

BROWN, Murray (1884 – 1958)

Murray Brown practiced architecture in Toronto from 1914, until his death in 1958. There are many examples of his work, from coast to coast, all bearing the mark of excellent detailing, refined materials and harmonious proportions. His buildings reflect the best of Art Deco, imparting a freshness and originality which is distinctly Canadian. Brown contributed to the profession through the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, where he was Treasurer and served on numerous committees, and was elected President of the Ontario Association of Architects in 1935-36.

He was born at Broughty Ferry, Scotland on November 10, 1884. From 1900 to 1905 he attended classes in architecture at University College at Dundee and apprenticed with the firm of Johnston & Baxter, Dundee. He then went to London, England and entered the office of W. R. Davidson, Architect where he served as chief assistant from 1907 to 1911 and studied architecture at the Royal Academy. He came to Canada in 1914, initially working for the talented Beaux-Arts architect Charles S. Cobb of Toronto.

He designed many sumptuous theatres which reflect the luxury of the period, including: Belsize (Crest) Theatre, Mount Pleasant Road, Toronto (1926-27); Bedford Theatre, Yonge Street, Toronto (1927); Capitol Theatre, 2nd Avenue, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan (1928-29); Famous Players Theatre, North Bay (1928); Famous Players Theatre, Galt (1929); Capitol Theatre, Sudbury (1929); Capitol Theatre, Spring Garden Road, Halifax, Nova Scotia (1929); Famous Players Theatre, Port Hope (1930); and the Palace Theatre, Cornwall (1939).

His designs for A.D. Gorrie garage and automobile sales showroom, Gerrard Street, Toronto

(1928) were awarded the First Award in the category by the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada in 1929, as was his shopfront design for the Sampson-Matthews Building, Yonge at Summerhill, Toronto (1928). His garage design is a finely executed study of the stripped classical style, combining the classical forms with Art Deco planar surfaces and rich detailing. The shopfront design uses more traditional sources of inspiration to give the conservative tone required by the patron.

Brown's design for the J. Frank Raw Building at Richmond and Church Streets, Toronto (1931), with its carefully studied window openings, is one of the most strikingly original office designs executed in the Art Deco style. It shows Brown's ability to combine different parts into a unified whole. Postal Station K, Yonge Street at Helendale Avenue, Toronto (1936) is another dignified design which is executed in an even more severe rendition of Depression-moderne style, yet Brown includes rich detailing to denote the buildings public functions. His design for the Bank of Nova Scotia, New Westminster, British Columbia (1936), is extremely urbane, being inspired by the banking structures built by John M. Lyle earlier in the decade. It's decorative detailing, taken from Canadian sources is applied less frequently in keeping with the periods stylistic trends.

Other projects of note include the City Hall for the Township of North York, (Toronto), Yonge Street (1924); large residence for Mr. L. Babayan, North York (1929); Third Church of Christ Scientist, High Park Avenue, Toronto (1933-34); North York Fire Hall, Yonge Street, Toronto (1941); Centennial Road Public School, Scarborough, Ontario (1947); and Public School at Whitby and Newmarket, Ontario (1949).