

# Modern Architecture in Manitoba

## An Overview



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**On the Cover:**

Photograph of Precious Blood Roman Catholic Church, Winnipeg, 1968, Etienne Gaboury Architect, courtesy Bryan Scott.

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# 1. Introduction

Manitoba is fortunate to have a collection of mid-century architecture that is both extensive and relatively complete. A group of architects, in most cases Manitoba-born and trained at the University of Manitoba, adopted Modernism just as the province was experiencing considerable population movement and societal change; some went on to develop regional variants that make Manitoba's mid-century architecture both representative of world-wide trends and unique to the province. These buildings have now reached an age at which they are beginning to be threatened by various issues, a fact that makes this a good moment to assess the province's mid-century architectural resources.

The decades following the Second World War were a time of optimism and excitement in North America, Canada, and Manitoba. The Great Depression had been survived, the war was over, and science and technology promised to make life longer, better, and more entertaining. These years saw Manitoba evolve into a modern society from the predominantly rural, agrarian community it had been.

Before the war, most Manitobans had lived in small towns and in rural areas with few modern conveniences; now the province had become a predominantly urban society in which more and more people had indoor plumbing, radios, electric stoves, refrigerators and even television sets. Rural areas, too, were beginning to experience modern advances; farm electrification, begun immediately after World War II, was essentially completed by the mid-1950s. The same period saw rapidly-improving telephone service expand across the province. Manitobans began to take control of their environment, as the Red River Floodway, conceived in the 1950s and constructed during the 1960s, protected the city of Winnipeg and the southern part of the Red River corridor from catastrophic floods against which there had previously been no defence beyond sandbags and prayer. Soldiers returned home from the war dreaming of raising families in their own small houses, and many were the first in their families to attend college or university. Those who chose to farm or live in small towns saw their children bussed to new consolidated schools that were replacing the pioneer one-room schoolhouses that their parents had reached on foot or horseback. Many more settled in the rapidly-growing cities, where new industries and an expanding professional sector put membership in the middle classes increasingly within their grasp.

These dramatic developments are marked today by buildings and other structures. Not surprisingly, given the societal shifts taking place, the majority of these structures are located in urban areas – particularly Winnipeg, but also, to a lesser extent, Brandon, Thompson, and Portage la Prairie; depopulating rural areas saw little new construction in the mid-century decades. If we agree that one of the prime reasons for understanding and preserving the built environment is that it is a physical manifestation of history, the buildings and sites of the mid-century period are important as a tangible memory of vast change on every level of Manitoban society: political, social, cultural and technological. Just as archaeological sites hold the secrets of Manitoba's pre-contact Aboriginal peoples and early European explorers, and the buildings of the Victorian and Edwardian ages tell the story of the province's early settler history, so its mid-century buildings stand as witnesses to the decades in which Manitoba as we know it today came into being.

Manitoba has largely avoided the kind of "boom and bust" economy that characterized many jurisdictions in the latter part of the twentieth century, and it has maintained growth at a fairly steady rate. As a result, the province has not seen the excessive development pressure that

can be so dangerous to the built environment, and it retains a large number of mid-century buildings in a range of styles.

The study of modernism was for some time cast largely in architectural, formalist terms. People tend to understand these buildings largely in terms of architectural theory, of the architect as artist, and of the materials, technologies and especially styles that make the buildings. But there is also a host of social and cultural themes that both explain and are shaped by mid-century architecture, and that may also interest a wider group of people. Perhaps the most obviously visible theme is the development of the suburb and of a variety of building types designed to cater to people driving motor vehicles. But mid-century buildings also speak of an age of optimism, when anything seemed possible – from space travel to the eradication of poverty. The buildings and sites of the modern period speak to this zeal for progress and the conviction that the built environment could change the world for the better.

## 2. The Development of Architecture in the Twentieth Century: A Brief Guide

### What is Modern Architecture?

The main storyline of architecture in the twentieth century is that of the development of Modernism, and various reactions to it. Most of us use the term “modern” to refer to something that is of its time, and perhaps even up-to-the-minute and fashionable. But from the 1920s or so in avant-garde circles, the term “Modern” came to refer to a particular approach by a group of architects who sought to cast off historical precedent and develop something entirely new and different for their own time. The carnage of World War I having convinced them that the ways of old Europe were a failure, Modernist architects saw historical styles—developed in response to earlier conditions—as anachronistic, irrelevant, and potentially decadent. They rejected ornament as frivolous and outdated, seeking instead to create an entirely new aesthetic based on the needs and opportunities of new materials and structural approaches such as reinforced concrete and steel frames.

### Structural Innovations

The development of the steel frame, which became a crucial aspect of Modern architecture, had its roots in the iron frames that began to make their appearance in the tall office buildings of Chicago in the 1880s. Until that time, almost all buildings of any size—including all masonry buildings—had depended on their walls to hold them up; the material of the walls both kept the weather out and formed the structure of the buildings. The taller the building was, the thicker the walls had to be at the base to support the vast weight above them (unless architectural devices such as domes and vaults were employed in combination with buttresses, as in ecclesiastical or large public buildings). There is a limit to how tall such a building can practically be before the lower floors begin to disappear in the thickness of the walls; the tallest load-bearing masonry office building ever built was Chicago’s Monadnock building in 1893, at seventeen storeys high and with walls six feet thick at the base. But with the development of the steel frame, the walls were no longer required to bear any weight; instead, the building was held up by the interior frame, while the walls kept the weather out.

Initially, such buildings were clad in brick, stone or terracotta. They continued to appear nearly as massive as their masonry predecessors, partly as a visual reassurance to the public that this radical new type of structure would not collapse. But as time went on, windows became larger and cladding thinner. The non-load-bearing walls came to be known as curtain walls because they hung on their frames. Steel frames also allowed for considerable flexibility of plan, with steel beams and girders allowing for the creation of wide interior spaces. Increasingly, architects began to think about the implications for a new aesthetic.

### The Aesthetics of Function

Louis Sullivan, an architect who was highly influential in the development of the Chicago School, and who had a profound effect on Modernist architects, coined the phrase “form ever follows function” in 1896. His idea was that the design of a building should be based on the needs of its function, not on historical ideas or precedent. By the 1930s, “form follows function” had become a rallying cry of Modernist architects who believed that they were approaching design



from a functionalist approach that resulted in buildings perfectly suited for their intended use, without unnecessary detail or extraneous decoration. In 1932, the architect Philip Johnson and the architectural historian and critic Henry-Russell Hitchcock co-curated an exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). They identified the new style, which they dubbed "**International Modernism**", with three main characteristics:

- Emphasis on architectural volume over mass. Thin outer walls, often with windows placed flush with or very near the outer surface, could create the impression of a shell stretched taut over the frame—very different from the massive appearance of a load-bearing wall pierced with openings.
- The rejection of symmetry, which had particularly characterized architecture in the classical tradition. Hitchcock and Johnson argued that the Modernists replaced symmetry with a sense of regularity, created by a feeling for rhythm and balance.
- Finally, the Modernists largely rejected applied decoration, with visual gratification instead being created through the use of intrinsically beautiful materials, elegant proportions, and the elements of structure itself.

The MoMA show greatly underplayed the social mission of the pioneering European modernists, many of whom were convinced that they could make a better society through architecture and urban design. They hoped the "light and air" of their mass housing schemes would improve the lives of the working classes living in crowded, down-at-heel tenements. They believed that their new style would make the world a better place.

The 1932 exhibition's three-part definition of the new architecture became a self-fulfilling prophecy as aspiring Modernists took it as a prescription for progressive design. Hitchcock and Johnson had also argued that International Modernism was equally at home in any social, cultural or climatic situation, and buildings in the new style sprang up from New York to Moscow, from Rome to Winnipeg, and, eventually, also from Seoul to Rio de Janeiro.

## Three Giants of Modernism

Advances in photography, inexpensive printing and the relative ease and speed of transatlantic travel allowed considerable influence to flow between the two main wellsprings of modernism in the early twentieth century. In turn-of-the-century Chicago, Frank Lloyd Wright had developed the Prairie Style of architecture, associated with low, horizontal silhouettes, deep eaves, open plans and a highly integrated ornamental program based, not on historical forms, but on geometry and nature. Wright's work was published in Europe in 1910 and was highly influential among the architectural avant-garde there. By the 1920s, several startlingly innovative buildings, now recognized as Modernist icons, had been completed in Europe. Although the most radical, like Gerrit Rietveld's Schröder House in Utrecht or Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye at Poissy, were too extreme to have an immediate effect on mainstream architecture, their lessons were noted and eventually absorbed. Standard features of suburban mid-century tract housing, such as open plans and deep overhanging canopies, find their roots in these early Modernist experiments. The three names most often associated with the development of High Modernism are Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Le Corbusier.



**Gerrit Rietveld, Schröder House, Utrecht, 1924**

The upper floor has no permanent walls, but sliding panels can partition it in different configurations. Such open planning—familiar now—was a radical departure from tradition. The asymmetrical exterior shows a total avoidance of traditional ornament. This building also demonstrates another common feature of Modernism; placed at the end of an older terrace, it makes no visual reference to its neighbours.

## Walter Gropius

Not surprisingly, schools of design act as crucibles for new ideas, just as publications are vectors for their dissemination. The Staatliches Bauhaus, founded in Weimar, Germany in 1919, was one such highly-influential school. When it was forced by the Nazi regime to close down in 1933 its founder, the Berlin-born Walter Gropius (1883-1969), was among the many European avant-garde architects who took their ideas and abilities to schools of architecture in the United States, galvanizing the development of modernism on this continent.

