

# STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

**SYKES RESIDENCE**

**MARCH 2010**

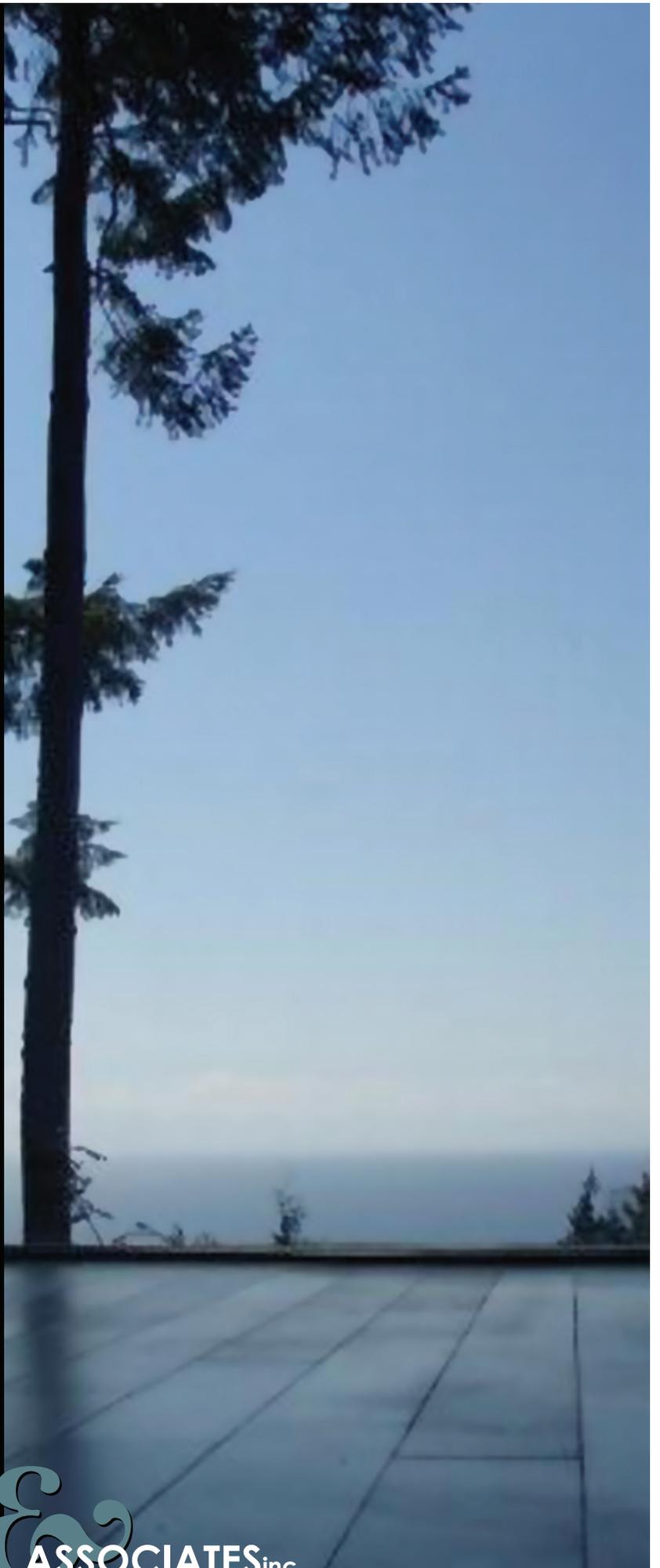
prepared for:

**DAVID & CHRISTINA LESLIE**

prepared by:

**DONALD LUXTON**

**& ASSOCIATES Inc**



Thursday, March 4, 2010

Mr. Stephen Mikicich  
Senior Community Planner  
The District of West Vancouver  
750 - 17th Street, V7V 3T3

Dear Mr. Mikicich;  
RE: Eligibility of the Sykes Residence, 5616 Westport Place, for the West Vancouver Heritage Register

Built in 1964, the Sykes Residence is an unusual example of West Coast Style architecture in West Vancouver. Our firm, Donald Luxton & Associates, has been hired by the owner to conduct an assessment of the Sykes Residence, to determine its eligibility for addition to the West Vancouver Heritage Register. To conduct this assessment, we evaluated the residence by preparing both a Heritage Evaluation and a Statement of Significance. The Heritage Evaluation utilizes the ranking criteria established for the 1987-88 West Vancouver Heritage Inventory. These criteria allow the relative scoring of the Sykes Residence based on architectural, historical and contextual significance, and the degree to which it has retained its original integrity. Our assessment concludes that the Sykes Residence scores high for architectural merit and original context, giving it an overall numerical score that would in turn support its addition to the Heritage Register.

