

Redrawing Philadelphia

Rich Villa

One morning I was reading an Inquirer article regarding the current proposals for Penn's Landing, and as I read, I found myself questioning every sentence that posed an architectural idea, solution, or scheme. I repeatedly said, "That's bad," or "That's not what I would do".

At some time after that morning, I walked my dog down to Penn's Landing to look closely at its current state. We walked from Washington Avenue to the Ben Franklin Bridge, and along the way I stopped critiquing the ideas of others and began making my own proposal in my head. I researched the history of the site and began drawing "with my hands and pencils and templates and a parallel bar." The result was a set of ideas for a new Penn's Landing development that I called "Carpenter's Wharf." When I finished the hand-drawn perspectives, I rolled them up and put them in the attic.

A few weeks later I read an article about the failed proposals for Eighth and Market. These inspired the same "not-what-I-would-do" responses. Then I thought, "Sure, I'll design something for this site, too." Then I started having fun drawing again.

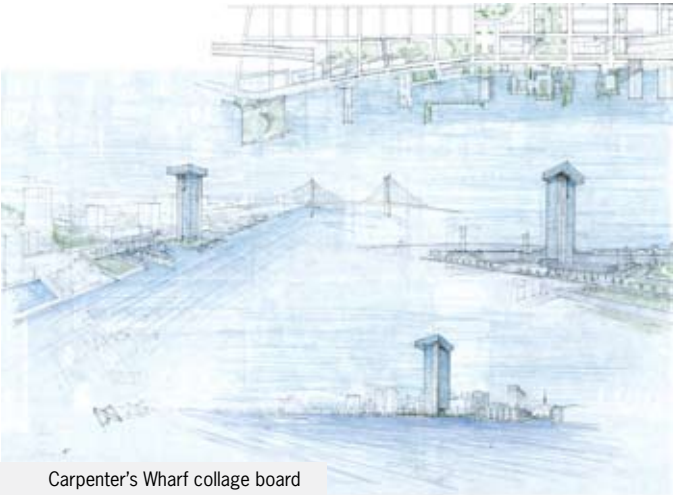
After that, every time I read an article about an empty property or the critique of a proposed building, I would take to my newly purchased drafting board. I made 18in. by 24in. hand-drawn perspectives of my ideas, and one after the other, they went upstairs into the attic. I now have around ten of them. I decided to do a computer model to test my design for Carpenter's Wharf, but it all really came from the hand-drawn work.

One day, after I had made a lot of drawings, I was sitting at Bodhi Coffee on Second Street, drinking a cappuccino and looking at the artwork on display. It was different from the exhibition the day before. I asked, and Tom said that they change artists every month. I asked if they would consider displaying architectural drawings. They said sure, and about a month later I had my "show." It was interesting to hear some people say, "They should do this there," while others said, "That would be a shame." It was, however, what fellow architect Sam Olshin said that led me to prepare several of my projects for this article. He said, "It's nice to see that someone drew there ideas by hand and put them out there to see. You know, DAG would probably be interested in these..."

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Carpenter's Wharf collage board



Looking north on Delaware Avenue



Looking north at the new slips from the public walk

Carpenter's Wharf

My proposal for the waterfront predates the Delaware River Waterfront Corporation's Plan for the Central Delaware, but it responds to many of the same challenges. My plan calls for the complete reconstruction of the Delaware riverfront and Interstate 95 from South Street to Vine Street and comprises three main ideas: **(1) connect Delaware Avenue to the Delaware River at "Carpenter's Wharf," (2) connect Independence Park to the riverfront, and (3) rebuild the former city streets over Interstate 95.**

Called "Carpenter's Wharf," this proposal calls for the removal of much of the land mass at Penn's Landing, allowing slips to be cut back into the land and recreating the river edge closer to its eighteenth-century location at Columbus Boulevard. The slips allow tall ships and other large vessels to dock at the old waterfront. The remaining land area would be developed as green space of varied sizes and shapes. The islands of green would create multiple outdoor experiences and differ in character and use, including festival areas, open lawns, and outdoor sculpture gardens.

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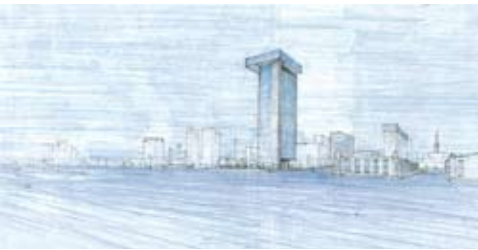
Market Street tower from Market Street



Tower from the river



Tower from Delaware Avenue



Tower from across the river

The largest of the new piers would be at the terminus of Market Street, where a new high-rise building would be developed. The tower's height would match the top of William Penn's hat atop City Hall. Its base would be occupied by the River Link Ferry Terminal, while the top two floors would house a portion of the Atwater Kent Museum of the City of Philadelphia, where visitors would be treated to a beautiful view of Penn's city plan at full scale.

