

Save the Arches on the East Riverfront 96 Jewels of St. Louis — both Art and Architecture

Architects, sportswriters and St. Louisans agree that Busch Stadium has a special personality that makes it the crown jewel of the “cookiecutter” stadiums built in the 1960s. The 96 arches that frame the sky and echo the Gateway Arch’s curve are more than an architectural treasure. They form one of St. Louis’ most recognized symbols and an irreplaceable landmark.

Busch Stadium’s Crown of Arches was the contribution of Edward Durell Stone (1902-1978), who had already gained recognition in the previous three decades as a designer of “inhabitable art,” including the Museum of Modern Art in New York and Kennedy Center in Washington. Stone is recognized as a pivotal architect in the 20th Century postwar period, having helped to transform the International style into the Postmodern.

A unique example of 20th Century art and architecture, the Crown of Arches is a concrete ideal of Postwar 20th Century America and “The Space Age.” It isn’t an accident that the Arches attract our gaze between pitches and seem an inseparable complement to the Gateway Arch towering in the background. One of the great architects of the last century designed it that way. Robert Duffy wrote in the January 26, 2003, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, “That crown of arches is part of a dialogue of shapes and a genuine visual relationship between the stadium and the Gateway Arch.”

The Crown of Arches could be repurposed as the centerpiece of a park and cultural attraction to complement the Gateway Arch. At least a dozen facilities have been proposed through the years for the site directly across from the Arch on the riverfront of East St. Louis.

Since 1960, the East St. Louis Riverfront across from the Gateway Arch has been the topic of one proposal after another. As the perennial off-and-on future site of some national, state or

local facility, it someday would complete the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial and mirror the Arch in some meaningful way.

In 1995, the Gateway Geyser Fountain, an impressive technical achievement, was installed just east of the riverfront site. Because it is set back from the river and sees limited use, it hardly qualifies as a realization of the riverfront's potential as a public space. The Gateway Geyser, among other ideas, was proposed by Malcolm Martin, a lawyer and civic leader who made it his life's mission to extend JNEM to the East Riverfront.

Following Martin's death in 2004, the riverfront remains mostly undeveloped. Most of the area is open field. Half of it is occupied by an aging Cargill grain elevator, which would be the only relocation necessary, other than railroad tracks. In 1998, Congress tabled the NPS plan indefinitely, effectively preventing the completion of this internationally significant monument. The current Strategic Plan for Jefferson National Expansion Memorial declares east side expansion is officially "on hold." The report continues: "Although funds were authorized to begin the initial land acquisition, Congress placed a moratorium upon such land acquisition by the National Park Service in the fiscal year 1998 Appropriations Bill.

The moratorium remains in effect, and the prospect of actual expansion of the park into the State of Illinois on the east bank of the Mississippi River has faded."

([data2.itc.nps.gov/parks/jeff/ppdocuments/Strategic Plan - 2000.doc](http://data2.itc.nps.gov/parks/jeff/ppdocuments/Strategic%20Plan%20-%202000.doc)) Congress gave up on the East Side again. Doesn't this internationally known monumental space deserve better than 45 years of giving up?

All one has to do is stand under the Gateway Arch and gaze across the river the know that the East Riverfront has been mostly ignored. The view is an aesthetic disappointment for travelers from around the world who visit St. Louis and look across the river. And when they want to view the skyline from

the world-famous East Bank point of view, they can't get a decent photo without trespassing. The Crown of Arches could be an awe-inspiring platform that affords that view.

The Crown comprises 16 six-arch sections, which are too large to be transported very far on a roadway. But Interstate Highway 64 is adjacent to the stadium, and with a series of cranes, trucks and possibly a barge, the sections could be moved to the East Riverfront site.

The accompanying illustrations show the Crown supported at just under half its current height above ground level. The picture on the cover shows the Crown atop stainless steel to match the Gateway Arch. The remaining images suggest concrete with a facade of local red granite from the east side of the river. Historically meaningful materials would be appropriate.

Given the history of the relationship between St. Louis and East St. Louis, the lack of action on the East Side is unfortunately symbolic of larger realities inherited from earlier generations. An additional layer of symbolism surrounds the area because it was not only a crossing during the Westward migration of European-Americans in the 19th Century. For many African-Americans, it was a way station between slavery and freedom, and for American Indians a conduit of invasion that resulted in forced migration.

This is an opportunity to create a grand public space, left as a legacy when Edward Durell Stone designed the crown of Busch Stadium to share the visual space of the Gateway Arch. In 2005, the opportunity exists to put the works of Stone and Eero Saarinen together, uniting the sides of a geographical and historic divide.