

333 BROADWAY – MONARCH LIFE BUILDING

Smith Carter Searle Associates (1961)



Acknowledged and celebrated as one of Western Canada's finest modernist building, the Monarch Life Building at 333 Broadway was built in 1961 for another national company choosing Winnipeg for its headquarters, choosing Broadway for its business address and choosing one of the city's many fine architectural firms, Smith, Carter, Searle Associates to design its cutting-edge building.

Monarch Life Assurance Company was founded in 1904, with business in Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba. After a legal issues were addressed surrounding its creation, the insurance company, headquartered in Winnipeg, began expanding throughout the country. Expansion after World War II necessitated a new headquarter building and 333 Broadway as built. In 1999, this building became the head office for the Worker's Compensation Board.

The six-storey building sits on a wide pedestal of smooth dark granite and pre-cast concrete on all four sides that fills much of the block. The upper floors, clad in granite panels, overhang the ground

floor and the front (south) and rear (north) façades are similar in design. These main elevations include vertical columns and thin, angled rectilinear window openings separated by dark spandrels. The top floor features deeply recessed windows and a penthouse. The east and west façades are windowless. Original windows were replaced in 1995, the front landing/stairs were replaced for barrier free access in 2007 and new door openings added to the north façade in 2009. Between 2010 and 2012, all the exterior cladding was removed and stored, asbestos removed, a complete new building envelop installed and the originally cladding re-attached.

On both the exterior and the interior, the design is based on a 5'-8" x 5'-8" planning module.

The interior, designed by Allison Bain of Toronto, was as unique as the exterior. The main lobby features an 18-foot high continuous luminous ceiling over a single large open area finished in a wealth of materials including stainless steel, granite, off-white vinyl and plaster wall coverings, black terrazzo floor, and black leather and chrome furnishings. According to one source, this ground floor contains the only remaining luminous ceiling installation in Winnipeg and one of the few remaining in Canada.

Smith Carter Searle Associates was formed in 1947 by three recent University of Manitoba Architecture graduates – Ernest John Smith, Dennis Carter and Walter L. Katelnikoff. The firm grew steadily in the 1950s and the firm took on a fourth partner, E. Fitz Munn in 1954, although he only stayed with the firm for two years. In the late 1950s, Jim Searle joined the firm, which became Smith Carter Searle Associates. In 1969, the firm merged John B. Parkin Associates of Toronto to become Smith Carter Parkin. In 2012, the firm, which had become Smith Carter Architects, was acquired by Genivar Inc. and in 2014, merged with five other Canadian firms to create Architecture 49. In its various forms, Smith Carter would design many fine and award-winning structures including:

Monarch Life Building, 333 Broadway (1959-1963) – Massey Medal winner

J.A. Russell Building (University of Manitoba Faculty of Architecture), 83 Dafoe Road (1959) – Massey Medal winner

Knowles School for Boys, 2065 Henderson Highway (1960)

Medical Arts Building Parkade, 218 Edmonton Street (1961)

Canadian Wheat Board Building, 423 Main Street (1962)

Royal Bank Building, 220 Portage Avenue (1965)

Pan Am Pool, 25 Poseidon Bay (1967)
Richardson Building, 1 Lombard Place (1967-1969)
Manitoba Centennial Centre, 555 Main Street (1967-1972)
Lombard Garage, 136 Lombard Avenue (1969)
Winnipeg Inn (Westin, Lombard Hotel, Fairmont Hotel) and Lombard Concourse, 175 Portage Avenue East (1970)
Canadian Grain Commission Building, 303 Main Street (1970)
Bank of Canada Building, 161 Portage Avenue East (1971)
Woodsworth Building, 405 Broadway (1973)
Carlton Club, 280 Fort Street (1976)
Credit Union Central Plaza (IKON Building), 215 Garry Street (1976)
Great-West Life Assurance Company Building, 60 Osborne Street (1979)
Trisec Building, Scotia Bank Building & Winnipeg Square, Portage & Main (1980)
Great-West Life Assurance Company Building, 60 Broadway (1981-1983)
Air Canada Building, 355 Portage Avenue (1984)
Portage Place, 393 Portage Avenue (with Number Ten Architectural Group), 1986
St. Boniface Hospital Research Centre, 351 Avenue Taché (1986)
John Buhler Research Centre (Health Sciences Centre), 715 McDermot Avenue (ca.1990)

The Monarch Life Building was built by local contracting firm Bird Construction.

Elements of the building that would require approval if alterations were planned are:

Site-

- Generally open, dark granite and pre-cast concrete panelled podium on all four sides.

Exterior-

- Six-storey granite-clad building with penthouse located on a wide pedestal of dark stone on the north side of Broadway from Hargrave Street to Carlton Street, its main façades facing south onto Broadway and north onto a parking lot, its east façade facing Hargrave Street and its west façade facing Carlton Street;
- Its main (south) and rear (north) façades with their glass main floor and cantilevered upper storeys with thin columns running from the pedestal to the top of the smaller sixth floor, bays of angled windows in rectilinear openings, dark spandrels and stainless steel accenting; and
- Its windowless east and west façades with granite panels and stainless steel bands.

Interior-

- Volume of space, lighting and metal and stone finishes of the main floor lobby area.