

Geoffrey Massey dies at age 96

The son of actor Raymond Massey was partners with Arthur Erickson in the 1960s.

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Vancouver architects Arthur Erickson, left, and Geoffrey Massey, here on July, 31, 1963, had their design chosen for the new Simon Fraser University of Burnaby Mountain. Erickson is the University of B.C. associate professor of architecture. Massey is the son of actor Raymond Massey. Photo by Deni Eagland /PNG

Geoffrey Massey's legacy can be seen all over Vancouver.

As Arthur Erickson's architectural partner in the 1960s and early '70s, he helped design local icons like Simon Fraser University and the MacMillan Bloedel Building.

As a Vancouver city councillor with Art Phillips and TEAM in 1972, he was part of a political movement that put a stop to freeways and redeveloped the south side of False Creek from industrial to residential.

He was even one of the early owners, architects and developers at Whistler in the 1960s.

Massey died Tuesday morning from pneumonia in a hospice near Lion's Gate Hospital in North Vancouver. He was 96.

His life story could have been scripted by Hollywood. In fact, his father, [Raymond Massey](#), was a movie star, his uncle [Vincent](#) was Canada's governor-general from 1952-59, and his family founded the farm-equipment giant Massey-Harris, which became Massey-Ferguson.

Geoffrey Massey was born on Oct. 29, 1924, in London, England, where his dad had a long and successful career in live theatre. His mother, [Peggy Fremantle](#), also came from a prominent family — her father was British Admiral Sydney Fremantle.

But his parents divorced in 1929 and Geoffrey was raised by his father and his second wife, actress [Adrienne Allen](#).

"He never saw his mother from 1929 until he was 40 years old," said his daughter, Eliza Stanford. "When he did see her, he said it was very formal, there was absolutely no connection. He said it meant nothing to him. She basically said, 'OK, we're divorced, I'm getting on with my life, you can go with your father,' and that was it."

Raymond Massey moved to the U.S. in 1939, and Geoffrey came with him. Geoffrey joined the Canadian Army when he turned 18, training as a paratrooper.

At one point, he passed through Vancouver en route to visit his dad in Beverly Hills, where he lived.

“He bookmarked this place,” said Stanford. “ ‘I’m coming back.’ ”



August 1963. Architects Geoffrey Massey, left, and Arthur Erickson get into a helicopter to check out the future site of Simon Fraser University on top of Burnaby Mountain. Massey and Erickson had just won a competition to design the new university, which opened on Sept. 9, 1965. Photo by Brian Kent /PNG

After the war, he went to Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., earning a B.A. degree in 1949 and a master of architecture in 1952. After a stint with an architectural firm in Montreal, he decided to move west in 1952.

“He didn’t know anybody, but had a letter of introduction to Bert Binning,” said Stanford. “(Bert’s wife) Jessie was away and Bert said, ‘Oh, come and stay with me.’”

Artist [B.C. Binning](#) was one of the giants of West Coast modernism, and Massey soon found himself in the West Coast modern social circle, with a job at the architectural firm of Thompson, Berwick and Pratt. There he met [Arthur Erickson](#). They became friends and at one point rented a house together in Whytecliff in West Vancouver. Ruth Killam hired them to [build a house](#) at a spectacular location nearby and, in 1955, Massey married her.

“He told a really funny story,” said Stanford. “I guess they went on a date; they went to the symphony. She asked him, ‘Do you know what’s playing?’ And he said, ‘The violins.’ And she thought he was the one, that captured her heart. That was life for him. Of course he didn’t know what music it was, but the violins were playing.”

Erickson was the best man at their wedding. The ushers were architects [Ron Thom](#) and [Ian Davidson](#).

In 1963, Massey and Erickson teamed up to submit a bid to design a new university atop Burnaby Mountain. Their design for Simon Fraser University was so futuristic that the future still hasn’t caught up to their design, and their partnership flourished.

Architect [Bruno Freschi](#) worked at Erickson Massey in their 1960s’ heyday.

“Geoff was particularly generous (to other architects),” said Freschi. “He was great. He stayed in the background and took care of things, and always supported the creative ideas. He was a great inspiration to everybody at Erickson Massey.”

Freschi loved going to parties at Massey’s Whytecliff home, a stunning modern structure with a glass pyramid above the central living room and breathtaking views of Howe Sound. It even had a white marble courtyard, made from marble salvaged during the demolition of the historic Vancouver Opera House/International Cinema on Granville Street.

“When they tore down the theatre where Pacific Centre is now, we went out and took out all the great big sheets of white marble from the bathrooms, the urinals,” said Freschi, with a laugh. “It was Geoff’s father, Raymond Massey, who came down with us and said, ‘Take everything, take everything!’ Recovering old pieces of Vancouver.”

