

The Trend House Program

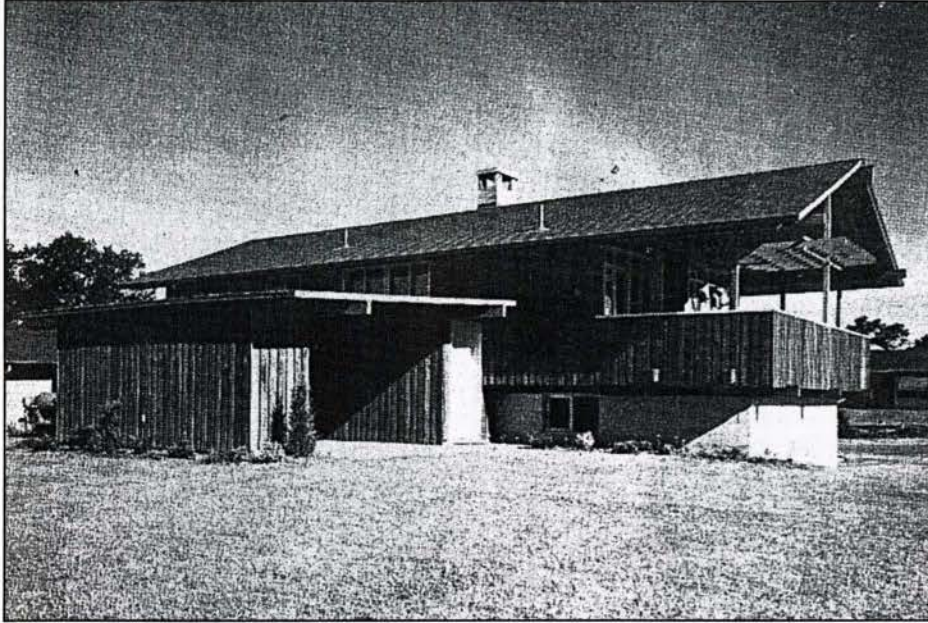


Figure 1. The 1952 Trend House, 68 Rosethorne Road, Toronto, designed by Fred Brodie. (*Canadian Homes and Gardens*, September 1952)

Canadians increasingly embraced Modern architecture and design in the boom years following the Second World War. Across the country there was growing interest in a simple, easy-care type of house which incorporated open planning, innovative building methods, newly available building materials such as plywoods and plastics, and new approaches to siting. There was also strong interest through the 1950s in modern furniture and industrial design, examples of which could be seen at art gallery exhibitions and purchased at department stores.

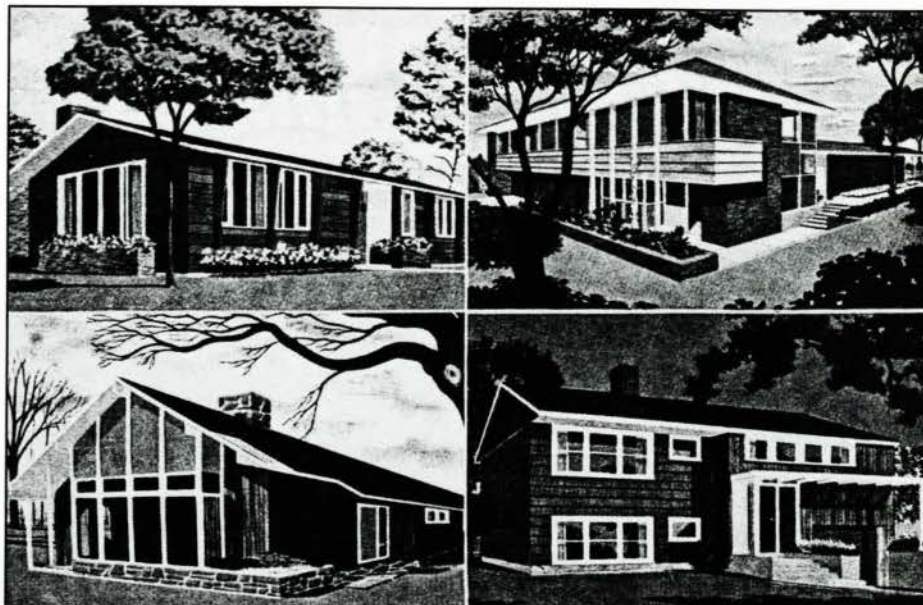
In response to this interest, the British Columbia wood industry launched an imaginative promotion of its wood products throughout Canada. The British Columbia Lumber Manufacturers Association (BCLMA) and other B.C. wood interests¹ sponsored eleven so-called "Trend Houses," which were constructed in major centres across the country in the early 1950s. These were architect-designed model houses, all open to the public, intended to illustrate modern trends in small house design using B.C. woods. Whenever possible, the Trend Houses were furnished with award-winning, Canadian-designed products, recommended by the National Gallery of Canada and Eaton's department store. The houses proved immensely popular with the public, who valued the opportunity to see in one venue progressive architectural ideas expressed in West Coast woods and the latest in Canadian design presented in a modern architectural setting.

