What's so special about the Vancouver Special?

by

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Abstract

During the 1960s and 1970s, Vancouver sought to redevelop its image as a cosmopolitan city. In order to encourage new urban development, the Planning Department loosened zoning restrictions regarding new house construction in an attempt to make it more affordable, and to encourage increased densification. These changes allowed for a new housing style to emerge, which challenged the existing ideas of race, class and power embedded in the domestic landscape. This thesis examines how the construction of the Vancouver Special shaped the city's urban environment by further reinforcing the class distinctions between east and west side of the city. The affordability of the Vancouver Special allowed many new immigrants and working-class families to create a sense of place in the city. In 1984, the ending of approval of the construction of Vancouver Special became a way of limiting who should live in the city.

Keywords: Vancouver Special; Vancouver 1960s-1980s; urban planning; domestic architecture; home ownership

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List of Acronyms

AHPA	Architects House Plan Agency
CMHC	Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation from 1946-1979. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation from 1979-Present
COV	City of Vancouver
CVA	City of Vancouver Archives
DHA	Dominion Housing Act
FSQ	Floor Square Ratio
LAP	Local Area Planning
NHA	National Housing Act
NIP	Neighbourhood Improvement Program
RM-3	Apartment dwelling
RM-3A	Luxury apartment dwelling
RS-1	Single-family dwelling
RS-2	Single-family dwelling with a suite
RT-2	Two family dwelling
UEL	University Endowment Lands

Glossary

Clerestory Windows	Windows located above eye level in order to let in fresh air and/or light.
Dutch Gables	A small gable at the top of a hip roof.
Indigenous Architecture	A style of architecture that is designed for the particular climatic and landscape conditions in which it is built.
Plan-based Architecture	Mass-produced house designs, often found in catalogues. It is an affordable option for new house construction.

The Vancouver Special

2690 Trinity Street
Note: Photo by Jennifer Chutter

Chapter 1.

Introduction—Disrupting the neighbourhood aesthetic

In 1980, the Vancouver Planning Department undertook a study "in response to resident concerns" regarding the "high proportion of new houses [built] according to a very small range of designs which have been referred to as 'Vancouver Specials'."[1] The Planning Department defined the Vancouver Special as "a two-storey residence constructed at, or slightly below, the ground level on a concrete slab"[2] with "a mid-peaked, low sloping roof."[3] Though the exteriors of these houses has varied through the use of brick, real and artificial stone, textured stucco, and wood siding, and while later iterations included clerestory windows and Dutch gables, the basic rectangular shape maximizing the lot lines remained the same during the twenty years they were constructed.[4] Popular historian Michael Kluckner suggests changes to the roofline and size of the balcony were the only external variations, while the interiors of the houses remained relatively stable.[5] Between the mid-1960s and 1984, over 10,000 Vancouver Specials were built across the city, though they were predominately located east of Main

[1] Vancouver Planning Department, *The Vancouver Special* (Vancouver: Vancouver Planning Department, 1981), 1. According to a handwritten note at the bottom of the page, this report was only published as a draft report and was not approved by City Council as policy. Copies of the report were located in the Vancouver City Archives, as well as, the Vancouver Public Library.

[2] Vancouver Planning Department, *The Vancouver Special*, 2.

[3] ibid., 3.

[4] ibid., 3. Michael Klucker also discusses the changes in the exterior design of the Vancouver Special in *Vanishing Vancouver*.

[5] Michael Kluckner, *Vanishing Vancouver* (Vancouver: Whitecap, 2012), 123.

Street.[6] This high proportion of a single style of house design prompted the Planning department's decision to undertake its study of the phenomenon.

Figure 1.1. Different iterations of the Vancouver Special
Note. Photos by Jennifer Chutter

[6] I haven't been able to find a start date for the construction of the Vancouver Special. Though Michael Kluckner speculates construction began in the mid-1960s. The Vancouver Planning Department stopped approving them in 1984 because the animosity towards them was growing.

In the 1970s, the city had conducted surveys to gather residents' opinions regarding a by-law revision to allow for the construction of secondary suites in existing homes,[7] and regarding the development of False Creek.[8] However, this was the first time the city gathered opinions about a single, particular house design. The construction of legal secondary suites and the development of False Creek suggest that Vancouver, during the 1970s, was attempting to include a wider set of parameters for acceptable homemaking. Yet, the City wanted to regulate where in Vancouver secondary suites would be allowed and where multi-family dwellings would be constructed, indicating its desire to control changing densification rather than leaving it up to individual homeowners. With its potential to convert the lower floor to an additional suite, the Vancouver Special appeared to be aligned with the City's agenda for encouraging densification within the city. However, the fact that this particular design was not conceived of and regulated by the Planning Department exposes the complex relationship between urban planning and housing in creating the visual aesthetic of the city.

The visual aesthetic of the city, which is defined by both the built form as well as the natural environment, in turn shapes the city's ethos: its character and cultural heritage embedded in the built environment which informs the practices, customs or beliefs of the society. This underlying sentiment of acceptability is determined by the signs, signifiers, and signified elements of the built environment.[9] The built form comprises both the urban planning decisions surrounding street layouts, lot size, house setbacks, trees and street lighting, as well as the architectural references in the house itself. In Vancouver, rapid construction of industry, commerce and housing was a sign that the city was growing. The urban planning principles and designs, and many of the new buildings were embedded with signifiers of British cultural heritage, power and

[7] Pat Johnston and Derek Hayes, *Housing Residential Developments—Secondary Suites*, (Vancouver: City Planning Department, 1974). City of Vancouver Archives 119 G2 File 10

[8] *City Planning Department False Creek Team report*, (Vancouver: Vancouver Planning Department, 1973), City of Vancouver Archives S656 97-C-6 folder 10.

[9] I am drawing from the work of Ferdinand de Saussure to expand the definition of ethos. The house is the sign of settled society. Furthermore, its architectural features, lot, neighbourhood all signify socio-economic status and cultural heritage. The exterior details signified the status of the occupant of the home. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Roy Harris, (New York: Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2013).

socio-economic status. Vancouver drew on an older British architectural heritage in order to give the city an appearance of age, stability, and wealth. Many buildings with the same signifiers contributed to the formation of the ethos of the city. Once the signifiers become entrenched into the landscape through urban planning practices and architectural designs, it becomes harder to shift or change the ethos of the city.

Houses are often neglected in understandings of the city's ethos because discussions of urban planning[10] and architecture[11] tend to focus on the visual aesthetic and functional role of public, government or commercial buildings built across the city. Very rarely do they look at the importance of single-family dwellings in shaping the landscape of the city or at their functional role in housing people. Since single-family dwellings make up the dominant architectural form in the city, this thesis focuses on the Vancouver Special as a case study to examine how housing contributes to the visual aesthetic of the city, and how it challenges the embedded cultural values within the built form. Moreover, it is important to note that the architectural style of houses was not controlled or regulated by the Vancouver Planning Department until the mid-1980s. In 1984, the Planning department stopped approving plans for the continued construction of Vancouver Specials. While it was not clear from the planning documents I had access to as to why, Katharyne Mitchell's work sheds light on the changes in housing on the west side of Vancouver starting in the early 1980s.[12] She explores the growing animosity towards new house construction, which was seen as disrupting the British architectural aesthetic of west side neighbourhoods. These early houses were referred to as Vancouver Specials, because the design aesthetic and placement on the lot was similar though they were significantly larger due to the wealth of the new homeowners and the increased lot size found in west side neighbourhoods. By the late 1980s, these new

[10] Geographers David Ley, *The New Middle Class and the Remaking of the Central City*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) and Nicholas Blomley, *Unsettling the City: Urban Land and the Politics of Property*, (New York: Routledge, 2004) along with urban planner, John Punter, *The Vancouver Achievement: Urban Planning and Design* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003) all discuss the changing urban landscape of Vancouver.

[11] Harold Kalman has written extensively on the architecture of Canada. Harold Kalman and Robin Ward, *Exploring Vancouver: The Architectural Guide* (Vancouver, Douglas & McIntyre, 2012); it gives a brief architectural history of neighbourhoods and buildings across the city. It builds on previous work Kalman published with John Roal on Vancouver's neighbourhoods and house styles.

[12] Katharyne Mitchell, *Crossing the Neoliberal Line: Pacific Rim Migration and the Metropolis* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004).

constructions were referred to as “Monster Houses.” She posits that the reaction to new styles of housing actually reflected a growing fear towards the changing class and racial makeup of neighbourhoods with the increased number of immigrants from Hong Kong. Changes in housing were discussed extensively in newspapers at the time, which created the popular perception that the Vancouver Special had always been a hated architectural style.

The examination of the Vancouver Special reveals the legacy of two contrasting views of urban development in Vancouver,[13] and exposes the social construction of single-family dwellings’ reproducing British or American architectural aesthetics as the only acceptable form of home ownership. This thesis argues that the Vancouver Special is significant because it highlighted the fact that there were “two Vancouvers” as the split between west side and east side became more entrenched with neighbourhood aesthetics becoming distinctly different.. The ethos of the east side of the city was not dependent on a British architectural heritage reflecting the cultural heritage of homeowners, nor was it concerned with maintaining ideas of class and power in its built environment. The development of the west side of the city has been more heavily documented both in the archives as well as in the existing scholarship, which has perpetuated the idea that Vancouver has developed following a British colonial legacy. This idea is further reinforced with west side of the city dominating the visual portrayal of the city in tourism campaigns. Almost exclusively, images of the city of Vancouver feature the west side, the West End and downtown, and in an effort to showcase nature as more prominent and more impressive than the built environment, these images conveniently eliminate over the half the city from view. Houses or the buildings in downtown, if present at all, are tiny features in the foreground or are blurred images in the background. These angles of the city only give a slim view of the city as a whole. This thesis draws attention the underexplored development of the east side of the city,

[13] In 1905, the municipality of South Vancouver split along Ontario Street. The west side was renamed as Point Grey and the east side remained South Vancouver. The province formalized the division on January 1, 1908. The residents of Point Grey wanted to collect property taxes in order to fund urban infrastructure projects such as street lighting, gutters and curbing along city streets. Residents in South Vancouver, who were typically working class wanted to pay for improvements on an as needed basis. The two municipalities were agglomerated with Vancouver in 1929, but the visual differences between the west and east side of the city were not smoothed over.

and how it differed from the west side thereby exposing a class-based narrative that has dominated the current discussion of Vancouver's urban development.

Studying the Vancouver Special from a historical perspective draws together the political and technical uses of the land in the city. It also allows us to trace the changes of the visual form of the city in order to understand the social changes in Vancouver during the 1960s and the 1970s. Historicizing the Vancouver Special underscores how an earlier visual culture created by urban planning decisions and architectural choices represented an aesthetic corresponding to the preferences of the city's middle- and upper-class citizens of British cultural background. A design that did not fit into the existing landscape was perceived as a challenge to the normalization of British colonial ideas of class embedded into the built form. The Vancouver Special disrupted the dominant narrative of homeownership because it lacked architectural references familiar to those who criticized it. Beyond the Vancouver Special's challenge to the existing visual landscape on the west side of the city, the house itself became a tangible marker of working-class material culture. This was reinforced by the fact that it was not constructed by a large development company, or through municipal, provincial or federal government funding, but rather by small-scale builders. Unlike the development of the west side of the city, which was largely regulated by the CPR and the province, the visual landscape on the east side of the city changes as a result of individual home owners and small-scale builders constructing houses that appealed to arriving immigrants to the city. Since single-family dwellings make up the dominant architectural form in the city, I seek to reverse the lens through which the city's development is typically considered by looking through the Vancouver Special to explore wider ideas of urban development, the visual language of the city and the changing ideas of homeownership.

Since houses are owned by individuals, but are also part of neighbourhoods, they emphasize the duality between place and space within the city. Drawing on Yi-Fu Tuan's definition of place, "as an object in which one can dwell," and space, "as the distances and expanses that separate or link places," houses encompass both the individual dwelling, that becomes a place, as well as contribute to the larger visual

aesthetics of the city, which in turn defines it as a space.[14] Urban planning policies and architectural movements are concerned with spatial practices. Through these practices, Tuan suggests, "the built environment clarifies social roles and relations."[15] Home ownership was encouraged as part of place-making practice, both in Vancouver, and in North America in general; it represented stability and permanence. The Vancouver Special allowed many immigrants to participate in the narrative of home ownership, while at the same time providing flexibility within a single design for homeowners to finish the basement either as a rental unit or a suite for their extended family. The Vancouver Special created a new set of social roles and relations because prior to the changes in zoning bylaws, rental suites were illegal and living with extended families was not considered a dominant social value.. As a result of the construction of the Vancouver Special, neighbourhoods on the east side helped to increase the rental market and reflected multi-generational living; thereby challenging the existing definition of single-family dwelling. While home ownership is still presented as an ideal to ascribe to and a way of creating a sense of place within the city, the fact that the new home constructions were representative of different ideas of family and place-making is important. The Vancouver Special represents a tension between the individual homeowner's desire for place and the City of Vancouver's desire to shape the development of space across the city to reflect middle-class British aesthetics and values.

During the 1960s and 1970s, two narratives of home ownership came to the fore in Vancouver. On the west side of the city, housing prices were rising and as a result new homeowners were searching for more affordable housing in the suburbs. In order to maintain a stable population on the west side of the city, several neighbourhoods were redeveloped with higher-end or luxury multi-family dwellings designed by architects and constructed by large development companies. These new developments helped to perpetuate the middle-class narrative of home ownership, while at the same time promoting a new alternative for living in the city. Despite the declarations of rising unaffordability in the city in newspapers and magazines, the east side of the city

[14] Tuan, Yi-Fu, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 12.

[15] Tuan, *Space and Place*, 102.

experienced a housing boom. These newly built houses, often purchased by working-class or lower-middle-class families, were a way to enter the housing market. Individuals would often buy a double lot and demolish the existing house in order to construct two 'Specials' side-by-side, representing "a significant consideration for newcomers with limited capital."[16] This thesis suggests that the Vancouver Special came to represent a new way for working-class, previously racially marginalized groups, and immigrant families to participate in public life of the city through ownership. The study of the Vancouver Special complicates the existing narratives that middle-class British homeowners were predominately responsible for Vancouver's urbanization, and that neighbourhoods across the city were racially exclusive. Vancouver Specials could be built easily and efficiently, thereby allowing new owners to create a sense of home and belonging to the city quickly; however, I want to challenge the existing claim that their proliferation was solely due to economic considerations. This dynamic sheds new light on our understanding of a city in which little research has explored the role of homeowners in shaping the visual aesthetics of neighbourhoods across the city. .

This research draws on a theoretical framework laid out by philosophers Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau.[17] Lefebvre suggests that too much emphasis is placed on who produces the space and what they are producing rather than "uncovering the social relationships (including class relationships) that are latent in spaces."[18] Lefebvre argues that class struggles are inscribed in space and are reflected in the production of space. Buildings are embedded with signs or architectural references. These references become signifiers of larger ideas of race and class. The Vancouver Special, predominately purchased by working-class families, changed the visual aesthetics of neighbourhoods across the east side of the city. The exterior design of the Vancouver Special was called into question with the undertaking of the survey in Marpole and Hastings-Sunrise, but there was little recognition of how the combination of changing by-laws and a revised approval process fostered the spread of the this particular house.

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[16] Lance Berelowitz, *Dream City: Vancouver and the Global Imagination*, (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2005), 196.

[17] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1991) and Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life Vol. 1*, trans. Steven F. Rendall, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

[18] Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 90.

Lefebvre suggests urbanization becomes the focus of urban planners and architects, and as a result any construction that falls outside of those two domains is considered a sickness that needs to be cured.[19] In Vancouver, it was the Vancouver Special itself that embodied the problem or the sickness needing to be cured, not the process that led to its approval. The focus on the exterior aesthetics resulted in the interior functionality of the house being ignored. Certeau's work helps us understand how the space of the individual house, located within the wider area of the city, becomes a home, imbued with the more personal characteristics of place. Certeau argues that people use houses in interesting and important ways, which cannot be easily determined by an architectural plan, which allows them to create a sense of home. In the Vancouver Special, the lower floor had only roughed in walls, which allowed families to use the space in a way that was personally meaningful. What was an in-law suite for one family could be more bedrooms for a larger family with more children. The flexibility of the interior space allowed working-class families to develop a sense of place within the city.

Despite the fact that there were over 10,000 of this particular house design constructed between mid-1960s and 1984, there exists very little scholarship on the Vancouver Special. Specialists of Vancouver's urban history do acknowledge the Vancouver Special's mark on the landscape, but the intersection of planning, architectural heritage and ideas of home ownership is neither explicitly nor evenly developed.[20] Rather than addressing the changes in zoning and agendas for neighbourhood development that created the conditions in which the house design proliferated, or asking why people wanted to purchase this house plan in particular, these studies instead focus on the lack of architectural aesthetics of the house. The focus on the exterior details as the primary commentary on the home fails to acknowledge their role in the development of the city and the importance of how the visual landscape of the city shifted away from a British aesthetic as a result of their construction, thereby disrupting existing spatial practices. This scholarship also fails to acknowledge that some people preferred this house to others, and that by purchasing it,

[19] Lefebvre, 99.

[20] John Punter, *The Vancouver Achievement*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003), Lance Berelowitz, *Dream City: Vancouver and the Global Imagination*, (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2005). Kenneth Terriss, "Stucco" in *Vancouver Matters*, James Eidse, Mari Fujita, Joey Giamo and Christa Min, eds, (Vancouver: Blueimprint, 2008).

new homeowners were able to create a sense of place within the city. The development of the east side of the city has not been problematized enough in the existing scholarship on Vancouver's urban development. As a result, the differences between the urban development of the west and east side of the city are not recognized as telling two unique stories. This thesis seeks to demonstrate that the Vancouver Special is an important part of Vancouver's spatial and place-making practices because it offers a counter-narrative to the role of architects and development companies establishing the visual aesthetics of neighbourhoods. My research highlights the underexplored role of working-class families played in the role of settling the city, and their lack of adherence to the dominant British colonial narrative embedded in urban development practices.

In his discussion of Vancouver's spatial practices, urban planner John Punter suggests that, "it was not so much the preponderance of secondary suites in these newer houses—the so-called Vancouver Specials—that provoked a reaction from neighbours as their sheer size and ugliness."[21] Punter argues that their functionality superseded any architectural detailing and character found in earlier Craftsman styles of houses and in doing so fails to explicitly address the cultural assumptions behind favouring the Craftsman style of house, nor does he acknowledge the importance of functionality for homeowners. Drawing from Lefebvre, the "size and ugliness" can be viewed as a disruption to the existing signs and signifiers embedded in housing constructed in Vancouver, prior to the mid-1960s. Houses, such as the Craftsman, as Punter suggests, represented the sign of acceptable homemaking. Architectural historians Harold Kalman and Robin Ward suggest the Craftsman was "the favourite middle- and working-class house after WWI" and it proliferated across the west side of the city, especially the Kitsilano neighbourhood.[22] Viewed from this perspective, the construction of the Vancouver Special reflects a noteworthy disruption in the urban environment because the existing signs and signifiers were no longer repeated in a new form of construction, even though the repetition of a single design remained the same. The lack of regulation around the approval of single-family dwelling construction meant new homeowners in Vancouver were able to purchase and inhabit a house that could be

[21] John Punter, *The Vancouver Achievement*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003), 118.

[22] Harold Kalman and Robin Ward, *Exploring Vancouver: The Architectural Guide*, (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2012), 210.

finished in order to meet their needs rather than conforming to the existing architectural styles.

Punter glosses over the fact that "initially, they were constructed by small-scale house builders on cheaper lots in the eastside of the city."[23] In celebrating the work of large developers working together with the Planning Department, Punter's work overlooks the significance of small-scale builders radically altering the urban landscape by constructing homes to meet buyer demands. His assessment of the Vancouver Special fails to acknowledge that they were built for people, who were actively choosing that particular style. Nor does he address how the inclusion of secondary suites changed the definition of a single-family dwelling. By examining the intersection of changes in urban planning policies and in architectural design, this thesis challenges the assumption that the low construction costs sparked the proliferation of the Vancouver Special. It argues instead that the Vancouver Special has been neglected from urban planning discussions because neither the Planning Department nor a large development company were actively involved in their construction. As a result, this particular housing form, despite being so prevalent on the city's landscape, does not fit into conventional narratives of Vancouver's growth and development.

Like Punter, architect Lance Berelowitz posits the economical construction costs were the driving force behind the Vancouver Special's popularity with new homebuyers. Berelowitz also suggests that the house design "suited the needs of many new immigrants, whose concepts of the extended family often were quite different from the traditional North American nuclear family."[24] What Berelowitz fails to explore is the significance of how the Vancouver Special was able to accommodate a changing view of family by allowing new immigrants to create a sense of place within the city they had recently adopted. Berelowitz instead suggests that the Vancouver Special was a response to the "restrictive local zoning laws and rising demand for cheap housing."[25] However, zoning laws, with regards to housing, had been in place in Vancouver since

[23] Punter, *The Vancouver Achievement*, 119.
[24] Berelowitz, *Dream City*, 196.
[25] Berelowitz., 196.

