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### HOME

## Riverside art house lovingly restored

Caroline Skelton

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When Michael Smith bought the house at 2357 Riverside Dr., he didn't realize he was buying a piece of North Shore history.

Originally built in 1963, the West Coast-style home was created by some of the city's most influential names in design: architect Ron Thom, designer Rudy Kovach and artist Bill Reid, who operated an art studio in the basement in the 1970s.

"The house reflects the style of all three of them," said Smith.

The house then passed to two other owners before being bought by Smith who, over the past 17 years, has worked to restore it to its former glory.

"It's an artist's home," he said. Unlike other houses that are brightened with artwork and decoration, he said, "this house, all the wood, all the material and the setting, is a work of art in itself."

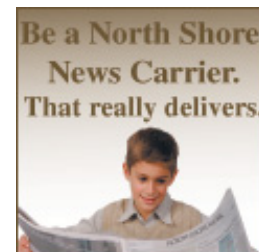
On Monday, Smith was an honouree at this year's heritage awards, presented by the District of North Vancouver's community heritage commission, in the category of Restoration of a Residential Structure. Other categories included Restoration of a Commercial Structure, honouring work on the Fromme Block, Lynn Valley Parent Participation Preschool and North Vancouver Community History Centre; and Heritage Landscape and Enhancement, which recognized work on the Veterans Plaza. Also recognized by the district was the End of the Line general Store, at 4193 Lynn Valley Rd., which was acknowledged for its location's social and historical significance.

The City of North Vancouver and the District of West Vancouver are also presenting heritage awards, all in honour of the provincewide Heritage Week, which runs Feb. 19-25.

"I think it's important so people continue to value heritage in the community," said Kathleen Larsen, staff liaison to the commission, of the awards. The awards are meant to honour special projects and

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accomplishments in the field of heritage conservation, she said. "I think it helps maintain the heritage value in the community."

The City of North Vancouver's heritage awards were presented in the categories of Heritage Awareness Achievement, which went to Robin Inglis for his support of heritage projects, public awareness and historic research; Small Scale Heritage Improvement, presented to Ronald Moravek and Paige Inman for their work on 745 Grand Blvd.; and Residential Heritage Conservation, which recognized Amy Usher and Cameron Grieve for their restoration of 736 East 6th St. Also receiving an award from the city was Grant Stuart Gardiner, whose advocacy of heritage conservation was recognized with a Heritage Awareness Achievement award.

Gardiner, a Realtor with Prudential Sussex Realty, started his career as a member of the city's heritage committee, during which time he became a Realtor. He saw an opportunity to become an expert on the area's stock of heritage homes, and was soon sending out a newsletter on the topic to clients, and updating a website that tracks the heritage inventory and his own real estate sales.

Since he began his career, Gardiner has seen a change in the popular perception of heritage homes. "When I started they were cheaper, I guess, than everything else, and now they're recognized - they're quite sought-after," he said.

For Gardiner, there's something unique about the homes he sells. "They've got some sort of life that a new house doesn't seem to have," he said. They can also tell a story about the region's history - whether it be the modest, working man's Edwardian homes, or the grander houses from the turn of the century, when the economy was strong.

At the District of West Vancouver's 11th annual heritage achievement awards, the Hollyburn Ridge Association was honoured for its work keeping intact a cabin community that tells another story about historical life on the North Shore.

"What makes this award so important is that the District of West Vancouver is . . . really positioning themselves as stewards of Greater Vancouver's skiing history," said Catherine Rockandel, president of the association.

The cabins (from the '20s, '30s and '40s) were built by the area's early skiing community, where some of the province's first ski jumping took place. The Hollyburn Ridge area is "really the birthplace of early skiing in Vancouver," said Rockandel.

In the '70s, the cabins - 111 of which are still standing - were in trouble, many not getting the attention needed to keep them from rotting away in the woods. But since then, the association has worked to maintain the buildings and have their historical value recognized. The long-term goal for the association, said Rockandel, is not only the preservation of the cabins, but also "the celebration of the living history of the community."

Also honoured at the district's awards were Barrie Chapman, author of *So Where Were You When the Phone Rang?*, a book about West

Vancouver's telecommunications history; Julie Clements, for www.westvan60.com, a memorial to the West Vancouver men and women killed in the first and second world wars, and the West Vancouver Fire Museum and Archives Society for the development of a new storage building.

For Smith, this year's award recognized his work as a restorer, but more so the work and style of the Kovach residence's original creators.

Nevertheless, Smith had his work cut out for him during the restoration project - one previous tenant, for instance, replaced the kitchen's cabinets, done in cedar and leaded glass, with white cabinets with aluminum pull handles, along with avocado-toned Formica countertops. Also, simply finding the materials to restore the home - the house features walls and ceilings of old growth knot-free planking, for instance, with cabinets of cherry, mahogany and birdseye maple - and the artisans able to do it, has been a challenge.

But Smith wasn't alone in the project: he was also able to track down Rudy Kovach himself, seeking his guidance and learning more about the philosophy behind the house. While Kovach passed away last year, Smith is still working to restore his home's original beauty - a starkly different style from the often cookie cutter-type design of today's modern homes.

"You get, back in those days, a more artistic style - homes were very individual and customized and reflected an artist's view of the home," he said.

published on 02/21/2007

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