

THE SOARING CITIES

"There is little doubt that we are in the midst of a revolution of a much more profound and fundamental nature than the social and political revolutions of the last half century — a revolution so subtle and yet so encompassing that we will only gradually be aware that everything has changed — completely changed — and that nothing is as it was before."

Arthur Erickson

Architecture as you encounter it across Canada in the 1970s is an art constantly changing, just as society is constantly changing. Architecture is more closely tied to society than any other art form.

Poets or painters can follow their own private visions and produce work that only they and perhaps a few others appreciate, but architects cannot do that. They must reflect the desires, moods, and hopes of their fellow citizens. They must especially reflect the decisions of society's leaders, because architecture is only art in which all the final decisions are made by non-artists: business and government officials give the final approval to the architect's art. They let it happen.

If you want to know a country's real nature, then study its architecture. Canada has no great architectural tradition, but it has a history of distinctive building. The French settlers along the shores of the St. Lawrence in the seventeenth century brought with them the traditions of provincial France and you can still see some of the churches and houses they built as they imported their old culture and developed a new one. High Victorian design from England played a major role in Canadian building in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and in many cities you can see government buildings and universities that were built in that tradition. Today such buildings are cherished relics of the past, passionately protected by citizens' groups intent on preserving them.