The BIG 4-O

For our 40th anniversary, we gave ourselves the impossible task of selecting (in no particular order) the 40 things that define design and innovation in the West. (Let the debates begin.)
When, a few years back, the dilapidated Graham house in West Vancouver was finally put out of its misery and demolished, it created a furor among ordinary citizens. Magazines and newspapers published obituary-style features. Activists chained themselves to the property in an attempt to deter bulldozers.

This, for a house. Of course, it wasn’t an ordinary house. It was an Arthur Erickson masterpiece, built in 1963, a collection of jewel-like spaces that cascaded down a rocky cliff face where everyone had said you couldn’t build a house at all.

Erickson—who had a healthy awareness of his own genius—made a habit of proving people wrong. And, once he was finished showing people what was possible, they tended to fall madly in love with his work. It’s true that certain institutional buildings and office towers of his developed a reputation among non-designers for being depressive monoliths of concrete (the cool futurism of his Simon Fraser University campus comes to mind), but the houses were always soulful, always beloved. He was, arguably, the greatest designer of single-family dwellings this country has ever produced. He taught us not just how to design a home, but what it means to live in a particular landscape. There’s an assumption people often make about these houses—that they “blend” inside and outside. But that’s not so. Erickson’s houses actually have an aggressive relationship with the landscape. They explain the landscape.

Nowhere is that powerful expression more evident than in Erickson’s Eppich II house. Pictured here, the house’s three pavilions are framed by muscular arches of steel while they descend into the landscape. This treasure is a West Vancouver hillside dwelling, like the Graham house before it, and was designed for Hugo Eppich, the CEO of Ebco Metal Finishing, in 1979.

These houses, being privately owned and very often situated in the rainforest of the West Coast, are particularly vulnerable to the vagaries of time and unsympathetic renovation. A century from now, how many of them will still be standing? It’s a good question to ask of any architect’s houses. In Erickson’s case, though, these most intimate creations are like diamonds—compact, brilliant, ennobling—and that should make us hold them close.—Michael Harris
Arching expanses of steel create a sublime framework for Arthur Erickson’s Eppich II.
2 BRENT COMBER ’95 Long before it became the thing to do, Comber was sourcing unprocessed wood, complete with cracks and knots, to pioneer the “rough” aesthetic we see everywhere in furniture today.

3 THE ROYAL ART LODGE ’96-08 The audacious Winnipeg artist collective brought a shot of brilliance (and humour) to the country. Its most famous son, the great Marcel Dzama, designed these whimsical salt and pepper shakers.

4 CALIFORNIA ROLL ’74 Others may claim paternity, but we stand by sushi chef extraordinaire Hidekazu Tojo, of Vancouver’s Tojo’s, who won over Western palates in the 1970s by creating the now ubiquitous California roll of cucumber, avocado and crab.

5 ART GALLERY OF ALBERTA ’10 An $88-million Randall Stout renovation last year gave Edmonton its most distinctive public space. Shades of Frank Gehry?

6 TILES BY SID DICKE NS ’95 We knew the Vancouver-based Dickens had made it when his antique “memory blocks” were displayed in the apartment on Friends. Now: ubiquitous and highly collectable.
40 YEARS

7 CABIN COLLECTION ’03
A good four years before taxidermy became au courant in home design, Todd Falkowsky and friends (under the name Motherbrand) created the Cabin collection: clever rethinks of classic furniture pieces with a modernist Canadiana spin—like this Buddington Bear, a faux bearskin rug complete with red leather strips for its heart.

8 HOTHOUSE & PURE DESIGN ’92
Pure Design grew out of Hothouse, an Edmonton collective of U of A industrial design grads. The group created and fostered enduring designs, including this Douglas Coupland Target table—which Roots brought back into production last year.

9 John ’89 FLUEVOG
The Vancouver shoemaker gave us a key element of the Grunge uniform of the 1990s with his Angel boots.
On the prairies,” observes Clifford Wiens, “the way the sky and earth come together is profound.” From that starting point, Wiens has devised an architecture that harnesses the poetry of his home province of Saskatchewan, as exemplified in the Lakeshore residence pictured here. Built in the Qu’Appelle Valley, near the village of Lebret, the moated wood-and-concrete house rises at a stark angle, like a small cathedral. This muscular upward thrust is a characteristic that defines much of the architect’s work. “It provides a vertical counterpoint to the horizon line of the prairies,” says Wiens. And it generates a powerful sense of the vastness of the landscape.

Wiens embraced environmental design long before the concept was fashionable. For the Lakeshore Residence, he devised an ingenious system of buffering spaces and apertures within its wooden walls to redistribute the heat and humidity generated by the home’s indoor swimming pool. “The walls are warming themselves. Can you imagine?” he says. The home’s distinctively louvred south façade is a brise-soleil, the architectural manifestation of how, when we step out of a building into the blaze of the prairie sun, our reflexive gesture is to shield our eyes with our fingers, he notes.