Gropius, who had begun his architectural career in the studio of Peter Behrens—considered to have been the first-ever industrial designer—was among the Europeans struck by the lessons of Frank Lloyd Wright. Together with Adolf Meyer, Gropius designed the facades for the Faguswerk, a shoe last factory in Alfeld-an-der-Leine (1911-13). The building was remarkable for the large expanses of glass that blurred the lines between the interior and exterior, and for its reliance on pure cubic forms with no ornament.

Gropius was director of the Bauhaus from 1919 to 1928. The school was founded on the idea that all the arts and crafts were of equal value and status, and that they should work in harmony to create a total work of art. Unlike some earlier movements (such as the Arts and Crafts Movement) that also preached a unity of art and handwork, the Bauhaus celebrated technology and the possibilities of mass production in creating high-quality, well-designed functional products. Although the teaching of architecture did not become part of the curriculum until the late 1920s, the school had a profound effect on architectural practice. Gropius eventually moved to the



**Walter Gropius and Adolf Meyer (facade), Fagus shoe last factory, Alfeld-an-der-Leine, Germany, 1911-13**

Prior to the development of the steel frame, it was impossible for windows to wrap around a corner in this way, and the architects have used this device to emphasize and celebrate the structural innovation. Practically, the large amount of glazing provided extensive natural light. The façade is devoid of ornament, with visual interest being provided instead by the balance and rhythm of the materials laid out in bands and grids

United States and brought his ideas to this continent, teaching at Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Several prominent Winnipeg architects took their training at MIT, bringing the Bauhaus influence directly to Canada via Manitoba.

Early in his career, Gropius had worked side-by-side in the office of Peter Behrens with two others who were to become perhaps the best-known Modernist architects in the world: Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969) and Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris, who later chose to be known as Le Corbusier (1887-1965). Although they originally worked from a similar set of ideas, they came eventually to rather different conclusions. Most architects of the mid-century period can be broadly classified as having been generally Miesian or Corbusian in approach. For all of them, though, the driving mechanism of twentieth century building was the development of an architecture based on structure and materials rather than on style and ornament. This rejection of everything historical changed the face of modern cities.



**Walter Gropius, Bauhaus, Dessau, 1925-26**

The Bauhaus School emphasized the harmonization of the crafts and the fine arts to create a total work of art. It had a profound influence on Modernist architecture, graphic design, furniture and other interior design, typography and industrial design. Here, the lettering has an aesthetic as well as a practical function.

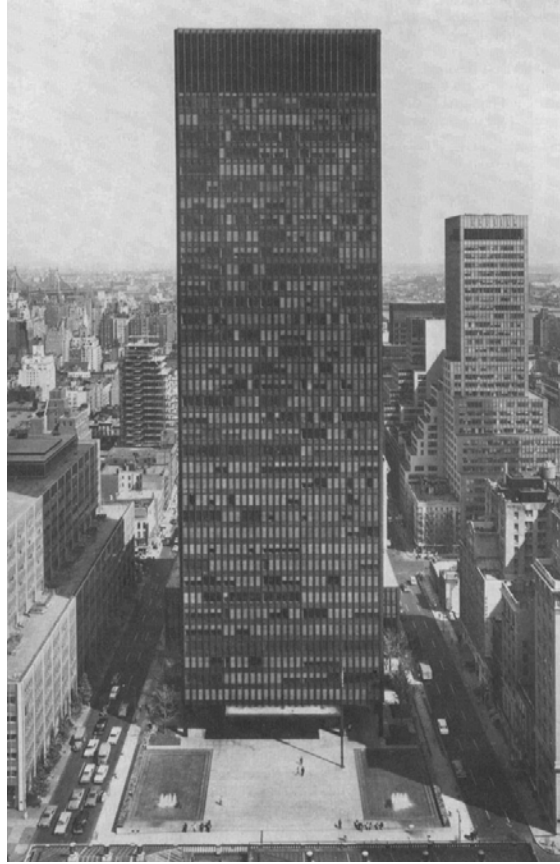
## Ludwig Mies van der Rohe

Mies was director of the Bauhaus from 1930 until it closed, at which time he left for the United States and became a highly-influential architect and instructor at Chicago's Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT). He developed a style that was angular and spare, typically using dark glass and metal. His buildings tend to assume one of two forms, both of which display the grid of their structure: a sleek oblong skyscraper, such as New York's Seagram Building, or a low pavilion on a podium, such as Crown Hall, the School of Architecture building at IIT. Mies saw these basic forms, with variations, as solutions for any building type, in any situation. Coining the aphorism "less is more," he did away with ornament and insisted that the structure itself must always determine the aesthetic of a building. He was sometimes criticized for refusing to consider fully the building's requirements, causing practical considerations to take a back seat to his own aesthetic choices.



**Mies van der Rohe, Crown Hall, IIT, Chicago, 1950-56**

Mies often used rich, polished materials, which, with elegance of proportion, provide visual interest and beauty without ornament. Here, the capabilities of steel frame construction are evident in the fully glazed exterior walls and the large open space on the main floor.



**Ludwig Mies van der Rohe with Philip Johnson, Seagram Building, New York, 1958**

An icon of International Modernism, the Seagram Building expresses its structure on the outside and has no other ornament. Ironically, fire regulations required the steel framing to be clad in masonry, and Mies expressed his hidden structure by attaching non-load-bearing bronze I-beams to the exterior of the cladding. Emphasizing that the structural frame—not the visible walls—is holding up the building, the entrance level is a glass box smaller than the footprint of the building. Other features common to many International style buildings are the cantilevered canopy over the entrance and the setting of the building in a large plaza.

## Le Corbusier

The Swiss-born Le Corbusier came to favour a more expressionist approach, with curves and surprises. Even his earlier buildings that were emblematic of the International Style, such as the Villa Savoye near Paris, added dramatic curving elements to their basic rectilinearity. Le Corbusier believed in the late 1940s that he had designed a one-size-fits-all apartment building—called the Unité d’Habitation—that would work in any situation and any climate; several versions were built in different cities. But he eventually inclined to relate his buildings more directly to their surroundings and needs, and to use forms with emotive force, as he did at the chapel of Notre Dame du Haut in France.

In contrast to Mies’s taut curtain walls and gleaming surfaces, Le Corbusier often employed rough, poured-in-place concrete, deep window reveals and dramatic shapes to create forms that are emotive rather than intellectual. As he did in his buildings for the new Punjabi capital at Chandigarh, India, Le Corbusier’s mature work took into account local conditions of climate and culture, as well as the function of the building.



### Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, Poissy, 1929

Le Corbusier identified five points that he believed were the key features of Modern architecture; all are present in this weekend house near Paris:

- The use of pilotis, or support columns, to elevate the main building above the ground and allow the space under it to be used.
- A flat roof, on which a terrace would reclaim for outdoor use the same space on which the building sat.
- A free plan. The use of a steel frame and the elimination of load-bearing walls allowed the interior to be arranged without regard to structural needs.
- A free façade. The thin curtain wall, with no requirement for bearing a load, could have openings where convenience and beauty demanded them.
- Ribbon, or strip windows, which provided extensive light and ventilation and emphasized the non-load-bearing quality of the wall.

Le Corbusier was also highly influential for his ideas about city planning. As early as 1922, he had developed a design for a *Ville Contemporaine*, which featured enormous skyscrapers standing isolated in green space and connected by a system of raised roads with interlinked airports and train stations. Pedestrian and vehicular traffic were completely separated, and the city would be heavily zoned by use, with the well-to-do people living in houses outside the urban precinct and workers in skyscrapers nearer to the factory zones. Le Corbusier's ideas gave us several themes that were to influence bricks and mortar urban development in Canada, including the placement of buildings in open spaces (such as the paved plazas around office towers or the open—theoretically park-like—precincts around housing projects), the separation of pedestrian from vehicular traffic (such as pedestrian overpasses or dedicated cross-town expressways), near-total dependence on the automobile, and the dedication of inner city areas to offices that would be abandoned at 5:00 each evening by white-collar workers leaving the supposedly grimy city for the leafy suburbs.



**Le Corbusier, Notre dame du Haut, Ronchamp, France, 1955**

This building could hardly differ more from Crown Hall, though it was built at nearly the same time. In place of Mies's strict geometry and smooth, polished surfaces, Le Corbusier used rough concrete, poured in place in expressionist curves and following the contour of the hill on which the building stands. The thick walls, pierced by windows of different shapes and sizes, create a mysterious and emotive interior very appropriate for a pilgrimage church.





**Le Corbusier, Punjabi Legislative Assembly, Chandigarh, India, 1957**

Nearly Contemporaneous with the Seagram Building and Crown Hall, Le Corbusier's work at Chandigarh, with its weathered concrete surfaces, is very different in approach although he employed the grid form on the sides of this building. Responding to the location, he set the windows deep into the walls, creating "brises-soleils," or sun-breaks, to shade the interior from the hot Indian sun. The dramatic inverted parasol shape is derived from traditional regional building forms.



