



ARTSCAPE GIBRALTAR POINT

CASE
STUDY



Artscape gratefully acknowledges the support of the Ontario Trillium Foundation Province-Wide Fund in the creation of Artscape DIY. For more information on the Ontario Trillium Foundation and its work, visit them online at www.trilliumfoundation.org



© Artscape 2018

Unless otherwise noted, all content is copyrighted by Toronto Artscape Inc., with all rights reserved. Under the copyright laws, this material cannot be reproduced in any form without the prior written permission of Toronto Artscape Inc.

CASE STUDY: ARTSCAPE GIBRALTAR POINT

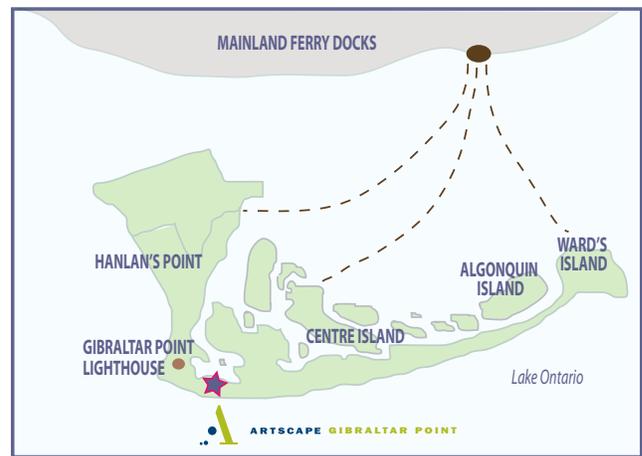
443 Lakeshore Avenue, Toronto Island, ON

Artscape Gibraltar Point is one of Artscape's most unique and tranquil properties, located in a secluded park setting with its own beachfront on Toronto Island. The project was catalyzed by a group of Toronto Island residents who contacted Artscape when the historic Toronto Island Public and Natural Science School, located on the southwestern-most tip of the Toronto Islands, was threatened with demolition. Working with a Community Advisory Committee and the City of Toronto, Artscape created a new vision for the site that included a retreat centre, artists' lodge and long-term artist work studios. With a small grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, staff-led building improvements and community sweat equity, this important part of the Island's heritage found a new purpose. Artscape Gibraltar Point is now a world-renowned centre giving the artistic and non-profit communities an affordable place to think, experiment, create and share ideas.

THE PLACE

The Toronto Islands is an archipelago that lies across the harbour from downtown. The islands were initially formed as sandbars originating from the Scarborough Bluffs, connected to the mainland at the base of Woodbine Avenue. In 1858, a hurricane completely separated the peninsula from the mainland and the break was never repaired. Toward the end of the century, the City of Toronto began to divide and lease lots on the islands, and in the same period a commercial main street was established on Centre Island. A stadium and amusement park was built at Hanlan's Point, creating a small community of cottages, amusement areas and resort hotels. The island community continued to grow; at its height in the early 1950s it included 630 cottages and homes between Ward's Island and Hanlan's Point, as well as a school, movie theatre, bowling alley, stores and dance halls.

On January 1, 1956, the City of Toronto transferred responsibility for the islands to the new Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto Parks Department, who felt the scarcity of parkland in Toronto necessitated the expropriation and demolition of all residential structures on the islands to create a large park. Demolition proceeded from Hanlan's in the west to Ward's in the east in fits and starts and had begun to dwindle by the end of the 1960s when the Toronto Island Community Association (TICA) was formed. During the early 1970s, roughly 250 houses on Ward's and Algonquin



islands remained, but their future was still in doubt. For the residents of the islands, the fight to save their community lasted more than 20 years. In 1993, Bill 61, *The Toronto Island Residential Community Stewardship Act*, was passed by the provincial government. Bill 61 resulted in the creation of the Toronto Islands Residential Community Trust (TIRCT), which was established to manage and lease the public lands to residents for 99 years.

Today, 262 homes still remain on Ward's and Algonquin Islands. After years of fighting for their right to stay, the residents have developed a reputation as a strong, self-sufficient and passionate community with a commitment to the environment and the arts.

THE SPACE

In 1888, the population of the islands was growing, and the City of Toronto donated land to the school board



CLICK
HERE

Click here to watch
Toronto Islands
Resident and Former
Island Public/Natural
Science School
Caretaker Jimmy
Jones remember
life on the Toronto
Islands.



