

PARKIN, John Cresswell (1922 – 1988)

John C. Parkin used one word to describe his style; that word was “rigorous”. A pioneer of the International Style in Canada, he was partner and head of design for what was by the end of the 1950’s the country’s largest and most influential architectural firm.

Born in Sheffield England to Canadian parents, Parkin was educated at the University of Manitoba, and at Harvard University under Walter Gropius. The clarity and strong design sense of the modernists attracted Parkin who became acquainted with some of the leading exponents of modernism such as Alvar Alto, and Le Corbusier. At Harvard he also met his future wife Margaret Jeanne Warmith who was studying art history.

In 1947 he formed a partnership in Toronto with John B. Parkin. Coincidentally both partners, who were not related, had the same name with the exception of different middle initials. Their firm combined strong design skills with equally strong construction and engineering capability. It was said of John C. Parkin that everything he did came in on budget, a remarkable feat especially considering the scale and complexity of many of his commissions which include Terminal One of

Toronto International (now Lester B. Pearson) Airport and a collaboration with Finnish architect Viljo Revell on Toronto City Hall.

In 1979 John C. Parkin was awarded the prestigious gold medal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada for his more than 30 years of architectural achievement. This honor was added to his 14 Massey Medals for Architecture, the Companion of the Order of Canada, presidency of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts and a host of other important and influential chairmanships on boards and councils for the arts and architecture throughout Canada and in the U.S.

Parkin summed up his vision of architecture with the phrase “Economy though not poverty of statement; good architecture is simplicity”. Along with Toronto’s airport and City Hall, his numerous notable buildings include the Ontario Association of Architects headquarters, Toronto; Union Railway Station, Ottawa; the Health Sciences Complex at Memorial University in St. John’s, New Foundland. Parkin also designed the Henry Moore Gallery for the Art Gallery of Ontario and collaborated with Mies van der Rohe on the Toronto Dominion Centre.

Important work:

Residence for the architect, Don Mills, Ont.	1953
OAA headquarters building, Park Rd. Toronto	1954
Ortho Pharmaceutical building, Don Mills	1955
Toronto International Airport, Malton	1963-66
Union Railway Station, Ottawa	1969