## A Catalogue of Modern Styles

Like most new doctrines, Modernism began among the avant-garde and gradually became mainstream. As the Miesian glass box was widely adopted, some critics began to complain that cities the world over were coming to resemble each other and consequently losing their identities. “God is in the details,” Mies had famously said, and Modernism’s elegant forms, deceptively simple and easy to copy, could quickly result in dull, banal buildings in the hands of less able architects. Among the followers of a Corbusian approach, who were more inclined to react to local conditions, climates and needs, Modernism was becoming more varied in its appearance and regional differences are more evident. People came to realize that it was no accident that different styles had developed in various climates and situations; for comfort and efficiency, the grey and rainy conditions of one city demand a different kind of building than the hot and arid climate of another. In particular, architects working in extreme climates responded to Modernist theory with a range of regional solutions. By the 1950s, many architects were beginning to move away from the spare outlines of high modernism to develop a wider range of forms.

The following pages provide a brief guide to some of the more common developments from the International Modernism that Johnson and Hitchcock had named in 1932. These include:

- Popular Modernism
- Brutalism
- Corporate Modernism
- New Formalism
- Post Modernism

## Popular Modernism

The beginnings of Modernism came with a good deal of writing, theorizing and debate about the meaning of Modernist forms and the role architecture could and should play in society. But bit by bit, its forms also entered popular culture and small-scale commercial architecture. For such businesses as coffee shops, diners, motels, bowling alleys and a host of other building types—mostly small commercial or recreational buildings—up-to-date or particularly noticeable architecture can act as an advertisement. In the late 1920s and the 1930s, Art Deco had played this role, and as Modernism entered the mainstream, its forms began to spill over into these commercial building types as well. The 1950s and 60s, particularly, saw the development of a popular type sometimes called “space age” modernism, or named “googie” after a coffee shop of that name in Los Angeles. These buildings used dramatic architecture as a billboard to advertize themselves, and often featured such elements as folded plate or concrete shell barrel vault roofs, amoebic curves and jutting cantilevers, bright colours and striking graphics. Large neon signs were often an added identifying feature, and the signs themselves could be almost architectural in scale.

One of the best examples of Popular Modernism in Manitoba is Perth’s Drycleaners on Main Street in Winnipeg.



**Quigley and Clark, Kona Bowling Lanes, Costa Mesa, CA, 1959**

The eccentric folded-plate roof line, plate glass windows rising the height of the walls, and eye-catching roof fins combine to draw attention.

## Brutalism

The British architects Peter and Alison Smithson coined the term “New Brutalism” in 1954, taking it from Le Corbusier’s term “béton brut,” or raw concrete, which referred to the look of cast-in-place concrete with the marks of the wooden forms visible on its surface. The style was intended as a critique of the refined surfaces, thin skin and increasing uniformity of high Modernism. It was used mostly for public buildings, and remained relatively popular until the mid-1970s. Typical Brutalist buildings feature blocky shapes, often with brises-soleils and deep-set windows. The reinforced concrete walls are load bearing (rarely, one sees other facing materials such as brick or stone), and the overall massive impression of these buildings is very different from that of the Miesian curtain-wall construction that was by then nearly ubiquitous.

A fine Manitoba example of Brutalism is the Manitoba Theatre Centre.



**Kallman, McKinnell and Knowles, Boston City Hall, Boston, MA, 1968**

Varied exterior forms delineate different functions (such as the council chamber and mayor’s office), while deep-set window openings create a highly textured façade.

## Corporate Modernism

By the late 1950s there was a demand for corporate buildings that included eye-catching features and forms that were less cerebral and more individual than those of International Modernism. Architects of early corporate modernist buildings sought to develop forms that would be unique and identifiable with a particular image. These buildings tend to be sleek and polished, often with a lot of reflective glass. Although many follow the basic forms of International Modernism, they are not restricted to oblong shapes and right angles, and often feature large glass atria, sometimes several storeys high. The firm perhaps best known for corporate modern buildings is Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (SOM), architects of the Sears Tower (now known as the Willis Tower). Extended into the speculative market, corporate modern buildings continued to dominate the urban skyline until the end of the twentieth century, with nods to various prevalent styles.

In Manitoba, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill were responsible for the Richardson Building in Winnipeg.



### **Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, Willis (formerly Sears) Tower, Chicago, 1973**

An excellent example of corporate modernism, the Willis Tower is made up of nine oblong tubes of varying heights, each one like an individual International Modernist building but together forming an attention-grabbing silhouette. Combined with its one-time status as the tallest building in the world, this provided name-brand identity for the Sears Corporation, which occupied only a relatively small part of the building.

## New Formalism

In contrast to the rough massiveness of Brutalism, some Late Modernists a decade later began adding historical references to their work, in a highly-polished style that has been dubbed New Formalist. These buildings, like International Modernist buildings, are usually light in feeling with many windows, but they include classical or sometimes gothic motifs such as the arcade (rounded or pointed) and cornice. New Formalism appears particularly in small office buildings, banks and civic buildings. It shares International Modernism's restrained elegance, but with a wider variety of forms. New Formalist buildings are often clad in white marble or—more modestly—in white-painted stucco or concrete.



**Edward Durell Stone, State University of New York at Albany, NY, 1964**

Stone designed an entire university campus in this style that interprets modernism in a classical vocabulary including arcades, vaults and supporting columns.

## Post Modernism

Post Modernism appeared on the architectural landscape in the mid-1960s as a rejection of High Modernism's functional, increasingly bland forms and lack of sympathy to site or history. Pioneering post modernist Robert Venturi insisted, in protest against the Miesian aesthetic, that "less is a bore." Although Post Modernism shared bright colours and unusual shapes with Space Age Modernism, it was heavily theorized from the beginning, and was not limited to commercial buildings. For the first time in decades, cutting edge architects were rejecting the proscription on decoration and history, and were using ornamental details for their own sake, without reference to structure. Originally, Post Modern buildings often made ironic "in jokes" about architectural history, exaggerating proportions or using elements out of context. They combined aspects of historical architecture with modernist structure and splashes of colour, and they often made reference to neighbouring buildings or to the history of the site. As time went on, Post Modernism developed a series of identifiable features that could be deployed to create buildings that lacked the creative sense that had driven the earlier designs, much as the Miesian office block had been reduced to a banal and characterless vocabulary in the hands of lesser architects. Square window openings, pastel colours and curved banks of glass all fill the bill. Employed by creative architects, however, the Post-modernist approach could result in witty and attractive buildings that responded well to their surroundings.

Though far more conservative than the example below, the CanWest building in Winnipeg is Post Modern in style.



**Michael Graves, Portland Public Service Building, Portland, OR, 1977**

The Portland Public Service Building was the first large Post Modern office building. The exaggerated architectural motifs, such as the giant keystone with ribbon windows running through it, are architectural "in-jokes" that put it squarely in the Post Modern camp. The square window openings and pastel colours are also characteristic.



### 3. Modern Architecture in Manitoba: A Brief Guide

The exciting and vibrant activity that drove Modern architecture in Europe and the eastern United States in the second and third decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was also experienced in Manitoba, though its effects were felt somewhat later. Following is an outline of the adoption and adaptation of modernist approaches in Manitoba buildings. It is not intended to be an exhaustive discussion of the architecture of the period, or to address every important site, but the examples illustrated provide a good idea of the significance of the mid-century built environment in the province.

#### The Early Years: c. 1925 to 1934 and beyond

The early stages of the radical Modern movement were largely ignored in Canada, at least outwardly.<sup>1</sup> Canadian architects continued to work with familiar styles for several more decades, with Manitoba not seeing its first International Modernist buildings until the 1950s. Architects and others debated what the most appropriate style might be for their time, but generally concluded that Modernism was too radical and unsuitable for the Canadian situation, preferring instead to adapt various historical styles. They did, however, adopt new materials and approaches, and many an early twentieth century Manitoba building features traditional ornament over a wholly modern structure.

Aesthetically, the influence of modernism began to appear in the simplification of detail and flattening of planes, particularly in the classical idiom. The resulting style, often known as “stripped classicism,” allowed architects and clients who were wedded to traditional styles as a way to express certain notions—such as the solidity and grandeur appropriate to a bank building or court house—to continue to draw on those ancient associations while bringing their designs somewhat up to date in the modern context.

As ornament and historical precedent were gradually stripped away, the streamlined style that emerged in the thirties and forties came to be known as “**Moderne**.” This style was used particularly for residential and small commercial buildings. An early manifestation of Modernism in Manitoba, this style had been outdated in Europe for two decades before it made its appearance here.

Often, Moderne appears as a vernacular expression of Modernism—an adaptation of some Modernist characteristics into the work of designer-builders. It is generally identified with plain wall surfaces of concrete, stucco or masonry (usually brick), often with curved corners. Windows may be placed asymmetrically, and glass block is a common material. Moderne commercial buildings may feature small cantilevered canopies, usually with curved corners, and lettering used with decorative effect. The Moderne style offered an elegant, up-to-date appearance and could be quite affordable to build since it did not depend on the expensive materials and ornament of Art Deco. It also lent itself well to an inexpensive updating of earlier buildings. It was commonly adopted for low-rise apartment buildings in the city.

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<sup>1</sup> Harold Kalman, *A History of Canadian Architecture*, volume 2 (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 705.



**Frank R. Lount, Winnipeg Clinic (before additions), 1942**

This original portion of the Winnipeg Clinic illustrates many features of the Moderne style. It is horizontal in orientation, and has an asymmetrical façade with a flat roof and no cornice or other projection at the roofline. The overall impression is of a streamlined shape, with sleek limestone walls and the rounded south side (at right) accentuated by the use of glass block. Except for some subtle incised details around the entrance there is neither ornamentation nor reference to traditional architectural styles. The building has received two additions, and the windows have been altered.

