

First of all, its site is superb. From the penthouse terrace that surrounds the diplomatic dining-room on the ninth floor, there is a broad view up and down the Ottawa River, across to the Quebec side and on to the horizon of the wooded Gatineau Hills. To the left are the spires of Parliament Hill, just below is Earncliffe, the modest Victorian home of Canada's first Prime Minister, and beyond the French Embassy to the right is the Prime Minister's official residence. Additional conversation pieces are the old National Research Council building just across the street, the Ottawa City Hall right beside us and, just over there, that rather gruesome fortress the Mint. Displaying this whole scene to a visiting diplomat, one could with justice say: "Here is Canada". One could also explain that Sussex Drive is a kind of processional route between Parliament Hill and Rideau Hall, which together symbolize the sovereignty of the nation.

In such a superb setting, so closely associated with the symbols and affairs of state, it would certainly have been a temptation to choose a stately architectural design, in the traditional sense. Should there, perhaps, have been some historic reference to the classical columns and courtyards of the Foreign Office in Whitehall, or some recollection of the ornate architectural good manners of the Quai d'Orsay, or even, perhaps, a bow to that crusty stylistic monster, the old State Department Building in Washington? But all of these got their Roman style from an imperial age in diplomacy and more appropriate, perhaps, would have been some overtones of the blander architecture of the United Nations building, signifying the period in which Canada became actively involved in international affairs. All these recognizable architectural conventions can be used by a competent firm of architects with the expectation of winning gold or silver medals if the conventions are used in a stylish and graceful way.

### Surprising design

However, the architects for the new External Affairs building, the firm of Webb, Zerafa, Menkes and Housden, did not use any of these architectural conventions, but put their minds to work on the real-life requirements of the Department. This has produced a design that has taken everyone by surprise because of its unexpected form and unconventional character. It is not quite like anything the public has seen before, and it has, consequently, been the target for some rather foolish criticism.

This is not really a single building but a three-dimensional cluster of several pieces, stretching nearly 300 yards along Sussex Drive, linked together and planned round a very handsome main entrance and foyer. The whole composition is raised on a podium, with a battered wall 12 feet high, that gives a robust strength to the design and provides a setting for garden terraces and groups of large trees. The highest tower in the cluster is the principal diplomatic centre, with the protocol and reception facilities at the foyer level, the Secretary of State for External Affairs on the tenth floor just above the penthouse terrace, and the officers of the Department on the second to the eighth floors. Also facing Sussex Drive, in a separate, lower building, is the Passport Office and, behind this, a general departmental office building.

At the main entry from Sussex Drive one either drives directly into the parking space below the podium or up to the main foyer doors, circling round the ascending steps of patterned gardens and under the shelter of a *port-cochère* roof. Entering the richly-sculptured bronze doors, one finds oneself immediately within the entry hall, which is two storeys high, not unlike the foyer of a large hotel, and serves the function of a kind of town-square surrounded by the whole cluster of buildings and their various features. In one direction from the foyer is the open hall of the Passport Office and the large cafeteria dining floor, both of which look into an interior courtyard that faces out towards the Rideau River; this garden courtyard will be a very pleasant place for lunch in the summer. At the back of the foyer is the Library, with a well-lit reading-room, a public display of documents on the history of Canada's external relations and, under greater security, a collection of NATO documents.

In another direction from the "town-square" is the international conference centre, with its own lobby and a smaller courtyard garden; there is a theatre-style auditorium seating about 220 and a highly-sophisticated conference chamber in which

*Robust strength plus a setting for garden terraces and towering trees*

*Humphrey Carver, town-planner and authority on the social-policy aspects of housing, served as chairman of the research committee and later as chairman of the advisory group of Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation during nearly 20 years with CMHC. Mr. Carver is author of Cities in the Suburbs, and acted as chairman last year of the jury for the Vincent Massey Awards for Excellence in the Urban Environment.*

