

Workmen's Compensation Board Building

Description:

The property at 90 Harbour Street is worthy of inclusion on the City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties for its cultural heritage value or interest. Located on the northeast corner of Harbour Street and York Street, the construction of the Workmen's Compensation Board Building began in 1950 and was completed in 1953 according to the designs of George N. Williams, chief architect and deputy minister of public works for the Province of Ontario. After the Workmen's Compensation Board (now known as the Workplace Health and Safety Board) vacated the premises, the complex served as the headquarters of the Ontario Provincial Police from 1975 until 1989.

Statement of Cultural Heritage Value:

The cultural heritage value of the property at 90 Harbour Street is related to its design or physical value as a representative example of a mid-20th century office building that blends features of the three prevalent styles of the period. While the symmetry, cladding and profile reflect Modern Classical styling, the stepped plan and vertical elements recall the Art Deco and the band windows are identified with the Art Moderne. All three styles were introduced in the 1920s and remained popular until the International Style or Modern Movement gained acceptance in the 1960s.

The cultural heritage value of the Workmen's Compensation Board Building is also connected to its contextual value as it supports the evolving character of the Central Waterfront as the location of government edifices. The Toronto Harbour Commission Building (1917) at 60 Harbour Street, which adjoins the subject property, and the neighbouring LCBO Headquarters and Warehouse (c. 1947) at 55 Lake Shore Boulevard East are recognized on the City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties.

Heritage Attributes:

The heritage attributes of the property at 90 Harbour Street, related to its cultural heritage value as a representative example of a mid-20th century office building blending aspects of the prevalent styles of the period, are found on the exterior walls and the roofs, with particular attention to the principal (south) façade of the main block, and on the interior as described below.

The building is organized in three parts where a five-storey central block is flanked on the east and west by three-storey wings. Above a base clad with polished black granite and ashlar limestone contains window openings, the elevations are faced with buff brick and trimmed with limestone.

On the centre block, the principal (south) façade is organized into three bays by a monumental stone frontispiece that rises five stories. The frontispiece, composed of a stone surround with an outer framework of piers and a cornice, is divided into three sections by two angled piers. The main entrance is placed at the base of the frontispiece where three sets of doors with sidelights and an oversized transom are recessed beneath a canopy. Within the frontispiece, single flat-headed window openings are placed on either side of the entry and in trios above it. The vertical thrust of the frontispiece is balanced by the horizontal lines of the strip windows in the outer bays of the centre block. The strip windows are set in stone surrounds and contain metal sash windows. The pattern of the fenestration continues on the east and west elevations of the centre block. Its rear (north) wall features similar detailing, apart from the flat piers that divide the frontispiece. The east and west wings repeat the pattern and appearance of the fenestration introduced on the centre block. A cornerstone at the southeast corner of the building reads “The Workmen’s Compensation Board 1951.” Limestone coping trims the flat roofs covering the centre block and wings.

On the interior of the centre block, the first-floor entrance vestibule and elevator lobby with its patterned aluminum elevator doors, terrazzo floor, and marble-faced walls and baseboards is an important feature. The remaining interiors, including the first-floor cafeteria with its Art Moderne elements and the elevator lobbies on the upper floors, have been documented but are not included in the Reasons for Listing.