

# THE JORGENSON HALL

ASC 735 Heritage Conservation Theory and Practice  
Ryerson University, Department of Architectural Science

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Assignment 1  
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## General Information

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| Building:                  | The Jorgenson Hall, Ryerson University |
| Address:                   | 380 Victoria St, Toronto, ON M5B 0A1   |
| Neighbourhood:             | Church-Yonge Corridor                  |
| Year of planning:          | 1966                                   |
| Beginning of construction: | July 1969                              |
| Year of completion:        | 1971                                   |
| Architects:                | Webb Zerafa Menkes Housden             |

## The History

In the 60's no purpose had been found yet for the area where Gerrard St and Victoria St cross paths. An 'Open House' meeting was being held on January 20th, 1957, where the committee's report would be announced and ideas on the use of the site could be offered. (Murphy, 1957) Since the increasing demand for student spaces, the site seemed to be one of the potential locations for expansion of the university. In February 1966 this planned expansion was officially announced by Prime Minister John P. Robarts and Minister of Education William G. Davis. (Pael, 1969)

The Jorgenson Hall was named after former Ryerson president Frederik C. Jorgenson and would be a part of Ryerson's \$27,000,000 expansion program. This building would be the first of the five phases. The 13-floor tower would accommodate the president's office, dean offices and other administrative functions. The completion of the project was to be expected by September 1970, however, in reality it took almost one more year to complete the Jorgenson Hall. (Hewer, 1968)

The plans of the Jorgenson Hall were well known since this building was the solution for the lack of student spaces Ryerson was dealing with. The Bulletin, a general Toronto journal, even projected an illustration of the Jorgenson Hall on the cover of its October issue. (Sanders, 1969)

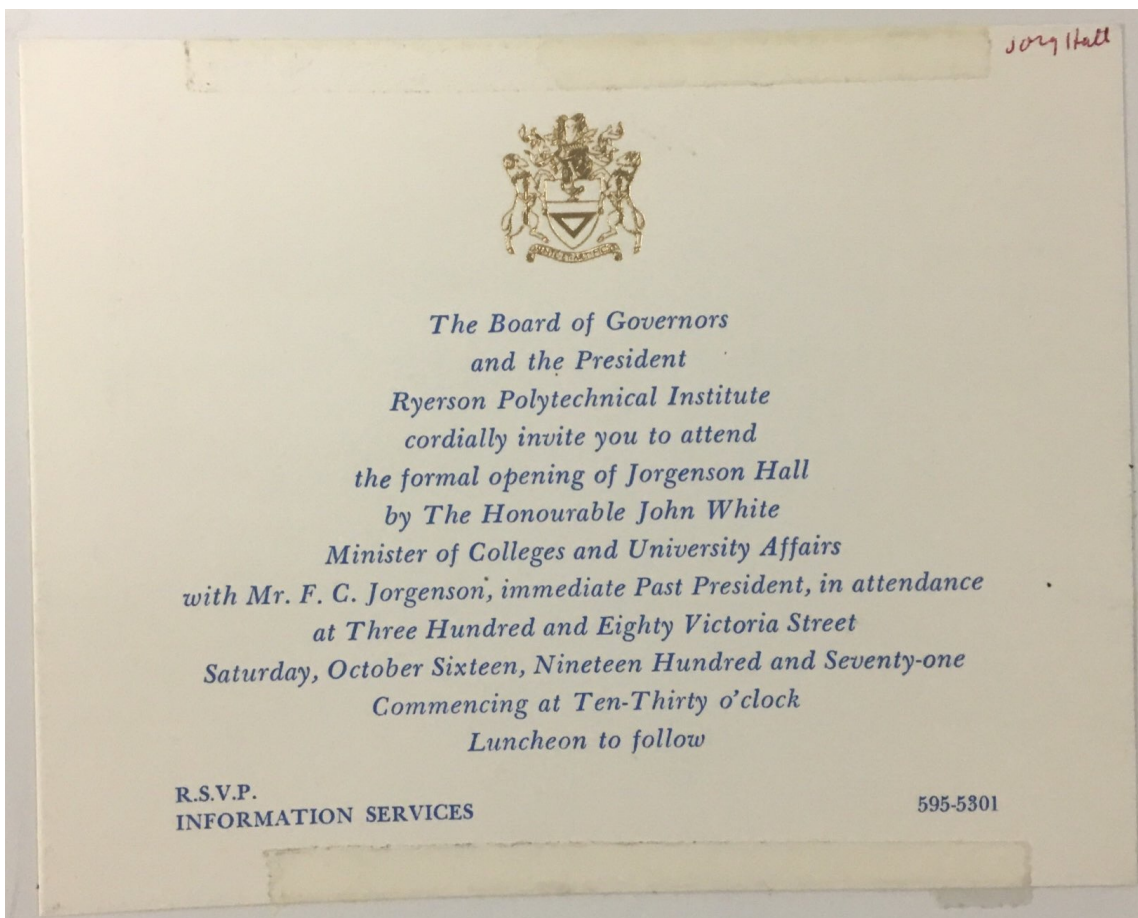


The Bulletin Cover of October 1969.  
Source: (Sanders, 1969)