The Trend House program might never have happened were it not for changing market conditions after the war. As a result of a drop in wood sales to the United Kingdom, the B.C. wood industry looked increasingly to Canadian markets to take up the slack. At that time, news of the experimental activities of West Coast architects was beginning to drift eastward. By the early 1950s, articles on West Coast post-and-beam houses were dominating the pages of *Canadian Homes and Gardens*. Seeking to capitalize on this coverage, the industry decided to build a model house in Eastern Canada that would demonstrate how popular features of these new West Coast houses might be incorporated into eastern buildings.

¹ The eleven Trend Houses were a promotion of three main groups: the B.C. Lumber Manufacturers Association, the Plywood Manufacturers Association of B.C., and the Consolidated Red Cedar Shingle Association of B.C. For the sake of simplicity I have referred to the sponsors as the "BCLMA" or as "the wood industry."

B Y A L L A N C O L L I E R

Figure 2. Clockwise from top left, the 1954 Trend Houses in London (Fanshawe Park Road, Stoneybrook Heights), Toronto (41 Weybourne Crescent, Lawrence Park), Montréal (2 Woodland Avenue, Beaurepaire), and Halifax (15 Balmoral Road, Francklyn Park). (*Western Homes and Living*, May 1954)



Planning for Canada's first Trend House began in 1951. Forest company executive Cleve Edgett contacted the progressive Vancouver architectural firm of Sharp & Thompson, Berwick, Pratt to commission a design for a model house to be constructed at an international trade fair slated for Toronto in 1952. The firm held an in-house competition resulting in 14 proposals. The winning design by Fred Brodie was built not at the trade fair as originally intended but in the Toronto suburb of Thorncrest Village where, it was hoped, the house would attract a broader cross-section of visitors. The house remained open to the public through the summer of 1952.

The first Trend House was designed to appeal to a small family with an average income. It was a simple rectangular two-storey structure with a low-pitch gable roof extending over a deck at one end (figure 1). There was a flat-roofed carport attached to one side and a wide bay of tall windows facing a view on the other. The exterior was clad in vertical cedar siding which, at the time, would have been a novelty in Toronto, where brick was the norm. With only 1,000 square feet of living area, the architect succeeded in creating a sense of interior spaciousness by employing an open-beam ceiling and by consolidating the kitchen, dining, and living areas. Plywood built-ins left extra floor space for light-weight chairs and tables that could be re-arranged into various groupings. The overall look was modern and clean, with visual warmth provided by the natural finish of the cedar walls and ceilings.

