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## THE ARCHITOURIST

Hobbs Sun House brought International Style to Toronto's Rosedale



The Hobbs Sun House in Toronto, c. 1945.

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

*The strikingly modern, 3,000-square-foot home was designed for the president of Hobbs Glass*

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o architecture buffs, firsts are important. Which villa was Andrea Palladio's first? Could we pinpoint the very first Queen Anne home? Since Art Deco existed before Paris's 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs, which buildings defined the style? Were the exhibition homes of the Weissenhof Estate in 1927 Stuttgart the very first International Style homes?

While there are no Palladian villas in Canada, we can claim a rich history with many architectural movements, including the International Style. Honest, stripped of ornament, and

with walls of sheet glass made possible by 20th-century technology, it was born in 1920s Europe and given its name by architects Philip Johnson and Henry Russell Hitchcock for their groundbreaking 1932 Museum of Modern Art exhibition in New York.

While the International Style's Canadian heyday was certainly the post-Second World War period, a handful of progressive Canadians were thinking about it before the war; most consider the first soul brave enough to turn it into bricks-and-mortar to be artist Bertram Charles Binning. A 1932 graduate of the Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Arts, in 1939 the art teacher designed a small, open-concept home in North Vancouver that, according to Donald Luxton & Associates in a 2017 conservation report, acted "as a catalyst for the Modern movement in Canada." (Indeed, in 1997 the house became a National Historic Site of Canada.) He moved in in 1941.

In Toronto, while the 1922 Ashley-Crippen house in Moore Park may have been first to reject ornament, its massing and punched windows keep it firmly rooted in the Art Deco realm. To find floor-to-ceiling glass, such as Binning's, we must travel to Rosedale for the 1944 "Hobbs Sun House."



*The Hobbs Sun House was designed by architect Gordon Sinclair Adamson for Clare F. Wood, president of Hobbs Glass.*

#### DAVE LEBLANC/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Using the (then) new technology of insulated glass units (triple-paned "Thermopane" windows, invented in 1930), architect Gordon Sinclair Adamson – who'd been designing Georgians up until the 1940s – designed a strikingly modern, one-storey, 3,000 square foot home for Clare F. Wood, president of Hobbs Glass.

Having just moved from London, Ont., Mr. Wood acquired a large, vacant ravine lot at 7 Dale Ave. and worked with the recently converted Modernist to produce an L-shaped, open-plan show home for his glass products, which included Vitrolite tiles for bathroom and kitchen walls (the original 1954 Yonge line used them; only Eglinton station survives), heat-treated "armorplate glass" doors, a glass staircase (this according to David Wood, who grew up in the house), and bathroom walls made of opaque glass. Judging from the few, period photos available, furniture was rather "glassy" also.

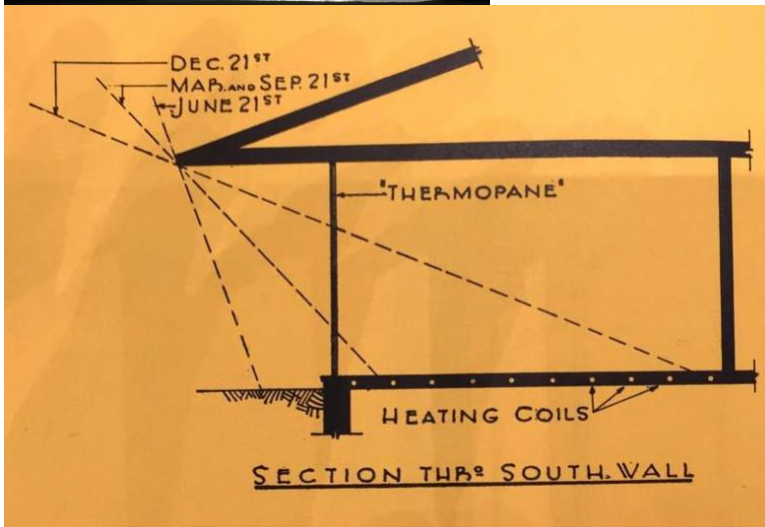
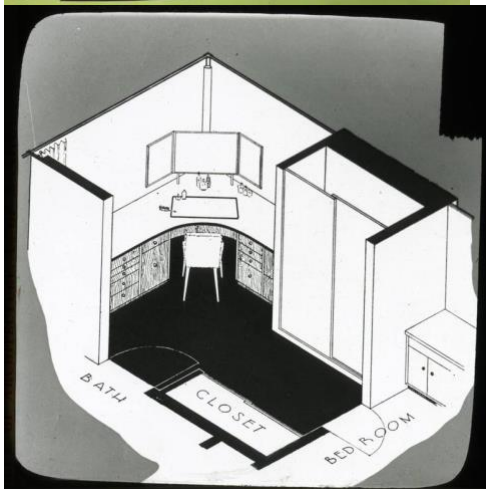