A Statement of Significance has also been prepared for the Sykes Residence. The intent of this documentation and analysis is to understand the significance of the historic place for addition to the District of West Vancouver Heritage Register and to act as a tool for its future conservation. The Statement of Significance consists of a description of the historic place, an evaluation of its heritage value and identification of those physical elements that relate to its heritage value (character-defining elements).

In conclusion, both the Heritage Evaluation and Statement of Significance determine that the Sykes Residence is considered to be a rare and intact example of modern architecture in West Vancouver. We recommend that the Sykes Residence be added to the Heritage Register in order to promote its retention and future conservation.

Sincerely,



Donald Luxton, FRAIC, Principal  
dl:am

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## INTRODUCTION

The Sykes Residence, located at 5616 Westport Place in West Vancouver, is a spectacular house and an exceptional example of the West Coast Style of architecture for which West Vancouver and North Vancouver have become renowned. Hungarian born architect Peter Kaffka designed the Sykes Residence in 1964 for original owners Major Paul Sykes and his wife. Having completed a wide variety of architectural projects, from multi-unit residential towers, to ski lodge structures, to University buildings, Kaffka was an innovative and ambitious designer who created some of Vancouver and West Vancouver's most noteworthy structures.

When viewed from the street level, 5616 Westport Place appears to be a single level bungalow with an open carport to the east and a unique circular room to the west. Only upon entering the home and viewing the exterior from the back of the property is it clear how unusual and distinctive the Sykes Residence is in both form and innovation. The house features a distinguishable 'spiral helix' roof reflecting the shape of a seashell. This organic design echoes the marine environment that is visible from the house as well as the use of organic inspiration in the West Coast Style of architecture. With an elevated concrete floor and large floor-to-ceiling windows, the house appears to be floating in the trees, giving it a feeling of weightlessness. The carport, also with a concrete floor, is located over living space, demonstrating the boldness, creativity and practicality of Kaffka as a designer. Through efficient use of space, Kaffka was able to functionally design all necessary components of the house into the natural environment and natural layout of the site.

Aside from the spectacular views offered from almost every south facing room in the house and the dramatic cliff top setting, much of the significance of the Sykes Residence is in the smaller details. The chimney acts as a source of heat, a staircase, and the principal support for the central roof structure, it also connects two unique and vastly different fireplaces; one, which is located in the original library, features a tall tapered column, while the other is clad in large, irregular granite stones, which, when burning, heats the moulded concrete staircase above. The unique circular design of the original library of the house reflects the shape of the Vancouver Observatory, which was often frequented by original owner Major Paul Sykes<sup>1</sup>. From its unassuming front façade to its innovative design details, the Sykes Residence is an excellent example of an unusual and impressive West Coast Style home.

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<sup>1</sup> It is unknown whether Sykes, who was a physicist and astronomer as well as a life member of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (RASC), had any influence on the design of the house or whether Kaffka took the personalities and interests of his clients into account when designing private residences, however, it would appear that the house was perfectly suited for the Sykes family, evidenced by the fact that Sykes remained in the house from its completion in 1964 until his passing in 2005.

SYKES RESIDENCE, 5616 WESTPORT PLACE, STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE



Carport, which is located above living space



Curved 'Denstone' wall of the library



Fireplace of library



Granite fireplace with concrete stairs above



Exposed beams and large windows of the main room



View from the back deck

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE



**Name:** Sykes Residence

**Address:** 5616 Westport Place, West Vancouver

**Architect:** Peter Kaffka

### Description of the Historic Place

The Sykes Residence, located at 5616 Westport Place in West Vancouver, is a one and one-half storey house, built into a steep and rugged cliffside. Designed in the West Coast Style of architecture, it features both a flat and round 'spiral helix' roof with wide flaring eaves and exposed beams, vertical V-joint cedar siding, and a curved concrete 'Denstone' block wall. Located on a 20,800 square foot residential lot with south facing views of the Strait of Georgia, Passage Island, and Bowen Island, the Sykes Residence is distinguished by its integration with the natural environment.

