

Fig. 1. The Binning residence (1941) in West Vancouver, designed by artist B.C. Binning and constructed in consultation with architects C.E. Pratt and R.A.D. Berwick, represents an early and remarkably intact example of a new approach to residential design in Canada during the modern era.

(Photograph by Graham Warrington, c. 1951. B.C. Binning Fonds, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal)

Susan D. Bronson

Binning Residence, West Vancouver

The Binning residence (Fig. 1) was designed by well-known Canadian artist B.C. Binning (1909-76) and constructed in collaboration with consulting architects C.E. Pratt and R.A.D. Berwick¹ during the early years of the Second World War. At the time, the house and its garden demonstrated an innovative approach to residential design and construction that had an influence on postwar residences on the West Coast and in other parts of Canada, as well as on the integration of art and architecture in postwar buildings of various types. The property, which is in a remarkable state of preservation, represents an early testimony of the cultural phenomena — the changing social, economic, and political conditions, the rapid technological advances, and new ways of responding to form and responding to functional demands — that influenced the design and production of the buildings, ensembles and sites of the Modern era.² It is listed in the heritage inventory of the District of West Vancouver,³ and there is interest in pursuing its designation at the municipal level.⁴

This report discusses the potential national significance of the Binning residence in five parts that correspond to the criteria for the built heritage of the Modern era: Part 1 deals with the property as an illustration of the changing social, economic, and political conditions of its days; Part 2 focuses on its design as a new expression of form and response to functional demands; Part 3 addresses the technological advances applied to its design and construction; Part 4 examines its impact on subsequent work; and Part 5 summarizes its integrity.

Social, Economic, and Political Conditions

The Binning residence is largely a personal response to mid-20th century social, economic, and political conditions by a man who was to become one of Canada's leading promoters of Modernist ideology. Despite communication barriers imposed by the Rocky Mountains, the lack of disposable income in the aftermath of the Depression, and the shortage of materials and manpower during the Second World War, artist B.C. Binning pursued his education in Canada, the United States, and England, and returned to Vancouver in the late 1930s prepared to make a major impact on residential design on the West Coast. Teaming up with two young architects who had recently arrived from the east, he created a

Ce rapport fut présenté à la réunion de novembre 1997 de la Commission des lieux et monuments historiques du Canada. La ministre du Patrimoine canadien a déclaré la maison Binning lieu historique national du Canada en 1998 à la suite de la recommandation favorable de la Commission et une plaque de bronze a été apposée pour marquer cette reconnaissance en 2001.

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B.C. Binning, Self-Portrait, ink, undated.

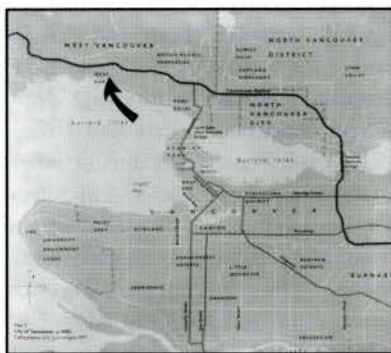


Fig. 3. The Binning residence is located in the District of West Vancouver, a popular suburb of Vancouver because of its close proximity to downtown, hilly topography, and splendid views. (Rhodri Windsor Liscombe, *The New Spirit: Modern Architecture in Vancouver, 1938-1963* [Montréal/Vancouver: Canadian Centre for Architecture/Douglas & McIntyre, 1997], p. 25.)



Fig. 4. The Binning property, which was located on a quiet street and possessed lots of trees, sloped down towards the water. One of the smallest lots in its immediate neighbourhood, it was evaluated at \$ 600 in 1942. (Corporation of the District of West Vancouver, Legal Composite Map.)

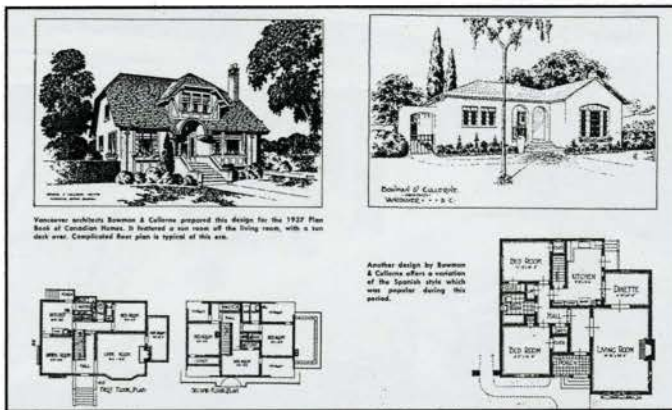
of teachers who had come over from England and Scotland,⁷ and then taught there from 1934 until 1949. Feeling that the West Coast was cut off from exciting developments underway elsewhere,⁷ Binning broadened his outlook and pursued his artistic training by studying at the University of Oregon under Eugene Gustav Steinhof in 1936. After his marriage that same year, he and his wife Jessie went to London, England, where he spent a year studying under such well-known Modern artists as Bernard

Fig. 2. B.C. Binning (1909-1976), one of Canada's most well-known artists, taught art and architecture in the School of Architecture at the University of British Columbia (UBC) and directed its Department of Fine Arts. (Reproduced from *Le Soleil de Colombie*, May 14, 1976, in biographical file on B.C. Binning, Vancouver Art Gallery.)

building that could serve as a model for an economical and efficient approach to residential design and for the expression of artistic and architectural ideas that he and his West Coast colleagues would continue to develop and promote for the next three decades.

Bertram Charles (better known as B.C.) Binning (Fig. 2) was born in Medicine Hat, Alberta, in 1909. His family moved to Vancouver in 1913 and, with the exception of short periods of foreign study, the West Coast became his home for the rest of his life. When he was young, Binning spent time in the architectural office of his grandfather, but prolonged illness during high school and lack of local opportunities led him to pursue his higher education in art instead of architecture.⁸ He graduated in 1932 from the Vancouver School of Art, which he later described as "a quiet little provincial art school taught by a staff

Fig. 5. When the Binnings first began to think about the design of their home in the late 1930s, the most popular residential styles on the West Coast were traditional in their rendering. ("100 Years of B.C. Living," in *Western Homes and Living*, January 1958, pp. 41, 42.)



Meninsky, sculptor Henry Moore, painter Mark Gertler, and Amédée Ozenfant, a former associate of Le Corbusier. In 1938 he went to New York to study at the Art Students' League under Morris Kantor. By this time he was becoming known for his joyful pen-and-ink drawings, mostly of images related to the sea.⁸

When the Binnings were considering building a new home for themselves in the late 1930s, they did not have a lot of money to spend.⁹ They purchased a small lot in West Vancouver (Fig. 3), which was close to Jessie Binning's family home in Gleneagles and was quickly becoming one of the most desirable residential areas in the Vancouver region.¹⁰ Evaluated at a mere \$600 in 1942,¹¹ their property was one of the smallest lots in the neighbourhood (Fig. 4), but its steeply sloping site, located on a quiet street with many trees, possessed a spectacular view of Burrard Inlet. At first, the Binnings considered various traditional styles of houses being built at the time in the Vancouver area — Cape Cod, Tudor, Spanish (Fig. 5)¹² — but, following their return from abroad in 1938, B.C. Binning was convinced that a "Modern" house was in order. He later recounted "... what I wanted to do was to build this house... I wanted to prove to myself that there was a contemporary architecture and it worked. And lo and behold it did!"¹³

Binning's design was to be inexpensive — it ended up costing about \$5,000¹⁴ — and was intended, among other objectives, to provide "a model for ordinary housing."¹⁵ In the early years of the Second World War, Vancouver, like other urban centres throughout Canada, was experiencing an acute housing crisis. The country experienced a sharp decline in home ownership and an increase in tenancy between 1931 and 1941 due to an economic situation that led to doubling up and substandard accommodation. The situation worsened during the first few years of the war, when government controls on manpower and materials and the general deterioration of the housing stock combined with housing shortages caused by the movement of the families of those working on the war effort to urban centres and areas near armed forces bases. There was a pressing need for economical, efficient homes, especially for middle- and low-income families, that could be constructed quickly with the limited labour and materials available during wartime.¹⁶



Fig. 6. Although “Modern house” design — characterized in the 1930s by such features as a flat roof, simple volumes, lack of ornament, and open plan — was being promoted during the 1930s in some parts of Canada, such as Ontario and Quebec, it was not popular in British Columbia and it was not promoted by the federal government. All of the prize-winning designs of the 1936 Ontario Small House Competition (left) were based on the principles of modernism, but there were very few prize-winning entries to the 1936 Dominion Housing Competition (right) that came close to reflecting a modernist image. (“Awards in the Ontario Government Housing Competition,” *Journal, Royal Architectural Institute of Canada*, Vol. 13, No. 8 [August 1936], p. 152 [left]; A.S. Mathers, “Dominion Housing Competition,” *Journal, RAIC*, Vol. 15, No. 4 [April 1938], p. 91 [right].)

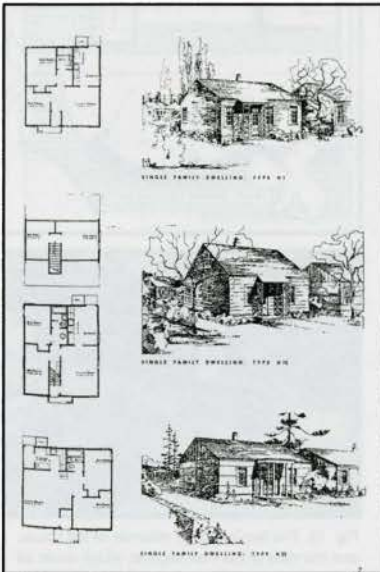


Fig. 7. During the early years of the war, the Wartime Housing Limited homes constructed by the federal government across the country fell into four standard types. Designed to be temporary and demountable, they were simple in their formal expression and layout, and economical in their construction. In the Vancouver area, traditional wood-frame construction and clapboard replaced prefabricated panels and asbestos siding due to the wartime shortage of plywood in the area. (Burwell R. Coon, “Wartime Housing,” *Journal, RAIC*, Vol. 19, No. 1 [January 1942], p. 7.)

relatively traditional in appearance, constructed according to standardized models (Fig. 7). Nevertheless, these wartime homes were innovative in terms of their efficient response to an urgent social need, their simplicity of form, and their economical approach to construction.

