

St. Stephen's Anglican Church

Statement of Heritage Value

"...the walls become solid, while the corners dissolve as glazed elements."

- The West Vancouver Survey of Significant Architecture, 1945-1975, F.G Architectural and Planning Consultants, page 86

Description of the historic place

Located at 885 22nd Street, St Stephen's Anglican church is an iconic Mid Century Modern building situated on the border of the Dunderave and Ambleside villages of West Vancouver. Designed by the architecture firm Thompson, Berwick and Pratt, the church was built in 1967. This historic place includes the church, Pavilion extension and grounds.

The church is widely recognized as West Coast Modern in design given its reliance on exposed interior wood beams and cladding, and an exterior cedar shingle roof with glass infill panels which creates a strong patterning of solids and voids. With its dramatic geometric roof form, soaring interior space, and bold piercing of coloured glass, St Stephen's is a superb example of Expressionism, resulting in a highly emotive experience for its congregation.

Heritage Value

St. Stephen's Anglican Church is significant as the oldest continuously operating church in West Vancouver and, as such, is linked to its earliest social and spiritual development. In 1913, Bishop de Pencier held a church service for 48 West Vancouverites at the Dunderave Conservative Hall at 2423 Marine Drive (which subsequently became Sager's Maple Shop). In 1925, the congregation moved into a new building at the corner of 22nd and Fulton, designed by architect Hugh Hodgson. The municipality of West Vancouver, desiring a civic square concept, negotiated with the church for a land swap, with St. Stephen's trading its property for a new site on the west side of 22nd. The first service was conducted in the new building on April 14, 1968. In 1996, a complementary one room extension to the building, known as the Pavilion and designed by West Vancouver architect Alex Webber, was added for the purpose of holding additional church meetings and welcoming community user groups. The church is part of the Diocese of New Westminster, which also owns the associated rector's strata townhouse, which is close by, but not attached to St Stephen's, and is not a historic site. St Stephen's continued to serve the community as a social centre and place of worship until August 2024 when Sunday worships ceased being held due to the departure of its serving Reverend.

Character Defining Elements

Key elements that define the heritage character of St Stephen's Church include all of the elements of this West Coast Modern building: its bold massing, steeply-pitched roof (which also forms the sides of the structure), flared triangular corner windows, bold interior coloured slab glass windows and the surrounding garden.

St Stephen's features a bold roof-line with an unusual form and treatment reminiscent of a Mayan temple.
"Beginning in the 1950s, modern churches favoured an expressionistic aesthetic, with the roof becoming the

dominant design feature. Structural design was derived from the solution of technical problems, especially the construction of large open span spaces conducive to revised liturgical procedures. These so-called structural necessities resulted in highly dramatic and emotive buildings, as evocative and mysterious as any traditional architectural forms. In retrospect, this indicated a movement away from a purely 'modern' sensibility, and provides a conscious return to formal, historicist tendencies.” (The West Vancouver Survey of Significant Architecture, 1945-1975, F.G Architectural and Planning Consultants, pg xii).

“Following the 1960s form of expressionist architecture, this building displays a conscious attempt to define a new style that reflected modern liturgical procedures. As a reversal of traditional church buildings, the walls become solid, while the corners dissolve as glazed elements. The roof becomes the defining feature of the form, dramatically angled in a manner reminiscent of Frank Lloyd Wright's Elkins Park Synagogue in Pennsylvania.” (The West Vancouver Survey of Significant Architecture, 1945-1975, F.G Architectural and Planning Consultants, pg 86).

Thompson Berwick and Pratt, Architects

St Stephen's was designed by Richard (Dick) Mann, the managing partner for Thompson Berwick and Pratt and Partners, an architectural firm that was founded in 1908 as Sharp and Thompson. The firm played a substantial role in the development of Vancouver and Canadian Architecture and was a training ground for several famous Canadian architects including Barry Downs, Paul Merrick, Arthur Erickson, and Ron Thom.

The construction work was done by W. H. Haebler & Co.

Vitraux d'Art A Rault Company, Memorial Windows

The stained-glass windows in St Stephen's are bold and unique. Known as 'Dalle de Verre' or slab glass, they were created by the master glazier Andre Rault (1912 – 1997) in Rennes, France. The design, inspired by the work of Matisse and Leger, is comprised of 1 inch thick faceted glass jewels which are five times heavier than traditional glass and leaded together evoke a 'curtain of colour'. The 60th Anniversary (1913 – 1973) blue daylight memorial window was installed in 1974. In 1978, the east window (suggesting a yellow sunrise) and the west window (ablaze with the red of sunset), were added. A mixed colour window was added behind the organ.

