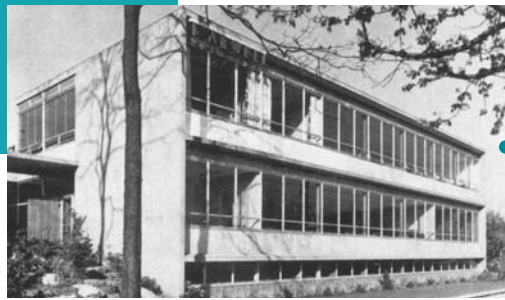


[original site of] MARWELL OFFICE BUILDING 14

1500 West Georgia Street, Vancouver  
Semmens and Simpson 1950–51

Now demolished



From 1952 to 1976 this site contained the winner of the first ever Massey Gold Medal Architecture Award, the Marwell Office Building. Semmens & Simpson, considered by many to be Vancouver's finest International Style architects, designed this elegant glass and concrete gem. Sadly, this touchstone of the "West Coast" Modern style, inspiration to a generation of architects, could not compete with the tall office towers of the 1970s and so was demolished and replaced by the Crown Life building in 1976. \*Today this landmark features a 12,000 sqft. reflecting pool with a black long cascading waterfall that fronts West Georgia Street.

WESTCOAST TRANSMISSION BUILDING 13

1333 West Georgia Street, Vancouver  
Rhône and Iredale 1969

@ Georgia between Broughton and Jarvis



The head office built for Westcoast Transmission, now a residential building, is one of Vancouver's most sublime buildings - the twelve-story office block appears to magically float above the ground. In reality, structural engineer Bogue Babicki adapted the proven principles of the suspension bridge and hung the floors from aluminum-clad steel cables secured to the top of a central concrete core. In addition to creating a striking visual image, the design provides greater earthquake resistance, column-free underground parking, and unobstructed street-level views of Coal Harbour and the North Shore Mountains beyond. Unfortunately, these views have been obscured by recent residential developments along the waterfront, but walking underneath the vast bulk of the building is still a uniquely exciting experience. The building has recently been sensitively converted to condominiums called the "Qube."

MACMILLAN BLOEDEL BUILDING 16

1075 West Georgia Street, Vancouver  
Erickson/Massey 1968

@ Georgia and Thurlow



Nicknamed the "Doric façade" by Arthur Erickson, the MacMillan Bloedel Building has the simplicity, strength, and ruggedness befitting the offices of one of the largest timber companies in the world. In this design, we see the advancement of Erickson's West Coast style. This powerful, monolithic structure, set back from the street, overlooks a simple reflecting pool, reminiscent of the local mountains rising above the Burrard Inlet. The walls of the two offset 27-story towers are poured-in-place load-bearing concrete, not the typical curtain-wall construction of the time, and taper like massive tree trunks from a thickness of eight feet at the base to eight inches at the top. The deliberately rough-cast concrete is effectively contrasted by the smooth, mullion-free window glazing. As testament to the design skills of Erickson and Massey and the value of their unique vision and style, the building received a Massey Medal for Architecture in 1970.

BURRARD BUILDING 17

1030 West Georgia Street, Vancouver  
C.B.K. Van Norman 1955–57

@ Burrard and Georgia



Along with the BC Electric Building, the Burrard Building was one of Vancouver's first curtain-walled towers and was the first large building erected downtown in over twenty years. It started an office-building boom that continued virtually unabated until the recession of the early 1980s. Van Norman's tower-and-podium design took its design cues from the 1952 Lever Building in New York, and set a precedent for the office tower style in Vancouver for the next 10 years. A delicate aluminum and glass curtainwall system with metallic lemon-lime colour spandrels wraps the tower in transparency. Sadly, much of the building's original character was lost through extensive renovations in the late 1980s when the aged but layered curtainwall facade was replaced by flush panels of black glass and dark grey granite.

