

identité propre, grâce à la place d'Armes, qui les mets en présence l'un de l'autre. De même, on peut soutenir que la gare Windsor n'a rien d'unique, puisqu'elle s'inspire de l'oeuvre du grand architecte américain Richardson. Greffé cependant sur le square Dominion, voisinant, par l'intermédiaire de ce tampon de verdure, l'église Saint-George, la cathédrale Marie-Reine-du-Monde et l'édifice romantique de la Sun Life, cet ensemble victorien est absolument unique.

There is an example here to follow in the study of all Canadian cities.

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EXPLORING VANCOUVER

Harold Kalman and John Roaf
University of British Columbia Press
\$5.95

Urban geographers, ethnologists, social historians, industrial archaeologists, and even gastronomes — as well as architectural historians — will find something of interest in the Kalman and Roaf book, *Exploring Vancouver*. A compendium of facts and figures generously illustrated, the book is a tribute to the catholic interests of Dr. Harold Kalman and the photographic skills of John Roaf. Those who have struggled with Pevsner's *London* only to have the binding disintegrate in a swirl of Chelsea fog or who failed to locate a crucial cross-reference in the *Michelin Guide to Paris*, will appreciate the physical package. The 264 page 4½" x 10" format does fit in the pocket. The graphics and overall design facilitate quick reference and easy reading. The arrangement of points-of-interest into six walking tours and four driving tours follows not only logical geographical divisions but also the chronological sequence of Vancouver's development. Each tour is prefaced by a brief historical profile which establishes the general economic and cultural setting. The subjects of each discussion are illustrated on the following pages. Included in the package are a glossary of terms and two invaluable indices: one of architects, and the other a general reference, mainly of places. The overall quality of the book, in particular the saddle stitched binding (now alas becoming rare in a paperback) justifies the price of \$5.95.

Dr. Kalman states that "the book is intended primarily as a field guide for active participation." But "used instead as an armchair guide, the book becomes an illustrated historical record of the city and its buildings." The author quite rightly points out that architecture constitutes only a part of the

city's physical environment. Often the areas between the buildings, the landscape, placement of houses, street layout and views are equally important. However, since shelter-construction and the related crafts are now considered "folk art", and as such are respectable subject matter for academic enquiry, it is unfortunate that architectural historians, such as Dr. Kalman, still feel obligated to justify their concern with 'Architecture'.

The reader will appreciate the chronological range of examples, from the board-and-batten Hastings Mill Store of 1865, to the as yet incomplete C.B.C. Regional Broadcasting Centre, its steep angled facade still very much an oddity on the Vancouver landscape. One is also intrigued to learn of the famed Guinness family's financial interests in Vancouver landmarks. The history of False Creek from tidal mud flats to major railway terminus, heavy industrial precinct, dereliction, and then modern residential and parkland use, is fascinating and in many ways illustrates in microcosm the turbulent development history of the Vancouver area itself. The tour through the remnants of False Creek's history is one which in a few years will survive only in print.

Areas documented with a lively sympathy for their sociological interest include Chinatown. Here as in the Gastown tour the combination of fact and anecdote are the closest a book of this nature could come to evoking something of the original character of the area and flavour of the times. Gastown is redolent with history but probably the most memorable anecdote is associated with the Sam Kee building in Chinatown. Recorded by Ripley as the narrowest building in the world, the 4-foot, 11-inch-deep structure was built out of spite when the city expropriated most of Kee's property and refused to compensate him for the remaining strip.

Chinatown itself as an architectural response to the needs of an alien culture is indeed one of the more fascinating chapters of the book. And again one appreciates Kalman's suggestion to savour the culinary delights of this area, a topic which the author thoughtfully enlarges on in each tour introduction.

In faulting some aspects of the book, we deal mainly with cosmetics. The weighting in favour of post 1950 construction (accounting for nearly one quarter of the illustrations) is perhaps a question of taste. It may to some extent be accountable to the heavy involvement in terms of finance and technical assistance by the Architectural Institute of British Columbia. One also regrets that the maps do not fold out. Had they done so the book would have been a much more efficient tool. It is unfortunate too that the authors did not include period photographs. Added to the introductory sections these would have given some substance to the theme of transition, and graphically captured the flavour of the buildings in their original context. Mildly frustrating is the failure to provide layout maps of the all too brief references to landscape architecture. This is especially true of the Sharpe and Thompson plan for the Point Grey Campus for the University of British Columbia and the scheme for British Pacific Properties by the Olmstead Brothers.

One of the more laudable aspects of *Exploring Vancouver* is the ingenious arrangement of the areas and tours so that the introductions and illustrations together unfold a cohesive theme. That theme is growth. And the authors have correctly identified the significant cultural factor in Vancouver's comparatively brief history. The West Coast's heritage as well as its physical landscape is littered with wrecks from the merciless "boom-and-bust" economics of frontier life. Vancouver, in many ways the spoilt child of Western

Canada, is one of the few which made it. And to a large extent this precocious "growth" mentality, unscarred by the memory of major failure, is still a critical factor in the lives and attitudes of Vancouverites today.

