

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 13, 2015

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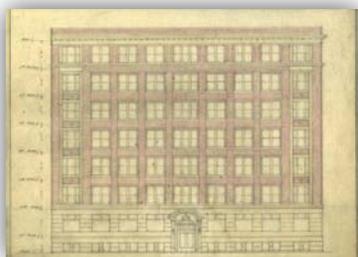


**FIRST-EVER EXHIBITION FEATURING BENJAMIN BROWN, ONE OF TORONTO'S MOST SIGNIFICANT ARCHITECTS  
OF THE EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

**Benjamin Brown: Architect**

February 12, 2016-April 23, 2016

Urban Space Gallery, 401 Richmond Street West, Toronto



The New Textile Building, 205 Richmond Street

The Ontario Jewish Archives, Blankenstein Family Heritage Centre (OJA) presents the work of Architect Benjamin Brown (1888-1974), whose career made a significant and lasting impact on Toronto's built heritage. Brown's buildings—the Balfour and Tower Buildings, the Hermant Building, the Primrose Club, Beth Jacob Synagogue—are exquisite examples of Brown's mastery of the *au courant* Art Deco styles while also incorporating the more traditional architectural tropes of the period. Brown's iconic loft-style buildings on lower Spadina express his signature style that characterized the garment district for much of the 20th century.

*Benjamin Brown: Architect* will feature original drawings, blueprints, watercolour presentation boards, historical photographs, and maps that capture the breadth of Brown's architectural accomplishments in the commercial, industrial, corporate, cultural, and residential landscape. They will provide insight into Brown's process of designing handsome yet utilitarian and enduring structures. These buildings will be explored within the context of Toronto's architectural heritage and the growth of the Jewish community that commissioned many of Brown's buildings in the 1920s and 30s.

A short documentary film featuring interviews with architects Michael McClelland, Jack Diamond; and architectural critic Alex Bozikovic (Globe and Mail) on view in the gallery, presents contemporary perspectives on Brown's buildings and how they stand as testaments to the past while re-purposed for today. And, local artist/urban geographer Daniel Rotsztein is creating an illustrated map of Toronto, richly animating the project and demonstrating how Brown's buildings span the Toronto landscape.

The OJA is fortunate to be the chosen repository for the extensive collection of Brown's architectural drawings. "The OJA is thrilled to showcase the life of this relatively unknown, yet brilliant, architect while providing a lens into the Jewish community during this time," says Dara Solomon, Director of the OJA.

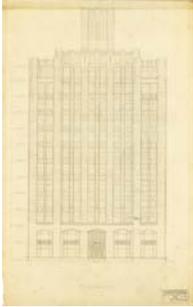
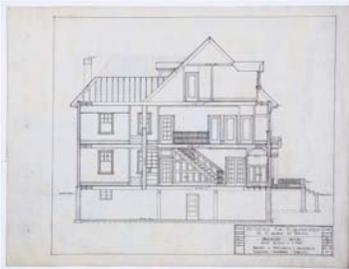
Throughout the exhibition, the OJA will offer tours and school and public programs. Additionally, Heritage Toronto will unveil a historical plaque in honour of Benjamin Brown. More information here: <http://bit.ly/1N24wnH>.



Balfour Building, 119 Spadina, 1930.

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The following are a small selection of Brown's buildings represented in the exhibition:

	<p>The <b>Balfour Building</b> at <b>119 Spadina Avenue</b> was one of Brown's most significant commissions and considered the gateway to Toronto's thriving garment district in the 1920s and 30s. Many Jewish-owned garment businesses such as furriers, cloak and coat makers, and tailors set up shop here. The floor plans revealed that large open spaces were incorporated into the design for rows of sewing machines and large fabric swaths to be unrolled and cut.</p>
	<p>The <b>Beth Jacob Synagogue</b> was the first synagogue in Toronto designed by a Jewish architect. Located at <b>23 and 23 ½ Henry Street</b>, the synagogue was built in the Romanesque style and was notable for its stained glass windows and retractable roof. The building was sold to the Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Church in the 1960s.</p>
	<p>Brown designed a number of residences in Rosedale, Forest Hill and other prestigious neighbourhoods around the city. A home he designed for businessman and community leader Mendel Granatstein at <b>42 St. George Street</b> (just north of College Street) was one of his earliest residential commissions. It was a six-bedroom mansion with a sunroom, a study, a large living room and dining room, and servants' quarters in the attic.</p>
	<p>The <b>Hermant Building</b>, located at <b>21 Dundas Square</b> is a fourteen-storey tower commissioned by the lens-manufacturer Percy Hermant in 1929. It is a windowed grid, clad in concrete and terracotta, combining slender vertical lines at the centre with progressively thicker verticals toward the edges. The decorative terracotta on the building's façade demonstrates a high degree of craftsmanship.</p>
	<p>Brown's impressive storefronts and interiors in various Toronto neighbourhoods demonstrate a real flair for colour and design, and a feeling for the contemporary styles of the period. The façades are embellished with geometric Art Deco designs that are complemented by the sleek, aerodynamic lines of the signage and interior architecture.</p>
	<p>The <b>Primrose Club</b> located at <b>41 Wilcocks Street</b> exists today as the University of Toronto's Faculty Club. Originally it was an elite Jewish men's club founded by prominent members of the Jewish community. In the context of Brown's career, the Primrose Club was important; it was, likely, here that businessmen would have discussed their various building projects and Benjamin Brown as the architect who could design them.</p>