VANCOUVER PUBLIC LIBRARY 18

750 Burrard Street, Vancouver  
Semmens & Simpson 1955–57

@ Burrard and Robson



As the city's central library, now a retail store, the building was envisioned as an instrument of progressive social change, a Modernist architectural vehicle for the democratization and dissemination of knowledge to a broader public. To this end, architect Simpson broke down the elitism and inaccessibility of traditional library architecture and created a new and sophisticated library model. He employed double-height window-walls and extensive glazing to invite in both natural light and passers-by, and commissioned a monumental tile mosaic for the entry hall, symbolizing humanity's quest for knowledge, by artist Lionel Thomas. Automated aluminum sunscreens shaded the south façade, while a wall of granite tied the rectilinear composition to the site. In later years the library became overcrowded and run-down, and was eventually sold. Through the use of the city's transfer-of-density and density bonus program the building was rehabilitated for commercial use. While much of the building's distinctive exterior was restored (including the Lionel Thomas illuminated sculpture) or replicated (curtain wall glazing), the distinctive vertical sun louvers on the Robson Street façade were removed and commercial signage now overwhelms the building's clean Modernist lines.

[original site of] CANADA CUSTOMS BUILDING 08

1001 West Pender Street, Vancouver  
C.B.K. Van Norman 1950–54

Now demolished



The triangular site for a new customs house in downtown Vancouver was at the intersection of Burrard, Pender and Hornby Streets. Van Norman designed a powerful H-plan six-storey structure as one of Vancouver's earlier ventures into the International Style. Aluminum framed windows alternated with granite spandrels and the composition was framed by end piers of Haddon Island stone. The Customs Building was demolished in 1993. Demolition of this Modernist landmark prompted the establishment of Vancouver's Recent Landmark program, which affords heritage status if a building is at least 20 years old.

09 GUINNESS TOWER

1055 West Hastings Street, Vancouver  
Charles Paine 1967–69

@ Hastings between Burrard and Thurlow



This exemplary International Style building was designed with Miesian minimalism, lightness and clarity tempered by a West Coast sensibility. Paine was inspired by the calming qualities and grey-blue colours of the veiled coastal sky. The tower's cool, aloof presence and elegant ground floor lobby are contrasted and energized by an extraordinary mural by Jordi Bonet: *The Fathomless Richness of the Seabed*. Bonet was asked to create a mural that would echo the relationship between the building and its environment; he created a ceramic wall relief in blues and golds that abstracts the world at the bottom of the sea with chaotic, aquatic objects trouvés.

