

Go West, Young Man

Interior designer Mitchell Freedland left the East Coast to put down soulful design roots in Western Canada. BY ANICKA QUIN

It was a late 1980s summer, and *New Kids on the Block* owned the airwaves while Patrick Swayze ruled Hollywood. Aspiring interior designer Mitchell Freedland, just a few years out of school but already needing a change from the Toronto and New York design scene, threw his belongings onto a moving truck bound for B.C.

Fast forward to fall of 2009, and the interior designer has won more than 16 Interior Design Institute of British Columbia awards and designed projects as diverse as an airport lounge, a surgical centre and private residences, work that judge Paul Lavoie describes as having “a sense of thoughtful focus on local surroundings.” Score one for impulse decisions.

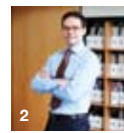
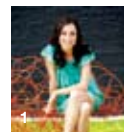
“I look at the work I was doing in New York and Toronto, and it still had roots in what I would call a northwest aesthetic,” says Freedland. “I always loved the architecture of Arthur Erickson, and so many of the pioneers in modernism on the West Coast.” Indeed, judge Raymond Girard points out Freedland’s affinity for a keystone of West Coast design: “His work truly succeeds at merging the outside and inside, to the point where it almost looks like a refined piece of landscape architecture.”

Freedland credits much of his success to his training at the Ontario College of Art, where his environmental design program had a very architectural focus. His architectural eye meant he clicked with architect James Cheng when he first arrived in Vancouver.

“James got me involved in other parts of the building, what the colours and materials mean in terms of how they respond to the whole mass of the structure,” says Freedland, with his infectious enthusiasm. That architectural precision was noted by judge Robert Ledingham, who lauded Freedland for his “choice of materials, the simplicity of design, the architectural planning,” and his ability to “creatively solve the exploration of space.”

Much of Freedland’s recent work has been designing multi-residential projects like Vancouver’s Residences on Georgia and the Argyle, with the odd dalliance into commercial work like the swank George Lounge in Vancouver’s Yaletown (for which he won a gold IDIBC award). But his firm shifted back to Freedland’s first love, private residences, last year. “More and more people were asking for us, and the residential projects were getting better and better,” says Freedland. “We thought, it’s rewarding work—maybe it’s time for a change.” Recent projects include a 40,000-square-foot home for a client near the Caspian Sea and two homes in Miami. These projects will no doubt have the qualities that Kelly Deck praised in Freedland’s work: “quiet, precise and enduring.”

Just like that seminal move he made nearly 20 years ago, his firm’s renewed focus on homes is one more example of Freedland’s instinct to make the right decisions—ones that result in beautiful design. *wl*



Judges

1 KELLY DECK’s talent for uniting beauty and simplicity has inspired the unique projects for which she has gained a national reputation. In addition to directing her Vancouver-based interior design firm, she is also the host and designer of HGTV’s *Take It Outside* and a regular design columnist for the *Globe and Mail*.

2 RAYMOND GIRARD, who was born in Winnipeg, studied interior design at the University of Manitoba and architecture at the Université de Montréal. He interned in Minneapolis with Thomas Hodne Architects and worked in Montreal with Jean Pierre Viau and Gervais Harding Design. He is the former publisher of Air Canada’s *enRoute* magazine, published by Spafax, and is now the president of Spafax Interactive.

3 PAUL LAVOIE has been a Calgary-based residential interior designer for more than 20 years. His projects include homes in Canada and across the world. His career has been documented by leading design magazines such as *Architectural Digest*, *Western Interiors* and *Western Living*.

4 ROBERT LEDINGHAM has led Vancouver-based Ledingham Design Consultants since the mid-1970s. His projects range from homes and residential developments to Whistler’s Westin and Pan Pacific Hotels. He has received more than two dozen major awards, including the International Interior Design Association Leadership Award. He is a Fellow and past president of the Interior Designers of Canada and an active supporter of the arts community.

One to Watch

Longtime Victoria interior designer **Bruce Wilson** completed his first West Coast modernist home project in Cordova Bay, B.C., this year. Previously known for his signature style of traditional with a contemporary edge, Wilson relished the challenge of a small-footprint seaside home. “This project can be considered a major breakthrough for me not only because it succeeds in providing maximum living in a minimal space, but it also represents my first modern-style house, with a design truly shaped by its surroundings.”

INTERIOR DESIGNER OF THE YEAR

Mitchell Freedland



Our winner in the Vancouver offices of Mitchell Freedland Design. Turn to page 58 to see a Freedland-designed home.