

Classic home in West Vancouver could be earmarked for bulldozer

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THE PROVINCE

With its low-pitched gable roof, broad eaves, prominent chimneys, wide expanse of plate glass and outdoor decks that extend the living space toward a rocky beach, the West Vancouver home is a classic example of the type of architecture that was popular in B.C. in the 1960s.

The 3,000-square-foot waterfront beach house, which was designed by renowned B.C. architect Ron Thom, has been in the Merler family since it was built 51 years ago and is among the most significant modern buildings in the district, according to a report published in the 1990s.

It also recently hit the real-estate market for the first time.

The well-kept house has charm and historical value, but according to the ad on realtor.ca, the value is in the land and it's more likely that the property, priced at \$9.55 million, will be sold to someone who will demolish the structure to build something bigger and more modern than to someone who will live in it or renovate.

The multimillion-dollar teardown is a phenomenon that's become more common over the past few years, according to West Van realtor Tom Hassan, who has been in the business for 23 years.

"I think the land is just becoming so valuable that it puts demands on what people do with the properties," Hassan said. "People who pay \$2 million to \$3 million, they don't want to live in a house with two bedrooms and no ensuite."

Hassan is the listing agent on the Merler residence, but didn't feel comfortable talking specifically about the property without the owners' consent.

However, he readily told the story of a Sentinel Hill property he listed last week for \$1.598 million. He had six offers and two days later it sold for \$1.91 million.

"It was definitely a land-value sale," Hassan said.

Hassan said developers are certainly part of the equation, but doesn't necessarily agree with the opinion that offshore buyers are driving the trend, at least in West Van.

He said he's seeing people escaping from other parts of the Lower Mainland, looking to spend big



More older homes in Vancouver are being sold, then torn down to make way for bigger houses because property values are in the land. This 3,000-square-foot waterfront beach house in West Vancouver was designed by renowned B.C. architect Ron Thom. It's for sale.



This house in the 3500-block West 35th Avenue in Vancouver is being torn down to be replaced by a bigger one. It sold for

ter (of the home), it is the economics of the lot," Wayne Hamill, a realtor with ReMax Select Properties, told The National Post after the sale.

Last year, a 50-year-old West Van mansion in good condition was listed as a \$38-million teardown because it was expected that whoever bought it would divide the large waterfront lot into three parcels.

The year before, another West Van teardown, a 1,400-sq.-ft. rancher, sold for \$1 million more than its \$1.8-million asking price, shocking both the realtor and the woman who had owned it.

Dorothy D. Barkley, executive director of the Architecture Foundation of B.C., said she doesn't take issue with people who buy a property and build a new house that fits in with the neighbourhood. But Barkley said she wishes more people would look into renovat-

ly ones that are architecturally significant.

"Our architectural heritage isn't as deep as you might hope because (Vancouver is) too young. Whatever built environment memory there was is being decimated by the rampant construction going on," Barkley said. "I think it's a tragedy and travesty."

Caroline Adderson, a writer who started the Facebook page Vancouver Vanishes — "a lament for, and celebration of, the vanishing character homes in Vancouver" — said if older homes continue to be torn down in favour of more modern, lot-maximizing buildings, streetscapes will be forever altered and housing will be even further out of reach for the average person.

"Basically, I'd say nothing is sacred," Adderson said. "It's all about money and I think Vancouverites are