



Rudy Friesen: Designing for the people

As the architect-in-charge of the multi-million dollar Holiday Square project in downtown Winnipeg, Rudy Friesen is excited by the venture and believes it is what Winnipeg needs. "The project is an exciting one and one which will change the face of downtown Winnipeg. I consider it a challenge.

"Large projects of this kind are like jigsaw puzzles — hundreds of different pieces all of which have to make up a whole. My job is to make sure the right pieces go into the right places at the right time."

Recently, Mr. Friesen, 29 years of age, was made a partner of the Libling Michener Architectural Group, formerly Libling Michener and Associates. This architectural group was formed to provide clients with the personal services of a principal experienced in housing, commercial, industrial and health building projects.

Construction has already started on the 411-room \$10 million Holiday Inn Hotel, the first physical implementation of Metro's much discussed Downtown Development Plan. Also included are apartment blocks, office towers, underground parking, and a Japanese garden. The entire complex will be linked to the proposed convention centre.

Mr. Friesen, a native of Manitoba, believes that today the architect can no longer design buildings which are purely functional. "Not only should the plumbing work and the roof not leak; a building, as an instrument of social contact, must be designed first for the people that will use it."

The \$3.2 million Thompson Shopping Centre, one of several projects that Mr. Friesen is involved with in the north, was recently opened. Its indoor mall includes a town square, complete

with fountain, which is used by the people of Thompson for public meetings and community activities.

In addition to working in the north, Mr. Friesen is engaged in important projects in more southerly climes — for instance, he is involved in the development of a 960-acre property in Curacao, The Netherlands Antilles. This Caribbean project is still in the development stages and eventually it will be a complex of hotels, holiday villas, condominiums, and possibly a golf course.

How did he first become interested in architecture? "At school I was strongest in art and mathematics. I could therefore never quite decide whether to go into fine arts or engineering. Eventually, I decided to compromise and chose architecture, a mixture of the two." He attended the Mennonite Collegiate Institute at Gretna, and in 1965 graduated from the University of Manitoba.

After a year of local employment, he decided to go to Europe: "In Stuttgart, West Germany, I worked under Karl Ellsmer, a prominent German architect. I was involved in many school and residential projects, as well as some architectural competitions. My wife, Irene and I also travelled extensively throughout Europe. I feel now that this experience of working, living, and travelling in Europe was much more educational than any further formal education could ever have been. The experience was invaluable."

Soon after his return to Winnipeg, in 1967 he joined the Libling Michener group. His career success to date has been rapid. He was asked how he viewed the role of the modern architect:

"The architect's role in society is changing. No longer is he the old Master Builder. Today he is part of a team. His job is to ensure that this team works in unison and comes up with an end-product that all can be proud of."

He believes the modern architect has a responsibility to society, to see that visual pollution is avoided in our man-made environment. "Visual pollution is another form of pollution, just as serious as sound and air pollution."

In 1969, Mr. Friesen was a CMHC national home design competition winner. He is a member of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, and was a member of the former committee on church architecture of the Conference of Mennonites of Canada.

He has strong views on church architecture and is critical of some of the more traditional styles of church building, particularly those neo-Gothic ones with large towers derived from medieval fortresses — "This style directly contradicts the Mennonite belief in non-resistance."

He thinks the church building should express what the congregation believes: "How can beliefs be strong if we are afraid to express them in our buildings? As a brotherhood of believers, we should be grouped around the pulpit and our church buildings should express our communal fellowship in their forms. The formal reflection of this man-to-man fellowship concept should be a single space, easy to comprehend, with no mysticism about it. Too many Mennonite churches have a long and ceremonial worshipping space and this is not conducive to a participatory form of worship."

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