

FHBRO Number 97-68

Vancouver, British Columbia

**Bessborough Armoury**

2025 West 1 1<sup>th</sup> Avenue

The Bessborough Armoury was constructed in 1932-33 for the 1 5<sup>th</sup> Field Brigade, Canadian Artillery, and the British Columbia Hussars. It was designed by Richard T. Perry, a Vancouver architect and the Commanding Officer of the 1 5<sup>th</sup> Field Brigade. Significant alterations include window replacements (1980s); the addition of a motor transport office on the west side (circa 1940); a Petrol, oil and lubricant shed in the southwest corner of the vehicle compound; two second storey classrooms on the north side (1984) and chain-link fencing on the south, west and north side of the compound. The building is currently used as an armoury and as a community centre. The Department of National Defence is the custodian. See FHBRO Case File No. 97-68.

**Reasons for Designation**

The Bessborough Armoury has been designated Recognized because of its architectural importance, its environmental significance and its historical associations.

The armoury is of interest architecturally for its use of the stylized and simplified details and smooth, crisp appearance of 1930s buildings reflecting a preference for functional design. Art Deco details on the facades emphasize the volumetric massing of the building, and the main entrance facade has two elaborately stepped frontispieces contributing to the Art Deco appearance. The Bessborough Armoury is the only large example of its type in Canada to be designed in the Art Deco style.

The large scale of the armoury contributes to its prominence, and its community use adds to its local familiarity. The building is compatible with its evolving setting of mixed use commercial and residential buildings.

The armoury is associated with the development of Canada's militia regiments during the interwar years, and is an example of the success of the militia reform of 1936 and the enthusiasm of the units in initiating construction of drill halls. The building is associated with the housing of Vancouver's artillery and cavalry units.

**Character Defining Elements**

The heritage character of the Bessborough Armoury resides in features expressing the Art Deco style and the traditional function of the building. This includes its massing, stylistic references, construction materials, and interior layout.

The building is composed of the two-storey vaulted roof volume of the drill hall with two-storey flat-roofed ancillary blocks on three sides. The external massing expresses the

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internal functions, and the clarity of this expression should be respected. Simplification of detail, and the expression of the volume of the building through the subtle treatment of projections like the pilasters or window surrounds, are characteristic of the Art Deco style. The stepped massing at the projecting entrance ways and the flat roof profile with its streamlined set back design also reflect the style. The massing and footprint of the building should be respected in any development.

The structure, including the facades, consists of poured concrete, with detailing concentrated at the entrances and enriched on the main facades. The facades are characterized by simple, flat, linear moulding details reflecting modern preferences for geometric shapes, a characteristic of the Art Deco style. These details should be respected. Features at the entrances include flattened and stepped volumes exaggerating vertical proportions. Decorative detailing, inset continuous paired bands of zig zag red and blue tile, chevrons and stripes, and illustrative panels of cavalry and artillery units with a flattened streamlined treatment all reflect the Art Deco style. The concrete would benefit from an ongoing maintenance program and conservation expertise in the choice of techniques for repair. The asphalt shingle finish of the drill hall roof is a prominent feature. When the roofing is being replaced, consideration should be given to reviewing historic precedent for roof materials and colour on this building.

The multi-paned sash windows replaced earlier windows, which had slender mullions with a flush profile and small glazing panes characteristic of the Art Deco style. The prominent frame profiles and larger glazing panels of the replacement windows introduce a contemporary character that is not in keeping with the Art Deco styling. At the end of their service life, the installation of new windows compatible with the design of the building would enhance heritage character.

The armoury interior is characterized by the large, open volume of the drill hall under the arched segmented steel trusses. Any development within this space should be designed to ensure that the original volume can still be perceived. The simple, spartan interiors, finished with concrete floors and wood and plaster for the walls, reflect the functional character of the building. Any new developments should respect this palette of materials and colours.

The landscape is characterized by a flat setting with a row of mature trees and grass in the narrow boulevard along the front facade, and with a strip of manicured shrubs and grass against the building. A more functional hard surfaced compound is enclosed by a chain link fence to the west of the building. Any future landscape treatment should

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maintain the simplicity of the existing landscape and the ornamental treatment along the south facade.

For further guidance, please refer to the *FHBRO Code of Practice*.

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Revised