

THE TORONTO EATON CENTRE

by Pauline Fowler

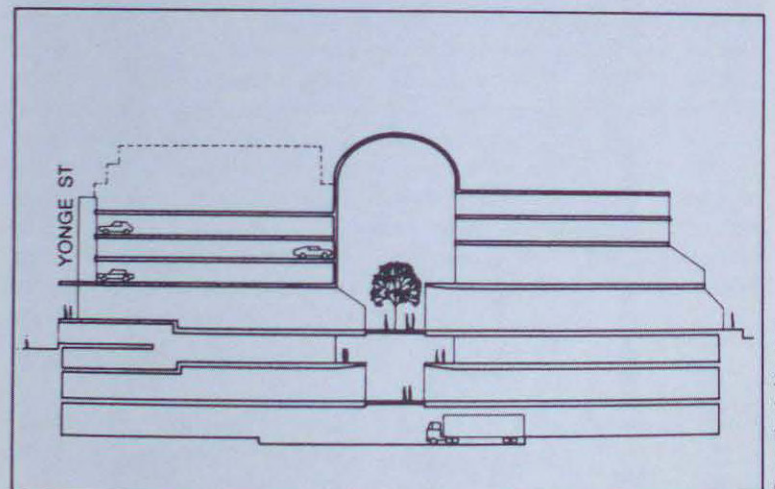
A comparative analysis between these two buildings is especially interesting, I think, inasmuch as the Galleria Vittorio II in Milan was quoted as a precedent in the early days of planning the Galleria Mall portion of the Eaton's Centre.¹ The arcade type at the most general level consists of a pedestrian thoroughfare, usually roofed in glass, and the building which borders it on both sides. In commercial applications there are shops behind the facades along the passage, dependent for their prosperity on the urban context, as the passage usually connects two busy streets. The idea was brought to Europe in pictorial fashion from the bazaars of the East by travellers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and exhibits many diverse influences: classical colonnades, markets and basilicas; medieval market squares and trading halls; the interior galleries of Paxton's Crystal Palace. It evolved through the nineteenth century to include an aspect of monumentality which is best embodied in the Milan Galleria. In the latter years of the century the arcade type declined in use, its death being finally signalled when building officials prohibited exposed iron in interior spaces.² The type has reappeared recently in this century, the Galleria Mall at Eaton's being one such instance. Although the Eaton's Centre has been the object of much comment, controversy, and criticism since its inception, references to its precedent have been casual and passing, in spite of some obvious similarities between the two structures.

The Galleria Vittorio Emanuele in Milan connects the Piazza del Duomo on the south with La Scala through the city fabric to the north. The idea for this connection dated from the time of the Austrian occupation and was finally implemented after the unification of Italy under Vittorio Emanuele II. Intervening schemes, of which there were many, found expressions of most of their major components in the design by Mengoni which was eventually built: the enlargement of the Piazza del Duomo to give Milan a centre, a colonnaded street to connect it to La Scala, a bazaar through the fabric with an octagon at its centre, a glass cover over the street, a semi-circular (apse) ending for the oblique entrance to the north, the triumphal arch motif as exterior facade, and the flanking arcades. The proposal was clearly conceived as an urban renewal project, in which Mengoni saw represented all the glory of a unified Italy. The imagery is most strongly influenced by Roman Imperial models, incorporating the vaulting and proportions of the Roman baths, the triumphal arch entry which appears as a free-standing element, and the large dome at the centre, which has exactly the same diameter as St. Peter's. As a street, it is included in the regular construction of the block, with the two sides backing into neighbouring properties in the manner of the Uffizi in Florence. Early plans show no actual building, only the arcade. The cruciform plan came much later, probably deriving from the contemporary Galleria de Cristoforis in Trieste, finally giving a structural autonomy to the form of the building. It is possible that the Latin cross is a reference at the larger scale to the Savoy coat of arms which appears in the floor under the dome, but it is more likely a direct and ambitious intention to create a secular counterpart to the cathedral, symbolizing the new King, service to trade and commerce, and contemporary bourgeois society. Commissioned by public authorities, designed by competition, and built through international cooperation, it represents the zenith of the arcade's development and was pronounced a great success by all on opening.