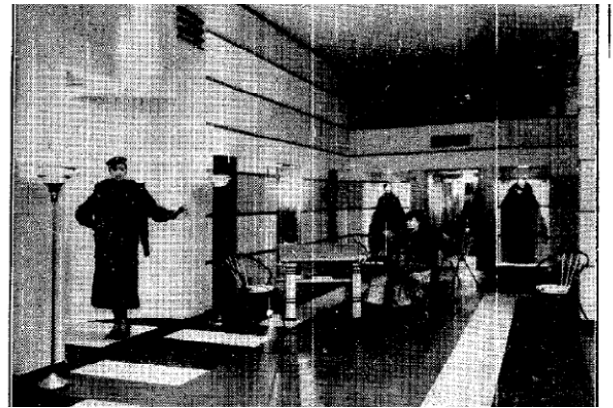


**Moderne door canopy addition to the Peck Building, Winnipeg, (building by Charles H. Wheeler, 1893)**

A minor facelift such as this could update a building without too much financial outlay. This door canopy, in which the lettering is a key element of the design, may have been added in 1928 when the building underwent somewhat extensive interior alterations.

## Opening the Doors to Modernism: 1934-1955

In 1935 the *Winnipeg Free Press* hailed the arrival of what it called “the first example of true modern architecture in Winnipeg.”<sup>2</sup> The building, by the firm of Green, Blankstein, Russell and Ham (later Green, Blankstein and Russell), was a new retail shop for the Hurtig Fur company, at 262-4 Portage Avenue. The newspaper article is instructive, as it clarifies how Manitobans approached Modernism in that time. The architects reportedly asserted that the building was modern only in that it was “simply a development to meet the owners’ needs and wishes in a straight-forward manner in good, suitable materials. There is no unnecessary ornament, and no attempt has been made to follow any particular architectural style.” The large plate glass windows (now obscured by signage) and elegant, streamlined interior (wholly altered) must have made an impression on Depression-era Winnipeggers.



**Green, Blankstein, Russell and Ham,  
Hurtig Furs, Winnipeg, 1934**

This building is faced in Tyndall stone with simple incised Art Deco motifs. The words “Hurtig Furs,” spelled out in aluminum letters thirty inches high, would have provided an aesthetic focus. The “vast expanse of glass,” as the newspaper called it, was obviously a radical sight for Manitobans in the mid-1930s.

The Great Depression and the war years were quiet ones for the building industry in Manitoba. Even in the early 1940s, though the prairie drought had ended, construction remained restricted by the war effort; relatively few large buildings were erected until later in that decade. By the time building began again in earnest, architecture had undergone a sea change. Even Manitoba, which was not given to charging ahead in the vanguard of style, was moving steadily in the direction of Modernism, with historic ornament and extensive detail increasingly rarely to be seen. Modern approaches were more and more affecting the skin as well as the bones of buildings.

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<sup>2</sup> “First Example of New Architecture Features Hurtigs,” *Winnipeg Free Press* (January 4, 1935): 8.

Historians have identified the 1950s and 60s as a period of Renaissance for Manitoba after a long difficult period that had lasted since the beginning of World War I.<sup>3</sup> In Manitoba, as in areas across the developed world, the mid-twentieth century saw vast changes to society and culture. Not surprisingly, these were reflected in both the types of structures that were being built, and the styles and materials used for them. Although agriculture remained the province's driving economic force through much of the period, Manitoba's population became increasingly urban, resulting in expanding cities and shrinking or disappearing small towns and villages. In 1941, 55% of the province's population lived in rural areas, but a decade later this had declined to 43%.<sup>4</sup> Ten years later the divergence had increased still more dramatically.

## University of Manitoba Faculty of Architecture

All this population movement demanded new buildings in new places, and when the province was ready to build again, the School (later Faculty) of Architecture at the University of Manitoba was prepared with architects eager to work in the new style. Indeed, the university's School of Architecture has produced some of the foremost Canadian practitioners of Modernism, and with its help Winnipeg became what has been called "a kind of crucible of Canadian Modernist architecture."<sup>5</sup>

The school was established in 1913. John A. Russell, who had taught in the school since 1928, became its first dean in 1946. Trained at MIT, the American-born Russell maintained connections with prominent architects and schools in the United States and Britain, encouraging his students to go abroad for work and learning. Through Russell, and through the students who sought enrichment at places like MIT and IIT, the school had early connections to some of the architects and designers who had been in the vanguard of Modernism in Europe and the United States—including Gropius, Mies, Eero Saarinen and Louis Kahn. Thus, Manitoban architects were well aware of international developments and ready to bring architectural innovations to the province.

Several of these University of Manitoba-trained architects remained in the province after graduation, and they, together with local architects trained elsewhere, created a collection of high-quality modern buildings in Winnipeg and elsewhere in the province. By the 1950s, they were producing buildings in the International Modernist style.

In 1955, the *Free Press* sought to introduce the new style to the public, with an article on "Modern Design in New Winnipeg Buildings." Author Gordon Sinclair defined "the new trend" as follows: "functional, devoid of unnecessary frills, and with cleancut lines; buildings composed, in some cases, largely of glass."<sup>6</sup> The article provides several examples of the new style, including the recently-completed Manitoba Power Commission building on Portage at Dominion (now Manitoba Highways) and the new post office on Graham It also mentions the Dayton Building, then under construction at the corner of Portage and Hargrave. Completed in November of 1955, "Winnipeg's first experiment" in the "ultra-modern" commercial building was afforded an article

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<sup>3</sup> Serena Keshavjee, citing Edward Whitcomb, "Introduction: Modified Modernism," in *Winnipeg Modern: Architecture 1945-1975*, edited by Serena Keshavjee (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2006), p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> *Manitoba 125: A History*. Volume Three: *Decades of Diversity* (Winnipeg: Great Plains Publications, 1995) p. 55.

<sup>5</sup> Keshavjee, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon Sinclair, "Business in Glass Houses: Modern Design in New Winnipeg Buildings," *Winnipeg Free Press* (1 January 1955): 21.

of its own.<sup>7</sup> The chief attraction was its glass facades, and the building was said to reflect “the planning of the future.” Its architects, Green, Blankstein and Russell, were clearly identified as the local innovators in Modernism.



**Green Blankstein, and Russell, Dayton Building, Winnipeg, 1955**

At the time of its construction, this building was hailed as Winnipeg’s first all-glass-faced structure. The development over two decades from the same firm’s Hurtig Furs building illustrates Manitoba architects’ transition to International Modernism; ornament is provided only by the structural elements themselves and by the lettering, and the structure is clearly expressed—with the glass curtain walls revealing the support columns inside. The building is now home to a sports bar; the ground floor and interiors have been altered, while the curtain wall has recently been with large-scale decals.

By the end of the decade, High Modernism was established, for the moment, as the principal style for government and institutional buildings, with several major projects having been carried out as International Modernist designs. With its underlying progressive ideology, this style was remarkably appropriate for a rapidly-growing government with a vision of progress and an improved society.

Generally, International Modernism offered a fairly uniform solution to the challenges and opportunities presented by building programs. Manitoba architects have been credited with creating regional variants through, for example, the use of the visually-characteristic Tyndall stone for cladding on the Norquay building, the airport terminal, and others. Slightly later, several Manitoba architects developed more truly regional styles based on modernist principles.

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<sup>7</sup> “Ultra-Modern Block on Site of Ruin,” *Winnipeg Free Press* (18 November 1955): 14.



**David Thordarson for Green, Blankstein, and Russell, Norquay Building, Winnipeg, 1959**

With its glass curtain wall set slightly behind strong vertical piers, a flat canopy over its entrance, and its placement in a compact plaza (all that the small site would allow) the Norquay building is a textbook essay in International Modernism. Tyndall stone for the cladding on the side walls creates some harmony with earlier surrounding buildings. The style, with its promise of a bright future, was particularly appropriate, as this building represents the crest of a wave of expansion of government in Manitoba that occurred between 1958 and 1969, under the premiership of Duff Roblin. During this time, provincial expenditures increased fourfold and the civil service doubled in number.

