

HERITAGE SURVEY AND EVALUATION FORM

Building Name and Address: Hart Massey House, 400 Lansdowne Road

Construction Date: 1959

Original Owner: Hart Massey



(Source: Herron, A., 2011).

CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING CULTURAL HERITAGE VALUE/ INTEREST

	Yes	No
Design Value	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Historical Value	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Contextual Value	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

A property may be designated under Section 29 of the *Ontario Heritage Act* if it meets one or more of the above criteria. Ontario Regulation 09/06

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DESIGN OR PHYSICAL VALUE

Architecture

Is the property a rare, unique, representative, or early example of a style, type, expression, material or construction method? YES NO

The Hart Massey House is considered one of the most architecturally unique and renowned buildings in the Rockcliffe Park Heritage Conservation District.

It is an iconic example of Modernism in Canadian residential architecture, and its simple design, construction methods and materials, and sensitive siting within its natural environment are strongly associated with Modernist principles. More specifically, the house reflects a distinctly Canadian interpretation of the International Style. Modernism became firmly rooted in Canadian architectural practice in the 1950s, finding expression in many forms, from public institutional buildings to suburban development and the birth of new towns, such as Kitimat, British Columbia. Modernism in Canada was pioneered by a group of enthusiastic young practitioners determined to challenge traditional notions of architecture at the time, including Hart Massey, for whom this house is named.

The building is two storeys in height, supported by thin black steel pilotis that help to preserve the integrity and continuity of its natural environment by raising the house above it. The upper storey is a long, rectangular form and the lower level, perpendicular to the street, cantilevers over the sloping



(Source: Herron, A., 2011).

shore of McKay Lake. It is constructed from a wood and a black steel frame, containing a series of modular boxes with free facades clad in vertical siding and

floor-to-ceiling windows. A row of small, peaked skylights run along the roofline of the Lansdowne Road elevation. This elevation was designed as the back of the house for the sake of privacy; the front of the building looks entirely towards McKay Lake through complete walls of glass. The garage is integrated into its upper storey, with garage doors flush to the rest of the rear elevation and distinguished subtly by the use of horizontal siding.



(Source: Herron, A., 2011).

The interior of the house was purposefully designed to facilitate a continuity of space between inside and outside. The lower storey (the main living space, below street-level) has an open plan layout, with interior dividing walls that do not meet the ceiling. This open, free-flowing layout is a central concept in Modernist architecture, and is achieved due to the steel structural frame of the building that frees its internal divisions of their load-bearing function. Its lake-facing elevations are comprised almost entirely of floor-to-ceiling glass and black steel beams, maximizing visual transparency. The rectangular upper storey is accessed by a black circular staircase.

In comparison to the clean and unadorned geometry of the building, the lot on which it is located is characterized by steep slopes, many mature trees and sweeping plantings. The landscape is informal in nature, creating a strong juxtaposition between the house and its surroundings.



(Source: Massey, J., 2004).

Craftsmanship/Artistic Merit

Does the property display a high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit?

YES

NO

The artistic merit of the building lies in its stripped-down, skin and bones design and its subordination to the natural environment. Abstraction is expressed by clarity of the building's pure form and its distinct lack of ornament. In this way, the volume of the building is emphasized rather than its mass. Its architecture is an extension of the surrounding landscape, heightening the visual impacts of space and views, and its large sheets of glass facilitate a continuity of indoor and outdoor space, opening the house to a landscape of mature trees and views of McKay Lake and revealing the "truth" of the building's inner structure. The design of this house contributed to a change in the way residential architecture in is understood in Canada.

Technical/Scientific Merit

Does the property demonstrate a high degree of technical or scientific achievement?

YES

NO

There are no known technical or scientific achievements associated with this property.

HISTORICAL AND ASSOCIATIVE VALUE

Historical Associations

Does the property have direct associations with a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization or institution that is significant to a community?

YES NO

The historical significance of this property is due to its close associations with the award-winning architect Hart Massey, as well as for the awards bestowed on the house itself. Hart Massey was an Ottawa-based architect and the son of the first Canadian-born Governor General, Vincent Massey. Massey's career began in London, UK after receiving a degree from Oxford University. During his time in Europe, he traveled widely and was deeply influenced the Modern architecture of the Bauhaus movement. In the early 1950s Massey returned to Canada and opened a small firm in Ottawa. He is credited with designing many of Ottawa's landmark buildings and received numerous awards for his work. Massey's approach to his work was driven by great attention to detail and the utilization of new materials and technologies. He designed 400 Lansdowne Road as his family home and resided there from 1959 until the 1970s.

The Hart Massey House has been credited as a source of early inspiration to internationally renowned Canadian artist, John Massey, the son of architect Hart Massey. John's first introduction to modernism at the age of eight, at which time the Massey family moved into the house, became the hallmark of his work as a contemporary visual artist. The house became the subject of his travelling exhibition, *Phantoms of the Modern*, in 2004.



