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## Toronto-Dominion Centre

On Tuesday, June 7, 2005, the Ontario Heritage Foundation unveiled a provincial plaque in the City of Toronto celebrating the Toronto-Dominion Centre. The plaque text reads as follows:

### **TORONTO-DOMINION CENTRE**

Designed by Modernist architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in association with John B. Parkin Associates and Bregman and Hamann Architects, the Toronto-Dominion Centre is located in the heart of Toronto's financial district. The Centre was commissioned by Allen Lambert, chairman of TD Bank, in partnership with Fairview Corporation. The complex is arranged around a granite-paved pedestrian plaza and originally consisted of three buildings: the 56-storey Toronto-Dominion Bank Tower (1967), the one-storey Banking Pavilion (1968), and the 46-storey Royal Trust Tower (1969). An underground shopping concourse is located beneath the granite plinth. The buildings are steel structures, clad with bronze-coloured glass and black-painted steel, with steel I-beam mullions attached to the exterior. A leading example of the International style in Canada, the Toronto-Dominion Centre altered the Toronto cityscape and influenced many buildings throughout the country.

### **LE CENTRE TORONTO-DOMINION**

Conçu par l'architecte moderniste Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, en collaboration avec John B. Parkin Associates et Bregman and Hamann Architects, le centre Toronto-Dominion est situé au cœur du district financier de Toronto. Le centre a été commandé par Allen Lambert, président de la Banque TD, en partenariat avec la Fairview Corporation. Le complexe est aménagé autour d'une place publique piétonnière en granit. Il était composé à l'origine de trois bâtiments : la tour de 56 étages de la Banque Toronto-Dominion (1967), le pavillon bancaire d'un étage (1968), et la tour Royal Trust de 46 étages (1969). Un centre commercial souterrain est situé sous la plinthe en granit. Les bâtiments sont des structures en acier recouvertes de verre de couleur bronze et d'acier peint en noir, avec des meneaux aux poutres en acier, en forme de I, attachés à l'extérieur. Parfait exemple du style international au Canada, le centre Toronto-Dominion a changé le paysage urbain de Toronto et a influencé de nombreux bâtiments dans tout le pays.

## **Historical background**

### **Modernist architecture and the International Style**

Designed by influential Modernist architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969), the Toronto-Dominion Centre (TD Centre) is a prominent example in Canada of Modern architecture known as the International style.

In the second quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a significant architectural movement emerged in Europe. This “modern” movement initiated a radical departure from past practices for designing buildings.

The International style, often used synonymously with Modernist architecture, was named for its applicability to different cultural and climatic conditions, implying a universal design approach and aesthetic that could be valid anywhere in the world. This name was first used in conjunction with the 1932 Museum of Modern Art’s exhibition in New York City, titled “The International Style: Architecture since 1922”. The Bauhaus School in Germany gave the movement cohesiveness in the 1920s under the direction of Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe. The International style favoured modern materials and standard modular parts for ease of fabrication and erection, emphasized volume instead of mass<sup>1</sup>, and shunned surface decoration. Architectural historian Detlef Mertins, in his article “Living in a Jungle”, wrote:

Mies understood that the potential for a new freedom was contingent on a new structuring “form” that would be at once technological, social, economic and visual. Clarifying the underlying structure was key not only for the sake of its own expression, but also to achieve an operational framework within which new ways of living could emerge with minimal preconception and interference and, in turn, usher in the next stage of history. Because it was understood that all the spheres of human activity was structured homologously within a given period, the architect’s task of mastering its “unbridled forces” demanded an expanded horizon of knowledge and preparation.<sup>2</sup>

The Bauhaus School disbanded following the rise of Nazism in Germany. Subsequently, Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and several other leaders of the Bauhaus School immigrated to the United States.

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<sup>1</sup> Volume, in an [architectural](#) context, refers to the [space](#) within a [form](#). Thus volume refers to the space within a building. Mass, refers to the effect and degree of bulk, [density](#), and weight of matter in [space](#); the three-dimensional area occupied by a [form](#) such as a building.

<sup>2</sup> Phyllis Lambert, Ed. *Mies in America*. (Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers, 2001) p. 606.

**Modernist architect: Mies van der Rohe**

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe was born in Aachen, Germany in 1886. He received his principal training as an employee of the architect and furniture designer Bruno Paul (1874-1968). Between 1905 and 1907, he was an employee of the pioneering industrial architect Peter Behrens. He was the Director of the Bauhaus from 1930 until the school's closing in 1933. Mies van der Rohe came to the United States in 1937 and in 1938 he became Director of Architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology, a post he held for 20 years.