Binning’s goal, in the design of his home, was to develop a residential model that would combine a Modern approach to form and function with economy and efficiency of construction, and at the same time make use of local materials and up-to-date construction technologies. Similar objectives for government-sponsored WHL housing, designed to be demounted after the war, introduced prefabricated components (such as plywood panels) and new materials (such as asbestos siding) that could be salvaged for postwar construction.¹⁸ In Vancouver, however, the shortage of plywood (which was manufactured locally but sent to the east for war-related priorities) for prefabrication led to the construction of the standard designs according to traditional wood-frame and clapboard construction.¹⁹

Realizing that it had to take the lead in resolving this nationwide problem, the federal government created Wartime Housing Limited (WHL) in 1941. Thousands of homes were constructed across the country by WHL until it was dismantled and replaced some six years later by the newly established Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CHMC). Although new approaches to “Modern” residential design — characterized by such features as simple volumes, flat roofs, lack of ornament, and open planning — were being explored during the 1930s in some parts of the country (Fig. 6),¹⁷ the “temporary” WHL houses of the early 1940s were

Fig. 8. Architect Peter M. Thornton’s first house (1938-39) in West Vancouver was one of a very small number of residences constructed during the 1930s on the West Coast that experimented with the principles of modernism. It possesses a gently sloping roof and generous fenestration, and makes use of post-and-beam construction and local stone.

(Tony Archer, 1947, *Journal, RAIC*, Vol. 24, No. 6 [June 1947].)



Fig. 9. Architect C.B.K. Van Norman’s residence for his family (1938-39) in Vancouver, constructed in collaboration with Thornton, Birmingham, and McKee, also experimented with the vocabulary of modernism. It was demolished in 1994.

(Tony Archer, 1947, *Journal, RAIC*, Vol. 24, No. 6 [June 1947].)



Very few private homes were constructed in Canada during the Second World War, largely due to society’s focus on other priorities and the government’s restrictions on manpower and materials for initiatives not related to the war effort. Homes that explored Modern design principles were even more scarce: prior to the construction of the Binning residence in 1941, only a couple of Modern homes had been realized in the Vancouver area. Nevertheless, the city was beginning to attract energetic young architects from the east in a trend that would continue into the postwar era, making the West Coast a centre for experimentation and innovative transatlantic design.²⁰ Many of those who settled there, both during and after the war, were artist and architect friends of the Binnings and shared their enthusiasm for the Modern way of living. In 1938-39, architect Peter M. Thornton, who had just immigrated from England after studying at the Architectural Association in London, built a two-storey home for his mother in West Vancouver; his design made use of local fieldstone and wood in a manner that reflected his knowledge of European Modernism (Fig. 8).²¹ At the same time, architect C.B.K. Van Norman, who had studied at the University of Manitoba in the 1920s, experimented with Modernism in the two-storey Vancouver residence he designed for his family in collaboration with Thornton and two other young architects, William H. Birmingham and Robert McKee (Fig. 9). Like Thornton’s home, this simple rectangular building was clad in local stone and wood siding, and possessed a gently sloping roof.²² In 1939, R.A.D. (Bob) Berwick, who had recently arrived from the east following studies at the University of Toronto, designed and built a low-lying Modernist residence for himself in West Vancouver (this house was substantially renovated in 1948 following a flood).²³

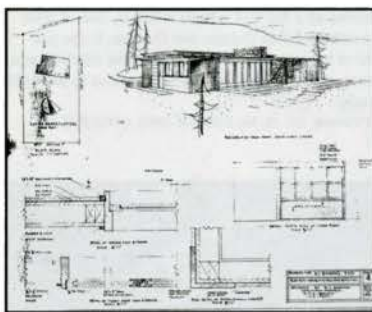


Fig. 10. This proposed site plan and perspective for the Binning residence, one of two schemes rendered as construction drawings in March 1941, show that the building was sited and designed to make the most of its relationship to its immediate landscape and south-facing views. Details for doors and windows, although custom-designed for the house, were conceived in a manner that allowed for mass-production. ("Residence for B.C. Binning Esq.: Plot Plan, Perspective View and Details, etc." Sheet 4, March 10, 1941. B.C. Binning Fonds, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal)

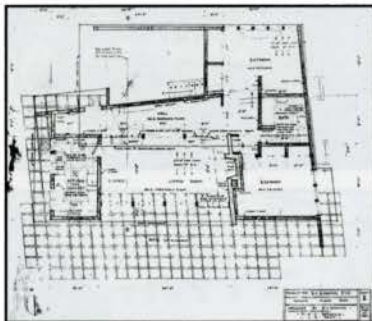


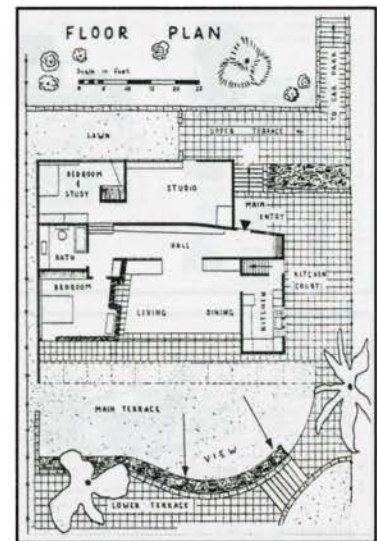
Fig. 11. Two alternative layouts were drawn up in March 1941. This one, which was not constructed, shows the bedrooms and bathroom on the east side of the house and the kitchen on the west side. A carpark was shown instead of a studio. ("Residence for B.C. Binning Esq.: Ground Floor Plan," Sheet 2, March 10, 1941. B.C. Binning Fonds, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal)

shared his enthusiasm for developing a contemporary residential building vocabulary that was economical in construction and sensitive to its setting, and at the same time made use of local materials and components that could be mass-produced (Fig. 10). Two schemes, one almost a mirror image of the other (Fig. 11), were drawn up by March 1941;²⁷ both showed a low structure on two levels that stepped down with the topography of the site. The lower level featured a generous hallway that doubled as a gallery and opened into a living-dining area that extended outwards to a terrace and garden facing Burrard Inlet to the south, as well as a kitchen and master bedroom. The upper level included a second bedroom and a carport. By May 1941, the water was connected²⁸ and the construction of a modified version of one of these schemes (Fig. 12), with a studio in place of the proposed carport (a car shelter was constructed near the street instead), was underway. During the 1940s, the finishing touches — furnishings, draperies, murals, artwork, landscaping — were added²⁹ (Figs. 13, 14, 16-20), and the design reached a state of integrity which has been respected in subsequent modifications (Figs. 15, 21-23).

Form and Function

The design of the Binning residence, which remains remarkably intact today, demonstrated new ways of expressing form and responding to function in three respects: in the harmonious relationship of its architecture to its environment; in the efficiency and economy of its layout and the interrelationships between its form and its function; and in the manner in which Modern art

Fig. 12. The final layout includes the kitchen on the east side and the bedrooms and bathroom on the west side. The hallway, with its clerestory windows and slightly curved wall, serves as an extension of the living-dining room as well as a gallery and circulation corridor. A studio replaces the carpark, which was constructed instead beside the road. An upper terrace, a kitchen court, and the main (lower) terrace extend the house into the surrounding garden. This layout is intact today. ("The B.C. Binning House," in *Western Homes and Living*, October-November 1950, p. 16)



and architecture can intersect to create a dynamic and meaningful experience of space.

Despite the knowledge and understanding of the world he acquired through education abroad and his keen sense of the need to keep up with what was current elsewhere, B.C. Binning possessed a strong attachment to his local environment, and went to extremes to ensure that the design of his home and garden was sensitive to and made the most of its immediate setting and the materials and climatic conditions of the West Coast. The building was located near the top of the sloping property (Fig. 10) surrounded by existing trees and new plantings so that it enjoyed privacy from the street above and from its neighbours. It was designed as two low-lying quasi-rectangular volumes, one lower than the other to maximise the potential of its slopping site (Figs. 11-14) and to allow the penetration of natural light, via a clerestory window between the two planes, into its central hallway-gallery.



Fig. 13. The two low-lying volumes of the house and the view of the inlet beyond, which could be seen from the upper terrace around 1950, are barely visible today due to the lush landscape of the sloping site. (Photograph by Graham Warrington, c. 1951. Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal)

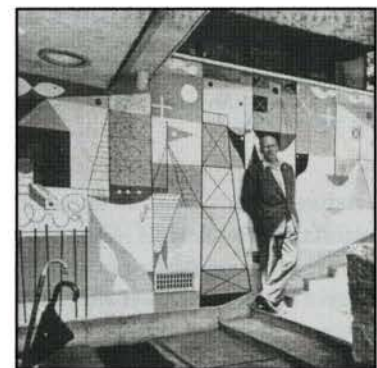


Fig. 14. The entrance is sheltered by a canopy. The joyful composition of marine motifs within an architectural framework, typical of Binning's work of the 1940s, was the first of three murals painted by the artist to welcome visitors to his home. (Photograph by Graham Warrington, reproduced from *Journal. RAIC*, Vol. 27, No. 9, September 1950.)