1922.[26] Furthermore, zoning had become less restrictive in order to encourage new construction.[27] The rising demand for cheap housing was a west side phenomenon, as there were fewer lots available for new construction and existing homes on large lots were becoming out of reach for average middle-class home owners. His argument runs counter to that of architect Kenneth Terriss, who traces the impulse to build houses economically in Vancouver to the 1930s, making it anything but a new phenomenon in the 1960s. For Terriss, the significance of the Vancouver Special rested in the design's ability to maximize the regulatory limits of zoning in order to provide a living space that was almost three times the size of post-war housing while still remaining economical.

While Terriss' work does explain the significance of the Vancouver Special from an architectural point of view, he does not connect it to other architectural movements across the city, specifically West Coast Modernism or modernist architectural movements in general.[28] According to Rhordhi Liscombe, the Modernist architectural movement sought to create a more egalitarian society through design.[29] The promotion of modernist planning would disrupt the class-based visual landscape of the city. The affordability of the Vancouver Special along with the flexibility of the design places it alongside modernist designs. However, the Vancouver Special has been ignored from architectural discussions because it is considered plan-based architecture, designed by a builder, rather than an architect.[30] While Berelowitz's work does suggest the

[26] Richard Harris, *Creeping Conformity: How Canada Became Suburban, 1900-1960*,,(Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 124 These initial zoning laws were put into place in order to ensure that a the neighbourhood aesthetic found on the west side of the city, at the time called Point Grey, was maintained. They ensured that only single-family dwellings were constructed and that industrial or commercial development was restricted to the south slope near the Fraser River. When Point Grey and South Vancouver were amalgamated with Vancouver in 1929, these zoning laws were carried over.

[27] In 1974, the City removed the restriction of houses needing front stairs in order to get to the front door. This meant that houses could be built with the front door at ground level. This change eliminated extra construction costs in labour and materials, but it also altered the visual aesthetics of the house and the streetscape. Kenneth Terriss, "Stucco" in *Vancouver Matters*, James Eidse, Mari Fujita, Joey Giamo and Christa Min, eds, (Vancouver: Blueimprint, 2008), 124.

[28] Terriss, "Stucco," 116-127.

[29] Rhorhi Liscombe, *The New Spirit: Modern Architecture in Vancouver, 1938-1963*, (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1997).

[30] Peggy Schofield, ed., *The Story of Dunbar: Voices of a Vancouver Neighbourhood* (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2007), 171.

Vancouver Special reflects "one body of domestic architectural work that was (and remains) genuinely original," he does not elaborate on the significance of this in shaping the visual aesthetics of the city.[31] Instead, he goes on to celebrate the more well-known "indigenous style…known as West Coast Modernism," thereby shifting the focus back on to architect driven changes to the visual landscape.[32] Through the lens of the Vancouver Special the tension between architect-designed houses and plan-based houses and their role in shaping the visual landscape is revealed. The emphasis placed on architect-designed houses overshadows other forms of place-making in the city and continues to promote the middle- to upper-class narrative of urban development found on the west side of the city. My thesis attempts to draw attention to the class divide in the city, by highlighting the housing styles found on the east side.

Not only is the Vancouver Special important to study because of its reflection of architectural modernist principles, it is also architecturally significant as an indigenous form of architecture. An indigenous form of architecture is one that occurs in a specific location and is dependent on the surrounding climate and topography to support its design. Both Berelowitz and Terriss recognise the Vancouver Special as indigenous to Canada's West Coast, the latter explains how the natural topography and climate inspired its unique design features.[33] Their view, however, runs counter to that of historical geographers Peter Ennals and Deryck W. Holdsworth, who argue the history of plan-based construction has prevented an indigenous form of architecture from

[31] Berelowitz, *Dream City*, 197.

[32] Berelowitz, 197.

[33] Lance Berelowitz, *Dream City: Vancouver and the Global Imagination*, (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2005). Kenneth Terriss, "Stucco" in *Vancouver Matters*, James Eidse, Mari Fujita, Joey Giamo and Christa Min, eds, (Vancouver: Blueimprint, 2008). Terriss' work explains how the topology and climate of the city makes this particular design a local phenomenon. The mild winters allow for a shallow basement as only eighteen inches needs to be removed in order to pour the foundation. The lack of snow also allows for a flattened roofline. Terriss argues that there were several precursors to the Vancouver Special in the history of urbanization in the city, but they failed to maximize the living space and the lots laid out in the city.

developing at all in Canada.[34] As this thesis will show, the Vancouver Special represents an important change in the development of housing in both Canada more generally, and Vancouver, specifically, because previous plans that were purchased by working- and middle-class residents did not account for the distinct topography or climate of Vancouver and were reflective of popular domestic styles found in more established cities.[35] Little has been written in architectural history about the homes in which the majority of people live because they are pattern-based rather than designed for an individual owner by a trained architect.[36] Because of its perceived lack of aesthetic quality and its pattern plan rather than unique forms, the Vancouver Special is rarely discussed in architecture books or in architectural history texts. Yet, its unique story and distinct functionality tell us a lot about shifting perceptions of place an space in a time of accelerated change in Vancouver.

Architecture historian Harold Kalman points out that Canada has tended to use pattern books, predominantly from the United States, but also from Britain, for its domestic architecture.[37] The Vancouver Special falls in line with the history of Canadian domestic architecture because it is a plan purchased by individuals; however, it is a completely localized housing phenomenon found only in Greater Vancouver and does not have an existing architectural heritage. The history of architecture frequently

[34] Peter Ennals and Deryk W. Holdsworth, *Homeplace: The Making of the Canadian Dwelling over Three Centuries*, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1998). In an earlier work, co-authored with Joan Simon, Holdsworth does acknowledge the Vancouver Special as a having "a slightly different appearance" compared to the growth of housing across Canada; however, there is no acknowledgement of the climatic and geographical reasons for these visual differences, and instead it is attributed to "sidestepping zoning by-laws." Deryk W. Holdsworth and Joan Simon "Housing Form and Use of Domestic Space" in *House, Home and Community: Progress in Housing Canadians 1945-1986*, ed. John R. Miron (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 195.

[35] Ennals and Holdsworth argue that grand architectural styles found in Spain, Britain and Southern United States were adopted because their opulence created a form of "pedigree" in the New World. These house styles were often built on a smaller scale in Vancouver. Working class houses tended to borrow from Californian designs, either the Craftsman or the bungalow.

[36] Rhordi Liscombe has written about the West Coast Modernist architectural movement in Vancouver. The work of Arthur Erickson, B.C. Binning, Ron Thom, Ned Pratt and Fred Hollingsworth have been featured in a variety of retrospectives of their domestic space design at the Museum of Vancouver and the West Vancouver Art Gallery.

[37] Harold Kalman, *A History of Canadian Architecture Vol. 2*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1994), 616. These house plans could be purchased by individuals and often came with the required instructions and materials to build them with relative ease. By 1919, the Eaton's catalogue carried twelve patterns for working and middle class homes.

discusses the unique and the distinct both in public buildings and private dwellings. The homes that are featured have often been commissioned by people who had social, economic or political importance and typically reflect the work of a specific architect. The result is that much architectural history is written about the homes of the upper-classes. While some architectural history discusses working-class rental housing in reference to maximizing space and on co-op housing or state sponsored housing,[38] there is a distinct gap in the literature when it comes to middle-class or working-class single-family dwellings. However, the Vancouver Special's lack of distinguishing features did not in any way diminish its popularity among new home owners as the interior design of the plan had functional room layouts and also allowed for a flexibility in how the family could finish the lower floor. While the elimination of exterior details did make it more economical to construct, the significance of this design forging a new style needs to be discussed because of how the Vancouver Special has visually changed the aesthetic of the broader urban landscape.

This lack of attention to formal considerations reflects an equally significant gap in the scholarship on housing and home ownership in Vancouver. As historian Robert McDonald shows for early Vancouver, class consideration shaped differences in housing between the west side, which tended to draw middle- to upper-class families, and the east side of the city, which tended to draw working-class families. McDonald argues that land speculators, wealthy elites and business owners purchased land and soon established both political and economic connections to the city through home ownership.[39] His work illustrates how house size, design and location became indicators of wealth and status in Vancouver. Living in detached houses was a marker of a

[38] Jill Wade, *Houses for All: The Struggle for Social Housing in Vancouver, 1919-1950*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994); Deryck W. Holdworth and Joan Simon "Housing form and use of Domestic Space" in *House, Home and Community: Progress in Housing Canadians 1945-1986*, ed. John R. Miron, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993); Sean Purdy, "Scaffolding Citizenship: Housing Reform and Nation Formation in Canada, 1900-1950" in *Contesting Canadian Citizenship*, eds. Robert Adamoski, Dorothy E. Chunn, and Robert Menzies, (Peterborough: Broadview Press, LTD, 2002).

[39] Robert A. J. McDonald, *Making Vancouver: class, status and social boundaries, 1863-1913*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1996). McDonald's work establishes the ethos of home ownership developed early in Vancouver's history because there was plenty of land and lumber was abundant, which made house construction relatively quick and easy. This ethos continued in Vancouver despite economic depressions in 1913 and the 1930s.

respectable family.[40] With the extension of the interurban line into the suburbs of South Vancouver and Point Grey, it was easy for newly arriving immigrants to purchase an affordable lot within walking distance to transit in order to get to jobs downtown.[41] McDonald's work is significant for understanding the importance of home ownership to immigrants arriving in Vancouver, but also for how class differences became embedded in the urban landscape both in the planning practices and in architectural styles. McDonald's work illustrates the early class differences between the west and east side of the city and how they were represented in the visual landscape. My thesis illustrates that these early class differences became more entrenched in the landscape as the city continued to grow and develop. These differences complicate our understanding of the city because the urban development of the east side did not hold onto a British design aesthetic, nor did it seek to replicate the socio-economic and cultural homogeneity found in many west side neighbourhoods. However, the city was cohesive in its promotion of home ownership as the dominant narrative of place-making.

Geographer Deryck W. Holdsworth furthers McDonald's argument by stating that house ownership was conflated with ideas of home and domesticity.[42] He argues this narrative of home ownership of a single family dwelling was particularly appealing to working class families who could not afford to own a home in England and saw Vancouver as a city full of opportunities because of its relatively low land costs and affordable building materials.[43] Holdsworth connects home ownership to ideas of citizenship, "since those who had no stake in society could not be expected to work within the social and economic rules of those that did."[44] The work of McDonald and Holdsworth illuminate how class differences became embedded in the urban environment based on the styles of houses people chose to construct. Holdsworth argues that advertisers promoted a "correct" style of house for a Vancouver home

[40] McDonald, *Making Vancouver*, 23.

[41] McDonald, 193.

[42] Deryck W. Holdsworth, "House and Home in Vancouver: Images of West Coast Urbanism, 1886-1929" in *Canadian City: Essays in Urban and Social History*, ed. Gilbert Stetler. (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1991),192.

[43] Holdsworth, "House and Home in Vancouver," 192.

[44] Holdsworth, 193.

dweller, which was largely based on English designs.[45] After 1929, very little home construction took place in Vancouver for close to two decades. As a result, the English design aesthetic still dominated the visual landscape of the west side of the city in the post-war period. However, Holdsworth's work does not indicate that the east side of the city was not constructed based on the same adherence to English designs; houses tended to be smaller and simpler in detailing.

While her research mostly focuses on the lack of affordable social and rental housing, historian Jill Wade expands on Holdsworth's scholarship by explaining how home ownership remained a deeply rooted ideal until the 1950s. Wade sheds an important light on the hesitancy on the part of Vancouverites to adopt housing styles produced by the Dominion Housing Act[46] because they did not want "a square box, two stories high," but instead wanted houses that resembled the California bungalow or the Tudor revival style because those designs were visually connected to West Coast tastes.[47] This illustrates the attitudes residents had regarding preferred house designs, and possibly why the Vancouver Special was singled out in the survey conducted in 1980. Her work further informs the discussion of the Vancouver Special because of citizens' conflicting views regarding the development of secondary suites in homes during the 1930s-1940s, and continuing into the post-war period. Secondary suites provided much needed rental income for struggling homeowners, but also disrupted the single-family dwelling aesthetics with the inclusion of non-family members within the home. Her research helps to inform why the construction of secondary suites within the home remained a concern. The study of the Vancouver Special reveals the legacy of long-standing debates in the city of what makes an acceptable single-family dwelling.

There is a gap in the existing scholarship on the development of housing in Vancouver, as Wade's work stops at the 1950s. Little has been written on Vancouver's housing development during the 1960s and 1970s. Geographer Kathryne Mitchell

[45] ibid., 202.

[46] The Dominion Housing Act (DHA) was established in 1935 to provide mortgage assistance to owners and builders. It mostly benefitted middle-class homeowners by providing low interest on mortgage loans. The program was implemented more on the east coast of Canada.

[47] Jill Wade, *Houses for All: the struggle for social housing in Vancouver, 1919-1950* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994), 74.

explores changes in domestic architecture and home ownership beginning in the late 1980s. Her work is important for understanding how the reaction towards changing styles of architecture and the surrounding garden in Vancouver revealed fears and anxiety about not only the cultural makeup of the city, but also the declining visual representation of English architectural and landscaping traditions. Unpacking the Vancouver Special becomes a bridge between the earlier work of McDonald, Holdsworth and Wade and Mitchell because it connects the importance of home ownership as a way of achieving status in the city, and how changing status of home owners became threatening to a largely Anglo population living in Vancouver. The construction of the Vancouver Special, while considerably larger than the existing housing, reflected a similar design aesthetic to other houses constructed on the east side of the city. The differences between the west and east side of the city became more obvious once there was little land left to develop, and as a result the Vancouver Special stood in stark contrast to the deeply entrenched visual aesthetic found on the west side of the city. These differences also highlighted the shifting signs and signifiers attached to the Vancouver Special because larger houses indicated wealth and status, yet it was owned by working class families. Furthermore, situating a larger house on a smaller lot with little surrounding landscaping revealed a movement away from the English garden aesthetic. This thesis suggests that the changing spatial practices on the east side during the 1960s and 1970s represents a shift in the signs and signifiers embedded in domestic architecture, which indicated class, wealth and ethnic background, while at the same time perpetuating homeownership as the dominant narrative of belonging in the city.

The discussion of housing in Vancouver also falls outside of the urban-suburban divide in the existing scholarship. While the municipalities of Point Grey and South Vancouver were considered suburbs of the city of Vancouver until 1929, by the 1960s both were closely connected to the urban core bringing the discussion of further urban development to focus on issues of densification. This poses a unique challenge in discussing the Vancouver Special because the suburban aesthetic of single-family dwellings was protected through zoning restrictions established in the 1920s; however, the city of Vancouver was exploring ways in which to expand the housing density, which in turn disrupted the visual aesthetics of established single-family dwelling

neighbourhoods. Historians Christopher Armstrong and Richard Harris both discuss suburban development as a result of the baby boom. They both focus on the factors that led to the homogenization of the suburban landscape, specifically in the post-war period.[48] Armstrong's work gives a detailed description of changes in post-war housing in Toronto. Harris' work provides not only a wider scope of suburbanization in Canada, but also insight into the differences between the urban development of Point Grey and South Vancouver. However, the Vancouver Special sits slightly outside both of these bodies of research. The homogeneity of the Vancouver Special and its proliferation appear to parallel many suburban developments across Canada; however, unlike the majority of suburban developments, this particular design was not constructed by a single developer over large tracts of land. The Vancouver Special was infill housing on empty lots in existing neighbourhoods or as a result of the subdivision of double lots, which made the construction of two identical lots side-by-side economical. While the design itself is relatively homogeneous, the repetition of this single design was a result of individual homeowners making the choice to purchase this particular house plan, and small-scale builders constructing them in order to satisfy buyer demands rather than the construction of a single developer, like many post-war suburban developments were. As a result, it is difficult to draw parallels to other urban or suburban trends across Canada. This unique housing phenomenon offers insight into how homeowners as well as small-scale builders shaped the aesthetics of neighbourhoods in the city.

Changes in neighbourhoods began with early construction of the Vancouver Special, in the mid-1960s, but rapid building occurred in the 1970s. This puts the construction of it outside of the domain of the baby boom, and the suburban development that occurred in the immediate post-war period. While historian Doug Osram claims children of the baby boom were dropping away from the aesthetic of the house and garden, his research proves limited in scope in gaining an understanding of changes in housing in the post-war period in Vancouver.[49] Osram focuses on changes to

[48] Christopher Armstrong, *Making Toronto Modern: Architecture and Design 1895-1975*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), and Richard Harris, *Creeping Conformity: how Canada became suburban 1900-1960*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

[49] Doug Osram, *Born at the Right Time: a history of the baby-boom generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 312.

the west side of Vancouver rather than encompassing the city as a whole. His lack of recognition that urban development on the east side was different is significant because it perpetuates the dominant narrative of west side spatial practices as the norm for Vancouver's urbanization. The east side of the city, as a result, is under-explored topic in the research. The spatial differences between the west and east side of the city was a result of the division of the municipality of South Vancouver in 1908 into Point Grey and South Vancouver. Homeowners in the municipality of Point Grey wanted to raise property taxes to invest in building urban infrastructure, such as, paving roads, curbing and street lighting, whereas homeowners in South Vancouver wanted to invest in improvements as an as needed basis. As this thesis will show, however, the class divide in Vancouver, which was established with the creation of the two municipalities in 1908, was never smoothed over through the use of an master plan or greater municipal investment in the east side to ameliorate differences once the municipalities amalgamated in 1929. Working-class families enacted place-making practices in distinct ways on Vancouver's east side meaning that theories applied to development of the west side are often not appropriate for discussing patterns on the east side of the city.

Furthermore, exploring changes in housing in Vancouver offers a counter-narrative to what is normally written about the 1960s and 1970s in Canada.[50] The historiography of the period has tended to focus on dissent, turmoil and change on people who dropped out of the mainstream of society or opted out of a traditional lifestyle. These narratives of the time period illustrate middle-class Anglo-Canadian society wrestling with ideas of identity, belonging and place-making, which all tie into wider ideas of citizenship. My research, however demonstrates that people were also

[50] Stuart Henderson explores a small local period of tension in his discussion of Yorkville in the 1960s. In *Making the Scene: Yorkville and Hip Toronto in the 1960s*, Henderson explores the clash between the day scene of the upper-class shoppers with the night scene of the artists, bikers, and drug users within a small neighbourhood in Toronto. While Henderson's discussion falls heavily on the side of the night scene rather than offering a more balanced discussion of how Yorkville was a contested neighbourhood, he does capture the tension of middle-class values being subverted with the rising counterculture movements, but also speaks to ideas of who belongs in the neighbourhood and subtly asserts property owners have greater political, economic and social voice in shaping how neighbourhood space is used. Sean Mills, in *The Empire Within*, explores a local period of tension in the 1960s in his discussion of the political activism that emerged in Montreal. These activists adopted the ideas of decolonization in the third world to ignite an anti-imperialist and anti-colonial resistance to what they considered the oppressive federal and provincial power. Mills' work illustrates how ideas of belonging and citizenship are central to the discussion of the 1960s-70s in Canada.

yearning for stability and integration into society through home ownership. Yet, within the historiography of the 1960s and 1970s, Vancouver, the third largest city in Canada, appears to be missing. Historian Lawrence Aronsen comes the closest in his work *City in Love: Vancouver in the 1960s.* Aronsen's work, though is written for a popular audience and does not offer a rigorous analysis or a close analytical framework. He explores the idea of counterculture in Vancouver discussing the construction and conflicting ideas belonging within the city. He portrays Vancouver as a city living on the edge; it is dynamic and pushes the boundaries of change, both social and politically. Yet, during this same period the Vancouver Special was being built, representing a view of the city that counters the narrative of turmoil and tension, as houses indicate permanence and stability. Home ownership was actively encouraged by the federal, provincial and municipal government as a way to encourage stability within cities. Working-class families and immigrants purchased the Vancouver Special indicating that their needs were different than the middle-class Anglo-narrative of the time period that is frequently told. Yet, the Vancouver Special did quietly disrupt the visual narrative of the city both in its application of urban planning restrictions and its architectural features.

In order to deconstruct how the Vancouver Special disrupted the visual narrative of the city, I split my thesis into three chapters. Following Lefebvre's ideas of the roles of urban planners and architects play in the production of space, Chapter two discuss the urban planning decisions developing and regulating the visual language of the city.and chapter three discusses the architectural landscape of Vancouver. Chapter four draws on Certeau's ideas of place-making and examines the role homeowners played in changing the visual landscape of the city.

