

## Don Valley “art fence” to increase access to trails

Toronto artist and architect Paul Raff to design an art fence along lower Don Valley trail that is more about access than barrier

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LUCAS OLENIUK / TORONTO STAR

Artist and architect Paul Raff, standing beneath the Riverdale bridge, has been commissioned to design a fence to enhance the area.

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By: [Mary Ormsby](#) Feature reporter, Published on Mon Jun 02 2014

A fence, typically, is a barrier. To Toronto architect and artist Paul Raff, his “art fence” deep in the Don Valley is about access.

[Raff](#) has been commissioned by the City of Toronto to replace a sagging 1.6-kilometre stretch of rusted chain-link fencing in the lower Don Valley, a divider installed decades ago to steer pedestrians and cyclists away from train tracks.

Raff said beauty and function are key components of his “nascent” design plans (to be unveiled this summer) but the thrust is to give the public more entry points to the city’s lush, green heart.

“Toronto is a big, giant place with a lot of diversity and a lot of density and the Don Valley reflects that,” said the 46-year-old Raff, whose previous [public artwork mirrors the action at Underpass Park](#).

“When you walk down the Don Valley, you can be looking at the beautiful tree-lined slope along an expressway with 10,000 cars on it per minute. Then suddenly the blast of a GO Train goes by. Cyclists are navigating many, many kilometres of trails that extend into quite far reaches of the city. You can see all of this metropolitan intensity right there in the Don Valley.”

The path, used by cyclists, joggers, stroller-pushers and pedestrians on the west side of the Don River, will be widened to reduce jostling on the busy narrow strip. Raff’s fence will be moved closer to

the train tracks to allow for that path expansion.

Raff's work is part of a larger city plan to improve a 4.7-kilometre section of the lower Don Trail, which runs along the Don River from Pottery Rd. to the Corktown Common.

Raff was selected for the project from a national competition by a Toronto-based jury consisting of artists and architects. He is working with architecture, urban planning and landscape firm DTAH and construction on his art fence is scheduled to begin in the fall.

The enhanced Don Trail is a legacy project for the 2015 Pan Am/Parapan Am Games to be held in Toronto.

There are no drawings of the art fence yet. Raff said he is in the early stages of the creative process with his team of about 10 but hints he's "not about to bring new imagery" to the river valley.

"I'm someone who appreciates the inherent beauty of the Don Valley and I want to accentuate that for the experiencers — ha, I don't know if that's a word — of the Don Valley," said Raff, who often takes his young daughters to the Riverdale Zoo, close to a portion of an area he will design.

"I want (the fence) to add to the rhythm and cadence of a journey and the path of the Don Valley."

To more widely share the Don Valley's natural beauty, Raff said more safe public entrances are necessary along the trail.

The Toronto resident hopes to make use of existing structures, like bridge staircases, to allow people to get to the trail on foot or on wheels. Raff had to leave his 2-year-old daughter's stroller at the top of the Riverdale foot bridge and carry her on his shoulders, down into the valley, during a weekend outing.

"One staircase from one bridge could have multiple access points, I think, to link (the path) into the network of the city," he said.