

Dreams for North America

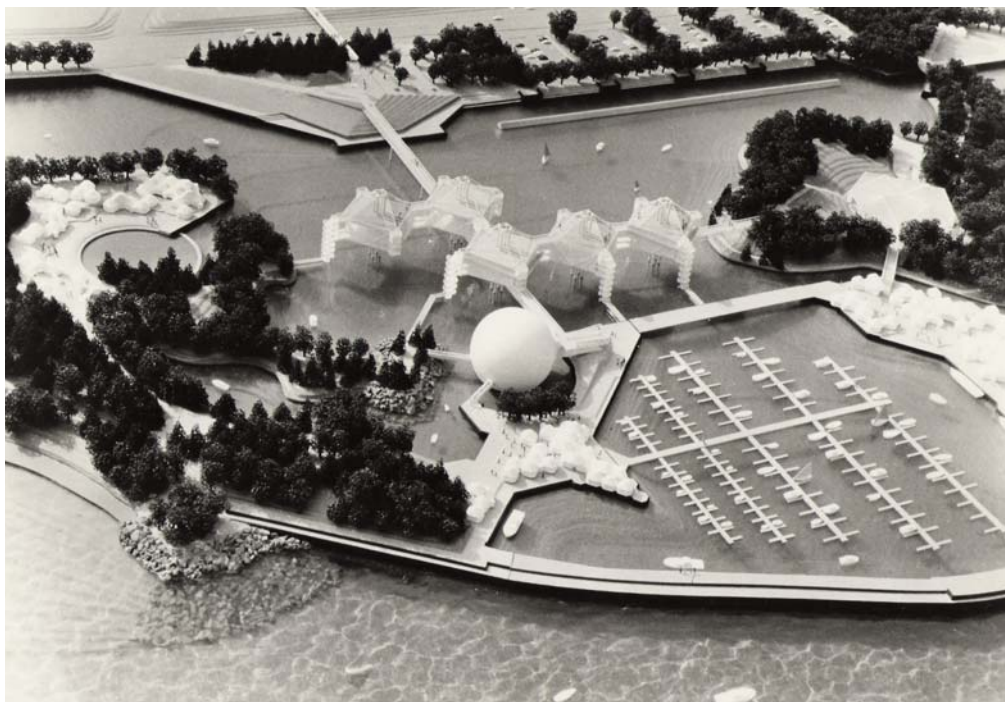
Water has always been a strong and challenging element in my life. As a child I was taken to a ‘public baths’ by my uncle. Our changing room was at the deep end of the pool. My uncle told me to walk to the shallow end and then dived into the water. It appeared quite simple, so I dived into the deep end and discovered to my complete surprise that I couldn’t breathe under water. I did not drown, I was dragged out of the water in time, but the experience stayed with me.

1968 -- Canadian Government Exhibition Commission

Years later I did drown. I was working in Ottawa and during the lunch break I joined a group to swim in a nearby river. I was never a good swimmer having little practice, but I climbed into the river and followed my work mates out to fiberglass buoys in the middle of the river. As we swam back I became exhausted, I shouted for help, people thought I was fooling. I continued to try to make it to the shore but became exhausted, gave up and sank deep into water. I still have a clear memory of that moment when I stopped trying to stay afloat, it was so much easier. **By the time Dave and Vivian got to me I was unconscious, they dragged me out and the lifeguards did their work on me and I was revived.**

1971 -- Ontario Place

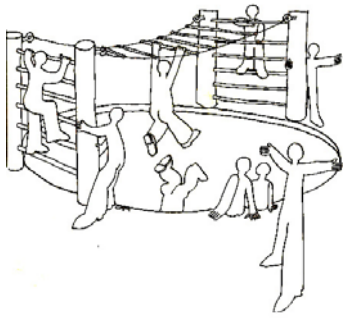
Not long after that I moved to **Toronto to become part of a team planning the water front attraction ‘Ontario Place’.** When it opened in 1971 I was appointed its Chief Designer, and given the opportunity to remedy mistakes made in the planning of the project.



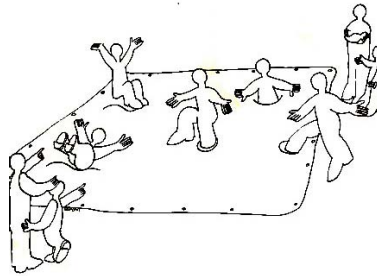
Model – Ontario Place

1972 -- Children's Village Ontario Place

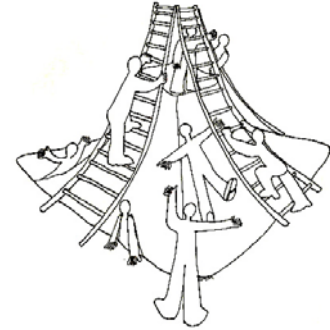
One of the 'mistakes' was the project's lack of child appeal. I was invited to present concepts for the development of a children's play attraction. **Dave Lloyd was my assistant and together we came up with some wonderful ideas.** The Children's Village opened in July 1972 and it was an amazing success. People loved it and it quickly became the top attraction at Ontario Place.