### Heritage Value of the Historic Place

Built in 1964, the Sykes Residence is valued as an outstanding representation of the West Coast Style of modern architecture in West Vancouver. Exemplified by design innovation, advancing architectural technologies, use of natural materials, and sensitive integration with the natural environment, the West Coast Style was prevalent between 1945 and 1970. This was an era of postwar optimism, prosperity, growth and pent-up demand for new housing. The Sykes Residence is a fine representation of this new modern architecture, and features exposed beams and a 'spiral helix' roof that emulates the shape of a seashell. Utilizing high-quality materials and progressive techniques, the house features sophisticated lines that give it an organic sense of flow while differentiating it from earlier, simplistic post-and-beam structures. The interior features floor-to-ceiling windows that offer unobstructed views and ceilings that follow the curve of the unique roofline and expose its structure. The central chimney, which functions as the heart of the house, connects two unique fireplaces and is formed into the main staircase, creates interior walls, and acts as the primary roof support.

Built on an expansive residential lot, the Sykes Residence is significant for its seamless blend with the natural environment, a hallmark feature of the West Coast Style. The living room floor is constructed on an elevated slab of concrete supported by two concrete pillars to permit the house's incorporation into the steep cliff with minimal disruption of the rugged landscape. This construction technique allows for maximum views and natural light, and by designing an elevated living room, Kaffka's design creates

an infinite sense of space, which gives the impression that the house is hovering amidst the trees. With southwest-facing views to the Strait of Georgia, Passage and Bowen Islands, and surrounding vegetation, the Sykes Residence functions as an urban retreat.

This house is also valued for its association with the original owner, astronomer and educator Major Paul Sykes Jr. Born in Hummelston, Pennsylvania in 1918, Sykes was giving radio lectures on the subject of astronomy and publishing a monthly astronomical column by the age of fourteen. Sykes served in the Pacific in the United States Air Force during the Second World War and, after earning a Physics degree from the University of British Columbia in 1948 and studying nuclear physics, he rejoined the Air Force, achieving the rank of Major. He was a long-term lecturer and administrator in the Physics Department at UBC from the late 1940s until his retirement in 1983. Sykes was also a Life Member of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada. He and his wife owned and occupied this residence upon its completion in 1964 until his passing in 2005.

The Sykes Residence is additionally significant for its association with prominent architect Peter Kaffka (1899-1992), who was born in Budapest, Hungary. After graduation in 1925, Kaffka worked for several Budapest firms before advancing to the position of director of the Budapest planning board. In the 1930s he was involved with the post-war reconstruction of Budapest before immigrating to Canada in 1945, and settled with his wife and son in Vancouver in 1950. Kaffka is attributed with the design of some of Vancouver's most iconic buildings, including Parkview Towers (1960), the Thea Koerner House (1961) at UBC, which was awarded a Gold Massey Medal for outstanding architecture in Canada, and the Imperial Tower (1962), which upon completion, was the tallest building in Western Canada. Kaffka designed several West Coast Style houses in both West and North Vancouver and was recognized for his experimental nature and his ability to combine design and function. Kaffka viewed each project as an opportunity to amalgamate the natural and built environments, while utilizing creative design, and the Sykes House remains as a testament to his exceptional design skills.

### **Character-Defining Elements**

Key elements that define the heritage character of the Sykes Residence include its:

