Ottawa, Ontario
National Research Council Building M-12
Montreal Road Campus

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The National Research Council Building M-12 was constructed in 1953, with alterations in 1958, 1960 and 1985. The original designer was C. Gustave Brault of the Chief Architects Office. The 1985 addition is by Ogilvie and Hogg Architects. The custodial department is the National Research Council. See FHBRO Building Report 90-245.

Reason for Designation

The National Research Council (NRC) Building M-12 was designated Recognized for its architectural design and environmental significance, and also for historical reasons.

The 24 buildings erected on the NRC campus between 1940-1 950 are examples of federal architecture of early modern design. Building M-12 is a fine example of the International Style, with its emphasis on horizontality, stripped ornamentation, repetition of structural bays, and use of smooth modern materials and finishes such as steel, glass and stucco.

Despite building additions and modifications to the site, the building's relationship to its environs and to nearby structures is relatively unchanged. Building M-12 is a compatible element in the sprawling campus-like ensemble.

The building forms part of a complex of research facilities established in the late 1930s on a 130 acre site known as the Montreal Road Laboratories. As the main research centre for applied chemistry, it is representative of the NRC's importance to Canadian industry in supporting technological development through research.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of Building M-12 resides in its massing, materials and details as expressions of the International Style, and in its site relationships as a component of the NRC campus.

The three-storey purpose-built research facility is characterized by horizontality, which is achieved through the use of a low, flat roofline, horizontal strip windows, repeated structural bays, and a continuous strip of windows at foundation level, which makes the building appear to float above the ground. Together with the use of smooth "modern" materials (steel windows and panels, expanses of glass and white stucco), these features identify the building with the International Style.

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National Research Council Building M-12 (Continued)

Any repair or alteration of the building should be grounded in an understanding of the design principles underlying this style. For example, the steel-framed glazing is essential to the character of the building, as is the horizontal arrangement of the windows. The existing windows should be retained if possible. If replacement is essential, the new units must replicate the fine scale of the mullions and muntins and the subdivision into operable or fixed units with a horizontal orientation. The placement of the windows relative to the exterior wall plane must also be maintained. The exterior roller blinds are an elegant feature and should be retained.

It is also essential to maintain the visual qualities of the current stucco exterior walls, with their shallow recesses and sill projections, as well as the slimness of the canopies and fins found on the building.

The six-storey addition dating from 1985 disrupts the horizontal massing, but is not unsympathetic to the existing building: the scale of the fenestration, and the positioning of glazing units flush with the exterior wall, reflects the existing character. Any future additions should respect the stylistic tenets of the original building.

The interior plan is simple and functional, with a staircase off the lobby space and a corridor leading to offices, open workshops, and research laboratories. In keeping with the International Style, the intent was to create as flexible a facility as possible. Finishes such as terrazzo, and fixtures such as steel door handles with a horizontal orientation, are typical of the style, and should be protected. Development of the interior should maintain the emphasis on smooth, sleek, modern materials.

The character of the site has remained relatively unchanged, with smooth expanses of landscaped area between buildings. Site development should respect the simple character of landscaping which is appropriate for this site, and preserve the effect of a low, horizontal building on a flat site.

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