What enhanced the contemporary look of the interior was undoubtedly the Canadian-designed furnishings selected from the National Gallery of Canada's Design Index.² Included in the house were some of the most inventive work by Canada's design community: furniture by Jan Kuypers and Russel Spanner (Toronto), Peter Cotton and Morrison-Bush (B.C.), and Julien Hebert (Montréal); lighting from Norman Slater and D.C. McCormack (Toronto); fabrics by J. and J. Brook (Toronto); and miscellaneous items such as cookware, "Tintawn" carpeting, and small kitchen appliances. Ceramic bowls and mugs and hand-woven place mats were provided by the Handicraft Guild of Canada. Paintings by David Milne, Carl Schaefer, and others were lent by the Picture Loan Society of Toronto. From home to contents, this first Trend House was a thorough demonstration of the state of Canadian design at the time and proved immensely popular with the public. More than 200,000 people visited, prompting the B.C. sponsors to plan for an expanded program.

In 1953, the BCLMA announced plans to build ten additional Trend Houses in major centres across Canada. They were to open to the public in the spring and summer of 1954. In addition to the extensive use of wood, the designs were to reflect the trend toward smaller, inexpensive houses by focusing on the efficient use of space which could be achieved by amalgamating living and dining areas, eliminating halls, and providing built-ins. The designs were also to focus on more effective siting to provide easy access to outdoor spaces adjacent to living areas. Instead of commissioning a Vancouver firm, the sponsors chose local firms working in the ten centres where the houses were to be built. These were: John di Castri (Victoria), Davison and Porter

² The Design Index was a periodically updated registry of Canadian-designed products, administered by the Industrial Design Division of the National Gallery of Canada.

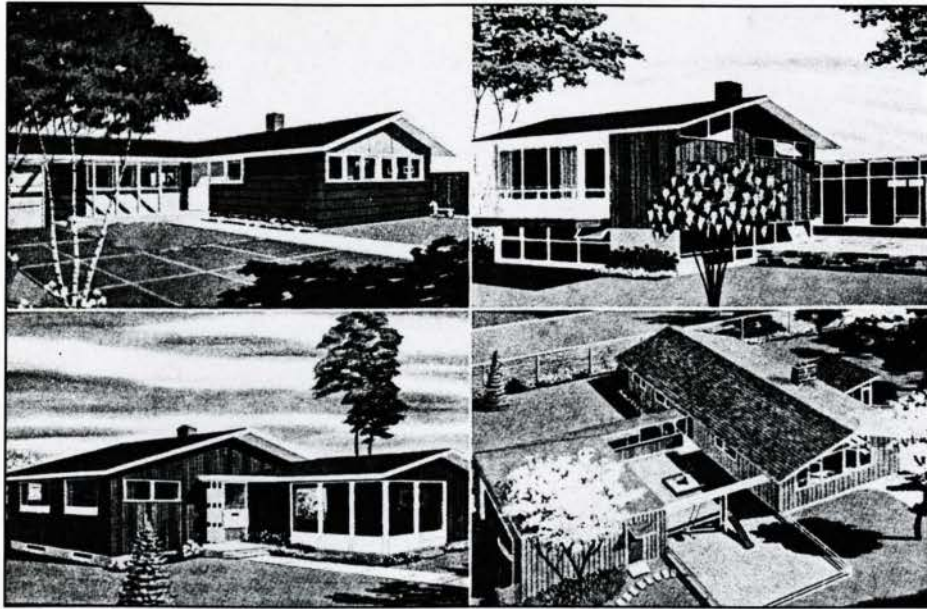


Figure 3. Clockwise from top left, the 1954 Trend Houses in Edmonton (8331 120th Street, Windsor Park), Calgary (4738 Elbow Park Drive, Elboya), Regina (3720 Albert Street, Lakeview), and Winnipeg (762 South Drive, Fort Garry). (*Western Homes and Living*, May 1954)

(Vancouver), Rule, Wynn, Rule (Calgary), Dewar, Stevenson and Stanley (Edmonton), Stock and Ramsay (Regina), Smith, Munn, Carter, and Katelnikoff (Winnipeg), Philip Carter Johnson (London), Fleury, Arthur, and Calvert (Toronto), Philip Goodfellow (Montréal), and Allan, Duffus, Davison, Duffus, Romans, and Davis (Halifax). With their knowledge of local climate, geography, codes, materials, and building traditions, it was thought these architects would be better suited to design houses of interest to the local market. While B.C. woods were already available across the country, each area had demonstrated certain preferences: in Victoria, it was hemlock; in Ontario, western red cedar; and on the Prairies, Douglas fir plywood. The expanded new program would build on these preferences by providing house visitors and suppliers alike with information on appropriate uses in each area.

