

World fair in Vancouver heading for major success

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In 1965, most Canadians outside Montreal were only dimly aware that a world fair was being prepared on an island in the St Lawrence. But when Expo opened on April 28, 1967, it turned out to be the most spectacular peacetime event in Canadian history, the cause of unprecedented national euphoria and self-congratulation.

This year, most Canadians are viewing with excitement the completion of Expo 86, another world fair, which is busily under construction on the banks of False Creek in Vancouver. When it opens in May next year, it will prove every bit as successful as its much-heralded predecessor.

Certainly it is going to happen on a very large scale indeed. The main site will cover 130 acres, in the heart of Vancouver. Two kilometres away, on Burrard Inlet, there will be another large installation, the Canadian pavilion, which will later become a convention centre.

More than forty nations from five continents will be represented, along with various Canadian provinces, American states, and private corporations. Britain was the first country to agree its participation in the event. For the first time in North America, the Soviet Union and mainland China will both take part in the same exhibition. It will run from May 2 to October 13, twelve hours a day, and the people organising it expect the attendance to reach 15-million.

Catching the spirit of the times

Expo 86 — whose twin themes are transportation and communications — will celebrate the hundredth

anniversary of the arrival of the CPR on the west coast of Canada and the founding of Vancouver, just as Expo 67 celebrated the centennial of Canadian Confederation. But a world fair, if it succeeds, is much more than a birthday party. The best fairs are historic events: they catch the spirit of their times like a kind of freeze-frame.

Recently, the British architectural critic Reyner Banham remarked in the *Times Literary Supplement* that 'Expo 67 seems to be gaining retrospective stature as one of the key monuments of the culture of the 1960s.' By all accounts Expo 86 will be viewed in the same light for the 1980s.

To be truly successful, a world fair must combine showmanship, art, politics and philosophy. It must attract people with an appeal something like that of Disneyland; but to lodge itself in the consciousness of the world, it must also express the aspirations of nations and the best ideas of architects and designers.

No-one has ever worked out the combination of elements that produces both commercial success and historic importance, and that's one reason why the preparation period for a world fair is usually a trying one. But in Vancouver, the Expo 86 planners have been taking no chances. Says one of the fair's senior officials: 'It is by far the best planned world exposition ever.'

There have been two international planning meetings in Vancouver — in May, 1983, and May, 1984 — as well as a national meeting at which various Canadian thinkers were asked to share their ideas about the fair. Last January, there was an Expo 86 symposium, titled 'Tomorrow Begins Today,' at

