



## City Works Exhibit Presses the Issue of Our Urban Potential

By Gwendolyn Purdom

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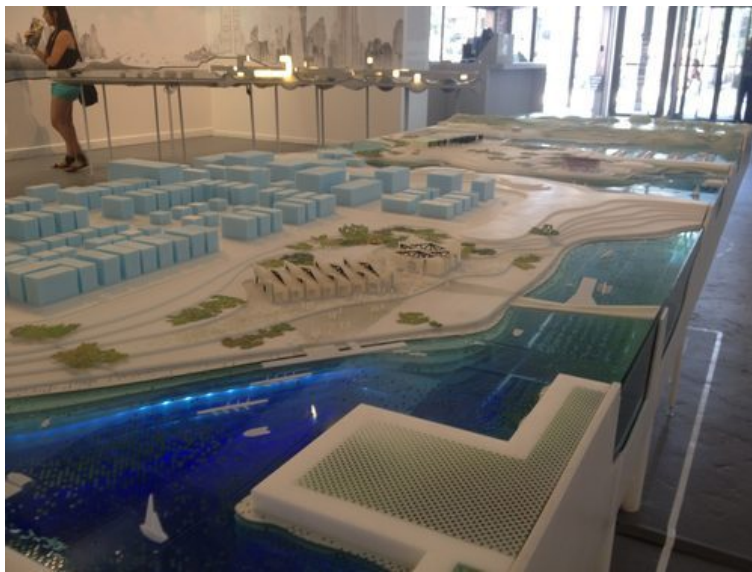


City Works: Provocations for Chicago's Urban Future at Expo 72

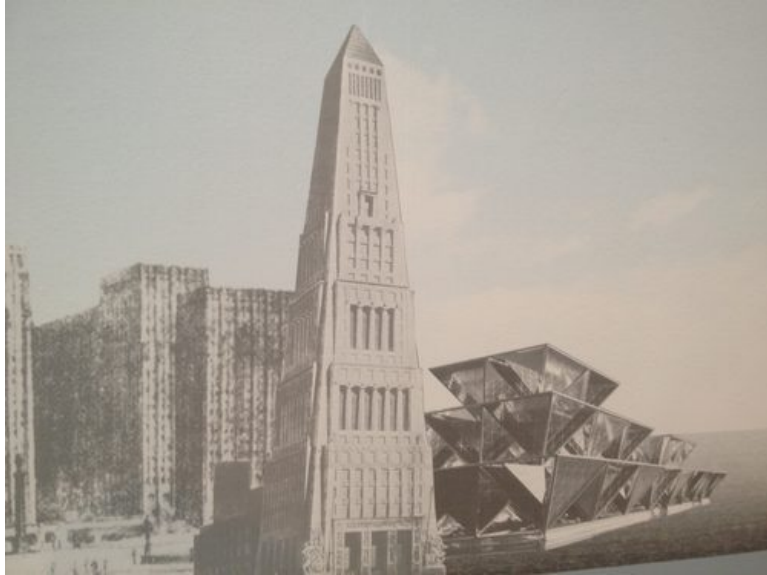
The familiar structures and spires that make up the Chicago we know may be physically set in stone, but when it comes to the urban possibilities of our city's future – and its past – things get a little more fluid. That's the whole idea behind *City Works: Provocations for Chicago's Urban Future*, the imaginative free exhibit that's spent the summer in the Loop's Expo 72 gallery and will be wrapping up its run at the end of the month. The sparse but thoughtful installation presents four interpretations of large-scale design concepts Chicago could potentially incorporate from the likes of innovative urban thinkers Studio Gang Architects, David Brown, UrbanLab / Sarah Dunn and Martin Felsen, and Stanley Tigerman. Circling those dioramas, a 160' panorama curated by Alexander Eisenschmidt and his team shows a collection of visionary Chicago designs that never made it past the drawing board.



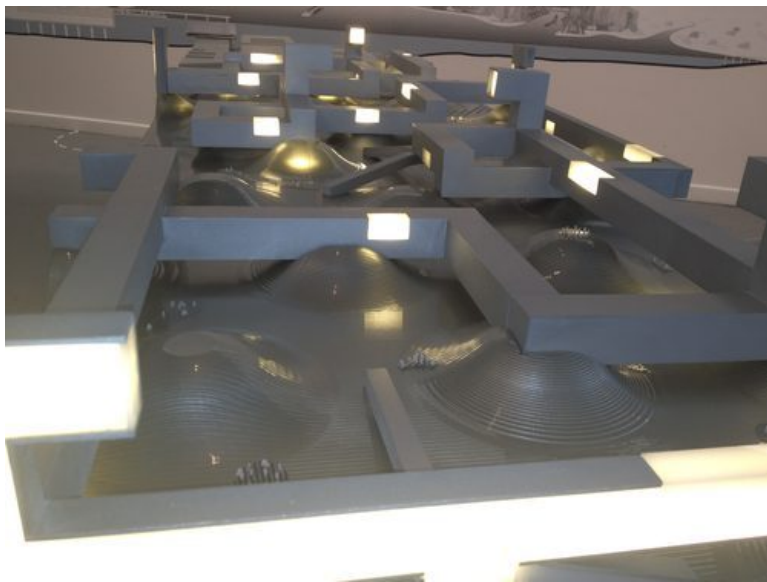
Studio Gang's "Reclaiming the Edge" project