Terraces of square paving stones on the north, east, and south sides extended the house outwards into the garden (Figs. 1, 12). The house was carefully oriented to take advantage of natural light and views: the generously proportioned southward-looking windows and doors between the lower terrace and living-dining room, as well as the slightly smaller windows of the master bedroom, faced the treed garden below and the water be-

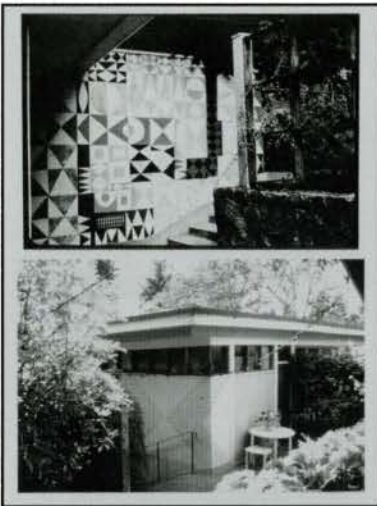


Fig. 15. The second entrance mural (top), probably painted in the 1950s, was more abstract than the first. The third one (bottom), a minimalist combination of white and yellow, has recently been renewed.

(Reproduced from slide belonging to Jessie Binning, documentation file, B.C. Binning Fonds, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal [top]; S.D. Bronson, September 1997 [bottom])



Fig. 16. The hallway, which doubles as a gallery, is filled with light from the south-facing clerestory windows. The end (west) wall is defined by an abstract mural, and the cedar v-joint to the right provides a backdrop for an ever-changing selection of paintings. Built-in shelving accommodates books and art objects. To the left, a partition with rolled glass set in 24" squares allows additional light to enter from the living room. The present-day view (right) confirms that little has changed since the earlier photograph was taken in the late 1940s (left). (Reproduced from c. 1948 slide belonging to Jessie Binning, documentation file, B.C. Binning Fonds, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal [left]; S.D. Bronson, September 1997 [right])

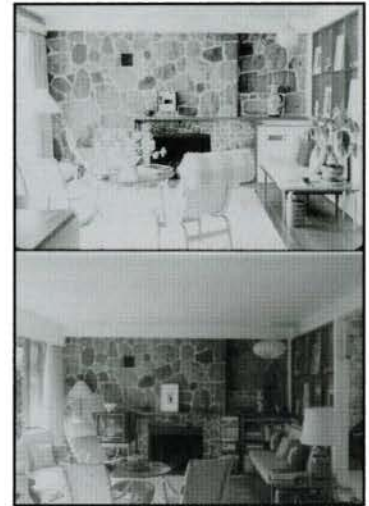
The interrelationships between the form of the house and its various functions, both characterized by economy and efficiency, are also remarkably intact today. The visitor is directed down from the street towards the entrance by a comfortably proportioned stairway (Fig. 13), passing the upper garden and arriving at the upper terrace beside the low building, which is clad mostly in cedar v-joint boards and capped by an overhanging flat roof (Figs. 13-15). A lively mural by B.C. Binning (discussed in detail below) defines the corner and signals the main entrance door, which is down a few more stairs and sheltered from the elements by a cantilevered canopy. One then enters the hallway (Figs. 12, 16), a long gallery space defined by a subtly curved wall of cedar v-joint boards to the right and a wide opening into the living-dining area to the left. The visitor is once again confronted with a B.C. Binning artistic creation, a powerful mural that terminates the west end of the hallway. Displayed in the hallway gallery is a selection of paintings — intended to change periodically, consisting either of a single work or a grouping — embellishing the cedar wall, which is lined with low, built-in shelving

yond, and the second bedroom, or study, and the studio looked out to the upper terrace and garden. Also, as will be discussed in Part 3 below, Binning's respect for the environment was confirmed through his use of local materials, especially wood but also stone.³⁰

Since 1941 the relationship between the Binning residence and its immediate environment has changed little, while substantial parts of its larger context of West Vancouver and the greater Vancouver area in general have changed a great deal, developing in a manner that reflects the economic pressures imposed by rapid suburban growth and the recent necessity to house a massive population influx.

Fig. 17. The living-dining room is dominated by a stone fireplace wall. Its furniture is light in weight and simple in design. With the exception of the addition of a sofa and a television (bottom), little has changed since the 1940s (top).

(Reproduced from c. 1948 slide belonging to Jessie Binning, documentation file, B.C. Binning Fonds, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal [top]; S.D. Bronson, September 1997 [bottom])



filled with books and Oriental pottery and topped with a few carefully selected art objects. The space is filled with natural light from south-facing clerestory windows, which provide constantly changing illumination as the sun moves over the course of the day. Except for the "temporary" addition of a new shelf unit at the west end of the hallway, the design of the original space and its furnishings are completely intact (Fig. 16).

The generously proportioned living-dining area (Figs. 12, 17) is dominated by a fireplace wall built by local artisans of fieldstone from nearby Cypress Creek.³¹ It was here that the house came alive with energy as artists and architects, including Richard Neutra, gathered for "fireside chats" about how they could improve the world by creating a better balance between art and living.³² The hearth forms a focal point for the arrangement of lightweight canvas-and-wood chairs and a built-in sofa facing the view. Above the sofa, a semi-transparent partition, the upper portion of which is made up of tinted rolled glass set in square wood frames, forms a backdrop for displaying some of Binning's smaller works. The wide opening between the living room and the hall is spanned by a curtain rod; originally, Jessie Binning thought that it would be necessary to separate the more public hallway-gallery from the living-dining area — up to 60 visitors came through the house at a time, according to one source³³ — but, as it turned out, she and her husband frequently entertained small groups of friends and acquaintances who came to view B.C. Binning's paintings and to socialize, and the living-dining area became an extension of the gallery-hallway and vice versa. The same may be said of the trellised lower terrace and the garden below (Figs. 1, 12, 18), which physically extended the living space. The living-dining room remains unchanged, except for the recent addition of a television and a sofa on the south side of the room (Fig. 17).

Beside the dining room is the kitchen (Figs. 12, 19), with its U-shaped layout of fir plywood cabinets added with chrome handles. A window facing east floods the room with morning light, and a doorway opens out to the side terrace. An enclosed stairway leads to the basement. At the other end of the hallway, a narrow door opens into the bathroom, which possesses the same plywood cabinets as the kitchen. Both the kitchen and bathroom have undergone minor modifications over time — the appliances in the kitchen have been replaced, the bathroom has new fixtures and tile, and skylights have recently been installed



Fig. 18. Floor-to-ceiling glazed doors open onto the main terrace, extending the living-dining room into the garden. Comparison of the 1940s view (top) and the present-day view (bottom) reveals that very little has changed. (Photograph of c. 1948 slide belonging to Jessie Binning, documentation file, B.C. Binning Fonds, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal [top]; S.D. Bronson, September 1997 [bottom])



Fig. 19. The kitchen and bathroom feature the original built-in plywood cabinets with chrome handles. Since 1941, new appliances have been installed in the kitchen and new tiles and fixtures have been installed in the bathrooms. Skylights have also been installed in both rooms. (S. D. Bronson, September 1997)

on art and architecture (Figs. 20, 21). A short hall leads to the studio at the northeast corner of the building; part of the wood floor is inset with linoleum and splashes of paint confirm that this was where the artist worked at his easel. In addition to generous windows looking out on the upper garden, and a door to the terrace, this room, the exterior of which accommodates the entrance mural, possesses a band of high windows facing north and east (Figs. 12, 14, 15, 21).

Throughout the house and garden, one cannot help but be aware of an overpowering sense of the harmonious and dynamic integration of abstract art and new architectural forms. By providing a muralled hallway-gallery for an ever-changing selection of his paintings (Fig. 16), which were also displayed throughout the other rooms of his home (Figs. 17, 20, 21), and by painting a sequence of murals on the exterior entrance wall to enhance the point of arrival (Figs. 14, 15), B.C. Binning ensured that his domestic environment would evolve in response to the development of his art, which became increasingly abstract over his 35-year tenure.³⁴ Inside, comparison of the photographs taken at different times in the history of the house³⁵ reveals that the selection of paintings on display changed often; Jessie Binning confirmed that she sometimes had to be very insistent, during her husband's lifetime, to ensure that her favourite older works were not sold or replaced by more recent pieces.³⁶

— but are otherwise intact.

In the southwest corner of the house, a compact master bedroom is designed to seem larger by its generous south-facing windows and its built-in headboard, drawers, and closet (Fig. 12). Across the hallway, a short stairway leads to the guest bedroom, which also possesses a built-in headboard. This room, which has a window facing the upper terrace and garden, features a small study nook with a desk, above which are built-in shelves carrying, to this day, some of B.C. Binning's standard references

Fig. 20. The guest bedroom possesses a study nook with a built-in desk and shelves. (Reproduced from c. 1948 slide belonging to Jessie Binning, documentation file, B.C. Binning Fonds, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal)



Outside, B.C. Binning painted three different murals on the corner wall that enclosed his studio, which was covered with plaster. The first, executed during the 1940s, perhaps before 1948 when he took a sabbatical year from teaching to paint and his work underwent a dramatic change,³⁷ was a joyful, abstract composition of seaside motifs — fish, light towers, sail boats, and the like — set within an architectural grid of water and sky (Figs. 13, 14). The second mural, which probably dates to the 1950s, was more geometric, corresponding to



Fig. 21. To this day, a selection of B.C. Binning's seminal references on art and architecture is kept in the shelves above his desk (see Figure 20). A short passage leads to his studio. (S. D. Bronson, September 1997)

a more abstract phase in his work (Fig. 15).³⁸ His last mural, which was deteriorated and has recently been renewed by a local artist to match its original colours and texture, may have been painted after 1968, when he retired from his position as Director of UBC's Department of Fine Arts so that he could devote more time to painting. Its composition, in tones of yellow and white, is bold and minimalist (Fig. 15). These murals confirm Binning's conviction that the aesthetic criteria of harmony, integrity, order, and balance work for art and architecture alike.

Only two other major changes have modified the design of the property over the course of its history. In 1966, the car shelter beside the street was replaced by a garage, which exploited the sloping site to include a workshop and storage space underneath (Fig. 22). In 1989, a bathroom was added to serve the guest bedroom on the west side of the house (Fig. 23). Both of these modifications, which were carried out in response to new functional requirements, respect the integrity of the original design intentions.