The ten new Trend Houses were built over the winter and spring of 1953-54 using funds from a total budget of \$500,000. The Victoria house was the smallest (825 square feet) and cost under \$10,000; Montréal was the largest (1,800 square feet) and was projected to cost about \$30,000. In some cases the houses were designed for specific clients: the Victoria house was designed for writer Gwen Cash, and the Toronto house for Eric Arthur of the architectural firm Fleury, Arthur, and Calvert, which had the design commission. Before construction began, some of the houses were sold to owners who had a say in the finishing details.

Much of the budget was spent on an extensive, well-organized publicity campaign. In the spring and summer of 1954, full-colour advertisements with renderings of the ten model houses, complete with opening dates and addresses, appeared in national home magazines (figures 2, 3, 4). Several days prior to the opening of each Trend House, local newspapers included four or five pages of reporting and advertisements. Most of the reporting reiterated wood industry press releases which included stories on hemlock as the "Cinderella wood," on the versatility of plywoods, and on the potential of red cedar as a framing material. There were also descriptions of the types of floor plans and structural systems, and of the latest state-of-the-art heating systems. Local reporting often included an overall impression of the house and an interview with the builder and architect, who explained the rationale for the building, its siting on the lot, and the choice of detailing. Advertisements were placed by the contractors and suppliers and by Eaton's, who coordinated the selection of furnishings, mostly from the Design Index. Brochures, pamphlets, and a 32-page booklet were made available by mail, at the houses, and at lumber suppliers.

Consistent with the aims of the program, wood was used almost exclusively throughout the Trend Houses, except in the Toronto house where local codes required some brick. Some of the most noteworthy uses of wood were in the Vancouver house, where the architect specified 6-inch-wide cedar siding with closely spaced saw kerfs to add texture to the massive exposed ceiling (figure 5). Both the Toronto and Victoria houses had ceilings of red cedar planks which were lapped like the hull of a clinker-built boat. Most of the houses featured fir plywood kitchen cabinets and built-ins;

Figure 4 (top). The 1954 Trend Houses in Victoria (3516 Richmond Road, Saanich) and Vancouver (4342 Skyline Drive, Forest Hills). (*Western Homes and Living*, May 1954)