I started my research with the Vancouver Special survey conducted by the Vancouver Department of Planning in 1980, and published as a draft report in 1981. From there I tried to trace the backstory of how the design of the Vancouver Special became a "problem" worthy of study. The letters of complaint of the Vancouver Special referenced in the draft report, however, were not part of the archives. Without the letters, I had no way of knowing what was actually being complained about, how many complaints were received and where in the city these complaints were from. This required me to look at documents written by people in position of power in order to read

against the grain in order to construct an understanding of urban development in Vancouver. I read through the city clerk's records, urban planning policy documents as well as Local Area Planning reports. The urban planning policies were focussed on densifying neighbourhoods, increasing the rental market, encouraging families to remain and promoting immigration. In chapter two, I show how the Vancouver Special met the city's desire for families to remain in the city and for increased densification, but it did not meet city's approval because it challenged the class-based narrative of housing size and its relationship to the surrounding garden. I position the Vancouver Special within the existing spatial narratives of the city in order to illustrate how it used the changing by-laws to maximize the floor square ratio (FSQ). This allowed for two families to live in a house in neighbourhoods zoned for single-family dwellings. The city instead favoured the development of luxury townhouses and apartments on the west side of the city in order to ensure real estate values remained high and middle-class homeowners continued to live in the city. The construction of the Vancouver Special highlighted the visual differences between the east and west side of the city. This reveals two contrasting visual narratives in the city's urban development.

In chapter three, I discuss how the Vancouver Special altered the visual landscape of the city with its lack of architectural references. This specific design exposes the social construction of the signifiers embedded into the previous forms of housing across the city. The Vancouver Special highlights the differences between the east side and west side visual culture as well as the legacy of the CPR controlling the visual aesthetics of the domestic landscape. The CPR established the legacy of architect-designed houses with the land-use covenants in the neighbourhood of Shaughnessy. Other neighbourhoods mimicking the aesthetic established in Shaughnessy normalized ideas of class and power reflected in domestic architecture. In order to gain an understanding of the architectural climate of Vancouver, I read *Western Homes and Living Magazine* and *Vancouver Life* magazine. These two magazines featured the work of architects and discussed ideas of how the city should develop architecturally. I show that despite being maligned as a design, the Vancouver Special reflects many of the ideas that architects were discussing in the 1960s and 1970s. The magazines featured new construction on the west side of the city, the West End, and the North Shore of Vancouver. The lack of attention paid to the east side of the city indicates

a desire to maintain and popularize the existing class based visual narrative found on the west side of the city.

In chapter four, I discuss how this particular design fostered a sense of belonging and attachment to place for homeowners. The Vancouver Special was an affordable housing option for many working-class families and immigrants to the east side of the city.. However, there were rising fears, presented in newspapers and magazines, about the perceived lack of affordability of housing on the west side, but the suburbs and higher-end multi-family dwellings were presented as an alternative rather than suggesting the more affordable neighbourhoods on the east side of the city. The language of home ownership further reinforced the class lines in the city. In order to gain an understanding of what homeowners were concerned about, I examined the Local Area Planning Committee reports. From these documents, I show that many east-side neighbourhoods wanted this particular design within their neighbourhoods because it ensured families remained in the neighbourhood. However, the large secondary suite challenged the class perceptions of acceptable single-family dwelling living. Despite the visual differences between the west and east side of the city, home ownership was the preferred option for housing on both sides of the city. The construction of the Vancouver Special illustrated that homeownership on the east side did not reflect a British colonial heritage. This challenged the dominant narrative of the west side of the city, which conflated home ownership with British middle-class urban planning policies and architectural plans together as the acceptable form of place-making in the city. I acknowledge that conducting interviews to determine what motivated homeowners to purchase a Vancouver Special would have enhanced my thesis; however, I hoped my archival sources would reveal some of this information. This did not prove to be true, but in order to complete my MA in a timely fashion, I needed to work with what I could glean from the Local Area Planning reports.

Finally in the conclusion, I explore the position of the Vancouver Special within the current stories of Vancouver's urban development. I suggest that place-making narrative, established by working-class and immigrant families, is being co-opted by middle-classes families searching for an "authentic" form of architecture. While the house is still marketed as an economical and flexible housing choice, its place-making

narrative is slowly being erased as the landscape becomes increasingly homogenized both racially and socio-economically. The Vancouver Special is losing its status of a tangible marking of working-class material culture as housing prices continue to rise in the city.

Chapter 2.

Urban Planning—Keeping the city free of "architectural harlots"

> "Already the city is big. It may soon be out of control. I ask myself if it can be saved by thinking small."—Warnett Kennedy[51]

Urban planner Warnett Kennedy's monthly column in the opening pages of *Western Homes and Living* magazine revealed his passionate thoughts about urban planning issues in Vancouver. While most of the feature articles focused on remodelling suggestions and architect-designed houses, the inclusion of his column indicates that the metropolitan form was of interest to the magazine's middle-class readers. After extensive construction in domestic dwellings, both privately and federally directed, Vancouver, by the mid-1960s, was nearing the end of a period of rapid growth in its built environment. However, Kennedy's call for expansive thinking captured the need for a new metropolitan plan for the city of Vancouver to cope with the economic downturn of the early 1960s, the rising population, and the shifting urban fabric to a post-industrial economy.[52] As industry relocated into the suburbs of Richmond and Surrey, due to cheaper land costs, the urban landscape was changing as new infrastructure was built to attract businesses. Kennedy's columns emphasized the importance of architects' involvement in the design of the overall cityscape rather than just focussing their efforts on individual buildings because, in his opinion, "the passion to standardize is nowhere more evident than among contractor-developers. They buy or copy standard suite plans

[51] *Western Homes and Living* January 1966 vol. XVII No. 1.

[52] Statistics Canada, Census data. While the population increase in Vancouver over a twenty-five year period is significant, the increase in Metropolitan Vancouver is more dramatic. In 1941, the population was 393, 898, and by 1961 it had jumped to 790, 741, whereas, the population in Vancouver jumped from 275, 353 in 1941 to 410, 375, in 1966. Graeme Wynn and Timothy Oke eds., *Vancouver and Its Region*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992).

from architectural harlots."[53] Kennedy's fear of the "architectural harlots" gaining control of the city was fuelled by the rapid expansion of the surrounding suburbs by developers.

During this period, suburban housing developments, especially, were becoming increasingly homogeneous. As geographer Richard Harris suggests, the corporate suburb, which rose between 1945 and 1960, "was designed, financed and built in an increasingly standard way," [54] resulting in "a frenzy of criticism over suburban 'conformity' " permeating both academic circles and popular culture.[55] Historian Kenneth Jackson further illustrates that the fear of suburban conformity permeated American culture as well.[56] However, in both Canada and the United States cheaper housing in the suburbs was particularly luring for new homeowners causing many cities to experience an exodus of middle-class citizens, leaving urban centres with a declining population.[57]

Twenty years later, the Vancouver Special Draft Report and the survey questions, on which it was based, reflected a realization of the fears that Vancouver had become homogenized as a result of the particular style of house that had proliferated. Surveying homeowners to comment on how the Vancouver Special fit into the surrounding neighbourhood thus became a spatial discussion. However, the planning department was not challenging the existing spatial narrative—neither the class biases on which it was based, nor how it had become normalized. This chapter illustrates how the east side had been absent from previous spatial discussions around the urban development of Vancouver, which had provided an opportunity for a different spatial practice to emerge. I define spatial practice as the application of zoning regulations and land-use guidelines in order to regulate how people live in neighbourhoods. It demonstrates how the regulation of housing styles in Vancouver in the 1980s reflected

[53] *Western Homes and Living* March 1966, 4.

[54] Richard Harris, *Creeping Conformity*, 132.

[55] Harris, *Creeping Conformity*, 155.

[56] Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

[57] This exodus was particularly pronounced in cities like Detroit, Chicago, Los Angles and San Francisco. Both Kenneth Jackson and Joel Garreau discuss the changing urban landscape with the rise in suburban living in the post-war period. Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) and Joel Garreau, *Edge City: Life on the new frontier*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1992).

the rise of an increasingly homogeneous and exclusive view of belonging within the city. By focussing on higher-end developments and capitalizing on the natural environment, new construction in Vancouver perpetuated a class hierarchy within the visual landscape. The regulation of the Vancouver Special was a way of exercising control of who could live in the city. While the Vancouver Special corresponded to the city's agenda of encouraging families back into the city and of densification, its predominance on the east side of the city meant that the Planning Department and the popular media failed to recognize it as a distinct spatial practice shaping the urban social and cultural fabric.

In Lefebvrian terms, architects, urbanists or planners' can be seen as the "doctors of space."[58] In his column, Kennedy was confident that if Vancouver employed the right kind of doctors, it could transform its urban landscape. Amidst fears of rapid suburban exodus and expansion and the settlement of outlying areas, Kennedy contended, " 'people are the city'."[59] To him, those who left the urban core "should be brought back from the suburbs to enjoy a full social life in a splendid environment."[60] Vancouver, he argued, needed to have a master plan to guide its urban development, to ensure that its built form illustrated its metropolitan aspirations, and to encourage people to stay in the city. Previous master plans for the city had helped to create the spatial narrative of a grand city growing rapidly out of the wilderness. Inspired by the City Beautiful movement, these plans failed to acknowledge that the urban environment was shaped by middle-class values of house and landscape design. As a result, housing and landscape design falling outside of this narrative was either ignored or denigrated. Because houses are stable and slow to change, they contribute to a longstanding visual narrative that goes largely unchallenged for a lengthy period of time. Part of the difficulty in transforming the urban landscape was that the "doctors of space" needed to incorporate the existing visual narratives with new construction.

Kennedy's call for civil action was an attempt to once again define a visual narrative to guide the development of Vancouver's urban landscape. If Vancouver was

[58] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 99.
[59] Warnett Kennedy, *Western Homes and Living Magazine*, March 1966, 4.
[60] Kennedy, 4.

going to become an "executive city"[61] or a "world city,"[62] then greater emphasis needed to be placed on urban planning in order to attract developers and investors. Central to the discussions of urban planning in Vancouver were how to maintain the liveability of the city, while at the same time ensuring the attractiveness of the natural geography was emphasized. While much of the debate about what the city should look like focused on the downtown core, the discussion spilled over to individual neighbourhoods because in order to entice developers and investors into the city, housing needed to be as appealing as modern office towers. Vancouver, though less than one hundred years old at the time, was trying to assert itself on a world economic stage. In order to be recognized in this realm, its visual culture had to reflect not only stability, but also a modern progressive look that would convince developers and investors to relocate or establish new businesses in the city. The urban planning department was faced with two significant issues. Firstly, after several failed attempts at American-style urban planning, it needed to develop a clear agenda for the development of the downtown core.[63] As geographers Robert North and Walter Hardwick suggest, "Vancouver City Council was haunted by the spectre of American-style urban decay."[64] These fears seemed unfounded because Vancouver had many neighbourhoods in the southern part of the city that were relatively underdeveloped until the post-war period, unlike many cities in the United States that were experiencing a massive exodus to the suburbs. However,

[61] Walter Hardwick, *Vancouver*, (Don Mills: Collier-MacMillan Canada, Ltd., 1974), 44.

[62] David Ley, Daniel Hiebert, and Geraldine Pratt, "Time to grow up? From urban village to world city, 1966-91," in *Vancouver and Its Region*, eds. Graeme Wynn & Timothy Oke, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992), 235.

[63] In an attempt to follow the urban development of other American cities, Vancouver attempted to build a freeway through the Strathcona neighbourhood and along the water's edge in Gastown and then through Stanley Park. This development project was squashed by community protest and the highway was relocated through the North Shore instead. The strength of the protest and its success in stopping the freeway development indicated a strong attachment to the existing built landscape and the way it shaped the patterns of living for the inhabitants of the city. The elimination of the freeway through the downtown core also stopped a major commercial development called Project 200. Project 200, a modernist mixed-use complex, of interconnected pedestrian plazas would have had easy access to the freeway. This $200 million complex was run by Project 200 Properties Limited, a consortium including real estate developers and agents, a subsidiary of the CPR, and two department stores. The development of Block 42 in downtown also revealed the lack of direction in urban planning. The shopping district did not create any visual interest and the underground mall was more suited for a much colder climates.

[64] Robert N. North and Walter G. Hardwick, "Vancouver since the Second World War: An economic geography," in *Vancouver and Its Region*, eds. Graeme Wynn and Timothy Oke, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992), 208.

there was no cohesive development to housing, in Marpole, Oakridge, Sunset and Victoria-Fraserview neighbourhoods unlike other master planned suburban developments in eastern Canada and the United States.[65] While their development was recent, the houses were a result of the choices of individual homeowners rather than guided by the Town Planning Commission. Secondly, the surrounding neighbourhoods needed to house people who would work in the city. With the rising land values, there were fears of continuing economic exodus to the suburbs from the west side of the city. Zoning and land use restrictions needed to change in order to allow for new kinds of domestic architecture to occur.

A new definition of the city required a changing of the visual codes of the built environment. However, Vancouver was not a *tabula rasa*; the existing built environment had layers of signs and signifiers embedded into the domestic architecture and streetscapes. Signs of power and wealth were reflected in the size of the buildings. The British architectural heritage reflected in many buildings signified the cultural background of the colonial power and reinforced the British system of land-use according to middle-class values. The City of Vancouver, in its eighty-year history, sought to shape its urban form by applying a set of master design principles in order to encourage new economic and commercial growth. Gaining an understanding of the previous master plans for Vancouver helps to set the context for how the visual narrative in Vancouver developed in the way it did. Thomas Mawson, a landscape architect, presented Vancouver with its first master plan in 1913. According to architect and urban historian Lance Berelowitz, "Mawson assumed Vancouver would soon take its rightful place among the great cities in the Western world."[66] His grand architectural visions sought to transform Coal Harbour and the entrance to Stanley Park to mimic a Parisian urban aesthetic with sweeping boulevards and majestic neoclassical buildings. By drawing on Parisian architectural heritage, Mawson sought to embed the signs of a "great city" into the newly emerging urban landscape in order to elevate its status in the Western world and to give the new city signifiers of permanence. Civic debate over Mawson's plan, according to historian

[65] Both the suburbs of Don Mills, located outside of Toronto, and Levittown, New York were designed by a master plan with curving streets similar to earlier Garden City plans. The suburban development was constructed from a limited number of house styles and plans. This created an efficient construction process, but also a very homogenous urban landscape.

[66] Berelowitz, 56.

Robert McDonald, revealed the differences in class opinions of the role of park space in the city and how it should be enjoyed.[67] Environmental historian Sean Kheraj points out Mawson's "commitment to the ideological and architectural foundations of the City Beautiful movement" with the more "romantic sentiments regarding nature."[68] While Mawson's plan was ultimately not adopted due to the economic depression in 1913 followed by the outbreak of World War One, his vision did help to bring to the forefront ideas of how Vancouver should integrate park space into its urban form and what style of architecture would best represent the small city emerging out of the wilderness on Canada's Western shore. Stanley Park remained a central feature of the city, along with many neighbourhood parks spread throughout the city, while the rest of Mawson's grand architectural plans were shelved.

A decade after the end of World War One, the city hired Harland Bartholomew and Associates to produce a second proposed master plan, this one intended to help smooth the amalgamation of Vancouver with the suburbs of Point Grey and South Vancouver to occur 1929. This plan was much larger in scope than Mawson's and sought to create a unified urban aesthetic by regulating street widths, park spaces and industrial areas.[69] Though Bartholomew's language in his opening pages mirrors Mawson's in stating "Vancouver is the most important Pacific port of a great city. Here, if anywhere, should develop a great city."[70] Both Mawson and Bartholomew sought to create a vision for the city that would highlight its greatness. Bartholomew noted visual differences between the east and west side of the city, and the need to smooth out the disparities between the suburb of Point Grey and South Vancouver in order to create a more unified urban aesthetic. However, what Bartholomew and Associates were subtly suggesting was the creation of an urban landscape based on middle-class values. He explicitly states that the proposed improvements would lift "the working class out of their lower life" by providing them with access to parks and by improving the infrastructure.[71] However, increasing the available park space and other urban amenities raises the land

[67] McDonald, *Making Vancouver*, 173.

[68] Sean Kheraj, *Inventing Stanley Park*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 110.

[69] Harland Bartholomew and Associates, *A Plan for the City of Vancouver, British Columbia*, (Saint Louis, 1928) https://archive.org/details/vancplanincgen00vanc Accessed April 20, 2015.

[70] Bartholomew, *A Plan for the City of Vancouver*, 10.

[71] Bartholomew, 10.

values thereby making it less affordable for working-class families to live in the city. While the plan covered suggestions for transportation, transit, recreation, zoning and civic art, ultimately, only parts of the plan were implemented due largely to the start of the Depression followed by World War Two.[72] In an effort to generate employment during the Depression, men were hired to clear sections of the city blocks of trees in order to put in numerous neighbourhood parks. The ability to implement large-scale construction projects required abundant funds from municipal coffers, and the visual differences between the east and west side of the city remained.

After nearly two decades of very little construction, Vancouver was eager to develop its urban environment. Bartholomew and Associates were hired by the city again in 1947-48 to create an extensive preliminary report on a variety of urban issues, including, parks, recreation and schools, transit planning, downtown, and decentralization and regional planning.[73] These plans were published in a series of booklets over a period of two years. One booklet titled, *Appearance of the City*, suggested Vancouver be "made more pleasing to the eye"[74] and should try to "deter a haphazard and hodge-podge pattern."[75] The essential features of an aesthetically pleasing city were aspects such as treed streets, paved roads and power lines moved to back lanes.[76] The west side of the city already had these features, thereby making the east side in need of improvement. Defining urban development on the east side of the city as haphazard and hodge-podge did not address the underlying urban problems that allowed these developments to initially take place. The Bartholomew reports focused on promoting middle-class aesthetics rather than on the inequity of funds disbursed for infrastructural improvements.

All three proposed Master Plans attempted to capitalize on the majesty of the mountains surrounding the city and the vastness of the ocean lapping on its shores. They promoted a powerful urban aesthetic in its built environment to mirror the

[72] Berelowitz, 61.

[73] Harland Bartholomew and Associates, *A Preliminary Report upon The City's Appearance*, (Saint Louis, Missouri, 1947) https://archive.org/details/harlandbartholomew Accessed April 20, 2015.

[74] Bartholomew, *A Preliminary Report upon The City's Appearance*, 11.

[75] Bartholomew, 13.

[76] ibid., 11.

spectacular natural environment. However, as Berelowitz suggests, “master-planning was replaced with more modest, practical, smaller increments of urban change. Continuity and stability were favoured over grand gestures.”[77] The difficulty of creating a new visual language to shape new urban spaces was further compounded by the fact the city had, as the Bartholomew reports had pointed out, two distinctly different entrenched visual cultures. The majority of the west side of the city had been controlled by by-laws and design restrictions, whereas the east side of the city had become settled in a more organic fashion based on individual tastes. This visual difference between the two sides of the city reflected the differences of opinion regarding urban infrastructure that caused Point Grey municipality to split away from South Vancouver in 1908. Residents in Point Grey wanted to collect property taxes in order to improve the urban environment by installing curbs, gutters and street lighting. South Vancouver opted for lower taxes and payments on an as needed basis to pay for neighbourhood improvements. In a special insert in *The Vancouver Sun* newspaper titled “Peeking From Vancouver’s Windows,” Vancouver was presented as a city of contrast; “the park-like settings of Shaughnessy manors can’t be compared to the tin-can littered back alleys of slum sections, neither can the expanse of water and mountains viewed from many homes compare to the litter of billboards seen from tenement dwellings in the downtown area."[78] The Cedar Cottage—Renfrew study further highlights the visual aesthetics on the east side of the city. The study indicated land speculators holding onto undeveloped lots, and multiple grid systems being used to lay out streets on the east side resulting in narrow or triangular lots not suited for building, which as result lay derelict, were part of the structural problems found in that neighbourhood.[79] According to the study, “80% of all the local streets do not have full pavement or curbs.”[80] These visual differences helped to reinforce ideas of class, with wealthier neighbourhoods displaying a more unified design aesthetic, and controlled, orderly streetscapes.

For the third time in the twentieth-century, there were calls for the city to develop a master plan to guide the city to develop in a more cohesive way. As a result of an

[77] Berelowitz, 67.

[78] *Vancouver Sun* August 17, 1973. Special Insert 4A

[79] Cedar Cottage—Renfrew Study: Surveys and Issues, City Planning Department, May 1968. PUB-: PD990.

[80] Cedar Cottage—Refrew Study, 13.

urban renewal study conducted in 1970, which recommended "a programme of Community Improvement and Development be established," [81] the Department of Planning and Civic Development formed local area planning councils to serve "as a guide for the area's future."[82] Rather than following a master plan for urban development, the "local area planning programmes are an attempt to work with all the variables that affect the quality and effectiveness of an individual neighbourhood's environment in both the physical and social sense."[83] Initially, the city established Local Area Planning Councils in the Kitsilano, and Cedar Cottage—Refrew neighbourhoods. These two neighbourhoods were identified as having the greatest need for improvement. The creation of Local Area Planning Councils reflected a larger shift in federal, provincial and municipal politics to social liberalism and an effort to give citizens of the city a greater voice in urban planning decisions. Smaller neighbourhood improvements could apply for federal funding through the Neighbourhood Improvement Program (N.I.P.), established by Pierre Trudeau's Liberal government provided the funding was for a one-time improvement to a neighbourhood.[84] This allowed the city to make improvements to the urban environment without actually paying for it themselves.