Both in the introductions to each tour and the commentaries on the buildings themselves, Dr. Kalman documents this growth by observing major areas of change: developments in transportation amenities; changes in zoning regulations; evolutions in building style; and changes in land use and building functions — often seen through zoning alterations and by-law amendments. This approach brings out some interesting facts about significant alterations in the urban morphology (for instance, the 1964 zoning change which encouraged the construction of larger balconies in highrise apartment developments and also the zoning history of the prestigious Shaughnessy Heights residential area as a political response to fluctuating social and economic factors). The inclusion of such structures as a MacDonalds Restaurant and an Imperial Oil Service Station sum up recent trends in these areas succinctly — as utilitarian commercial art always does.

In the interests of a wider appeal the author might have taken a more interpretive approach to his theme. The importance of the concept of growth to the cultural and social life of Western America is rarely appreciated in the East, and is almost totally incomprehensible to Europeans — for both have long histories and established roots. With little over a century of settlement, civilization on the West Coast has remained veneer thin.

This factor, prominent in the social psychology of six generations, including that of today, goes a long way to explaining the industrious, vital, but

slightly neurotic life-style of Westerners. The West has always seen itself as an orphan child (its population for the most part orphans of many diverse cultures and countries) constantly trying to prove its maturity. And as a land of hope and promise for so many, from gold-seekers to property speculators and remittance men, it has also been a world of glorious dreams. Like San Francisco with its preposterous Nobb Hill mansions, Vancouver is studded with evidence of this. These dreams surface in precocious architecture and in the way new technologies were hastily seized upon. Kalman notes for instance publicity for the 1910 Dominion Building (billed at the time as the tallest building in the British Empire and the highest steel structure on the West Coast) "an object of pride to every citizen . . . advertizing our city as the most prosperous go ahead commercial city on the continent." In 1912 Vancouver outdid the Dominion Building with the 272-foot Sun Tower, thus retaining claim to the British Empire's tallest building. And all this in land-abundant British Columbia. In a similar vein, Moodyville boasted the first installation of electric light north of San Francisco.

Vancouver is a classic example of the frontier growth complex. Gastown grew up in desperate competition with New Westminster; Vancouver had a jealous eye cast over its shoulder at pretentious Victoria until 1900, and since then has looked south to San Francisco (always ignoring upstart Seattle) and east to Montreal. The fragility of sustained economic stability required continuous acts of faith in future prosperity. The investment of cash in a substantial building was the ultimate commitment a believer could make.

The desire to be modern and contemporary has, despite occasional pathetic moments, been the basic rationale that promoted the creation of an

economy of growth at any cost. In recent years this attitude has continued to foster a lust for symbols of maturity while patently rejecting the experience of the 'mature' East in a mad scramble for metropolis status. This includes downtown expressways, partly built then aborted, first by San Francisco then by Vancouver (both refusing to accept the failure of such expressways already documented in many eastern cities). It also includes the Miesian "Pacific Centre" with its acres of black reflective glass built 25 years after New York's Lever House when reductionist design precepts are giving way to increasing public criticism. In the same light one can understand the stance of Vancouver's city fathers who have recently launched bitter attacks at all levels of government for their failure to assist in financing an underground rapid transit system. San Francisco has just finished digging its trenches, and elsewhere in the world subways have become economic nightmares, the cause of decaying city-cores, and the scene of violent crime.

While an objective point of view is of course natural when dealing with historic architecture, Dr. Kalman has chosen for the most part an uncritical stance when dealing with contemporary work as well. That he rarely passes subjective judgement on design, is perhaps commendable as too many books of this type are larded with opinionated verbosity which is intended to pass for aesthetic criticism. However, Dr. Kalman's reticence in this area is probably fortunate for where he does venture an opinion I find myself in disagreement. I, for instance, fail to see why public response to the Pacific Centre by dubbing it the "Black Tower" was either "unkind" or unfortunate. It seems to me entirely logical, and appropriately censorious. I also fail to respond, as Dr. Kalman does, to the R.G. Gray House (1969) overlooking "beautiful" Howe Sound: "the gay col-

ours and simple shapes of Kemble's 'environment for enjoying life' respond to the rugged natural setting through contrast rather than emulation". The house is an eyesore.

Dr. Kalman's prose style is commendable. He eschews the normal rhetorical patter all too common with his profession to provide us with a clear and concise narrative of Vancouver's growth from boom-town to metropolis. The book is eminently readable. As a handy reference work it should be on the bookshelf of anybody interested in Canadian or Westcoast architectural history. It is a practical and entertaining guidebook which should have a wide and popular appeal. As a source book it is a significant contribution to the maturing genre of Canadian Architectural history.

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