## **Prairie Regionalism and Major Firms and Designers**

In Manitoba and elsewhere in the 1960s and 70s, many architects began to see that a general architectural solution had its limitations, and that cities filled with such generic buildings could easily become quite characterless. These Late Modernists began to modify the forms of High Modernism, introducing more sculptural shapes and producing buildings that were more individual. As International Modernism began to give way to a series of creative innovations, it is not necessarily possible to attach a style name to each building, and architectural historians differ as to the names they assign to the stylistic variations that arose. A common thread, however, is that architects in this later mid-century period were almost invariably reacting to International Modernism; its ideologies, its materials, its technologies and its forms were embraced or rejected or stretched to greater or lesser degrees to develop the buildings of the later decades of the century. In Manitoba, several prominent architects who had begun in the Modernist School began to develop their own approaches in response to the opportunities and exigencies of prairie conditions and the existing built environment. These notable Manitoba firms are briefly profiled, with major projects illustrated, on the following pages:

### **Major Firms**

Green, Blankstein and Russell (GBR)  
Libling, Michener, and Associates  
Moody, Moore Partners  
Number Ten Architectural Group  
Smith, Carter (with various associates)  
Waisman, Ross and Associates

Architectural firms have a tendency to form and re-form under different names, with varying combinations of associates. The firm names here are those by which the firms were probably best known during the 1950s and 60s. It is important to note that architectural firms frequently consist of members with different specialities, including design work and engineering, but also the business details. Quite frequently, the design architect for a specific building might not be a principal in the firm, and thus the designer's name might not be normally associated with the building. In addition to multi-person firms, there are also architects who operate independently. These individuals are presented at the end of this section (It is well worth noting that most of the province's prominent mid-century architects were both born and trained in Manitoba):

### **Major Designers**

David Thordarson (associated with GBR)  
James Donahue (associated with Smith, Carter)  
Gustavo da Roza II  
Étienne Gaboury  
Leslie Stechesen

## Green, Blankstein and Russell (GBR)

Lawrence J. Green, Cecil N. Blankstein, and G. Leslie Russell were also partners with Ralph Carl Ham (as Green, Blankstein, Russell and Ham) until 1944. All of the principals were Winnipeg-born and received their architectural training at the University of Manitoba; Russell also worked for a time with a firm in Chicago. GBR was the pre-eminent modernist firm in Manitoba, and was responsible for designing several of the iconic modernist buildings in the province—including Winnipeg City Hall and the airport—as well as Hurtig Furs, the building described by the *Winnipeg Free Press* as Winnipeg’s “first example of true modern architecture.” GBR had a national presence in the mid-century period, and in 1954 had won a competition for a new building to house the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa. Though the project was never realized, the gallery occupied, for some three decades from 1958, the Lorne Building, which was also designed by the firm.



Left: Overall view with Council Building at left. Below left: courtyard and entrance of Administration Building. Above: Council Building.



## David Thordarson and Bernard Brown for Green, Blankstein, Russell and Associates, Winnipeg City Hall, 1962-65

The City Hall project is a particularly fine example of the optimistic mission of Modernist architects. Placed on Main Street a few blocks north of Portage, it was intended to rejuvenate a struggling area. Shortly thereafter, it was followed by the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, the Planetarium, and the concert hall. These major civic projects were part of a broader scheme of urban renewal that was occupying the city in the late 1950s and early 1960s.



## **Libling, Michener, and Associates**

Gerald A Libling and Mel P. Michener (the latter born in Winnipeg) received their training at the University of Manitoba before forming a partnership in 1955. They won the Massey Medal for the International Style Executive House apartments (designed by Leslie Stechesen, see below under his name) and branched into Brutalism with the Public Safety Building.



**Libling, Michener and Associates, St. Paul's College High School, Winnipeg, 1964**



**Libling, Michener, and Associates, Lord Selkirk Park, Winnipeg, 1967**

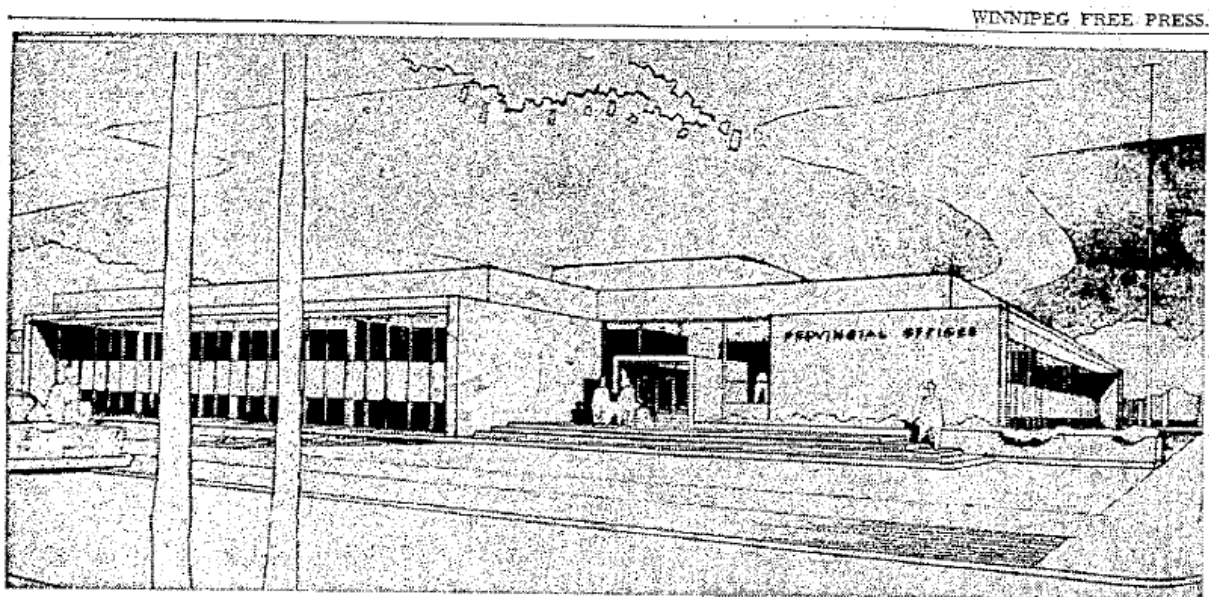
This housing replaced a rundown mixed residential and commercial district. The new project, intended to improve the lives of residents and decrease crime, was a descendent of the housing envisioned most famously by Le Corbusier in the 1920s: residences (in this case medium density), set in areas of green space. Lord Selkirk Park is another interpretation of some of the ideas that had driven the development of Wildwood Park (see below), modified for the poor and set in an urban situation. Many such urban renewal schemes failed to deliver the improvements they had promised, and they often destroyed forever what had been vibrant—if poor—communities.

## Moody, Moore Partners

Herbert Moody and Robert Moore were both born in Winnipeg and took their training at the University of Manitoba; Moody also spent time with firms in Boston and Toronto in the late 1920s and early 30s. The firm was responsible for a number of International Modernist buildings, including the Manitoba Hydro building on Taylor Avenue and the Provincial Building in The Pas.



Moody, Moore Partners, Manitoba Hydro Head Office, Winnipeg, 1958



Artist's Sketch Of Proposed Provincial Building At The Pas

Moody and Moore, Provincial Building, The Pas, 1958-59; second floor (not shown here) 1969-70

The glass curtain walls are recessed behind deep reinforced concrete overhangs, emphasizing the non-load-bearing nature of the skin. A second storey was added a decade later.

## Number Ten Architectural Group

In 1959, Winnipeg-born Morley Blankstein and Isadore Coop joined together with Allan Hanna and Doug Gillmor to form a partnership, all four having received their initial architectural training at the University of Manitoba. Blankstein and Coop went on to study at IIT under Mies van der Rohe, while Hanna and Gillmor chose to attend MIT, where they came into contact with renowned modernists Louis Kahn (Hanna), Buckminster Fuller (Gillmor) and Eero Saarinen (both). They were joined five years later by Alan Waisman and Jack Ross, to form Waisman Ross Blankstein Coop Gillmor Hanna Architects/Engineers. In 1969, the firm became Number Ten Architectural Group.



### **Number Ten Architectural Group, Manitoba Theatre Centre, Winnipeg, 1969-70**

Designed by Alan Waisman, the Manitoba Theatre Centre is carried out in raw concrete in the Brutalist style. Its sculptural forms provide visual interest at street level and create a dialogue between the outdoors and interior; where the earlier Public Safety Building evokes a fortress, the Theatre Centre uses a similar vocabulary to draw the public inside. The building was designated a National Historic Site in 2009.

## **Smith, Carter (with various associates)**

Ernest John Smith, born in Winnipeg, and Dennis H. Carter, born in Montreal, both received their architectural training at the University of Manitoba. Smith also spent time at MIT. With various partners, Munn, Katelnikoff, Searle, Parkin and others, Smith and Carter were responsible for a number of prominent Manitoba buildings, ranging from Rae and Jerry's Steakhouse to the School of Architecture at the University of Manitoba.



**Smith Carter Architects, Assiniboine Park Zoo Bear Pits, 1955**



### **James Donahue for Smith, Carter & Katelnikoff, John A. Russell Building 1959**

This building looks to Mies's Crown Hall for its low temple form and vertical members reflecting the support structure within. In 2008, LM Architectural Group won a Heritage Winnipeg Preservation Award for the restoration of the building envelope.

## Waisman, Ross and Associates

Winnipeg-born Allan Waisman and Jack M. Ross, both trained at the University of Manitoba, formed this firm in 1953. They joined with BCGH in 1964 to become the Number Ten Architectural Group. Waisman and Ross designed the Northern Sales Building, an early Manitoba example of the International Style, and were also responsible for probably Winnipeg's best remaining example of Space Age architecture in the Perth's Drycleaner on Main Street.



### Waisman, Ross and Associates, Perth's drycleaners, Winnipeg, 1962

With its undulating roofline and dramatic, brightly-coloured sign, and set back from the street line to allow for parking in front, Perth's drycleaners is an excellent example of the popular modernism that was used in the 1950s and 60s. The building itself—designed to catch the eye as one passes at speed—is like a billboard for the business. Sadly, the sign was taken down in December 2011 and the building has lost much of its effect.



### Waisman, Ross, and Associates, University of Manitoba Residence Cafeteria, 1964

## David Thordarson

Born in Winnipeg and educated at the University of Manitoba, Thordarson was a design architect with GBR from 1949 until 1991. His works with that firm include St. George's Anglican Church, the Winnipeg International Airport and the Winnipeg City Hall and Administration Building.



