

## Remembering Eb

Architect Eb Zeidler died last weekend, a few days before his 96<sup>th</sup> birthday. He was born in Germany and came to Canada in 1951 after studying design and architecture at the Bauhaus. Zeidler made his way to Peterborough and set up shop with Blackwell-Craig Architects. The firm moved to Toronto in 1963 and became Craig, Zeidler and Strong, producing landmark buildings including the Eaton Centre and Ontario Place. and today the firm continues under the name Zeidler Architects with four offices in Canada and two abroad.

Zeidler produced designs for many public buildings and private residences in town. He had a distinctive but not showy style. His home designs were understated and well designed, responding sensitively and opportunistically to their site, expressing contemporary living, and embracing timeless beauty.

Zeidler Craig Architects designed the Beth Israel Synagogue, built 1964. This is a signature building, already shortlisted as a candidate for heritage status as an excellent example of early modern architecture in Canada. The design draws on the tradition of synagogue design – the 35-foot cube of the sanctuary may be a reference to the first Temple built by Solomon completed in 957 BCE.

Below is a description of the building excerpted by a talk delivered to the UFP in 2013.

*“The story of the synagogue goes back 3000 years to the Temple in Jerusalem, that ancient, sacred gathering place that served as temple for the Christian church and the Islamic Mosque. For Jews, the synagogue is the heart of ritual. The arc is the central sacred object. It contains the Torah – the scrolls of the Hebrew scriptures.*

*The architectural concept behind Beth Israel lies, in part, in the relationship between the large, shrouded sanctuary and the open void of the courtyard. The two spaces play off one another and create a tension that sets up a series of varied architectural experiences, one of which is the processional entry; the arrival sequence beginning at the parking lot, proceeding through the gate, the courtyard, into the compressed ceiling space of the lobby, and finds completion at the expansive and darkened void of the sanctuary.*

*Another architectural effect is the experience of natural light collected almost entirely through the courtyard and dispersed throughout much of the main floor. The contrast between inside and out is heightened by this light as it draws our attention inward, toward the communal experience of worship and gathering.*

*The shape of the floor plan, with two wings flanking the courtyard, resembles the outstretched arms of a welcoming embrace. The exterior*

*massing is a carefully composed collection of forms and planes. There is no applied ornament. The palette of materials is limited to brick, wood and glass. Interior detailing is simple with clean joints constructed using reveals instead of applied mouldings, which, being left exposed, is intended to express good craftsmanship.*

*From the outside the building stands alone in a field, detached from any context; no connection to the street or neighbours, all which serves to emphasize the break from historic tradition. Modern architecture is an abstract art. “*

I see Zeidler as a humanist, aligning his design values with the needs of ordinary people. He brought the soft hand of modernism to support a better life for people and institutions.

Scott Donovan