Hand Over Water



Foam Swamp



King of the Mountain

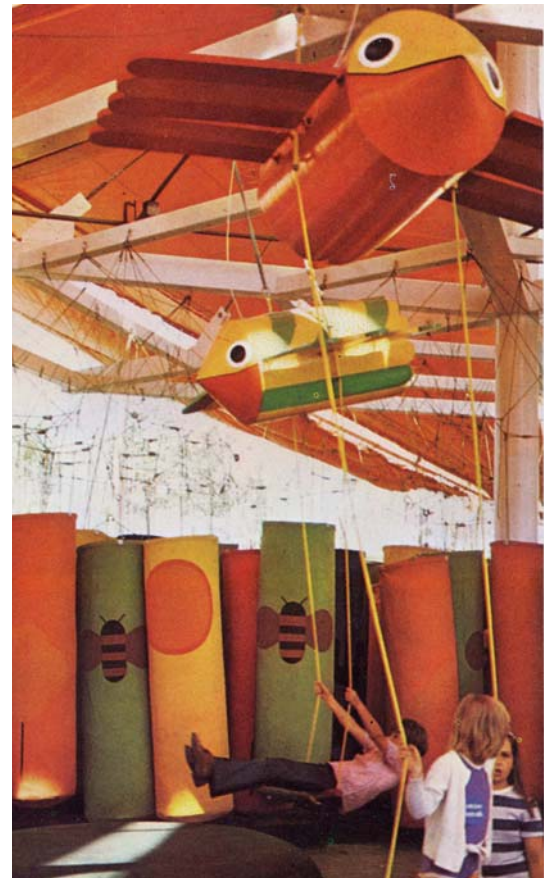
Suddenly I became the world's expert on child's play. I was ill equipped to handle the responsibility that comes with such a rush of fame. What a magical time, my ego began to fly I became less insecure.



Children's Village



Snake Tube Crawl



Punch Bag Forest

1973 -- Water Play Ontario Place

With the success of the Children's Village it was easy to persuade people to build a water play attraction. The Ontario Place Water Play area opened in 1973. Water was the element of play: dams, fountains, rivers, bicycle cannons, taps, water cannon towers, spray bridges, hand pumps, tap tunnels ... We also built a giant child dryer to make the parents feel safe.

This Water Play area was an immediate success, dramatically increasing attendance and receiving more media attention than the initial opening of Ontario Place. **From that one project grew a world wide 'Water Play' industry.**



Water Canon Tower



Fountain Play



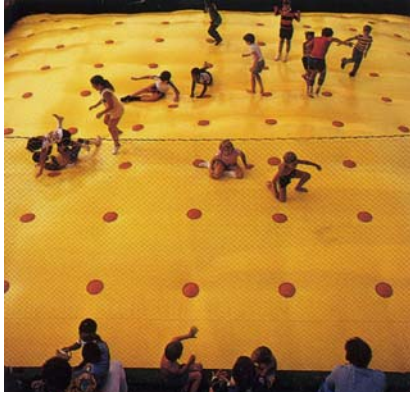
Tug of Water



Ontario Place was a dream job. I was even given the opportunity to design its symbol. Unfortunately the management of the project became driven by power struggles. I tendered my resignation three times to protest the strangling of the project's spirit and potential. On the third occasion, the management's response was to close down the whole design department.

1974 -- Sea World Play Attractions

Then I was approached by the American theme park industry that saw the commercial potential of my ideas. **I started a creative design business, Eric McMillan Inc., with Rose Duell and Len Rydahl as my partners.** And now again water came into my life. The Sea World Company in San Diego engaged us to design and build children's play attractions for their parks. **Our designs proved amazingly successful, seeding a billion dollar 'Soft Play' industry.**



