

## Heritage Planner's Statement of Significance

### Grotski Residence - 5903 Capilano Crescent NW, Edmonton

#### **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Plan 2442KS Blk 56 Lot 25

Lot: Rectangular

District: CAPILANO

Zoning: RF1

#### **DESCRIPTION OF HISTORIC PLACE**

The 1959 Grotski Residence, renovated in 1978, has a low side-facing gable roof and large wooden beams protruding over an almost continuous row of floor-to-ceiling windows, interrupted by the front entrance on one side and a prominent, sloping brick chimney on the other. The bungalow is located on a single lot in the middle of a residential street in Edmonton's Capilano neighbourhood, overlooking Capilano Park and the North Saskatchewan River.

#### **HERITAGE VALUE**

The Grotski Residence is significant for its association with the theme of urban development in post-war Edmonton. The Capilano neighbourhood was one of the new communities in post-war Edmonton developed to accommodate a greatly expanding population. This neighbourhood is one of only a few that has direct river valley access and was an ideal location for architect Douglas Cardinal to experiment with his nature-based design aesthetic.

The Grotski Residence is associated with lawyer John Grotski, who was a prominent member of the legal community during his work life, which extended from the mid-1950s to the late 1990s. In addition to his legal career, he was an important Edmonton developer, having been instrumental in the construction of Chancery Hall and Century Place office towers. In addition to his legal work, Grotski served numerous community roles including president of the community league, a lifelong Lion's Club member, which included a stint as president, Knights of Columbus member, and Little League baseball umpire, often returning to the office in the evening.

The Grotski Residence is associated with the career of internationally recognized Alberta architect Douglas Cardinal, who did not design many single-family residences. The design characteristics of the residence are unique to this architect and there is great consistency in the evolution of his work. The roots of this particular design can be found in the West Coast Post and Beam Style, but the execution displays Cardinal's curiosity to explore his unique stylistic inventions that include a nature-based, "organic" design aesthetic. The residence is an important component in the career evolution of Douglas Cardinal who has been nationally and internationally recognized as a master architect. The design of the Grotski Residence embodies Cardinal's native identity, his

association with the environment and the prairie landscape, his academic roots in the fluid designs of numerous previous architects and his non-conventional personality.

### **CHARACTER DEFINING ELEMENTS**

The heritage value of the Grotski Residence is expressed in such character-defining elements as:

#### **Exterior:**

- the single-storey height with low gable roof;
- the set back location on a treed lot;
- the post and beam construction expressed through the extended and overtly expressed roof beams around the perimeter of the residence;
- the large expanses of glazing between the wood clad structural columns;
- the commercial style bronze-anodized aluminum window frames;
- the unique brick-clad chimney with its double sloping shafts and arched top treatment;
- the colour and style of the brick;
- the exterior cedar cladding and its clear finish;
- the patterns of the installation of the cedar cladding;
- the partially covered open porch on the wood deck that extends around the back of the residence;
- the framed main entrance door feature; and
- the broad front entrance sidewalk with its brick treads and risers.

#### **Interior:**

- the unique form, scale and curvilinear massing of the living room and master bedroom fireplaces;
- the curvilinear low brick wall and steel handrail that separates the living room from the dining room;
- the colour and style of the brick;
- the brown-coloured glazed floor tile throughout the dining room, kitchen and family rooms on main floor;
- the extensive use of clear-finish cedar ceiling and beam cladding in the living room, dining room and family room areas; and
- the geometric patterns of the cedar wall and ceiling cladding in the front entrance and office area.

#### **Further information:**

##### **Style**

The style of the Grotski Residence does not fall into a convenient stylistic category. The design is unique to this architect and there is great consistency in the evolution of his work. The roots of this particular design can be found in the West Coast Post and Beam Style, but the execution displays Cardinal's curiosity to explore his unique stylistic inventions that include a nature-based, "organic" design aesthetic.

