

# Brick Works in for unique retrofit

Preparation of Don Valley site starts this month

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The Toronto Brick Works heritage site revitalization hasn't even been built yet and it's already winning awards.

The project by Evergreen, a non-profit organization which seeks to make cities more livable by connecting residents with nature in a hands-on approach, will turn the century-old brickworks in the Don Valley into an educational, interpretive community centre opening in 2010. Preparation of the site, off Bayview Ave. just south of Bloor St. near Pottery Rd., is set to begin this month.

What's unique about the design, and what garnered it a \$20,000 2008 Holcim North America Awards Acknowledgement prize, is the way it integrates into the environment, both metaphorically and physically.

The Holcim Awards are given out globally, recognizing designs and proposals for sustainable architecture and are sponsored by Swiss concrete and aggregate giant Holcim through the Holcim Foundation. The latter administrates and convenes juries to hand out \$2 million (U.S.) every three years.

Architect Joe Lobko, of Du Toit Allsopp Hillier (DTAH), says the project is unique in many ways and that's what caught the judges' attention.

"I'm lucky enough to live near the site, so I've been there many times," he says. "You can almost feel the stories pouring out of the walls and feel the heat and the rumble of the train carrying the bricks through those long tunnel kilns. It's a magic place in a unique location, a quarry in an area where there are marks from two ice ages."

The factory itself ran from 1889 to the mid-1980s and churned out many of the bricks that literally built Toronto. Because it sits on a flood plain, Lobko had to be careful how his design would impact on the environment but also in how the environment could impact on the design.

"It floods every two years and a big flood could come at any time," he says, noting that after Hurricane Hazel in 1954 any development on the Toronto flood plain was banned, though the Brick Works was grandfathered, like other existing buildings.

To contain any flooding as much as possible, and to stay true to Evergreen's mandate of integrating urban spaces with nature, he's designed a series of 14 "greenways," literally wetlands which extend into the buildings and provide a channel for any water while offering visitors a close-up of the typical vegetation and eco-chain in the area.

Plans also call for installing sustainable technologies in the buildings as part of the retrofit. The five-storey administration building is aiming for LEED Platinum certification, North America's highest standard for environmentally sustainable design.

The exteriors will also get a makeover while still preserving the integrity of the bricks and structures and will feature things like natural venting and cooling, a solar chimney which draws in heat from the sun and then distributes it throughout the interior, biomass heating, which uses wood pellets or other organic material, burned at high temperatures in sealed incinerators, and solar panels to create electricity.

He drew his inspiration from the nearby Distillery development, other projects around the world, such as a former steel plant in Duisberg, Germany and his own work over the last few years converting the historic west-end Wychwood TTC barns into an arts and community centre with affordable housing.

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The site is a total of about 16 hectares, mostly parkland, while the buildings sit on about 4.8 hectares, says David Stonehouse, of Evergreen, which has already raised some \$40 million of the \$55 million needed for the development.

"We expect to get more when construction starts because then people will see it is really happening," he says. There are some programs running over the summer at the Brickworks such as a farmer's market. Once all the renovations are complete, Evergreen plans on rolling out an ambitious slate of programs, from slow food cooking classes, to hands-on gardening, garden design, a plant nursery and pottery-making. For more see [evergreen.ca](http://evergreen.ca).

Ontario and Canada also figured prominently in the Holcim Awards. The Living with Lakes Centre for freshwater restoration and research in Sudbury won a bronze prize worth \$25,000 (U.S.), while the North Vancouver Outdoor School also garnered an acknowledgement prize of \$20,000.

And a pair of young Chinese architects won a Next Generation second prize of \$10,000 (U.S.) for their proposal of densification of Toronto's urban environment by creating housing in unused spaces such as along the blank, windowless sides highrise apartment buildings, over ramps to parking garages and even on the roofs of institutional buildings.

This is the second flight of Holcim Awards since its creation in 2003. It has attracted 4,774 submissions from 121 countries.

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An artist's rendering shows how the Don Valley Brick Works will look in 2010 as an educational, interpretive community centre.