Island Ferry passengers 1908?
City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1244, F1244_10234

#234

City of Toronto Archives photo, Island Ferry Passengers, c1908.

for the construction of a one-room schoolhouse at the southernmost point near the Gibraltar Point Lighthouse. The original school burned down in 1909 and was immediately rebuilt to accommodate the 52 children in attendance. By 1921, the number of students had doubled and a second room was added to the original structure. More rooms were added in the early 1930s. Following the Second World War, a housing shortage in the city saw more people living year-round on the islands. The student population continued to grow throughout the 1940s and 1950s, with a total of 630 pupils in 1964.

As a result of Metro Parks' demolition plans, enrolment dropped throughout the 1950s. To make use of the now-empty school rooms, the Natural Science Program was developed. It provided an opportunity for as many as 500 students per year from across the city to live at the school for a week studying nature and science. Because the school housed large numbers of students in these special programs, there were ten classrooms, two large dormitories, thirteen small bedrooms to accommodate teachers, a large kitchen and several portables.

Today, the school houses Artscape Gibraltar Point, and offers 35,000 square feet of multi-use space. Self-directed artist residencies provide short-term accommodation and studios for professional artists in 10 studios and bedrooms, and 15 long-term workspace studios for painters, sculptors, musicians, theatre companies and a recording studio. The Retreat Centre has two large rooms



CLICK
HERE

Click here to view
photo galleries of
the interior and
exterior of Artscape
Gibraltar Point.

and a variety of facilities for small conferences, board retreats and meetings. This idyllic beachfront property has the feeling of a remote cottage getaway but is a short fifteen-minute ferry ride from downtown Toronto.

THE SITUATION

In 1960, the Island Public and Natural Science School at Gibraltar Point began running a natural science program for students from across the Toronto school district. The influx of students from Toronto attending the Natural Science School, in addition to the local students who used the building every day, caused wear and tear on the old structure. In the late 1990s, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) investigated options to renovate or rebuild the school. A decision was reached to build a new Toronto Island and Natural Sciences School nearby and demolish the old site and return it to parkland.

Under threat of demolition, the much-loved and historic old schoolhouse would need to find a compelling new use if it was to survive. A group of Toronto Island residents proposed that the old island school could be repurposed as an arts centre.

“Once the (Toronto Island residents) community was granted a 100-year lease...there was talk about building a new school...people were keen to get the new school and the idea of keeping the old one wasn't really on the agenda. People had fought hard to get a new school and argued that the [old] building was worthless. Now they had to be convinced that the building could be saved.”

—LEIDA AND JOHN ENGLER, RESIDENTS OF THE ISLAND WHO WERE INSTRUMENTAL IN THE PRESERVATION OF THE ISLAND SCHOOL



City of Toronto Archives photo, Island School, c1954

With demolition slated to begin in April of 1999, a group of islanders began to organize a campaign to save the school. They met regularly and lobbied City of Toronto staff and politicians in the hope of convincing municipal authorities that the building should be given a new life. They met with stiff resistance from local government, which had already tendered a bid for demolition.

CLICK
HERE

Click here to watch Leida Englar, Toronto Islands resident and community activist, discuss the community's involvement in saving the island school.

“Who were our allies? We had none at the beginning. Because they had signed off on demolishing the building. The Parks Department had signed off on [demolishing] the building...it was our persistence to save the building and to convince them it was a good idea. I would call the Commissioner of Parks every day and I would ask, ‘Are there any more hurdles that I have to go over? I just satisfied this one.’ If there was any strategy, it was filling in the blanks that were thrown at us. The biggest one was the architectural assessment of the building. I can remember at this [public meeting]...They put their assessment report down and it was a few pages, and ours was presented and it was like a telephone book. I don’t think they realized we could prove them wrong.”

—LEIDA ENGLER, ISLAND RESIDENT

Early in this period, Julie Stone, the group’s Chair contacted Artscape for advice. A tour of the site was organized and Artscape was invited to attend meetings with City officials.

“When I first visited the site, I was taken aback by its beauty but when I began to assist the Islanders in their bid to save it, I was even more taken aback by the resistance they encountered from City staff. There seemed to be entrenched opposition among some officials to anything proposed by Islanders and a healthy amount of scepticism about the idea of repurposing the building. The Islanders were very adept at raising social capital and were able to produce plans and reports prepared by experts to address the issues and concerns raised. It seemed as if the more issues we were able to address, the longer the list of concerns became. Artscape did not set out to take on the project but the further into it we got, the more determined we became to help preserve this important part of Island heritage.”

