

HERITAGE

Vancouver

NEWSLETTER

What Happened to Theatre Row?

by **JOHN ATKIN**

THE CAPRICE, STUDIO, and Plaza are yet another group of Granville Street theatres to go dark on what is supposed to be Vancouver's Theatre Row. There have been theatres on Granville Street as long as there has been a street. The Canadian Pacific Railway opened the Vancouver Opera House at the corner of Robson and Granville, behind their hotel, in 1891 to woo business to their landholding on the western portion of downtown. It was a break from the established theatre district centred on Main and Hastings.

The Opera House started a trend and soon others followed. There were some relatively crude buildings passed off as theatres along West Pender and Hastings Streets but others such as the Alhambra (later known as the Colonial and ending its life in the 1970s as the Magic Theatre) at the corner of Dunsmuir and Granville certainly tried to compete with the Opera House on equal terms.

As serious entertainment gave way to movies, Granville Street became Vancouver's movie street. Elaborate movie houses such as the Maple Leaf (later to become the Dominion and even later, the Caprice) featured a huge stain glass dome in the ceiling while the Capital Theatre's interior went for the overblown classical look. The Vogue was thoroughly modern for the 1940s even though it was built as



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Vancouver: The Way it Was M. Kluckner

Some Madams had their names laid in tile in the entranceways—the last remaining one is Fay Packer's in a rooming house at 639 Alexander Street.

November 15, 2000
8.00 PM, Vancouver Museum
Hey buddy, you got the time?
Prostitution: Past and Present

It's always been here and no matter how hard we try it always will be. Prostitution. Join Linda Eversole and Michael Kluckner for this peek at the world's oldest profession in Vancouver.

Linda Eversole is writing a book on the life of a Victorian madam and Michael Kluckner is a well known author and historian who has written many books on Vancouver.

Free for Heritage Vancouver and Vancouver Museum members, \$5.00 for everyone else.

December 20, 2000
8.00 PM, Vancouver Museum
The Open Projector

Join Heritage Vancouver for its traditional end of the year meeting. Everyone is invited to bring along some personal slides and put them up on the screen. Find out what others have done and are interested in. There are always surprises.

A free evening.

VANCOUVER MODERN



Narod house, north elevation

Photo: R. Moffatt, 1998

Narod house an early Ron Thom example

BY *Robert Moffatt*

Narod house I
5512 College Highway, UBC
Ron Thom of Sharp and Thompson,
Berwick, Pratt 1950

Along with Arthur Erickson, Ron Thom was probably the strongest design talent to emerge from Vancouver's postwar architecture scene. Trained as a painter at the Vancouver School of Art, Thom began his apprenticeship at Sharp and Thompson, Berwick, Pratt in 1949 and quickly demonstrated an almost poetic design ability. With Ned Pratt, Bob Berwick and others he formed the nucleus of one of Vancouver's most renowned firms.

Thom was deeply influenced by the work of Frank Lloyd Wright and Richard Neutra, the German-born California modernist. In this early post-and-beam design for Alvin Narod, a forward-thinking contractor who built many of Vancouver's early Modernist houses, Thom achieved elegance through a sophisticated interplay of planes and forms and the clean-lined simplicity of materials like cedar, glass, and brick.

Thom located open-plan living areas on the ground floor with two bedrooms above, puncturing the ceiling with a double-height section around the massive central fireplace. Daylight softly floods from the celestary windows, accenting the interlocking

post-and-beam horizontals and verticals and creating a tranquil, almost Japanese effect. Structural beams extend outside the house to the rear to define a south-facing patio area. Natural brown woodstains were the likely exterior finishes, currently replaced by an eye-popping magenta colour.

Thom's choice of post-and-beam construction also allowed for a modular expandability to house a growing family, further accommodated by setting the house at the higher west edge of the large, gently sloping corner site. An addition was completed in 1955.

Through the 1950s and early 1960s Thom completed dozens of acclaimed houses in the Vancouver area and played key roles in larger buildings like Vancouver's BC Hydro tower. Seeking broader horizons, Thom moved to Toronto in 1963 following the completion of Massey College and enjoyed further success as designer of Trent University, the Metro Toronto Zoo, and several West Coast-influenced houses. However, for personal and professional reasons his career sharply tapered off in the late 1970s and early 1980s. He died in 1986.

