

Statement of Significance

Merrick House

5762 Larson Place

West Vancouver, B.C.



Description of the Historic Place

Merrick House is a multi-level wood-frame house located on a forested rocky promontory at the top end of its property in the Eagle Harbour area of West Vancouver. The building is comprised of the original tower form built in 1974, and two coordinated flanking additions constructed between 1974 and 1981.

Heritage Value

Merrick House is valued as an excellent and well-preserved example of the West Coast modernist domestic architecture for which West Vancouver is renowned, and for its association with the influential architect and native West Vancouverite Paul Merrick.

The house is exemplary for displaying characteristic formal qualities of the West Coast modernist domestic architectural tradition: siting that incorporates a challenging rocky irregular landscape, an exposed wood frame structure, and spaces that are open to its coastal forest setting.

Merrick House is particularly important as an example of the West Vancouver design tradition that built on the classic post-and-beam exposed shells from the 50s and 60s, characterized by exuberant structural and material expression, increased reverence for nature, and idiosyncratic non-conformity. The house is valued for its exposed dimension-lumber structure and detailing that enables large expanses of exterior wall to be non-structural areas of glazing or openings, for its expressive deployment of native stone and

exposed bedrock, for its careful crafting that responds intimately to the particulars of the knoll's topography and its trees, and for its refreshing and delightful experimental quality that includes areas left unfinished.

The house is valuable for clearly revealing a succession of cultural influences that define Merrick's work. The original 1974 house reflects Merrick's appreciation of the West Coast forests gained in his early life on the outskirts of Ambleside. Its wood joinery and detailing are informed by both Merrick's knowledge of marine craftsmanship and the expressed joinery found in the Arts and Crafts building tradition. The house's sophisticated spatial organization builds on the masterworks of Merrick's mentors, most notably the works of Ned Pratt, Ron Thom, and Bud Wood. The 1981 Master Bedroom wing addition references English ecclesiastical spaces that inspired Merrick in his years of architectural practice in England between 1974 and 1981.

Through exemplary stewardship, the virtually unchanged house is extremely valuable as a record of Merrick's design aesthetic. Interior and exterior materials have been carefully maintained while allowing the effects of wear and weathering in accordance with Merrick's aesthetics. The landscape and trees forming the immediate context of the house - only minimally modified by Merrick - have been preserved as Merrick conceived them.

Character-defining elements

Site

- two-part site: lower field, and upper rocky knoll
- form of rock on knoll, which is entirely unblasted
- mature trees immediately surrounding the house
- uncultivated landscape immediately surrounding house
- informally surfaced vehicular access and parking between house and street

House - original 1974 section

- expansive glazed wall areas
- clear glass skylights
- sliding glazed wall panels between main room and adjacent roof deck
- native stone fireplace and chimney wall
- built-up dimension-lumber posts, associated lumber braces, and joinery detailing
- individual modest spaces accessed from irregular staircase
- faceted exposed structural framing
- simple wood railings and guards
- miscellaneous detailing and hardware
- exposed bedrock in room below main room
- indigenous and recycled wood building materials
- recycled coloured glass dining table windows
- unfinished balconies and lookout at the top of the house

House - additions

- vaulted Master Bedroom area
- exterior wood filigree
- glazed bridge to bedroom wing
- faceted lower bedroom wing fitted between adjacent large trees over steep terrain
- roof deck extension

Views:

- view from main space northwest through and over trees to glimpse of Eagle Harbour, the rocky coastline beyond, and the sky
- views from many points in the house out into the trunks and boughs of adjacent evergreen trees