## **Designer/Builder**

### **Douglas Cardinal**

The Grotski Residence is associated with the architectural practice of Douglas Cardinal. Cardinal graduated from the University of Texas in 1963, and interned with the Red Deer architectural firm Bissell and Holman. He became registered with the Alberta Association of Architects in 1964, and gained international recognition as an independent architect with his St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church commission in Red Deer, Alberta, which was designed and built between 1964 and 1968. It is considered a masterpiece and the start of Cardinal's illustrious career. Cardinal's next work of major significance was Grande Prairie Regional College; the first building after St. Mary's to fully develop the use of his organic architectural vocabulary. It was designed and constructed between 1972 and 1974. Another significant provincial commission following that was Ponoka Provincial Building, which opened in 1977. Cardinal designed only a few single-family residences and the Grotski Residence was his last private commission.

By the early 1980s, Cardinal landed the commission to design the new St. Albert Civic Centre. Although Cardinal had been interested in and experimented with computer-aided design in the 1970s, the St. Albert project was his first building completed entirely on the computer. This remarkable innovation is possibly the first of its kind in Alberta, and anticipated the direction of the entire building industry by the turn of the century. The final design for St. Albert is a compromise of his original vision for reasons of economy, but confidently builds on his curvilinear architectural language and aesthetic that was developed previously. Another Edmonton landmark is the Space Sciences Centre, designed and constructed at almost the same time. Both St. Albert Place and the Space Sciences Centre were completed in 1983, just before Cardinal received the prestigious commission to design the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa. Cardinal by this time was considered a master architect.

The work of Douglas Cardinal is recognized internationally for its lineage from the seminal, organic Prairie Style designs of American Frank Lloyd Wright and his later nature-based design language.

In a recent interview, Cardinal recalled the renovation of the Grotski Residence. He (Grotski) said, "my wife and I want to be able to renovate our house so we can really enjoy the area. Rather than build a new home, we want to be in the same place where we brought up our children... Helen felt that the house hadn't really served her. She wanted to be at home and she had so many things and magazines and ideas. We started off with the kitchen and began renovating that, and then they wanted to do the living room and dining room and open them up... Then we took the carport and looked at opening that up and making it a study for John. He would like to have spent more time at home... And then they said, 'let's put a sunroom on the back'... and we'll have to do the bedroom' – that included the Habitat installation. We started to renovate the kitchen and pretty soon it was the whole house... It was a lot of fun working with them. I enjoyed them... They liked the wood and the cedar and the feeling of wood around them. We did the fireplace in a very organic way. It just kept going until everything except the basement was changed... Helen was in charge. They would be asking me 'what about

this' and 'what about that'? They did a lot of travelling and while we were designing together, she was into all the latest books...We went to Seattle to a home show together. Every major centre has a centre that offers products at lower prices to architects and designers. That's probably where we saw the Habitat...For them, the adventure was instead of travelling around the world. They designed a home they could live in."

## **CULTURAL HISTORY**

### **Historical Importance**

#### **John Grotski**

John Grotski, like many of his contemporaries, immigrated from Europe as a child. He persevered and obtained his law degree from the University of Alberta in 1958. Grotski's path to law was circuitous. He came from the farm and enrolled at the U of A in Education and he boxed for the Golden Bears. He failed Education and re-enrolled in Agriculture. After obtaining his Agriculture degree, he spent four years in North Dakota in the late 1940s where he taught soil science to a Mennonite community before returning to Alberta to apply to the Faculty of Law, where the Dean interviewed him and a key question was his sincerity in pursuing law. His summer job during his law studies was as a landman for an oil company where he negotiated oil leases and rights-of-way. His farming background enabled him to deal with farmers and sign many agreements. Later, he moved into corporate and commercial work but he also had a number of families and family businesses which became long-term clients.

John Grotski moved his family into the home in 1959, the year it was built. John lived there until his death in 2010.

## **CONTEXT**

### **Site**

The bungalow is located on a single lot in the middle of a residential street in Edmonton's Capilano neighbourhood, overlooking Capilano Park and the North Saskatchewan River.

### **Neighbourhood**

The Capilano neighbourhood was first subdivided in 1910, but remained largely farmland until the 1950s. The community was annexed by the City of Edmonton in 1954.

### **Visual/Symbolic**

The Grotski Residence is not a significant landmark building given its semi-secluded location and its deliberate 'blending' into the landscape of this city street.

**INTEGRITY**

The integrity of the Grotski Residence sufficiently reflects its historical and architectural significance from 1978.