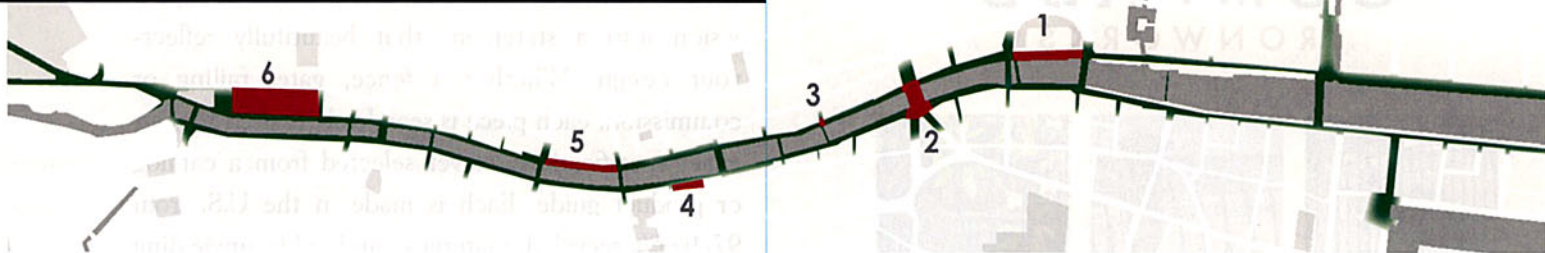


## START TALKING



**TWO ENTERPRISING YOUNG DESIGNERS  
PROPOSE A NEW FUTURE FOR  
DUBLIN'S RIVERFRONT.**

BY JONATHAN LERNER

With the “Celtic Tiger” of the Irish economy dead, 2010 was an inauspicious year for the Dubliners David Jordan, now 27, and Fergus Browne, 28, to complete master’s degrees in urban design. While studying, they had drawn speculative redevelopment plans for London’s Battersea Power Station, a riverside brownfield. “We like the interaction between town and river,” Jordan says. Central Dublin, too, has a river—both its defining physical feature and an unfortunate source of disconnection. The city didn’t have a long-term strategy for the riverfront, so, seeing that jobs were scarce, the graduates resolved to “do some research, present the city with a plan, and start a conversation with the local players,” Jordan says. The players, it turned out, were eager to talk.



**ABOVE**  
Fergus Browne, left,  
and David Jordan,  
right: Recent grads  
take the initiative.

The River Liffey cuts east–west across Dublin, lined mostly by low-rise historic buildings. It is a broad, linear opening in a city center where tourism and business draw endless throngs but where many streets are narrow and twisting. Fifteen low bridges, several only for walking, link the north and south banks in the more than two-mile-long area that Jordan and Browne are studying, but moving through it is still challenging. Vehicles

jam roadways along both sides. Sidewalks are narrow and cluttered, crosswalks sometimes nonexistent. There is a variety of uses and conditions, with disjointed transitions between them. The river’s civic, urbanistic potential is enormous, but unrealized.

Browne and Jordan described their idea for a layered research process to the city’s planning agency, saying, as Jordan tells it, “We’re doing this anyway, and perhaps you can gain something out of it.” The city supplied some desks and printing, and also showed “intangible interest,” he says, meaning officials would talk to them when they had questions. The pair spent a year creating a report on their spatial, land-use, and mobility analyses around the river. They have presented their findings at public events, in articles, and on their website, [www.urban-nexusinitiative.com](http://www.urban-nexusinitiative.com).

In 2012, they mounted an exhibition of their work to date, *Connector + Divider*. It was supported by the city, the nonprofit Dublin Civic Trust, the Dublin City Business Association, and the Irish Architecture Foundation. “It was very much about getting feedback,” Browne says. For example, there was a “Post-it” panel where viewers could note their reactions. “Everybody, regardless of their background, has an interest in this space. We’re all pedestrians ↘

### LIFFEY CORRIDOR

- 1 CUSTOM HOUSE QUAY
- 2 O’CONNELL BRIDGE
- 3 HA’ PENNY BRIDGE
- 4 ESSEX QUAY
- 5 INNS QUAY/FOUR COURTS
- 6 CROPPIES ACRE/  
COLLIN’S BARRACKS

**RIGHT**  
O'Connell Bridge, the principal river crossing, is reimagined as an accessible outdoor room.



→ first," he says. The exhibition made some people "realize how angry they can be on the street" at its dysfunction. Jordan adds that their whole process has been "conversation based, about what you'd like to see," more informal and accessible than the public input required by statute for planning decisions.

The next phase of their work was to articulate a vision, which they presented this past summer in an exhibition at the Dublin Civic Trust. The show, *21st Century Liffey: A Boulevard of Rooms + Corridors*, was opened by Dublin's lord mayor. "Even if our opinions vary from something that the city council would themselves produce, it was important to have them involved at an early stage," Browne says, "because they are inevitably the people who are going to put in place a plan to do any change."

Graham Hickey, a conservation research officer at the trust, which takes a future-oriented view of preservation, says that the project "has in many ways set the agenda for how the Liffey should be viewed in the life of the city and particularly within the policy framework now being formulated by Dublin City Council." It was, he says, "the right way to build public policy." •

## MATERIALS

- 1 PRECAST CONCRETE PAVING
- 2 BITUMINOUS MACADAM CYCLEWAY
- 3 GRANITE DIVIDER
- 4 CONNECTED TREE PITS
- 5 SEATING
- 6 BINS
- 7 BIKE STANDS
- 8 BOLLARDS