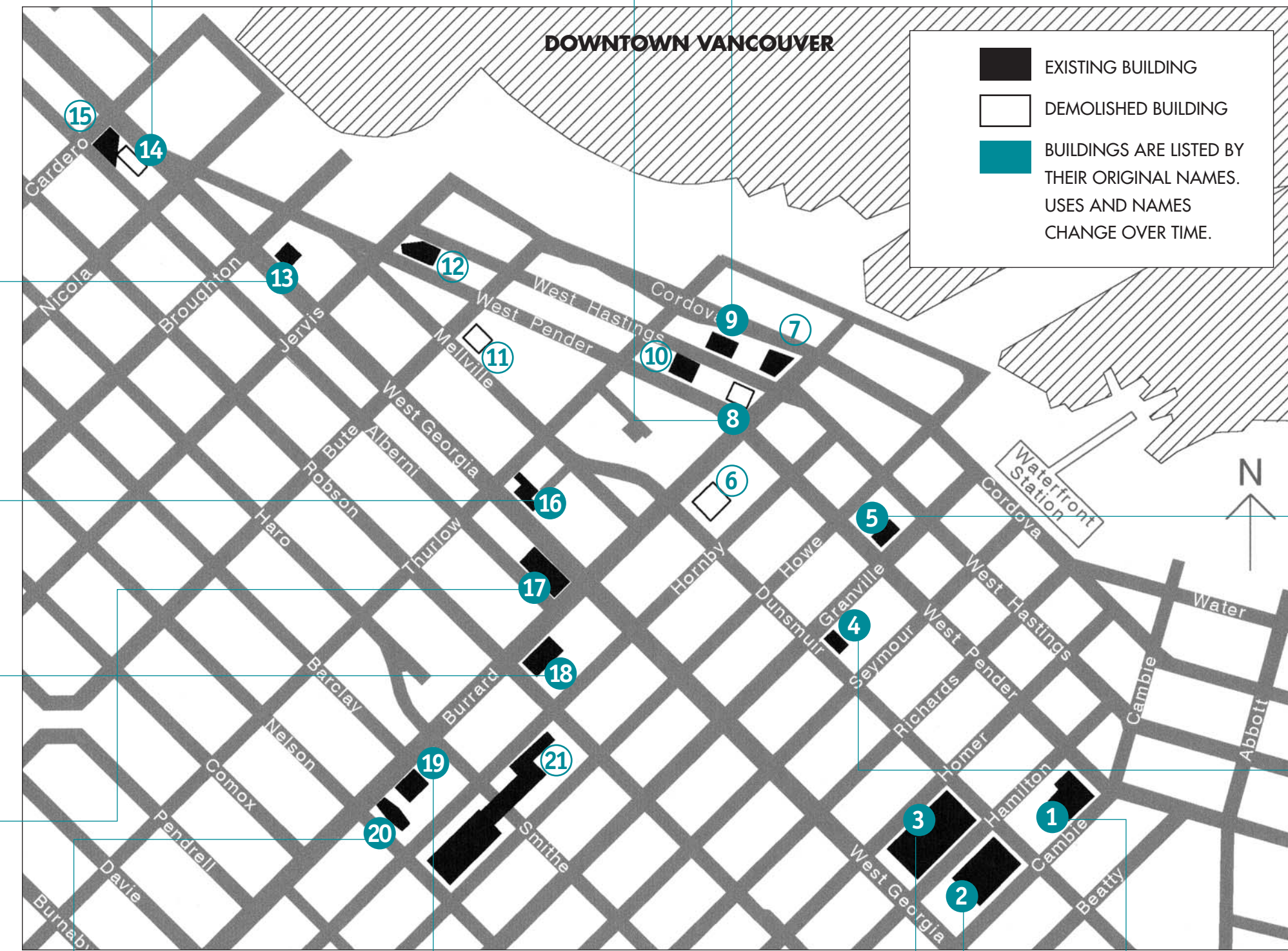
05 TORONTO DOMINION BANK

499 Granville Street, Vancouver  
McCarter and Nairne 1948–49

@ Pender and Granville



This forceful, Modernist composition was one of the first structures named to Vancouver's Recent Landmarks Program and is credited with awakening a dormant downtown to the possibilities of progressive postwar architecture. McCarter and Nairne's careful application of International Modern Movement design principles, including the addition of *bris soleil* to not only act as finned shades, but also to add a horizontal emphasis to the building, inspired many local architects to investigate the International Style.



6 (original site of) YWCA (now demolished) Vladimir Plavic & Associates 1967-69

Richly textured concrete and split travertine tile were used on this multi functional tower housing sport facilities, offices and residences. The 1960s expansion was built over the original low-rise 1951 YWCA designed by Sharp, Thompson, Berwick & Pratt. Demolished in 1999.

7 Marine Building 355 Burrard St. McCarter Nairne Architects 1929-30

Interior renovations by Paul Merrick, 1989. Inside and out, this is one of Canada's finest examples of Art Deco design.

10 Oceanic Plaza 1066 W Hastings St. Charles Paine & Associates 1976-77

A companion to the Guinness Tower by the same architect and developers, the two buildings are linked by a graceful pedestrian bridge and are perceived as one project. Lobby mural by Jordi Bonet, *Resurgence*, 1977

11 (original site of) Moore Building (now demolished) McCarter, Nairne & Partners 1968

One of Vancouver's most notable expressions of Le Corbusier's Brutalist style, this sensitively-scaled office anchored a difficult sloping site in a mixed commercial-residential neighbourhood. Demolished in 2006.