—TIM JONES, ARTSCAPE CEO

One of the biggest hurdles to overcome was developing a viable capital and operating plan that did not require a significant amount of money from the City. As the deadline for demolition loomed, the Island group realized that managing the property would be a tall order and a tough sell for a group of volunteers with no track record in operating an arts centre. They asked Artscape to play a leadership role. In December of 1998, Artscape agreed to become the lead proponent for the project and Susan Serran was hired as the Project Manager. Together with board, staff and the Islanders, Artscape launched a campaign to convince the TDSB and the newly amalgamated City of Toronto council to stop the demolition and enter into a long-term, nominal sum lease with Artscape. To everyone’s great surprise and relief, the campaign worked and a new urgency emerged to really figure out how the project was going to work.

THE VISION

When Artscape agreed to become the lead proponent of the project, a Community Advisory Committee was established to ensure community stewardship of the project in its development phase. Julie Stone and former City Councillor and Island resident Liz Amer joined this committee while others who had been part of the campaign to save the building focused on developing programs or were hired as staff of the new centre. Through community consultation and assessment of the potential of the old island school, a vision for Artscape Gibraltar Point (AGP) was developed jointly by Artscape, the Gibraltar Point Centre for the Arts Advisory Committee and the wider island community. Inspired by projects like the Banff Centre for the

CLICK
HERE

Click here to watch Jimmy Jones, Toronto Islands Resident and Former Island Public/Natural Science School Caretaker, recall the history of the island school and how the building was saved.

Arts, which provides short-term residencies for artists and creators from multiple disciplines, Artscape Gibraltar Point was envisioned as a year-round retreat for artists. In approaching its proposal to the City, Artscape stressed that AGP would be self-sustaining and would not require municipal operating support. Additionally, AGP would benefit municipal revenues with increased ferry rides and would help to ensure the care and protection of an environmentally sensitive area.

The activists who saved the island school had imagined from the very beginning that it should become a place for

creativity and the arts. By creating an isolated facility, AGP was envisioned as a place that would strengthen the arts community in Toronto by providing spaces for forums, workshops, rehearsals, retreats, conferences and special events.



“Imagine a place which provides a meeting ground for the brightest artistic minds of Toronto and their counterparts from across Canada and around the world. Leaders from the arts and other communities will gather

at this place for seminars and forums or to develop new strategies to prepare for the future. Painters, sculptors, actors, writers, filmmakers and musicians will use studios on site and take part in workshops to hone their talents. Performing arts companies will rehearse there. Charitable organizations will raise funds there. The public will learn about the history of the Toronto Islands and see exhibitions there. This very special place will be [Artscape Gibraltar Point].”

—ARTSCAPE (1999). GIBRALTAR POINT CENTRE FOR THE ARTS PROPOSAL TO THE CITY

THE PLAN

While the creation of an arts centre at Gibraltar Point was already a popular idea with both island residents and Toronto’s artistic community, creating a sustainable long-term plan in a short timeframe was a challenge. The cornerstone of the redevelopment plan was a 20-year lease from the City at \$1 per year. The City’s assistance in securing a change-of-use permit would also prove to be critical.

Once the property was secured, Artscape worked with contractors and architects to address structural and code issues. A one-time capital grant of \$75,000 from the Ontario Trillium Foundation was essential in funding the capital works required to sufficiently repair the property for use as an arts facility. In only five months with a renovation that was little more than a coat of paint, AGP went from a vacant building under threat of demolition to a functional and tenanted arts facility. Once up and running, AGP, like all of Artscape’s properties, was designed to operate on a cost recovery basis without requiring ongoing subsidy.

The operating plan proposed four streams of activity: i) a retreat centre serving the non-profit, government and

education sectors; ii) long-term tenancies for artist work studios; iii) an international artist residency program and iv) artistic training activities.

DESIGN/BUILD

The structural soundness of the school building raised several concerns. Artscape was required to conduct a structural assessment, architectural inspection and a heating and ventilating assessment. The reports on these assessments confirmed that the building could be retrofitted but would require some work immediately, while other repairs could be phased in over time. Some of the most pressing concerns included repairing wood rot, the installation of air conditioning and converting the heating system to gas.