Technological Advances

While the Binning residence does not distinguish itself in terms of technological innovation, it constitutes an early illustration of a number of important technological advances that were applied to West Coast residential architecture during the Modern era. It exemplified an economical and efficient approach to residential

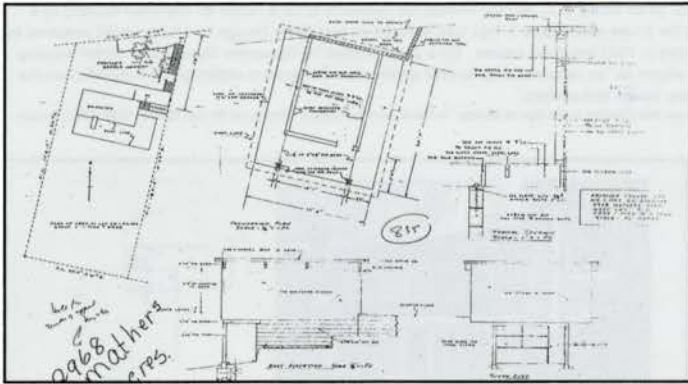
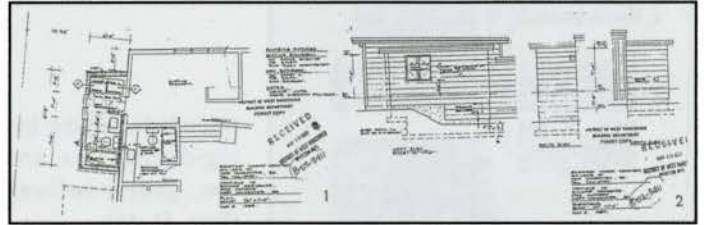


Fig. 22. In 1966, the Binnings constructed a garage to replace an earlier shelter for their car. This structure is still intact. ("Proposed Garage for Mr. & Mrs. B.C. Binning," May 10, 1966, reproduced from microfiche files in District of West Vancouver Planning Department.)

Fig. 23. In 1989, a bathroom was added to the west side of the house. The addition was executed in a manner that respects the integrity of the original architectural design and the site. (Geoffrey Massey Architect, "Additions to Binning Residence," May 6, 1989, reproduced from microfiche files in District of West Vancouver Planning Department.)



construction and exploited the advantages offered by such features of Modern design as flat roofs and new approaches to post-and-beam structure with concrete foundation walls. Designed and constructed during the war when construction materials and labour were difficult to secure for private homes, it made use of local materials and techniques in new ways that were later applied to postwar residential construction.

When it was constructed in 1941, the Binning residence was one of the earliest flat-roofed houses in the Vancouver region, and perhaps the first flat-roofed house in the area to qualify for a federally financed mortgage.³⁹ Although the flat roof had been a feature of residential architecture in some parts of Canada, such as the Montréal area, for decades,⁴⁰ sloped roofs were far more common on West Coast residential buildings of the 1930s and early 1940s (Fig. 5). A few architects in the Vancouver area, however, were beginning to experiment with this type of construction by the late 1930s; the houses that Binning's colleagues Peter Thornton and C.B.K. Van Norman designed for themselves (Figs. 8, 9), for example, had roofs with very shallow slopes, and others followed suit in the postwar era.

For Binning and his colleagues, the significance of the flat roof in residential design extended beyond its stylistic association with Modernism. In addition to encouraging a more contemporary, low-lying treatment of volume and mass, its combination with post-and-beam construction allowed the liberation of the plan and freedom to adapt a house to a sloping site by taking advantage of split levels and varied ceiling heights. It also opened up the possibility of introducing different roof planes separated by clerestory windows, and thus admitting daylight deep into interior spaces.⁴¹ In addition, the Binning residence, along with other West Coast houses, illustrates how low-lying, flat-roofed volumes on a sloping site with mature vegetation virtually disappear within the landscape, rather than block the view of the neighbours (Fig. 13).

The Binning residence was somewhat innovative in its structure. The construction drawings call for 8-inch reinforced concrete foundation walls and a full concrete basement under part of its volume.⁴² This allowed improved structural stability on its uneven site, as well as necessary storage space and improved insulation and protection against vapour transmission through the floor. At the time, many West Coast homes did not enjoy the luxury of a basement, their designers preferring to take advantage of the fact that a post-and-beam structure is economical and rapid to erect on uneven ground because it can be built

on simple footings for its posts, rather than on continuous foundation walls.⁴³ Above the foundation, however, the structure of the Binning residence was post-and-beam construction, which provided an economical and efficient solution that responded to the design intentions and made the most of British Columbia's rich forestry resources.

In light of the wartime shortage of construction materials and labour, most of the materials and building assemblies used in the Binning residence were traditional, economical, and locally available. As was the case for so many West Coast homes, the predominant material was wood. The construction drawings specify hardwood for the floors in the living-dining area and gallery-hallway, while fir floors, which were more economical, were proposed for the bedrooms and studio. A different grade of fir was used for the floors in the kitchen and bathroom, which were covered with linoleum, as well as the area in the studio where B.C. Binning's easel was located. While some of the interior walls were plastered,⁴⁴ either painted white or covered with white burlap, others were finished with cedar v-joint vertical boards, stained a natural colour (Figs. 16, 18). The latter material was also used for most of the exterior walls, with the exception of the fieldstone of the fireplace wall (which extended outside) and the corner wall near the entrance (which was finished in plaster for the entrance mural). Early in the history of the residence, the cedar v-joint boards, both inside and outside, were painted off-white as they were turning dark due to age and natural weathering (Figs. 1, 18).⁴⁵

As daylight and views were central to the design, glass is abundant, especially along the south-facing wall (Figs. 1, 18), which is made up of continuous floor-to-ceiling doors from the living-dining room and generous windows in the master bedroom; the north-facing wall possesses slightly smaller windows in the guest bedroom and studio (Figs. 12, 20), and the latter also has high windows of tinted glass. Clerestory windows flood the hallway with light (Fig. 16). Although the construction drawings suggest that the doors and windows, which were generous in size compared to the standard windows and doors available at the time, were custom-designed for the house (Fig. 10), their detailing reveals that they were conceived in a manner that could easily be mass-produced. Among the small number of new manufactured materials featured was the tinted "rolled ribbed glass," which was set in 24-inch squares on the upper portion of the par-



Fig. 24. In addition to meeting the needs of his family, B.C. Binning wanted his residence to be a model for improved housing at a larger scale. In 1945, a photograph of the house (see Figure 1, top) was featured as part of the Design for Living exhibit prepared by the Art in Living Group that he co-founded in 1943 with Fred Amess. On a panel entitled "A Vancouver Group Plans Better Housing and Slum Elimination," the house was shown as "an example of up-to-date architecture designed to obtain greatest benefit from the six elements — light, view, space, shape, colour and surface." (Scott Watson, "Art in the Fifties: Design, Leisure, and Painting in the Age of Anxiety," in *Vancouver Art and Artists, 1938-1983* [Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1983], p. 76.)

tition between the living-dining area and the gallery-hallway (Figs. 11, 16).

The extension of the house into the garden is emphasized by the overhanging wooden brise-soleil (Figs. 1, 13-15, 18), the details of which were carefully designed and indicated on the

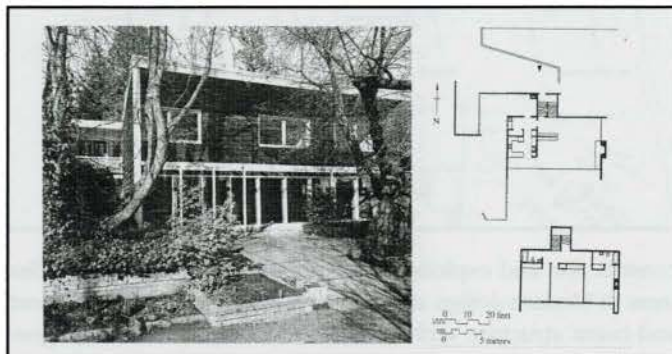


Fig. 25. C.E. Pratt's first residence (c. 1946) in West Vancouver demonstrates many of the same principles and features as the Binning residence, for which he was consulting architect five years earlier. South-facing floor-to-ceiling windows look out over a panoramic view. The rectangular volume, with a projection for the stair, is clad in wood siding and surmounted by a gently sloping roof that projected to provide protection against the elements. Two storeys in height with three bedrooms, its layout is simple, clear, and economical. (Photograph by John Roaf, 1973, reproduced from Harold Kalman, *A History of Canadian Architecture*, Vol. 2 [Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1994], p. 788 [left]; Drawing by David Byrnes, reproduced from Kalman, *A History of Canadian Architecture*, Vol. 2, p. 788 [right])

construction drawings.⁴⁶ At grade level, square concrete pavers were used to define the terraces on the south, east, and north sides (Figs. 11, 12); the original pavers (a new product at the time) deteriorated after several years, and have been replaced by precast rectangles of concrete aggregate, although a single row of the original pavers remains intact just inside the living-dining area doors.

Carefully designed wooden built-in furniture made by local artisans⁴⁷ — including shelving in the hallway, beds, and a desk (Figs. 12, 20, 21) — ensured the most efficient use of the space and avoided clutter. In keeping with the technology of the day, the kitchen and bathroom featured custom-made cabinets of plywood (Fig. 19); these were stained a natural colour and fitted with standard chrome handles. The U-shaped kitchen featured the most up-to-date appliances, including a dishwashing machine (Fig. 11), which have since been updated.