**David Thordarson for Green, Blankstein and Russell, Elizabeth Dafoe Library, University of Manitoba, 1951.**

The opening of this building has been identified as “the moment when Winnipeg’s architectural culture shifted irrevocably towards the modern” (Kelly Crossman, “The Meaning of White,” in Serena Keshavjee, [ed.] *Winnipeg Modern: Architecture 1945-1975* [University of Manitoba Press, 2006], p. 131).



**David Thordarson for Green, Blankstein and Russell, St. George's Anglican Church, Winnipeg, 1957**

## James Donahue

Born in Regina, Donahue was the first Canadian graduate of the Harvard School of Design, where he studied under Marcel Breuer and Walter Gropius. He joined the architecture faculty at the University of Manitoba in 1946, remaining there until 1963. He designed a number of notable buildings in Manitoba, including, for Smith, Carter, Katelnikoff and Searle, the Monarch Life (now Worker's Compensation) Building in Winnipeg.



**James Donahue, for Smith, Carter, Katelnikoff and Searle, Monarch Life/Worker's Compensation Building, Winnipeg, 1959-63 (*currently being re clad*)**

## Gustavo da Roza II

Da Roza was born in Macau and educated in Hong Kong. He taught for a time at the University of California at Berkeley, and then spent some time in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he met Walter Gropius and studied his work before becoming a professor at the University of Manitoba in 1971. He remained on the faculty for thirty years. His work has been identified as marking a transition between high International Modernism and Post Modernism. Although his best-known work is the Winnipeg Art Gallery, he also designed a number of modernist houses, ranging from relatively humble self-effacing examples in the early 1960s through a range of highly personal designs using unexpected angles and mannerist features such as oversized house numbers and exaggerated proportions.



### **Gustavo da Roza, Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1970**

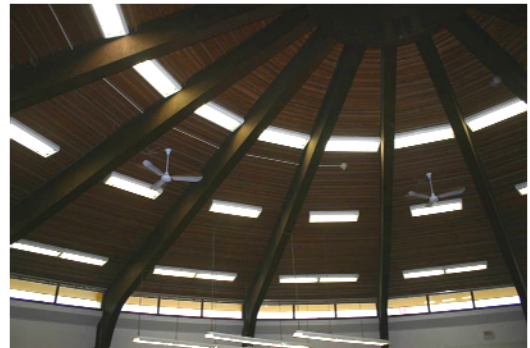
In its complete absence of ornament or historical reference, Da Roza's building is ultimately modern. But the architect's choice of Tyndall Stone harmonizes it with surrounding buildings, and he carefully composed the building so that, looking down Osborne Street towards the Legislature, the sight line along the gallery emphasizes, rather than detracting from, the provincial legislative building.





## Étienne Gaboury

Gaboury was born in Bruxelles, Manitoba and was educated at the University of Manitoba and the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. He began his career with Libling, Michener, designing the Massey-award winning Manitoba Health Services (now Blue Cross) Building before branching out on his own. He had been deeply inspired by Le Corbusier's Notre Dame du Haut at Ronchamp, and he began to develop a vocabulary of expressionist spaces in which, as he observed of Le Corbusier's chapel, "space [was] created by light."



### **Gaboury and Lussier, Regional Library, St. Pierre, 1964**

Originally a gymnasium for St. Pierre Collegiate, this building has made the transition well to a library; its skylights and high windows, first protected from errant basketballs, now make way for bookcases below.



### **Étienne-Joseph Gaboury, Église du Précieux Sang, Winnipeg, 1968**

The regular geometry and stark exterior with externally expressed (in wood veneer) beams on the St. Pierre library (top) contrast with the dynamic, swirling form of the shingled roof and the undulating brick walls of this church from four years later, marking the development of Gaboury's regionalist style.

## Leslie Stechesen

Stechesen received his architectural degree at the University of Manitoba, and then completed graduate studies in planning and urban design at the Architectural Association in London. Before going into private practice, he was head of design for Libling, Michener from 1957-71. Principle works with that firm include Executive House apartments and the Manitoba Teacher's Society Building, both in Winnipeg.



Leslie Stechesen, Bridge Drive-Inn, Winnipeg, 1958



Leslie Stechesen for Libling, Michener and Associates, Executive House, Winnipeg, 1959



## Leslie Stechesen and Associates, Leaf Rapids Town Centre, c. 1975

Leaf Rapids Town Centre was designed to incorporate all the features of a conventional downtown, protected from the weather under one roof. It included a school, church, community health centre and hotel, as well as cultural, recreational and sports facilities. The town won a Vincent Massey Award for Urban Excellence in 1975, and this approach became a model for other northern communities.

## 4. A Gallery of Significant Mid-Century Modern Sites in Manitoba

Manitoba has a striking collection of extant Modern buildings. With the international connections of many of its mid-century architects, these buildings represent a local manifestation of a worldwide movement. A remarkable number of Modern buildings, of a range of types, are still extant. Many of these represent a new design approach to an ancient (e.g. churches), relatively long-standing (e.g. banks and schools) or decades-old (e.g. offices) building type. Others are wholly new building types that were in step with broad societal changes. Among these are suburban developments, strip malls and shopping centres, and one-off projects like drive-in movie screens. Following is a guide to some of the most significant modern sites—in addition to those discussed earlier under individual architect and firm names—in the province. Not surprisingly, the majority of these sites are in urban areas, and particularly in Winnipeg. The gallery of sites is organized by the following functional distinctions, and accompanying texts describe the type through issues of architectural character as well as through typical challenges that attend them as potential heritage sites.

See also the buildings pictured elsewhere in the report. A number of these sites have been demolished or altered, or have come under threat since the first draught of this report in 2010.

- Civic and Government
- Cultural and Recreational Complexes
- Churches and Synagogues
- Schools
- Colleges and Universities
- Office
- Banks
- Retail
- Suburbs and other Autocentric Sites
- Residential
- Town Complexes
- Hotels/Motels
- Airports and Air Traffic Control Towers
- Factories and Warehouses
- Parks and Landscapes

## Civic and Government Buildings

Civic buildings in the mid-century period provided an ideal opportunity for communities to express their progressiveness, and the centennials of Canada in 1967 and of Manitoba in 1970 were the perfect time for renewal. In the case of downtown Winnipeg, the City Hall complex, together with the Centennial Concert Hall and Manitoba Museum, were part of an urban renewal project intended to bring renewed life and prosperity to the depressed inner city. These were built as part of the celebrations surrounding the centennial of Canada's confederation and also the centennial of the year that Manitoba became a province of the new country.

With its focus on light, air and progress, International Modernism provided an ideal aesthetic for an era of growth and hope. In contrast, another part of the North Main urban renewal program, the Public Safety Building, is an unusual example of a Brutalist style building clad in stone. The functions inside a Brutalist building can often be "read" on the exterior, as is the case here with the jails on the third and fourth floors. Such a building presents a public relations challenge today, but if the vertical fins and massive forms do not seem particularly friendly, it is likely that they were not intended to be.



**Brookside Cemetery Administration Building, 3001 Notre Dame**



**Former St. Boniface Civic Centre. Etienne Gaboury, 1962-64. 227 Provencher Boulevard**



**Steinbach City Hall, Norman Reimer, 1965**



**R.M. of St Clements Municipal Building, Hans Peter-Langes, 1968**



**Public Safety Building, Winnipeg, Libling, Michener and Associates, 1965**



**Brandon Land Titles Office**



**Royal Canadian Mint, Gaboury Lussier Sigurdsson/Number Ten Architectural Group, 1975. 520 Lagimodière Boulevard, Winnipeg**



**City of Winnipeg Fire Department Station #1, 65 Ellen Street**

## Cultural and Recreational Complexes

The relatively-affluent years of the 1950s and 60s provided great opportunity for civic development, ranging from regional projects, such as local libraries, to larger downtown complexes. Many of these buildings have retained their exterior appearance to a great extent, though we must use our imaginations to understand how dramatically forward-looking they must have appeared when they were built. The PanAm pool is shown below in photographs dating from near the time of its construction, as its interior and entrance area have been heavily altered.

Cultural and recreational buildings present possible designation opportunities; they are quite visible and often held in high esteem by the community. In addition, more often than not they retain their original functions for a long time and are thus often less prone to alteration.



**Winnipeg Public Library, Fort Garry Branch.**  
George A. Stewart, 1956. 1360 Pembina Highway, Winnipeg



**Winnipeg Public Library, St. Vital Branch.**  
George A. Stewart, 1963. 6 Fermor Avenue, Winnipeg *(building now under threat from amalgamation with another branch)*



**Centennial Concert Hall and Manitoba Museum, Moody, Moore/Green, Blankstein and Russell/Smith, Carter, Searle, 1967 (concert hall) and 1973 (museum)**



**Pan Am Pool. Smith Carter Parkin, 1966. 25 Poseidon Bay, Winnipeg (historic photographs; building has been heavily altered)**



**J.R.C. Evans Lecture Theatre, Brandon University, 1961**



**Masonic Temple, 1969. Osborne Junction, Winnipeg.**

## Churches, Synagogues, Temples

Religious buildings of most denominations have long been seen as sites for which extravagant architecture and lavish decoration are appropriate. The mid-century period, with its de-emphasis on ornament and rejection of historicism, saw a change in this approach. Churches and synagogues became more stark, often depending on effects of light and space for their emotional impact. Some avoid historical reference entirely, while others interpret traditional forms in a modern idiom (for example, at Holy Family Ukrainian Catholic Church, below). Religious buildings present a tremendous opportunity for heritage conservation. There is great potential for working with the institutional owners to develop schemes for good conservation practices. Many people see such buildings as a pinnacle of architectural and heritage achievement, and do not need to be persuaded to see them as worthy.

