

## COVER STORY: Inhabiting art in West Vancouver



By North Shore Outlook

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Inhabiting art can be a big responsibility.

For residents of Montiverdi Estates — a lofty granite enclave high on the western shoulder of West Vancouver — it's a life's work.

Much like Montreal's [Habitat 67](#), Montiverdi is a concept community built on a singular architectural vision of modernism meets best practices.

And today, the owners of the 18 estates of Montiverdi widely consider themselves and each other the keepers of a legacy and the custodians of the largest living museum of works by the late renowned architect, Arthur Erickson.

A "living" museum, not only for the bustle of the cul-de-sac's forty-odd residents, but because of the "nature" of Erickson's designs; sheer walls of overgrown granite meeting walls of sheet glass, flying buttresses making rest-stops for flying birds.

"The thing I really love about this house is it feels like a tree house," says Désirée LaCas who, with husband Brian LaCas, lives in the neighbourhood's original show home, built in 1981.

In fact, from a quick street-level survey of the neighbourhood, it's not unusual to see mature red cedar trees punching through the floors of patios and garages, narrowly missing late-model luxury vehicles, and rising high through ceilings and into the canopy above. Not unusual, but not conspicuous either, as Erickson's trademark inside-out aesthetic nowhere marries his interiors and exteriors so seamlessly as within these woods and rock outcroppings.

That aesthetic is today celebrated as a staple of Erickson's work and that of his contemporaries like Ned Pratt and Ron Thom, who have since gained prominence collectively as pioneers of West Coast Modernism.

"It's like belonging to an auto club or an art collectors' club," Brian LaCas says of living in Erickson's Montiverdi Estates. "Everyone who lives here is a collector and has such an appreciation of Erickson's vision."

And now that club will open to the public — if only for a day. And only for those lucky enough to have already snapped up a ticket.

This Saturday, the owners of six significant West Coast Modern homes on the North Shore will open their doors to the architecturally inclined as part of the West Vancouver Museum's West Coast Modern [home tour](#).

A recently renovated 1951 Ned Pratt house, a 1958 North Vancouver Ron Thom, an eclectic remodeled 1958 Edward Poskitt residence, a "floating" 1967 Barclay MacLeod and two of Erickson's Montiverdi Estates make up the half-dozen homes on the tour.

"West Coast Modernism is a way of living," says tour coordinator and West Van Museum assistant curator Kiriko Watanabe. "It's how you live close to nature and the connection between interior and exterior is just so subtle that you don't even realize when you're in the house, you're so surrounded by nature."

One of the tour's finest examples of that kind of transparent interior space is just across from the LaCas's home in Montiverdi, at the cliffside abode of Chip Mitchell.

From the steep, fern-covered granite rock face of his backyard, Mitchell enjoys an almost unobstructed panoramic view of Vancouver Island and the Sunshine Coast — straight through the glassy heart of his home.

"The house has a very West Coast First Nations sense of spiritual B.C.," Mitchell says, looking out over the Strait of Georgia from his lovingly restored kitchen. "You see some of the Tudor and Mediterranean style homes around here and they just don't quite fit. These houses though, you just feel they were built to be right here in the rainforest."

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