



# Recent Landmarks in Vancouver

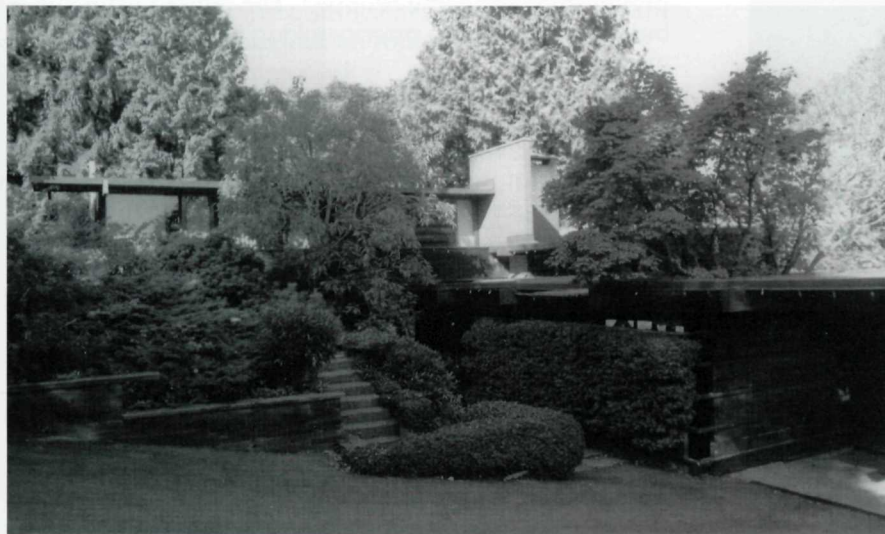
## The Post-1940s Inventory

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**V**ancouver, British Columbia, celebrated its centennial in 1986. At that time, a city-wide inventory was conducted of potential heritage resources; every building in the city was considered. As a result of the inventory, the city council adopted a list of over 2,200 buildings as the Vancouver Heritage Inventory (VHI). The VHI does not afford protection from demolition, but it does make available a range of planning and development incentives to aid in the conservation of listed buildings. These incentives, including zoning by-law relaxations, parking relaxations, permit fast-tracking, density bonus and transfer of density, have been instrumental in achieving the preservation, through legal designation, of about 52 properties since 1986.

Consistent with most communities in Canada that use the criteria of the Canadian Inventory of Historic Buildings, the VHI listing includes only buildings built before 1940. However, this limits potential heritage resources to those built in the city's first 54 years. The three-decade period after 1940 left the city a notable legacy of progressive, modern buildings, many of which are architectural and cultural landmarks.

In the post-World War II period, a prolific and influential community of young local and regional architects designed many notable buildings in Vancouver. They developed a distinct West Coast Regional Style, based on



Copp House. Sharp, Thompson, Berwick and Pratt, 1951. Planting and landscaping define spaces in the open plan design, and local materials are used throughout the house, which is a premier example of Vancouver's West Coast Regional design. Photo by Marco D'Agostini.



Vancouver Public Library. Semmens and Simpson, 1956-57. Clad in a glass and aluminum curtain wall, the Library's innovative design includes wide column spacing to allow for flexibility and future expansion. Courtesy of Vancouver Public Library.

wooden post and beam construction, integrated interior and exterior spaces, and extensive use of landscaping for residential buildings. One of the best examples of West Coast Regional design is the Copp House (Sharp, Thompson, Berwick and Pratt, 1951), with long horizontal wings that integrate the building into the landscape of its sloping site. The Copp House received a Silver Massey Medal in 1952. The Massey Foundation, established by (then) Governor-General Vincent Massey, awarded medals for significant contributions to Canadian architecture. Massey Medals were awarded from 1951 to 1971 to the highest quality of architecture at a given time.

This youthful exuberance and experimentation is also evident in Vancouver's stock of post-war institutional and commercial buildings. British Columbia's architects built many distinctive buildings by adapting modern construction methods to local conditions.

The present Vancouver Public Library (Semmens and Simpson, 1956-57) is an excellent example of the modern aesthetic. A main feature of the building is the two-story floor-to-ceiling fenestration at the corner that invites people in to use the facility. The public library received a Massey Foundation Silver Medal in 1958. The building is currently at risk because the city plans to construct a new library that will be partially funded by proceeds from the sale of this building.

Some of these award-winning buildings from the 1950s and 1960s have already begun to disappear or, like the library, are threatened. In 1970, the Marwell Building, then just 20 years old, was demolished. Also by the Vancouver architectural firm of Semmens and Simpson, the building had the distinction of being the country's first recipient of a Gold Massey Medal. The late 1980s building boom saw the potential loss, through redevelopment, of several other notable buildings of this recent era, including the Customs House (C. B. K. Van Norman, 1950-54). An early work of modernism in Vancouver, it is a carefully composed design responding to

*(Vancouver—continued on page 32)*





(Vancouver—continued from page 31)

an unusually shaped site. Both curtain wall sections and masonry cladding (local Haddington Island andesite) are used on the exterior.