On the other side, declining participation in traditional denominations presents a challenge as buildings may be sold for conversion to other uses. There are, however, good examples of sensitive conversions that may serve as models for successful transformations.



**Shaarey Zedek Synagogue, Winnipeg, Green Blankstein and Russell, 1949**



**Holy Family Ukrainian Catholic Church, Winnipeg, Zunic and Sobkowich, 1962**



**St. Andrew's United Church, 255 Oak Street, Winnipeg. Moody & Moore, 1953**



**Lutheran Church of the Redeemer. John N. Reimer, 1963. 59 Academy Street, Winnipeg**





**St. Peter's Lutheran church. Gaboury Lussier Sigurdson Venables, 1970, 65 Walnut Street, Winnipeg**



**Donnelley United Church, 1226 Waller Avenue, Winnipeg. Moody & Moore, 1961.**



**St. Claude Roman Catholic Church, St. Claude, Etienne Gaboury, 1964**



**Silver Heights United Church, 199 Garrioch Avenue, Winnipeg. Doy Gillmore & Al Waisman, 1965.**



**Blessed Sacrament Roman Catholic Church, Etienne Gaboury, 1966. Wabasha Street at Harold Avenue, Winnipeg (Transcona)**



**St. George's Anglican Church, 5<sup>th</sup> Street & Southern Avenue, Brandon. K.R.D. Pratt, 1956**

## Public Schools

The emergent modernist style was widely used for schools in the post-1945 period. Rural districts saw the consolidation of schools in the 1950s with one-room schoolhouses being replaced by larger schools, set in towns and villages, which would serve a much larger area. An example is the Fannystelle School—an example of the vernacularization of Modernism—with its smooth stucco surfaces, crisp, linear decoration and small cantilevered canopies over the doors.

To accommodate the post-war baby boom, the Winnipeg School Division built a number of schools using a Moderne aesthetic. Restrained decoration typically takes the form of some horizontal banding such that seen on Rockwood School, below, and the entranceways are emphasized with curved and fluted motifs and often with extra height. Many older school buildings received gymnasium additions in the mid-century period, with the one at Earl Grey School being a creative response to a particularly elegant original building. By the 1960s, Modernism was the inevitable style for new school buildings.

Schools are heavily affected by issues of ongoing maintenance and changes in educational ideology and standards such as safety and accessibility that can result in insensitive alteration. These need not pose an insurmountable problem if the people in charge are aware of the issues and the heritage value of the buildings in their care.



**Fannystelle School, Fannystelle, 1951**



**Rockwood School, 1949-50; annex in 1952**



**Kelvin High School, 1963-65. 155 Kingsway Avenue, Winnipeg**



**Earl Grey School Gymnasium, 1965. 340 Cockburn Street, Winnipeg**



**Nellie McClung School, Manitou. Smith, Carter, Searle, 1964.**

## Colleges and Universities

To meet the baby boom generation, Canadian colleges and universities expanded rapidly in the late-1950s and early 1960s. Even institutions that were founded much earlier underwent extensive building during this period, and 1960s Modernist buildings often dominate.

The issues surrounding college and university buildings are similar to those around schools, though there is more likelihood that these buildings will see their primary functions change. In addition, because universities are generally growing within limited boundaries, there is often a need to pack more buildings into existing spaces, often ruining intended sight lines and sometimes almost obscuring original buildings.



**University of Manitoba, St. John's College and Chapel, Moody & Moore, 1958**



**University of Manitoba, Mary Speechly Hall. Waisman Ross, 1962-64**



**University of Manitoba, University College, Moody, Moore and Partners, 1964**



**University of Manitoba, Faculty of Music. Smith Carter Searle, 1965**



**University of Manitoba, Former Fitzgerald Building, School of Art. Smith Carter Searle, 1965**



**University of Manitoba, Robson Hall. Ward McDonald and Partners, 1969**



**University of Winnipeg, Lockhart Hall. Moody, Moore and Partners, 1970**



**Red River College, Building "B", 1963**



**University of Winnipeg, Centennial Hall, Moody, Moore, Duncan, Rattray, Peters, Searle, & Christie, 1970-2**

## Office Buildings

Cheap electricity, together with new technologies in lighting and cooling, changed the basic form of the office building.

Windows no longer had to open, and natural light was less important. The flexible interior spaces of frame and curtain wall construction made International Modernism an excellent choice for many building types. In its early days, it also looked strikingly contemporary, and could help to create a positive corporate image just as terracotta ornament had done a generation or two earlier.

Many office buildings change hands often and are at fairly high risk of both unsympathetic alteration and deferred maintenance. Recladding can drastically alter the appearance of a building, while some, like the Stanley Knowles Federal Building in Winnipeg, are almost unrecognizable under later additions and alterations.



**Northern Sales Building, Waisman, Ross, and Associates, Winnipeg, 1953**



**Great West Life, Green, Blankstein and Russell/Morani Morris, 1955-58**



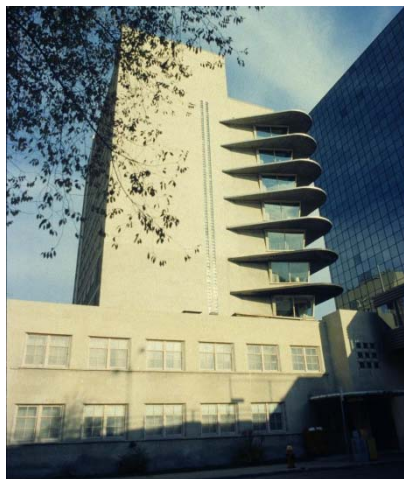
**Manitoba Health Services, Etienne Gaboury for Libling, Michener and Associates, 1959**



**219 Kennedy Street, Winnipeg**



**Manitoba Building (Former St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Building, 1954), Moody Moore and Partners, 1954**



**Winnipeg Clinic, with 1947 and 1961 additions.**



**Former National Revenue Building/ Stanley Knowles Federal Building, Moody Moore and Partners, 391 York Street, Winnipeg (historic photograph; *building greatly altered*).**



**Otis Elevator Building. 203 Sherbrook Street, Winnipeg**



**Former Winnipeg Builders' Exchange. Waisman Ross & Associates, 1967. 290 Burnell Street, Winnipeg**



**Former Archdiocese of Winnipeg Chancery Office. Green Blankstein Russell & Associates, 1965. 50 Stafford Street, Winnipeg (exterior and courtyard; *central glazed portion of facade recently altered*)**



**329 St. Mary's Road, Winnipeg**



**10 Donald Street, Winnipeg**



**Richardson Bldg, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill/Smith, Carter, 1967-9**

## Banks

Well into the twentieth century, banks tended to have historical features (most often from the classical tradition) intended to create an aura of grandeur and associations with longevity. Even small-town banks often have such features, while major urban branches might resemble classical temples. As these overt classical allusions were stripped away in the mid-century period, rich materials and grand spaces were used with the same purpose, especially in town or city centres. Many of these buildings have a strong sense of corporate identity

They are at risk because the large, open banking halls that were still traditional in the mid-century period are no longer standard; the automation of teller services has also resulted in the need for many fewer branches. These conditions invite demolition or reuse—sometimes insensitive. Even with their clean lines obscured by inappropriate signage and other excrescences, these buildings may often be identified by large banks of windows, night-deposit drops, and sometimes corporate symbols.



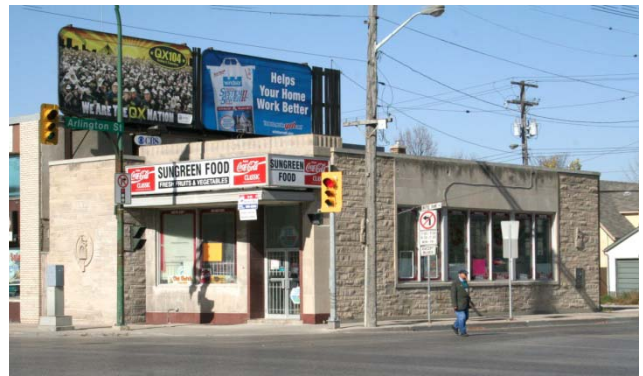
**Former Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, 1954. 412 Graham Avenue, Winnipeg**



**Former Bank of Montreal, 1957. 333 Portage, Winnipeg (under threat from massive alteration as part of APTN)**



**Former Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, 2181 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg**



**Former Imperial Bank, 909 Notre Dame Avenue, Winnipeg**



## Retail

The mid-century saw the construction of many buildings for retail purposes, almost invariably associated with extensive parking for the new age. These buildings were often intended to attract customers through eye-catching, up-to-the-minute architecture and this has made them very vulnerable to demolition or loss by alteration as they continue to be updated to meet changing fashions. At Winnipeg's Polo Park Shopping Centre, for example, it is difficult to make out the original outlines in the building as it now stands. Insensitively-done neon or backlit signage and large posters can also obscure the appearance of a building, disguising expanses of plate glass and regular grids.

Some other buildings have been luckier, and may retain much of their original appearance and even their distinctive signage. It is worth noting that a Vancouver Safeway, of the same design as the one below, has been placed on the Canadian Register of Historic Places.



