

## GROSSMAN, Irving (1926 – 1995)

**A**n architect who believed in the multifaceted nature of modernist doctrine, Irving Grossman made his mark on the urban fabric of Toronto by his designs of single family houses, schools, synagogues, seniors' apartments and multiple housing projects.

Born on December 7, 1926 to a left-leaning Jewish family, the young Grossman, who loved to draw and sketch, took seriously the notion of the artist's responsibility in improving society. He enrolled at the University of Toronto in 1945, where his exposure to the planning ideals of Le Corbusier and Gropius set his course onto modernism.

Five years later, Grossman graduated *cum laude* with a Pilkington Glass Traveling Fellowship that took him to the heady arts scene of London. When he returned in 1953, the Toronto that greeted him was devoid of the intellectual stimulation he had found in England. "There was nobody to talk to" he lamented. Rolling up his sleeves, he set to work on his fledgling practice by designing, in time-honoured tradition, some very striking, and at the time, avant-garde, houses. One of these modern gems, the Klammer House, received the Ontario Association of Architects 25-year Award in 1995.

It was the 1958 international competition for Toronto City Hall that finally brought to Grossman's city the modernist outlook he was thirsting for. The winds of change blew in major talent and Toronto was fertile ground for the seeds of the International Style. Soon after, municipal, provincial and federal housing departments, in tandem with private enterprise, embarked on a series of ambitious mass housing projects. Grossman was commissioned for several of these developments including Edgeley Village and a private initiative, Flemingdon Park, which was much admired in the international press.

Grossman's techniques also extended to the smaller scale. By "whitepainting" old houses on

Alpha Avenue he ignited a widespread trend that proved irresistible to young professionals wanting to live downtown. With Beth David Synagogue, one of four synagogues he had completed by 1963, Grossman explored the possibilities of incorporating art in the concrete walls by collaborating with artist Graham Coughtry for the formwork. The resulting walls, with tactile imprints of Jewish iconography, were the fruits of a technique that he later employed with sculptors Armand Vaillancourt, Ted Bieler and Ulysses Comtois for the Administration and News Pavilion at Montreal's Expo 67, a collaboration which helped him win the Massey Medal.

Articulate, and tireless in his advocacy of architecture, Grossman wrote for radio and magazines and championed the cause in his capacity as lecturer and studio critic at a number of universities around the globe. A man who loved life, Grossman had many outside interests, but his passion was architecture. In recognition of his great contribution, the Toronto Society of Architects honoured him on October 13, 1994, with the Fellowship Award for "representing the foundation of Toronto architecture, of Toronto modernism."

It was a fitting tribute to a man who returned to his native city some forty years earlier to help set the groundwork for a new heroic age of architecture. He died a year later on September 9, 1995 at the age of 69, leaving his wife and two sons.

*Some other significant buildings designed by Grossman of which he was particularly fond:*

The Houzer House, Ottawa;  
The Winesanker, MacPherson-Dobbin, Betel  
and Fogel Houses, Toronto;  
Crombie Park Apartments, Toronto;  
Shaarei Tefillah Synagogue, Toronto;  
Temple Emanu-El, Toronto;  
Adath Israel Synagogue, Toronto.