

THOM, Ronald James (1923 – 1986)

A leading figure in Canada's post-second world war generation of architects, Ron Thom brought the west coast style to Toronto. In British Columbia and Ontario he created some of Canada's most unique and impressive buildings.

He was born in Penticton, B. C., the son of one of Canada's first female lawyers. Raised and educated in Vancouver, Thom began studying at the Vancouver School of Art while attending high school. After seeing action in World War II he returned full-time to his art studies. Here he fell under the influence of British Columbia artists Jack Shabolt and B. C. Binning who encouraged him to become an architect. After he graduated in 1947 he articulated with the firm Thompson, Brewick, Pratt and Partners, where he was a partner from 1958-1963. After winning the competition for Massey College, University of Toronto he moved to Toronto and established the Thom Partnership.

"A man of the tall timbers" Thom loved the Canadian landscape particularly that of his native province. Influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright, Thom was one of the pioneers of the west coast house style, designing more than 100 residences for which he won several Massey Medals. He empha-

sized an organic approach, with low horizontal roofs and extensive use of wood with his buildings fitting intimately into the landscape. "A building has to make love to a site" was Thom's phrase for it. With a special feeling for color, texture and materials, he created a human and intimate architecture which *Time* magazine once called "unconscious architecture".

Thom was the first architect to bring the west coast aesthetic to Eastern Canada. His first commission in Ontario was Massey College (1963). Thom brought together modern design with traditional college design creating a cloistered inward looking structure "so redolent of the Oxford spirit". Other commissions followed quickly, Trent University, Peterborough (1963); Sir Sanford Fleming College, Peterborough and Lindsay (1967); Shaw Festival Theatre, Niagara-on-the-Lake (1970); Prince Hotel, Don Mills (1971); Summit Golf Club, Aurora (1977); Ryerson Architecture Building, Toronto (1978) and the master plan for the Metropolitan Toronto Zoo and its African Pavilion.

Thom was a Fellow of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada.

Important work:

Trent University, buildings (Peterborough): Catherine Parr College and Rubidge Hall 1963-64; Master Plan 1964; Champlain College, Lady Eaton College, Thomas J. Bata Library, Chemistry Building, and Reginald Faryon Bridge	1964-71
Shaw Festival theatre, Niagara-on-the- Lake, Ontario	1970
Metropolitan Zoo, Scarborough, Ontario (with Clifford and Lawrie and Crang and Boake)	1972
Ryerson Architecture Building, Toronto	1978