Stairs leading down to open deck and front entrance, from John Massey's exhibition, *Phantoms of the Modern* (Source: Massey, J., 2004).

Community History

Does the property yield, or have the potential to yield, information that contributes to an understanding of a community or culture? YES NO

The post-war era in Rockcliffe Park saw the introduction of more contemporary houses in response to the changing lifestyles of the day and the arrival of many new families to the village. Many families no longer had servants, as they were difficult to find and expensive to keep, the family automobile quickly replaced the need for public transportation in the village, and builders began to employ new building technologies and house designs in line with international trends. Modern houses were not initially welcomed, but despite the local council's distaste for contemporary architecture, many examples appeared across the village throughout the 1950s. At the same time, the village was experiencing an expansion eastward, establishing a subdivision on the east side of McKay Lake, and southward towards Beechwood Avenue along Juliana Road. Hart Massey was at the forefront of these changes in Rockcliffe Park, designing the Tovell (321 Lakeway Drive) and Ignatieff (55 Juliana Road) Houses in addition to his

own house at 400 Lansdowne Road, which is considered the most remarkable house of the era. These houses were radical departures from their neighbours, challenging the traditional concept of housing, but they still reflected the overall pattern and vocabulary of housing in the village.

Representative Work

Does the property demonstrate or reflect the work or ideas of an architect, artist, building, designer or theorist who is significant to a community? YES NO



Hart Massey
(Source: Ottawa Journal, 1967).

The house was designed by Hart Massey, a local architect and member of a prominent Canadian family and son of Governor General Vincent Massey, who began practising in the 1950s. His principal clients include the Federal Department of Public Works, Carleton University, University of Toronto, Expo '67, City of Ottawa, National Capital Commission, and the Canadian Government Exhibition Commission. His Ottawa works include his own residence at 400 Lansdowne Road, the Ignatieff residence, also in Rockcliffe, a pavilion in Vincent Massey Park and the Sir John Carling Building (demolished). Massey also contributed to the plans for Carleton University's original campus and designed several buildings on the campus. He was the recipient of the Massey Medals for Architecture in 1958 and 1964, Ministry of Public Works Design Award, 1968, and three design awards from the Ottawa Chapter, Ontario Association of Architects. Massey's buildings were influenced mostly by international Modernist principles.



Vincent Massey Park Pavilion (left) (Source: Parks Canada, 2022) and Sir John Carling Building (right) (Source: Capital Modern, 2014).

CONTEXTUAL VALUE

Community Character

Is the property important in defining, maintaining, or supporting the character of the area? YES NO

This property is one of the few properties in the Rockcliffe Park Heritage Conservation District that directly faces the water. Although it features several elements common to other properties, such as mature trees and low-lying plantings, it is a unique property that blends in well with the treed and rural character of the village by being almost sheltered from the street. This property contributes dramatically to the character of the shoreline of McKay Lake.

The Hart Massey House is a well-known building admired for its unique modular character. The building almost appears to be a modest bungalow when viewed from Lansdowne Road, but when viewed from McKay Lake, it is one of the most architecturally interesting properties in the district and one which evidently was constructed to work in harmony with the natural landscape, rather than to compete with it through excavation or other measures that would have enabled this building to have more easily been constructed.



(Source: Herron, A., 2011).

Context

Is the property physically, functionally, visually or historically linked to its surroundings?

YES NO

The property is physically and visually linked to its surroundings by creating a juxtaposition of simplified geometric forms in a picturesque landscape. This relationship allows the building's design to stand out, yet its siting and diminutive scale allow it to fit in its park-like setting. This house is one of the few that front directly onto McKay Lake, as most other waterfront properties are set back from the steep drop. Although it is not easily viewed from the Lansdowne Road streetscape, the mature trees, informal layout of the side yard, and the impressive openness at the shoreline contribute to the character of this section of Rockcliffe Park.

The property is located within the Rockcliffe Park Heritage Conservation District, designated under Part V of the *Ontario Heritage Act*. The building is classified as a Grade I property under the Rockcliffe Part Heritage Conservation District Plan. It respects and enhances the qualities of the district in its design and siting and, although more contemporary in its design, fits the vocabulary of houses in Rockcliffe Park.



(Source: Google Earth, 2022).

Landmark

Is the property a landmark?

YES

NO

Although this building is largely sheltered from the street, it is clearly visible from across McKay Lake. This is a well-known residence having been profiled in many publications due to its architectural character as well as for its associations with Hart Massey. It is considered a landmark both within the Rockcliffe Park community and the broader city of Ottawa. The property was designated by the Government of Canada as a National Historic Site in 2018 to commemorate its role as an iconic example of modernist architecture in Canada.

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