12 Evergreen Building 1285 W Pender St. Arthur Erickson Architects 1978

This design successfully reflects Vancouver's urban center and harbour surrounds. The building has two faces, a rectilinear street façade and a softer, terraced elevation, planted with greenery, fronting the harbour.

15 Crown Life Plaza 1500 W Georgia St. Rhône & Iredale 1976-78

In this example of "technological brutalism", Miesian curtain walls coalesce with exposed concrete towers and pilots. The tower, reflecting pool and single storey retail space are each given individual expressions on the triangular site.

21 Robson Square 800 Block Robson St. Arthur Erickson Architects; Cornelia Oberlander Landscape Architect 1972- 79

Erickson, working with project architect Bing Thom, created a new paradigm for the town square as a reflection of the West Coast landscape. Pools of water infill portions of the roof and cascade in tiers over the skylit offices below (inlets, waterfalls and rivers). An ingenious arrangement of ramps and steps - stramps (mountains and valleys) - replace the traditional plaza and allow for varied views and viewing while encouraging a new mode of urban participation.

04 CANADIAN IMPERIAL BANK OF COMMERCE

586 Granville Street, Vancouver  
McCarter, Nairne & Partners 1958

@ Granville and Dunsquair



McCarter & Nairne designed numerous downtown office buildings during the 1950s for financial institutions and insurance companies starting with the TD Building, and the Imperial Bank is the finest of the few survivors. This striking structure is composed of an office block of white Vermont marble supported around the perimeter by elliptical black granite columns that seems to float above the glassed-in banking hall. Inside is a stunning Venetian glass mosaic mural by artist B.C. Binning, celebrating British Columbia's industries, crafts, and natural resources. Stretching 44 feet across the powerful banking hall, the mosaic required more than 200,000 pieces of glass to complete. Elegant, clean-lined walnut woodwork, terrazzo floors, and green marble tables and counters finish the interior. Preservationists take note, this building is in danger of losing its character through renovations.

02 QUEEN ELIZABETH THEATRE

600 Hamilton Street, Vancouver  
ARCOP (Affleck, Desbarats, Dimakopoulos, Lebensold, Michaud and Sise 1958–60

@ Hamilton and Dunsquair



In 1954 the City of Vancouver announced a national architectural competition to design a new 3,000-seat civic auditorium. The judges selected a scheme submitted by ARCOP, a team of students and instructors from McGill University's school of architecture. The winning out-of-province design consisted of a curving reinforced concrete concert hall contained within rectilinear curtainwalls of glass, aluminum and porcelain tile. The lounge and lobby overlook an expansive front plaza and fountain through a huge floor-to-ceiling glass wall. In 1962 a smaller 647-seat theatre was added at the rear of the main auditorium. The building has some vexing acoustical problems and the plaza has not lived up to expectations as a people place, but the "Queen E" remains a vital part of the downtown Vancouver arts scene.

19 DAL GRAUER SUBSTATION

950 Burrard Street, Vancouver  
Sharp & Thompson, Berwick, Pratt 1953

@ Burrard and Nelson

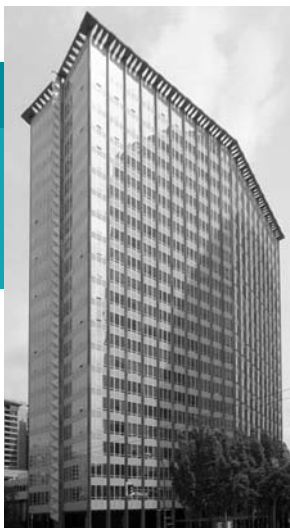


This hydro-electric substation provides power to Vancouver's downtown peninsula and is probably the city's truest expression of the Modernist form-follows-function credo. Rather than decorating a windowless box, architect Ned Pratt celebrated the massive substation equipment by cladding the street elevation with transparent glass-and-steel curtainwall. The interior circulation corridors that are visible from the street were painted in a rich palette of colours selected by renowned local artist B.C. Binning, creating a De Stijl-like composition. Particularly vibrant at night, this photogenic structure became an icon for Vancouver "Modern", and was recognized as such internationally. The effect was dulled by the replacement of the original clear glass with translucent Plexiglas following a mechanical explosion in 1984; however, the transparent glass is scheduled to be restored.

