

» MILE END TRAIN TRACKS

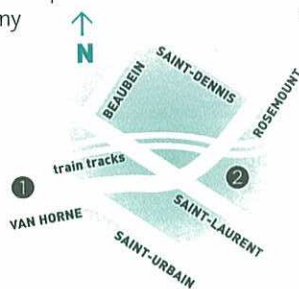
Field of possibilities

MONTRÉAL At the northern edge of Montréal's densely populated Mile End neighbourhood, a web of footpaths leads to the railroad tracks.

If you follow the paths to the chain link fence, you are sure to find a hole, and if you step through that, you end up someplace magically different from the surrounding streets.

It's quiet and the air smells sweet. Pink-blossomed milkweed plants and a tangle of purple wildflowers mix with Queen Anne's Lace along the tracks that stretch into the distance.

Every time I hauled my bike over these tracks, I admired the way gaps in the fence always seemed to open up — no matter how many times Canadian Pacific mended them to keep people out. Now CP has started handing out \$140 tickets to people who dare to cross the tracks.



Local residents are organizing to fight these charges and to petition for a level crossing.

Sculptor Glen Lemesurier has a workshop that backs onto the tracks just north of Rue St. Urbain and he has created a sculpture garden featuring pieces made from scavenged train parts (#1 on map below). It's a Mile End landmark and a good spot to watch people pop through the fence as they cross the tracks illicitly.

If you follow the tracks as they curve east and duck out a few blocks past Boulevard St. Laurent, you'll come across another grassy lot (#2 on map) crisscrossed with dirt paths and sprinkled with mugwort and tansy.

This land, which the City recently acquired from CP but has yet to transform, is often referred to as "the field of possibilities," thanks in part to Emily Rose Michaud. She's an artist and guerrilla gardener who loves this urban wild space and who is now part of a committee lobbying the City to rezone the field as a park.

While train tracks usually act as a barrier in the city, Mile End residents have spilled into the untamed place that the railway creates and found inspiration there. †

ALANAH HEFFEZ

photos by Alanah Heffez & Christopher DeWolf



Map link of this Hidden Gem at www.spacing.ca/national

» NEIGHBOURHOOD GATES

Entering into the unknown

TORONTO The Connaught Gates near St. Clair Avenue West and Bathurst Street were erected by Sir Henry Pellat in 1913, a lure to entice investors to buy property in an exclusive gated community called Cedar Vale. Unfortunately for Pellat and for Cedar Vale, the First World War erupted the following year. Potential buyers invested their money in war bonds, not land, and Pellat's vision of Cedar Vale never materialized. All that remains of his grand plan are the gates that preside over Claxton Boulevard.

After an extensive restoration, the gate lanterns were lit in 2004. Today, the gates serve as a galvanizing force in the neighbourhood. "It's a critical landmark for the community and it's a wonderful way to enter the area — they're just really cool," says City councillor Joe Mihevc. "People are really sentimental around cornerstones in their community."

At Guildwood Parkway and Kingston Road stand the Guildwood Gates. Originally installed in 1841 at Stanley Barracks, the main military facility of New Fort York (later Fort Toronto), they were salvaged by Spencer and Rosa Clark when the barracks were demolished in 1953. The Clarks rebuilt them in 1957 at the entrance to the "Guild of All Arts,"

the rent-free crafts cooperative they established on the Scarborough Bluffs in the 1920s. While the guild is no more, the gates remain at the site today.

Palmerston Boulevard is distinguished by a pair of stone and iron gates; one set at Bloor Street, one set at College Street. The gates were built at the turn of the 20th century as part of Seaton Square, a subdivision that extended north from College to the city limits at Bloor between Lippincott and Hope. Topped by unique double fixture globe lights, the gates define Little Italy and Palmerston to this day. These gates are signs of stability and change: clues about where Toronto has been and, sometimes, what it could have been. †

LESLIE SINCLAIR

photos by Matthew Blackett

