

Vancouver skyline circa 1966

OPEN VANCOUVER

mid-century modern

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

Bergdoll, 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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Photo: Selwyn Pullan

Mid-Century Modernism in Vancouver

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

In the mid 1920's, 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



BC Archives

1. Hycroft Towers Residence

Architects: Semmens & Simpson, 1951

Developer : Marwell Construction

The building was designed with three wings projecting out over the embankment. The north wing, raised on piers, was built over two levels of parking and a service station, now incorporated into the parking garage.

The reinforced concrete frame of the building is modular construction which is reflected in the incised mouldings on the exterior concrete spandrels. The module determined the dimensions of the windows and the standardized millwork for the original space-saving built-ins. The windows are English Crittal windows developed after WWI and used on many Art Deco and Modernist buildings.

The building boasted 'modern conveniences' when it was constructed including: hardwood floors, ample light and fresh air, pleasant vistas and communal laundry. The sense of community was further enhanced by the Corbusian roof-garden over the north wing. Promotions for the building touted convenience and efficiency that was the most luxurious in the country.

Built on reputedly poor soil due to what was thought to be underground springs but which turned out to be leakage from the old wooden aqueduct supplying water to Shaughnessy, Engineer Otto Safrir built reinforced-concrete caisson foundations allowing a taller structure than was originally planned.

In 1973 Dawson Developments converted the building to strata units, in a move that proved controversial due to the older residents who were forced to purchase the units or move out.

The interior elevator hallway murals are by artist, Lionel Thomas who is described during an exhibit of his work in 2005 at the Belkin Gallery as 'a man of enormous enthusiasm..... one of a small circle of people who brought modern ideas about art and architecture to the city and won battles. Vancouver is a livable city because of them.'

Three units are open on the tour: #125 / #418 / #525.



2. Coultter Residence

Architects: Don Coultter, 1959
Contractor: Jim Oliver

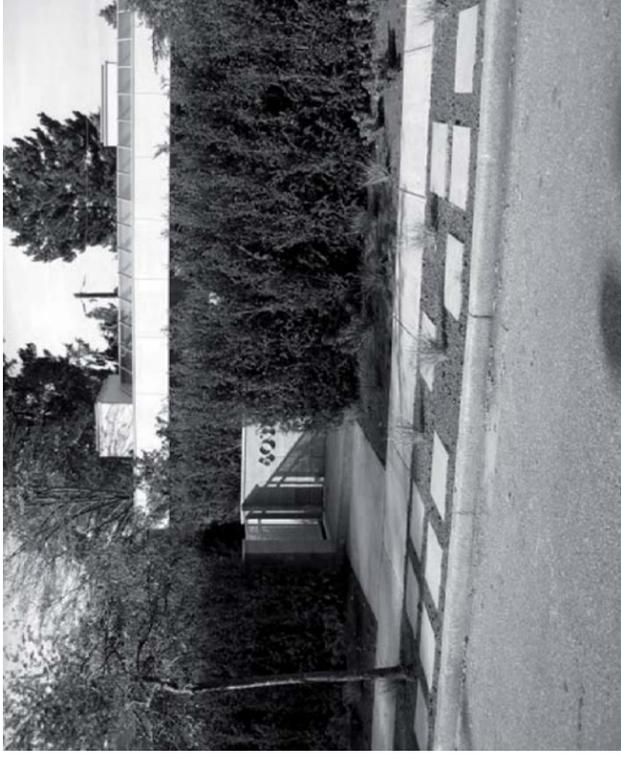
The Coultter Residence, located on the newly opened Southland Flats, was one of the first modern houses to be built below Southwest Marine Drive. Like the Peter Oberlander home across the street, architect Don Coultter (1931-2004) and wife Donna Mae, preferred a modern, functionalist home that would hover above the fertile landscape, offering a sense of the Fraser Delta and the euphoria of a raised living level. The house is exemplary because of its ingenious split-level plan which sets a lower level partially into the site and suspends an upper living level above a thriving garden. Vine Maple, Rhododendron and Japanese Maple accents, enjoy the peaty soil. All are over-viewed through a continuous south wall of glass. At the house entrance, vine Maples interweave with a series of steps and terraces. Coultter hand crafted sculptures, and lanterns abound in the low foliage. Garden and home become one.

