

Early Modern Architecture

Houses from the Victorian era are fairly well protected in our heritage conservation areas, but St. John's also had many remarkable houses from the early modern period dating from just before and after Newfoundland's confederation with Canada. In this period, a few Newfoundland architects bravely tried to reconcile their awareness of contemporary modern architectural design work done elsewhere with local conditions. Today, the work of these architects is threatened by unsympathetic renovations and demolition. Present-day historic preservation by-laws seem to be based on a selective interpretation of history that largely excludes this period of Newfoundland's architecture.

I have documented some of these houses with the photographer Ned Pratt, and it seems there has been some progress in boosting awareness of the need for a heritage conservation strategy for early modern architecture. Some noteworthy early modern houses in St. John's are the Goldstone Residence (recently restored by Derrick and Linda Rowe) on Rostellan Street by architect Paul Meschino (figures 24 and 25) and the Clouston Residence by architect F.A. Colbourne, at the corner of Rostellan Street and Elizabeth Avenue (figure 26). Colbourne also designed a house for the Kinsmen in the early 1950s across from Churchill Square on Elizabeth Avenue (figures 27 to 30). This house was constructed in aid of the Kinsmen's General Charitable Fund, and it was offered as the first prize in a raffle. At about the same time, Colbourne also designed a similar private residence for the MacDonald family at #3 Forest Avenue (figures 31 and 32: recently restored by Scott Jamieson and Anne Thareau).

Figures 24 and 25 (left): The Goldstone Residence designed by architect Paul Meschino (restored by Derrick and Linda Rowe, with Keith Pierce as the restoration contractor). This project won a Southcott Award.

St. John's residents are not used to thinking about neighbourhoods planned in the 1940s and 50s as historic, but the legacy of the planning work for Churchill Park and the houses in this area designed by architect Paul Meschino just after Confederation are worthy of preservation (figures 33-35). When this residential area was first developed, it was held in high esteem by the residents of St. John's as a modern alternative to sub-standard housing conditions downtown. Today, it is one of the most appealing suburban residential areas in the city, due mainly to its convenient location and mature landscaping. The character of the area is changing quickly, however, as the original houses are being demolished in favour of the construction of new houses that are too large for their sites. Urban design regulations to guide the massing and disposition of new projects in existing neighbourhoods would help to address these problems.

For more information on early modern architecture in St. John's, see my article "Modernism in Newfoundland," in the March 2002 edition of *The Canadian Architect*, pages 18-21.

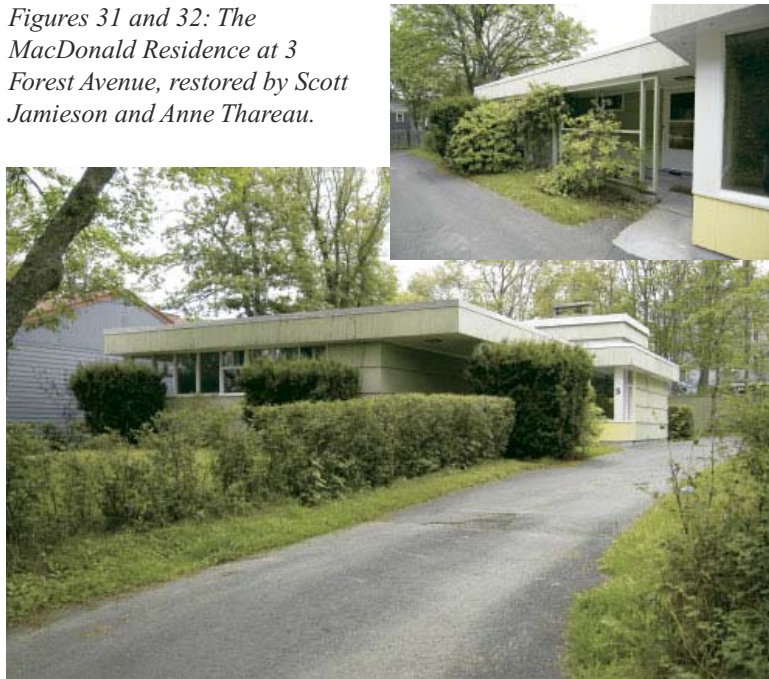
Figure 26: The Clouston Residence, designed by architect F. A. Colbourne in the early 1950's.