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Market house at the new slips, from the new park



Arena at Piers 39 & 40, looking south on Delaware



Arena from across Delaware Avenue



Arena from the river



Market house at the new slips



Market house and Market Street tower from the west

The current Independence Seaport Museum at Penn's Landing would be reintroduced as the National Maritime Museum. The long breakwater that encloses the marina south of the museum would be rebuilt as a north-south pier that terminates in a new public river beach. A low rise building housing fresh food markets and other commercial uses would line Delaware Avenue between the high-rise and the museum. Future commercial development could take place south of the museum along the pier opposite Foglietta Plaza (between Dock and Spruce Streets), and links would be created along the Delaware. A new Spectrum-sized arena would be located within the facades of the historic Pier 39 and 40 buildings, here called the "US Airways Arena".

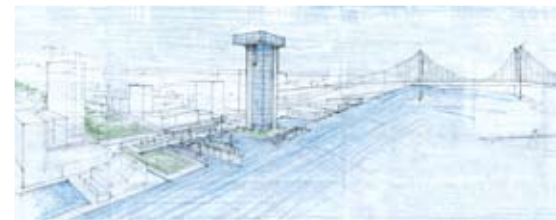
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Looking west from above the waterfront, into the new park



Looking north at Carpenters Wharf, with new park connected to Independence Park at left

Expansion of Independence Park

The expansion of the green space of Independence Park could be accomplished by demolishing the current Ritz East parking garage, and in its place developing a new park that would be bounded by Second, Front, Moravian, and Ionic Streets, along with a new block covering I-95. This new block would accommodate the reconstruction of historic Tun Tavern, a Revolutionary era meeting house and the birthplace of both the United States Marine Corp and freemasonry in the United States. The new greenway would connect an existing major tourist attraction (Independence National Park) with a potential new tourist attraction, encouraging a natural flow from the historic nodes of the city to the revitalized waterfront.

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Rebuilding Interstate 95

The construction of Interstate 95 along the riverfront removed critical portions of the city grid, eliminating access points to the river and creating daunting elevation changes between the river and the city from Vine Street to South Street. As now built, the southbound lanes of I-95 are low enough from Chestnut Street to well beyond South Street for a deck to be created above the road. However, at Market Street the Market-Frankford El must make a 90-degree turn under the south bound lanes, which lifts the road and creates a tall east wall along Front between Market and Vine. This portion of the subway line would need to be lowered to accommodate new “land” above it. The northbound lanes would only require work north of Dock Street North and south of Spruce Street.

Looking southeast from Market Street, over the route of I-95



I-95, covered by a new deck





The Gallery looking northeast from above Eleventh Street, with new public square at Tenth and Market

The Gallery

My proposal to renovate the Gallery at Market East builds on a key idea in the original design by BLT Architects. When initially designed, the gallery of shops between Strawbridge's and Gimbel's was intended to anchor the two large department stores, connecting them with four floors of shops that step in and out at each level. This idea worked, and still works, in the part known as Gallery I. When Gallery II was built early in the 1980s, the idea of a gallery was abandoned, and the upper levels were constructed like a typical suburban indoor shopping mall.

The vision for the renovated Gallery is to create a block long "gallery" of shops that are solely on the north side of an interior glazed in pedestrian hall going from Ninth Street to middle of the block between Tenth and Eleventh Streets. The south side of the hall would be a three-story glass wall that would look out to a new public square at the northeast corner of Tenth and Market Streets. This amenity would require the demolition of the original Gimbel's building, which is currently occupied by offices. A new office tower would be developed on the northwest corner of Ninth and Market Streets, with a three-story, open-air public entrance to the Gallery's lower level, also creating a new connection to the Market East Station.

The public square would become a key node along Market Street, a place that invited shoppers to sit, relax, and enjoy the outdoors against the backdrop of shops and buildings. The glazed hall would allow for the stores in the Gallery to have street presence, without branding and store signage being placed along the street. The open area under the tower would allow for a visual pass-through to Ninth Street, while creating a covered space for outdoor dining--or simply a refuge from the rain.

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The block from Tenth to Eleventh streets would be occupied by two anchor stores—one in the shape of an “L” that would fill the entire Market Street frontage and turn the corner up Eleventh Street, and the second occupying the full block along Cherry Street. The second-, third-, and fourth-floor shops would push into the Eleventh Street block and end at the front doors of the new anchor stores. At ground level one of the anchors would have both a Market Street façade and a public square façade. The new public square would become a focal point for pedestrians, shoppers, and commuters.

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