He developed a design approach based on advanced structural techniques and Prussian Classicism as practised by architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel, who distilled the essence of ancient, medieval and renaissance architecture. Mies van der Rohe also emulated the aesthetic philosophy of both Russian Constructivism<sup>3</sup> and the Dutch De Stijl<sup>4</sup> group.

After the First World War, he began studying the skyscraper as a building form and designed two innovative steel-framed towers sheathed in glass. One of them was the Friedrichstrasse skyscraper, designed in 1921 for a competition. Although this building was never built, it drew critical praise and foretold his skyscraper designs of the 40s, 50s and 60s.

Skyscrapers reveal their bold structural pattern during construction. Only then does the gigantic steel web seem impressive. When the outer walls are put in place, the structural system, which is the basis of all artistic design, is hidden by a chaos of meaningless and trivial forms ... Instead of trying to solve old problems with these old forms we should develop new forms from the very nature of the new problems. We can see the new structural principles most clearly when we use glass in place of the outer walls, which is feasible today since in a skeleton building these outer walls do not carry weight. The use of glass imposes new solutions.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Russian Constructivism is named for a modern art movement, which commenced in 1913 in Russia. It was founded by Vladimir Tatlin, an artist and architect. Constructivist art began with works of primarily abstract constructions and sought "to liberate art from the ballast of the representational world". Constructivists sought an art of order, rejected the past and lead to a world of understanding, peace and unity. Constructivist art expressed itself using total abstraction, and paintings articulated geometrical shapes flatly painted on pure canvas surfaces.

<sup>4</sup> De Stijl (Dutch for The Style) is the nonfigurative art movement, also called neo-plasticism, which started in 1917 and lasted 14 years. The leaders of the movement were painters Theo van Doesburg and Piet Mondrian, and architect Gerritt Rietveld. De Stijl philosophy was based on functionalism, with a strict insistence on rectilinear planes. The practitioners advocated a purification of art and set out to create a universal style in painting, architecture and design. All surface decoration except colour was to be eliminated, using rectangles and squares in flat planes of bold primary colors and black, gray and white, all carefully orchestrated with straight lines.

<sup>5</sup> Pawley, Martin. *Mies van der Rohe*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970) p.12.

In keeping with these ideas, many Mies van der Rohe buildings took rectilinear shapes with symmetrical facades. His notable high rise buildings include two, 26-storey high Lakeshore Drive apartment buildings in Chicago, designed and built between 1949 and 1951, which are organized at right angles to each other and are composed of pure, simplified forms, and dark-coloured exposed steel members that carefully modulate the façade compositions. His famous 39-storey high Seagram Building in New York, originally owned by the Montreal-based Bronfman family who controlled the property development firm Fairview Corporation (now The Cadillac Fairview Corporation Limited), was completed in 1958. This office tower is clad in a curtain wall of bronze I-beam mullions and spandrels and brown-glass, and is sited 27 m back from the Park Avenue street line forming a street level plaza. Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building revolutionized corporate architecture in North America.

### **Modernism in Canada**

Modernism reached Canada in the 1930s. However it did not become firmly entrenched until the 1950s when, fuelled by the post-war economic boom, this movement changed the appearance and function of Canadian cities over a period of three decades. Toronto assumed a leading role in spreading the International style in central and eastern Canada commencing in the 1950s. During the 1950s and early 1960s, two leading Toronto architectural firms worked in this style, Page and Steele (Peter Dickinson, lead design architect) and John B. Parkin Associates (John C. Parkin, lead design architect). Dickinson was a major force in Modernist architecture in Canada and his Toronto credits include: 561 Avenue Road Apartments (1956), 111 Richmond Street West Office Building (1956), and Beth Tzedek Synagogue on Bathurst Street. Prominent and influential buildings designed by Parkin in that formative era include the Headquarters of the Ontario Association of Architects (1954), Ortho Pharmaceutical Plant and Office (1956), Lester B. Pearson Terminal One (1965), and – in association with Mies van der Rohe – the Toronto-Dominion Centre.

### **Toronto-Dominion Centre**

The Toronto-Dominion Bank was created in 1955 through the amalgamation of The Toronto Bank and The Dominion Bank. The Bank of Toronto had opened for business in July 1856 at 78 Church Street, operating an efficient and profitable business during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its core customers were farmers, merchants and processors of farm products. The Dominion Bank was established in 1871 by several entrepreneurs and professionals. The maturing Canadian economy and the opening of the Canadian West and Northern Ontario encouraged both banks to become aggressive in loans to resource industries, utilities and manufacturing. As both banks became significant national institutions, they moved their Toronto head offices, The Bank of Toronto to the corner of King and Bay Streets, and The Dominion Bank to King and Yonge Streets. With the post-Second World War boom, both banks became more active in business lending but realized that the costs of expansion and competition with larger rivals made their objectives hard to realize. In 1954, the two banks began to negotiate with a view to amalgamation. Following governmental approval, The Bank of Toronto amalgamated with The

Dominion Bank to form The Toronto-Dominion Bank on February 1, 1955. By 1962, the new bank had solidified its domestic base and had established its credentials as a major institution and decided to emphasize its status by developing a new head office complex.

