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OPEN VANCOUVER 
mid-century modern



3846 West 10th Ave
Barber Residence

Date: 1936
Architect: Ross Lort

Residential Tour

The Modern Movement emerged in Europe in the early 20th century and gained momentum after World War I when there was a need for massive rebuilding. There was an opportunity for a way of building based on new materials, technical innovation, and a shift in social values away from appearance and towards practicality and functionality.

The movement soon reached across the Atlantic where it became known as the International Style. The buildings were characterized by clean, elegant lines; little ornamentation; and a construction and layout generated primarily by function. While examples of the style were realized in much of Vancouver's public architecture such as office towers, libraries, and educational buildings, it was in residential structures that the Modernist influence was most evident.

The International Style in Vancouver found a unique regional expression that became known as West Coast Modernism. Using the post-and-beam structural framework, architects capitalized on local building materials such as fir, cedar, and other lumbers that were cheap and widely available. Between the large posts and beams, generous and strategically placed windows and doors framed the region's magnificent views. The large panes of glass blurred the distinction between the exterior and interior while enhancing the veiled coastal light.

Japanese architectural influences were evidenced in both the open floor plans where living spaces flowed freely from one "room" to another, and in the low, flat roofs with wide overhangs that protected the glass from rain and sun.

Celebrating its 70th anniversary this year, the Art Moderne style Barber House is one of Vancouver's most distinctive and visible pieces of early modern architecture.

Built at the end of the Art Deco period and foreshadowing the tenets of the Modern Movement, the house embodies many interesting design features.

The exterior's board-formed concrete is poured over a skeleton of vertical steel columns - actual railroad rails - on a rigorous 4 foot wide grid. Within this structure the punched windows (most are the original single-glazed wood frame sash) are grouped in bands to accentuate the cubic nature of the design.

The interior was updated in 1990 leaving the living room in its original second floor position with its panoramic view and red-railed balcony. A palette of 1930's era materials - exotic Avodire wood veneers, mirror, polished plaster and lacquer are rendered in a contemporary manner. The strict geometry of the William Reed-designed landscape complements the original architecture.

In 1990 a contemporary infill dwelling was built along the lane on this formerly double lot, and the Barber house designated as a heritage building.

Rehabilitation and rear yard infill by Robert Lemon Architect and Ledingham Design Consultants



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4755 Belmont Ave
Copp Residence

Date: 1951
Architect: Ron Thom



6275 Dunbar St
Downs Residence

Date: 1959
Architect: Barry Downs



6095 Balaclava St
Danto Residence

Date: 1962
Architect: Arthur Erickson



2870 West 47th Ave
Saba Residence

Date: 1947
Architect: Ned Pratt

This Ron Thom masterpiece was constructed between 1950 and 1951 for Dr. Harold Copp, a noted member of the Faculty of Medicine at UBC.

Exterior architectural features such as the horizontal overlapping roof planes with deep overhangs, and the almost exclusive use of wood and glass, are defining elements of Ron Thom's interpretation of West Coast Modernism. His use of extensive glass walls creates transparency and ambiguity between house and site while taking full advantage of the northern view over English Bay.

The central brick fireplace and massive chimney act as an anchor that stabilizes the horizontality of the wings of the house, providing a visual focal point. The clerestory window to the south of the central living space balances the glare of the northern glass wall and expands the perceived volume of the space.

An apprentice with the local firm of architects Thompson, Berwick & Pratt, Thom translated his respect for noted architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Richard Neutra, and artist B.C. Binning into something fresh, exciting, and suitable to the West Coast. Copp House was awarded a silver Massey Medal for Architecture in 1952 for its notable spacious open plan and integration with the contours of the terrain.



Built in 1959 and designed by Architect Barry Downs for his own family, the Downs residence and garden are an especially fine example of a Westcoast Modern home. The wood-frame, flat-roofed house, and landscaping dominated by native tree species are influenced by both the Californian scene and by Far-Eastern aesthetics, such as the use of wood in its natural state, the emphasis on modular design and the harnessing of natural light.

Its highly functional and open plan is representative of the Modernist design rationale. Its form is demonstrated in the uncluttered spaces, the separation of kitchen and entertainment areas, the private indoor/outdoor family space and the modest size of the house. In its original state, much of the furniture and light fixtures were designed by Mr. Downs.

The early Westcoast Modernist home required a new kind of landscaping which the Downs residence displays through an interplay between interior and exterior spaces. It is experienced through glass walls and extensions of interior wall lines into the landscape, the way the house embraces the private portions of the garden and the use of native plant material in a natural manner. Changing seasons are always a vitalising force within the inner rooms of the house.

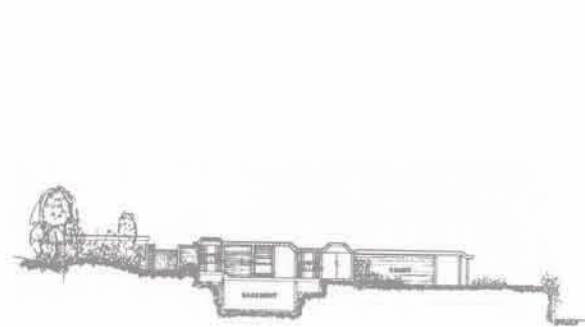
Considered to be unpretentious and beautiful in its time, the Downs Residence was one of 15 Canadian houses selected for the Massey Medal Exhibition in 1961.



This house was designed by architect Arthur Erickson for Dr. Julius L. Danto and his family. Constructed in 1962, the 1967 Massey Medal winner departs from the conventional, informal West Coast Regional Style of post-and-beam structuring. Rather than using natural materials, Erickson chose to use what he calls "the marble of our times" – concrete, as the main support of the building, offering residents the comfort of solid protection. His use of concrete was derived from a passion for simplicity and functionality, qualities apparent in both the exterior and interior of the house.

While the crisp white exterior, the U-shape of the house and the paved garden court make it a unique home in its neighbourhood, the roofline that rises and falls in a series of steps to follow the gently sloping site coupled with bamboo all around the cedar fence blend the house into its surroundings and keep it unobtrusive.

Inside, the stepped roof creates a changing play of interior spaces, and the sliding Japanese "fusuma" panels throughout the house add openness and flexibility to the already spacious interior. Designed for minimum maintenance and maximum functionality, this Erickson creation features dramatically simple lines that come together to form surprising, complex spaces pleasing to the eye and mind of its inhabitants.



Charles E. Pratt (Ned) of Thompson, Berwick and Pratt, designed this house in 1947 for the Clarence Saba family. This Kerrisdale residence is an early and fine example of Westcoast Modernism. It is important for its association with Mr. Pratt who was a pivotal figure in the development of Modern architecture both provincially and nationally. The house is one of the earliest examples of post and beam construction, a framing method that evolved with distinction on the West Coast.

The Saba Residence is also important for representing a shared desire to reconfigure the domestic realm to better reflect suburban family life. The use of the latest wood framing innovations, and the planning that integrated both the private garden and the more public auto court with the house proper, is evidence of the avant-garde architect and client together devising late 1940's novel forms of suburban living.

The building is a shed-roofed rectangular block shape, with two story windows on the street side that reveal an open stairway. The absence of stair risers furthers the general open feel of the house. Although only 30'x 16", the living and dining room area exudes a feeling of space and luxury. Upstairs there were originally three bedrooms with a play deck, accessible through sliding doors, off the children's' rooms. The main floor was originally divided into entry, dining room, living room and kitchen zones by built in storage units, some of which could be moved for entertaining.