In an effort to give more decision-making power to individual neighbourhoods, on September 25, 1975, Vancouver City council passed a motion in regards to public hearings for changes in residential areas.[85] R. Henry, the Director of Planning, offered guidelines for notice to be given to those directly affected by development and those within the neighbourhood itself. With funding from the provincial government, the city of Vancouver established Local Area Planning (LAP) Councils across the city. The city was divided into twenty-one neighbourhood groups, and "the consensus was that no single model should be imposed but that each community should define its own approach" to

[81] H. W. Pickstone, Report to Standing Committee on Community Development, 8, ADD. MSS 999 Location 601-F-2 File 1.

[82] Pickstone, Report to Standing Committee on Community Development, 8.

[83] Pickstone, Report, 1.

[84] Neighbourhood Improvement Program (NIP) was a cost-sharing program between all three levels of government for one-time improvements to neighbourhood facilities. It provided funds for community facilities improvements, street lights, traffic lights, bus shelters, improvements to parks and playgrounds,

[85] City Clerk's Department, September 25, 1975. COV 32-C-1 File 2.

guide development within the neighbourhood.[86] These planning Councils were made up of members of the community who had a vested interest in guiding how the neighbourhood should be developed, and were based in a store front office space within the community. The Local Area Planning Councils were supported by the city in the form of funding for the office space in the community, and with a file clerk or secretary who was responsible for tracking letters, scheduling meetings, and typing up the minutes. These "local area planning teams" were responsible for five primary areas—"planning, information, education, advising and problem resolving"—and were expected to work collaboratively with all civic departments in the city.[87] Initial meetings set rules of governance and voting procedures to order to ensure that decisions reflected the neighbourhood as a whole, rather than smaller localized areas within a given neighbourhood. They worked with a city planner, who was assigned to each neighbourhood and who was "capable of bringing wider civic concerns into discussions of local planning issues," and who would help to coordinate architects, planners, city engineers and other tradesmen.[88] In Lefebvrian terms, the citizens became the "doctors of space" who were granted the ability to define desired changes to their neighbourhoods. The experts—architects, planners, engineers and tradesmen—were placed in a subordinate rather than a dominant role in the changing of urban fabric.

While the idea of Local Area Planning Councils gives the impression that the municipal government was emphasizing more involvement by citizens and attempting to decentralize decision-making and planning, their structure was flawed to the extent that each neighbourhood received the same amount of money, regardless of need. As such, this mechanism favoured the west side of the city where larger commercial centres generated additional funds to improve the business districts. Improvements in the commercial district of the west side Kerrisdale neighbourhood, for instance, resulted from municipal funds matching those raised by the Kerrisdale Business association. The east side Collingwood neighbourhood, for its part, lacked a strong business association and was unsuccessful in procuring additional funds. Unidentified scrawled commentary on the Department of Planning and Civic Development draft position indicates that the

[86] Manager's Report, May 28, 1976. COV 32-C-1 File 2.
[87] Pickstone, 11.
[88] Manager's Report, May 28, 1976, 2.

report should be thrown out because the lack of planning in the poorer areas of the city is a result of the "lack of power."[89] It is not clear from the commentary whether the writer is referring to a lack of economic power in poorer areas of the city to improve their neighbourhoods, or if the Local Area Planning Councils themselves lack power because they rested "with the Department of Planning and Civic Development."[90] Ultimately, the Department of Planning would have to sign off on all work to be completed and federal funds were granted to the City to pay for projects and not to individual neighbourhoods.

The Local Area Planning councils varied in size across the city and the number of required meetings depended on the pressing concerns of the neighbourhood. Most planning councils wanted to ensure development in their neighbourhoods reflected the desires of the existing home and business owners. While most recognized that development of commercial areas was necessary for neighbourhood vitality, changes in the domestic environment remained at the forefront of the planning process. The vast majority of the neighbourhoods were zoned for RS-1, single-family dwellings. According to Harris, Point Grey was the first municipality in North America to enact zoning by-laws.[91] Zoning restrictions were implemented on the west side of the city as a way of regulating construction to ensure that the neighbourhoods, during a period of rapid construction, remained middle-class. Regulating the size of houses, and their placement on the lots further reinforced the signs and signifiers of a British middle-class population. These zoning regulations were carried over when the municipality of Point Grey amalgamated with Vancouver and the municipality of South Vancouver. However, each area had its own existing visual landscape, and by applying middle-class zoning regulations to the city as a whole, it had the effect of perpetuating a middle-class design aesthetic.

The lack of a ward system in Vancouver's municipal politics meant that some neighbourhoods had no representative on city council and had to look for other opportunities to air their views on development. At a Local Planning Workshop Charlie

[89] Commentary, on Department of Planning and Civic Development's Draft Position on Local Area Planning, is most likely made by David Robinson. April 3, 1973. City of Vancouver Archives: Private Records. ADD. MSS 999 601-F-2 File 1.

[90] City of Vancouver Archives: Private Records. ADD. MSS 999 601-F-2 File 1.

[91] Harris, *Creeping Conformity,* 124.

Christopherson, a representative from the Mount Pleasant Citizen's Committee, expressed his support for local area planning because "in the absence of a neighbourhood planning process sensitive to neighbourhood needs, the neighbourhood is planned by real estate companies with little regard for the well-being of its citizens."[92] Older areas of the city were considered a priority because the older housing stock was being "removed to make way for apartments."[93] By placing a greater emphasis on Local Area Planning, the city had hoped to ensure new development continued to be encouraged while at the same time maintaining some streetscapes and buildings of the past by rezoning some areas of the city as RT-2 (two family dwelling) as conversion areas to allow for conservation of historical features.

The difficulty for many neighbourhoods rested in the individual homeowner's right to sell their dwelling to whomever they wished. Several development companies purchased individual homes and then left them derelict, thereby dropping the property values of surrounding homes, which were then bought up by the same development company. The developer then submitted an application for rezoning in order to establish apartments or townhouse constructions, thus maximizing their profits per acre. By overseeing and controlling the zoning in neighbourhoods, citizens hoped to stem the development of high-rise apartments specifically, and to maintain the family nature of their neighbourhoods.

The Local Area Planning Councils cared passionately about changes in zoning in their area because zoning was the main form of power citizens had to maintain the single-family characteristic of their neighbourhood. They were also concerned about the overall aesthetics of their neighbourhoods. The Local Area Planning Councils provided an opportunity for citizens to raise their concerns about urban development, but the city was slow to find resources to implement those changes. The three common complaints raised by councils in the east side of the city were the lack of park space or inadequate park space, the lack of curbing and gutters and the need for improved commercial areas.

[92] Summary of Local Area Planning Workshop, April 22, 1976. COV S62-10 32-C-1 File 3

[93] Standing Committee of Council on Planning and Development Report August 1, 1976. COV S62-10 32-C-1 File 3.

By demanding these features, citizens were asking for was an equalization of the visual aesthetics of the city; the city, however, put it back on the citizens to pay for these improvements themselves. In the Grandview-Woodlands neighbourhood, for example, residents argued it was the city's responsibility to put curbing around schoolyards to clearly demarcate the boundaries.[94] Curbing was seen as a safety issue so that cars did not intrude onto school property. In the Cedar-Cottage neighbourhood securing the funds from neighbours in order to put in curbs became particularly problematic because there were many odd size lots that were undeveloped and many were held by land speculators or absentee landlords who would be unlikely to pay for improvements in the street aesthetics.[95] Smoothing out the disparities of urban development would help to create a more cohesive urban aesthetic, but if payment for these neighbourhood improvements fell on the shoulders of citizens, who statistically were earning a lower income, then it was unlikely the changes would ever occur. While the city wanted to perpetuate a middle-class aesthetic, their lack of willingness to pay for it demonstrated that their sense of class needed the juxtaposition of working-class neighbourhoods to justify their superiority. Geographer Katharyne Mitchell notes that many west-side residents were "fearful that they might be sucked into the vortex of the immigrant working-class neighbourhood of South Vancouver."[96] This desire for a clear class distinction between the east side and west side of the city resulted in the split in the municipality of South Vancouver and the formation of Point Grey in 1908. More than sixty years later this attitude was still prominent in the shaping of the new urban fabric.

Amidst all the concern about the visual language of the city, the focus was on creating new modern-looking structures and to move away from the construction of more single-family dwellings because they were perceived as becoming increasingly unaffordable. It was into this urban climate that the Vancouver Special began to appear. The Vancouver Special matched the visual language of the east side of Vancouver, but it challenged the civic vision that had emerged from decisions made in the western portion of the city. As a result of settlement differences between the east side and west

[94] Manager's Report March 20, 1980. COV 88-G-4 File 4

[95] Cedar Cottage—Renfrew Study.

[96] Katharyne Mitchell, *Crossing the Neo-liberal Line: Pacific Rim Migration and the Metropolis*, (Philidelphia: Temple University Press, 2004).

side of the city established in 1908, the urban landscape had developed following two distinct patterns.[97] On the east side of the city, housing was not regulated and size of the house and placement on the lot was up to individual homeowners. This resulted in a less-uniform overall neighbourhood aesthetic. Whereas on the west side in 1922, the Point Grey Municipal Council passed legislation preventing anything except homes and other necessary buildings attached to the dwelling to be the only form of construction in the suburb.[98] This limited further commercial or industrial development and ensured only single-family dwellings would be constructed. This form of zoning was carried over after the amalgamation of South Vancouver and Point Grey with Vancouver in 1929. As the city grew, zoning along the arterial routes was changed to include commercial development and was employed by the municipal government to shape how people lived and moved in the city. By the mid-1960s, the lack of cohesive urban planning implemented by the Town Planning Commission as well as the passiveness of civic policy towards urban development was becoming more apparent. With rising immigration to the city, most notably from Asia, the wealthier residents in the city wanted to ensure that their property investment and style of living was protected by the City Council through zoning by-laws, and through the encouragement of further investment and development.

Zoning is a way of regulating how people live in cities, and it works to shape the spatial story of the city because the master plan is translated into structural practice and codified through land use guidelines.[99] As Mitchell adds the "historical zoning patterns in Vancouver had been bound to racial and class-based definitions and processes since the arrival of white settlers in the city."[100] The zoning and land-use restrictions developed and controlled by the CPR resulted in a "highly regulated residential district from its inception."[101] However, residential exclusiveness was only true for the west side of the city. East-side neighbourhoods did not have the same elitism attached to housing or

[97] 1908—marks the separation between the municipality of Point Grey and South Vancouver. Mitchell, *Crossing the Neo-liberal Line*, 143.

[98] Berelowitz, *Dream City,* 60.

[99] Stephen Marshall, *Urban coding and planning*, (New York: Routledge, 2011). Richard Harris, *Creeping Conformity: How Canada Became Suburban, 1900-1960*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

[100] Mitchell, *Crossing the Neoliberal Line*, 141.

[101] Mitchell, 144.

land-use. As a result, the east side neighbourhoods were more ethnically mixed, and house styles did not follow distinct guidelines.

While the city was trying to encourage new development as a way to spur on the economy and was encouraging new developers to invest in the city, it was clear that changes to residential neighbourhoods were unwelcome. Changes in residential zoning further divided the city visually. Neighbourhoods on the west side were more willing to accept changes in zoning provided the new developments "were luxury apartments" or of "high quality design."[102] They were willing to accept changes in zoning and the ensuing multi-family developments because the rising costs in land had made the affordability of a west side home out of reach for most middle-class homeowners. There were fears that the more well-to-do areas in the city would become derelict because aging homeowners could not longer afford repairs and maintenance. In Kerrisdale, several high-rise apartments were constructed for seniors who wanted to remain in the neighbourhood, but no longer wanted to live in and take care of a house. They were also marketed towards the children of homeowners in the neighbourhood, in an effort to ensure the population age demographic remained diverse, as younger homeowners were no longer purchasing in the neighbourhood.[103] The Kitsilano neighbourhood also encouraged luxury apartments.[104] By encouraging the development of higher-end housing in the neighbourhoods, the existing property values were maintained.

However, not all neighbourhoods on the west side were willing to adopt changes in zoning to encourage densification. Shaughnessy Heights Property Owners Association (SHPOA) was divided on the best way to ensure that their neighbourhood was able to maintain is semi-rural aesthetic, while at the same time accommodating many of the older homeowners who were no longer able to continue to maintain their homes and were looking at infilling in order to raise funds to maintain their property. SHPOA hired Richard Mann, a senior partner at Thompson, Berewick, Pratt & Partners to advise and help develop a redevelopment plan for the Shaughnessy neighbourhood.

[102] Townhouses in Vancouver's Conversion Areas—August 1, 1976. A Policy Guide for Considering Applications for Townhouses as a Conditional Use in RT-2 Zoning Districts. COV 32-C-1 File 3.

[103] Kerrisdale Community Profile, 33. COV S40 121-B-2 File 2.

[104] Kitsilano an Information Handbook. (Vancouver, July 1974). ADD.MSS 999 601-F-2 File 2.

This was the only neighbourhood that hired an architect to help guide the planning policies.

With the closure of Shaughnessy and Quilchena golf courses on the west side of the city, due to changing leisure habits, the pastoral nature of the neighbourhood was altered. Part of Shaughnessy golf course was purchased by the Vancouver Park Board and developed as Van Dusen gardens, the only publicly owned park space for which there is an entrance fee. Developers constructed high-rise apartments surrounding the park in order for homeowners to be able to capture the view of the redeveloped heavily landscaped park space and the views of the urban environment. The CPR lands surrounding the Langara golf course were also sold to a developer and the townhouse complex that went in was marketed as "luxury" living. Homeowners were able to buy a dwelling situated in a rural-like environment, with views of the golf course; however, the emphasis on higher-end dwellings ensured that any changes in zoning towards multi-family did not impact the property values in the neighbourhood.[105]

The desire to maintain a single-family neighbourhood aesthetic became the perfect breeding ground for the Vancouver Special to flourish. The early Vancouver Specials had stairs leading to a second storey entrance. Its particular design took advantage of by-laws in the early 1960s of single-family dwellings. In an effort to reduce construction costs and to smooth out the economic downturn, the lower floor was left unfinished so that it did not need to be included in the floor square ratio of .45. This allowed for an 1800 square foot house to be built on a 33' lot. This design was able to accommodate multi-generational families or a rental suite because homeowners were able to finish off the lower floor after purchase to suit their particular living needs. The resulting finished house, however, was close to 3000 square feet of habitable space, which significantly disrupted the signs of wealth in the city, as larger homes were equated with greater wealth. In an effort to control the spread of these significantly larger houses, according to architect Kenneth Terriss, "the City amended the by-law in 1975 to include all spaces with a ceiling over 4' in the FSR and subsequently raised the FSR to

[105] Oakridge Community Profile, 1978 COV S40 121 B-4 File 7 and Kerrisdale Community Profile, 1978 COV S40 121-B-5 File 2.

.60."[106] The lower floor needed to be included in the FSR, which meant that the house became slightly smaller on the upper floor to fit into the new guidelines. The finished house was around 2400 square feet. The City also eliminated the need for front stairs to lead to a small porch or vestibule.[107] The building materials for the front stairs were considered an additional, yet unnecessary, expense. Prior to the elimination of front stairs altogether, the size of porches had been slowly dwindling in an effort to make new home construction more affordable.[108] These two changes produced the iconic looking Vancouver Special, and encouraged new construction by lowering the over all material costs. More significantly, they resulted in unintended and dramatic changes to the visual landscape on the east side of the city.

It was these changes to local by-laws that made it possible for the Vancouver Special to be constructed, radically altering the residential landscape. Zoning changes to different neighbourhoods allowed for the construction of apartment buildings and garden townhouses, but the zoning change from RS-1 (single-family dwelling) to RS-1A (single-family dwelling with a suite) and RT-2 (two dwellings) in many neighbourhoods was preferred because of the strong attachment to the single-family dwelling aesthetic. This allowed the Vancouver Special to be constructed in several areas of the city because it could fit under multiple zoning restrictions. In the Local Area Planning reports, residents of many neighbourhoods expressed their preference for RS-1A and RT-2 zoning changes because it prevented the possibility of apartments, especially high rise apartments from being built in quiet residential neighbourhoods. While the visual language of the city was changing, it is evident in the reports that people were unwilling to alter their ideas of what made an acceptable form of residential development. The unique form of the Vancouver Special was an ideal compromise, allowing for multi-family dwellings while from the exterior maintaining the visual aesthetic of single-family development.

The most significant change to urban planning policy that led to the rise of the Vancouver Special was the changing by-laws around the conversion or construction of

[106] Terriss, "Stucco," 124.
[107] Terriss, 124.
[108] ibid., 123.

secondary suites within a home. A study conducted by the City Planning Department, in 1975, assessed whether the construction of more secondary suites in the city was "a feasible and quickly implementable means of providing an increase in the housing stock to alleviate the housing shortage."[109] On the basis of the survey, the city relaxed the restrictions on RS-1 zoned areas of the city in include secondary suites provided that they were a minimum of 400 square feet and had a ceiling height of over seven feet. The Provincial government also provided additional incentives to homeowners who were converted their basement into a secondary suite. The inclusion of more secondary suites in the city improved the rental market without disrupting the single-family dwelling aesthetic of the neighbourhood. According to the survey, "more that 92 per cent of the homes west of Cambie St. have basements with ceilings seven feet or higher."[110] Basements were generally three to four feet below grade and the front stairs had a maximum rise of four feet. Seven feet was considered the minimum height to make a space habitable. This limited the homeowner's ability to convert basements into secondary suites, though many did during the depression and during World War Two in order to make ends meet.[111] Yet, on the east side of the city only fifteen per cent fell into this category. In order for families to take advantage of the changes in municipal by-laws and incentives offered by the provincial government, new construction that offered the potential for a secondary suite was favoured. The Vancouver Special satisfied the conversion criteria, since inclusion of a suite on the bottom floor would have adequate daylight and ventilation, and have a floor only twelve inches below grade. The side or rear door helped to maintain the existing single-family dwelling aesthetic.[112] However, if the entire bottom floor was converted to a rental suite it helped to create a rental market for families wanting to remain in the city.

Throughout the 1970s, the emphasis on Local Area Planning further cemented the visual differences between the east side and the west side of the city. Resistance to changes in zoning on the east side of the city indicated a desire to control their urban environment in a different way. Citizens wanted to ensure that families were still able to

[109] Housing Residential Developments—Secondary Suites Vancouver. CVA 119-G-2.
[110] ibid, 15.
[111] Ibid., 1.
[112] Ibid, 34.

own in their neighbourhoods. As a result, they favoured changes in zoning to RS-1A and RT-2, which would allow for two dwellings to be constructed on a single lot. This would ensure development of new lots was not by a large development firm constructing apartments or townhouses, but favoured small-scale builders.[113]

The survey questions in the Vancouver Special Draft report reflect the ways the spatial practices that emerged as a result of changing bylaws and greater input from local planning councils clashed with the visual narrative created through the implementation of master plan principles on the west side of the city. On the west side of the city, zoning was used to regulate the design aesthetics of the street layout in order to perpetuate the signs and signifiers of the British middle-class. The statements in the Vancouver Special Draft report do not indicate a desire to revert zoning policies back to the 1960s, but instead reflect a reaction to the changing signs and signifiers as a result of zoning changes. In the Vancouver Special draft report the statement the rapid construction of Vancouver Specials "have resulted in too much old house demo," reflects two important assumptions. Firstly, that the old housing stock was still liveable. Many of the houses that were demolished were nearing eighty years old. Secondly, that the older houses were preferable to newer construction. The older houses were signifiers of a sense of history within the city. Living in an older house was one way families could project a sense of establishment within the city. The older housing stock reflected British architectural features, which further reinforced the cultural background of its inhabitants. New houses with unrecognizable architectural features were perceived as the dismantling the embedded values.

Despite Mawson's plan and the two Bartholomew reports, no cohesive master plan for Vancouver's urban development was adopted. As a result there were no clearly defined principles guiding the visual aesthetics of the city to use as a baseline for new development. After several decades of rapid development, the city of Vancouver had few empty lots left. However, not all house styles were a welcome addition to the Vancouver landscape. The statement, Vancouver Specials "have improved the neighbourhood appearance," becomes a highly subjective way of defining the urban development.

[113] Extract from Report to Council from Standing Committee on Planning and Development, January 27, 1977. CVA Series 602 COV 32-C-1 File 5.

There is no basis for what improvement actually is, since house styles were largely left up to individual's homeowners' tastes, and not regulated through an approval process.