Non-glass walls were constructed of a buff flagstone.  
GORDON S. ADAMSON & ASSOCIATES

After the home was completed in 1945, Hobbs Glass sponsored a "Kitchen of Tomorrow" exhibit, constructed of "fabulous glass," at Eaton's stores across Canada. Along with full Thermopane walls, it featured foot-pedal faucets and a "horizontal" refrigerator.

To ensure the Wood family wouldn't cook in summer, sun angles for Dec. 21 and June 21 were calculated and roof overhangs designed accordingly to block summer sun while permitting low winter sun; to reflect intense summer rays, the roof was clad in the same "duraluminum" used on Lancaster bombers (the roof is still in place today). To keep interior temperatures even, radiant tubes in the concrete slab were fed by a gas boiler positioned in the attic space inside the chimney.

"Fireproof doors at either end made a compact boiler room which has a separate outside air supply," wrote the unnamed author of a whopping nine-page feature in the November, 1944, issue of *Canadian Homes and Gardens*. There was also, the author continued, separate climate controls so the homeowner could "be simultaneously heating a zone on the north side of the house" while cooler air could enter the southern, glass-walled rooms "through a magnitude of small holes in the acoustic ceiling."



*Illustrations of the Hobbs Sun House from Canadian Homes and Gardens, November, 1944.*  
CANADIAN HOMES AND GARDENS

The Sun House, with "more than half the walls" made of glass, gushed the author, signified the end of "a long struggle from the time when primitive man sought shelter in a dim cave."

Outside, non-glass walls were constructed of a buff flagstone – laid by Scottish stone masons who were flown over – and extensive landscaping of the large lot was handled by the oft-billed



"father" of Canadian landscape architecture, Howard Burlington Dunnington-Grubb of Dunnington-Grubb & Stensson; the geometric design remains mostly intact (Howard and Lorrie Dunnington-Grubb lived at 3 Dale). Son David Wood remembers his father imported topsoil from Saskatchewan because he wanted "good soil."

Eventually, Clare Wood would purchase the lots on either side of 7 Dale and have low-slung bungalows constructed well back from the sidewalk, like his, to keep Rosedale's park-like vistas intact.



The lot's extensive landscaping was handled by Howard Burlington Dunnington-Grubb.  
GORDON S. ADAMSON & ASSOCIATES

The Sun House architect, Gordon Adamson, would go on to win a 1953 Massey Medal for the Savoy Plaza apartment building, which features a gently curving, very glassy façade facing Old Forest Hill Rd., as well as the Redpath Sugar Refinery on the waterfront.

With all of this pedigree, it's hard to believe an application to demolish the Hobbs Sun House, along with the properties on either side, was filed in August, 2016, in order to construct "The Dale," a 26-unit, four-storey condo with a façade positioned much closer to the sidewalk. Luckily, South Rosedale is a Heritage Conservation District, which offers some protection. Unfortunately, when the HCD research was being carried out in 2002, the Hobbs house and its neighbours were given a 'C' designation, meaning that, while they "contribute" to the overall character of the neighbourhood, they possess no individual merit. That, writes Letourneau Heritage Consulting in a November 2017 report, can be attributed to "volunteer amateurs drawn from the neighbourhood" and the "minimal research" provided. It is Letourneau's opinion that 7 Dale, at least, should be given individual, and full, protection. Although that hasn't happened

yet, on Jan. 31, 2018, the city's acting chief planner recommended to the Toronto Preservation Board that the demolition permit be refused.



An application to demolish the Hobbs Sun House was filed in August, 2016, to construct a condo. The city's acting chief planner has recommended the permit be refused.  
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And while that suits Katherine Lee, a Rosedale resident and BCE Inc. board member who hired Letourneau to assess the properties as part of her "My Rosedale Neighbourhood" opposition campaign, she notes that the preservation board has deferred its vote until spring, and, as is always the case, the developer has requested a hearing at the Ontario Municipal Board (a quasi-judicial, unelected and unaccountable body that can overturn city decisions).

"Today's architecture, today's development is more about take up every square foot of your lawn and build something big," says Ms. Lee. "Whereas Clare Wood, because of his love of architecture ... it wasn't about dollars and cents, he wanted to build something meaningful." A meaningful building that, in Europe, would be charging admission at the door.