Impact on Subsequent Work

In addition to illustrating the three cultural phenomena associated with the Modern era, the Binning residence had a significant impact on subsequent Canadian buildings, ensembles, and sites. It has enriched the work of countless artists and architects, as well as other members of the general public, and it is expected that it will continue to do so well into the future. Described as "a humanist in the finest sense of the word, vitally concerned with people, their lives and the environment,"⁴⁸ B.C. Binning was successful in meeting, through the design of his home, two of his principal objectives: to provide a model that would lead to the improvement of housing in general, and to encourage the integration of art and architecture in Modernist design. Thanks to his continued commitment to and promotion of these ideals, especially in the 1940s and 1950s, the impact of the design of his residence was not only immediate but enduring. Furthermore, its

significance has recently been renewed due to an increasing interest in the built heritage of the Modern era throughout Canada, an interest that is particularly keen in the Vancouver region.

B.C. Binning's objective of influencing housing design on a larger scale began to come to fruition within a few years of the completion of his home. In 1943 he and his friend Fred Amess, who also taught at the Vancouver School of Art, formed the Art in Living Group, which aimed to sensitize a whole generation of budding artists, art teachers, architects, and the general public to the problems that were about to emerge as part of the postwar boom and urbanization. This group, which included mostly artists and students, studied small house design, housing for families, neighbourhoods and community, and appropriate educational environments for children, and prepared a series of didactic exhibitions to promote their ideas.⁴⁹ In their 1945 "Art in Living" exhibition, a photograph of Binning's house was featured as "an example of up-to-date architecture designed to obtain greatest benefit from the six elements — light, view, space, shape, colour and surface" (Fig. 24).⁵⁰ During the course of the postwar era, these elements became key touchstones in the design of houses and housing projects throughout Canada.⁵¹

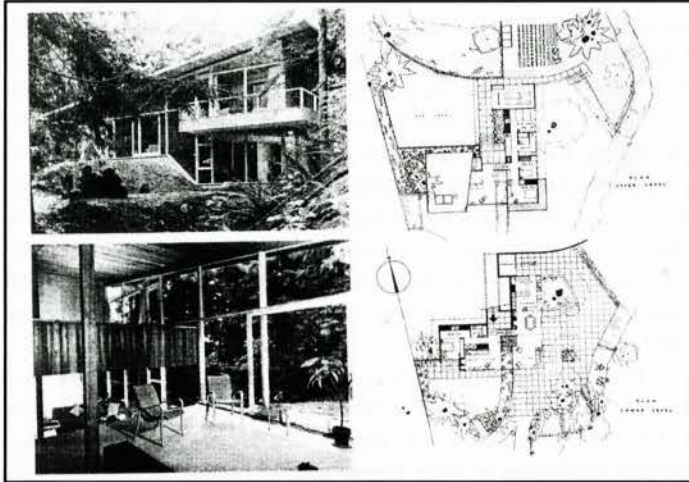
Among the several examples of Vancouver area homes that explored the architectural principles demonstrated in the Binning residence was the first house that C.E. (Ned) Pratt designed for his family in West Vancouver (Fig. 25) about five years after he served as consulting architect on B.C. Binning's home. This structure, like its 1941 forerunner, was compact and economical in its planning (with a U-shaped kitchen and a combined living-dining area), possessed large windows and doors opening onto a south-facing view, exploited the potential of post-and-beam construction, and was clad in wood siding. It distinguished itself from the Binning residence, however, by its size: its rectangular volume was two storeys high, with a projection for the staircase and a gently sloping roof; it housed such necessities for growing

Fig. 27. The residence of Dr. D. Harold Copp (1950-51) in Vancouver was designed by Ron Thom, a former student of B.C. Binning. Like the Binning residence, it featured a post-and-beam structure with generous fenestration that extended its interior into the garden and the spectacular landscape around it. Low-lying rectangular volumes topped by flat roofs are constructed on different levels according to the topography of the site, and clerestory windows allow the penetration of light deep into the interior spaces. Its layout is economical but includes such necessities of modern families life as a laundry room, two bedrooms for children, and a master bedroom.

(Ron Thom, architect, Collection Dr. D. Harold Copp, reproduced from Windsor Liscombe, *The New Spirit*, p. 125 [top]. *Journal, RAIC*, Vol. 40, No. 1 [January 1953], reproduced from Windsor Liscombe, *The New Spirit*, p. 125 [bottom])

Fig. 26. The John Porter residence (1947-48) in West Vancouver, designed by John Porter architect, like the B.C. Binning residence, possessed a post-and-beam construction, large expanses of glass, and a layout on different levels that followed the topography of its site. It distinguished itself from the B.C. Binning residence by its gently sloping roof.

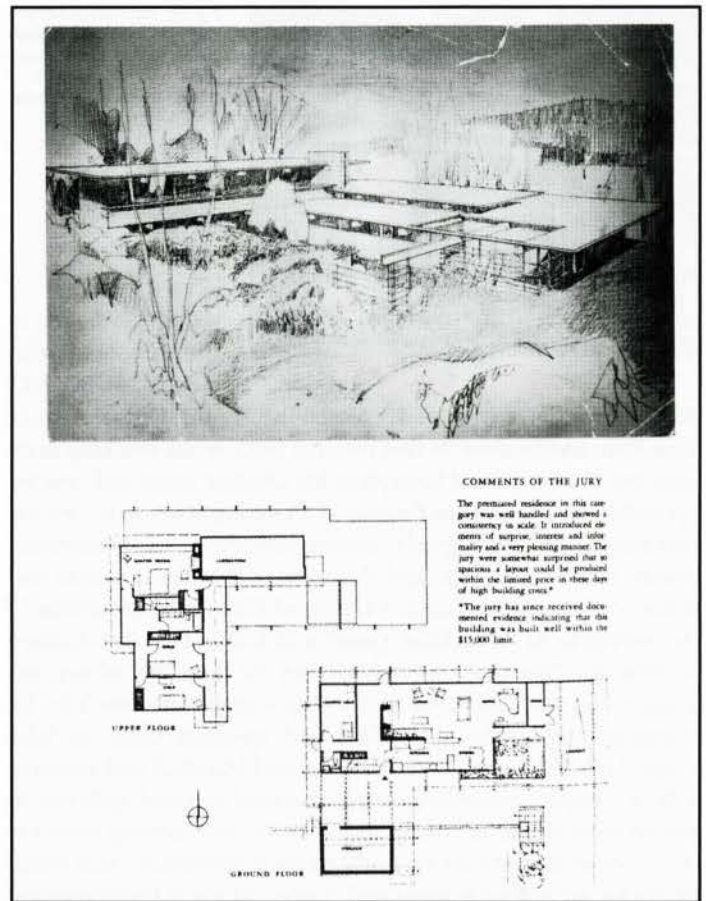
(Photograph by Tony Archer and plans, *Journal, RAIC*, Vol. 27, No. 9 [September 1950], reproduced from Windsor Liscombe, *The New Spirit*, p. 116 [left] and p. 117 [right])



postwar families as three bedrooms and a fully equipped laundry room.⁵²

In 1947-48, architect John Porter completed his residence (Fig. 26) in West Vancouver. Like the Binning residence, his design experimented with different levels that related to the topography of his sloping site, with large expanses of glass, and with post-and-beam construction. Designed to house an expanding family that eventually included six children, the resultant massing was quite different, and the structure, part of which was two storeys high, was surmounted by a gently sloping roof. This design received a Massey Silver Medal in 1952 and provided inspiration for one of several "Trend Houses" constructed across Canada to promote "an entirely new trend in modern living and building."⁵³

A third house influenced by Binning's groundbreaking residence was designed on a hilly Vancouver lot in 1950-51 by architect Ron Thom for Dr. D. Harold Copp (Fig. 27). This house illustrates that many of the principles demonstrated in the Binning residence were practised well into the postwar era: its low-lying rectangular volumes were surmounted by flat roofs separated by clerestory windows, it was carefully integrated with the surrounding landscape, and its post-and-beam structure was clad with local wood siding and large expanses of glass. Its plan was economical in layout but, like the Pratt and Porter residences, was generous in size and featured a large laundry-service room, an extensive area for living, music and dining, and three bedrooms. As was the case with an increasing number of



homes in the 1950s, the master bedroom was large and separated from the children's bedrooms.⁵⁴ Thom, who was studying under B.C. Binning around the time Binning was designing his residence in 1941, said "He taught me to see. He taught me to think. He was an irreplaceable teacher whose lessons have lasted."⁵⁵

It was about the time of the construction of the Copp residence that the Binning residence, by that time a decade old, was featured in two major publications that not only gave it exposure to a wider audience but confirmed that the principles it demonstrated were still valid in the 1950s. In October-November 1950, *Western Homes and Living*, one of the most well-read architectural/lifestyle journals in western Canada, published an illustrated article entitled "The B.C. Binning House" that began with the impressive announcement: "This is the story of a house that was a pioneer ... a pace-setter ... in West Coast contemporary design 10 years ago and is still thoroughly modern."⁵⁶ The following year, the 1951 edition of *Canadian Woods: Their Properties and Uses*, an invaluable reference work, featured a photograph of the Binning residence (Fig. 28) as an illustration of how wood could be used in Modern residential design.

In the meantime, Thom and several of B.C. Binning's students, friends, and colleagues were benefiting first-hand from spending time at the Binning residence. Over the years, the living-dining room and the terrace provided a venue for many a lively debate and intense discussion with friends, colleagues, and noteworthy visitors. After his appointment in 1949 as an as-

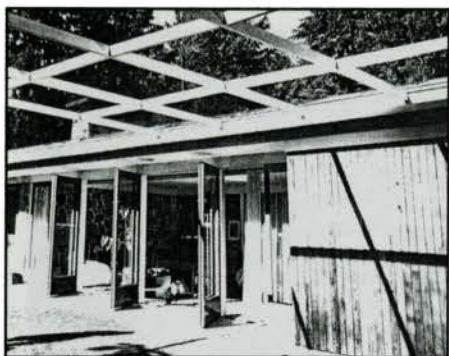


Fig. 28. The 1951 edition of the seminal *Canadian Woods: Their Properties and Uses* featured a photograph of the Binning residence, by this time a decade old, as an example of how Canadian woods, in this case B.C. cedar and fir, could be used in the construction of "Modern" homes. Later, when the cedar v-joint panelling aged and became very dark, the Binnings painted it off-white.