West Vancouver Listed Heritage Building

The importance of St Stephen's is formally recognized within several West Vancouver Municipal Hall documents:

- Listed on the official West Vancouver Heritage Register [3311 \(westvancouver.ca\)](#).
- Included (page 86) in the “The West Vancouver Survey of Significant Architecture 1945 – 1975” [West Vancouver Statement of Significant Architecture 1945 to 1975.pdf](#) which set out to “identify significant and influential buildings constructed in the municipality following the Second World War....this current study builds upon the initial identification of 93 significant contemporary buildings in the 1988 West Vancouver Heritage Inventory.”

The Heritage Value of St Stephen's includes:

Aesthetic Heritage Value

- An iconic West Coast Modern design with its use of exterior cedar shingle roof cladding and frosted glass infill corners which creates a rhythmic pattern of solids and voids
- A fine example of Expressionism given its dramatic and powerful geometric roof form.
- Bold roof-line forms the dominant design feature with a treatment suggestive of a Mayan temple and dramatically angles reminiscent of Frank Lloyd Wright's Elkins Park Synagogue in Pennsylvania.
- Wholly integrated exterior and interior design themes.

- Dramatic open Sanctuary features solid interior walls where the corners are pierced by “curtain of colour” stained dalle “slab’ glass by French master stained glass artist Andre Rault.
- Exposed interior geometric cedar ceiling cladding and imposing wooden beams.
- Dramatic original metal chandeliers formed with plexiglass fins and an array of light bulbs and crosses.

Historic Heritage Value

- First church in West Vancouver and the longest continuously operating church from 1913.
- Association with population boom in West Vancouver in the 1960s.
- Designed by managing partner, Richard Mann (d. 1992), of architects Thompson, Berwick & Pratt.
- Church possesses many of the original building plans by architects Thompson Berwick and Pratt.
- Church possesses numerous original photographs taken during its 1967 construction.
- Narthex features three of the stained-glass windows from the altar of the previous 1925 church.
- Contains several gothic-revival pews from the 1925 church designed by Hugh Hodgson.
- Memorial 1970s church windows include dedications to those who served Canada in the two great wars.
- A tablet inside the south door of the chancel bears the names of St Stephen’s lost soldiers from WWII.

Spiritual/Community

- A source of spiritual guidance to parishioners.
- A community meeting place for various local social groups.

Cultural Heritage Value

- Intentional setting designed to complement the neighbouring municipal Mid Century Modern Ice Arena (Carlsberg Jackson Partners, 1965) and the West Vancouver Community Centre whose original design was also by Thompson, Berwick and Pratt, 1958.

Social Heritage Value

- The church serves as an important gathering place for local community groups.

Environmental/Carbon Value

- Estimated waste generation by weight (based on a 4,000 sq ft building): 270,000 kg.

Preliminary Character-Defining Elements

- The roof is dramatically angled suggestive of Frank Lloyd Wright's Elkins Park Synagogue in Pennsylvania.
- Bold massing as expressed by steeply-pitched roof reminiscent of a Mayan temple.
- Designed in the West Coast Modern “Expressionist” style, as typified by its dramatic shingle-clad roof.
- Flared and frosted exterior triangular corner windows with aluminum banding.
- Courtyard as framed by the church narthex, corridor and Pavilion.
- Horseshoe-shape plan located at an oblique angle to the rectangular site and street
- Highly dramatic and open interior Sanctuary space.
- Daring, black screen-clad, original organ located on the north side of the Sanctuary.
- Bold interior ‘curtain of colour’ faceted slab-glass windows by the Rault Freres of Renne, France.
- Louvered aluminum windows within the Sanctuary.
- Pierced and glazed separation between Sanctuary and narthex.
- Mitered corner windows within the Pavilion.
- Furniture, including the 1986 Bishop’s chair, have been designed specifically for St Stephen’s Sanctuary.
- Mature trees and shrubs in the surrounding garden at the side and rear of the church.
- Dramatic original metal chandeliers formed with plexiglass fins and an array of light bulbs and crosses.

Historic Images



St Stephen church in 1925 when the congregation moved into a new building on the corner of 22nd and Fulton designed by architect Hugh Hodgson. The site of the current 1967 building is across the street.



St Stephen church shortly after it was built in 1967. Photo: courtesy of St Stephens church records



St Stephens looking south Photo: West Coast Modern League



St Stephens Sanctuary exterior Photo: West Coast Modern League



St

Stephens and its integrated design incorporating geometric shapes within its ceiling, pierced stained glass corners, light fixtures and custom liturgical furniture. Photo: St Stephens records



View of the original organ, pierced narthex, lights, and north-facing window and ceiling: Photo: West Coast Modern League



Close-up of the faceted dalle slab glass by Bold interior 'walls of colour' faceted slab-glass windows by the Rault Freres of Renne, France Photo: West Coast Modern League



One page of the original site/floor plans for St Stephens by Thompson, Berwick and Pratt, Oct 25, 1966, signed by the architect, Richard (Dick) Mann. Photo: Susan Walker



Pavillion and courtyard. Photo: West Coast Modern League



Corridor, Pavillion and courtyard. Photo: West Coast Modern League