“There are still outlines on the floor from where the bunk beds used to be, and scuff marks on the wall where kids used to lean back in their chairs. And of course, the fountains are low and the toilets are small. We don’t want to completely lose the idea that it was a school. That’s why we keep the pictures and try to archive the school days [as much as possible].”

—LISA CRISTINZO, MANAGER, ARTSCAPE GIBRALTAR POINT



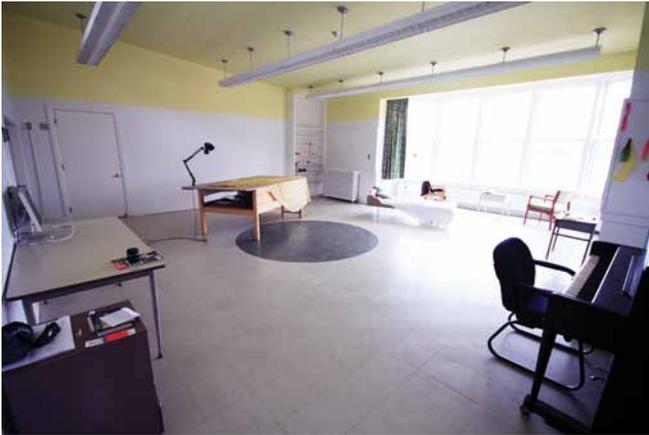
Outdoors at Artscape Gibraltar Point.

The unique location of the facility along the shore of the island was both an asset and a challenge. Artscape worked with the City of Toronto to ensure that all activities were compatible with the environmental assessment and the building’s natural setting.

OPERATE

Artscape Gibraltar Point opened in late 1999. Since then, it has hosted an international residency program and large arts and cultural events, as well as retreat and lodge facilities. Over 800 artists have experienced the unique

and tranquil setting, which provides affordable short-term studio and accommodation rental service for professional artists and arts administrators looking for time and space to focus exclusively on their work. The Retreat Centre has hosted meetings, workshops, small conferences and team-building events for more than 600 not-for-profit and charitable organizations in addition to weddings and corporate events.



Artist work studio at Artscape Gibraltar Point.

The operating model for Artscape Gibraltar Point has been adjusted over time to improve its sustainability. Upon opening in 1999, it quickly became apparent that the logistics and expense of organizing artistic training classes on the island made this stream of activity unfeasible. Difficulty in securing funding for the international artist residency program caused the end of this highly acclaimed and sought-after strand of activity in 2007. In place of the residency program, Artscape Lodge was created as an alternative way to provide low-cost, short-term bedroom and studio accommodation for visiting artists. The vision and operating model for Artscape Gibraltar Point continues to evolve in response to demand for its programming and the self-generated revenue and other funding available to support it.

Members of the island community continue their active involvement in the day-to-day life of the centre.

“We have sessions where we try to get the communities together. The island community and the Gibraltar Point community. To learn what each other is doing and publicize events, try to make that a stronger connection.”

—JOHN ENGLER, ISLAND RESIDENT

LESSONS

Artscape Gibraltar Point, like many other Artscape projects, began with a building in search of a use. Too

often, worthy community-led projects are written off as fanciful. First and foremost, this project illustrates that local communities have a lot more capacity than people normally give them credit for. They are capable of overcoming seemingly impossible challenges through sheer determination and strategic partnerships.

Artscape Gibraltar Point’s development marked the organization’s first use of a community advisory committee to help shape the vision and development of a project. By embracing the principle of community stewardship in this way, Artscape Gibraltar Point and all subsequent projects have benefited from the foundation of strong shared visions that are built from the ground up in the local community.

The restoration of AGP is an example of how a building can be brought back to life without a great deal of money or a large amount of redesign. The existing island school was minimally retrofitted; in fact, much of the building was untouched during its transition to AGP. As a resulting benefit, the lingering remnants of the building’s history have made it attractive to both short and long-term visitors.

Artscape Gibraltar Point also reminds us that everything does not always work out according to plan and part of the job of operating such places involves adapting and revising best-laid plans to ensure long-term sustainability.

AWARDS

2008 Ontario Trillium Foundation Partnership Award



CLICK
HERE

Click here for the Artscape Gibraltar Point
BIBLIOGRAPHY



CLICK
HERE

Click here for the Artscape Gibraltar Point
ARCHIVES



CLICK
HERE

Click here for the Artscape Gibraltar Point
MEDIA GALLERIES



CLICK
HERE

Click here for the Artscape Gibraltar Point
PROJECT MATERIALS