Within the building, Coultter's precise detailing and fine cabinetry are evident. Furnishings are mid-century originals and are supplemented by the architect's accomplished watercolors.

The only changes made to the house are an early renovation that enclosed a portion of the back deck in order to enlarge the kitchen when the couple's third child arrived, and a new marmoleum kitchen floor.

Don Coultter was one the early graduates of the UBC School of Architecture. In 1955, he won the RAIC Medal, as top student. Like his contemporaries, Richard Archambault, Blair MacDonald, Clive Rowett, and Reno Negrin, they initiated spartan designs influenced by their Bauhaus oriented Professors, Lionel Thomas, Bert Binning and John Porter. Coultter worked briefly for John Porter then moved on to join Reno Negrin. He became Negrin's primary hotel designer. His outstanding works include many Western Hotel structures, the Discovery Inn at Campbell River and the Delta Suihiro Restaurant in Richmond.

Text by Barry Downs



3. Wright / Fitterman Residence

Architect: Unknown / 2006 Stuart Howard Architects Inc., MAIC
Contractor: 2006 Renovation - Yoshi Amano, Interior Craft Inc.

The house was built in 1957 for Mr. Temple Wright, President of Campbell and Grill, a roofing company established in 1901 and still in business today in Burnaby. Over the next five decades the house had more than eight different owners, and latterly suffered from a lack of maintenance and updating.

In 2006 the current owner began an extensive renovation of this post and beam house. What remains of the original structure are the beams and the tongue & groove cedar ceilings which are now painted in a warm putty colour, the original swimming pool which has been rehabilitated, the roof line, and the basic layout of the house.

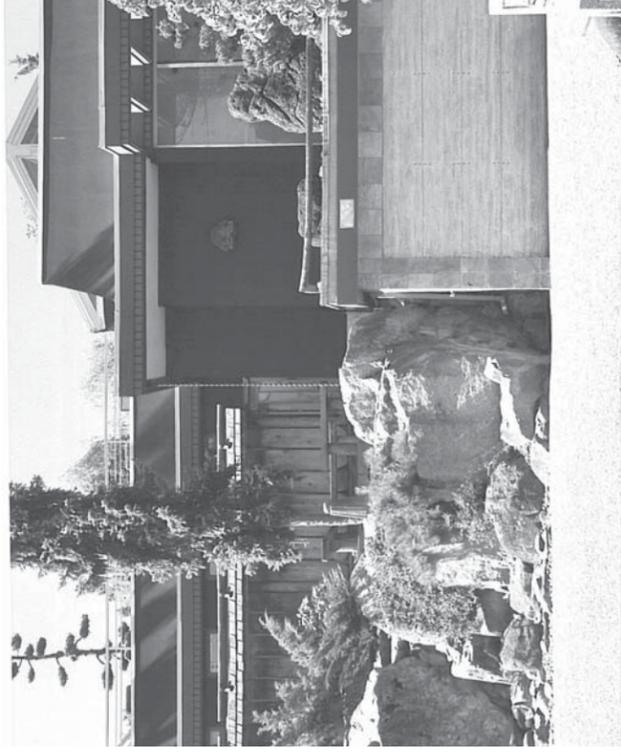
Key alterations to the house are the inclusion of the rear bedroom suite which was once connected to the rest of the house only through an outdoor breezeway and which is now incorporated into the interior space; the creation of a large ensuite for the master bedroom; and the front façade of the house which has been altered to a wall of glass from its original brick facing topped with a row of high windows.

At the rear of the house the glass walls looking out to the swimming pool remain. The configuration of the living, dining, kitchen and bedrooms remains much the same as it was originally, with the exception of the kitchen which was opened up to incorporate a small den/bedroom to the north.

