

About the VHF

The Vancouver Heritage Foundation is a registered charity committed to the conservation of Vancouver's heritage buildings. Creating new life for the city's older buildings is important in sustaining the culture, economy and environmental well-being of our city. When a historic building is demolished we lose the connection to our past, and we add tons of debris to our landfill. Through education, public awareness and granting activities, the VHF is helping to create a city that repairs and reuses its older buildings.

...for further reading on modernist architecture check out these books in our reading room:

Bergdol, B and Christensen, P. Home Delivery: Fabricating the Modern Dwelling. New York: MoMA, 2008.

Erickson, Arthur. The Architecture of Arthur Erickson. Montreal: Tundra Books, 1975.

Gillies, Veronica, Christopher Macdonald, Matthew Soules. A Guidebook to Contemporary Architecture in Vancouver. Douglas & McIntyre: Vancouver, 2007.

Gössel, Leuthäuser et al. Architecture in the 20th Century. Köln: Taschen, 2005.

Hollingsworth, Fred. Living Spaces: The Architecture of Fred Thornton Hollingsworth. Italy: Blueprint, 2005.

Liscombe, Rhodri W. The New Spirit: Modern Architecture in Vancouver, 1938 -1963. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1997.

Shadbolt, Douglas. Ron Thom: The Shaping of an Architect. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1995.



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mid-century modern

residential tour 2011



Photo credit: Martin Knowles Photo/Media

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Mid-century modernism in Vancouver

...an aesthetic of openness, efficiency, and clear, purposeful design...

In the mid 1920s, as the post-war economy improved, the new utopia began to take shape. Avant-garde, Modernist design moved from little-seen exhibitions or small-circulation magazines to a much wider audience.

Designers now had official positions as city architects or organizers of large international exhibitions. This gave them a stage on which to promote the 'New', and to do so in ways that proclaimed the unity and internationalism of the arts. The New Architecture, the New Dwelling, the New Photography, the New Typography were all terms used during the period.

Underpinning this movement towards the New was the idea of the 'New Spirit', one that reflected new social and economic relations, as well as new technology. This, so designers hoped, would seize the imagination of everyone and fundamentally transform the way people lived.

Between 1938 and 1963, Vancouver became a centre for the interpretation of Modernist architectural theory and practice. Being a small city in a superb setting with a temperate climate, Vancouver attracted young architects in search of a community open to new ideas. Many were influenced directly by the designers and institutions that initiated the modernist movement: Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, and Walter Gropius. Vancouver's movement towards an aesthetic of openness, efficiency, and clear, purposeful design serves as a reminder of the central tenet of Modernism - that intelligent design is a critical element in the achievement of vital social goals. Intelligent design is more relevant and necessary today than ever before.

Adapted from Liscombe, Rhodri W. The New Spirit: Modern Architecture in Vancouver, 1938 -1963 Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1997



1. Cohen Residence

621 West 51st Avenue
Architect/Designer: Ron Thom
Built: 1960

This Ron Thom designed 1960 residence offers an abundance of natural light, warmth and family-oriented living while still affording ample privacy from the neighbours and street. The original owner, still in residence, worked closely with Thom, who was also the site supervisor for the house construction, and said 'he was a pleasure to work with and very attentive to the family's needs when designing the house'.

The privacy the house affords is unparalleled in the area, being almost invisible from the street. Both house and landscape are designed to make a holistic view of the exterior almost impossible unless you are standing in the main courtyard. By using the front and back courtyards and inward facing floor to ceiling windows, the house makes wonderful use of natural light. The den, dining room and living rooms all wrap around and open onto the central courtyard and offer great flow through the house in summer months. This house was designed for a family that entertained, and the beautiful silver collection in the dining room was never purely decorative.

The house remains in its original condition including the interior design. Yellow shag carpets and matching draperies adorn the living room and there is original wallpaper in the bathrooms. The artwork reflects a half century of avid collecting of diverse art and antiques, both locally and abroad. Thom designed the light fixtures in the living room, the foyer and the stairwell, and they beautifully compliment the architecture. All walls were originally white and the dark ceiling trim is a unifying thread throughout the house, upstairs and down.