This followed bank practice: the Bank of Toronto's 1862 office at Wellington and Church Streets (by William Kauffman, demolished) had marked its initial prosperity, and its 1911-13 temple by Carrere & Hastings, on the southwest corner of King and Bay, had announced its status as a leader of Edwardian banking. In the early 1960s Mies was (as Carrere & Hastings had been fifty years before) one of the most famous and respected architects in the world: the Bank and Fairview gave him virtually a free hand to create the Toronto-Dominion Centre.<sup>6</sup>

Allen Lambert, chairman of The Toronto-Dominion Bank until his retirement in 1978, commissioned the creation of the TD Centre in Toronto after persuading the TD board that the bank should go into partnership with Fairview Corporation to create a new headquarters. To build the development, TD and Fairview became 50-50 partners, but the bank had final say on the design of the complex.

Fairview Corporation worked with the bank to create its new head office, replacing The Bank of Toronto building, a Beaux Arts-style building on the southwest corner of King and Bay in downtown Toronto designed and built in 1913 by Carrere & Hastings, the designers of the New York Public Library. To build the TD Centre most of the city block surrounded by York, King, Bay and Wellington Streets was assembled, which was the largest land assembly in Toronto until that time. In addition to The Bank of Toronto, the block contained another significant building, the Toronto Stock Exchange Building on Bay Street.

To deal with such a large scale of development, TD Bank and Fairview decided to involve an internationally known designer of office towers. In this regard, Phyllis Lambert<sup>7</sup> played a prominent role in the eventual hiring of Mies as the design architect. Initially, the choice came down to Gordon Bunshaft, chief designer of Skidmore Owings & Merrill, and Mies van der Rohe. While initially Bunshaft was chosen, his design proposal was thought to be very radical, and potentially not able to withstand the harsh Toronto climate. As discussed in Daniel Stoffman's book titled *The Cadillac Fairview Story*, Lambert subsequently wrote that Bunshaft's

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<sup>6</sup> Dendy, William, and William Kilbourn. *Toronto Observed. Its Architecture, Patrons and History*. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1986) p. 277.

<sup>7</sup> Cemp Investments, through its subsidiary, The Fairview Corporation was the builder of TD Centre. Cemp is the contraction of the names of the four children of its founder Samuel Bronfman: Charles, Edgar, Minda and Phyllis. Phyllis Lambert is responsible for much of the Bronfman family's contribution to the architecture of North America. She is an architect and is founding director and chairwoman of the Board of Trustees of the Canadian Centre for Architecture in Montreal.

design had called for placing stainless steel piston-like slip joints at the top of the building to deal with the expansion and contraction problems of exterior structural columns – a prominent feature of his design. She also thought that this was a daring and unproven solution. In an interview later, Lambert stated that the Bunshaft design “was a ridiculous proposal on many levels.” She further stated that, “Even in a milder climate, it would have been problematic.” Bunshaft was fired over his refusal to redesign. Subsequently, Parkin’s firm was asked to design the complex, which called for a below-grade banking pavilion. During this time, Phyllis Lambert insisted that Mies be invited for an interview. Following his interview, Mies was hired to be the lead design architect for the Centre and consultant to John B. Parkin Associates and Bregman and Hamann, two architectural firms based in Toronto.<sup>8</sup>

The TD Centre (1963-69) became the last major work of Mies van der Rohe. As American architect Philip Johnson said, “the TD Centre is the biggest Mies in the world”.<sup>9</sup>

### **Initial three buildings**

As conceived by Mies van der Rohe, the initial phase of construction comprised three buildings: the 56-storey TD Bank Tower located at 66 Wellington Street West and completed in 1967, the one-storey Banking Pavilion at 55 King Street West completed in 1968, and the 46-storey Royal Trust Tower located at 77 King Street West completed in 1969. The buildings are asymmetrically arranged on a plinth, or plaza, paved with gray, St-Jean granite. The original program for the Centre called for 288,000 m<sup>2</sup> of office and banking space, 14,300 m<sup>2</sup> of retailing in a below-grade concourse, and underground parking for 700 vehicles.