Air Mattress



Beverly Bounce



Ball Crawl



Earth Box Crawl



Net Tunnel Climb



Wobble Walkway



King of the Mountain



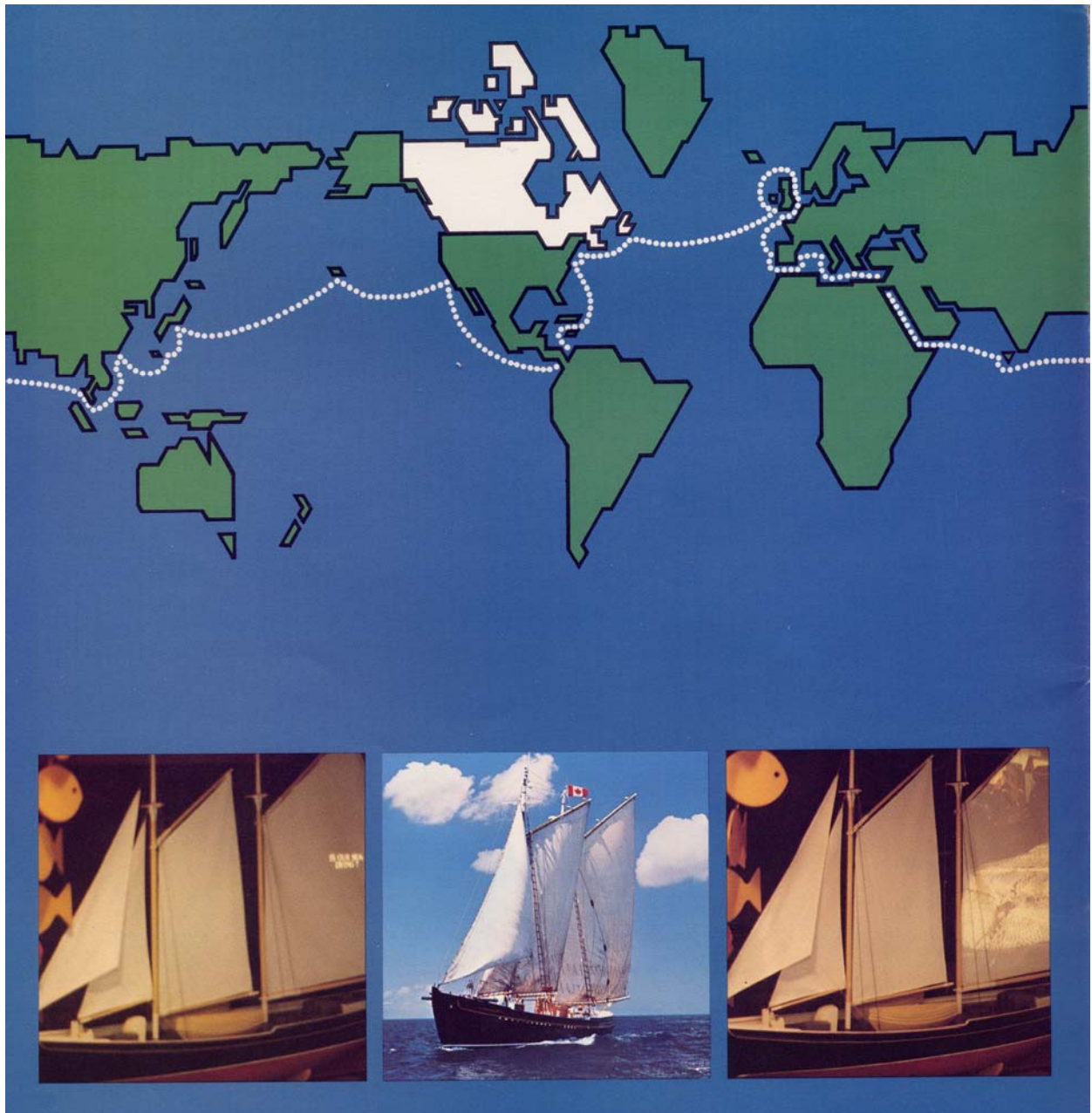
Rolling Bin



Roller Slide

1975 – Norma and Gladys Law of the Sea Conference

I became aware of the rapid depletion of our Oceans when we were engaged by Canadian External Affairs to work with them to promote the Law of the Sea conference. Our input was to fit out a Newfoundland Grand Banks fishing schooner with an exhibition that argued for a more sensible management of our oceans and sail it around the world. We built our argument around **the depletion of the Grand Banks by the practice of industrialized overfishing. That was in 1975 since then the fishing industry in Newfoundland has collapsed. Unfortunately the fisheries around the world are following the same path.**



Is Our Sea Dying?

Norma and Gladys

Industrial Overfishing

1980 -- Sesame Place

By this time I really thought I could change the world through play. I was convinced of the positive changes that could be achieved by such playful social interaction. In my enthusiasm I convinced others to join me in my cause. We were approached by Children's Television Workshop, the producers of the 'Sesame Street' program to develop a concept that would make lots of money for them and change the culture of America.