Changes to the house include the addition of an east wing staircase, a glass enclosed sunroom completed in consultation with the architect, and new cabinet doors in the kitchen. All appliances remain original.

This house demonstrated Ron Thom's understanding of family needs and his ability to work with owners to design a house that was not only beautiful but functional. There is no mistaking the pride the owner exudes when talking about her home. Its spacious rooms and easy flow have served her family remarkably well for the last 51 years.



Photo credit: Martin Knowles Photo/Media

2. Chichik Residence

1346 West 53rd Avenue
Architect/Designer: Max Chichik (1913-2011)
Built : 1957

Designed by owner and engineer Max Chichik for his family, the modest proportions of the Chichik Residence are today dwarfed by the oversize neighbouring houses and tall trees. The house, which is almost completely original, including its furnishings, kitchen, light fixtures, and horizontal band of windows on the front façade, is a wonderful example of mid-century design in 1950s Vancouver. Local artist and architect B.C. Binning summarized this design style in a 1950 Western Homes & Living article as ‘an economical structure, functional composition of internal and external volumes, open and flexible rather than rigidly defined plan, and an interrelation of internal and external space.’

An early renovation to the Chichik house in 1963 to ‘spruce up’ the exterior of the house added the decorative white trellising to the front façade and created a more grand entrance concourse and vestibule. During the same period, the back deck was closed in to create a family room and the living room beams were painted white (the sections between the beams had always been light in colour). This is the extent of any changes to the house.

The three bathrooms retain their original fixtures and tiling; the bedrooms were redone in 1963 and the original shag carpet, matching drapes and bedspreads remain from that time; and the kitchen has the original plywood cabinets and second generation arborite counters. The light fixtures throughout the house and the living and dining room furniture are as they were when the house was built.

At the basement level, large floor to ceiling windows create a nice interplay between the inside and outside. Mr. Chichik’s office, the bathroom, a former maid’s room and the ubiquitous 1950s rec room with a wet bar, all stand as they were built almost 50 years ago.



3. Adrian Residence

2237 West 33rd Avenue
Architect/Designer: Robert McLeod (1932-2003)
Built : 1963 by Kvist & Hopkins

With its flat roof, vertical siding, floor to ceiling windows, and courtyard entranceway, this 3-bedroom house is a quintessential example of mid-century architecture in Vancouver. The underlying vision for the house was that of a functional, easy-to-live-in dwelling that would be an attractive, practical and adaptable home for a young family of five. Upon completion in 1963, the architectural style provoked adverse comments, including allegations that the design was ‘unfriendly’ because no windows faced the street and the screen sheltering the entrance to the courtyard limited public view of the house. Still owned and lovingly cared for by the original owner, the basic structure was unchanged from the original plan designed by Robert Macleod in 1961 until renovations were undertaken in 2001. It was important to the owners that the integrity of Mr. Macleod’s design be preserved, notwithstanding the need to update and improve the house. Upon consultation, Mr. Macleod readily gave his blessing to changes that would accommodate the growing family and preserve his commitment to the practical functionality of the architectural design.

The exterior of the house was designed without overhangs so as not to detract from its clean, uncluttered lines. The lack of exterior protection from wind and rain resulted in leakage problems. The large sandstone fireplace in the living room had water ingress during construction and consequently was painted a soft sand colour to cover the water marks. The deteriorating wood window sashes throughout the house were replaced with European-style windows in 1999. Prior to 2001, the only change to the house was the installation of a lower level suite to provide accommodation for family members. The sloping lot allows the suite to open directly to the backyard—thus eliminating a basement feeling. In 2001, the owners engaged the services of Margaret Armstrong, Interior Designer, who designed an open plan for the kitchen, dining and family room. The wall-to-wall carpet on the main floor was replaced with hardwood.

