

The evolution of Erickson's career

As a boy Erickson was fascinated by animal and plant structure, from which he began to paint abstracts. Vancouver, British Columbia, the city Erickson grew up in, also provided a visual stimulus for him. It boasted some interesting examples of Art Deco and conservative Modernist design, together with a superb natural setting. However, Erickson's interest in architecture only materialised after war service in the Far East. When he returned to Canada he first considered a diplomatic career, but embarked on his true vocation after reading an article in *Fortune Magazine* on Taliesin West, and its 'Welsh guru' Frank Lloyd Wright whom he was to visit in 1950.

By that date, Erickson had nearly completed his professional training at McGill University at the outset of the first phase of his career.

In his graduating year, Erickson was awarded a travelling scholarship. This scholarship was to have taken him directly to London in time for the Festival of Britain, but the ship on which he worked his passage across the Atlantic was diverted to Egypt. From there, Erickson meandered throughout the Mediterranean basin and became acquainted with the ancient springs of western architecture.

Thus, aware of the heritage of Mediterranean civilization, he returned to Canada, via London — more of an internationalist, if still a modernist.

The first phase of Erickson's career, distinguished by the award of two of the eight Massey Medals he was to win, ended with his 1961 tour of Japan and the Far East.

There he came to comprehend the sophisticated interplay between nature and artifice in Japanese design, declaring of Katsura, 'It is the most complete work of art in Japan, and, I think in the whole repertoire of architecture it demonstrates the sense of refinement, of restraint, of serenity, of melancholy, of simplicity that the Japanese can achieve.' Then he added an equally illuminating phrase: 'it can be an albatross to the development of a new tradition.'

The second phase of Erickson's career began in 1963, when he progressed from being a gifted regional domestic architect to become nationally recognised for his institutional and corporate commissions.

That year he won first prize, with his partner Geoffrey Massey, in the provincial competition for Simon Fraser University built on top of Burnaby Mountain near Vancouver, British Columbia.

Museum of Anthropology

The third phase of Erickson's career is marked by buildings that range from the MacMillan Bloedel Headquarters in Vancouver to the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia. Their ability to resolve practical specifications with imaginative expression, and hence attract a diverse clientele, is immediately evident.

Erickson's maturing talent for discovering appropriate architectural solutions is equally well demonstrated in the three pavilions he designed for the Canadian Government: Tokyo International Trade Fair; Montreal Expo's Man in the Community building; and Osaka World's Fair.



Where freed from a pre-determined architectural setting, Erickson was unashamedly inventive, the Museum of Anthropology embraces the environment out of which the North-west Coast Indians created the objects displayed within, by means of a series of flat arches enclosed by walls of glass. Entering through a lower arch, the visitor walks down past display bays housing progressively large artifacts, towards the magnificent panorama of the Strait of Georgia.

Erickson establishes his own company

Erickson ended a partnership he had had with Geoffrey Massey in 1972 and the fourth phase of his career followed. His wish to control design standards was achieved by establishing Arthur Erickson Architects, initially in Vancouver but subsequently with offices in Toronto and the Middle East, and now in Los Angeles and Kuala Lumpur.

He assumed a position of creative leadership amidst a diverse group of gifted designers and technicians, presiding over discussions with clients, the analysis of specifications from conceptual sketches to critical interchange around models, to final working drawings. As a result there has been a great broadening of Erickson's practice in types of commission and their location. Among them the church (Christ Church Cathedral, Vancouver); the concert hall (Roy Thomson Hall, Toronto), and the government office (Courthouse and Provincial Government Offices, Vancouver). The last exemplifies the creativity of Erickson's mature work. Replacing a proposed tall office building, the complex subordinates the legal and bureaucratic agencies to the society each serves and provides a garden oasis in the downtown core. The public space flows over and through the official accommodation, while the tiered structure, with its trees, shrubs and waterways, harmonizes with the West Coast environment. Emulating the disciplined, yet variegated, naturalism of

Simon Fraser University