**Safeway, Main Street, Winnipeg, Waisman and Ross, 1963 (*once common, these buildings are rapidly disappearing*)**



**Polo Park Shopping Centre, Winnipeg, Green, Blankstein and Russell, 1958 (*historic photos; building massively altered*)**



**Silver Heights Strip Mall, Portage Avenue, Winnipeg**



412 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg



3307 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg.



Hudson Building, 1959, 414 Graham Avenue, Winnipeg



Baked Expectations. Sid Diamond for Kurnasky & Weinberg, 1954. 161 Osborne Street, Winnipeg (see below).



Omega Building, 424-438 Graham Avenue, Winnipeg

**GRAND OPENING**

We Proudly Present The New  
**GLow'S PHARMACY**  
161 OSBORNE ST. off Wardlaw Ave.



DESIGNED BY SID, DIAMOND, B. ARCH.  
America's finest drug store embodying the latest trend in design for shopping comfort.

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SEE OUR FLYER FOR SPECIALS — FREE GIFTS FOR ALL — DOOR PRIZES ETC.

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## Suburbs and other Autocentric Sites

By mid-century, private automobiles were becoming ubiquitous, leading to radical changes in urban design and the development of new building types. Suburban development had a profound effect on cities as people began to perceive dense urban areas as dirty, dangerous and inconvenient. For those who could afford them, suburbs were touted as the “answer to the problem of our crowded cities.”<sup>8</sup>

Among many more conventional suburbs, Wildwood Park, with its houses oriented inward to a green common space and turning their backs to the crescent-shaped streets, was a radical departure from most urban or suburban design, then and now. The amenities it provided were intended to “make wearisome trips downtown unnecessary.”

Mid-century Manitoba saw several new building types designed specifically to serve cars. These include the parkade (introduced to Winnipeggers—and probably Manitobans—by the Bay downtown in 1954), and drive-in versions of restaurants and movie theatres. The strip mall, indoor shopping centre and large grocery store emerged, while restaurants and retail establishments, set back behind their parking lots, sprang up along major roads.

Many of these buildings types are threatened by changes in taste and aesthetics. Drive-in movie theatres are nearly extinct, while drive-in restaurants have been replaced by drive-through windows. Where they survive intact, however, mid-century commercial establishments may actually profit from a resurgence of interest in mid-century design.



**Hubert Bird (developer) and Green, Blankstein and Russell, Wildwood Park, Winnipeg, 1947**



**Garry Parkade, Libling and Michener, 1963. 295 Garry Street, Winnipeg.**

<sup>8</sup> Advertisement for Wildwood Park, *Winnipeg Free Press* (19 November 1947): 24.



**Rae and Jerry's Steakhouse, Winnipeg,  
Smith, Carter and Katelnikoff, 1957**



**Stardust Drive-In Movie Theatre, Morden  
(soon closing owing to the transition to  
digital technology)**



**Dutch Drive-Inn, original canopy, 1957. The  
Pas.**

## Residential Architecture

Mid-century residential architecture was built in a range of styles from the traditional to the ultra-modern. Winnipeg has a fine collection of architect-designed single-family houses, some designed by the architects for their own families. Many are High Modernist in style, but an exception is Etienne Gaboury's own house, which is an example of regionalist modernism that draws on local traditional forms and materials such as the cedar shingles, pitched roof, and projecting bay to create a design that is both wholly modern and sympathetic to the local vernacular.

A neighbourhood such as Winnipeg's Silver Heights, with its elegant gateposts, features more modest houses that, together, are redolent of the post-war dream of nuclear families living in detached houses in leafy suburbs.

The sheer numbers of residential buildings from this period make it impractical to deal one-to-one with their owners. Houses and apartments are frequently updated and altered as families grow and tastes change. The recent rise of the "home improvement" culture—promulgated on television and in books and magazines—increases the prevalence of residential alteration, though mid-century modern design has recently risen in popularity and this may lead to the preservation of some residential buildings.



**Blankstein Residence, 95 Waterloo Street, Winnipeg, Blankstein and Coop, 1956**



**76 Wilton Street, Winnipeg**



**F. Burshtein House, Winnipeg. Gustavo da Roza, 1969.**



**Gaboury Residence, St. Boniface, Gaboury, Lussier & Sigurdson, 1968**



**Donahue Residence, 301 Hosmer Blvd,  
Winnipeg. James Donahue, 1955.**



**Waisman Residence, Winnipeg. Waisman,  
Ross & Associates.**



**Thunderbird Apartments, 2150 Portage  
Avenue**



**2187 Portage**



**Billingsley Manor, 2515 Portage Avenue**



**Grosvenor House Apartments, 811  
Grosvenor Avenue, Winnipeg. Libling,  
Michener and Associates, 1962.**



**Silver Heights Gate, Portage Avenue at Mount Royal Road, Winnipeg. William D. Lount, 1950-51**



**23 Harmon Drive, Winnipeg**



**126 Hearne Drive, Winnipeg**



**93 Rowand Drive, Winnipeg**

## **Town Complexes**

As Manitoba's natural resource industries began to develop, communities were founded or expanded in more or less remote areas. A military establishment such as that at Fort Churchill is another example. At the height of the Cold War, nearly 4,500 people lived in Fort Churchill in housing built for the purpose. The community of Pinawa was built from the ground up, and was intended to provide all the amenities of a long-standing community.

These communities tend to be located in areas now experiencing depopulation. Even where the founding industry is still operating, in most cases many fewer people are required to run increasingly-mechanized processes. Finding other uses for buildings in is a major challenge when the population has shrunk dramatically.



**Athlone Crescent, Pinawa, 1963**



**Churchill, Manitoba, photo c. 1960**



**Former Atomic Energy of Canada Limited Staff House, Pinawa, 1963**



## Hotels/Motels

Widespread car ownership made travel more affordable and more common, and led directly to the development of the “motor hotel,” or motel. Motels and smaller hotels typically have large parking lots in front, while a centrally-located tower will invariably have a parking garage. In the case of a building like the Radisson, in Winnipeg (below), the parking garage comprises the lower section of the building, and helps determine its form.

Like retail establishments, hotels and motels are frequently updated to attract customers. These alterations may be quite superficial, but changing expectations may also lead to major renovations. Independent motels are under threat from chains.



**Chalet Motel, Brandon**



**Former Brittany Inn, 1958. 367 Ellice Avenue, Winnipeg**



**Manitou Motor Inn, Manitou**



**Capri Motel, 1819 Pembina Highway, Winnipeg**



**Radisson Hotel, Winnipeg, Number Ten Architectural Group, 1969**

## **Airports and Air Traffic Control Towers**

The airport replaced the railway station as the symbolic gateway to the city in the twentieth century. Like Winnipeg's airport terminal building, airports in major cities were often strong architectural statements, featuring public art and dramatic spaces in the most advanced styles.

They are at risk from changing technological needs. In addition, any building that was intended from the start to make a bold and modern statement is likely to come under pressure to be replaced by an even more up-to-date building.



**Richardson International Airport, Main Terminal, Green, Blankstein and Russell, 1964 (*now being demolished*)**



**Air Traffic Control Tower, St. Andrew's Airport**

## Factories and Warehouses

As industrial production and delivery methods grew and changed in the mid-century, there was high demand for new buildings to house these functions. New “Industrial Parks” were laid out to house a range of industrial buildings, located at city perimeters where they would be served by truck rather than train. International Modernism lent itself particularly well to these buildings, allowing as it did vast, unbroken interior spaces. Such buildings could be visually dramatic: large expanses of what appears to be solid brick wall suspended precariously over a glass base must have seemed almost unbelievable to people used to the thick masonry walls of earlier industrial buildings. Elegant lettering and various colours and textures contributed to visual interest.

Even the most visually compelling of these buildings present a conservation challenge. They are usually located off the beaten path, in industrial zones rarely frequented by people looking for heritage architecture. They are often very large, and as the economy changes they may become redundant and are challenging to reuse. They are privately owned by for-profit companies that may have difficulty seeing their architectural value.



**Wall Street and Notre Dame Avenue,  
Winnipeg**



**1315 Notre Dame Avenue, Winnipeg**



**Blackwoods Beverages, Winnipeg,  
Waisman, Ross and Associates, 1957**



**Atlas Graham Building, 1725 Sargent Avenue, Winnipeg**

**Red River Co-op Headquarters, 1960 Notre Dame Avenue, Winnipeg**

## Parks and Landscapes

Parks and cemeteries in the mid-century were very different from the lush parks of the Victorian and Edwardian period. Like Modernist buildings, Modernist parks were sleek and economical, depending on interesting materials, compelling spatial relationships, and restrained decoration in a few key places—for example, at the entrance—in place of the lush plantings and ornate pavilions that had characterized the earlier generation of parks.

As places of memory important to people whose loved ones are buried there, cemeteries are generally not sites at risk. Parks, however, may be threatened by infill. In addition, modernist landscaping—like many modernist buildings—is often dependent on regular maintenance to look good. Where there is no ornament or lavish planting to distract the eye, peeling paint or chipped concrete soon look down-at-heel.



**Chapel Lawn Cemetery, Winnipeg**



**Rosh Pina Cemetery, Winnipeg**



**Memorial Park, Winnipeg (under threat owing to maintenance issues)**



**Metro Plaza, Osborne and Corydon, Winnipeg. Etienne Gaboury, 1966 (historic photo; largely demolished)**



**International Peace Garden, South of Boissevain**



**Monument, International Peace Garden**



**Peace Chapel, International Peace Garden**