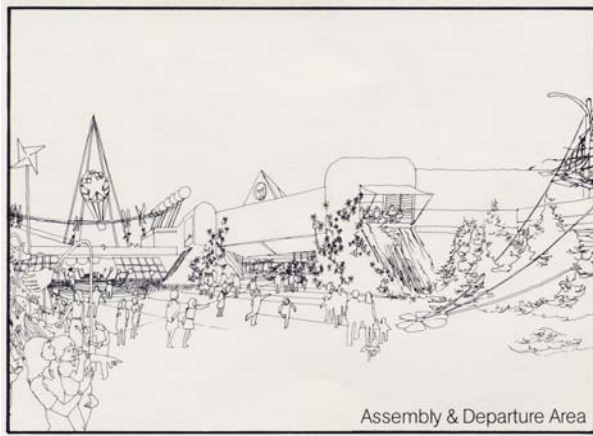
It was to be called 'Sesame Place'. **There were to be many of them. Fifty one potential sites were identified across America.** They also agreed that in recognition of our group's unique creative contribution we would receive a percentage of the gross profits of any project built. In terms of potential, our profit sharing would have made us very rich.



Model – Sesame Place

We formed a team that designed an interactive family play theme park which required the modest capital investment of five million dollars, rather than the usual hundreds of millions, and with a small footprint of three acres, rather than the normal hundreds of acres. This meant it could be built next to existing attractions such as a shopping center. Sesame Place offered a whole new concept of 'learning through play'.

We developed a basic philosophy to guide us: **“A place that celebrates life. A place in which the self image is developed in relationship to the community. A place for the enrichment of the child's reality. A place where the child develops an awareness of its own potential as part of the human community. A place where a child can ask questions of what it means to be human. A place where old and young forget their age.”**



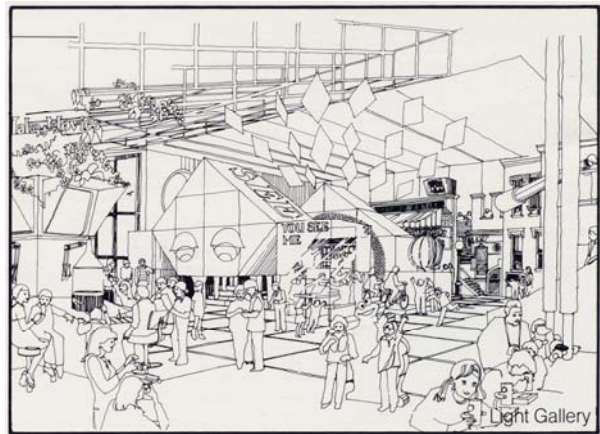
Assembly & Departure Area



Water Court



Games Gallery

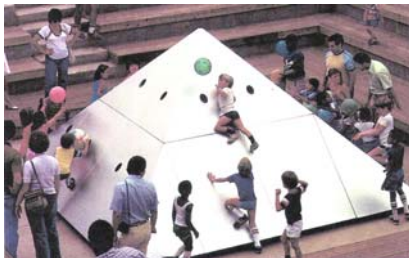


Light Gallery



The first Sesame Place Park opened in Philadelphia in 1980 with amazing success. On an average day the park was filled to capacity by early morning, ten thousand people playing and learning. On a five million dollar investment it grossed \$900,000 in its first week of operation. And as part of our profit participation in the first year of operation we received our profit sharing cheque.

The future looked good and very promising. However, Anheuser Busch as the principal investors in the project took on the management. I was not impressed with their methods - they tried to operate it like a giant iron ride park and ignored the project's basic philosophy.



Spheramid Toss



Water Balance Beams



Together Toys



Slab Slide



Computer Games Gallery



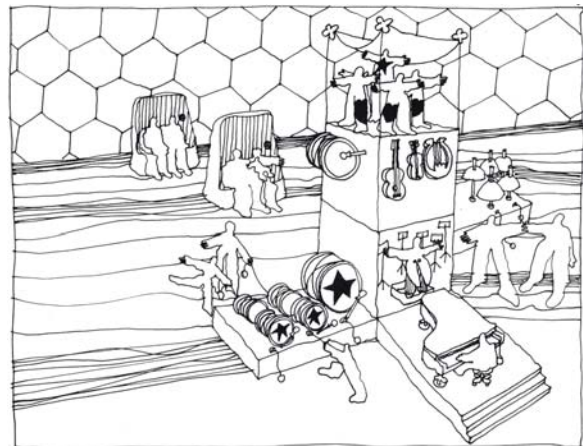
Foam Swamp

The second Sesame Place was planned for Dallas but Anheuser Busch and I had a clash. I wanted creative control over the project and declined the role of consultant. The Dallas project was built without our involvement. **It failed after two years.** The original Sesame Place in Philadelphia still operates. And the lesson for me was “don’t antagonize a major corporation like Anheuser Busch as they can respond by being vindictive and destructive”. Our profit sharing cheque stopped and they drew us into a whole cycle of negative litigation that wasted much of our group’s time and energies. However, despite their corporate venom we did survive.