The total estimated costs of the Jorgenson Hall would be around \$500,000. The University building consists of a north part with a 190 foot tower, a middle part: 'podium' and the south end which will be used as the University library. The building would include over 40 classrooms and seminar rooms and in the north tower financial aid, administrative, English, Social Science and Social Service offices were planned to be located. Bright colours and mobile furniture are used to give the complex a modern appearance and maximize the circulation of students. (Mardus, 1970)



Official Opening Jorgenson Hall April 17th 1971  
Source: (Unknown, 1971)



Invitation Formal Opening Jorgenson Hall on October 16th 1971  
Source: (R.S.V.P. Information Services, 1971)

## The Architecture

The Jorgenson Hall is seen as the (Ryerson) building that defines the architecture and program of the 1970's. The building complex is called modern and monumental, the symbol of Ryerson university. The article even says this high rise, brutalist building made the university urban and had influence on its surroundings.

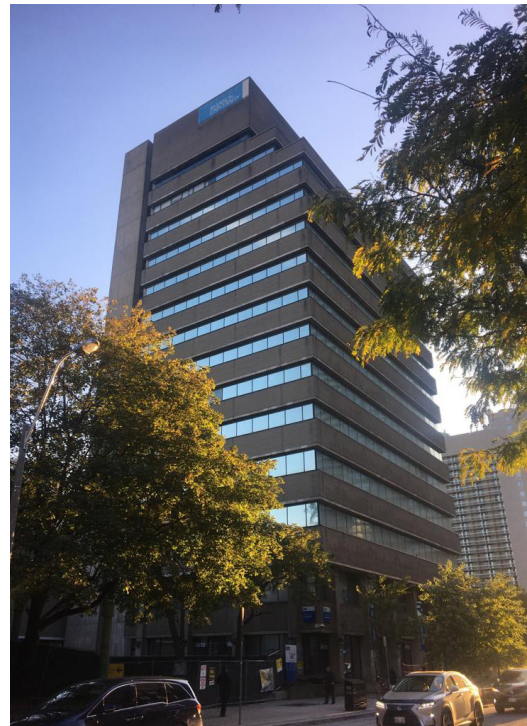
## “The building that devined the seventees”

Headline Ryerson Rambler article. Source: *(Unknown, 1980)*

On the other hand, also more negative opinions were heard. Mainly people who worked at the university disliked the lack of intimacy of the building complex. Also, people were being critical about the fact that offices of the president and board staff could be found on the top floors of the building as if a hierarchy was created and contact between different types of staff became less common. *(Unknown, 1980)*



Bottom floors of the Jorgenson Hall.  
Source: *(Own work, 2019)*



The Jorgenson Hall.  
Source: *(Own work, 2019)*

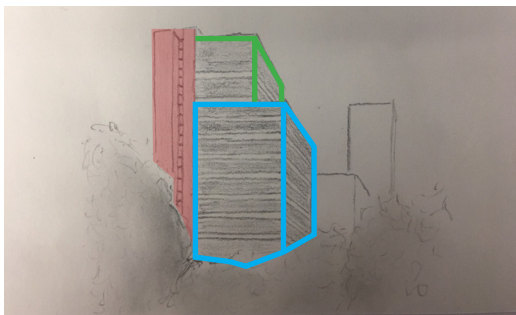


Detail materials of the Jorgenson Hall.  
Source: *(Own work, 2019)*

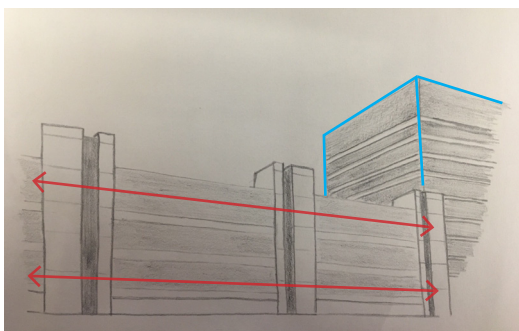
## The Interior

'Brutalism' is the word that describes the architectural style of the Jorgenson Hall. The cubic and orthogonal shaped building is executed in raw concrete and bricks, alternated with horizontally oriented windows. According to A. and P. Smithson brutalism has to be seen as a form of "raw poetry" in which the honesty of the construction is shown on the inside as well as the outside of a building. (Smithson, A., Smithson, P.; 1957) That same honesty is being shown in the relation between function and façade. In the first sketch below is visualized how the outside of the building shows the separation of the main circulation area (red part), the President's and dean offices (green part) and the left over administrative facilities (blue part).