(Forestry Branch, Forest Products Laboratories Division, *Canadian Woods: Their Properties and Uses* [Ottawa: King's Printer and Controller of Stationery, 1951], p. 37)

sistant professor in the School of Architecture at UBC, B.C.

Binning was given the task of establishing the Department of Fine Arts, and became its first Head in 1955. While working as an educator, he continued to explore his creative spirit and was responsible for the annual Festival of Contemporary Arts, "an extravaganza of avant-garde events including art exhibitions, poetry readings, ballets, and theatrical and musical events that made Vancouver the cultural capital of Canada in the sixties."⁵⁷ According to Alvin Balkind, Director of UBC's Fine Arts Gallery in 1986, the "Binning era" at UBC "set the stage for cultural explosion and put Vancouver on the artistic map in the late '60s" by bringing world-class performers and speakers (such as John Cage, Alan Ginsberg, Dylan Thomas, and Marshall McLuhan) to UBC's campus, provoking small so-called parallel galleries to put on risky shows of young artists' work, and forming *Intermedia*, a spawning ground for multimedia presentations that melded the visual arts with music and dance.⁵⁸ Many of the interesting artists and architects whom he brought to Vancouver, including California-based Viennese architect Richard Neutra (who became a friend and stayed with the Binnings in 1946 and 1953), were invited to meet Binning's students, friends, and colleagues at his home.

Many well-known artists and architects were influenced by the work of B.C. Binning, of which his residence is probably the most all-encompassing specimen. Scott Watson, current Director of UBC's Fine Arts Gallery, noted in 1986 that "through the force of his own example (he often had as many as 60 people a day through the house), he introduced modern domestic architecture to the city." Furthermore, Watson suggested, B.C. Binning's house was also economical and within the reach of the average Canadian.⁵⁹ Douglas Shadbolt, former director of UBC's School of Architecture, confirmed that the house attracted wide attention: "It was one of the first flat-roofed houses to be built in Vancouver.... Binning also demonstrated the potential relationship of abstract art to new architectural forms, both by providing an interior gallery for his own work and by painting a mural on the exterior entrance wall of the house." Following B.C. Binning's death in 1976, fellow artist Jack Shadbolt noted that "He wasn't a professional architect — he was an amateur who was interested. But he had more influence than the professionals."⁶⁰ A former student, Don Jarvis, echoed all of these ideas:

One of the things he emphasized in his teaching was simplicity, economy, but at the same time fullness, richness. This was always evident in his own work, and very much so in Bert and Jessie's house. The house, which he designed in 1940, the first of its kind in

Vancouver, was a powerful influence on the subsequent work of West Coast architects — a very special house.⁶¹

B.C. Binning's sphere of influence extended beyond artists and architects. In January 1942, not long after his house was constructed, he gave a public lecture on "Modern Architecture — Its Meaning and Development" in which he claimed that architecture is the harmonious expression of science and society, its form derived from science and its function from the needs of society. He claimed that "No one can disregard architecture. All of us spend most of our time within four walls. The cheerfulness or gloominess, the heaviness or lightness have a profound influence on our lives."⁶² He concluded his address with a challenge for architects and artists: "In democracy we have the right to express ourselves freely and we had better learn to express ourselves well in architecture."⁶³

B.C. Binning's home was also the site of his own creation and the pursuit of ideas that had a far-reaching effect during the 35 years he lived there, and after his death. He had his first one-person exhibition in 1944, three years after moving into his new home. In 1948, during his sabbatical year before accepting a position at UBC's School of Architecture, he worked on his art and the design of two other houses.⁶⁴ In 1968, he stepped down as head of the Fine Arts Department to devote more time to his painting, and in 1974 he was granted status of professor emeritus. Throughout his lifetime and since his death in 1976, his work has been exhibited in prestigious international exhibitions;⁶⁵ several major travelling one-person shows were also organized in Canada.⁶⁶ During the last 20 years of his life, he also won a number of prestigious awards and sat on national and international committees.⁶⁷

One of B.C. Binning's most important contributions was his promotion of close collaboration between artists and architects. Labelled "an exponent of new architecture in paint,"⁶⁸ B.C. Binning once said that the best architects understand

how to use sculpture, murals and the like, as an integral part of the architectural concept ... they know what sculpture or painting can do to architectural mass; how to give it scale, definition, emphasis and enrichment. They know how these things can effect space, giving direction, a point of reference; and how they can be a means to identify the in dweller to that space.⁶⁹

He demonstrated this union of art and architecture first in his own house, then in the design and execution of murals for major buildings in Vancouver — including the CKWX radio station studios (1954-56), the B.C. Electric Building (1955-57), and the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (1957-58) — and at the Edmonton airport. He also developed the colour schemes for the much-lauded Modernist B.C. Electric Dal Grauer substation in

Fig. 30. To celebrate the creation of the National Gallery's Design Centre in 1954, *Canadian Art* published a special issue entitled "1923-1953 Compared." The 1923 living-dining room featured overstuffed chairs, a proliferation of different textures and colours in the upholstery and carpets, and an elaborate landscape painting. The 1953 living-dining room possessed simple, lightweight furniture and a few carefully selected colours and patterns; it featured Binning's abstract painting "Reflected Ship" (1950), and the entire space was designed "to reflect the wit and style of the Binnings."

(Scott Watson, "Art in the Fifties: Design, Leisure, and Painting in the Age of Anxiety," in Vancouver Art Gallery, *Vancouver Art and Artists*, p. 81)

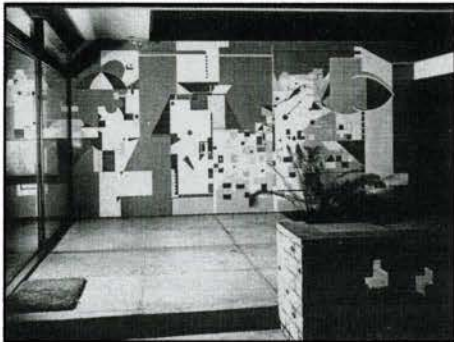
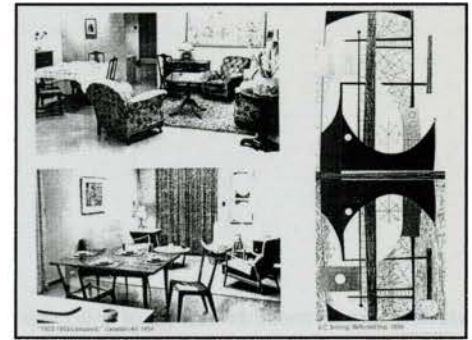


Fig. 29. Twelve years after the completion of B.C. Binning's house, architect D.C. Simpson asked Abstract Expressionist artist John Korner to paint a mural 8-1/2 feet high x 35 feet long for the living room/patio wall of his second house (1953). Apparently, the geometric design was inspired by the brickwork, the architectural and natural settings and the colour-contrast theory.

(Photograph by Graham Warrington, 1954, Collection B. Simpson, reproduced from Windsor Liscombe, *The New Spirit*, p. 101)



to his innate interest in architecture. According to one biographer, he "was a classical spirit that delighted in resolving order from chaos through the cool, rational rendering of space and mass. His art is elegantly simple and harmoniously proportioned in its geometry and architecture ... with every detail exactly as it must be."⁷⁰ In 1962, B.C. Binning was awarded the prestigious Allied Arts Award by the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada in recognition of his work as an artist and a teacher, and his promotion of good architectural design in our contemporary urban lives.

In addition to procuring future work for himself from architects, B.C. Binning's house inspired collaborative projects between other artists and architects: in the second home of architect D.C. Simpson, built in West Vancouver in 1953 (Fig. 29), Jack Horner painted a mural to welcome visitors, and the entrance hall of the Main Branch of the Vancouver Public Library (1953-57), designed by Semmens Simpson, architects, featured a lively abstract mosaic by artists Lionel and Patricia Thomas.⁷¹

In a 1954 issue of *Canadian Art* entitled "1923-1953 Compared," which celebrated the creation of the National Gallery's new Design Centre in Ottawa, one of B.C. Binning's paintings was featured as the point of departure for "tasteful" interior design (Fig. 30). A photograph of a 1923 interior showed a living-dining area with overstuffed chairs, a proliferation of different textures, colours and patterns, and an elaborate landscape painting. The 1953 interior, by contrast, featured "Reflective Ship," a 1950 abstract painting by Binning; the entire space was designed "to reflect the wit and style of the Binnings." The furniture was lightweight and simple in design, the colours and patterns were carefully selected, and homespun curtains suggested a large window.⁷²

Considering the impact of the work of B.C. Binning on art and architecture, one biographer noted in 1986 that he was as highly conscious of his failure as he was of his success:

He often wished that he had given more of his time to his painting — throughout his active life he only had one year, 1948, given over fully to his own career as an artist. He also realized that, although he had accomplished a great deal, the city had lost many opportunities for great modern architecture and planning. Binning's own

modernism, the International Style inflected in Japanese aesthetics, had an influence on domestic suburban architecture for several decades. But in the 1980s there has been a marked return to mock-Tudor, mock-colonial tract houses that Binning's generation saw as morally degenerated and aesthetically illiterate. The emptiness of the age prefers parody.⁷³

Indeed, just over a decade later, the renewed interest in Canada's built heritage of the Modern era in general,⁷⁴ and in the Binning residence in particular, suggests another cycle is upon us. In 1987-88, the District of West Vancouver included the Binning residence in its heritage inventory, which aims not only to identify significant buildings of the past but also to signal architecture of exemplary quality to serve as a model for present-day design and construction.⁷⁵ Most recently, the work of B.C. Binning, including his home, is being featured in the exhibition "The New Spirit: Modern Architecture in Vancouver, 1938-1963," guest-curated by Rhodri Windsor Liscombe and organized by the Canadian Centre for Architecture, and in the seminal book of the same title.⁷⁶ In conjunction with this exhibition, which will be hosted at the Vancouver Art Gallery between November 1997 and January 1998, students at UBC's School of Architecture are preparing a model and presentation of the Binning residence, among other Vancouver area houses of the Modern era.⁷⁷

Integrity

One of the conditions of the proposed criteria for evaluating the potential national significance of a building, ensemble, or site of the Modern era is that "it is in a condition that respects the integrity of its original design, materials, workmanship, function and/or setting, insofar as each of these was an important part of its overall intentions and its present-day character." It should be clear from the preceding pages that the Binning residence is in a remarkable state of integrity. Except for a few changes that were intended from the beginning — such as the evolving relationship between the architecture of the house and its artwork, and the growth of the vegetation around the site over time — the modifications that were necessary in order to meet changing functional requirements or to repair damaged or deteriorated materials⁷⁸ have been carefully carried out without compromising the original design intentions. This high level of integrity, which can be attributed to the high quality of the original design and construction and continuous and respectful care over the years, is unusual for a private residence, which by its nature is subject to change, and particularly rare for a house of the

Modern era as most dwellings of this period have been modified over time due to the obsolescence of their physical fabric.

