



Friedman House

By Richard Cavell

Built in 1955 and fully restored in 2014, House Friedman was designed by internationally-trained architect, Frederic Lasserre, founder of the UBC School of Architecture. Situated near the university, just outside the city of Vancouver limits, the house combines a modernist aesthetic with a distinctively West Coast Modern ethos. Distinguished by its spatial complexity, and by its seamless relationship to the landscape design of Cornelia Oberlander, the house asserts its adherence to global modernism while asserting a local aesthetic that has come to be identified as West Coast Modernism. Architect Lasserre, whose early career was associated with Berthold Lubetkin, and landscaper Oberlander, a student of Gropius, together produced an iconic design for modern living featuring an open plan, generous glazing, and a subtle flow between the house and garden. The future of the house was threatened by the exorbitant land values in Vancouver, where the price of property often trumps architectural value; however, a national effort to save the house was successful, and the house remains as a testimony to those who value modernist architecture's special place in the West Coast ethos.

I came to this project as someone who studies how spaces are produced, as well as how spaces are productive. In the context of this book, I was influenced by the media theories of Marshall McLuhan, which argue that media are not simply neutral transmitters of information but actually transform information. Applied to an architectural context, this theory suggests that architectural spaces transform us in essential ways. This notion is at the heart of the West Coast style of architecture.

Author

Richard Cavell is Professor of English and co-founder of the Bachelor of Media Studies Program at the University of British Columbia. He is the author or editor of six books and more than 80 chapters, articles and reviews.

Photography by Michael Perlmutter.

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