The similarities between the library tower and Jorgenson Hall are well visible and the podium seems to serve as a connection between the two buildings, using the same design style with the horizontally orientated 'layers' of concrete and glass.

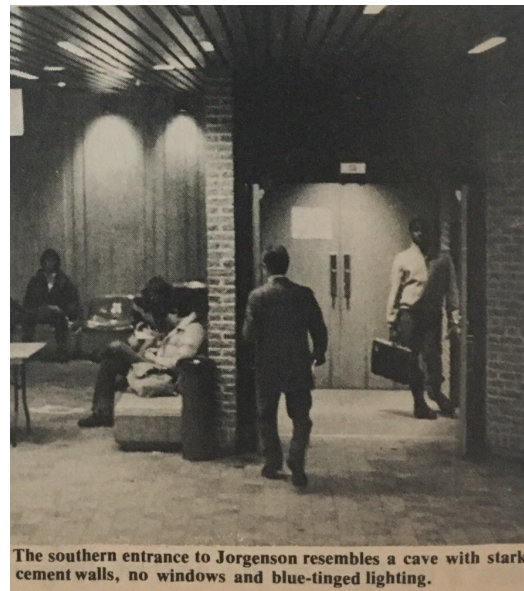


The Jorgenson Hall.  
Source: (Own work, 2019)



The brutalist podium and library..  
Source: (Own work, 2019)

The podium is largely used for classrooms, dining halls and kitchen facilities. Students will be able to see the sky when having dinner because skylights lead into the dining hall. Classrooms are octagonal in shape and a large dark room, with space for a built in projector, can be used as a theatre room. Some walls in the building will be painted in bright colours where others create a modern look by exposing the concrete which the building is made of. (Blatchford, 1971)



The southern entrance of Jorgenson Hall.  
Source: (Black, 1982)

However, some critics say the interior design of the building, classrooms and cafeteria in particular, had negative effects on the well-being of the users of the building. In an article Hume even says "There is a complete lack of respect for solar implications." (Black, 1982, p.18) In November 2001 plans were made for redesigning the building. The plans included lots of glass to lead more sunlight into the building and focusses on the accessibility of facilities like the library. However, to implement these design options would cost over \$3 million. (Woods, 2001)

# Problems

In the past some issues had occurred with the environmental control systems in the Jorgenson Hall. The windows were single glazed, in October 1974 there was a heatwave inside the building due to difficulty of temperature maintenance. (Peake, 1974). A few months after there was a flood because of a break in the water heating system. (Guggi, 1975) Besides that, also asbestos issues occurred in 1988 but due to the Ministry of Labor the building could still be used without removing the asbestos (Piasecki, 1988)

Students became very critical about the Jorgenson building as can be read in the 'Wither goest Jorgenson' article below. They didn't like the dated interior and exterior of the building, things are broken, there are dirty washrooms and students feel unsafe. According to an architecture student this building could be really nice if Ryerson were to clean it up and fix the problems. (Ebden, Kittelberg; 1996) However, it would cost Ryerson a lot of money to repair and maintain everything. Money they did not have. (Friscolanti, 2000)

**R.P.U.**  
**fact and fiction**

# Wither goest Jorgenson?

## In which our modest reporter sets out to discover why the Hall sucks

By Theresa Ebden with Lori Kittelberg

Welcome to Castle Jorgenson, our citadel of academia carved into the heart of downtown Toronto. On this tour, we shall wander through this crumbling edifice, searching deep into its bowels for the answer to the gripping question—why does Jorgenson suck? But don't wander off. You will get lost. Forever. Stay with us, learn our grief, share the aroma of the stale stench of uncalibrated air from the breath of Rye students that studied here long ago.

Sticking out in the immediate skyline like a failed *Jetsun* set, Jorgenson Hall is the cement heart of Ryerson campus.

Designed using late 1960s perceptions of modernism, Jorgenson was brought into creation by a team of skilled professionals led by a man named Professor Jack Shukla.

That's right, Ryerson's centre was designed by a team headed by one of its very own stock. On Nov. 7, 1989, Shukla went on to receive an international award for another building.

Photo: Steve Jorgenson

So why is Jorgenson so bad, and how did it turn out that way? Let's proceed on our tour and find out.

