession forward. In retrospect, he felt that the follow-through never quite materialized and viewed Expo 67 as a once in a lifetime, never to be repeated experience.

4 PARTIAL PLAN OF NOTRE-DAME ISLAND - TOURIST MAP c. 1967  
 5 VIEW OF EXPO 67 MAN AND HIS WORLD SITE  
 6 CONCEPT PLAN OF GARDEN OF THE PROVINCES c. 1965  
 ALL DOCUMENTS FROM DON GRAHAM ARCHIVES

### A TIRELESS ADVOCATE

Don's passion and tireless efforts to enhance the visibility of the profession contributed to clearing the way for LAs today to be accepted as respected professionals by the public, by allied disciplines and across public and private realms.

He was a past president of the CSLA ('64), a founding member of the AAPQ ('65) and editor of the first national publication about Landscape Architecture in Canada ('61 to '64). He worked, alongside colleagues from across Canada, to found, foster and further the idea behind the Landscape Architecture Canada Foundation (LACF). He was an active CSLA member throughout his life, respected by his peers and a mentor to many.

### THE 80s

The eighties marked a shift in Don's career when an intriguing professional opportunity enticed him to uproot and move to Toronto. However, despite the challenge of his international work in Medina, Saudi Arabia and other projects he enjoyed, he decided to return to his home in Ottawa and to the NCC where he collaborated once again on various civic projects, this time as a seasoned administrator.

### RETIREMENT

He finally "retired" in the mid nineties, to the Saint Lawrence River near Iroquois, Ontario, where he and his wife Ree had built a summer cottage many years prior. Shortly after, he brought his capacity and vision to the non-profit arena by establishing the DIAMONDS LAND CONSERVATION TRUST. For many years, Don persevered to build the public's understanding of stewardship, and the unique values of the cultural and natural landscapes in South Dundas, Ontario. DIAMONDS was successful in orchestrating new agreements with industry and government for greater public access to the shoreline and natural areas. The transfer of privately owned Domtar lands to the South Nations Conservation Authority for public use was just one example of what DIAMONDS achieved.

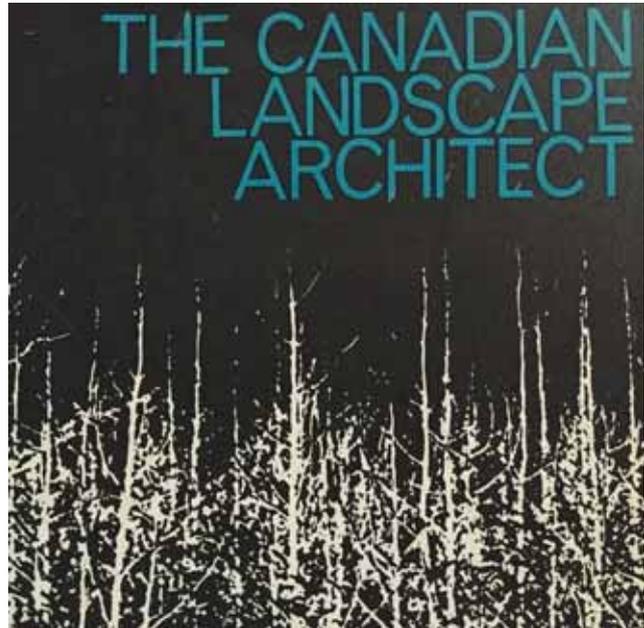
### LEGACY

Don would say that acknowledging our profession's legacy from the past contributes to our ability to design better for tomorrow. The span and the diversity of his portfolio of work across private, public and non-profit sectors and his lifelong commitment to core values of the profession of landscape architecture reflect this idea. His capacity to communicate these values to others combined with charisma, humour and a relentless dedication made him a quintessential professional, an inspiration for others and a true leader in the field. As such, he leaves an indelible imprint on the land and in the memory of those who knew him.