Mr. Macleod valued the physical labour that an owner could contribute to the creation of his/her home. The owner was a passionate and talented woodworker and he built much of the furniture, including the dining room buffet, the base of the dining room table, a country-style hutch for the lower level, night tables, cupboards and a retro-style vanity dresser for the master bedroom.



Photo credit: Larry Goldstein Photography Inc

4. Conlyn/Goldstein Residence

2707 West 43rd Avenue
Architect/Designer: Maxie House Designs
Built : 1964

This 2500 square foot, three bedroom, split-level home is a quintessential example of vernacular* mid-century modern architecture. The stucco cladding and the three to four concrete stairs to the front door ending a straight run from the city sidewalk define thousands of such homes built in Vancouver in the period immediately following WWII.

The current owners were on the hunt for a flat-top mid-century modern home when they stumbled upon this house which had been on the market for 10 weeks. They immediately saw potential where the realtor saw demolition and purchased the house seven years ago from the original owners. Although a little tired, the home was in remarkably good condition. The potential of this solidly built, vernacular bungalow has been realized through the vision and focus of its current owners. The house is a great example of how the homeowners have made very few changes to the original structure and layout but have managed to effortlessly create a feeling of contemporary living.

The homeowners have retained all of the original wood paneling as well as the dining room built-in buffet, accordion doors, fireplaces, and the fabulous water glass in the bathroom and basement windows and door, all in pristine condition. Changes include removal of wrought iron detailing between the living and dining rooms (visible in the before images on display) and between the entrance and the living room, replacing it with an updated, sophisticated version that pays homage to the original. The house has a new kitchen and updated ensuite bathrooms. The furniture is a collection of vintage pieces and local designs, such as Niels Bendtsen, brought from the owners’ previous house as well as pieces from a ‘furniture swap’ with the owners’ sister that are a natural fit. The master bedroom has been relocated to the back of the house to take advantage of the balcony (once an enclosed smoking room!) overlooking the immaculate landscaping.

The homeowners, a graphic designer and photographer, appreciate and love the clean lines, minimalist living and amazing light found in this beautiful mid-century modern home.

***Vernacular Architecture** refers to buildings made by common builders in an informal way, rather than by architects using design methodologies. Used for the first time in the early 1800s, the concept became popular in the twentieth century when dwellings were presented in architects’ exhibitions and in books as objects of aesthetic and cultural value. Gabriel Arboleda, Ethno Architecture: Indigenous & Vernacular Buildings, 2011.



5. Lendvov Residence

2268 South West Marine Drive
Architect/Designer: Unknown
Built : 1962

Situated on nearly one acre of steeply sloped, forested property overlooking the Fraser River and YVR, this 5,000 sq. ft. residence has been lovingly renovated after decades of decay.

Although the current owners had a desire to brighten and modernize the interior which they found to be very dark, they showed restraint in their choice of furnishings and finishes. The interior doors and walls remain without trim and the new kitchen and bathrooms have simple, clean lines. The ground floor bathroom retains the original frosted vertical fibreglass and louvered windows.

The landscaping and exterior of the house remain as they were when the house was built almost 50 years ago. The exterior cladding is unique 1 ½” vertical channel siding. Although the windows have been replaced with double glazing, the window openings are identical to the original. The sliding doors to the numerous outside decks are original. The living room fireplace and hearth are believed to be original. The basement room is completely original with the exception of the paint.

The interior layout remains as it was originally apart from the removal of dividing pillars between the dining and living room and the shortening of the wall between the entrance and the living room. Another change is the removal of the hall wall enclosing the den.

Interior finishes are entirely new. Originally the house had mahogany parquet flooring, stair balustrades, and paneling in the den. Finding it in very poor condition, and also very dark, the current owners replaced it with light coloured tile and paint, carpet and open iron stair railings. The kitchen and bathrooms have been updated.

Many houses built in the early part of the 20th century throughout Shaughnessy had very low entrance halls that exploded into high-ceilinged stairways and living rooms. The Marine Drive home built in the mid-20th century had the opposite design, with a vaulted ceiling in the entranceway and original ceilings that dropped to 7’ in many rooms in the rest of the house, which the current owner raised during renovations.