The middle-class values present on the west side of the city especially are most apparent in the survey statements related to the increased densification. The statement, Vancouver Specials "have resulted in an increase in on-street parking" presents two assumptions of middle-class housing. Firstly, middle-class housing should have a garage in which to park one's car. Secondly, by questioning the availability of parking, it became a way to question the definition of a single-family dwelling neighbourhood. Single-family neighbourhoods should not have streets congested with cars. However, the increased congestion points at the house and its occupants rather than the changing nature of automobile usage in the 1970s. Larger homes in Shaughnessy had larger existing garages as well as driveways to store a second vehicle, so it would remain out of sight. The design aesthetics of Shaughnessy were also reflected in the statement that the "neighbourhood seems more crowded." Few neighbourhoods in Vancouver have larger lots than the standard 33' lot. It is a reflection of middle-class housing values that neighbourhoods should appear spacious and with ample room between houses. Crowded houses were associated with poorer housing. The statement "new houses block sunlight," is also a middle-class housing value that houses should have ample sunlight and not be close together. The survey questions indicate that the reaction to the Vancouver Special was based on the proliferation of a single-design, which shifted the visual aesthetics of the city to reflect the working-class rather than the visual aesthetics of the neighbourhood of Shaughnessy continuing to dominate the landscape.

While the city was looking for a master plan, it ultimately did not want to invest in smoothing out the infrastructure disparities between the east and west sides of the city. Instead it encouraged developers to construct new luxury townhouses and apartments through changes in zoning. This changed the visual appearance of the west side of the city, but at the same time ensured that property values did not drop. Ultimately, it was decisions of individual homeowners that changed the visual aesthetics of the east side of the city. With over 10,000 Vancouver Specials built between the mid-1960s and 1984, this particular house design changed the visual landscape of the city. Changes in the political and economic policies of the federal, provincial and municipal government

provided a climate that made the construction of this specific design a favoured choice to increase the density within neighbourhoods, while at the same time maintaining the single-family dwelling aesthetic. The Vancouver Special survey, Draft Report and cessation of approval of the house plan are all examples of working-class agency being limited by the City Council.

Chapter 3.

Domestic Architecture—Perpetuating ideas of class and power

> Little boxes on the hillside
> Little boxes made of ticky-tacky
> Little boxes on the hillside
> Little boxes all the same
>
> Malvina Reynolds, 1962[114]

Vancouver's urban planning policies laid the foundation for visual differences between the east and west side of the city. British and American spatial practices were further cemented in the domestic architecture constructed across the city. The style and type of housing frequently reflected the socio-economic status of neighbourhoods. Large houses on large lots signified wealth and status, and smaller houses closer together signified middle- or working-class status. After a period of rapid construction in the postwar period, by the 1960s, most lots in Vancouver had houses on them. While the City of Vancouver was attempting to redefine itself as an "executive city," concerns were being raised about the lack of affordable housing, especially on the west side of the city.[115] A lack of affordable housing, many feared, would cause an exodus to the suburbs and sections of wealthier neighbourhoods would decline. In urban planner Warnett Kennedy's opinion, architects should play a stronger role in conceptualizing residential neighbourhoods in order to ensure Vancouver "be made liveable, clean, green and full of diverse interests."[116] He argued, "until the basic structure of the new Vancouver has been determined, designers cannot get down to the tissues of detail that determines the

[114] Malvina Reynolds, Little Boxes (c) 1962, Schroder Music Co.
[115] Walter Hardwick, *Vancouver*, (Don Mills: Collier-MacMillian Canada, Ltd., 1974), 44.
[116] Warnett Kennedy, *Western Homes and Living*, March 1966, 4.

quality of the environments which are being created."[117] His use of the term "new Vancouver" indicated a change in the city's understanding of itself. However, Kennedy's call for architects to be actively involved with neighbourhood development shifts the idea of who belongs in the city. Architect designed homes are more expensive than plan-based homes. Thus, the promotion of architect-designed homes becomes a way of ensuring middle-class and upper-middle class homeowners were still living within the city because the costs of hiring an architect was significantly higher than constructing a new dwelling from a purchased plan.

Plan-based suburban developments were denigrated for their lack of architectural variety and homogeneous aesthetic.[118] The homogeneity, however, made the houses more affordable, which was appealing to new homeowners. Kennedy was advocating for new development to ensure middle-class homeowners continued to live in the city, but he also wanted to ensure the existing visual culture of the west side of the city was maintained. Kennedy's comments, however, do not acknowledge the widespread use of plan-based housing development, nor does he acknowledge the previous contractor-developers constructing many neighbourhoods on the west side. Architects or urban planners did not guide the vast majority of urban development in Vancouver. By advocating a renewed use of architects in making a "new Vancouver," he wanted to replicate the neighbourhood development of Shaughnessy and the University Endowment Lands, the two areas of the city that were guided by large developers and architects.

Twenty years later, the Vancouver Special survey showed how the proliferation of a single plan had changed the visual landscape of the city. This chapter will outline how the Vancouver Special significantly altered the domestic architectural landscape by disrupting the existing signs and signifiers embedded in the urban form. I argue that reaction to the Vancouver Special was largely class based, as the house did not have familiar exterior architectural references that established the socio-economic status of homeowners. Furthermore, I argue that the Vancouver Special reflected many of the

[117] Warnett Kennedy, *Western Homes and Living*, February 1966, 9.

[118] Richard Harris in *Creeping Conformity* and Christopher Armstrong in *Making Toronto Modern* both discuss the increasing homogenization of suburban developments.

design solutions advocated by architects practicing in Vancouver, but that it has been maligned because of its standard design and mass appeal. The Vancouver Special is architecturally significant, even though it was not designed by a credentialed architect, because it is an indigenous form of housing.[119] This particular design is based on Vancouver's climatic conditions, and the specific lot sizes, found particularly on the east side of the city. Furthermore, the Vancouver Special met the need for economical construction and affordable housing that, in turn, increased the densification of the city.

In Vancouver, like the rest of Canada, the domestic landscape—that is, housing and its surrounding landscaping—was largely constructed by using plan-based architecture, as the vast majority of citizens could not afford an architect to design a unique dwelling. As both historian Peter Ward, and geographers Peter Ennals and Deryk Holdsworth explain the majority of housing styles in Canada were purchased from American and British plan catalogues.[120] By 1919, the Eaton's catalogue boasted a variety of house plans, with instructions and all the required building materials available for purchase, though there was nothing inherently Canadian in the designs.[121] The house plans did not reflect the specificities of Canadian climate or geography.[122] Ennals and Holdsworth suggest that "the design possibilities presented through the pattern book became the norm for many as the grand designs changed from Georgian to Gothic, Second Empire, Queen Anne and Revivalist styles, their vernacular cousins borrowed, adapted, corrupted, or diluted the facade and plan."[123] Drawing from an established architectural heritage became a way for arriving immigrants to Vancouver to reinforce a colonial legacy through domestic architecture. The style of the house frequently reflected

[119] Plan-based architecture is defined as an architectural style that is mass-produced through plans available for purchase by either builders or homeowners. Indigenous architecture is defined as a style that reflects the specific climatic and geographic conditions of an area and is not found in other climate regions.

[120] Peter Ward, *A History of Domestic Space* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999). Peter Ennals & Deryk W. Holdsworth, *Homeplace: The Making of the Canadian Dwelling* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1998).

[121] Kalman, *A History of Canadian Architecture Vol 2*, 616.

[122] For example, houses with large wrap around verandas were popular in eastern Canada. This design was imported from the southern United States. It was ill-suited for a Canadian climate because the large veranda limited the amount of sunlight into the home making it dark and dreary.

[123] Ennals & Holdsworth, *Homeplace*, 233.

the homeowners' cultural background as well as their socio-economic status.[124] However, the signs and signifiers embedded in the domestic architecture displayed sharp difference between the west and east side of the city. These early distinctions are important to note because houses remain largely unchanged for long periods of time, and therefore become a stable attribute of the visual language of a neighbourhood.

The differences between east-side and west-side architectural styles emerged in the early 1900s and were closely correlated to variances between urban planning decisions in the suburbs of Point Grey and South Vancouver. Lots on the west side of the city were zoned for different sizes depending on the neighbourhood. The differences in lot sizes altered the visual landscape in two ways. Firstly, the proportion of the size of the house to the surrounding land was determined by specific by-laws, which varied from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. Secondly, the surrounding landscaping further reinforced the middle-class understandings of the garden as an extension of the home and a display of socio-economic status. Contractor-developers would buy several lots in a neighbourhood and construct houses of the same style to lower their overall costs, which solidified the socio-economic status of the neighbourhood. As neighbourhoods rapidly developed, there developed degree of homogeneity with the repetition of house styles over several blocks. As a result of relying on plan-based house designs, neighbourhoods acquired a similar architectural aesthetic and homogeneity reflecting the signs and signifiers of the socio-economic status of the neighbourhood. By selecting from twenty to thirty available plans, homeowners were able to exercise a sense of individuality in selecting their home "for the price of rent."[125] Houses in the Kitsilano neighbourhood were predominately American Craftsman style favoured by "wealthier families of middling status."[126]

[124] MacDonald, *Making Vancouver*, 193.
[125] MacDonald, 204.
[126] ibid.,193.

Figure 3.1. American Craftsman
Note. Photo by Jennifer Chutter.

Ennals and Holdsworth argue that California bungalows became the preferred housing style for working-class and middle-class homeowners in the 1920s in Vancouver.[127] Vancouver's residential development was also governed by several large-scale developments. These larger developments significantly influenced the visual culture of the city and reinforced the class-based narrative of acceptable housing styles in the city.

Figure 3.2. California Bungalow
Note. Photo by Jennifer Chutter.

[127] ibid., 203.

Both the neighbourhoods of Shaughnessy and the University Endowment Lands were laid out according to master plans and had minimum building costs, which ensured the houses constructed were designed by architects and met the design principles laid out by the developer. The Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) was granted 5,000 acres to develop in the suburb of Point Grey in order to encourage wealthy investors and developers to settle in Vancouver. The neighbourhood of Shaughnessy was designed by the Montreal landscape architect Frederick Todd and featured homes "often designed by architects" and had architectural features reflective of pre-Industrial English houses.[128] The grid pattern imposed on the city did not apply to this development. Lots ranged from 1/4 acre to one acre. The CPR wanted maximum return on their investment, so focused on creating higher-end housing that would ensure only the very wealthy could afford to live there, and speculators, hoping to make a quick return, did not purchase lots. The minimum build costs for a house in this neighbourhood was set at $6000 with the costs for garages and coach houses running an additional $2000-$2500.[129] As a result of minimum build cost requirements, many people hired architects to design their homes rather than relying on finding an adequate plan in a catalogue. The CPR then approved the architect designed plans and monitored the construction to ensure that materials used and quality of workmanship remained at a high level. Houses as a result tended to follow a similar design aesthetic that resembled the British Arts and Craft style, or other designs of the late Victorian period. Drawing on an older architectural heritage was a way for newly arriving immigrants to establish their economic status and to reinforce their loyalty to their British heritage. In 1919, *The Vancouver Sun* newspaper called it the "finest residential section in the Dominion."[130] Higher-end development was also carried out at the University Endowment Lands (UEL). It covered 3,000 acres near the University of British Columbia, and was developed by guidelines established by the Provincial Government. These guidelines also included minimum build requirements, resulting in a high proportion of architect-designed houses. With their large gardens, wide tree-lined streets and views of the mountains and ocean, these houses, in

[128] Ibid., 156.

[129] First Shaughnessy Proposed Heritage Conservation Area, "Tours." Heritage Vancouver. www.heritagevancouver.org [accessed September 25, 2015].

[130] First Shaughnessy Proposed Heritage Conservation Area.

Shaughnessy and the University Endowment Lands, became the visual ideal for the city of Vancouver.

The neighbourhoods surrounding Shaughnessy and the University Endowment Lands attempted to emulate their architectural styles, though on a slightly smaller scale, as a way of ensuring their property values remained high. The Kerrisdale neighbourhood reflected more of a British heritage as it "experimented with the notion of a Tudor Revival house" in an attempt to solidify their status as the "province's mercantile elite."[131]

Figure 3.3. Tudor Revival
Note. Photo by Jennifer Chutter

The neighbourhoods of Point Grey and Southlands also boast large houses on large lots. In contrast, houses on the east side of Vancouver tended to be smaller, simpler in design with fewer architectural references. There were no large developments in South Vancouver, like Shaughnessy or UEL, until the post-war period. Little house construction occurred following the amalgamation of Point Grey and South Vancouver with the municipality of Vancouver in 1929 due to the Great Depression and World War Two. As a result, architectural styles remained largely unchanged for nearly twenty years, which helped to cement the idea that houses reflecting British heritage were the only acceptable form of housing in the city.

In the post-war period, the Federal government became increasingly, and primarily, involved in the construction of single-family dwellings. Prior to the Depression,

[131] Ennals & Holdsworth, *Homeplace*, 211.

"rarely was the government itself involved in the design or construction of houses."[132] In order to facilitate the ease of acquiring a mortgage by purchasing a set of approved plans, the Federal government created the Central (now Canada) Housing and Mortgage Corporation (CMHC) in 1946 as a Crown Corporation to administer "all housing programs."[133] These housing programs encompassed mortgage brokerage, house plan catalogues, construction, and large federally funded development projects. Art historian Rhodri Windsor Liscombe suggests that the post-war construction fell under the federal government's policies of "reconstruction" in which federal advisory boards were established to oversee urban development, institutional building and housing.[134] At the end of the war, housing was pushed to the forefront of urban development as many workers who had relocated to the city in order to work in munitions plants or in ship building were looking to acquire permanent dwellings, and returning veterans were promised houses to settle in. Like many other major cities across Canada, Vancouver also lacked adequate housing to meet the needs of those requiring shelter because the construction of houses had slowed down considerably during the Great Depression a process that continued throughout the war.

It was hoped that the increased efficiency of the CMHC providing a variety of services for a new homeowner would spur on the housing market. The CMHC assimilated the Wartime Housing, a Crown Corporation, which was responsible for building "about 25,000 dwellings in urban centres across the country from Halifax to North Vancouver."[135] The houses constructed were selected from a small number of basic house plans. The CMHC created a set of agency guidelines to ensure "the emergence of the corporate subdivision."[136] These newly constructed subdivisions were

[132] Ennals & Holdsworth, 210.

[133] Richard Harris, *Creeping Conformity*, 120. CMHC replaced the National Housing Act (NHA), which was established in 1938, as a division in the Ministry of Finance in order to oversee mortgage financing and the construction of new houses according to subdivision and building guidelines. The NHA had replaced the Dominion Housing Act (DHA), established in 1935. The DHA was modelled after the American Federal Housing Administration. The DHA approved mortgage lenders "were encouraged to provide long-term, amortized mortgages with DHA insurance." Harris, 119.

[134] Rhodri Windsor Liscombe, *Architecture and the Canadian Fabric* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 247.

[135] Harris, *Creeping Conformity*, 122.

[136] Harris, 123.

controlled by the CMHC, and developers had to adhere to the minimum standards for building materials, dwelling setbacks, preferred layouts, as well as street widths and provision of basic services in order to maintain their contract. Standard house plans, designed by builders and architects, were approved and published by the CMHC in an effort to regulate and standardize new house construction in the post-war period. The CMHC attempted to promote a more Canadian style of architecture by publishing its own book on house plans in 1955, which included designs by Canadian architects. In an effort to encourage purchasing of plans from the CMHC rather than other British or American plan catalogues, it was easier to obtain a mortgage if using a CMHC plan. In 1965, CMHC published a larger selection of small house designs for homeowners and builders. Working drawings of the plans featured in the book could be purchased for "$15.00 plus municipal and provincial taxes where these are applicable."[137] The plans in this book are indexed by number of bedrooms ranging from two to four and house style ranging from bungalow, to split-level, to 1 1/2 storey to 2 storey houses. The promotion of Canadian house plans designed by Canadian architects represents an effort on the part of the Federal government to subtly shape the national landscape to reflect an emerging Canadian identity and to move away from the British and American heritage of early plan-based house designs. However, homeowners tended to be conservative in their tastes, and while many of the house designs had moved away from steep rooflines and gables found in Tudor designs, they still featured brick and wood construction rather than a more modern finishing material such as stucco. These house plans were considered Canadian only because the federal government was involved in the promotion of them. They did not reflect the varied geography or climatic conditions found across the nation, nor did the style of the houses differ significantly from other forms of plan-based architecture developed in post-war United States. The CMHC favoured more traditional architectural plans because they had perceived lasting buyer appeal.[138] Lefebvre suggests that favouring of traditional forms, which he terms as the façade, "was always a measure of social standing and prestige."[139] And thus, by repeating this façade in new designs, architects perpetuate ideas of power and class. The houses remain

[137] CMHC, *Small House Designs* (Ottawa: Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 1965).

[138] Marc Denhez, *The Canadian Home: From Cave to Electric Cocoon*, (Toronto & Oxford: Dundurn Press, 1994), 113.

[139] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 361.

popular because people do not want to deviate away from these ideas nor do they want to put their own social positioning in jeopardy by presenting a façade different from existing social norms.

For many middle-class and working-class families wanting to purchase a home, obtaining a CMHC approved plan became the most expedient way to get a mortgage and approval through city hall. In Vancouver, the neighbourhoods of Jericho, Renfrew Heights and Victoria-Fraserview were developed by the CMHC. The grid street pattern was disrupted in order to create neighbourhoods with curving streets. Renfrew Heights was constructed as veterans' rental housing. CMHC chief architect, Sam Gitterman, oversaw the development and construction of "600 one or one-and a half storey houses."[140] With only eight standard plans, the aesthetics of the neighbourhood was very homogeneous. The neighbourhood of Fraserview had greater visual variety with "238 variations on thirty-four bungalow types."[141] Fraserview, according to historian Jill Wade, was dubbed the "workingman's Shaughnessy Heights," since it was a completely planned community by the CMHC, and its proximity to the Fraserview Golf Course was an attempt to raise its working class status; however, it lacked the large lots and cultivated gardens of the west side neighbourhood of Shaughnessy, as well as the diversity of architect designed housing stock.

By the mid-1960s, the period of rapid house construction in Vancouver was waning and there were few empty lots remaining. Some of the older housing stock sat on double lots, and there was the potential to demolish the existing home and subdivide the lot in order to construct two homes side by side. However, all but four of the 129 plans listed in the 1965 CMHC book were designed for lots larger than the standard thirty-three foot lot in Vancouver.[142] The smaller lot size required a specific house design that could provide adequate accommodation for families as well as space for an automobile. In order to expedite approval through the city planning office a house design reflecting the specific lot size found in Vancouver needed to be developed.

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[140] Jill Wade, *Houses for All*, 149.
[141] Wade, 151.
[142] CMHC, *Small House Designs,* 1965.

If domestic construction was becoming increasingly plan-based and homogeneous, then the Vancouver Special appears to be a new iteration of plan-based architecture. It could be purchased for $100 at a plan services shop on the corner of Broadway and Yukon in Vancouver, near City Hall.[143] Even though it is an example of plan-based architecture, it is considered an indigenous form of architecture. The plan worked within the existing by-laws specific to the city of Vancouver for both the lot size as well as the floor square ratio (FSR). It also reflected Vancouver's mild climatic conditions. From an architectural perspective it is important for four reasons. Firstly, it is one of the few house designs that would be constructed on the typical 33 foot lot on the east side of the city. On a small lot a rectangular box is the most efficient shape. While many of the CHMC *Small House Designs* featured simple, rectangular houses, the carport was at the side of the house rather than the rear.[144] This extension required a 50 to 60 foot lot minimum to accommodate these designs. The narrow lot size in Vancouver required the carport to be moved to the rear of the house thus radically altering the aesthetic of the front of the house in comparison to many of the more suburban designs.

Secondly, the Vancouver Special did not spread to the suburbs predominately because the construction needed a rear entrance for the carport making them only suitable for areas of the city with back lanes, which was not a feature of suburban development.[145] This allowed for off street parking of an automobile, but it also meant that the house could be wider, since the recommended fourteen foot width for a carport did not need to be included in the overall width of the house, thereby making it suitable for a smaller lot. The rear carport facilitated the creation of a large deck space off of the kitchen.

Thirdly, the Vancouver Special visually altered the landscape because the house itself maximized the lot lines and eliminated the underground basement. Maximizing the

[143] Kluckner, Vanishing Vancouver, 122.

[144] CMHC, *Small House Designs*, 1965.

[145] The grid pattern was less common in the suburbs because they were designed around the automobile. The curved streets were an attempt to shape a more rural looking environment, and to slow down traffic. Lanes were often eliminated to increase the land available for housing, and garage access from the front of the house became a feature.. Residential Street Pattern Design. http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/publications/en/rh-pr/tech/socio75.html [accessed, May 16, 2016] Michael Southworth and Eran Ben-Joseph "Street Standards and the Shaping of Suburbia" web.mit.edu [accessed, May 16, 2016].

lot size is significant because the house became a more prominent feature of the lot rather than the garden. Little care or attention was put into the landscaping the front of the yard. Constructing the house four feet from the edge of the lot set it apart in neighbourhoods of predominately, small single storey cottage-like houses on double lots surrounded by garden. The two-storey house towered over the smaller houses in the neighbourhood. In addition, due to the mild climate in the city, Vancouver Specials were built only eighteen inches below grade because there was little concern of the foundation freezing and cracking during the winter months. Previously constructed British and American designs were built with a basement as part of the foundation, which was between three to four feet below ground. In these earlier designs six to eight front steps were necessary to reach the first floor living space that was at least three feet above ground level and lead to a small veranda or vestibule by the front door. The Vancouver Special eliminated the front porch or vestibule, and instead the front door was at ground level. People stepped down two steps once inside the front door to enter the home. Though two storey houses were common in the city, the Vancouver Special appeared significantly larger because it was not partially underground.