20 BC ELECTRIC BUILDING

970 Burrard Street, Vancouver  
Thompson, Berwick, Pratt 1955–57

@ Burrard and Nelson



Gracefully rising 22 stories, the BC Electric Building, now the "Electra", is testament to the province's economic development in the 1950s and 60s. Working closely with Ron Thom, architect Ned Pratt and engineer Otto Safir cantilevered lozenge-shaped floors from a central core and wrapped the exterior in a glass, porcelain and aluminum curtainwall. Designed to take advantage of Vancouver's natural beauty, the tapered shape and slender profile created spaces in which no desk was further than 15 feet from a window and views of sea, mountain and sky. A West Coast water motif was reinforced by the vibrant abstract tile mosaics by artist B.C. Binning, as well as the illuminated blue and green vertical "zippers" at each end of the tower. Like Pratt's Dal Grauer Substation, the BC Electric Building became an internationally significant Vancouver Modern landmark, and was one of the first Modernist structures to be designated a heritage building by the City. In 1994 the building was converted to condominiums known as the "Electra" by architect Paul Merrick.

03 GENERAL POST OFFICE

349 West Georgia Street, Vancouver  
McCarter, Nairne, and Partners 1953–58

@ Georgia and Homer



Institutional monumentalism at its best (or worst), the General Post Office took almost five years to complete and covers an entire city block. Although a lavishly outfitted, state-of-the-art facility, incorporating a rooftop heliport and an underground mail tunnel stretching over two kilometres to the Canadian Pacific Railroad station, the building ignited unusually strong criticism when completed. Traditional murals and bas-relief sculpture also met with derision, and despite costing \$1.6 million to build, the underground tunnel was soon abandoned in favour of truck transport. Today, even the marble-walled grandeur of the vast main postal hall is obscured by movable wall dividers, but the building's sumptuous materials and meticulous detailing are still worthy of note. A recent upgrade has returned the building to its original colour, exposed the ultramarine tile details in the façade and conserved the pair of massive aluminum coat-of-arms on the Georgia Street frontage.

01 VANCOUVER VOCATIONAL INSTITUTE

250 West Pender Street, Vancouver  
Sharp & Thompson, Berwick, Pratt 1948–49

@ Pender and Cambie [Victory Square]



Now Vancouver Community College, this school is notable primarily as one of the first examples of the International Style erected in Vancouver's downtown core. Architect Bob Berwick organized three multi-story blocks around a central courtyard and connected them with recessed corner stairwells. In keeping with the functionalist principles of the Bauhaus, Berwick celebrated the stairs and structural columns by exposing them through floor to ceiling glazing. Immediately popular, additions were required in 1964, 1969, and 1983. The 1983 additions also extensively reconfigured and renovated the interiors.

