

SHAPERO/McILROY DESIGN

21 Rodman Street

Jamaica Plain, MA 02130

tel: 617 522-4247

email: [shapmc@rcn.com](mailto:shapmc@rcn.com)

web: [www.shaperomcilroydesign.co](http://www.shaperomcilroydesign.co)

April 25, 2022

Dear Planning and Housing Committee,

I am writing to express my support that the Girl Guides Headquarters building at 50 Merton Street be designated under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act when your committee meets at your upcoming April 27th meeting. I hope at that meeting that your actions support the building's designation at the City Council meeting on May 11, 2022.

I watched via zoom the Toronto Preservation Board meeting when its members unanimously voted at their April 5th meeting to recommend that the building be designated.

I also briefly interacted with heritage planner Marybeth McTeague over one reference detail for her superb report on the building.

I am part of a generation of architects who graduated from the School of Architecture at the University of Toronto who benefited from the teaching of architecture by Carmen Corneil. One of my most memorable experiences when I was starting out as a young architect, working in Toronto in the mid 1980's, was to assist Elin and Carmen on two prize-winning Scandinavian design competitions out of their Toronto studio. I recall conversations with them late at night over coffee, when we would take a break from compiling our submission, of Carmen's experience working in Alvar Aalto's office in Finland during the late 1950's. I've stayed in touch with the Corneil family over the years and consider them dear friends.

For inspiration in our own studio design work, I have paid close attention to the Corneil portfolio of projects. The Guide's building is both a demonstration of Carmen and Elin's teaching principles and an excellent example of Aalto's influence in North America. I have travelled to Finland to experience Aalto's buildings in person as well as analyze them in innumerable publications. MIT's Aalto-designed Baker House dormitory is close by where I live and work.

What impresses me about the Guides building is that it doesn't merely quote the Finnish master or traffic in an Aaltoesque style. It instead strongly, yet subtly, transfers Aalto's underlying design principles. This is accomplished in the Guides with its extended arrival sequence up the steps to its exterior terrace and south overlook above the street. Several thresholds are crossed in this journey from its urban context, up its finely detailed main interior stair to the light-filled spaces within the building. As in Aalto's work the building utilizes modulated top light in the main meeting room and a collage-like assemblage of contrasting materials such as a specially cast brick, exposed steelwork, brass details and the haptic touch of natural finished wood. These qualities ground the building to its specific place and moment in the maturation of Toronto as it became a worldly, outwardly-embracing city.

I realize the building might be hard to appreciate in its present condition. Several of its unique details have been removed and awkwardly replaced with unsympathetic additions: the original Merton Street

fenestration and brise-soleil, the entry terrace's water feature and the addition of the discordant handicap access ramp, among others. These unfortunate interventions could be ameliorated. I'm not against change. I am however committed to the reuse and transformation of existing buildings, especially one as extraordinary as this one. The Girl Guides Headquarters building deserves to be given a new life.

Respectfully yours,

Bill McIlroy, architect and urban designer

Shapero McIlroy Design  
Boston, Massachusetts  
USA