

# Grounds 03

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Quarterly

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Summer 2008

**OALA**  
Ontario  
Association of  
Landscape  
Architects



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**NOISE BARRIERS**  
greening the soundscape

Tony Biglieri was on a roll when *Ground* caught up with him to talk about alternatives to conventional sound barriers. His company, The Living Wall Inc., had just won a Green Toronto Award (in the Green Design category), and he'd recently finished building the longest (400-metre) living noise barrier in North America—a willow wall at Danforth and Birchmount in Toronto. "We don't fool around!" Biglieri says with a laugh.

The company has installed approximately fifty living walls, some of which are for noise attenuation, and some of which are for privacy screening: "We've done a lot in Quebec, but also in Guelph, Kingston, Bowmanville... Whitby was the first one we built for noise attenuation in Ontario; it's now in its fourth year." Comprised of European basket willow (*Salix viminalis*) grown at plantations in Ontario and Quebec, living walls can be used in many different applications—from highways to schoolgrounds to backyards. Tests done in Germany, where living walls were first used as noise barriers, have shown that sound reduction properties are comparable to conventional materials such as metal and concrete.

"A living wall is a great alternative," says Biglieri. "It becomes an instant landscape. The willow grows into a full hedge in six weeks." Maintenance requirements include watering for the first two years of establishment, and annual pruning. "You need to take care of it," says Biglieri, "but it's really simple." As for price, the Living Wall Screen Fence costs \$170-\$220 per metre completely installed, while the more densely planted Living Wall Noise Attenuation Wall costs \$600-\$700 per metre completely installed.

According to Lisa Shkut, OALA Associate Member, of Whitby's Planning Department, "We've had great success with the living wall in a residential setting in our town. The wall is healthy, well established, and requires minimal maintenance. Its greenery provides textural relief and lively movement where traditional acoustic barriers are stiff, still, and monotonous. The Town of Whitby Council has endorsed the living wall as an alternative to the typical wooden and concrete acoustic barriers, and we hope to use it in future industrial and retail applications."

For Biglieri, the appeal of living walls goes beyond the sound-reduction benefits: "I'd rather be driving down a street and see more vegetation..."

Information on The Living Wall Inc. can be found at [www.thelivingwall.net](http://www.thelivingwall.net).

03

**URBAN BEACHES**  
city sun and sand

Enticing bathers to a beach that borders unswimmable water seems an audaciously hopeful gesture. And it's one that's catching on around the world. Inner-city beaches, complete with palm trees, deck chairs, and trucked-in sand, have graced the Thames in London, the Seine in Paris and the Spree in Berlin.

Now, Toronto is embracing the trend. Two new beaches—one, HT0, designed by Janet Rosenberg & Associates and opened in 2007, and the other, Sugar Beach, designed by Claude Cormier and scheduled to be complete in 2009—border the central waterfront, challenging the city to re-imagine its relationship to Lake Ontario. (Can fishing be far behind?)

At HT0, sun worshippers flock to sandy stretches and umbrella protection, an urban gift surrounded by glass, steel, and the roar of landing airplanes. The setting may be louder than most cottages and water far from pristine, but this distinctly cityfied beach offers more than a hint of Muskoka for downtown sun-seekers. Summertime, and life's a beach...