Conclusion

The Binning residence is an early and remarkably intact illustration of the cultural phenomena that came to be associated with the most progressive residential design of the Modern era in Canada, and particularly on the West Coast. In response to the changing social, economic, and political conditions of the day, it was intended to provide a model for houses and housing that were economical in construction and sensitive to their setting. It demonstrated new ways of expressing form and responding to functional demands through the harmonious relationship of its architecture to its environment, the efficiency of its layout and of the interrelationships between its form and functions, and the manner in which art and architecture intersect to create a dynamic and meaningful experience of space. Although it does not distinguish itself in terms of technical innovation, it constitutes an early illustration of a number of technical advances that were applied throughout the Modern era, including the flat roof, post-and-beam construction on concrete foundations, and new ways of using traditional local materials. Finally and most importantly, the design of the Binning residence, probably the most all-encompassing expression of the Modernist ideology of the noted Canadian artist B.C. Binning, has and continues to have an important impact on the work of artists, architects, and other Canadians across the country.

Notes

1. The title blocks of the construction drawings (10 March 1941) read "Designed by B.C. Binning, Consultant Architects: R.A.D. Berwick, C.E. Pratt." Fonds B.C. Binning, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal.

2. For a more detailed explanation of these three cultural phenomena and their impact on the design and production of Canada's residential heritage, see Susan D. Bronson, "Framework for Analysis Study: Residential Buildings, Ensembles, and Sites of the Modern Era," prepared for the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, Fall 1997.

3. Foundation Group Designs, West Vancouver Heritage Inventory, photocopied document, 1988, updated December 1994, p. 25.

4. Meeting with Joel Lawson, Assistant Planner, Planning Department, District of West Vancouver, 8 September 1997.

5. Binning's paternal grandfather was the first architect in the area around Listowel, Ontario, and his maternal grandfather was an architect in Alberta. Binning commented in 1961 that "I would have been an architect too had it not been for an illness early in my life which kept me in bed for two years. Today I am not a bit sorry that I became a painter and teacher instead." Herbert L. McDonald, "B.C. Binning: He's Mining A New

Vein Of Color," *Weekend Magazine*, Vol. 11, No. 16 (1961), p. 11.

6. Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG), videotaped interview with B.C. Binning and Dorothy Metcalfe, 10 June 1974 (copy of transcript in VAG Library), p. 2. Binning's instructors at the Vancouver School of Art (known as the Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Arts until 1934) included Charles H. Scott, F.H. Varley, and J.W.G. Macdonald. "Chronology", UBC Retrospective Catalogue, 1973 (photocopy in VAG biographical file on B.C. Binning).

7. In a 1974 interview, B.C. Binning commented on the isolation of the West Coast in the 1930s and how the Second World War began to broaden the horizons of its residents:

...I don't think there was anyone here in the '30's that had been very far from Vancouver. I know I hadn't. In fact I hadn't seen a modern painting — until...well I was an exception really — I was abroad in '38 or '37 but most people hadn't really anything really except their own place. Well, this war was a really and terrible thing, but it did get people out of where they were living and broaden their horizons in all sorts of ways. The sense of seeing things — other places — and getting other ideas. The intermingling with other peoples. I think that started it and once you had started it you couldn't stop it. The whole business of travel and the idea of communication — almost instant communication and the growth of publishing all of these sorts of things. We just seemed to enlarge ourselves and kept growing and to the point of course where we wonder if it has been all that good.

VAG, videotaped interview, p. 1.

8. Biographical information on B.C. Binning can be found in the following references, most of which are in the biographical file in the VAG and in the Special Collections files in UBC's library: Kay Alsop,

"The Artistic Credo of B.C. Binning," UBC Alumni Chronicle, summer 1973, pp. 18-22; B.C. Binning, "The Artist and the Architect," published article in unknown, undated publication, pp. 320-21; press release for "B.C. Binning: A Classical Spirit," organized by the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 28 November 1985 - 2 February 1986; "Founder of UBC Department, Painter B.C. Binning Dies," Vancouver Sun, 16 March 1976; Don Jarvis, "B.C. Binning: The Man Remembered," Performance, June 1976, p. 10; McDonald, "B.C. Binning"; "Prominent Painter B.C. Binning Dies," Vancouver Province, March 1976; VAG, videotaped interview; Doreen E. Walker, "The Rich Architectonics of Binning," *Vie des Arts*, Vol. 18, No. 72 (autumn 1973), pp. 96-97; Scott Watson, "B.C. Binning: Modernism in a Classical Calm," *Vanguard*, summer 1986, pp. 23-27; various versions of curriculum vitae in UBC Special Collections files on B.C. Binning.

9. Meeting with Jessie Binning, 6 September 1997.

10. West Vancouver was to become an appealing location for new homes because its urban plan catered to the needs of those willing to invest in a high-quality residential environment with spectacular views, inexpensive lots, and convenient proximity to downtown, especially following the construction of the Lion's Gate Bridge in 1938. Laura Millar, "Community Interest and Corporate Investment: The Suburbanization of West Vancouver," term paper, April 1981 (photocopy available in West Vancouver Museum and Archives); Phyllis Sarah Walden, "A History of West Vancouver," M.A. Thesis, Department of History, UBC, October 1947 (copy available at UBC Library, Special Collections and University Archives).

