



Arthur Erickson: An Architect's Life

David Stouck

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Arthur Erickson, Canada's pre-eminent philosopher architect, was renowned internationally for his innovative approach to landscape, his genius for spatial composition, and his epic vision of architecture for people. Among his most celebrated large-scale works are three that helped to define Vancouver's urban landscape: Simon Fraser University, on Burnaby Mountain; the Robson Square complex at the heart of the city; and the exquisite Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia. Travel was key to Erickson's creative process; floating high above the clouds on extended airline flights, he made preliminary drawings on vellum with his fine-point black felt-tip pen, designing influential works not only for other parts of Canada—including Toronto's widely admired Roy Thomson Hall—but for sites in the U.S., Britain, and the Middle and Far East. Erickson worked chiefly in concrete, which he called "the marble of our times," and wherever they appear, his buildings move the spirit with their poetic freshness and their mission to inspire. But he was also a controversial figure, more than once attracting the ire of his fellow architects, and his professional achievements were tarnished by the excesses of a complicated personal life that resulted in a series of tawdry bankruptcies. In a fall from grace that recalls a Greek tragedy, Canada's great architect—a handsome, elegant man who lived like a millionaire and counted among his close friends Pierre Trudeau and Elizabeth Taylor—eventually became homeless and penniless.

This first full biography of Erickson, who died in 2009 at the age of eighty-four, traces the architect's life from its modest origins to his emergence on the world stage. Author David Stouck, acclaimed for his earlier biographies of Ethel Wilson and Sinclair Ross, demonstrates here once again why his work has been praised as imaginative, incisive and compelling. Grounded in interviews with Erickson and his family, friends and clients, as well as the resources of extensive public archives, TITLE is both an intimate portrait of the man and a stirring account of how Erickson made his buildings work. Beautifully written and superbly researched, it is also a provocative look at the phenomenon of cultural heroes and the nature of what we call "genius."

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