Phyllis Lambert, in her book *Mies in America* wrote:

With the Toronto-Dominion Centre, Mies realized an architecture of movement, and yet at the same time, through proportional relations among parts and whole, and through the restrained use of fine materials, this is also an architecture of repose. The light as it moves across the building surfaces, playing the mullions like stringed instruments, and the orchestration of the various buildings are together paradigmatically symphonic.<sup>10</sup>

The TD Bank Tower was the first building in the Toronto-Dominion Centre to be constructed and is emblematic of the complex. The TD Bank Tower is 56-storeys high and 222.86m (731’-0”) tall. It is framed in structural steel, with a structural steel core and steel and concrete flooring. The facades are distinguished by their visual openness. Exposed, matte black painted steel beams provide a frame, or grid, filled with curtains of bronze-coloured glass. Attached to

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<sup>8</sup> Stoffman, Daniel. *The Cadillac Fairview Story*. (Toronto: Cadillac Fairview Corporation, 2004) p. 35.

<sup>9</sup> Stoffman, Daniel. *The Cadillac Fairview Story*. p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> Phyllis Lambert, Ed. *Mies in America*. p. 419.

the outside of the mullions and structural columns are exposed I-beams, which perform both structural and aesthetic functions. The typical window module is 1.5m x 2.7m (5'-0" x 9'-0"). The building is raised on columns providing for a spacious ground-level base articulated with sheets of plate glass, revolving glass doors, leading to a travertine-walled elevator lobby. Above the base, a steel and glass curtain wall continues upward uninterrupted until it reaches the flat roof.

A mathematical order overlies the entire composition of [the] T-D Centre, not only in the proportions of the external grid but also in the planning of all elements, large and small. The height of each tower is proportioned to its width and depth. The granite plaza (often criticized for its windy bleakness) is paved in five foot square (1.5-m) modules. The banking pavilion, which is treated as a single interior space, is 15 modules (i.e. 75 feet or 22.9 m) square and express[es] the grid on its granite floor and in the lighting baffles in its ceiling. English oak and green marble provide an understated richness that relieves the blackness of the enclosing box. All the furniture and fixtures in the banking pavilion and the public spaces of the towers were designed by the architects.<sup>11</sup>

When the initial three buildings of the TD Centre were opened, they dominated the skyline, permanently altering the Toronto cityscape. It was an influential landmark that helped to fuel the appetite for Modern architecture in Toronto's post-war construction boom. Today, the TD Centre's influence may be seen in other skyscrapers in downtown Toronto, and the Modern architecture of buildings like the 57-storey high Commerce Court (completed in 1972 by architect I.M. Pei in association with Page and Steele).

### **Latter phases**

The Commercial Union Tower (now known as the Canadian Pacific Tower), located at 100 Wellington Street West, was added in 1974. This tower was not conceived by Mies van der Rohe in his original plan. The fourth and last tower on the block is the 31-storey high Ernst & Yonge Tower at 222 Bay Street, which was built in 1992 and incorporates the old Toronto Stock Exchange Building. As well, two towers are located across the street on the south side of Wellington Street West and are considered part of the TD Centre complex: the 39-storey high TD Waterhouse Tower (formerly the IBM Tower) located at 79 Wellington Street West, built in 1985; and the 22-storey 95 Wellington Street West.

In 2003, the City of Toronto designated the initial three-building phase of the Toronto-Dominion Centre under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* as "an outstanding example of the

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<sup>11</sup> Kalman, Harold. *A History of Canadian Architecture*, Vol. 2. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1994) p. 802.

International Style of Architecture” and “as a landmark of the Modern Movement in Canada that set the standard for the urban development of Toronto”.<sup>12</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Designed by influential Modernist architect Mies van der Rohe, in association with the Canadian architectural firms of John B. Parkin and Bregman and Hamann, the Toronto-Dominion Centre is an excellent example of Modernist architecture and the International style in Canada. The landmark, three-building complex, built between 1967 and 1969, furthered the acceptance of Modernism in Toronto, and helped to fuel the post-war construction boom. The influence of the TD Centre buildings can be seen in many buildings in Toronto and throughout the country.

The Ontario Heritage Foundation gratefully acknowledges the research of Moiz Behar, OAA, MRAIC, MCIP, RPP, in preparing this paper. Behar is an architect and planner who conducts research on the history of the Modern Movement and many of its prominent buildings and communities.



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<sup>12</sup> City of Toronto Staff Report “55 King Street West (Toronto Dominion Centre). Designation under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act, Toronto Centre-Rosedale – Ward 28”. December 18, 2002. pp. 1-2.