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How would you improve Toronto?

In *uTOpia: Towards a New Toronto*, thirty-four Torontonians tackle that question, lauding, lambasting and leading the charge for change in Canada's biggest metropolis. They talk about streetlights and streetcars, about strip malls, about scenesters and sidewalks. They profile exemplary Torontonians, they collect TTC transfers, they explore the architecture of our buildings and our imaginations.

Above all, they ask us, with both playfulness and pragmatism, to look ahead to *Toronto the Could*.

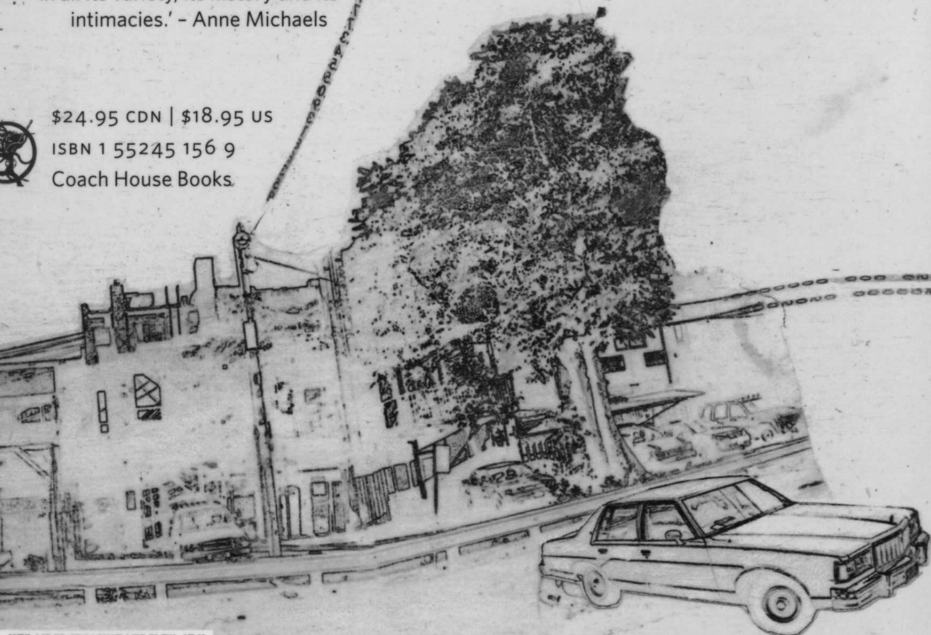
Includes a foreword by Mayor David Miller and two fold-out colour maps of potentially perfect Torontos.

'*uTOpia* - a collection of essays by people who are passionate about Toronto - contributes to a larger conversation that has been taking place in Toronto for decades. It's a frank discussion of the ways the city can best become itself, in all its variety, its history and its intimacies.' - Anne Michaels

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UTOPIA TOWARDS A NEW TORONTO

# UTOPIA

## TOWARDS A NEW TORONTO

EDITED BY  
JASON MCBRIDE & ALANA WILCOX



Howard Akler

## Home improvement: in appreciation of innovative houses

Take a stroll down Coxwell Avenue. See the monotonous reign of Victorian homes and cheap storefronts and then – surprise! Smack in the middle of this bland east-end stretch is the most distinctive house in the city: 157 Coxwell is built on stilts. And it's clad in squares of coloured plywood, a fanciful collage that remains strangely faithful to the surroundings. The leafy greens, flat

reds and twilight blues all come from the southern Ontario landscape; the house is a holistic fit even though the topography suggests a financial sinkhole. The site sits on a former creek bed. Trees and plant life grow like crazy, but only one developer was nuts enough to buy it. Rohan Walters, an independent building designer with an eye for marginalized land, ponied up \$50,000 back in 2001.

'We're not growing land in this city,' he argues. 'We need to make better use of our resources.'

So he built a house on stilts. Helical piles, forty-seven feet deep, provide secure footing in the soft, marshy ground east of Coxwell. A cedar catwalk connects the sidewalk to the front door and also discreetly carries phone, electricity and cable lines. Walters clad the house in resin-impregnated plywood, less expensive than brick or vinyl siding, but equally tough. The three-storey, 800-square-foot

