

**Despite undergoing periodic and sometimes rapid change,
a waterfront maintains for its bordering city some inherent
and unalterable stability**

Mind-boggling though Shanghai's current growth is, the phenomenon is not unprecedented. Shanghai itself experienced a similar boom toward the end of the nineteenth century when its population exploded to nearly a million from around 50,000 at mid-century. By comparison to Shanghai, one thinks of Boston as being slow to change. Imagine then an expatriate returning to Boston following a forty-year absence, not so long a period in the life of a city. He would have left a Boston at mid-twentieth century with its historic waterfront emptying: a much-diminished port (partly relocated to the future Seaport District), abandoned maritime infrastructure, pollution and decay resulted in a sort of ever-receding land-side tide. The not-so-busy wharves were storing a different kind of commodity: parked cars for the downtown. The waterfronts of many industrial-era cities experienced a similar fate, and many have yet to recover.

Could our hypothetical expatriate have predicted that within a generation the bustle at the waterfront would return, not in the form of warehouses, custom houses, longshoremen or clipper ships, but by courtesy of homes, cultural institutions, tourists and pleasure craft. Boston's oldest waterfront is a center of action again, but in redefined uses and desires. Our expatriate would surely be surprised that Rowes, Burroughs, Lewis and Mercantile Wharves were now all elegant residential addresses, not places of industry; that life in the Charlestown Navy Yard was being directed by homeowners' associations instead of naval protocol; that forty-seven miles of shoreline were being steadily converted to a continuous public promenade; or that some of the most valuable local real estate was along the not-so-long-ago dilapidating wharves.

Despite such shocks to his mid-twentieth-century sensibilities, this returnee would have little trouble finding his way along Boston's historic waterfront. Amidst all that was lost or transformed sufficient continuity persists. The delegation from Amsterdam referred to such persistence as the "infrastructure" of the waterfront, and proceeded to show how it can be added to through imaginative new architecture and engineering. It is this capacity for persistence through reinterpretation that is one of the most valuable qualities of waterfront regions. This, too, should reassure Bostonians as they plan the Seaport District. They need only recall their own prior successful waterfront transformations.

A city's waterfront cannot be thought about as a thin line

One tends to think of land/water relationships in terms of opposites, or of the edge between the two. Metaphysically this edge is razor thin. In terms of city-building, the opposite is true. Places like Amsterdam or Sydney make this quite evident with their complex land and water weave. Even when geography offers less variation, the broader the zone of overlap between land and water the more successfully a city captures the benefits of its water assets.

It is generally easier to attract investment to the very edge, and over time construct (even overbuild) a façade to the water. The Bund in