

PLACHTA, Michael Victor (1918 – 1990)

One of the partners and driving forces behind a well-known Montreal firm, Michael Victor Plachta was instrumental in transferring the ideals of Modernism from the initial sketches to the built form.

Michael Plachta was born in Warsaw, Poland on October 30, 1918 only two weeks before the end of World War I. He showed a keen sense of aesthetics and proportion even as a young boy and he left for England to study architecture at the University of Liverpool in 1938.

A year later, World War II broke out. Plachta trained as a paratrooper in a British regiment and joined the Polish army that was assembling in France. His unit narrowly avoided capture by the approaching German forces. Upon return to Britain's shores, his knowledge of English allowed him to help his countrymen within the ranks and he spent the rest of the war stationed in England and northern Scotland. When peace finally came, Plachta had lost his family in Poland. He immersed himself in his studies and obtained his bachelor's degree in architecture in 1946.

After a brief stint in London he emigrated to Canada and joined the architectural firm of Greenspoon, Freedlander and Dunne in 1948, a company that, along with Plachta and other later partners, was to become a leading player in securing many of Montreal's prestige commissions. Initially, Plachta was a designer as well as job captain, but he leaned towards contract administration and, after becom-

ing registered in 1954, showed his strength as project architect. In 1964, the firm received Canada's first structural steel design award, sponsored by the Department of Industry and the National Design Council for the C-I-L House in Montreal, a project in which Plachta was directly involved.

In 1966, Plachta became a partner of the reorganized Greenspoon, Freedlander, Plachta & Kryton (GFPK) and a member of the Ontario Association of Architects. In 1970, the firm was awarded the Massey Medal for Westmount Square in Westmount, Quebec a building that bears tribute to the collaboration of Mies Van de Rohe. Leaders in the coordination and implementation of large projects, GFPK established a firm presence on the Montreal stage, heavily promoting monuments to the International Style.

Plachta and his wife decided to move to Toronto in 1972. Plachta continued as partner to the firm, commuting between the two cities for eight years before retiring in 1980 and pursuing his interests of travel, stamp-collecting and golf.

Recalling his struggle as a young architect and desirous of directing public recognition to the unheralded achievements of the small architectural firm, Plachta and his wife established the Michael V. and Wanda Plachta Award in honour of an exceptional Ontario project built on a modest budget. He died in Toronto on August 14, 1990.