1981 -- Pavilion of Play

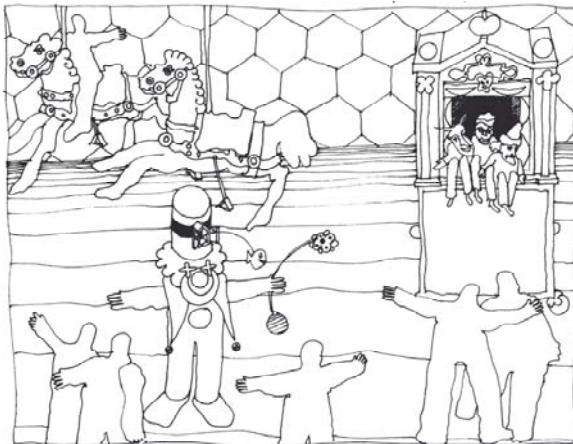


Former American Pavilion, Montreal

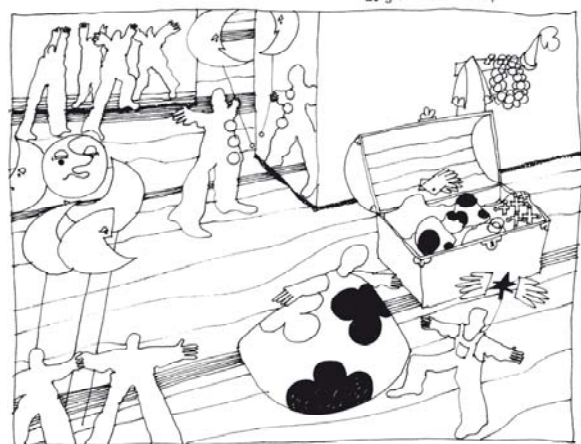


Musical Play

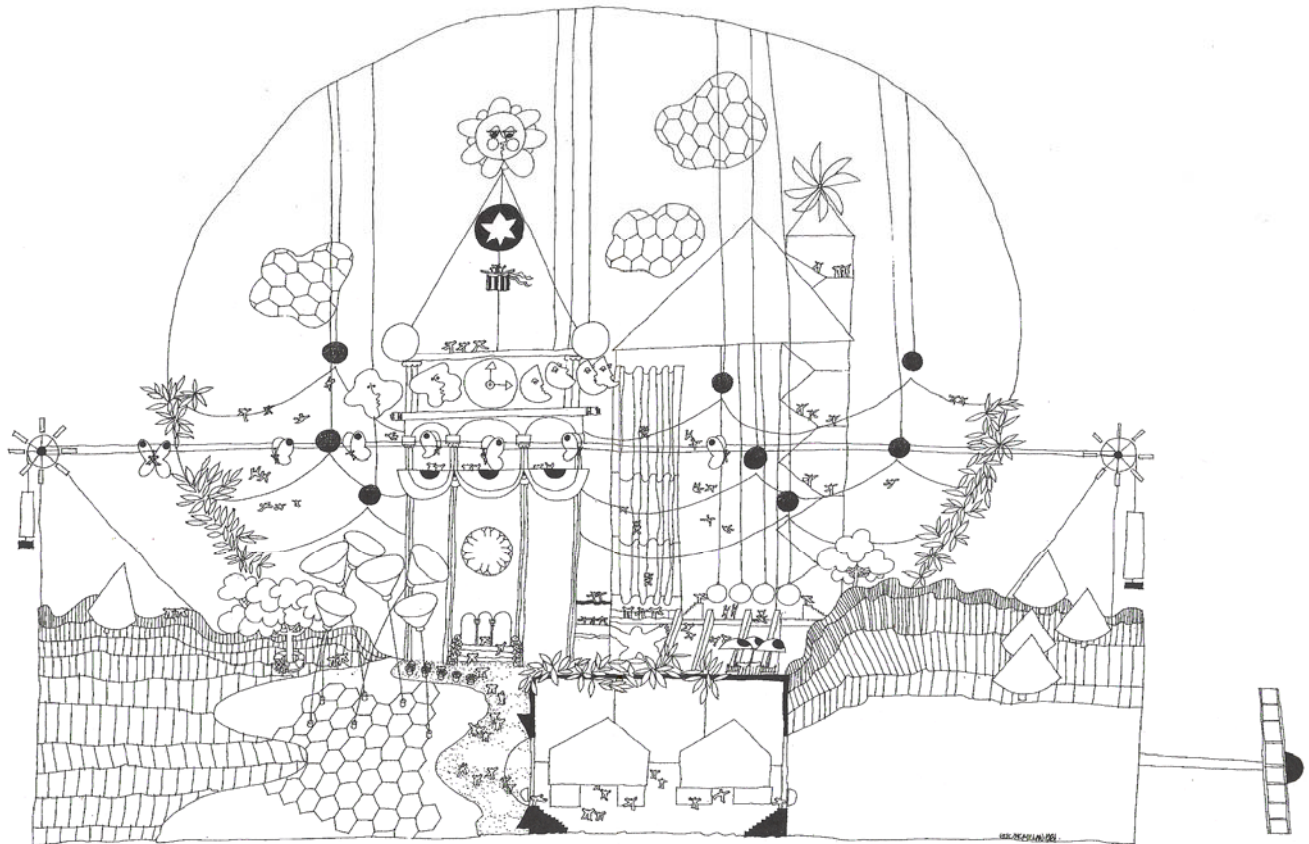
Flush with the success of Sesame Place in Philadelphia we were confident that we could raise the venture capital to finance and build our own projects. The timing was not good it was a time of very high interest’s rates. However, **we spent years trying to make it happen. Negotiating to lease prominent sites like” Man and his World”** in Montreal, the State Fair in Sacramento, the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto, and many others.



