

## ROBB, George Alexander (1923 – 1991)

**G**eorge Robb practiced architecture in Toronto for forty-four years, from 1947 to 1991. During those years, he designed a wide range of buildings, many in connection with tourism and the hospitality industry. He was also well known as a professor of design at the School of Architecture, University of Toronto, for thirty-six years.

George Alexander Robb was born on a farm near Galt (now Cambridge), Ontario, on March 15, 1923. He received his primary education in a one room school near his home, and his secondary education at Galt Collegiate Institute. He studied architecture at the University of Toronto, receiving the degree of Bachelor of Architecture in 1946. He joined the Ontario Association of Architects (OAA) and the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC) in the following year.

Following graduation from the School of Architecture, Robb worked for two years as a designer for Marani & Morris, Architects, and for three years in association with William McBain, Architect. In 1952 he established his own practice, George A. Robb, Architect. For three years, from 1965 to 1968, he worked in partnership with other professors at the School of Architecture: Bill McBain, Douglas Lee, Ants Elken, and Yusing Jung. He then re-established his own practice, George Robb, Architect, in which he continued until his death, in later years in collaboration with associates Peter Stewart and Donald Scott.

Robb was an orthodox Modernist in his approach to design. Like Mies van der Rohe, whom he greatly admired, he emphasized the importance of both a strong concept and careful detailing. Unlike the work of Mies van der Rohe, however, his designs generally made use of natural materials, especially wood and stone.

In his forty-four years in practice George Robb was responsible for the design of a large number of buildings including houses, cottages, commercial and industrial facilities, offices and banks. Much of his work was related to tourism and the hospitality industry and included the Ascot Inn, Etobicoke (1959), Tourist Reception Centres in Sault Ste. Marie, Windsor and Gananoque (1961), the Valhalla Inn, Etobicoke (1962), the Group I restaurants at Expo '67 in Montreal (including the popu-

lar Bavarian Beer Garden), and the Valhalla Inns in Thunder Bay (1980) and Markham (1990). He also designed many senior citizens apartment buildings, family housing projects and schools, notably the Country Day Secondary School in King, Ontario.

Possibly Robb's best-known building was the Shell Tower at Exhibition Place, Toronto, built for Shell Oil in 1956. This tall, well proportioned observation and clock tower, positioned on the axis of the main (Princes Gate) entrance to Exhibition Place, was the first welded steel structure, and one of the first notable examples of Modern architectural design, in the city. The tower was subsequently taken over by the Bulova Watch Company, becoming known as the Bulova Tower. Over the years, however, its condition deteriorated. It was closed to the public in 1983 and, in the face of considerable public opposition, it was demolished in 1985 as it was considered to be too costly to repair and bring up to current standards of safety.

In addition to his architectural practice George Robb taught at the School of Architecture, University of Toronto for thirty-six years, from 1948 to 1984, retiring with the status of Associate Professor. For the most part he acted as a "design prof", instructing students in a particular year in the design studio. He thus contributed to the education of most of those that studied at the School from the nineteen-fifties to the eighties, most notably as a strong advocate of the Modern approach to design.

Robb was also active in public service, particularly as a member of various housing and planning task forces in the City of Toronto and Peel Region. In recognition of these activities, he was named the first recipient of the newly established OAA Community Service Award in 1988.

The common thread in all of Robb's activities, practice, teaching and community service was his strong commitment to excellence in architectural design. In the words of Donald Scott and Peter Stewart: "Robb was truly driven by a passionate interest in the pursuit of quality in design."

George Robb died in a boating accident on Georgian Bay on August 25, 1991, survived by his wife Joy and their daughters, Jennifer, Serena and Meredith.