#### **Exterior Elements**

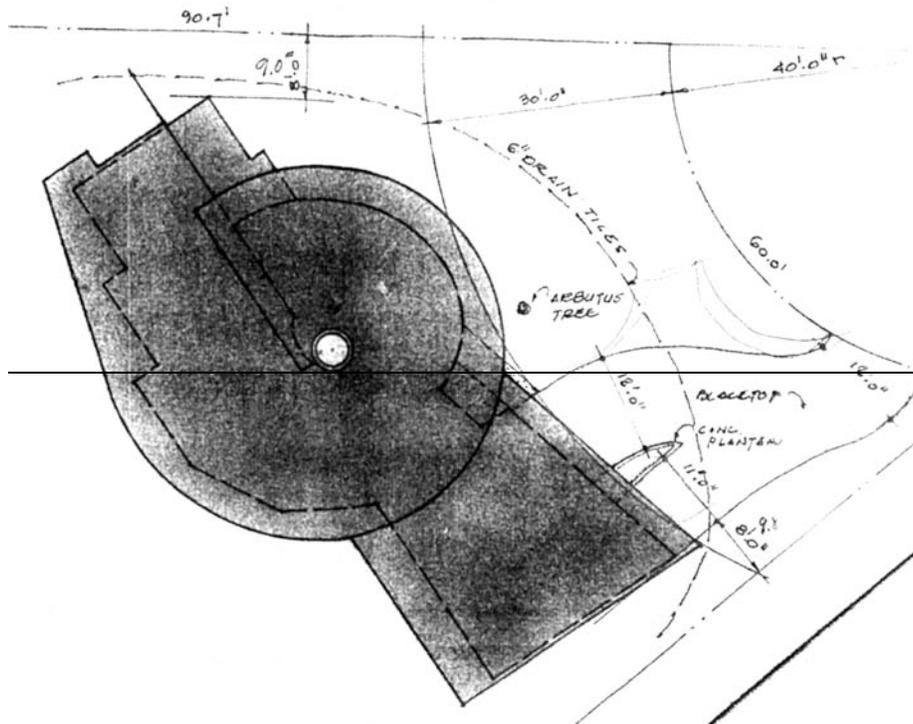
- setting amongst mature vegetation on a large lot, with expansive and unobstructed views southwest to the Strait of Georgia and Passage, and Bowen Islands;
- residential form, scale and massing as expressed by its one and one-half storey plan, one storey visible at the entry way and one and one-half storey height visible from the rear façade;
- flat and 'spiral helix' roof, exposed beams, and horizontal, asymmetrical massing;
- concrete construction with vertical V-joint cedar siding and curved concrete 'Denstone' block wall and chimney;
- West Coast Style details such as the use of local materials, the solid wood front door, the flat roof of the east façade and the 'spiral helix' roof of the west façade, all sides featuring wide flaring eaves and exposed wooden beams, smooth wall surfaces, windows set flush with the outer wall plane, and the relationship between the interior and exterior spaces;
- exterior architectural details such as the location of the two decks of the rear façade, poured concrete floors supported by two concrete pillars, the 'transom inspired' angled wall of the second-storey spare bedroom, and the open car port of the east façade, which was constructed over living space;

## SYKES RESIDENCE, 5616 WESTPORT PLACE, STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

- original windows such as its large two-storey fixed glass windows of the living room, small square reeded glass windows of the concrete block library wall, fixed-glass windows throughout the house and the solid wood panel front door with reeded glass sidelights; and
- associated landscape features such as the mature trees and plants including cedars, arbutus trees, Douglas firs, rhododendrons, and ferns, the original stone steps and stone walls located at both the front and rear of the house, and the original stone light pillars.

### Interior Elements

- open floor plan with split-level concept;
- elevated concrete floor of the lower level of the house, which is supported by three concrete pillars;
- concrete floor of the upper split-level of the residence;
- original fireplace with round hearth and tapered form in the library, which is connected to the central chimney;
- original granite-faced fireplace, which is incorporated with the concrete staircase above, and connected to the central chimney;
- central chimney which supports the weight of the main roof structure;
- cast-concrete staircase that spirals clockwise down from the upper level to the lower level of the house;
- banister and balusters of the staircase;
- curved wall formed by the location of the central chimney, which is clad in vertical tongue-and-groove cedar siding;
- exposed bedrock, which is visible in the storage area of the house; and
- exposed wood beams that follow the unique roofline of the house.



Aerial plan of the Sykes Residence depicting the 'spiral helix roof', "Building Plans for 5616 Westport Place", by Peter Kaffka

## **HERITAGE EVALUATION**

### **DISTRICT OF WEST VANCOUVER HERITAGE ASSESSMENT BASED ON METHODOLOGY FROM HERITAGE INVENTORY 1987-88**

#### 1.0 IDENTIFICATION

- 1.1 NAME OF BUILDING: Sykes Residence, 5616 Westport Place
- 1.2 STREET ADDRESS: 5616 Westport Place
- 1.3 LEGAL DESCRIPTION: Lot 4, Block E, District Lot 1374, Plan 10565
- 1.4 ROLL NUMBER:
- 1.5 ZONING:
- 1.6 TAX ASSESSMENTS:
- 1.7 PRESENT OWNER AND ADDRESS: David and Christina Leslie
- 1.8 EVALUATION CLASS: Recommended for West Vancouver Heritage Register

#### 2.0 HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

- 2.1 CONSTRUCTION DATE AND SOURCE: 1964
- 2.2 ORIGINAL OWNER AND SOURCE: Major Paul Sykes Jr.
- 2.3 ARCHITECT AND SOURCE: Peter Kaffka, Plans
- 2.4 BUILDER AND SOURCE: Unknown
- 2.5 PEOPLE OR EVENTS OF HISTORIC INTEREST ASSOCIATED WITH THE SITE: Major Paul Sykes