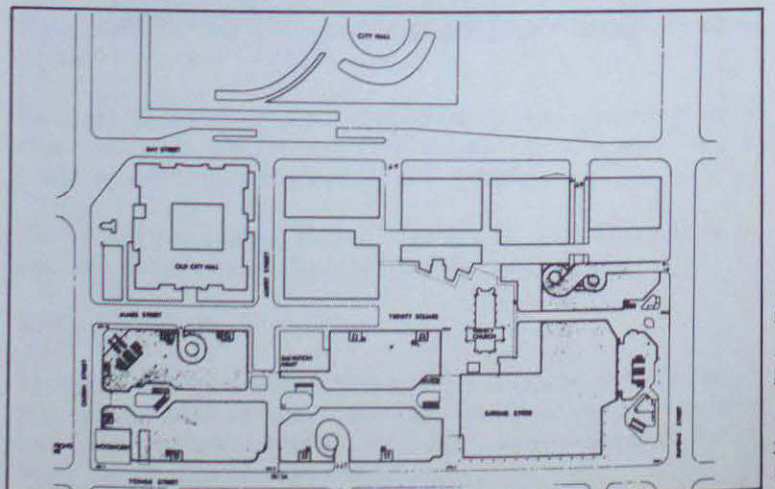
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The Eaton Centre



Progressive Architecture

Cross section of the Eaton Centre



Architecture d'aujourd'hui

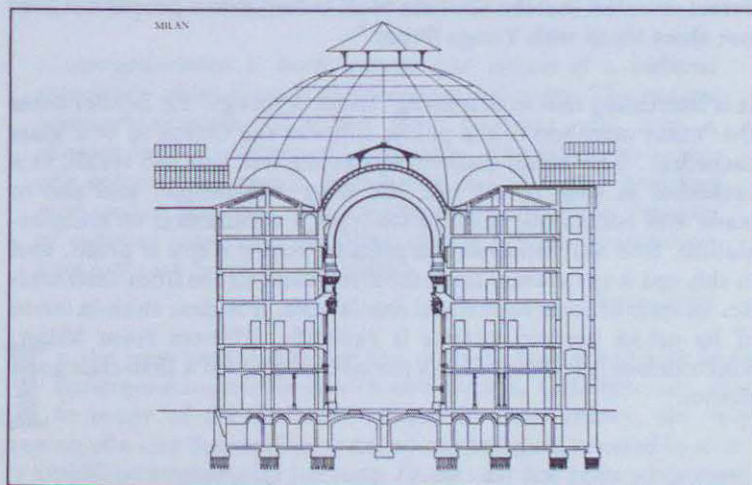
Plan and context, the Eaton Centre

and its precedent, the Galleria in Milan



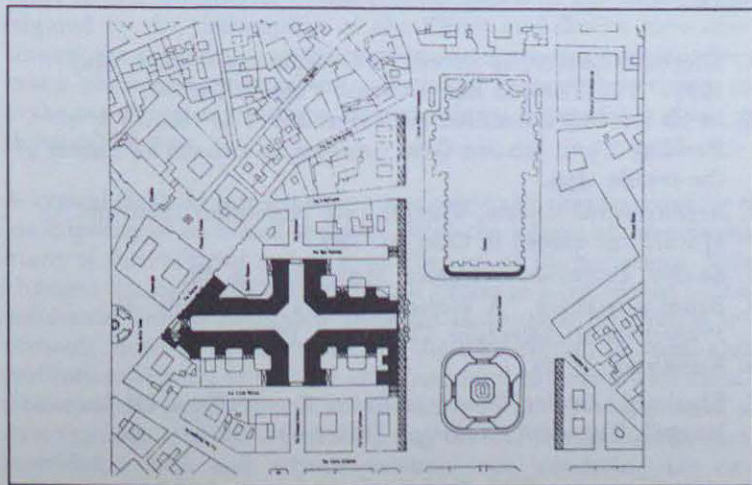
Streets for People, Rudolfsky

Lithograph, Ufficio Ceremoniale, Municipio di Milano



Arcades: The History of a Building Type, Geist

Cross section of the Milan Galleria



Arcades: The History of a Building Type, Geist

Plan and context, Milan

Every Milanese feels compelled to take his stroll in the Galleria at least once a week so as to treat himself to a Campari or a rabarbaro at the "Camparino" or to window shop, to buy things and generally enjoy his own living-room...³