Lastly, the roofline and finishing materials reflected the climatic conditions of Vancouver. With a mild climate and very little snowfall, a high-pitched roof was not necessary, as houses did not need a steep roof slope in order to enable snow slide. The use of materials also makes the Vancouver Special further stand out in neighbourhoods. The lower half of the house was typically finished with a brick veneer, which only went up part up the wall. The use of this material, it would appear, was an attempt to draw from an existing architectural heritage, from brick houses found on the east side of Canada, but the styling of did not continue around the side of the house. The rest of the house was finished in stucco. Stucco was first touted as an important feature of modernist housing and several display homes featured it in the 1933 Chicago World's Fair. However, as historian Christopher Armstrong points out people tended to be conservative about their house purchases and tended to favour more traditional materials and aesthetics.[146] While the use of stucco was not new to Vancouver, it was a distinct contrast from the more traditional wood siding found in American Craftsman style

[146] Armstrong, *Making Toronto Modern*, 108.

of houses.[147] Stucco, however, made more sense for Vancouver's wet coastal climate because it is easy to care for and it is not prone to rot. The windows were also aluminum framed, could be nailed in, and did not have a window frame. The elimination of window frames deviated from the more traditional styles. The changes in exterior finishing materials, the flattening out of the roof and the removal of the front stairs, and the rear carport fundamentally altered the look of the home, while also reducing the overall construction costs. Ennals and Holdsworth claim that Canada never developed an indigenous form of architecture.[148] Their statement is a reflection of a class-based distinction of what is considered architecture because a builder and not an architect designed the house, as a result the particular basic design of the Vancouver Special is not acknowledged. Kluckner credits the design to a builder named Crawchuck, which was later reproduced by Larry Cudney, a draftsman.[149] The lack of recognition of a builder developing an economical and efficient solution to a very specific housing problem exposes the bias in urban planning of who should be responsible for its development. The city has relied on experts who are university educated rather than looking for solutions elsewhere.

Prior to the Second World War, British and American educated architects guided much of Canada's urban architectural development. As a result the built environment in major cities in Canada reflected British and American design trends rather than specifically Canadian ones. However, the architectural climate shifted during the post-war period as a greater emphasis was placed on Canada to develop its own architectural style and to assert its independence as a nation by shaping the urban environment to reflect the modern ideals of the post-war society. During this period, Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver all experimented with Modernist architecture in their public buildings as these cities sought to reinvigorate themselves architecturally. In

[147] Graeme Wynn, "The Rise of Vancouver" in *Vancouver and its Region* eds. Graeme Wynn and Timothy Oke, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992). Wynn suggests that stucco was used in Vancouver in the 1920s on a style of house called builders' specials. He suggests that, "they provided relatively cheap basic accommodation and the opportunity for later improvements with only the slightest concession to contemporary stylistic concerns." (105) Stucco was also used extensively on houses built in the 1920s, but it was combined with steep roofs and half-timbering to give it a Tudor effect.

[148] Ennals & Holdsworth, *Homeplace*, 232.

[149] Kluckner, *Vanishing Vancouver*, 122.

particular, the construction of skyscrapers and new civic buildings changed the aesthetics of the urban core in Canada's three largest cities.[150] Modernist architecture characterized by smooth lines, large windows and taller constructions contrasted with the more ornate detailing on earlier constructions. As Armstrong reveals however, within the architectural community there were tensions between the younger and older faculty as to how to shape the architectural environment of cities.[151] Architecture schools in Montreal and Toronto favoured a more conservative approach in their design.[152] This conservatism in the built environment did not spread to the west. Vancouver, according to Liscombe, did not have an "entrenched architectural, cultural or even social establishment" guiding the built environment.[153] In the post-war period many young architects arrived in Vancouver looking for opportunities to move away from the more rigidly defined architectural climate on the east coast of Canada. Architecturally, in the post-war period, Vancouver began to set itself apart from the rest of Canada both in its public as well as private architecture.[154] While architectural Modernism was embraced for public buildings, it was not as readily accepted in single-family domestic architecture.

Many of the architects arriving to Vancouver "saw in Modernist planning, theory, and design a means to alleviate mounting local housing problems."[155] While architectural modernism was no longer considered radical by the 1960s, many still ascribed to the basic design tenets of equity, community and efficiency.[156] Their ideas of architectural modernism were spread in popular magazines such as *Western Homes and Living* and *Vancouver Life,* magazines that featured the work of architects such as Arthur Erikson, C. B. K. Van Norman, Bill Birmingham, and Geoffrey Massey. Frederick Lasserre, head of UBC's new Architecture department, was heavily influenced by Le Corbusier's thought

[150] Liscombe, *Architecture and the Canadian Fabric*.

[151] Armstrong, *Making Toronto Modern*, 187.

[152] Part of the conservatism, Armstrong suggests, stems from the fact that Montreal's School of Architecture was established in 1896. The University of British Columbia did not establish a school of architecture until 1949. Frederic Lasserre was the head of the new architecture department at UBC, and, according to Rhordi Windsor Liscombe, modernist architect Le Corbusier strongly influenced his work.

[153] Rhordi Windsor Liscombe, *The New Spirit: Modern Architecture in Vancouver, 1938-1963* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1997), 26.

[154] Liscombe, *The New Spirit,* 51-55.

[155] Liscombe, 26.

[156] ibid., 22-23.

and suggested that the existing housing problems in BC could only be alleviated by building for the masses—housing needed to be accessible and affordable for the majority of the population. Architect B.C. Binning also advocated for a "model for ordinary housing."[157] The problem then became defining what ordinary housing would look like and how to make it affordable. As *Western Homes and Living* magazine points out "most people think, and rightly so, that the cheapest house to build is the box…The problem is to make the economical box-like house as appealing to the eye as the conventional houses we are already accustomed to."[158] Architects Roger Kemble and Alex Webber advocated for a boxy style of house construction, which they called "packsack housing."[159] It was designed as "two-storey rectangles, small and light enough to fit on a truck. The interior is subdivided both horizontally and vertically, so there's a feeling of spaciousness where it doesn't exist." [160] His design plan resembles a Vancouver Special, but the construction materials were radically different. Architects in Vancouver appeared to be advocating for new forms of housing that would offer more affordable designs with cheaper construction materials. As Kemble articulated in *Vancouver Life* magazine, it was difficult to get City Hall and mortgage lenders to embrace modernist architectural designs. Approval for building permits and mortgages often took much longer, or were denied.[161] The more traditional forms embedded with signs and signifiers reflecting a predominately middle-class British cultural heritage were more likely to get approved. As a result, the visual landscape of the city was slow to change.

The architectural community in British Columbia recognized the distinct need for houses that reflected both the climate conditions and local materials of the west coast. They accepted that, while an architect was essential for ensuring housing built would reflect the single-family dwelling the city planning departments favoured, many new homeowners could not afford the fees that an architect would charge. They formed Architects House Plan Agency (AHPA) in 1953, which produced plans for purchase that reflected designs appropriate for the West Coast. The plans could be purchased for

[157] ibid., 40.
[158] *Western Homes and Living*, May 1952, 21.
[159] *Vancouver Life*, October 1967, 34.
[160] ibid., 35.
[161] ibid., 35.

$25.[162] However, the majority of these plans were for lots that were at least fifteen feet larger than the average thirty-three foot Vancouver lot found on the east side of the city. This limited affordability of constructing the AHPA designs as land values continued to rise.

While many architects advocated for a house designs that would appeal to a large section of the population, the homes by these same architects featured in magazines were custom built in the West Coast Modernist Style. This style of home blurred the boundaries between inside and outside with floor to ceiling windows and exposed wood and stone. They were often situated on lots so as to incorporate the natural landscape. While the homes featured were designed for families and were efficient in their use of space, they were unable to be mass-produced because many of their features were specific to lot shape and slope. The landscaping of the lot was a key feature of the West Coast style. Many of the homes appeared to be emerging from the rock or the trees were nestled into the home. While the form of the houses was new, they still reflected a landscaping style found in middle-class to upper-middle-class neighbourhoods.

Despite the discussion amongst architects and urban planners of how to increase affordability, the City of Vancouver seemed hesitant to embrace more architecturally distinct styles that would be available for lower income residents. In Vancouver, two new forms of domestic dwellings were developed in the mid-1960s—high-rise apartments and garden townhouses—in order to increase the densification of the city and provide rental accommodations. The completion of Beach Towers was much celebrated in *Western Homes and Living* magazine as providing a variety of sizes of apartments from the bachelor to two bedrooms for childless couples.[163] They were advertised as "a whole new concept for urban living in a changing society."[164] Prior to the mid-1960s, three or four storey walkups had been the preferred style for densification in the city. The twenty storey towers constructed near the north side of the Burrard bridge featured balconies with views of English Bay, Kits Beach and UBC giving urban dwellers a new

[162] *Western Homes and Living*, February 1953, 16.
[163] *Western Homes and Living*, January 1966, 22.
[164] ibid., 22.

outlook on the city. The three towers, connected by an underground parking facility, featured amenities, such as a gym and pool, reflecting a new modern style of dwelling. While architecturally Beach Towers was very different from houses in Shaughnessy and the University Endowment Lands, their focus on the landscape and the view was a modern reflection of the Garden City movement and upper-class attitudes. *Western Homes and Living* magazine emphasized that while they were rental units, local architect C.B.K. van Norman designed the three towers, and cost $6 million to build.[165] Thereby giving status to the building and aligning the new construction with the neighbourhood ideals attached to Shaughnessy and the University Endowment Lands.

In an effort to encourage "middle and upper income" families to move back to the city, garden townhouses were constructed on the west side of the city for families wanting to shorten the commute while still having access to garden space.[166] Garden townhouses were advertised a new choice for families who had "a traditional loyalty to the single family residence."[167] The garden townhouses in Vancouver were built on the former Quilchena and Arbutus golf courses. Van Dusen Gardens was also developed in conjunction with the closing of the Arbutus golf course to ensure that neighbourhood maintained its rural element. Creating new types of dwellings on the more affluent west side of the city was important because many families had moved out and had relocated in the suburbs. While the style of housing had changed the emphasis still remained on promoting the visual aesthetic already embedded in the west side of the city. Both Beach Towers and the garden townhouses boasted of the available amenities, such as pools, as well as the views of nature as drawing features to this new style of living.

While much of the attention in *Western Homes and Living* magazine was on the architectural designs of local architects and on new urban dwellings on the west side of the city, there was no discussion about urban development on the east side of the city. The Vancouver Special was not featured in design magazines or popular magazines even though it was designed for families and increased the densification of the city. Rather than celebrated as a way to increase urban density and to attract families across

[165] ibid., 22
[166] *Western Homes and Living*, September 1966, 11.
[167] ibid., 11.

the whole of the city, specialists of the city's urban development such as Berelowitz, Punter and Kluckner suggest that the Vancouver Special's popularity was due to its economical construction.[168] Yet, economically built apartments were featured as the modern way of living in the city and houses with the provision for more than one family to live in them were not. While garden townhouses and apartments were not considered cutting edge architecturally, as similar designs were found in Europe and on the east coast of the United States, they were celebrated as a significant mark of progress on Vancouver's domestic landscape. Though there were slight variations in the interior layouts of the apartments and garden apartments, the same basic plan was followed. The rising homogeneity in living accommodations was a marked feature of the modern city. Rather than being featured as an example of a modern single-family dwelling, the exterior the Vancouver Special is described as about as "attractive as a shopping mall,"[169] and as a "cookie-cutter house."[170] Yet, these phrases have not been applied to tower apartments and garden townhouses because architects guided their construction and development.

From the 1960s to the 1980s, the City of Vancouver was exploring different forms of architecture and ways of increasing densification and affordability in the city. The Vancouver Special successfully met the goals of the city to encourage families into the city and to increase densification; however, it challenged the notions of acceptable domestic dwellings because the CMHC, architects or contractor-developers did not guide its construction. I suggest that while the Vancouver Special reflected many of the architectural ideas suggested in *Western Homes and Living* and *Vancouver Life* magazines, it has been maligned as a solution for the housing problems in Vancouver because it was not designed by an architect, nor was the construction of it funded by a large development company. The lack of architectural references and size challenged the existing signs and signifiers of middle-class and working-class housing in the city. As a result, the exterior of the design has been denigrated because it did not match the

[168] Lance Berelowitz, *Dream City: Vancouver and the Global Imagination* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2005); John Punter, *The Vancouver Achievement: Urban Planning and Design* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003); Michael Kluckner, *Vanishing Vancouver* (North Vancouver, Whitecap Books, 2012).

[169] Kluckner, *Vanishing Vancouver*, 120

[170] Kalman & Ward, *Exploring Vancouver*, 79.

existing visual language of the city, which was based on middle-class design principles. However, with over 10,000 built during a twenty-year period, they cannot be ignored as significantly shifting the visual language of the city, and for what they represent architecturally of working-class culture leaving a tangible mark on the landscape.

Chapter 4.

Home Ownership—Creating a sense of place in a contested space

Shifting the discussion of the Vancouver Special from the "the abstract space of the experts (architects, urbanists, planners)," to the subjective space of everyday users highlights the importance of the house for individual owners as well as for the neighbourhoods in which they were constructed.[171] Lefebvre argues that, "private space is distinct from, but always connected with, public space."[172] Regulation of the public space of neighbourhoods, then becomes also a regulation of the private lives of the inhabitants. Spatial practices became a way of regulating place-making practices by limiting where people could live in the city. Lefebvre suggests that too much emphasis is placed on who is producing, and what they are producing rather than exploring how the social morphology is changing as a result of production. As chapters one and two demonstrate the city was concerned with developing an urban environment that was not only perceived as modern, but also reinforced a British design aesthetic both in its street layouts and in it domestic architecture. The changing by-laws had the unintended consequences of creating the conditions for a new housing style to emerge. This new housing style was purchased by non-Anglo homeowners predominately, thereby changing the social morphology of the urban landscape of Vancouver. If as philosopher Michel de Certeau suggests, "one admits that spatial practices in fact secretly structure the determining conditions of social life," then the construction and purchase of the Vancouver Special can be viewed as a tangible marker of the evolving domestic

[171] Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 362.
[172] ibid., 166.

landscape, but also changing views of home ownership in the city during the 1960s and 1970s.[173]

During the 1960s and 1970s, developers and investors were attempting to transform Vancouver into a world city; however, there was still the unwritten desire that the city remain predominately British in origin. The narrative of home ownership is also attached to larger ideas of nationalism and citizenship. Historian Sean Purdy argues that housing reformers promoted home ownership as a way of ensuring stability among the working-class. He suggests that many housing reformers held onto the notion that "to build good homes was to build good citizens."[174] Good citizens reflected British ideas, which reinforced the racial and class structures in the city. Early immigration to Canada and Vancouver, specifically, was largely British in origin. Ennals and Holdsworth suggest, "most [immigrants] saw in British North America…the opportunity to conserve a way of life that was rapidly being denied them at home."[175] For many immigrants, home ownership became a way of preserving a class structure or bettering their socioeconomic status. McDonald argues that early immigrants to Vancouver soon established both political and economic connections to the city through home ownership.[176]

In Vancouver, early homeowners shaped the visual aesthetics of the city as much as urban planning policies through their contribution to property taxes for improving urban amenities such as sewer, water, and street lighting. According to historian Patricia Roy, Vancouver's pride and identity were based on "being a city of homes where even men of modest means could expect to own their own single family dwelling on its own lot."[177] The municipality of South Vancouver attracted "thrifty individuals who wanted to avoid taxation as much as possible."[178] Many homeowners preferred to build their own roads rather than pay taxes to generate the funds for the city

[173] Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 96.

[174] Sean Purdy, "Scaffolding Citizenship: Housing Reform and Nation Formation in Canada, 1900-1950," 129.

[175] Ennals and Holdsworth, *Homeplace*, 45.

[176] McDonald, *Making Vancouver*, 138, 223.

[177] Patricia E. Roy, *Vancouver: An Illustrated History*, (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, Publishers, 1980), 67.

[178] Roy, *Vancouver: An Illustrated History*, 68.

to undertake this work. As a result, many homes did not have roads leading to them. However, many residents on the west side of the city were "frustrated by their inability to develop their land," and joined together to petition the province to create a new municipality. The split of the municipality Point Grey away from South Vancouver, on January 1, 1908, divided the city along class lines. Class lines were further cemented into the landscape with the development of Shaughnessy neighbourhood. Even though the lots sold for less than lots in working class areas of the city, the minimum build costs for houses regulated who could afford to live in the neighbourhood. The land-use covenant further excluded the sale of properties to people who were not Caucasian. These early land use decisions cemented the class divisions in the city, but still perpetuated the narrative of homeownership as a marker of good citizenship.

In the post-war period there was a renewed emphasis on home ownership as an indicator of good citizenship. In North America, it was considered as a way to fight against the "inroads of Communism" by extending ownership to "an ever widening segment of the population."[179] In an effort to encourage home ownership the federal government created the CMHC, which oversaw the development of many subdivisions across the nation. Homeowners were able to receive grants for purchasing a CMHC design as the federal government attempted to make it easier for homeowners to purchase a new home. The single-family dwelling was considered the ideal form of accommodation for the democratic society, was the sign of proper living and ownership of it signified a sense of belonging, citizenship, stability and permanence. This rhetoric was visually reinforced with the rapid building in the post-war period. The promotion of the nuclear family was a way to further ensure that the population remained politically stable. In 1958, the federal government passed a law that made exclusive land-use guidelines and covenants no longer legal.[180] The attitudes, of who belongs in the city, which had become entrenched in the landscape were slow to shift because the urban planning policies and architectural designs reinforced Anglo attitudes of citizenship, yet city officials were encouraging Vancouver to become more cosmopolitan through increased trade with and immigration from Pacific Rim countries.. As a result, the

[179] Marc Demhez, *The Canadian Home: From Cave to Electric Cocoon*, (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1994), 101.

[180] Land Registry Act R.S.B.C (1960) c. 208.

existing narrative of home ownership was challenged as a one that perpetuated British ideas of belonging and citizenship widened as different cultural groups began to purchase homes in the city.

Starting in the mid-1960s, in Vancouver, rising non-British immigration disrupted the previous narratives of belonging and citizenship through home ownership. The increase in Asian immigration altered the cultural demographic of the city. Historian Kay Anderson claims that informal pressure against Chinese families dwelling in neighbourhoods outside Strathcona became a thing of the past during the 1970s.[181] By 1970, according to historian Norbert MacDonald, 35% of the population in Vancouver was non-Canadian born, and one in five came from a non-English speaking country.[182] But as Anderson reveals the "growing flows of immigration from Asia" was highly contested both in the House of Commons and in Vancouver's municipal politics. Rising Asian immigration to Canada was perceived as a threat to the fundamental "nature of the Canadian population."[183] Geographer Katharyne Mitchell explores the racial and class tensions in Vancouver during the 1980s with the construction of what was termed as "monster houses" in the wealthier neighbourhoods of Shaughnessy and Kerrisdale.[184] I suggest that the beginnings of these tensions resulted from the construction of the Vancouver Special. The "monster house" used the existing by-laws utilized by the Vancouver Special to maximize the lot lines and to construct a large boxy structure in place of a smaller house.[185] While the design principles appear to be the same, the key difference between the Vancouver Special and the "monster house" is that the later was built on a significantly larger lot. Mitchell states that the arrival of wealthy immigrants from Hong Kong, who built large houses, which often towered over the smaller, existing housing stock, disrupted the ideas of class and power in the city.

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[181] Kay J. Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 215.

[182] Norbert MacDonald, *Distant Neighbours: A Comparative History of Seattle & Vancouver,* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), 156-157.

[183] Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown*, 241.

[184] Mitchell, *Crossing the Neoliberal Line,* 169.

[185] Katharyne Mitchell, "Fast Capital, Race, Modernity, and the Monster House" in *Burning Down the House: Recycling Domesticity*, ed. Rosemary Marangoly George, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 190.

While Mitchell's work sheds a harsh light on the racist and classist attitudes of those living in Vancouver in the 1980s, my work on the Vancouver Special sheds a different light on the arrival of immigrants to the city. The Local Area Planning reports reveal a desire to ensure families were able to remain in the neighbourhood by promoting different forms of zoning as well as a desire to maintain and encourage the ethnic diversity of their neighbourhoods. I suggest that the construction of this particular design allowed for a new form of place-making and home ownership to happen in the city that allowed for non-Anglo immigrants to challenge how a single-family dwelling should be inhabited by making it easier for a rental suite to be included as a mortgage helper or to live with a multi-generational family. As Mitchell suggests, focusing on the changing landscape and home hints at the changing "meaning of social and economic organization and of society itself."[186] The Vancouver Special represented a shift in construction of single-family dwellings that allowed working-class families and immigrant families an opportunity to establish a place in the city.