Wendy Graham, FCSLA, AAPQ  
Landscape Architect, Montreal



7



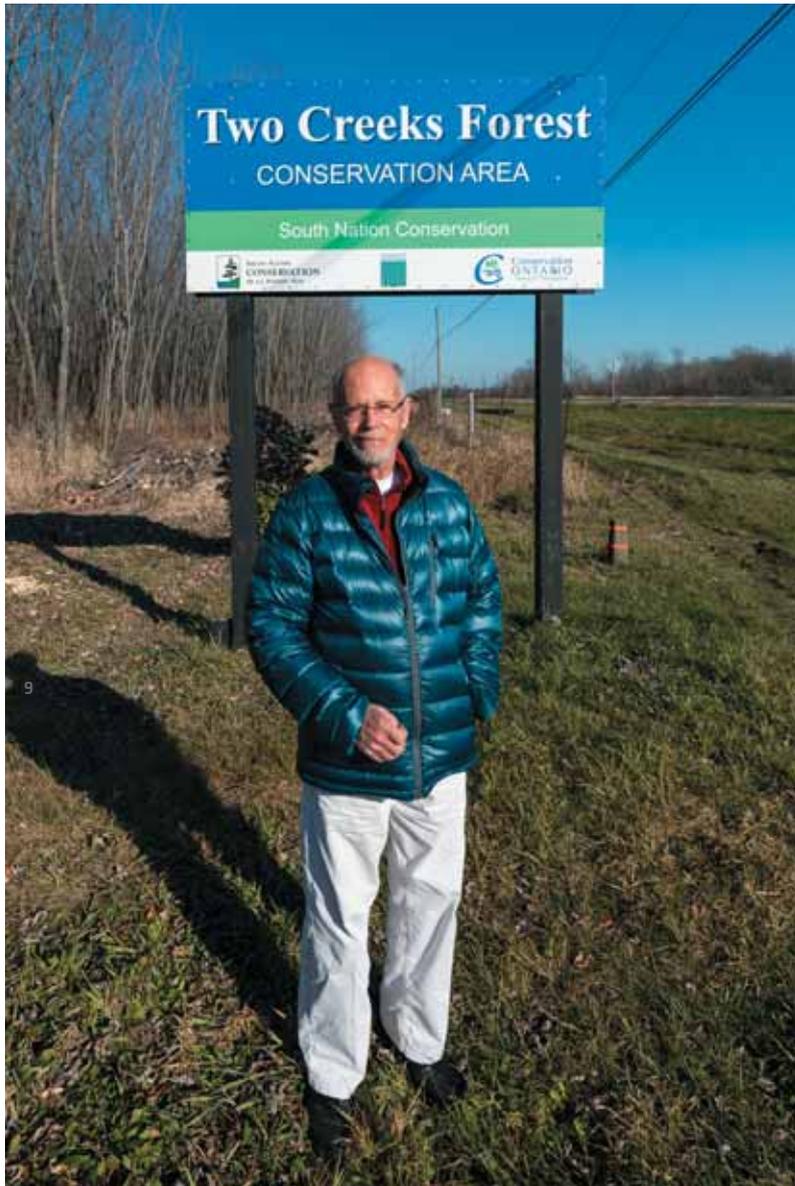
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7 DON GRAHAM, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT c. 1967

8 PARTIAL COVER, *THE CANADIAN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT*, c. 1962

9 ON A WET DAY IN NOVEMBER JUST A FEW YEARS AGO, THE CHAIRMAN OF THE SOUTH NATION CONSERVATION AUTHORITY UNVEILED A PLAQUE TO OPEN THE DON GRAHAM TRAIL. IT COMMEMORATED DON'S PERSEVERANCE THAT RESULTED IN THE TRANSFER OF DOMTAR OWNED LANDS TO THE CONSERVATION AUTHORITY. THANKFULLY, THIS NATURAL AREA WILL NOW BE MANAGED FOR PUBLIC USE IN PERPETUITY.

10 FRAMED VIEW FROM HIS HOME ON THE ST. LAWRENCE RIVER (ALL IMAGES FROM DON GRAHAM PERSONAL ARCHIVES)



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## In another voice...

All three of the Graham children – and, of course, his wife Ree – were immensely proud of “*Don the landscape architect.*” We visited his project sites, road-tested his designs and even hung around the office (or worked there). As such, we met the young interns and LAs passing through the “Graham Graduate School of Design” (as it was sometimes affectionately referred to at the time). Many of these professionals would transform into life-long friends.

But what of DW, the father?

He made life an adventure and was always full of ideas, projects and exciting things to discover. Let’s sail, walk, climb, ski, work, learn, build, read, create, enjoy... and on and on. He was a great communicator that got involved in his community and helped people plan and understand the importance of good design. And in the doing of everything, he taught us by example that it was important to be responsible, to connect and to make a difference. No wonder he inspired me to become a landscape architect. No wonder he was our hero.

*All his life, Don devoted himself to making the world a better place. Before he left, he bequeathed \$10,000 to the Landscape Architecture Canada Foundation (LACF), an organisation that he helped establish over 30 years ago. His wife Ree added the same amount in his memory and many of his colleagues and friends and colleagues donated to the Foundation in his memory. The family is grateful. A bursary has been established in his name to carry his legacy forward.*

**Learn more > [lacf.ca](http://lacf.ca)**

*D.W.Graham and Associates, Landscape Architects were proud of their work on the design of Andrew Haydon Park in Nepean (Ottawa). This 15-acre park was completely created on a landfill site in a wide section of the Ottawa River.*



**PHOTO:** AUTUMN COLORS ON A FOGGY MORNING AT ANDREW HAYDON PARK IN OTTAWA, CANADA (OC), [IMGUR.COM/GALLERY/NTW3FRU](https://imgur.com/gallery/NTW3FRU)