11. Foundation Group Designs, "Binning House," in "District of West Vancouver Inventory of

- Heritage Buildings 1987," pp. 292 (copy available at Planning Department, District of West Vancouver).
12. "100 Years of B.C. Living," *Western Homes and Living*, January 1958, pp. 41-43.
 13. VAG, videotaped interview, p. 3.
 14. According to B.C. Binning, the house cost \$5,000 (VAG, videotaped interview, p. 3). This corresponds approximately with the information in the West Vancouver Heritage inventory files (1987), where it is reported that in 1942 the land was assessed at \$600 and improvements were assessed at \$4,500 (Foundation Group Designs, "B.C. Binning House", p. 292). This amount was considered very reasonable at the time: in July 1940, Wm. H. Holcombe, Chairman of the Committee on Housing, reported that "the production of plans for houses that can be built for \$3,500.00 to \$4,500.00" under the National Housing Act represented a "bright side" of the housing crisis (Wm. H. Holcombe, "A Report of the Committee on Housing," *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada [JRAIC]*, Vol. 17, No. 7 [July 1940], p. 119). B.C. Binning reported in 1950 that the house would cost \$10,000 in 1950 ("The B.C. Binning House," *Western Homes and Living*, October-November 1950, p. 16), and noted in 1973 that he could have never afforded it later (Alsop, "The Artistic Credo", pp. 19-20).
 15. Rhodri Windsor Liscombe, *The New Spirit: Modern Architecture in Vancouver, 1938-1963* (Montréal and Vancouver: Canadian Centre for Architecture/Douglas & McIntyre, 1997), p. 40.
 16. See Jill Wade, "Wartime Housing Limited, 1941-1947: Canadian Housing Policy at the Crossroads," *Urban History Review/Revue d'histoire urbaine*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (June 1986), pp. 41-59; Jill Wade, *Houses for All: The Struggle for Social Housing in Vancouver, 1919-1950* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994), chapters 2-5. The wartime housing situation is also discussed in Bronson, "Framework for Analysis Study: Residential Buildings, Ensembles, and Sites of the Modern Era."
 17. This topic is dealt with in detail in Bronson, "Framework for Analysis Study: Residential Buildings, Ensembles, and Sites of the Modern Era." In Quebec, for example, the 1930s work of architect and interior designer Marcel Parizeau and others was inspired by the emerging principles of Modernism.
 18. Wartime housing is discussed in some detail in Bronson, "Framework for Analysis Study: Residential Buildings, Ensembles, and Sites of the Modern Era." See also Burwell R. Coon, "Wartime Housing," *JRAIC*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (January 1942), pp. 3-8; Wade, "Wartime Housing Limited"; Wade, *Houses for All*.
 19. Wade, *Houses for All*, p. 122.
 20. Windsor Liscombe, *The New Spirit*, p. 22.
 21. *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41; Foundation Group Designs, *West Vancouver Heritage Inventory*, p. 28.
 22. Windsor Liscombe, *The New Spirit*, p. 40.
 23. *Ibid.*, p. 199; Foundation Group Designs, *West Vancouver Heritage Inventory*, p. 23. The dates of the renovation vary slightly in these two references; those used in this paper are from the latter source. Unfortunately, the extent of the renovation, and thus the original design, is not clear.
 24. Windsor Liscombe, *The New Spirit*, p. 40.
 25. Robert A.D. Berwick (Shelburne, Ontario, 1909 - West Vancouver, 1974) obtained his B.Arch. at the University of Toronto in 1938. He worked for Sharp and Thompson from 1936 to 1941 and then served in the Canadian Armed Forces from 1942 until 1945. He became an associate in the firm Sharp & Thompson, Berwick, Pratt in 1944, and a partner in 1946; the firm changed its name to Thompson Berwick Pratt and Partners in 1946 and he remained a partner until 1968. He joined the Architectural Institute of British Columbia [AIBC] in 1946 and became a Fellow of the RAIC in 1957. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
 26. Charles E. Pratt (Boston, 1911 - Vancouver, 1996) moved to Canada in 1921 and obtained his B. Arch. from the University of Toronto in 1939. After working for Sharp and Thompson in 1938, he served in the Canadian Armed Forces throughout the Second World War, although he found time in 1941 to consult on the construction of the B.C. Binning residence. He was a partner in the firm Sharp & Thompson, Berwick, Pratt (1945-56), then of Thompson Berwick Pratt and Partners (1956-76). He became a member of the AIBC in 1940 and served as its president in 1961-62. He became a Fellow of the RAIC in 1957. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
 27. Drawings of both schemes are in the B.C. Binning Fonds, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal.
 28. Foundation Group Designs, *District of West Vancouver Heritage Inventory, 1987*, p. 292.
 29. Meeting with Jessie Binning, 6 September 1997.
 30. Binning was not alone in his conviction that West Coast architecture should reflect its environment. In 1946, he and Fred Amess succeeded in arranging a visit to Vancouver by Richard Neutra, the renowned Viennese architect and pioneer of the Modern Movement who was residing in California at the time. In his address, Neutra focussed on "westcoast" possibilities, and discussed the "mystery and realities of the site" and how his houses dissolved into and/or contrasted with the landscape through the use of pristine forms, extended planes, extended water, and all the features associated with the International Style, yet reinterpreted to respond to the site, materials, and climate of the west coast. Douglas Shadbolt, "Postwar Architecture in Vancouver," in *Vancouver Art and Artists, 1938-1983* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1983), p. 110.
 31. Windsor Liscombe, *The New Spirit*, p. 112.
 32. Meeting with Jessie Binning, 6 September 1997; Windsor Liscombe, *The New Spirit*, p. 40.
 33. Watson, "B.C. Binning: Modernism in a Classical Calm," p. 25.
 34. *Ibid.*, p. 23-27.
 35. Sources of views of the Binning residence at different periods in its history include Alsop, "The Artistic Credo", p. 20; "The B.C. Binning House," pp. 15-18 (1950); McDonald, "B.C. Binning" (1961); and photographs from slides belonging to Jessie Binning (c. 1948), documentation on file, B.C. Binning Fonds, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal.
 36. Meeting with Jessie Binning, 6 September 1997.
 37. Watson, "B.C. Binning: Modernism in a Classical Calm," p. 24.
 38. *Ibid.*
 39. A number of references on the Binning residence refer to it as the first flat-roofed house in the Vancouver area, which is misleading. It is likely, however, that it was the first flat-roofed house in the region to receive a federally financed mortgage. When asked about this in 1973, B.C. Binning confirmed that he had "been told that it startled the mortgage companies into a whole new field of architectural acceptance — but he's not sure about that. He threw so many curves at them that he thinks in the end they may just have thrown up their hands and conceded him the ball game" (Alsop, "The Artistic Credo," p. 19).

Jessie Binning recently reported that her husband had a difficult time convincing the mortgage companies that there would be no problems due to snow loads in the winter, and to this day the roof is shovelled off after heavy snowfalls (meeting with Jessie Binning, 6 September 1997). She is also reported to have mentioned to Adele Freedman in 1992 that, at the time of construction, the roofers trailed gravel through the house, necessitating refinishing the wood floors (Adele Freedman, "A Pioneer Spirit," *The Globe and Mail*, 1 February 1992, p. C2); this suggests that the roofing materials were installed fairly late in the construction process.

40. Montréal duplexes and triplexes dating to as early as the 1880s possessed flat roofs.

41. Shadbolt, "Postwar Architecture in Vancouver," p. 108.

42. "Residence for B.C. Binning Esq.: Basement Floor Plan," sheet 1, B.C. Binning Fonds, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal.

43. Shadbolt, "Postwar Architecture in Vancouver," p. 111.

44. An early form of gypsum board was used in some of the WHL houses, but this would not have been available for the construction of private residences during wartime. See Bronson, "Framework for Analysis Study: Residential Buildings, Ensembles, and Sites of the Modern Era," Part 2.

45. Meeting with Jessie Binning, 6 September 1997.

46. "Residence for B.C. Binning Esq.: Basement Floor Plan," sheet 3.4, B.C. Binning Fonds, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal.

47. Windsor Liscombe, *The New Spirit*, p. 112.

48. "Retrospective look at UBC's Binning Era," VAG Library biographical file on Binning.

49. Scott Watson, "Art in the Fifties: Design, Leisure, and Painting in the Age of Anxiety," in *Vancouver Art and Artists, 1938-1983* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1983), pp. 75-76.

50. The caption beside the photograph of the Binning residence provides details on the finishing of the residence: "The outdoor-indoor fluctuation is made possible by the mild climate of the coast. The colours of the house are those of the outdoors: cedar wood, clear varnished. Light yellow and emerald green doors with accents of flat white plaster and wood trim. The colours of the living room echo or complement those of the outdoors: pale green rugs, natural woodwork and a wall of local stones, as well as homespun draperies with light coral pink pattern" (*Ibid.*, 76).

51. See Bronson, "Framework for Analysis Study: Residential Buildings, Ensembles, and Sites of the Modern Era."

52. See Harold Kalman, *A History of Canadian Architecture* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1994), Vol. 2, pp. 787-88.

53. Windsor Liscombe, *The New Spirit*, pp. 116-18.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

55. Walker, "The Rich Architectonics of Binning," p. 96.

56. "The B.C. Binning House," pp. 15-18.

57. Press release for exhibition "B.C. Binning: A Classical Spirit."

58. Elizabeth Godley, "Binning: A Boon to Our Town's Culture," *Vancouver Sun*, 22 November 1986, p. H3.

59. Watson, "B.C. Binning: Modernism in a Classical Calm," p. 25.

60. "Prominent Painter B.C. Binning Dies," *Vancouver Province*, March 1976.

61. Don Jarvis, "B.C. Binning: The Man Remembered," Performance, June 1976, p. 10.

62. "Profound Influence on

Human Lives: No One Can Disregard Architecture says Speaker," *Vancouver New-Herald*, 24 January 1942.

63. *Ibid.*

64. Drawings for these two West Vancouver houses — one for Mr. and Mrs. John Harrison (1947) and the other for Mr. and Mrs. Roy Keay (1948) — are in the B.C. Binning Fonds, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal.

65. Among the international exhibitions in which Binning's work was featured are the survey of Canadian Art in Washington, D.C. (1950), the Pittsburgh International (1952), the San Paulo Biennales (1950, 1952, 1954), the Venice Biennale (1954), as well as exhibitions in Washington and Venezuela (1955), Milan (1957), and the Brussels World Fair (1958). Press release for exhibition "B.C. Binning: A Classical Spirit."

66. Canadian exhibitions focussing on B.C. Binning's work were held in 1961 at the VAG, in 1973 at the UBC Fine Arts Gallery (which he founded 25 years earlier), in 1988 at the Heffel Gallery in Vancouver, in 1985 at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, and in 1994 at the Medicine Hat Museum and Art Gallery. *Ibid.*

67. In the 1960s he was particularly busy in public life. He was made a full professor in 1961, after directing UBC's Department of Fine Arts since 1955. In 1963 he was awarded the Canada Council Senior Fellowship and was made a member of the National Arts Centre, Ottawa, from 1964 to 1967. He was on the Canada Council's Advisory Panel from 1965 to 1967, and was appointed as Canadian representative to the 1966 UNESCO conference in Tokyo. In 1971 he was made an Officer of the Order of Canada for his long and distinguished career in the arts.

68. "Exponent of a New Architecture in Paint" is the title of an article by D.W.B. [Donald W. Buchanan], a

promoter of Modern design in Canada, in *Canadian Art*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Spring 1949), pp. 148-150; see also Donald W. Buchanan, "B.C. Binning (1909-): A New Architecture in Paint," in *The Growth of Canadian Painting* (London and Toronto: Collins, 1950), pp. 76-79.

69. Press release for exhibition "B.C. Binning: A Classical Spirit."

70. *Ibid.*, quoting Martin Tuele. B.C. Binning is also quoted in the same source as follows: "No, I don't like chaos. I do like order ... the visual order I like has a great deal to do with my classical sense...."

71. Windsor Liscombe, *The New Spirit*, pp. 100-104. The Thomas mosaic was recently destroyed when the library was renovated for new uses.

72. Watson, "Art in the Fifties," pp. 80-81.

73. Watson, "B.C. Binning: Modernism in a Classical Calm," p. 27.

74. See Bronson, "Built Heritage of the Modern Era: Overview, Framework for Analysis, and Criteria for Evaluation," Appendix 3, pp. 3-5.

75. Foundation Group Designs, *West Vancouver Heritage Inventory*, p. 25; Meeting with Joel Lawson, 8 September 1997.

76. Windsor Liscombe, *The New Spirit*, pp. 40-42, 101, 112.

77. Two students visited the house on 6 September 1997, when the author was there, and have been in contact with the author since.

78. These include the replacement of the kitchen appliances, the installation of new fixtures and tile in the bathroom, the installation of skylights in the bathroom and kitchen, the addition of a few new pieces of furniture, the replacement of the concrete pavers, the painting of the cedar v-joint, the replacement of the carport with a garage, and the addition of a bathroom on the west side of the house, all of which are discussed in the text.