Photo credit BC Hydro  
From 1953 BC Electric Annual Report

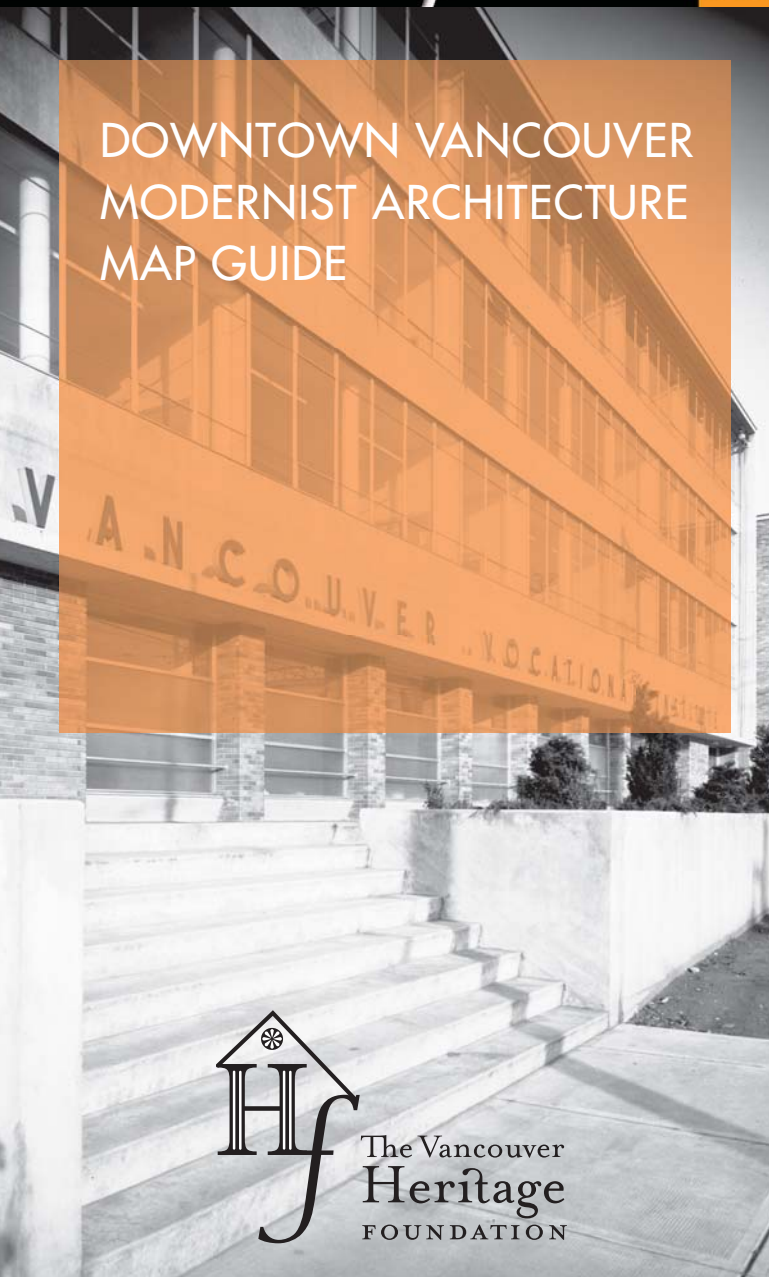
...at the beginnings of our movement stood an idea, not an obsession with specific forms and techniques. The activities of life itself were under scrutiny. How to dwell; how to work, move, relax; how to create a life giving environment for our changed society...The common characteristics which clearly emerged from all these innovations are: an increase in flexibility and mobility; a new indoor-outdoor relationship; and a bolder and lighter, less earthbound architectural appearance...

Walter Gropius, founder of the Bauhaus School, 1919  
Address to Columbia University, 1961



OPEN VANCOUVER  
mid-century modern

DOWNTOWN VANCOUVER  
MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE  
MAP GUIDE



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D.O.C.O.M.O.M.O.B.C.

MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE IN DOWNTOWN VANCOUVER

In the wake of the World War II, there emerged a sense of world wide renewal and a desire to rebuild. The opportunity was ripe to explore new materials, technical innovation, and a radical shift in social values away from appearance and towards quality of living. These Modern Movement ideas, which had emerged in Europe in the early 20th century and gained momentum after World War I, were well suited to Vancouver, a young and growing city. This was the perfect environment for creative designers to search for new forms, and develop these into a unique expression of West Coast life.

In the practice of architecture this evolved into Modernism (and the Modernist Style, a development of the International Style as it was introduced in North America in the early 1930s). Modernist buildings are characterized by clean, elegant lines; little ornamentation, and a construction and layout generated primarily by function. In BC the style would become known as West Coast Modernism.

