DOLPHIN, Charles Brammall (1888 – 1969)

Charles Dolphin was a Toronto based architect who designed some of the most flamboyant Art Deco buildings in the country.

Charles Dolphin was born at Ashton-Under-Lyne, near Manchester, England on March 3, 1888 and attended public and high schools in Canada and the United States. He graduated from the School of Architecture at McGill University, Montreal. He worked for the architectural firm of Finley & Spence in Montreal from 1905 to 1907 when he entered the office of Robert Findlay, Architect, Montreal where he stayed until 1909. He then worked for the architectural firm of Ross and MacDonald where he was chief draftsman from 1909 to 1913. Prior to the outbreak of World War 1 he spent a year of travel and study in Europe and 1913-14 he attended an Atelier of the Ecole des Beaux Arts, Paris, France. Dolphin then served in the Canadian Expeditionary Forces in France for four years during World War 1. Returning to Canada he formed a partnership in Toronto with H. A. Dowswell to become the firm of Dowswell & Dolphin. In 1925 he opened his own office in Toronto.

In 1927 he designed The Clarendon apartment building at 2 Clarendon Avenue at the northwest corner of Avenue Road, Toronto. It is decorated in the tudor style which during the period was associated with gracious living and expressed luxury in the scale and elaboration of details. Domesticity is suggested in the many windows arranged into bays and overhanging oriels with pronounced chimneys and gables piercing the roof-line. The 4-storey Clarendon is a variation on the Tudor palace but smaller and less flamboyant in brick with its elegant stone base and trim. It's real elegance is in the planning and decoration of the interiors, which contain all the features of a Forest Hill house. The Clarendon is planned in three blocks separated by narrow courts, open to the street, with each block having its own central elevator to avoid long corridors.

Dolphin's 1930's designs are highly original, personal interpretations of the Art Deco style. They reflect the Canadian nationalism of the period as he detailed his buildings with decoration of Canadian inspiration. His Consumers' Gas Showroom, Yonge Street at St. Clements, Toronto, (1930) is a lavishly decorated commercial building based on a Classical design. He used incised pilasters at the corners with stylized eagles as capitals to support an architrave of stone. The spandrel between the two floors is highly embellished with a Canadian floral motifs. The main facade is crowned by an aluminum eagle supporting a clock and flag-pole, giving the building real distinction from the shopfronts around.

Perhaps his most innovative design is the Post Office's City Delivery Building, Bay Street at the Lakeshore, Toronto (1939-40). It is streamlined-modern in form with a rounded corner and wrap-around stripped windows. The facade is reduced to bands of windows and wall surface only punctuated by the main entrance on the Bay Street facade and a series of entry ramps to the south. The stone work is highlighted by carved relief panels which depict the delivery of the mail throughout Canada and a frieze of alternating beavers and maple leaves crown the facades.

Dolphin also designed other buildings in the Toronto area including; the Cawthra Mansions, an apartment building at College and Beverly Street, (1927) executed in a traditional Georgian style and set in generous landscaping; Grey Coach Bus Terminal, Bay at Edward Street (1931-32), done in a Art Deco gothic style, and the Bay-Grosvenor Building, (1947-49) executed in a stripped international style with the planes of glass almost flush with the spandrels. In the 1950's he designed an office and showroom at Bay and St. Joseph Street, for the Remington Rand Company (1950), and an office building for International Harvester, St. Clair at Syms Road (1950-51). In Niagara Falls, Ontario he planned the General Brock Hotel in 1928-29 and in Huntsville, Ontario he designed a Hospital building for the Canadian Red Cross in 1945.