World Circus



Dream Attics



Pavilion of Play

We even had names for them: McMagic and Play Places, in the end we couldn't make it happen and so the whole dream of interactive family play attractions returned to ideas on paper.

1985 -- Space Science Park



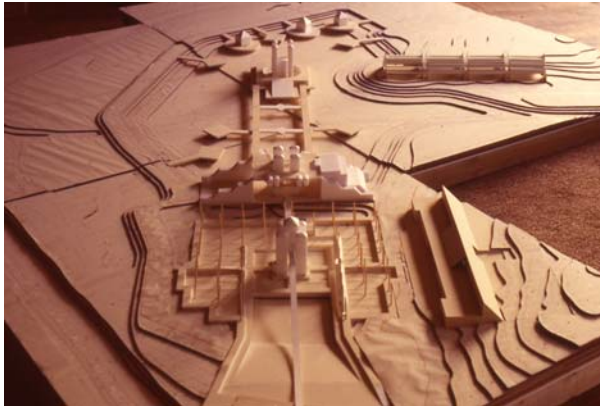
At the closing days of the Second World War the scientists at Germany's Peenemuende rocket development site concluded that since the regime that had fathered their development had failed, the choice was to offer their rocket knowledge to the capitalist system or the communist system. Some opted for Russia, others for America.

At the end of the war a thousand German scientists and their families were secretly moved into America first to Los Alamos, where the first atomic bomb had been developed, then to Huntsville Alabama, home of the army's Redstone rocket development site. **From this assembly in Huntsville has grown the American space program**, the Saturn rockets, Sky Lab and much of the effort to land a man on the moon. The byproduct of this work was **the world's largest collection of rocket and space hardware**.

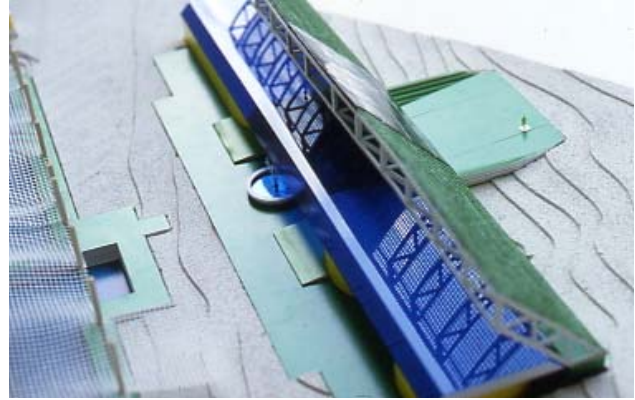


Master Plan – Space Science Park

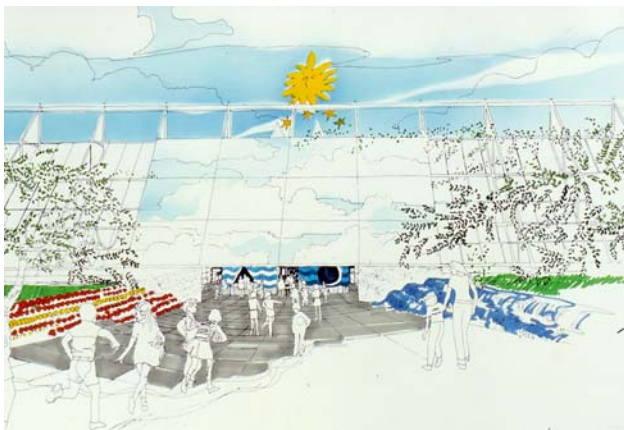
We were invited to develop a master plan for a Space Science Park. It was one of the most imaginative projects I had worked on, I was given much creative freedom. Again, throughout our planning of the project, we introduced the **concept of learning through play**.