When not writing his Vancouver Modern column, Robert Moffatt makes his living in corporate communications and public relations. rmoffatt@bc.sympatico.ca

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Treasure Saturdays is a new series of talks sponsored by the Vancouver Museum which takes a look at what people collect. Every third Saturday of the month offers a chance to learn something new and meet interesting people.

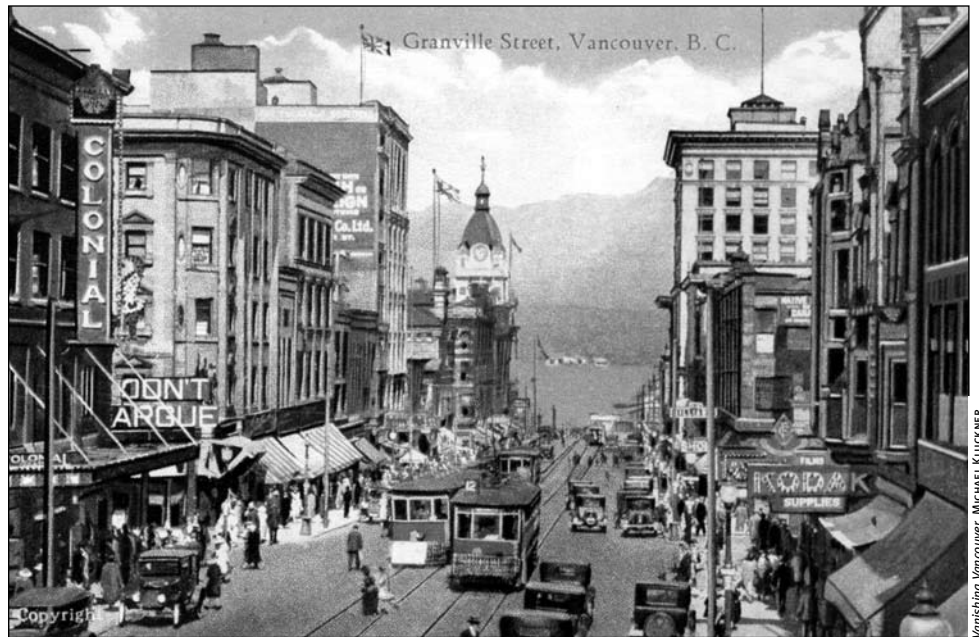
Saturday, November 18 at 1:30 PM
The Wright Stuff
at the Vancouver Museum

Find out what makes these utilitarian works of ceramic art so popular with collectors today and how to know whether you've got yourself a keeper! Bring along your favourite Russel Wright pieces for a lively discussion and consultation by Donald Luxton. Co-sponsored by the Canadian Art Deco Society

\$6.00 for members and \$10 for non-members. Pre-registration is advised and the opportunity for a consultation is available at an additional charge of \$6.00 for the first 18 to register.

from Theatre Row cover

a vaudeville house — something that didn't last too long. Eventually the movie business changed and big single screens were seen as a liability by theatre chains and they were either demolished or converted into multi-screen complexes. The Capital was replaced with the Capital 6 (the Orpheum was to have suffered the indignity of being converted to a multi-screen house at the hands of Famous Players, but was saved when



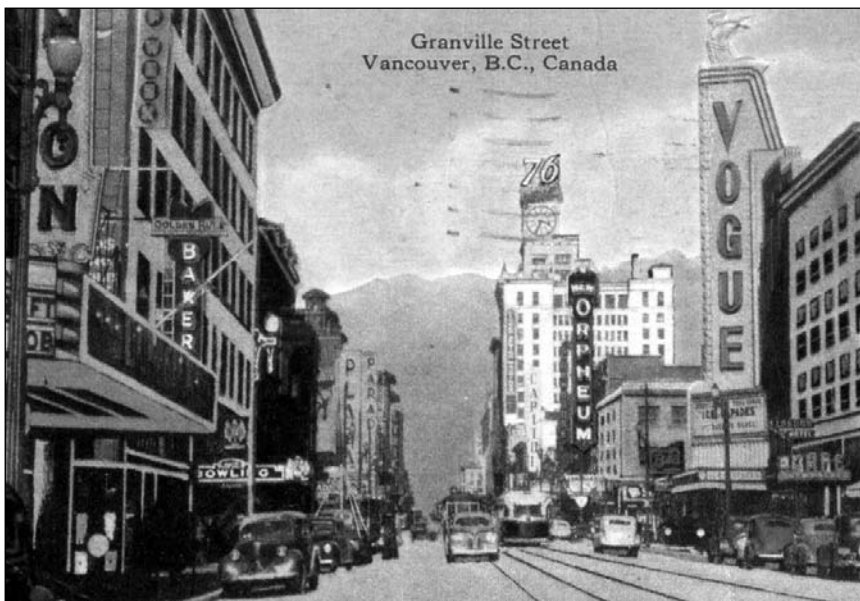
This postcard view from the 1920s looks northward, with the clock tower of the old Post Office—now the Sinclair Centre—visible in the distance. The crossing just past the Colonial Theatre sign is Dunsmuir Street.

