



# Arthur Erickson Foundation hoping to save famous architect's Vancouver home from developers

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**V**ANCOUVER - The home is just 850 square feet and valued at only about \$16,000, but the double sized lot where iconic Canadian Architect Arthur Erickson lived, is worth many millions of dollars.

In Vancouver, a city where lots with just a single home are becoming closer to unicorn-like status, the Arthur Erickson Foundation is trying desperately to hold on to its property, to preserve it and to restore it as a heritage site.

Erickson designed the University of Lethbridge Hall in the late 1960s (it was completed in 1971), and his master plan even included a second building to the south and slightly west, to be built in the coulees. He designed the original building such that the coulees wouldn't be destroyed, and so students and faculty could have everything from lecture halls to science rooms, lounges, and even residences all in one place.

Some of his other famous building designs include Simon Fraser University, The BC Law Courts in Downtown Vancouver, The Canadian Pavilion for Expo 1970 in Osaka, Japan, and the Canadian Embassy in Washington D.C.

The problem is, the Foundation is nearly \$600,000 in debt with two mortgages, after saving Erickson from bankruptcy in the 1990's. He continued to live in the home until his death in 2009. The home and property also need about a million dollars in restoration.

Simon Scott, the foundation's director and Erickson's architectural photographer, explains what happened.

"When an architect receives a commission, there is a certain amount of research prior to beginning the programming and design. And Arthur... spent a huge amount of money on research and the design process. In many cases, he overwent the budget for the fee. And so, in many cases, the project didn't make money... and he did live a bit of a lavish lifestyle around the world.

"How many world-renowned accountants do you know? There are many masters in art and in music who had brilliant minds in their particular subject, but you know, weren't able to hold the rest of their lives together. So Arthur went bankrupt. But he left Canada and the world things that are unbelievably more important than a bank balance."

The foundation has been approached many times by numerous developers, but Scott says he can't bear the thought of having the home levelled.

"We're not saving a house. We're saving a piece of Canadian culture. And that's what's valuable."

There may be hope for the foundation if the City of Vancouver brings back a plan to help save heritage buildings that involves selling "air space," or more commonly known as Unused Development Rights.

The initiative started about 10 years ago, Scott explains, where the city gave a certain number of credits to heritage buildings for unused vertical space. Those credits were "banked" and then sold to developers who wanted to build higher than would normally be allowed. The city eventually had more credits than developers needed or could buy at the time, and the program was shelved.

"If you have two properties and you've got 100 units on one and 100 units on the other, and one only needs 20 units. So, 80 units are transferred to the other and that one has 180 units of square footage rather than 100. It's a very clever system."

That program may be brought back in early 2018 once again, and that's where the foundation is hoping to make enough money to pay off the mortgages and restore Erickson's home and property. Altogether they need at least \$1.6 million.

"We're ready to start talking to the city next week."

Currently there is a tenant in the home, who helps with the garden and home upkeep, but if they're able to sell their "air space", they eventually hope to turn it into a museum.

"We would re-purchase some furniture that Arthur used to have, because we know what it all was. And then we would have some exhibits and people could come and look at books and photographs and I'm sure we would have some archives."

In the meantime, Scott, who also created the "Aperture" sculpture on the south side of the University of Lethbridge, says the Arthur Erickson Foundation is accepting donations as well.