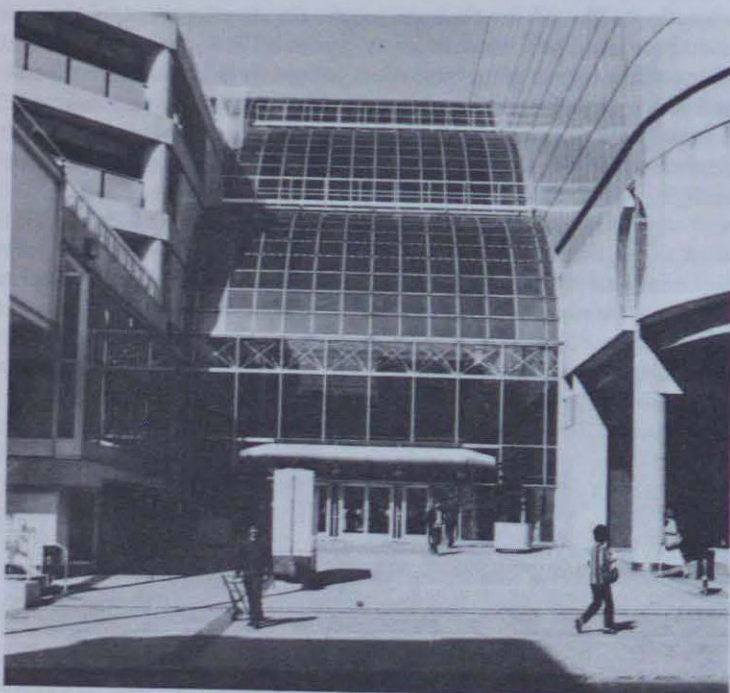
The galleria space is seven floors (29m) high in all places except under the dome, with regular, rhythmical arcades along the interior facades. Stairs, washrooms and other functional elements are located so as not to disturb the visual unity of these facades. Its horizontal dimensions are of street scale, 197m long by 15m wide. This vaulted space is a near-apotheosis of the Italian street, being forum and foyer for the Milanese and more than just a place to shop. While its many layers of references are now no longer directly meaningful, it remains a memorial to the era and national consciousness. The Milan Galleria marks the development of the arcade type at a point when it is the furthestest from being merely an anonymous object of private speculation: it is instead a national political symbol which takes its place in history among the theatres, palaces of justice, city halls, stock exchanges, and parliamentary buildings as one of the great representative buildings of the nineteenth century.

Since its inception in 1967, the Toronto Eaton's Centre has been discussed primarily in terms of its commercial success or failure. The centre of Toronto, unlike many North American cities in the 1960's, maintained relatively good economic health, but the T. Eaton company was looking nonetheless for a way of boosting flagging retail sales, perhaps lost to Simpson's across the street. The scheme developed by the architects was to move Eaton's north and then connect it by means of a skylit shopping gallery to Simpson's on the south, a concept already well tested in suburban shopping centres. It was this grand space — the Galleria Mall — for which the Milan Galleria was quoted as a precedent. It was not a civic or governmental gesture, but the architects postulated that a successful urban space can grow from purely commercial needs: it was to be "a major urban event, an interior street that would be image and orientation to the city".⁴ This 'street' was discussed as having an independent right within the grid pattern, knitting the centre into the fabric without a break. The largest single question in many minds as the project developed was whether it would contribute to the demise or the revitalization of an already-ailing Yonge Street.

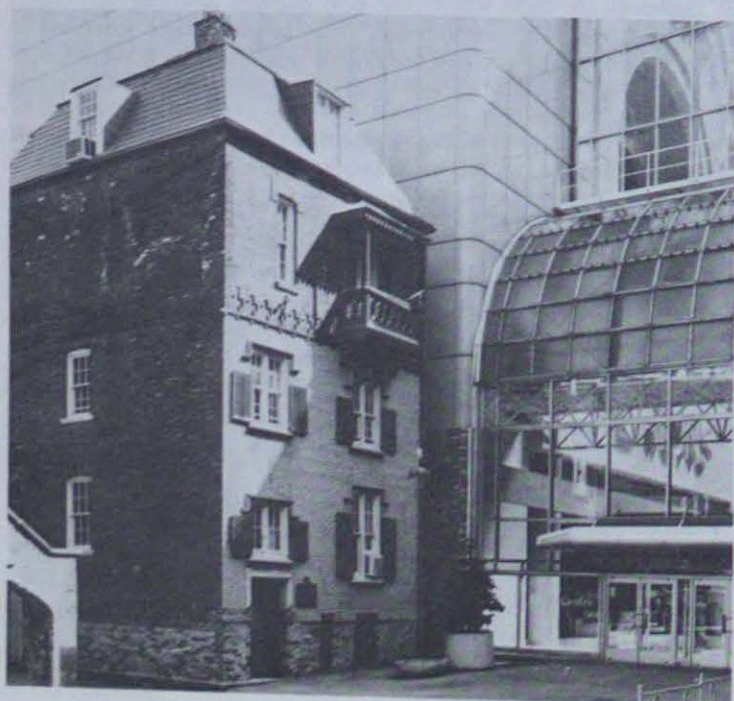
The primary similarity between the Milan Galleria and the Eaton's Galleria Mall exists in the fact of their being large, vaulted, skylit spaces; they are quite similar in their cross sections, although the Eaton's Galleria is substantially longer. The interior facades at Milan are highly regular and symmetrical; at Eaton's the facades are more a structural framework which has become distinctly secondary to the push and pull of function within the bays. In some places the need for more floor space has diminished the Galleria volume literally by half. In Eaton's the space is used as access to the 300-odd independent shops which are inside, and in this way is true to the earliest models as a form which organized retail trade. However, unlike these earlier examples and the Milan Galleria, access here is on three levels (50% below grade), with access ramps, stairs, and bridges further giving a functional emphasis to the large volume. The busyness of the space requires the strength and visual unity of the huge skylight down its length, distinctly similar to that in Milan.