In the 1940s in Vancouver, developers began to look west of the established Gastown core and West Hastings financial district. Influenced by architect C.B.K. Van Norman, Burrard Street would become the new downtown corridor. Anchored by the Art Deco landmark Marine Building at its north end, Burrard Street would develop into a civic, cultural and commercial centre modeled on the new vision of Modernism. This westward push permitted architectural experimentation. The erection of the Customs Building, Dal Grauer Substation and the BC Electric Building along Burrard Street in the 1950s established Modernism as a legitimate mode of civic architecture.

Prior to the war, Modernism had been limited to single-family homes (mostly by avant-garde architects and artists on the North Shore), and to a few isolated projects in the province (Revelstoke City Hall in 1938-39, and Powell River Company Store in 1941, both by Van Norman). In Vancouver, beginning with Vancouver Vocational Institute (now Vancouver Community College) in 1949, designers looked at Modernism with fresh eyes and began using its ideas to shape the city centre. Life, art and design were

intrinsically intertwined - as demonstrated by the integration of noted educator and artist B.C. Binning's works in many of the early downtown projects.

Architect Ned Pratt, of Thompson, Berwick and Pratt architectural firm (preceded by Sharp & Thompson, founded 1908) had collaborated in 1941 with Binning on Binning's own house & studio in West Vancouver. Pratt continued to champion the growth of this new expression, while his firm became the virtual "graduate school" for a generation of Vancouver architects. The architectural firm of McCarter and Nairne, would continue to dominate the early post war years with their ability to innovate and master various styles, while the finest and most award winning International Style designs emerged from the architectural firm of Semmens and Simpson.

Although it was architect Arthur Erickson who would catapult West Coast Modernism onto the world stage and forever change BC's architectural landscape, the province's early proponents of the Modern Movement possessed ample talent and drive to create

unique and award winning works. Semmens and Simpson's Vancouver Public Library and the Marwell Building could hold their own against their international counterparts, while Van Norman's Burrard Building (and the lifting of downtown height restrictions) forever changed the direction and form of the downtown to a high-rise core.

Noted on this map is a selection of some of the more striking examples of the post war Modern Movement. Some have been altered to suit new uses, and sadly a few have been lost. Through these projects you can discover the compelling story of how Vancouver grew into its own unique sense of style, life and optimism.

For more information on Modernist architecture in BC visit [www.docomombc.org](http://www.docomombc.org) and [www.vancouverheritagefoundation.org](http://www.vancouverheritagefoundation.org).



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The Vancouver Heritage Foundation is a registered charity committed to the conservation of Vancouver's heritage buildings in recognition of their importance to the culture, economy and the sustainability of our city. The VHF supports the conservation of homes, commercial and public buildings, and sacred sites by:

- Giving the public practical tools, information and incentives to be successful in conserving heritage buildings.
- Creating opportunities for the public to access and learn about Vancouver's historic buildings.
- Attracting public and private sector support for an endowment to protect buildings into the future.
- Developing strategic relationships that nurture a civic culture supportive of heritage conservation.

D.O.C.O.M.O.M.O.B.C.

Modern Movement Architecture in British Columbia

[www.docomombc.org](http://www.docomombc.org)  
info@docomombc.org

Docomomo International (Society for the Documentation and Conservation of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods of the Modern Movement) was established in the Netherlands in 1988 and currently has 35 active working parties worldwide. It publishes a periodical, organizes conferences and workshops, and actively promotes the preservation of structures and landscapes from the modern era (generally 1920's to present).

Docomomo.bc is a registered non-profit society and was officially recognized as one of 3 Canadian working parties (along with Ontario and Quebec) in 1997. Although it is a relatively new organization, many of its members are well recognized and long time participants in heritage awareness and architectural preservation efforts in British Columbia, and have been involved in docomomo for many years. Docomomo.bc has produced "BC.MOMO Modern Movement Architecture in British Columbia", an interactive CD-ROM giving a comprehensive overview of Modern Movement architecture in BC. To purchase the CD visit [www.vancouverheritagefoundation.org](http://www.vancouverheritagefoundation.org)