

West Vancouver Loses Modernist Arthur Erickson-Built Landmark

A distinctive piece of West Coast Modernist architecture designed by prominent Canadian architect Arthur Erickson is gone. Erickson's breakthrough David Graham House, a stunning multi-storey wood-and-glass house balanced on the rocky bluffs over the Pacific in West Vancouver, was demolished last December.



David Graham House
Photo: Esto Photographics Inc.

The David Graham House, completed in 1963, helped kick-start Arthur Erickson's auspicious architectural career. Set dramatically on a cliff "like a ladder," the house was on several levels with overlapping roofs and stacking terraces.

"The living room is a hovering glass platform with marvellous twisted pines clinging to the rock around it," Erickson wrote in his 1975 book *The Architecture of Arthur Erickson*. "The master bedroom hangs over the sea and its bathroom opens on submarine windows into the swimming pool."

In recent years, the house had fallen into disrepair. It had been vacant for some time, and the owner had been accused by conservation specialists of not maintaining the structure.

The house was recognized as a "primary" building on West Vancouver's survey of significant architecture from 1945 to 1975, but the list has "no teeth," according to Mayor Pamela Goldsmith-Jones, so the government could not stop the demolition. Her council issued the demolition permit, despite a last-minute request to have the house put on the city's heritage registry.

Along with the Arthur Erickson Conservancy and Heritage West Vancouver, Mayor Goldsmith-Jones had been exploring options to try to save the structure.

City planner Stephen Mikicich said that "in the end, this is private property we're talking about, so we're really looking to encourage conservation by the tools that are available to us. We really don't have, as a local government, any legal authority to further delay a demolition permit."

While it is too late for the David Graham House, the controversy has motivated Mayor Goldsmith-Jones to take steps to protect the remaining architectural gems in West Vancouver. She hopes to have a new policy in place by March.

According to Mikicich, the district is also working with the Arthur Erickson Conservancy to fully document the importance of 11 other Erickson homes in West Vancouver.

Globe and Mail, *Ont.*, 12/03/07; North Shore News, *B.C.*, 12/03/07 and 12/07/07; Vancouver Province, *B.C.*, 12/03/07.