**Part One: Inside and Outside Fort Jorge**

"I feel like I'm going through '70s re-run," said David Vink, a second-year Environmental Health student. "It's an attempt to look at the exterior of Jorgenson: the cold concrete-upon-concrete levels that span the narrow strip between Kerr Hall and Yonge Street. The windows look like canon firing sites, except for the grimy glass that covers them.

"That's our main building!" laughed Derek Milson, a first year Aerospace Engineering student. Sure—who says damp, foreboding mainmains can't be the a home away from home for students? Most don't think so.

"It's gross," said Cathy Bogart, a second-year Journalism student. "The light is so

**Part Two: Fix this**

Built in 1972, the walls of Jorgenson Hall are holding our centre of academia together, but don't expect anything to work.

Escalators were the number one complaint among students polled about building gipes. After nearly three decades of almost constant use—for which they were not originally designed—the bowels of our heavy metal expensive stairs skirted in yellow construction fencing is no longer a cause for Rye students rage.

Secondary complaints included doorknobs, elevators, heating, and circulation equipment.

Classrooms with manic hearing systems are also a chief complaint.

Overall, student agitation is high.

"I have considered dropping out of Aerospace and becoming a fucking fix-it man," grumbled Milson. "I'd make a fortune!"

**Part Three: Flush this!**

Perhaps the most disgusting area of

**Part Four: Safety! What Safety?**

"The safety situation won't necessarily get better in Jorgenson," said Owen Yorstin of the Ryerson Women's Centre, citing cutbacks to security as a result of budget cuts.

Yorstin herself feels safe on campus because she knows the design and knows where to find help. "If I was unaware of these things, I would not feel safe," she said.

Rath thinks that installing corner mirrors at sharp bends and stairwells could help make Jorgenson safer.

But that doesn't prepare anyone for what lurks in the darkness beneath.

**Part Six: Is there a Remedy?**

"It's actually not a bad building," said Jamie Cheveldyoff, a second year architecture student. "I've heard there's a couple of things wrong with it, but the design is pretty good."

Some students agree that for all its gross faults, their main building is not yet ready to be condemned.

"It's still acceptable, if they were to clean it up, it would be a really nice building," said Vink. "If they had replaced or at least cleaned the windows,

**Part Five: If Hades lived at Ryerson...**

Descending into the Lower Basement level of Jorgenson hall, I am led into an alternate sub-world of hallways that seem to lead nowhere, an endless sea of grey walls disappearing into darkness and exit signs which lead to no exit (over locked door of LB106—through the crack, we can see there are many boxes inside.)

Although many of the doors require a security card to get through, there is one well-lit area outside the entrance to the Computing and Communication office.

"There is life down here," says Adam Andrade, who answers phones at the main desk of the dim, windowless office. There was life in Dracula's castle, too. But that didn't make it any cozier—or safe.

**Part Six: Is there a Remedy?**

"I wouldn't go down there in the middle of the night," said Yorstin.

While considered by some to be dangerous by night, Jorgenson's basement is a round-the-clock health hazard.

The stairwell is littered with cigarette butts, gum wads, dust bunnies and fire passes to the Zoo Bar. Knobless doors lie like bodies beneath the stairwell, savaged with years of grime, amid decrepit deals from the time when Journalism used to be taught there.

"It used to be much more used than it is now," said Shukla. "People used to be down there all the time—the media centre was much more active."

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the cavity of Jorgenson's foundations are the floor tiles. Most are the regular grey kind, but every ten paces or so, there are white tiles with breathing holes.

There is no immediate explanation for the holes, but some things could be better left unknown.

the eyeopener • wednesday, march 13, 1996

The Jorgenson Hall. Source: (Own work)

# The Statement of Significance

## **Description of the project**

The Jorgenson Hall, completed in 1971, is a 190 feet tower and located on the Ryerson University campus in Toronto (ON), Canada. The building is attached to the Podium which connects the tower with the Ryerson Library. In the tower mainly administrative functions can be found.

## **Contextual and architectural value**

The Jorgenson Hall is a very good example of the brutalist architectural style that suits the time in which the building was designed. The raw materials being used for the construction are clearly shown in the design and represent the 'honesty' which is important in brutalism. Not only the outside of the building but also the inside and functional program reflect the architecture of the 70's. The building was very well known and it was the first campus building to have a great urban influence. For many years it was the symbol of Ryerson University.

## **Character-defining elements**

All design decisions are based on the concepts of 'Brutalism' which makes the design really strong.

The architects really thought the interior design through as well. Classrooms and lecture rooms didn't have windows so that all the rooms would be environmentally controllable. They thought about what spaces needed daylight and the suitable way in which this light should enter the building. They designed movable furniture to optimize the functionality of the Jorgenson Hall and created a smart circulation system for the students.

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