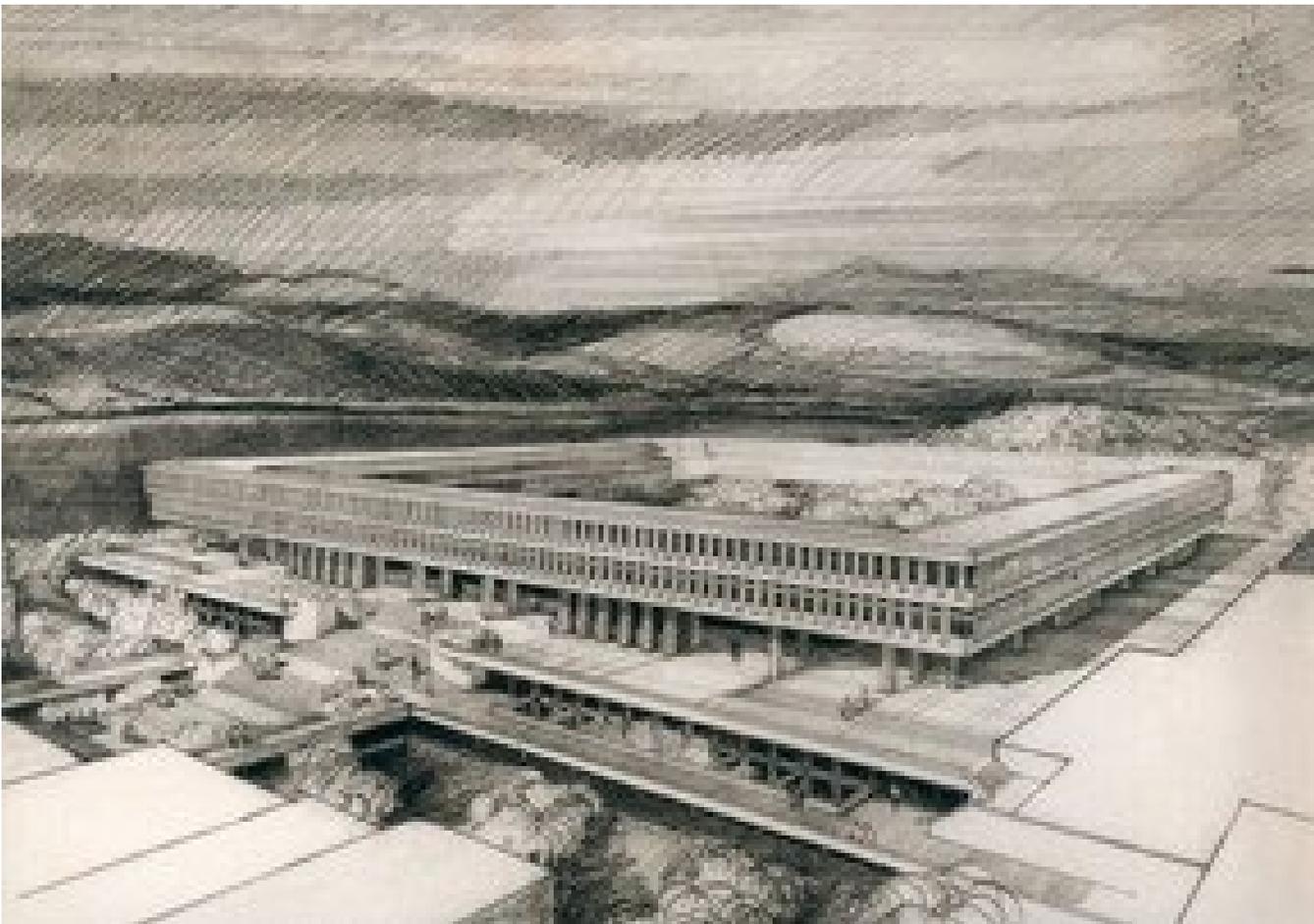
The Erickson Massey partnership ended in 1972.

“My father had a family and Arthur did not, and it seemed they were just diverging in their careers,” said Stanford. “But there was never any ill feeling between them.”

In his own practice, Massey mostly worked on private homes.

“He designed a round house for a client on Hernando Island,” said Stanford. “Half of it is a stone wall and half is wood and glass, looking out to sea. It’s a lovely house and is so unique — there isn’t another one like it.”

Massey sold his Whytecliff home around 1988 and retired from architecture in 1991. His wife died in 2011. He was also predeceased by two siblings (Daniel and Anna) who stayed in Britain and became successful actors. He is survived by his four children, Eliza, Raymond, Vincent and Nathaniel.



The design for Simon Fraser University by Arthur Erickson and Geoffrey Massey in 1964. Sun Files



Massey residence, 1955, Arthur Erickson and Geoffrey Massey architects. Vancouver Sun



On Sept. 10, 2006, Geoffrey Massey, left, joined others feting former architectural partner Arthur Erickson at the Law Courts. Photo by Malcolm Parry /Vancouver Sun



Vancouver architect Arthur Erickson, left, and fellow architects Bruno Freschi, centre, and Geoffrey Massey look over an unbuilt project in a May 18, 1966, photo. Photo by Deni Eagland /Vancouver Sun



Architects Geoffrey Massey, left, and Arthur Erickson with their winning design to build Simon Fraser University in 1963.