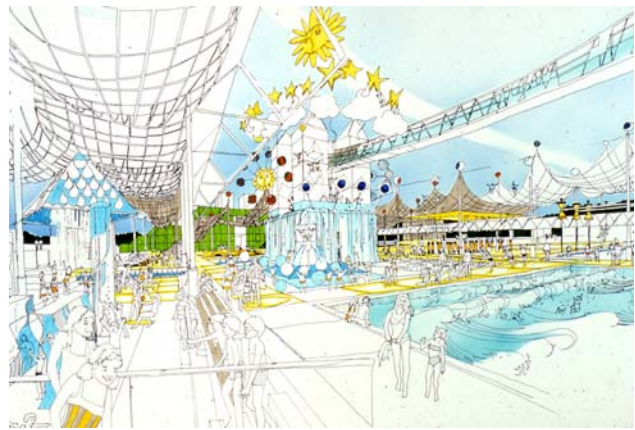
Model – Space Science Water Park



Model – Entrance Space Science Water Park

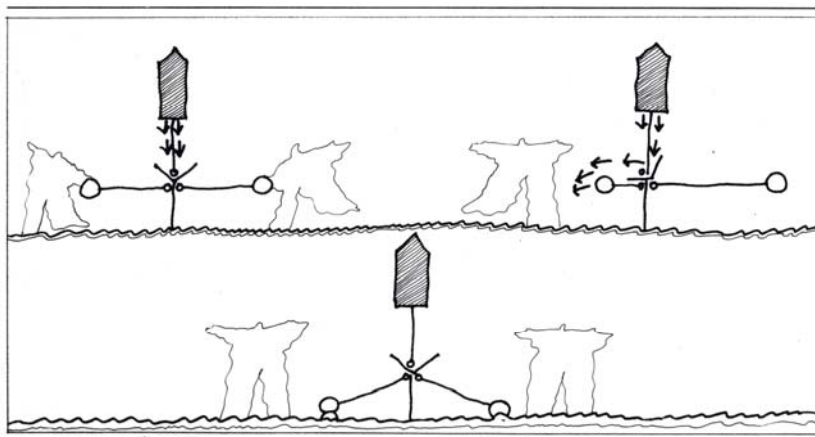


Concept - Entrance



Concept - Tower of the Universe

Visitors enter the Water Park through a piece of sky mirrored in the entrance building nestled down in soft greenery. Beyond, in a gathering area, water announces itself in the burst of a dazzling fountain. A single ribbon of water running softly leads visitors on towards themed towers. The Tower of the Universe is festooned with suns, moons and stars.



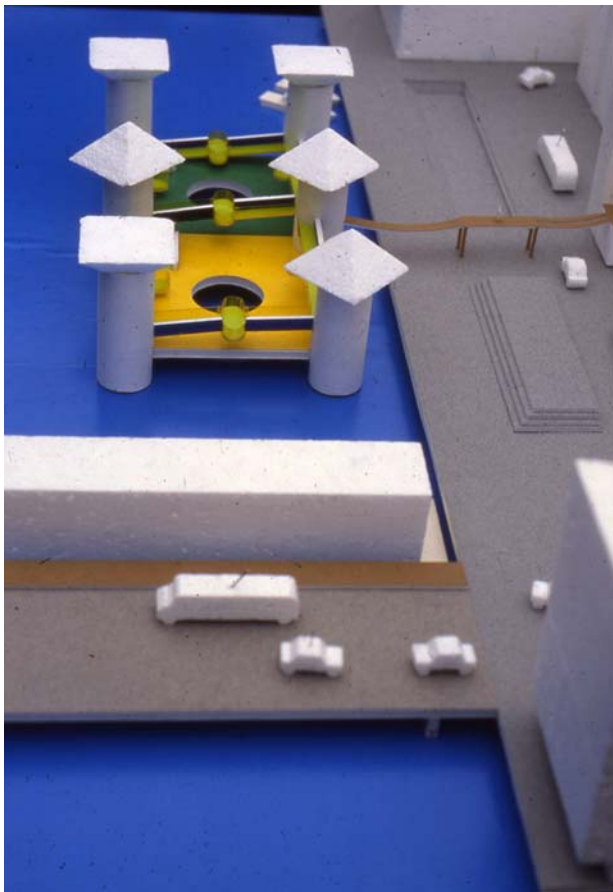
‘When students participate in a learning situation in a truly interactive way, retention of information is increased. In early childhood physical involvement in play makes children more receptive – play, discovery and learning becoming one and the same thing. In all age groups social interaction has a direct measurable effect on physical and mental well being.’

We designed a structure where play is the bricks and learning is the mortar.