#### 3.0 USAGE

- 3.1 ORIGINAL USE: Single Family Residence  
C.I.H.B. NUMBER: 0101
- 3.2 PRESENT USE: Single Family Residence  
C.I.H.B. NUMBER: 0101

#### 4.0 ARCHITECTURE AND STRUCTURE

- 4.1 FOUNDATION MATERIAL: Concrete
- 4.2 BASEMENT: Partial
- 4.3 NUMBER OF STORIES: One and one-half
- 4.4 STRUCTURAL MATERIAL: Wood frame
- 4.5 CLADDING: Exterior of vertical V-joint cedar siding, and a curved concrete 'Denstone' block wall. ORIGINAL: Vertical V-joint cedar siding
- 4.6 WINDOWS: Aluminum, some new vinyl
- 4.7 ROOF TYPE: Flat and curled, resembling seashell
- 4.8 ROOF COVER: New torch-on  
ORIGINAL: Fiberglass over living room
- 4.9 DESIGN DESCRIPTION: West Coast Style exhibiting design innovation, flat and 'curled' roof shape with wide flaring eaves, overall roof shape resembles snail shell; non-linear configuration of the house
- 4.10 CONDITION: Excellent

#### 5.0 CONTEXT

- 5.1 SITING: Situated on cliffside in West Vancouver overlooking the Straight of Georgia and Passage and Bowen Islands
- 5.2 CONTEXT: Compatible Residential Area
- 5.3 ADJACENT ADDRESSES SUITABLE FOR HERITAGE GROUPING: N/A
- 5.4 SIGNIFICANT LANDSCAPE FEATURES: Mature coniferous and deciduous trees, and rock walls at both the front and the rear

#### 6.0 RESEARCH INFORMATION

- 6.1 ASSESSMENT INFORMATION: N/A
- 6.2 ADDITIONAL REFERENCES: Martin Kaffka, son of Architect Peter Kaffka

SYKES RESIDENCE, 5616 WESTPORT PLACE, STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

EVALUATION: STREET ADDRESS: 5616 Westport Place

<u>DESCRIPTION</u>	<u>EVALUATION</u>			
	E	<u>VG</u>	G	F/P
<u>ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY</u>				
1. STYLE/TYPE Very good example of architect-designed residence; West Coast style	35	<u>18</u>	12	0
2. DESIGN Unusual interior features; inventive roof lines	30	<u>15</u>	10	0
3. CONSTRUCTION Notably use of local materials including cedar siding and concrete block	15	8	<u>5</u>	0
4. DESIGNER/BUILDER Peter Kaffka, prominent local architect	15	8	<u>5</u>	0
	(Maximum 45) <b>43</b>			
<u>CULTURAL HISTORY</u>				
1. HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION Association with original owner, Paul Sykes	35	18	<u>12</u>	0
2. HISTORICAL PATTERN One of the earlier houses in this newly-developing area	30	15	<u>10</u>	0
	(Maximum 35) <b>22</b>			
<u>CONTEXT</u>				
1. LANDSCAPE/SITE Treed site; recognizable site relationship	15	<u>8</u>	5	0
2. NEIGHBOURHOOD Compatible residential area	20	10	<u>6</u>	0
3. VISUAL/SYMBOLIC Partially visible from street	20	13	<u>8</u>	0
	(Maximum 20) <b>22</b>			
	SUBTOTAL 87			
<u>INTEGRITY</u>	0	<u>8</u>	-13	-25
Alterations to lower level; new windows at ground floor	TOTAL: <b>79</b>			

TOTAL.....**79/100**  
 RESOURCE EVALUATION CLASS.....Recommended for Heritage Register

EVALUATED BY: Donald Luxton & Associates Inc.  
 DATE: February 17, 2010

## RESEARCH SHEET

**NAME:** SYKES RESIDENCE

**CIVIC ADDRESS:** 5616 Westport Place, West Vancouver

**ARCHITECT:** Peter Kaffka

**SOURCE:** Building Plans for 5616 Westport Place and correspondence with Peter Kaffka's son, Martin Kaffka

**ORIGINAL OWNER:** Major Paul Sykes Jr.

**SOURCE:** Building Plans for 5616 Westport Place by Peter Kaffka and correspondence with Peter Kaffka's son, Martin Kaffka

**ORIGINAL DATE OF CONSTRUCTION:** 1964

**SOURCE:** Building Plans for 5616 Westport Place

### REFERENCES:

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