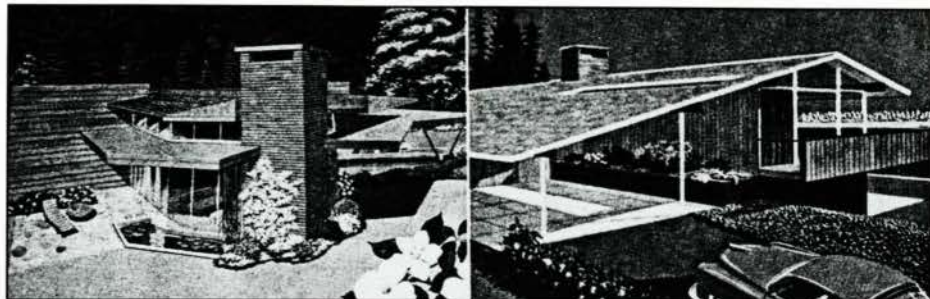
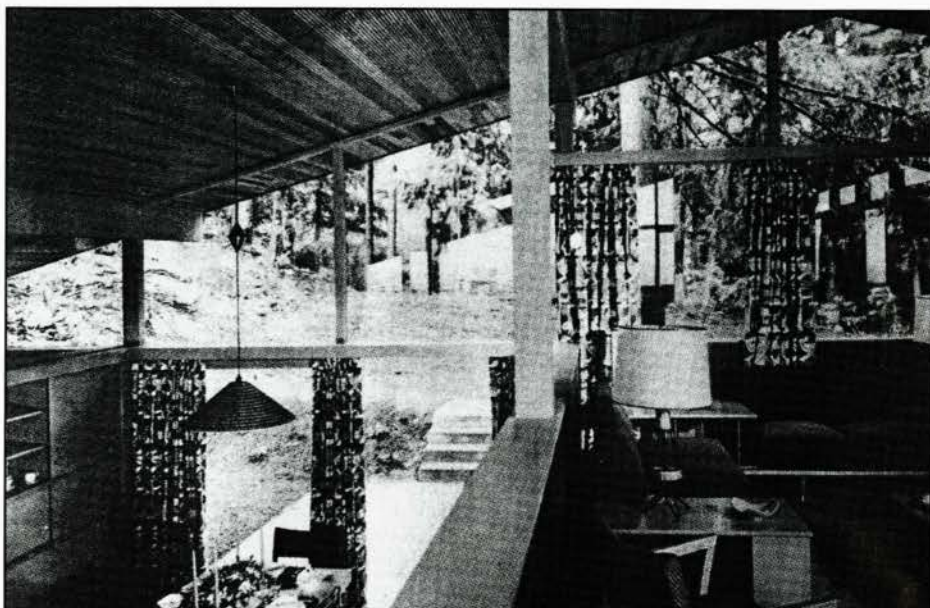


Figure 5 (bottom). Interior of the Vancouver Trend House, designed by Davison and Porter. Note the saw-kerfed cedar siding used on the ceiling. (*Western Homes and Living*, August 1954)



several featured “Driftwood” and other embossed-plywood wall panelling, which had just been introduced to the Canadian market. Unlike in the 1952 Trend House, architects of the subsequent Trend Houses specified a much greater use of paint colour, inside and out, to complement the natural wood.

To maximize a sense of space, the ten Trend Houses had open-plan living and dining areas; the Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Montréal, and London houses also had open-beam ceilings. The Victoria house, smallest of the ten, had higher than conventional ceilings, with wood partitions rather than full-height walls to define the spaces. It also had a ribbon of clerestory windows and a wall of glass to help visually open up the interior. Structurally, about half the houses incorporated aspects of post-and-beam construction. Porter’s Vancouver Trend House, like his own landmark residence of 1949, was an example of this structural system. In Victoria, John di Castri specified site-built trusses to accomplish his wing-shaped floating roof, and in London, Philip Carter Johnson used pairs of laminated hemlock “boomerang trusses” bolted together on the ground and then hoisted upright to form arches.

As the floor levels of most of the ten Trend Houses were at least partially at grade, direct access to the outside was greatly enhanced and gardens became a prominent focus. In the Winnipeg house, a sun-trap/play area was located between the garage and the kitchen, allowing easy supervision of children. In Victoria, Toronto, Calgary, and Vancouver, terraces were located adjacent to the main living area. In the Vancouver house, huge expanses of glass provided vistas of forest throughout the main living area.

Like the first Trend House, the 1954 Trend Houses proved popular with the public. In Victoria, more than 3,000 people visited the first day, while in Calgary the police had to be called to persuade the crowd to go home at 9 P.M. Lumber industry officials estimated that across Canada one million people would visit the ten model houses.³ In a retrospective edition on B.C. houses of the 1950s, *Western Homes and Living* magazine included the Victoria Trend House as one of the ten most influential of the decade. It, like the other model homes in this unique national program, were instrumental in helping Canadians formulate a personal understanding of the role of good modern design in their lives.

³ Attendance figures are from an article on the Trend Houses published in *Western Business and Industry*, May 1954.

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