1988 -- Ocean Filter Attraction



The idea of the Ocean Filter Attraction was in response to being instructed by the management of the Boston Children's Museum to **“capture as much of the ocean as possible, but don't let the kids touch the water it's to toxic!!”** So we developed the concept for an Ocean Filter which filters out the pollutants from the sea water below and returns clean living water back into an ocean of life and hope.

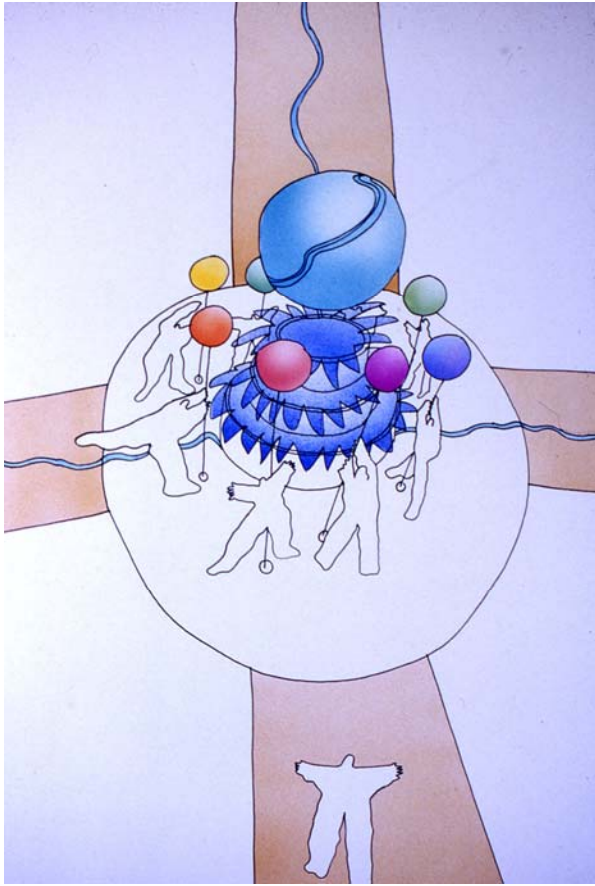


Model – Museum Wharf Boston

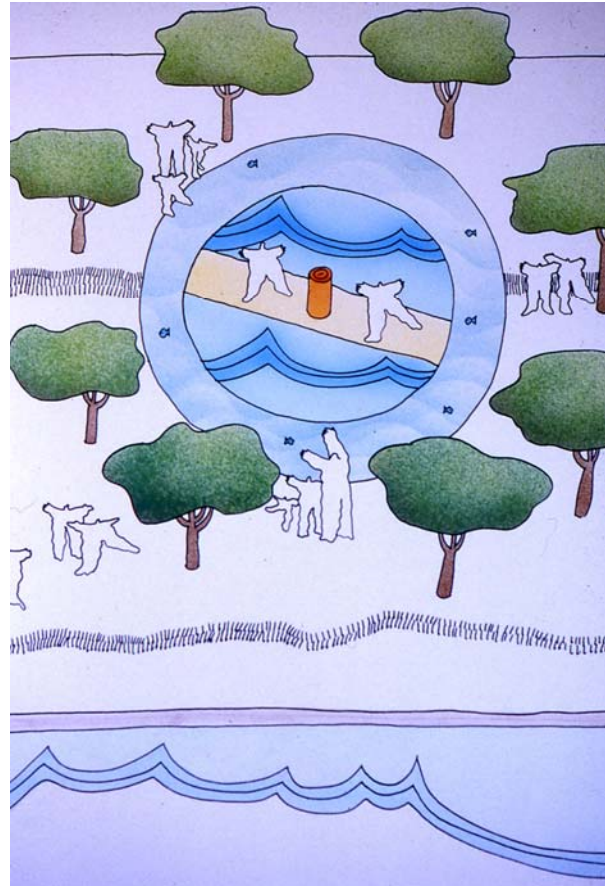


Model – Ocean Filter Attraction Boston

The management of the Boston Children's Museum loved the idea but thought it too political a concept to build. I found that frustrating, the future of our species is in jeopardy and it is considered too political to try to solve the problem. Because of the power of the attraction the Children's Museum could make amazing amounts of money.



Interactive Earth Fountain



Living Pond in Ocean Echo Fountain

Anyway, it's a wonderful idea that still waits on paper. Meanwhile the destruction of our Oceans gathers speed. **When will we recognize that the death of the oceans means the death of our species?**

Our oceans are a living body with finite resources and fragile interconnected life forms. It appears we may be on the edge of destroying all of it. As we all individually share this planet, it is obviously in all our interests to respond to its environmental crisis by trying to find ways to resolve the many problems with new and positive attitudes. We must move away purposefully from greed and wasteful consumerism and with the help of our creativity move toward a more caring and conserving management of the Earth's resources.