The design of previous housing styles indicated the cultural heritage and status of the homeowner. Stripping away historical or cultural architectural references found in earlier American or British house designs, further emphasized the shift in ownership of the Vancouver Special to a growing non-British population. Punter observes, "German, Italian, and Greek immigrants," purchased Vancouver Specials, though he neglects to mention Asians, predominately Chinese. This broad cross-section of cultural groups was drawn to the same house design, and by purchasing it they acquired one of the key markers of citizenship. Furthermore, the house design disrupted the previous signs and signifiers of socioeconomic status in the city. The size of the house had previously indicated the wealth and status of the homeowner—the larger the house, the greater the status. However, the significantly larger Vancouver Special, compared to the existing housing stock purchased by working-class families, challenged what house size signified. Secondly, home ownership of single-family dwellings on the west side of the city was becoming increasingly expensive. As a result, fewer families were purchasing homes there. In order to encourage homeowners to remain on the west side of Vancouver, new narratives of homeownership needed to be promoted. The definition of

[186] Mitchell, "Fast Capital, Race, Modernity, and the Monster House," 208.

the homeowner was expanded from only meaning purchasing a single-family dwelling to include ownership of condominiums and townhouses.

According to an article titled "Buy vs Rent" in *Western Homes and Living* magazine, "home ownership has a strong appeal for most people."[187] The article suggested that, "single-family homes have increasingly been seen as good investments in inflationary times."[188] Harris also suggests that the working-class aspired more for home ownership because it gave them a sense of agency with the municipality that middle-classes were able to get through businesses and other forms of investment.[189] However, the article predicts that condominiums and townhouses will become more appealing as an option with escalating housing costs. With rising housing prices and lack of available land there was a fear that the dream of home ownership of a single-family dwelling might be ending in Vancouver. Historian Patricia Roy suggested that, "soaring real estate values in the late 1970s meant that only the relatively affluent could afford even a small bungalow anywhere in the city."[190] However, she fails to recognize that the Vancouver Special was one of the few affordable housing options in the city that still adhered to the single-family dwelling aesthetic. The rising housing prices overall coincided with non-Anglo immigration to the city.

The Vancouver Special, due to its proliferation predominately on the east side of the city, not only shaped the aesthetics of neighbourhoods, but also visually represented the shifting narrative of home ownership in the city. While the design community, according to Berelowitz, shunned the Vancouver Special and considered it an "affront to the city's bourgeois aesthetic sensibility" few people in or outside the design community have commented on what the Vancouver Special offered people who purchased the home.[191] The discussion has instead focused on the perceived lack of exterior design and detailing on the home rather than on the significance "for newcomers with limited capital" to be able to build two Specials side-by-side or to purchase one.[192] The

[187] Brenda McCourt, "Buy vs Rent" *Western Homes and Living*, January/February 1970, 56.
[188] McCourt, "Buy vs Rent", 57.
[189] Harris, *Creeping Conformity*, 37.
[190] Roy, *Vancouver: An Illustrated History*, 140.
[191] Berelowitz, *Dream City*, 197.
[192] Berelowitz, 196.

Vancouver Special Draft Report indicates there was a high consumer demand for housing in general, and this particular design was "sought out by a number of buyers."[193] The design was cost-efficient and the approval process was quick, which meant the house could be built in two to three months, whereas custom built houses took thirty to sixty days longer to build.[194] Brushing the Vancouver Special off as little more than an economic solution to housing needs reduces the actions of arriving immigrants to financial considerations, rather than exploring what ownership of this particular design might have been offered that made it so appealing. The Vancouver Special became a way for new immigrants to enact a form of homemaking that "proved adaptable to suit a range of domestic arrangements."[195] This included living with parents, or in-laws or finishing the lower floor as a rental suite. This chapter argues that the shifting of domestic arrangements challenged the norms of homemaking.

The functional design of the Vancouver Special gave homeowners the opportunity to finish the home according to their needs. Certeau suggests that "what is counted" in the established practices of urban planning and architecture is "*what* is used, not the *ways* of using."[196] But moving past the spatial practices of the city, and exploring how people use the house hints at the importance of the house to the owner. Initially, the lower floor of the house was not included in the sale price, as the cost of the house was only based on the square footage of the finished rooms. This enabled homeowners to purchase the house, and then decide how the lower floor should be completed. For some, the lower floor was converted into an in-law suite, and for others it was completely closed off from the upper floor and it was rented out as a mortgage helper. The design of the house made it easy to complete these renovations because once inside the front door, the lower floor could be closed off completely or partially if laundry was to be shared. The plumbing and electrical lines ran along the center wall, which made it easy to put in a smaller secondary kitchen if desired.[197] The lower floor had between 1000-1200 square feet of usable space, depending on the configuration of the furnace and hot water tank. The upper floor was 1200-1400 square feet; this was split into two halves by

[193] Vancouver Special Draft Report, 23.
[194] ibid., 22-23.
[195] Berelowitz, 197.
[196] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 35.
[197] Terriss, 125.

the stairway from the lower floor. The three bedrooms and two bathrooms were on one side of the house and the open concept kitchen, dining and living room were located on the opposite side.[198] For most models, the only interior difference was whether the bedrooms were on the left or right side of the house. The bedrooms were sized to the width of standard carpet, which made finishing the rooms more economical because fewer cuts or custom orders were required. With a total square footage of 2400 square feet, the Vancouver Special provided not only a variety of options, but also provided "a considerable amount of useable living space."[199] The popularity of the design can be attributed to the fact that "in comparison, the amount of useable space in alternative 33' lot house designs is, on average, less than 1400 square feet."[200]

However, it was the use of the interior space that challenged the existing narrative attached to single-family dwellings. Since the bottom floor and top floor were nearly identical in size, two families could conceivably inhabit the same dwelling. While the house was mostly constructed in areas that were zoned for single-family dwellings, the potential to have two families occupying the same house challenged the notion of who should be living in a residential neighbourhood. One of the more contentious issues with the Vancouver Special surrounded the idea of a secondary suite. The inclusion of additional members into a home was considered incompatible with middle-class conceptions of homes being for nuclear families only. However, many people in Vancouver rented out rooms or sections of houses during the Great Depression and World War Two as a way to make ends meet during economically difficult times. Typically, they converted basements into suites. In 1956 a by-law was put in place, which made "secondary suites in single-family dwelling districts RS-1" illegal.[201] City Council required "the removal of all illegal suites from Single Family Dwelling Districts over a ten year period terminating in 1970."[202] However, permits were extended in 1966 due to a housing shortage. In 1975, the City Planning Department conducted a survey to determine homeowners' views towards secondary suites. According to the report produced by Pat Johnston and Derek Hayes, secondary suites were "a feasible and

[198] Vancouver Special Draft Report, 4.
[199] ibid., 14.
[200] ibid., 14.
[201] Housing Residential Developments—Secondary Suites, 1.
[202] ibid., 1.

quickly implementable means of providing an increase in the housing stock to alleviate the housing shortage."[203] The reported stated "there appears at first glance, to be an almost irrational distinction drawn in people's minds between permitting suites in their own houses and permitting them in their area. [underlining in original]"[204] According to the survey respondents, "85.6 per cent" wanted the option to put a suite in their own basement, and they would use it for additional rental income, but they did not necessarily want zoning to change to allow for suites in their neighbourhood.[205] South Vancouver had the highest percentage of people who wanted zoning to change to allow for suites. This area of the city was mostly recently constructed and did not have an entrenched design aesthetic in the neighbourhood. Numerous Vancouver Specials were also constructed in the neighbourhoods of Sunset and Victoria. On June 17, 1975, City Council approved a set of standards to guide the conversion of existing housing to include a secondary suite. These restrictions ensured that the owner remained an occupant of the house. The appearance of the single-family dwelling had to be maintained, and remain in keeping with the character of the neighbourhood. The unit must be at least 400 square feet, only 12" below grade, with adequate daylight and ventilation, as well as provide off-street parking.[206] Based on these restrictions, the Vancouver Special fit the criteria for secondary suite conversions. The City Planning Department was advocating for families to put in rental suites because "it is felt that resident ownership has a positive effect on a neighbourhood in that problems associated with absentee ownership such as a lack of maintenance and loose control of tenants would be minimized." [207] It was recommended that all of the Cedar Cottage neighbourhood and part of Kitsilano be rezoned to RS-1A to allow for secondary suite construction. Local Area Planning reports, however, reveal an opposition to the Vancouver Special in both of these neighbourhoods because of the existing older housing stock. Many felt that the demolition of older houses and construction of new housing disrupted the existing character of the neighbourhood.

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[203] ibid., 3.

[204] ibid., 26.

[205] ibid., 32.

[206] Ibid., 34.

[207] To: City Manager (for Standing Committee on Housing and Environment), 1. December 2, 1976. CVA 119 G 2 File 10 OR 105-C-2

The Vancouver Special Draft Report's suggestion that, "basement suites provided in some of these houses are good for the neighbourhood" has highly subjective implications depending on the specific neighbourhood to which it applies.[208] In the Grandview-Woodlands neighbourhood, many of the Local Area Planning reports state vehemently that they are opposed to development that disrupts or destroys the family nature of their community. They requested that zoning be changed in their neighbourhood to RT-2, which would allow for two family dwellings. Many of the Vancouver Specials in this neighbourhood are zoned for duplexes or double houses, rather than for a single-family dwelling with a suite, though Vancouver Specials were considered preferable to duplexes. The City Planning Department wanted to limit the number of duplexes constructed because they feared that land speculation would effectively block the provision of rental accommodations, which the city had very little of.[209] Many saw basement suites as a way to encourage families to remain in the neighbourhood as these spaces could be rented out for extra income to put toward their mortgage. It was also assumed that rentals with the landlord above were preferable to the entire house being rented as the homeowner could ensure greater control over the property. Local Area Planning reports from the Hastings neighbourhood also state that homeowners are not opposed to the construction of basement suites. Homeowners are seen as preferable to renters because they are more stable and more likely to contribute to the neighbourhood. However, rentals on the west side of the city were not seen as desirable because they were equated with having boarders, which was considered working-class behaviour. Since the Vancouver Special design plan fit into multiple zoning restrictions (single-family, single-family with suite and duplex), it could be approved for construction in multiple neighbourhoods in the city.

In addition to houses gaining personal significance for the owners, the promotion of ownership was closely tied to municipal politics. As a result of the baby boom and increased immigration, Vancouver, like many other North American cities, experienced a period of rapid house construction. Vancouver's southern neighbourhoods, which were considered more like suburbs in their relation to the city proper, experienced the most new construction. Home ownership was promoted in magazines and newspapers as an

[208] Vancouver Special Draft Report, 36.
[209] Housing Residential Developments--Secondary Suites, 33.

obtainable and worthy goal of new immigrants to the city and its surrounding areas, such as Burnaby, Surrey, Delta, Richmond and North Vancouver. North America had a long history of promoting home ownership as a guiding narrative of how people should live in the city. Historian Jill Wade suggests that 68.5% of single-family dwellings in Vancouver were owner occupied in the 1950s.[210] This high rate of ownership is significant because as geographer Richard Harris suggests homeowners were considered more involved politically, and tenants were restricted from voting.[211] Tenants were able to vote municipally in 1958 in Toronto, in most other cities by the 1960s, but not until the 1970s did they gain the right to vote in Vancouver.[212] Homeownership, thus, not only ensured domestic stability because inhabitants were no longer at the whim of landlords, but it also afforded them an opportunity to engage in municipal politics.

In 1975, as a result of provincial funding, the City Planning Department shifted the process of urban planning onto the individual neighbourhoods. This allowed for homeowners within individual neighbourhoods to assert a greater voice in the shaping of their neighbourhood. The city was divided into twenty-one areas based on similarity of socio-economic background and typography, which formed the Local Area Planning councils. According to the City Planning Department, the priority areas for development were Kitsilano, Fairview, Mt. Pleasant, Cedar Cottage and Grandview-Woodlands.

[210] Wade, *Houses for All*, 195.
[211] Harris, *Creeping Conformity*, 36.
[212] Harris, 37.

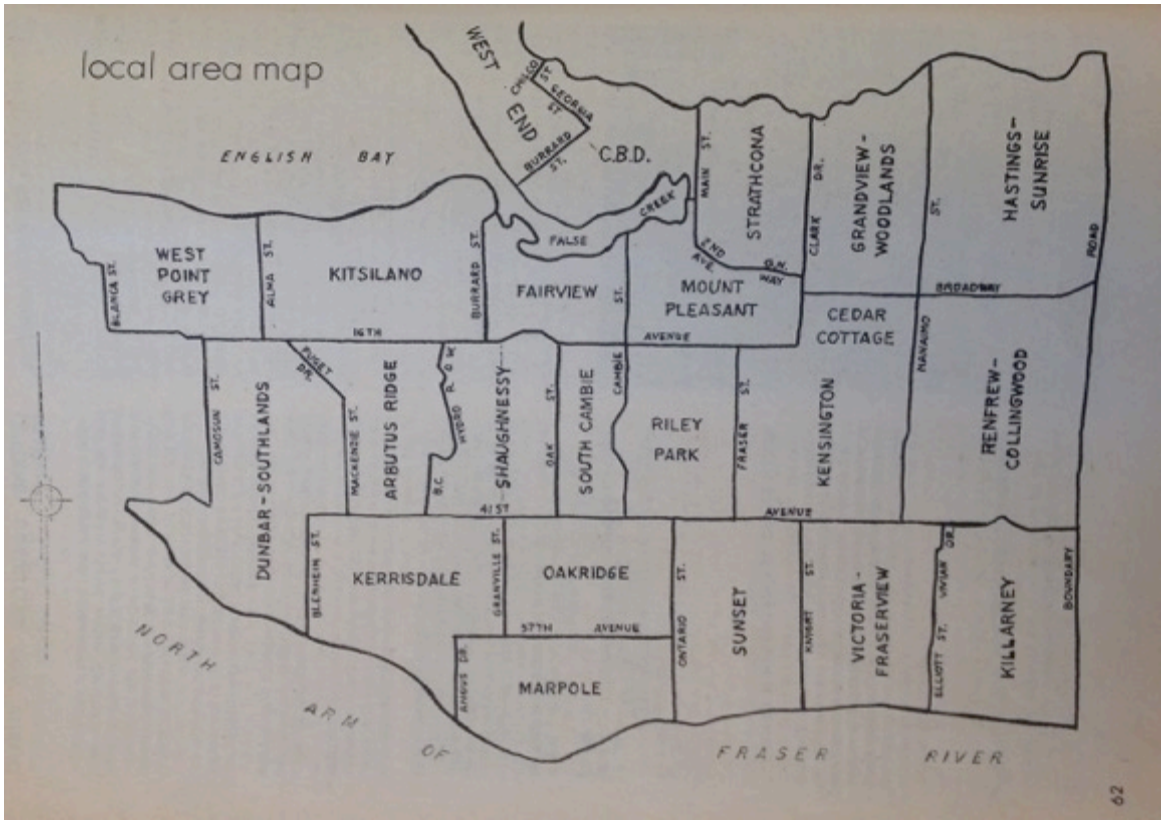

Figure 4.1. Local Area Map

Note. Forever Deceiving You: The Politics of Vancouver Development, (Vancouver: Vancouver Urban Research Group, 1972) Vancouver City Archives 85-C-3 File 46

These neighbourhoods have high density and redevelopment potential due to their proximity to the urban core. Hastings-Sunrise and Marpole were also given high priority because of their older housing stock.[213] Each area was assigned an urban planner, a secretary, and an office space within in the community, which was usually a storefront. This provided a place for residents to drop off concerns or suggestions for their neighbourhood. Each area formed a Local Area Planning Committee, which met once a month, usually in an elementary school gym. The committees were made up of volunteers from within the neighbourhood. The size of the committee ranged between twelve and twenty members. Hastings-Sunrise Local Area Planning committee was the most vocal and active group. For the first meeting, 450 people attended, and 115 people

[213] Manager's Report May 28, 1976. COV S62-10 32-C-1 File 3

stepped forward to be on the committee.[214] For the majority of the neighbourhoods the construction of the Vancouver Special was not part of their monthly discussions. Promoting home ownership was a common thread across the city; however, when given a voice in shaping development and planning in their neighbourhood, homeowners in the city were split in the types and styles of development that should take place. Guided by the Local Area Planning committees, the class differences between the east and west side of the city that were established in 1908, became more entrenched.

On the west side of the city, homeowners were advocating for changes in zoning RS-1 (single-family dwelling) to RM-3 or RM-3A, which was for apartments. This form of zoning was for higher-end new developments for purchase rather than increasing rental units in the city. The implementation of the Strata Titles Act in 1966 by the BC legislature allowed for new construction to still perpetuate home ownership as the ideal, but allowed for smaller residential areas to be developed across the west side of the city. These new constructions were designed by architects and frequently were established by large development companies. The changing nature of home ownership appears acceptable when it was driven by the city, and supported by developers. The CPR sold 66.12 acres to the city in order to develop the Langara Golf Course. Twenty acres were set aside for higher-end townhouses to offset the cost to the city. On the west side the new developments were nestled in gardens and close to golf course in order to maintain the same visual aesthetic of the neighbourhood. The higher cost of the apartments was a way of ensuring that the existing class structure of the neighbourhoods was maintained. According to a report to the Planning Department dated August 12, 1976, "an assumed goal of the owner-occupier is to maintain his lifestyle and economic position."[215] The report further discusses how the change in zoning to encourage townhouses was not standardized across the city; on the east side the emphasis was on social housing in the form of townhouses, but on the west side the city was encouraging "luxury form of townhouse development." [216] As geographer David Ley suggests, "the conformity inherent in neighbourhood sponsored design controls is indicative of a tightly bonded

[214] Hastings-Sunrise Local Area Planning Committee minutes October 1979. Hastings-Sunrise Local Area Planning 1979-80 88-G-5-File 1.

[215] August 12, 1976 Planning Department Report on the role of conversion areas in the city, 5. COV 32-C-1 City Clerk's Department File 3

[216] Ibid., 3.

social world where landscape offers a non-verbal communication of inclusion and exclusion."[217] While land-use guidelines could no longer be used to restrict home ownership based on class or racial background, the construction of luxury apartments became a way to perpetuate the existing class-based narrative in west-side neighbourhoods.

Whereas, on the east side of the city Local Area Planning committees were favouring changes in zoning to ensure secondary suites could be included as a way of guaranteeing that families remained in the neighbourhood. East-side neighbourhoods were resistant to large apartment developments changing both the aesthetics and family orientation of their community. In the Grandview-Woodlands neighbourhood, Local Area Planning reports expressed concerns that changes in housing would push out the existing families, thereby homogenizing the neighbourhood both economically and racially. In a brief to the Members of City Council from the Grandview-Woodlands Advisory Planning Committee, they state "The Grandview—Woodlands has a low to middle income population, mixed both in ethnicity and age, but PRIMARILY family-oriented. AFFORDABLE, FAMILY-SIZE HOUSING, THEREFORE, IS A PRIORITY IF THE PEOPLE LVING HERE NOW ARE TO REMAIN. [all caps used in the original]"[218] The passion with which this brief was written indicates a strong desire to maintain the existing single-family dwelling aesthetic. While some in the neighbourhood indicated a desire to sell their property to developers, the majority wanted to ensure that any changes in zoning protected the family-oriented nature of the neighbourhood. In the Second Brief to Members of City Council from the Grandview-Woodland Advisory Planning Council stated;

"THE CONCERN OF THE GRANDVIEW—WOODLAND PLANNING COMMITTEE IS NOT WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW HOUSING PER SE. RATHER WE ARE OPPOSED TO THE UNCONTROLLED DEVELOPMENT OF HOUSING WHICH IS OF NO BENEFIT TO THE EXISTING COMMUNITY, WHICH IS DEVELOPMENT FOR DEVELOPMENT'S SAKE AND SHOWS NO SENSITVITY

[217] David Ley, "Past Elites and Present Gentry: Neighbourhoods of Privilege in the Inner City" in *The Changing Social Geography of Canadian Cities*, eds. Larry S. Bourne and David F. Ley, (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queens's University Press, 1993).

[218] Brief to Members of City Council from Grandview-Woodland Advisory Council. Series 62 COV 32-C-1 File 5.

EITHER TO THE PHYSICAL OR THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT. [All caps used in the original]"[219]

Homeowners in Grandview-Woodlands neighbourhood wanted to ensure their community was maintained, despite the new development.