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Beyond the quality of this space, however, Eaton's Galleria begins to depart from the Milan precedent. Milan connects two street spaces, which means that the visitor continues on the main axis of the space directly into the Piazza del Duomo to the south and obliquely onto a street to the north. The Eaton's Galleria connects two department stores, so that to the south one passes into Simpson's and to the north into Eaton's. To rejoin the street system, a right angle turn is necessary, which gives this option a very secondary position. On the facade of Eaton's which terminates the Galleria are store displays contained within a large arched recess, a pale reference to the magnificent triumphal arches which form the actual entries to the Milan Galleria. The entries into Eaton's at various points around the perimeter, by contrast, make clear its true identity: they are multiple storefront and revolving doors, just like any other department store. Outside the building another substantial difference emerges. The Eaton Centre is a free-standing building — one can walk all the way around it — whereas the Milan buildings had only two, relatively short street facades and backs into the fabric on the other two sides. In conception the two are radically different: Milan's identity as a building came well after the Galleria had been established as a connecting street, but Eaton's was always considered as a building with the Galleria being primarily internal circulation. As such, Eaton's in fact turns its back on the already-established street system. The James Street elevation shows this condition more clearly: exit and loading doors, exhaust vents, and blank walls of such a scale as to make the adjacent historical buildings of Trinity Square look ridiculous by comparison. On the Yonge Street side there actually are seventeen stores which face it, but these for the most part represent lower-grade businesses which have replaced retailers who moved inside.⁵ This role in the city is direct opposite of Milan, which contributes as part of the street wall as a much-needed connector through a very large block in the existing fabric. There was no such need when the Eaton's Galleria was conceived; it splits lengthwise a block which is already narrow by comparison, suggesting that it would draw form existing street traffic. A 1978 study of Yonge Street revealed that the Galleria Mall indeed draws people but does not share them with Yonge Street.⁶

It is interesting that in discussing 'Issues of Image'⁷ Ed Zeidler notes that many members of the public consider the Centre to be a 'glass cathedral'. The Milan Galleria was conceived, one will recall, as a cathedral as well, to the era, the King, the people, and also to trade and commerce. Eaton's Galleria is a cathedral to commercialism, first and foremost. Its primary *raison d'être* is profit, and to this end it turns away from the streets and draws from their traffic. In spite of some superficial similarities, it is clear that in terms of its urban context Eaton's is radically different from Milan, which before all else is Milan's premier street and a first-class good citizen.

Notes

1. Eberhard Zeidler, as quoted in *Canadian Architect*, May 1977: "The Toronto Eaton Centre Phase I", p. 30.
2. In his recently-translated work *Arcades: The History of a Building Type*, Johann Geist provides an exhaustive history of the arcade type.
3. *Architectural Review*, Volume 140, November 1966, pp. 373-375, as quoted in Geist, p. 399.
4. Zeidler, *Canadian Architect*, May, 1977, p. 32.
5. Bruce Kuwabara, "A White Ship or a Black Hole" in *Progressive Architecture*, December, 1978, p. 68.
6. Kuwabara, p. 69.
7. Eberhard, Zeidler, "Toronto Eaton Centre Phase II: Issues of Image", *Canadian Architect*, November, 1979, p. 26.

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