

## **Gillett Building**

### Description

The property at 276 King Street West is worthy of designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act for its cultural heritage value, and meets the criteria for municipal designation prescribed by the Province of Ontario under the three categories of design, associative and contextual value. Located on the northwest corner of King Street West and Ed Mirvish Way, the Gillett Building comprises a four-storey warehouse (1901), which is adjoined on the west by a four-storey addition that was under construction in 1942. The site was listed on the City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties in 1984.

### Statement of Cultural Heritage Value

The Gillett Building (1901) is notable as the first of the commercial warehouses completed on the former Upper Canada College grounds on King Street West between Simcoe Street and John Street. Commissioned by the Pure Gold Manufacturing Company, producers of baking powder and other food products, the site was acquired in 1904 by the E. W. Gillett Company, which also made baking ingredients and moved to this location after the Great Fire destroyed its previous factory. By World War I, the Russell Motor Car Company occupied the premises and, following the conflict, the Dominion Government's Custom House was located in the building. The complex was extended in 1942-43 with the completion of the west warehouse for the James Morrison Brass Manufacturing Company.

Historically, the property at 276 King Street West is also associated with Toronto businessman Edwin "Honest Ed" Mirvish (1914-2007), who revitalized King Street West with his restoration of the Royal Alexandra Theatre in the early 1960s. Over the following decades, Ed Mirvish Enterprises acquired many of the warehouses along the street, including the Gillett Building, converting most to restaurants that attracted theatre patrons. Following the revitalization of the Royal Alexandra and the conversion of the adjacent buildings, Roy Thomson Hall (1982) opened on the south side of King Street, and Ed Mirvish Enterprises commissioned the Princess of Wales Theatre (1993) at 300 King Street West. Duncan Street between King Street West and Pearl Street was renamed Ed Mirvish Way in recognition of the entrepreneur's contribution to the cultural life of the neighbourhood.

The original Gillett Building (1901) was designed by Toronto architect A. Frank Wickson, during the decade he practiced alone before entering a partnership with A. H. Gregg. Prior to accepting the commission for this site, Wickson had gained experience in industrial design with his former partner, Norman B. Dick, when the pair prepared the plans for the series of warehouses for the Rawlinson Company on St. Joseph Street, west  
276 King Street West

of Yonge Street. The successor firm of Wickson and Gregg received a second project for the E. W. Gillett Company in 1906, a time when the firm was completing one of their best known works, the former Toronto Reference Library at College Street and St.

George Street (in association with architect Alfred Chapman) Directly west of the 1901 edifice, the project for the west warehouse (1942) was awarded to Scottish-born architect, Murray Brown, who was reputed for his modern designs for bank branches, movie theatres and municipal buildings, including Postal Station K in North Toronto, which is a recognized heritage site.

While the Gillett Building (1901) is a representative example of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century warehouse with Edwardian Classical styling, it is distinguished architecturally by its classical styling and its distinctive fenestration, with tracery highlighting the round-arched window openings that crown the south facade. The west warehouse (1942) stands out on King Street with its unabashedly modern design, where the architect applied a grid-like pattern to incorporate the large-scale industrial windows. While the parts of the complex were designed in different periods, they complement one another with their shared scale.

Contextually, the Gillett Building contributes to the historical character of the King-Spadina neighbourhood, which emerged as the city's new manufacturing centre after the Great Fire of 1904. The Gillett Building was the first in the series of early 20<sup>th</sup> century warehouses built on Russell Square, the former campus of the Upper Canada College, as the area evolved from an institutional precinct to the industrial sector. Following the departure of manufacturing interests from King-Spadina in the decades after World War II, the Gillett Building was one of the warehouses converted to commercial uses as King Street, west of Simcoe, emerged as the heart of the city's Entertainment District

The Gillett Building is linked visually, functionally, physically and historically to its setting on the northwest corner of King Street and Ed Mirvish Way, where it is part of the collection of surviving early 20<sup>th</sup> century warehouses in the extended block that share a complementary scale and appearance, many with Edwardian Classical styling. With the neighbouring warehouses, the Gillett Building provides a bookend to the Royal Alexandra Theatre, the National Historic Site at 260 King Street West.

### Heritage Attributes

The heritage attributes of the property at 276 King Street West are:

#### **1901 warehouse (northwest corner of King Street West and Ed Mirvish Way)**

- The warehouse that rises four stories above a raised base with window openings
- The scale, form and massing of the long rectangular plan
- The brick cladding (now painted), and the brick and stone detailing
- The cornices, with one marking the flat roofline and another dividing the attic storey
- The classical organization of the principal (south) façade with a base, shaft and attic
- The south façade, which is organized into three bays with a projecting centre section

- In the centre bay, the classical detailing of the lower storey where piers support the entablature that extends above the central door and the large segmental-arched window openings flanking it
- The main entrance, which is raised and recessed in a segmental-arched door surround with double doors and a transom
- Protecting the entry, the classically-detailed Tuscan portico with stone columns and an arched pediment
- Above the entry in the centre bay, the flat-headed window openings in the second and third floors, which are arranged individually and in pairs, and the round-arched window openings in the attic level that incorporate pairs of round-arched window openings and circular tracery
- In the outer bays, the placement of single segmental-arched windows in the lower floors, with round-arched openings in the attic storey
- On the long east elevation facing Ed Mirvish Way, the symmetrical placement of the fenestration, which combines flat-headed, segmental-arched and round-arched openings

**1942 warehouse (north side of King Street West, west of Ed Mirvish Way)**

- The warehouse extending four stories above a raised base with window openings to a flat roofline
- The scale, form and massing of the long rectangular plan
- The brick cladding and trim (now painted)
- The principal (south) façade, which projects slightly south of the 1901 warehouse to its east and features a grid-like organization of large-scale flat-headed window openings that are reduced in height from the first to the fourth stories
- The east elevation, where only the southernmost bay is exposed, which incorporates an entry at the basement level