The community of Grandview-Woodlands was also very ethnically diverse. One woman, Karin Morris, wrote several letters to City Council urging them to consider the fact that many people living in this neighbourhood did not speak English as a first language, and as a result may have difficulty expressing themselves.[220] She also suggested that many of the families living in Grandview-Woodlands had relocated there when their previous houses in Strathcona had been purchased by the city in the hopes of building the freeway through their neighbourhood. A letter to City Council from the West Grandview Property Owners Association further supported Ms. Morris' sentiments. This two page letter outlined how the ethnic "property owners were ruthlessly treated" during the devaluation of properties in Strathcona during the 1950s.[221] The property owners were advocating for protection of ethnic communities within the Grandview Woodlands neighbourhood to ensure that they did not experience dislocation again. The property owners forcefully stated, "THIS IS RACIAL PREJUDICE and takes advantage of the ethnic people who are not familiar with the English language. [All caps used in original]"[222] This letter was c.c.ed to the Sun and Province newspapers, a Chinese newspaper as well as three radio stations. There was no evidence in either the personal letters collected by the Local Area Planning committee or in the minutes that concerned citizens wanted to exclude families based on racial background. In the Manager's Report describing the neighbourhood, the key characteristics of the neighbourhood were its "family emphasis and ethnic diversity," which was further supported as "46.3% [were] ESL Italian, Chinese, Indo-Pakistani, Japanese, Portuguese, Spanish and East European."[223] The reports repeatedly emphasized the desire to maintain the "family

[219] 2nd Brief to Members of City Council from Grandview-Woodland Advisory Council, 2. Series 62 COV 32-C-1 File 5

[220] Letter from private owner Mrs. Karin J. Morris. Series 62 COV 32-C-1 File 5

[221] West Grandview Property Owners Association to City Council, January 10th, 197, 1. Series 62 COV 32-C-1 File 5.

[222] Ibid., 2.

[223] Grandview Woodland Area Policy Plan Part 1 Grandview-Victoria, 3. 88-G-4 File 3

nature of the community as the single most important goal of the area."[224] Thus, the homeowners attempted to use zoning to protect their neighbourhood from large apartment development that would make it difficult for families to remain in the neighbourhood. Concerned property owners advocated for increased zoning of RS-2 (One family dwelling with suite) and RT-2 (two family dwelling), which allowed the construction of the Vancouver Special to flourish in this neighbourhood. This indicates a desire to create an inclusive neighbourhood both racially and socioeconomically.

Homeowners in Hastings-Sunrise were also opposed to large development. The Local Area Planning Council met on a weekly basis often for over three hours to discuss changes and improvements in their neighbourhood. A sub-group formed the Hastings-Sunrise Action Council and produced a short book, titled *Inside Hastings Sunrise*, on the history of the neighbourhood. The short text focussed on changes in housing in the neighbourhood. A developer, United Equities Ltd purchased several homes on the 2800 block of Franklin Street in the hopes of constructing a hotel.[225] The Local Area Planning committee was able to stop the development, though the houses remained derelict and were eventually demolished. The lots were later developed by John Lipere with houses comparable in size to the Vancouver Special, though the committee did recommend he "break up the designs a bit more for more variety on the streetscape."[226] The Hastings-Sunrise reports also indicate a desire to change zoning to "RS-1A to allow for suites in existing houses. This would also give tenants more legal rights."[227] The recognition that renters need some protection through legal suites was not discussed in the Secondary Suite Report. In response to the Vancouver Special survey, the Local Area Planning committee did acknowledge "pressures in some sub-areas for increasing density, uniformity and limited forms of housing, housing costs, rehabilitation barriers and lack of housing."[228] In two years of reports, there was no mention of the Vancouver Special, specifically, becoming a concern for the residents in the neighbourhood despite the high

[224] Planning Department Report to City Manager, January 19, 1977, 1. Series 62 COV 32-C-1 File 5.

[225] Hastings-Sunrise Local Area Planning 1979-80 COV 88-G-5 File 1.

[226] December 11, 1980 Hastings-Sunrise Citizen's Planning Committee. COV S62-11 88-G-4 File 7

[227] Ibid, 16.

[228] Hastings-Sunrise Local Area Planning minutes, August 20, 1980. 88-G-5 File 1.

number of houses constructed in this neighbourhood. The Victoria-Fraserview neighbourhood report acknowledges that 17.7% of the area's 1976 housing stock was zoned as RT-2 for duplexes—"this proportion is double that represented in the entire city."[229] The rise of other types of houses reflected "the increasing financial unfeasibility of owning a single detached home for many families."[230] While the report acknowledges there has been a rise in demolitions and subdivision of lots, there is no reference to dissatisfaction with the new houses constructed or the Vancouver Special, specifically. The Sunset community profile also reveals demolition of older single-family dwellings and replacement housing is often classified as double houses or duplexes, which the Vancouver Special falls under.[231] The new housing has "not resulted in any significant digression from the community's housing character as being solidly single-family."[232] The majority of the Vancouver Specials were constructed on the east side of the city, yet the neighbourhood reports from the 1970s do not indicated a dissatisfaction with the type of housing constructed during this period. The neighbourhoods wanted housing that appealed to families and resisted apartment or townhouse development as on option for increasing densification.

The Vancouver Special survey and the eventual halting of their construction in 1984 indicated a desire to stop the place-making narrative of working-class and immigrant families. Under the guise of dissecting the overall visual aesthetics of the house and neighbourhoods, the City Planning department effectively gained control of the visual narrative of the city. An examination of the questions on the Vancouver Special survey reveals subtle middle-class bias in the questions. Owning a house implies a degree of expectation that the homeowner has also bought into a neighbourhood set of ideals that for the most part will remain unchanged. The survey statement "The neighbourhood seems much more crowded than it used to be" assumes that the previous living arrangements were somehow better before the new houses were constructed. It is also a veiled reference to the Garden City design aesthetic of houses

[229] Vernon Semotuk and Byron Mah Victoria Fraserview community profile (Vancouver City Planning Department, September 1978), 35. COV-S40 121-B-4 Folder 14.

[230] Ibid., 48.

[231] Vernon Semotuk and Byron Mah Sunset community profile (Vancouver City Planning Department, September 1978), 41. PD 300.

[232] ibid., 41.

on large lots and spaced away from each other. References to the neighbourhood becoming more crowded can be viewed as someone's socioeconomic status appearing to shift downwards as a result of new construction. Yet, a report done of Kerrisdale, Oakridge, Sunset and Victoria/Fraserview neighbourhoods in 1978 indicated that "the major conclusions of the study found all four areas to be stable, family oriented communities whose residents have relatively few complaints regarding their neighbourhoods."[233] Each of the individual neighbourhood reports acknowledges an increase in non-English speakers, and a rise in new housing, but there is no correlation between the Vancouver Special and the changing racial demographic of the city. If the Vancouver Special had significantly disrupted the neighbourhood aesthetic then complaints would have arisen across the city. The statement "The elevated balconies of these houses reduce the privacy of neighbours," also implies a class status that middle-class houses are afforded more privacy and space from neighbours. Yet, balconies were a common feature in the new high-rise apartments across the west side of the city. The difference was the balconies in apartments enabled the occupant to take in the view thereby repeating the design aesthetics of the Garden City movement of ensuring a close connection to nature. The visual narrative of the city needed to reflect the existing visual narrative of the west-side neighbourhoods rather than allowing for a new visual narrative to emerge.

The affordability of the Vancouver Special provided working-class families with a variety of options for living in the city.. The design of the house allowed for a flexibility in how to use the space, which, as a result, challenged the narrative of the single-family dwelling. While some neighbourhoods actively supported the construction of the Vancouver Special because it was a way to encourage families back into the city, other neighbourhoods fixated on the lack of exterior aesthetics, and tried to block its construction. I suggested in this chapter that the promotion of zoning to support new modern dwellings, and luxury apartments became a way of regulating space with Vancouver to appeal to a white, middle- to upper-classes. The Vancouver Special's design disrupted the previous signs and signifiers of the class-structure embedded in domestic construction. Not only were working class families able to live in a significantly

[233] Extract from the Minutes of the Standing Committee of Council on Planning and Development, September 28, 1978. COV 32-C-1 File 4.

larger house, the lack of architectural references reflected a shift in the cultural background of the homeowners. I argue that the reaction to the Vancouver Special as a house design was a veiled reference to the entrenched class divide in the city becoming more visible. However, this reaction to the Vancouver Special appears to be felt stronger on the west side of the city, where the ideals of middle-class British design aesthetics were more firmly entrenched in the landscape. During the time of their construction, there was no evidence in the neighbourhood reports that the style of house correlated to dissatisfaction with the changing racial demographics of the city. Mitchell's work indicates that the clash between housing and changing racial demographics was more intensely felt in the neighbourhood of Shaughnessy, where the visual language of the neighbourhood most strongly represented middle-class British design aesthetics. The east side of the city, however, had never been guided by these principles and the construction of the Vancouver Special merely represented a continuity of home ownership for working-class families. The ending of approval of the Vancouver Special in 1984 represented a desire to control the spatial practices of the city as well as the place-making practices of homeowners who bought into the narrative of home ownership, but chose a design that reflected their individual needs. The regulation of the house became a regulation of class in Vancouver.

Chapter 5.

Conclusion—Reclaiming the "Ugly House"

In January 2016, artist Kevin Lanthier opened an exhibit titled "The Special."[234] The installation was a commentary on issues surrounding affordability, rapid development and the changing architecture in Vancouver. In an interview with Sunshine Frere in the blog *Vancouver Is Awesome*, Lanthier discusses the changes in Vancouver's architecture and how it is reflected in his work. His work is primarily of photo-montages of either residential or commercial architecture found in the city. The images are clustered thematically in an effort to get the viewer to understand the "odd juxtaposition of neighbourhood, buildings, class structures and demographics" found in Vancouver's architecture.[235] The Vancouver Special features in his work because of the strong "feelings and reactions to them."[236]

Lanthier's installation follows in the wake of Ken Lum's exhibit "Vancouver Especially," which is also a commentary on the rising real estate prices in the city. Lum made a replica of a Vancouver Special scaled down to what its relative cost would be today. Using $45,000, which was the average cost of a Vancouver Special in the 1970s, he discovered the replica was so tiny, that it would likely go unnoticed by passers-by. He placed this tiny house on a pedestal and scaled his model up eight times in order to make it easier to view. While his work is a commentary on the rising house prices in Vancouver, it is also a commentary on the changing demographics of who can afford to buy a house in the city. In an interview, Lum states that he grew up in a Vancouver

[234] The exhibit was held at Hot Art Wet City gallery January 7-30, 2016.

[235] Sunshine Frere, "Of Myth and Mortar—The fabricated city," *Vancouver Is Awesome* (blog), entry posted Jan 21, 2016, www.vancouverisawesome.com [accessed May 26, 2016].

[236] Frere, "Of Myth and Mortar—The fabricated city."

Special in Strathcona, purchased by his mother "even though she worked in a sweatshop."[237] Both artists view their work as a commentary on the lack of affordable housing in the city rather than a celebration of retro qualities, as Lum says, appealing to the "hip urban professionals."[238] Their work also highlights the importance of the house in the context in which it was built. It represents an example of an affordable housing option for working-class families.

What both Lanthier and Lum are hinting at is the importance of the Vancouver Special as a place-making practice. The dwelling itself allowed new immigrants and homeowners in the city to establish a place for themselves in the urban landscape that met their needs. As Lanthier suggests, the recent house design built on essentially the same floor plan principles, but with a different exterior aesthetic, reveals that the Vancouver Special offered homeowners more than just an efficient plan. He states that these New Vancouver Specials are "a coping strategy for a ridiculous and unfortunate market situation," which in turn does not "elicit the same emotional response as being an affordable solution for incoming families."[239] Developers are driving the construction of the New Vancouver Specials, which leaves a different mark on the landscape than small-scale builders constructing two side-by-side or individual homeowners purchasing plans for one.

The name "The Special" has become synonymous with ideas of belonging and attachment to Vancouver, but to the east side of the city almost exclusively. It is the strong emotional response that has become part of the legacy of the house. This attachment to the Vancouver Special is featured in more than just the artwork of Kevin Lanthier and Ken Lum. Charles Demers' collection of essays titled *Vancouver Special* catalogues a series of attitudes and events that make Vancouver unique.[240] He titles his work Vancouver Special because he lived in one as a young child, and in some way found it formative of his understanding of the city. The house in Demers' view becomes representative of the city as a whole. Keith Higgins' zine "How to look at a Vancouver

[237] Ken Lum's 'Vancouver Especially' exhibit a critique on the state of Vancouver real estate, www.cbc.ca Feb 22, 2015.

[238] ibid.

[239] Frere, "Of Myth and Mortar—The fabricated city."

[240] Charles Demers, *Vancouver Special*, Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2009.

Special" highlights its specific architectural features of the house.[241] Higgins' blog catalogues the different iterations of the house across the city, and includes both a photograph and an address of each house and its location on a map.[242] All of these artist works indicate an attachment to a dwelling as an important place-making tool in the city—its value as a spatial practice is secondary.

Yet, recent marketing of the Vancouver Special for its iconic look, and its indigenity has overshadowed its historical context. It has been reclaimed as an important part of Vancouver's spatial practices, which minimizes its place-making practice for working-class and immigrant families to the city. The appropriation of working-class material culture by the middle-class for its revenue generating potential slowly erases working-class history from the landscape. Wandering down Main Street, it is easy to find shops carrying Vancouver Special merchandise, such as greeting cards, fridge magnets, or tea towels.[243] The house has become a symbol of Vancouver, since the form of architecture is not found elsewhere in Canada or the Pacific Northwest. This also creates a parallel between Vancouver and other older cities and their domestic landscape. For example, New York is recognizable by its Brownstone housing; San Francisco is recognizable for its Victorian style row housing. By drawing on the heritage of a single house design, Vancouver establishes both its uniqueness and also its stability. By popularizing the Vancouver Special's image, retailers are also able to capitalize on the commercial potential. At the corner of Main and East 20th Avenue, there is a small retail store bearing the name Vancouver Special.[244] Using the name Vancouver Special becomes a way to establish both its uniqueness as a retail outlet, but also to attach itself to the popular mythology of the house. The higher end housewares and furniture are far removed from the affordability the original Vancouver Special represented to new immigrants moving to the city.

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[241] Keith Higgins, *How to look at a Vancouver Special*, Vancouver: publication studio, n.d.

[242] http://www.vancouverspecial.com/ [accessed Sept 19, 2016]

[243] One of my favourite Vancouver Special items for purchase is a gingerbread making kit. This item retailed for $120. Alexandra Barrow, "Vancouver Special Gingerbread House," BC Business, http://www.bcbusiness.ca/tourism-Culture/vancouver-Special-Gingerbread-House [accessed Aug 5, 2016]

[244] https://shop.vanspecial.com/pages/about-us

In 2008, the Vancouver Heritage Foundation began a tour of Vancouver Specials, and claimed the design to be "an important part of the city's architectural heritage." [245] The annual tour consists of five houses, each located in different neighbourhoods across the city that have been renovated to suit a contemporary homeowner. In the 2013 brochure, they state the Vancouver Special was "often viewed as the 'ugly duckling' of Vancouver's residential neighbourhoods."[246] Referring to the house in this way poses an interesting narrative trajectory in which nearly forty years after the construction boom, the house itself has become a swan. Somehow with age and time the house has become beautiful and worthy of attention. Each of the five house descriptions, in the Vancouver Heritage Foundation tour guide, lists details of the often extensive, renovations completed in order to modernize or update the previous kitchens and bathrooms. The space available and relative ease with which renovations can take place is highlighted. Despite the fact that the Vancouver Heritage Foundation sponsors the tour, little value is placed on the heritage, but more on its real estate potential. The emphasis is always placed on what the house could become to a new owner, rather than what it symbolized to the original owner. Much effort has been put into disguising or altering the exterior in order to make it look less like a Vancouver Special and more like modernist design. Their renovation potential is frequently documented on social media sites, such as Pinterest. However, the striping away of the exteriors and modernizing of the interiors slowly erases evidence of working-class material culture embedded into Vancouver's landscape.

As this thesis has shown, the Vancouver Special should be considered a special part of Vancouver's urban development because of the tangible mark of working-class material culture it left on the landscape. It counters the dominant narrative of British colonial ideals and policies establishing the ethos of the city by highlighting how the east side of the city developed differently. It exposes the class-based bias in the existing scholarship of Vancouver's urban development, and draws attention to the firmly rooted class differences found on the west and east side of the city. By working within the city's changing by-laws and zoning restrictions, this design was able to maximize the square

[245] Vancouver Special House Tour 2013 brochure, (Vancouver: Vancouver Heritage Foundation, 2013).

[246] ibid.

footage available on the small 33' lot. This provided homeowners with a significantly larger house that was still affordable. Neighbourhoods were able to maintain the single-family dwelling aesthetic, while at the same time providing rental accommodation. This ensured that the city increased its densification and families remained in the city rather than moving to the suburbs. While the design of the Vancouver Special met the city's agenda of ensuring families remained in the city, it did not meet with the city's approval. The exterior features of the house did not resemble the existing architectural styles of housing found on west side of the city. The perceived unattractiveness of the house became the focus of complaints to the planning department, which in turn revealed the strongly entrenched culture of British urban design principles and architectural styles. The earlier Tudor Revival and Craftsman homes reflected the cultural heritage and socioeconomic status of homeowners immigrating to Vancouver. However, the cultural background of many immigrants to Vancouver was no longer British, and the shifting racial composition of the city paralleled the rise in popularity of the Vancouver Special. The use of oral history would shed further light on why this particular design became so popular, and whether different cultural groups finished the lower floor in ways that were unique to their particular notions of home. This would allow for a more nuanced exploration of Vancouver's urban development and would further complicate the existing narratives of immigration to the city. The role of small-scale builders and the use of informal networks to facilitate the efficient construction of Vancouver Specials would further enhance the importance of the role working-class played in the rising urbanization of the city.

While they are still considered "the city's biggest affordable housing resource," the Vancouver Special as a place-making narrative is shifting.[247] What was initially constructed by builders and sold to working-class immigrants is now being redesigned by architects and sold to middle-class families.[248] As Ken Lum suggested in an interview with the *Vancouver Sun*, the Vancouver Special represented "a last moment before the

[247] Vancouver Heritage Foundation September 2012 newsletter, (Vancouver: Vancouver Heritage Foundation, 2012).

[248] Though the Vancouver Special is becoming pricey even for average middle class families. A real estate search on February 11, 2016 indicated the price ranged between 1.2 million and 2.5 million dollars. This price range is only the ones listed on the east side of the city. In 2012, they were still priced under 1 million dollars.

social landscape turned over to the money class."[249] Parallels can be made to Suleiman Osman's work on the brownstone housing style in Brooklyn. He argues that the brownstone represented for many middle-class homeowners an opportunity to live in an "authentic" house. The brownstone represented a middle-class Victorian gentility, but at the same time was affordable to a rising professional class in the post-war period. The recent marketing of the Vancouver Special as something trendy and emblematic of belonging to the city is a form of gentrification. Like the Brooklyn Brownstone, the place-making meaning for immigrant families living in the city gets lost as soon as middle-class homeowners claim the house and mould it into something new. While homeowners are still buying a plan-based dwelling, they are at least purchasing a "story" or a "narrative" of a house design that was once so reviled that the city stopped approving plans of them, but now they can reclaim the house as being authentic as a form of architecture. There is a certain irony that a plan-based house that was replicated 10,000 times is seen as the most "authentic" form of architecture in the city. It exposes nostalgia for an older housing stock that is reflective of the city of Vancouver. Yet, many of the remodels have attempted to hide the features that made the Vancouver Special recognizable in the first place. The aluminum railings are often removed and replaced with wood slats or wrought-iron. The stucco finish is often hidden behind wood siding. These changes are celebrated as making the house more modern, but in fact it is a less overt urban renewal movement. As Osman suggests it is a form of "organic unslumming," which he suggests is a form of private gentrification in which the middle-class enacts a process of urban renewal by holding onto the "social and historic value" of a neighbourhood while at the same time reclaiming it for themselves.[250]

In the case of the Vancouver Special, it has been recently aligned with the mid-century modern architectural movement. However, this appears to be a false connection. The Vancouver Special was not constructed with exposed post and beams, nor did the windows cover large portions of the walls. Layering on architectural terms, forty years after its construction, obscures the fact that it was denied having any architectural merit during the time period it was constructed. Adding these descriptions and remodelling the

[249] Tiffany Crawford, "Homage to the Vancouver Special—and a time when housing was still affordable," *The Vancouver Sun*, February 20, 2015.

[250] Suleiman Osman, *The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 188.

house in order to position it aesthetically in relation to other architectural movements removes the significance of a builder developing a solution for a very specific urban planning issue. It denies the legitimacy of someone who is from a working-class background capable of conceiving a practical solution to the lack of affordable housing and the difficulty of building for a 33-foot lot. As geographer, Neil Smith suggests this form of gentrification is a way to "scrub the city clean of its working-class geography and history."[251] This rebranding of the Vancouver Special as an important architectural phenomenon combined with the rising cost of the housing in the city, more generally, will soon price it out of the range of many homeowners. This is an example of coopting a narrative in order to foster a neoliberal economy in which the house has become the asset rather than a home as a place to dwell. In the process, the importance of the Vancouver Special as a place-making narrative of working-class and immigrant families establishing connections to the city and participating in municipal politics is slowly eroded, and the more dominant narrative status and wealth controlling the ethos and visual aesthetics of the landscape will prevail.

[251] Neil Smith, *The new urban frontier: gentrification and the revanchist city*, (London: Routledge, 1996), 27.

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