The sale of the B. C. Hydro Building (Thompson, Berwick and Pratt, 1955-57) also raised concern for the future of an important post-war structure. Its distinctive lozenge shape, articulated cornice and mosaic tile decoration reflect a West Coast interpretation of the International Style. Yet there is no protection, nor development incentives available to these buildings because they are not listed on the VHI.

The Vancouver Heritage Advisory Committee, a Council-appointed body comprised of architects, heritage advocates, heritage consultants and lay people, set about to address the problems of protecting the recent past. The first task was to raise public awareness of the architecture of this period. In a young city, it is often hard to generate



B. C. Hydro Building. Thompson, Berwick and Pratt, 1955-57. The distinctive lozenge shaped building represents a West Coast interpretation of the International Style. Photo by Marco D'Agostini.

appreciation for turn-of-the-century buildings, let alone ones built a few decades ago. Clean lines and unadorned buildings elicit less nostalgia than Victorian gingerbread. The local design community had been watching and writing about the buildings of this period, but the public was generally unaware of the distinguished architecture in its midst. In 1986, the Architectural Institute of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University organized a sym-

posium on Award Winning Vancouver Architecture that helped to set the scene for a thorough look at the recent past. For its Heritage Awards events in 1990, the Heritage Advisory Committee promoted the theme of "Our Recent Heritage" and held the awards ceremonies in the auditorium of the B. C. Hydro Building.

Then a steering committee, made up of local architects, architectural historians and members of the Heritage Advisory Committee who were familiar with modern architecture, was formed to look more closely at the buildings from the recent past. The steering committee determined that two decades is a period of sufficient historical perspective within which to gauge a building's heritage merit.

Later in 1990, the city council directed the planning staff to review buildings that were more than 20 years old, for the possibility of adding them to the VHI. The next step was to conduct an inventory of post-1940s buildings. The Heritage Advisory Committee received a grant from the Provincial Heritage Trust to conduct the study, which was coordinated by the Planning Department of the City of Vancouver and the School of Architecture at the University of British Columbia.

Initial research identified a group of about 220 buildings as having heritage value. The criteria for selection was the same as for older buildings already on the inventory, including the architectural, historical and social significance of the building. Vancouver uses a weighted numerical evaluation system that considers the architectural characteristics, historical value, and importance of context and setting. Considerable thought was given to stylistic periods and their classification, and the terms selected were Moderne, Late Modern, International Style, Expressionist and West Coast Regional.

For comparative evaluation, buildings were reviewed both by style and building type. The importance of a building's construction techniques or association with a noted designer were also considered. A numerical evaluation was determined and the preliminary results vetted by the steering committee and planning staff. Some adjustments were made, some buildings added (particularly residential buildings, which had not been identified previously), and some dropped. The revised listing of buildings included a priority group of about 100 landmarks.

At this stage in the Inventory, a brochure describing the "Recent Landmarks" initiative was prepared. It discusses not only the buildings of the period but also the importance of the modern movement and the recognition gained by many of these buildings. The brochure also proposes that Burrard Street, a major downtown street, be identified as an "architectural corridor" given the wide cross section of the city's architectural development evident in the 19 buildings either already on the VHI or in the Recent Landmarks group. The Customs House, Burrard Building, Vancouver Public Library and the B. C. Hydro Building are located within an eight-block area on this street. At this time only those buildings in the Burrard Street corridor that are included on the VHI are eligible for retention incentives.

In October 1992, the city council authorized the next step in the process, which is to seek public consultation.

(Vancouver—continued on page 44)



*(Vancouver—continued from page 32)*

A series of focused meetings will be held with the owners of these buildings, the architectural community and the general public to discuss the Recent Landmarks initiative. This process is currently ongoing. Any objections from owners will be included in a report to the city council who will make the final decision on which buildings will be added to the VHI.

It is anticipated that most of the 100 high priority Recent Landmarks will be added to the Vancouver Heritage Inventory in the coming months. This will allow the VHI, a record of the city's architectural history, to reflect in a comprehensive way the city's heritage. Without this period of design, we would be left with the



West Coast Transmission Building. Rhone and Iredale with Bogue Babicki, Engineer, 1968-69. One of the first buildings in the world to employ suspension bridge techniques for structural support: a central concrete service core serves as the main structural support; the floors are suspended by thin, continuous steel cables hung from the core. The design also allows for a column-free parking garage and open plaza areas at the building's base. Photo by Marco D'Agostini.

very old and the very new and nothing in-between. For Vancouver, the in-between is a very rich three-decade period of architectural design—our Recent Landmarks.

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