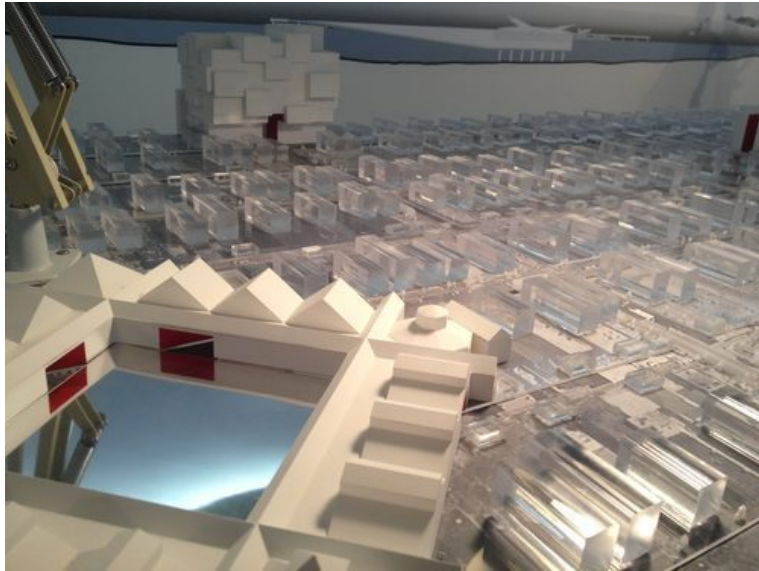
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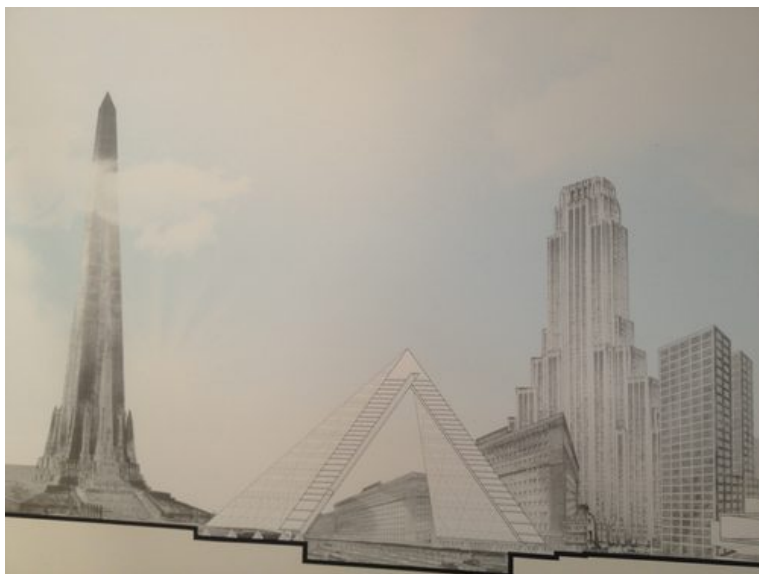
Alexander Eisenschmidt's "Phantom Chicago" project



UrbanLab/Sarah Dunn and Martin Felsen's "Free Water District" project



Stanley Tigerman's "Displacement of the Gridiron with the Cloister" project



Alexander Eisenschmidt's "Phanton Chicago" project



David Brown's "The Available City" project



David Brown's "The Available City" project

While there could have been a little more background detail (only two of the five works were displayed with explanatory volumes), the juxtaposition of potential past against potential future alone is reason enough to check out the exhibit. Eisenschmidt's walls of Visionary Chicago images, dotted with unbuilt curiosities like Greg Lynn's 1992 Stranded Sears Tower and Constant-Désiré Despradelle's late 1800s Beacon of Progress, certainly puts visitors in the targeted "what if" mindset (the UIC architecture professor and designer's research is also available on a corresponding smartphone app). The other designers and design team's projects take that open mentality and run with it.

Jeanne Gang and her Studio Gang Architects envision a proposed Natural Resources Defense Council Chicago River barrier as "a catalyst for human connections, recreation, and urban revitalization along the Chicago River" in their "Reclaiming the Edge" design. In UrbanLab/Sarah Dunn and Martin Felsen's "Free Water District," the untapped potential of urban waterways gets a different spin: using the Great Lakes' abundant aquatic supply for economy-boosting water-based industry, attracting said companies in exchange for free water and other community benefits.

Tigerman's "Displacement of the Gridiron with the Cloister" is easily the wonkiest of the bunch, an urban plan described in the exhibit as incorporating "an inaccessible spatial center that is at once inherently immanent and imminent (in the process of becoming) not unlike aspirations that we have for our own spiritual transcendence," (I'm sorry, what?) which seems to leave things pretty open to interpretation. Its corresponding model, filled with rows of transparent structures and very little detail, doesn't do much to clarify things either.

"The Available City," David Brown's concept for making the most of vacant city spaces is bright and resourceful, pitching another flexible approach that fills in Chicago's many empty places to create, what the project claims to be enough reclaimed space to equal twice the size of the Loop. Some of the exhibit's proposals seem more feasible than others, but for the purposes of the installation, it seems the old "journey is more important than the destination" adage rings true. In order to address the urban issues our city, and cities like ours, are currently facing and will face in years to come, getting creative is key.

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<http://chicago.curbed.com/archives/2013/09/03/thinking-outside-the-blocks.php>