Our History

Providing exceptional technical expertise and design excellence since 1934

We invite you to celebrate our past, while welcoming the innovations of the future...
Gordon S. Adamson

Gordon Sinclair Adamson (1904-1986) made a significant contribution to the introduction and development of Canadian modernism after World War II. Born in Orangeville, Ontario in May 1904, he came to Toronto in 1924 where he enrolled at the School of Architecture at the University of Toronto. After graduation in 1928, he was employed by F. Hilton Wilkes of Toronto and worked on the design of the Canada Permanent Building on Bay Street (1928-30). In November 1929, he joined the office of Sproatt & Rolph where he remained until September 1930. He assisted the prominent landscape architect Edwin Kay of Toronto from June of 1932 until October 1933 and then moved to Montreal where he supervised the construction of multiple-unit housing projects for the Shell Oil Co.

Mr. Adamson started his own practice in Toronto in 1934 and concentrated on the design of residential and commercial buildings. In the company of other young talented architects who had emerged in Toronto at this time, including John B. Parkin, Robert S. Morris, and Earle Morgan (the latter with whom he had a brief partnership from 1943 to 1945), the Adamson office grew and by the mid-1950s had become one of the dominant forces in the development of a distinctive Canadian interpretation of modern architecture. Adamson was elected as an Associate Member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts in 1950, and became president of the Ontario Association of Architects in 1953. It was in that year that he received his first Massey Medal from the Governor General for his design of the Savoy Plaza Apartment on Forest Hill Road in Toronto.

By the time Gordon Adamson retired from active practice in 1971, the firm had expanded considerably, having been involved in the master planning and design of several prestigious university campus buildings, and with a number of significant monuments of early Canadian, modern architecture added to its portfolio. Iconic corporate and industrial facilities include the Pratt Library on the University of Toronto Victoria College campus (winner of the Ontario Association of Architects 25-year Award in 1996), University of Ottawa Law School, University of Windsor Law Library, Royal Military College, Cuna Mutual Insurance head office, and the Redpath Sugar Refinery (one of the earliest modern industrial structures to be listed as a heritage property in the City of Toronto in 1984).
In the early days, the firm concentrated on the design of residential and commercial buildings typically executed in a conservative yet refined Neo-Georgian style. The design for the Dominion Public Building in Bradford, Ontario (1936) exemplifies this mode.
By the early 1940s, traces of the International Style of modernism began to appear in Adamson’s work as the firm experimented with the application of this new aesthetic in plans for the ‘Sun House’ in the Rosedale area of Toronto in 1944. This break with the more traditional styles of the past was virtually confirmed in 1945 with the completion of a dramatic office and showroom facility for the Crothers Manufacturing Co. in Leaside, Toronto and was commissioned to prepare a similarly striking design for the Canadian Nashua Paper Co.’s office and factory in Peterborough, Ontario in 1946.
The Adamson office continued to prosper and by the mid-1950s had become one of the dominant forces in the development of a distinctive Canadian interpretation of modern architecture. The firm received its first Massey Medal from the Governor General for the design of the Savoy Plaza apartment building on Forest Hill Road in Toronto. Other notable designs during this decade included the Holt Renfrew Building on Bloor Street West (1955) and the Redpath Sugar Refinery (1957).
1960 - 1969

During this decade, the office continued to design a wide range of buildings including commercial offices, industrial/manufacturing facilities, as well as residential buildings. Most notable amongst our achievements during the 1960s was our contributions to the campuses at York University (Ross Social Science and Humanities Building, Founder’s College) and Queen’s Park (Hepburn Block, Ferguson Block, Mowat Block and Hearst Block) as part of our work with UPACE. UPACE (University Planners and Consulting Engineers) was a consortium that that included John B. Associates, and Shore and Moffat and Partners. The 1960s also saw the completion of the award-winning E.J Pratt Library at the University of Toronto campus as well as the Kipling Collegiate Institute (winner of the firm’s second Massey Medal).

< E.J. Pratt Library Victoria College, University of Toronto, 1960 >
Adamson’s reputation for designing timeless and meticulously detailed buildings through the 1960s became a distinct advantage for pursuing development work in the 1970s as the firm became involved in commercial development projects across Canada with developers such as Canada Square, Menkes, and Olympia & York. Notable projects during this decade included the North York Municipal Building; the Gulf Canada Square in Calgary; and the North American Life Centre in Toronto.

< North York Civic Centre, Ontario, 1970 >
During this decade, the firm entered the international market when retained by Olympia & York Developments to act as the Executive Architect for the competition-winning World Financial Centre in New York City. Working in association with the Design Architect, Cesar Pelli, the World Financial Centre project set the precedent for numerous international projects involving Adamson as Executive Architect working in collaboration with world-class developers and internationally acclaimed design firms. In addition to the World Financial Center, our work during this period included the scheme for the Canary Wharf Estates in London’s docklands in association with Cesar Pelli and others.

< World Financial Center Winter Garden, New York, 1988 >
By the 1990s, the firm’s expertise in curtain wall and cladding systems coupled with its ability to collaborate with acclaimed designers to find constructable solutions, was well known—making Adamson a much sought-after collaborator. Notable projects during this era included the Chrysler Center renovation (with Philip Johnson/Alan Ritchie), the Kuala Lumpur City Centre in Malaysia (with Pelli Clarke Pelli), and the 50-storey One Canada Square at Canary Wharf Estates in London, which at the time of completion in 1992, was the tallest building in Europe (also with Pelli Clarke Pelli).
Adamson's reputation as a top-tier Architect-of-Record/Executive Architect has led to the forging of exciting new collaborations with celebrated design architects including Gehry Partners, LLP; Studio Daniel Libeskind; Renzo Piano Building Workshop; Ateliers Jean Nouvel; Maki and Associates; Foster + Partners; Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners; and Diller Scofidio Renfro. During the 2000s, we embarked on some of the largest and most complex projects in our firm's history ranging from the redevelopment of the World Trade Center site in New York City to the largest LEED® Gold-certified site in the United States (the 6,000,000 sf MGM Mirage CityCenter Block C Development) and the first LEED® Platinum Certified Skyscraper in New York City, One Bryant Park. And, while we continue to work across the globe in a succession of high-profile projects, we have remained true to our design roots and continue to contribute to the growth and development of the City of Toronto with such award-winning projects as the Telus House Tower, the Toronto Pearson International Airport, and the MaRS Centre redevelopment.