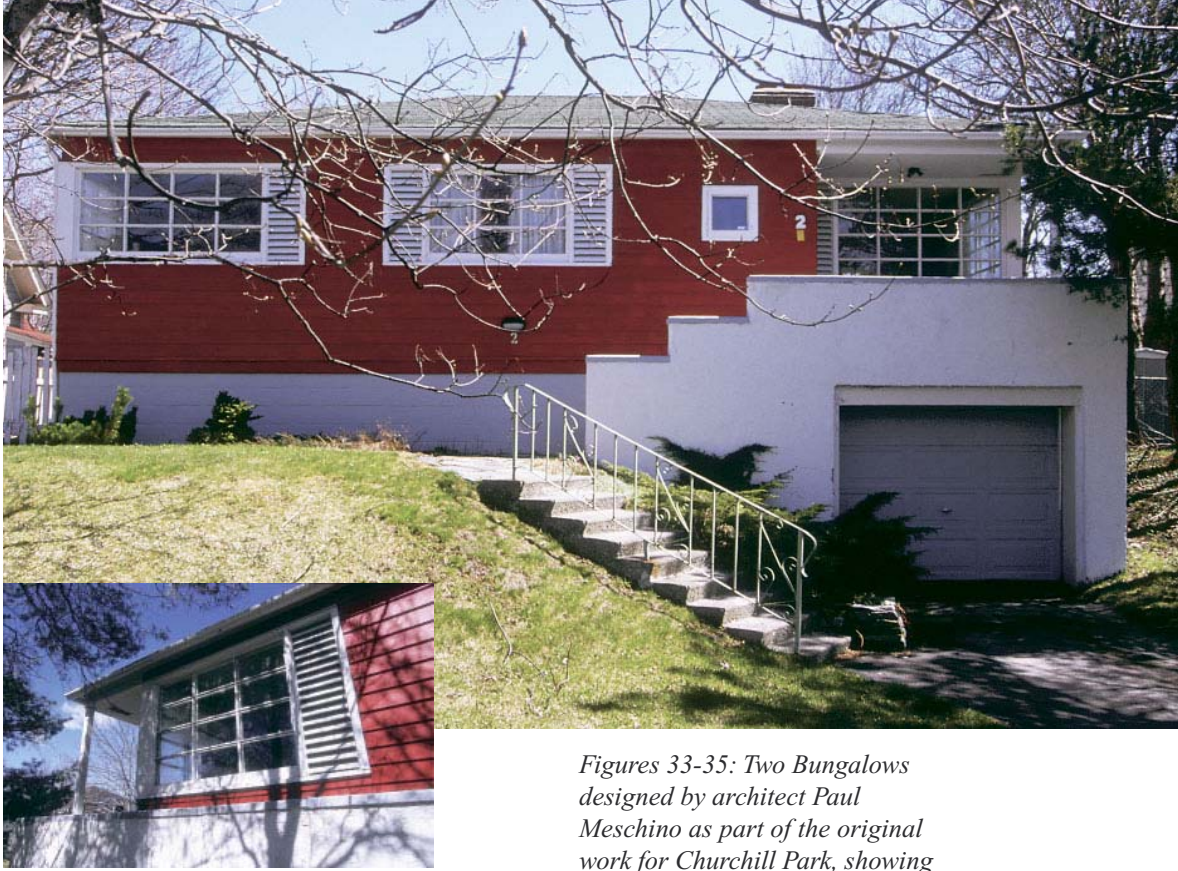




Figures 27-30: The house designed by architect F. A. Colbourne for the Kinsmen's General Charitable Fund.

Figures 31 and 32: The MacDonald Residence at 3 Forest Avenue, restored by Scott Jamieson and Anne Thareau.





Figures 33-35: Two Bungalows designed by architect Paul Meschino as part of the original work for Churchill Park, showing how his house designs responded to variations in topography. The corner window detail on the red house included a vent panel.