The owner and architect carefully selected trades and suppliers to fulfill the vision of a clean-lined, low maintenance house and garden. From the grey, concrete based Super Panel from Germany that is bolted onto the exterior of the walls and parapet, to the aluminum sash and trimmed windows by Craftsman Glazing, to the pale marble floors throughout the interior and the coloured concrete exterior hard surfaces, the house requires little maintenance other than a power wash and a sweep. Some of the original fencing remains at the rear of the property, new horizontal fencing has been installed on the south side of the property to play off the horizontal lines of the house, while the new north and east perimeter walls are made of ground-faced, coloured concrete block which is an economical, practical and handsome privacy solution.

The house while staying true to the principles of its original mid-century design, has been updated to incorporate the latest in technology and materials for 21st century living.

Text by Barry Downs



4. Frackson Residence

Architect: Fred Hollingsworth, 1963

Bastion-like walls create an inner sanctuary protected from the activities and noise of two confining streets. Although now slightly altered and reflecting the expressive Asian interests of its current owners, the Frackson house remains one of architect Fred Thornton Hollingsworth's most important courtyard works. Indeed, the court/atrium theme was imaginatively exploited in other designs such as Shalal Gardens, UBC Faculty of Law building and his final design for the Kassam Residence on Belmont Avenue. All can be sourced from an available book on Hollingsworth titled "Living Spaces", published by Blueimprint, 2005.

A clever "T" plan contains a welcoming central garden/atrium accessed from a northwest entry stair. Major rooms open to a splendid, secluded terrace garden to the south. Maximum daylight is achieved through the extensive use of floor to soffit glass areas. Indoor - outdoor space relationships are abundant. Original dark brown trim, red dentals and white walls, inside and out, have given way to an exterior palette of grey, arguably more appropriate to its new rock/garden setting. There are new terrazzo floors, the same as the original. An effective continuity of form and spatial delight remains, in an original design reminiscent of Frank Lloyd Wright's "Mayan" influenced houses of Los Angeles. In this residence of high ceilings a grand and elegant scale prevails.

Alterations to the house include the front façade being brought forward toward the street, the carport closed in, and a new entry. The kitchen and bathrooms have been updated and there is no longer stained cedar inside and out. A large deck has been installed on the flat roof.



5. Purkis Residence

Architect: Gerald Hamilton Architects, Barclay Macleod, 1966
Contractor: Cape Construction - Ralph Schwartzman

The house was designed by Barclay McLeod, Gerald Hamilton Architects, and built by Cape Construction for Dr. Robert Purkis and his family who lived in the house until 1977. It has many features that characterize the Westcoast Modern style including: low centre of gravity nestled into the landscape, a courtyard bringing light and nature into the house, and a strong interior-exterior relationship in the living room and dining room. Throughout the ensuing 44 years these primary features have been retained.

The house has been well maintained with minimum alterations. In 1983, the original carport was filled in to provide an additional bedroom and bathroom on the main floor; and a new detached garage was erected. One further alteration was made in 1988 to add a 40 sq.ft. sunroom under the existing deck. Another recent change was to lighten the original natural-stained tongue and groove red cedar in the principal rooms.

Today the house is a 21st century family home with an updated kitchen and new bathrooms. The basement playroom, originally built for the Purkis children, continues to be a place for children to play. And, although it is almost half a century old, the house still feels 'modern' which is a testament to the design principles of Westcoast Modernism in mid-20th century Vancouver.

Gerald Hamilton Architects, which became Hamilton Doyle Architects in the 1970s, also designed the HR MacMillan Space Centre and Vancouver Museum (1968), East Asiatic House at 1201 W. Pen-der (1963), Frank Clare Stadium in Ottawa (1967) among other significant landmarks. Architect for the Magnolia Street house, Barclay Macleod, designed many houses in West Vancouver including 3670 Cedaridge Place, 5765 Seaview Place which is on the West Vancouver Heritage Register, and the award-winning Caulfield Cove Townhouses designed in collaboration with architect Ron Howard (Howard Bingham Hill - now Bingham Hill) in 1975. As a student, Mr. Macleod worked in the office of architect Douglas Simpson who designed Hycroft Towers (also open on the tour).