purchased by the City of Vancouver), the old Paradise became part of the Granville 7 complex while others such as the Lyric (the old Opera House) and Colonial, were demolished for Pacific Centre. And some were just closed and left dark.

Now the few remaining theatres on Granville Street faced a new threat. Liquor licences. The City of Vancouver unveiled its vision for a two block stretch of Granville Street as an entertainment district, to accomplish

this they are encouraging the relocation of liquor licences from other parts of town to Granville Street. But this has had an unforeseen impact on what made Granville Street special in the first place. Theatres are now seen as being more profitable as nightclubs. The Plaza has already been converted. The Studio and Caprice theatres are the next to go. That leaves Granville Street with just the Vancouver Centre, Granville 7 and Capital 6 theatres as venues for movies and it's even rumoured that the Capital complex is close to being closed by Famous Players. Nobody at the City, when planning the entertainment district concept, looked at Granville Street and saw that they would be wiping out one form of entertainment for another. So, while the Orpheum and Vogue theatres are great spaces for live entertainment and have been restored to a former glory, the movie going public has lost something important as the movie house gives way to the dance floor. And once converted they never return.

John Atkin one of Heritage Vancouver's past presidents keeps himself occupied with old neon, old boats and old theatres.



This postcard shows "Theatre Row" in the 1940s looking north past Nelson St.

An invitation to get involved

Dear Members,

In this my first letter as your new Heritage Vancouver President, I would like to extend an invitation to all members to become actively involved this year. The AGM is behind us, we have a plan to direct our activities and your new board is excited about serving you and working with you in the coming year. Thanks to your previous board and president John Atkins we are inheriting a vibrant organization. We are committed to building on the work of our predecessors to ensure that Heritage Vancouver remains the number one organization in Vancouver in advocating for the preservation of heritage buildings and heritage areas.

We have exciting plans and we need your participation to make them happen! Many of you may wonder how you can get more involved in Heritage Vancouver. Here are a few suggestions.. Renew your membership if it is about to expire or invite a friend or colleague to become a new member. Attend one of our monthly talk series at the Vancouver Museum or volunteer to be a greeter at one of our events. Call us if there is an endangered heritage building in your neighbourhood or write a background paper on your favourite heritage building; Volunteer to spend some time in our booth at the annual Heritage Fair or join our planning committee to make sure we have the most dynamic booth at the Fair. Write letters to the editor or volunteer to write articles for our newsletter. Get involved in developing our new website...mentor a student or a new member... become our volunteer coordinator...get involved in one of our committees...the opportunities are endless!

I look forward to meeting and working with all of you in the up-coming year.



Janet Leduc
President, Heritage Vancouver

New Faces on the Board

The Heritage Vancouver Board for 2000-2001 has some new faces these are: Janet Leduc (President), Hillary Haggan (Administrator/Recording Secretary), Art Perret, and Walter Simek. Please make them feel welcome. Thank you also to those board members who are staying on. We appreciate the quality of continuity that repeat terms creates.

Get on the List

Heritage Vancouver is putting together its first 10 most endangered heritage properties list for release next year. We're seeking your suggestions of buildings, landscapes, interiors etc.

Put those thinking caps on and contribute to the list. Mail your suggestions to Heritage Vancouver or simply call the phone line at 254.9411.

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[HTTP://HOME.ISTAR.CA/~GLENCHAN/HVSINTRO.SHTML](http://home.istar.ca/~glenchan/hvsintro.shtml)

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YES

I WOULD LIKE TO VOLUNTEER FOR HERITAGE VANCOUVER

PLEASE SEND CHEQUE OR MONEY ORDER TO: HERITAGE VANCOUVER, P.O. Box 3336, VANCOUVER, BC V6B 3Y3