

An Independent Lifestyle Newsmagazine for the Mature Reader

January 2007 Volume 5 Issue 1

NORTH *OF* 50

Publications Mail Agreement 41188516

ISSN # 1710-4750

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Henry Yorke Mann

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HENRY YORKE MANN'S TIMELESS ARCHITECTURE OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT Story by Christine Pilgrim

Henry Yorke Mann didn't always design outhouses! In fact, the luxury one outside his new office, complete with glass dome so he can survey the sky as he sits, is his first.

This Mann is no run-of-the-mill architect. For his thesis at university, he designed a temple based on the mathematical work of Buckminster Fuller who was one of his mentors. His philosophy, from those early days to the present, has been that every home (or outhouse) should be a temple and that all the structures he designs and envisions are sacred in nature.

His book, 'Architecture - Part of the God Dance,' explains how he builds sacred places, as distinct from profane ones, to add layers of experience and importance to life patterns. It documents his early work and current approach to architectural design through a meticulously hand-written text with 100 photographic examples.

Both his father and grandfather were Master Builders and, while professional athletics might have been an option, Henry chose to follow in their footsteps, and build. His first job was as chief architect at a well-established firm in Vancouver between 1955 and 1963. Then he ran his own practice for seven years. For two of those years he joined ranks with his father under the name, Mann Construction. The firm was an early proponent of the design/build approach to construction, with Henry designing and Richard, his father, building. When Richard found the volume of work too overwhelming, Henry joined forces with construction manager, John Senac, and the firm became known as Senac and Mann Construction.

At the same time, Henry taught Architectural Design at the University of British Columbia.

In 1970 he was awarded a Canada Council Fellowship.

By this time he'd married Elizabeth who had a nine-year-old son, and the three of them homesteaded in Squamish where Henry was bitten by the cattle breeding bug. However, when four feet of snow fell in Squamish one winter, the family sought a bigger, warmer acreage in the more hospitable environment of the South Okanagan. They found the McCuddy Creek Ranch, listed as raw land, on Baldy Mountain just outside Oliver. Here, Henry Yorke Mann-Architect, became Henry Mann-Rancher and Top Breeder of Charolais, a French polled breed of cattle, renowned for its high meat yield. Old Man McCuddy had cleared 30 acres. The Manns cleared 150. They built three dams, installed high pressure irrigation to compensate for the South Okanagan's dry summers and invested in 500 head of cattle. Their scientific breeding techniques were so successful that their bulls were sought throughout Western Canada and North Western United States.



Twenty-six years later, after losing the ranch because of sky-rocketing interest rates, and eventually buying it back from the Farm Credit Corporation (the Government Lending Agency that had requisitioned it), Henry once more embraced the world of architecture. His marriage had



Above: This guest cabin uses sustainable and natural materials to replace a derelict log cabin on the exact same footprint. The source of the vision for this cabin lies in the spirits of the verdant growth and dramatic scenery in this Pacific Northwest area, as it was for the paintings of Emily Carr and Jack Wise. Below: Inside the Mandala residence, the construction is air and moisture transfusive (a breathing construction). Synthetic materials (plastic and poly anything) are avoided. Photos: Courtesy Stuart Bish Photography. Cover photos: Stuart Bish Photography



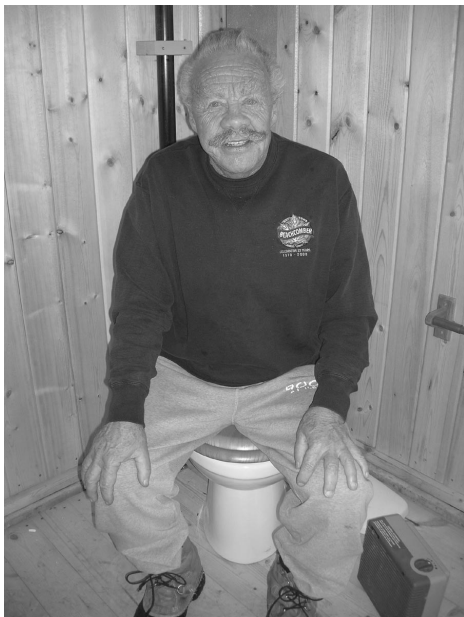
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Timeless Architecture

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Henry Yorke Mann and his designer outhouse. Photos: Christine Pilgrim



suffered as a result of the financial strains the family underwent; so, now alone, he designed and built a bachelor residence on thirteen of the original 700 acres he had bought. The rest were sold.

Re-enter Henry Yorke Mann, Architect. His house is built on the lines of a mandala... or in this case, Manddala. It was to serve as residence and office for the work that soon poured in. The new office was a far cry from the floating pavilion in Coal Harbour, his office in the early days in Vancouver, where he had designed 'sacred spaces', from single family residences to the Killarney Community Centre - the first building in BC to use the Linn Tee pre-cast structural system.

When asked to explain the role of the architect, he replies, "It covers a wide range of activities and responsibilities that can be grouped into three phases: Preliminary Design, Working Drawing development and Construction."

The first priority is to listen to the client's desires, concerns, needs and wants. As important is the ability to listen 'between the lines' for subtle informative details. The architect must also listen to the site, perceiving not only its topography and climate, but assimilating its essence. Early in the Preliminary Design stage, clients are asked to openly express what they hope to achieve in the new structure, how they go about their daily activities and what is truly important in their lives.


The architect distills the collection of the client's dreams, impressions and information, together with hard core practicalities like surveys, zoning, building code, structural engineering and heating/cooling, into a set of sketches which are then reviewed with the client. Budget and sustainability are also discussed.

The preliminary sketches are developed into a set of working drawings and specifications so that costing can be finalized and construction initiated. Close attention must be paid to design details, which contribute to the overall beauty of the structure as well as the client's enjoyment.

It is essential for all parties involved to maintain a common heart and purpose throughout the construction process.

Mann's work is on a par with Wright, Kahn and Sullivan and is internationally recognized. In the sixties, his Eijgel House was selected by the Massey Foundation for inclusion in the Best 100 Canadian Buildings touring exhibit. Since 1996 his structures have been featured in one-man exhibitions in Art Galleries throughout BC, and in magazines and publications throughout the world, specifically gaining recognition by Natural Home and Garden as one of the top ten 'green' architectural offices in North America. His designs are also featured on the covers (English and American editions) of the book, 'Designing Your Natural Home' by David Pearson.

Everything is significant in Henry Yorke Mann's work, right down to his logo which resulted from a doodle which spells out his three initials.



When his partner, Denise, entered his life ten years ago they talked of building her a low-budget house on the same site as the Manddala. The result is a smaller mandala that reflects the spirituality and tranquility of Denise, via the peace created by the centre-ing structure itself. And, because the mandala structure is mathematically predictable, it is simpler and therefore cheaper to build.

Henry, once a scholarship-winning ski champion, has not only survived numerous broken bones but is also a cancer survivor, as is his lady, Denise. He visits his lady each evening to share supper and she visits 'the Mann' (her nickname for him) to share books and his music, which spans Beethoven through New Age to Choral to Rock to Jazz, Folk and Blues, resonating throughout his Manddala.

Now Henry is planning a new project: designing a temple - along the very lines he drew in his early university days.

So, in true mandala style, Henry Yorke Mann's life turns full circle.

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