



OPEN VANCOUVER

mid-century modern

...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
- 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 modernism in Vancouver

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



residential tour 2008

McLellan-Saddy Residence, photo by Robert Lernermeier



1. McLellan-Saddy Residence

3245 West 48th Avenue
Thompson Berwick Pratt, 1958

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 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. A small city, in a superb setting with a temperate climate, it attracted young architects in search of a community open to new ideas. Many were influenced directly by the designers and institutions that initiated the modern 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 that central tenet of Modernism: that intelligent design is a genuine factor in the achievement of vital social goals.

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

In 1950s Vancouver, TBP was one of the largest and most important design firms, and an architect with talent and ambition was expected to spend at least a year there. While the firm had designed its own share of Neoclassical knockoffs, it's best remembered as the engine house for High Modernism. Perhaps the most crucial role of TBP was to make the new Modern paradigm accessible and attractive--not just for academics and mavericks but also for ordinary middle-class families.

The original house was constructed as a one-storey bungalow in 1958, while Ron Thom was a rising star at TBP and headed for partnership. The surviving blueprints of the McLellan-Saddy House, like most of TBP's smaller houses, aren't signed by any individual architect. But Thom's influence, if not his direct hand, lurks throughout. Thom's trademark strengths- the horizontal emphasis and the poetic solid-void rhythm- are certainly present. So are the Japanese influences so beloved of Thom: the geometric array of horizontal and vertical lines, and the spatial cavity alongside the fireplace evokes a ryokan (traditional Japanese guesthouse) wall.

TBP's 1974 addition of a second floor had generated more living space for the originally tiny bungalow. A more recent renovation in 2007 by D'arcy Jones Design Inc. created an eating nook in the kitchen and children's bedrooms on the second floor.

adapted from Weder, Adele. **Nip and Tuck**. Canadian Architect, April 2008, Vol. 53 Issue 4, p32-36



2. Gibson Residence

3249 West 49th Avenue

Architect Unknown, 1959-60

Landscape Designer: Nenagh McCutcheon

This residence is remarkable in that it has survived numerous renovations with its modernist bones intact. Today, remnants of the original house remain (evidenced by the front façade granite) as the base of a spacious family home on a large, beautifully landscaped property.

The house maintains the modernist sensibilities of a continuous flow between the interior and exterior, and open living spaces, with some of the original wood paneling surviving in the entrance hall and living room. Covered outdoor living spaces stemming from a 1964 renovation play a large part in the open-living concept of the house.

The property was farm land until 1959 when the Gibson Residence is listed in the city directories as ‘New House’ This was the same year H.R. Rosenfeld of Rosenfeld Construction received a building permit to erect a one-storey bungalow with a garage, three bathrooms and two bedrooms (one bedroom over the garage). In 1964, a building permit was issued to architects Scott & Furnadjieff, on behalf of owner E.A. Gibson, for extensive renovations to the house. At this time the living and dining rooms, entrance hall, two outside covered patios, updates to bathrooms and a carport were completed by Nielsen & Gramm Construction.

In 2004 the current owners, in collaboration with Stuart Howard Architects, altered the eastern front entry and garage, and completed interior work in the childrens’ bedrooms and in the basement. And no, the renovations are not over. The owners will soon be tackling the kitchen, master bedroom and pool room.

3.

7075 Hudson Street

Ron Thom (Thompson Berwick Pratt), 1963

Landscape Architect: Cornelia Hahn Oberlander

Inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright, this 6,000 sq. ft. house straddling two beautifully landscaped lots, embodies many elements of West Coast Modernism.

Wright’s influence is evident in among other elements, the deep overhangs, the seamless flow between exterior and interior, and the low entrance that explodes into a vaulted living room. West Coast Modernism is exemplified by the incorporation of Asian sensibilities, a close integration with site and setting, open plans, and liberal use of natural materials, including walnut screens, and clear cedar paneling in the principal rooms.

The house is centered around a brick core that houses the entrance hall, unique living room fireplace and a spiral staircase. The same brick extends to the flooring which has radiant heating.

The owners have rehabilitated the garden twice incorporating features brought from Japan: Including the stone lantern, the 30 stepping stones, and the Japanese millstones leading from north side of the dining room. The entrance way is paved with granite cobble stones recycled from city streets.

Changes to the house are not significant: A skylight was put into the previously dark entry, and an exterior entrance-way trellis collapsed and was not replaced. The west facing dining room wall which was once solid wood is now glass. The family room and laundry room recently received new flooring replacing the original vinyl flooring, and the kitchen and powder rooms have been recently updated.

4. Hwang Residence

Arthur Erickson, 1982

Landscape Architect: Cornelia Hahn Oberlander

In commissioning Arthur Erickson to design a home for them, Dr. Paul and Mrs. Josephine Hwang asked that it be nestled in private gardens and incorporate both Western and Eastern influences. According to the architect’s 1982 project description, the home is inspired by early classical houses of the garden city of Suzhou, China. These houses were built in pairs, oriented in opposite directions with a common rear wall. A series of rooms ran along that wall with each room oriented toward exterior decks and courtyards.

The Hwang Residence is accessed by crossing a bridge over ponds planted with lilies and bullrushes. Once inside there is a strong relationship between the interior rooms and the exterior courtyards, ponds and gardens. On the second storey, each of the four bedrooms connects to its own skylit private deck with sliding screens. The living room steps down from the entry to bring the seating area into the pond and create a greater volume of space within the room. A skylit extension is cantilevered over the pond; from the garden’s exterior point of view, the living room appears to float.

The timeless Japanese-tile roof, German-tile floors, hand-crafted kitchen counters and cupboards are all original. Finishes are seamless with ochre-coloured stucco, floating drywall, and Douglas-fir posts and beams throughout. Floor-to-ceiling windows and generous doors are below deep soffits opening onto decks and porches. Two ribbons of continuous skylights travel the length of the house and wash the interior in natural light.

written by Jan Alexander

5. Wong Residence

5010 Cambie Street

Duncan McNab, 1955

Landscape Architect: Cornelia Hahn Oberlander

The house was built for Mr. and Mrs. Wong Senior who wished to have a simple West Coast style modern house for themselves and their nine children. The chosen architect was Duncan McNab, who had studied at McGill. He was the perfect architect for this work. His designs expressed the residential building mode of post-war Vancouver by incorporating elements of the International Style, and responding to the regionalism of the Northwest coast forest by using primary inexpensive building materials of wood and glass.

Duncan McNab’s distinctive design was particularly responsive to the site. The Wong’s property on Cambie has a large outcropping of native rock along the Western property line. Cornelia Hahn Oberlander was called in to collaborate and integrate the building and site. She understood immediately the importance of the rock. The City wanted the rock removed because it intruded into the sidewalk by three feet, but the Landscape Architect prevailed saving the rock and giving noise and visual protection from the street. The usual boulevard planting on Cambie Street with grass was substituted with gravel which is still visible today. On the rock a small original tree is now a large specimen.

A path from Cambie Street leads to the inner courtyard of the house which was designed in the style of minimalism like an abstract painting. The sun is captured in the courtyard which originally allowed the children to play in a small rectangular piece of grass. This landscape is an early example of ecological design with low maintenance plant material requiring little water, with the aesthetics of modern gardens.

written by Cornelia Hahn Oberlander