Wiens, a graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design, has taught and practised architecture far and wide, but he concentrated his work in Saskatchewan for decades, earning a rare life membership as a registered architect in that province. He has won three Massey Awards and a wealth of other honours, most recently the 2011 Prix du XXe Siècle from the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada. As he took the stage in Vancouver earlier this year to receive that award, for his 1967 heating and cooling plant at the University of Regina, he gruffly lamented that he’d gladly trade the award for the chance to have his project maintained as he’d originally designed it. The audience gave him a robust burst of applause.—Adele Weder
A double-height wall of wooden shades creates dappled sunlight in Clifford Wiens’s prairie gem.
we've seen it all—or 40 years’ worth of it.
As our collective style evolved from the ‘70s through the ‘00s, so did Western Living.
Vancouver designer Omer Arbel’s bulbous pendant light seems to sneak into every issue of every design magazine (including this one).
The creation of this Winnipeg-based chain was the first real attempt by a Western Canadian design store to compete internationally. Seen here: its most iconic piece, the Replay sofa.

**13 EXPO ’86 ’86**
Vancouver’s False Creek waterfront was forever transformed once the party moved on and a huge swath of the city was handed over to hungry developers. (Enter the ubiquitous condo tower, and also the bizarre building term “Vancouverism.”) The city did get one very fine geodesic dome out of the bargain, though. Hey, Science World!

**14 EARLS, CALGARY TRAIL ’83**
Bus Fuller opened this green wonder (in colour, not ethos) in 1983, kicking off the casual fine dining trend. The CFD holy trinity of Earls, Joey and Cactus Club all owe some part of their DNA to this place, with its parrots and potato skins.

**15 THE ROCKY MOUNTAINEER ’90**
Trains have always been the connective tissue of our collective identity. Yet the Rocky Mountaineer made train travel across the West romantic, even glamorous, once more.

**16 THE WICK ’96**
The original rustic Wickaninnish Inn was a beloved, homey outpost on the far West Coast. So when the McDiarmid family announced a new Wick would be built, thoughts were mixed. It’s since become a modern-day Banff Springs, has practically reinvented Tofino—and is wildly popular among Hollywood folk and honeymooning locals alike for its note-perfect rugged sophistication.

**17 LULULEMON ’98**
When New Yorkers complain that we refuse to wear suits, they’re looking at our yoga pants. For better or worse, Lululemon’s powerful branding made comfy athletic gear into acceptable date wear.
In 1980 Calgary architect Jeremy Sturgess made his first appearance in Western Living. This residence, which first appeared in 2003—a vacation home in northwestern Ontario designed for a Calgary couple—marks his 32nd. It can be said with virtual certainty that Sturgess has placed more homes in this magazine than any other designer, and with complete certainty that they have covered greater stylistic ground.

The architect’s early work reflected his brief apprenticeships under two Calgary architects who rose to prominence during the tempestuous 1960s and 1970s. From Bill Boucock he absorbed a sense of the importance of landscape, and from Jack Long an emphasis on community. Sturgess, a University of Toronto graduate, chose to establish his own practice in Calgary “because it is a city of risk-takers—people who will give you five minutes to hear a good idea rather than going through the usual old boys’ network.”

From the start he embraced colour, seeing it as a response to the “intense Kodachrome light” prevalent in Calgary during much of the year. Through the 1980s, many of his projects reflected the era’s growing impatience with late modernism and an embrace of classical and romantic forms and styles, particularly Mediterranean. Before the turn of the millennium, his work had turned back toward a contemporary version of modernism, as seen here.

The Shebandowan Lake retreat is in fact two structures joined by a roof (creating a third, out-of-doors room between them), an approach to providing separation between hosts and guests that Sturgess has developed over the course of several notable second homes in recent years. During the same period, conversely, he has also focused on creatively conceived infill projects, including his own home, a duplex. Meanwhile, Sturgess Architecture has established for itself a strong urbanist identity, in evidence on high-profile projects such as the City of Calgary Water Centre, renovations to the 7th Avenue LRT complex and the firm’s significant work with Calgary’s giant Bow tower (see page 59), now finally nearing completion.

Residential work continues to account for about 20 percent of the firm’s work, and includes a project, five years in the making, that vaults it into the era of digital morphogenesis, where form is no longer constrained by standard construction geometries. In other words, expect the unexpected when Sturgess next appears in these pages with project 33.—Jim Sutherland
The dog stays in the picture: Douglas Coupland on his days as a Western Living editor.

The first article I ever wrote was for Vancouver magazine in September of 1987. Five months later, I moved downstairs to work as staff editor at Western Living. It was a meaningless title, but at least it had the word “editor” in it, so it felt like life wasn’t entirely falling down. I remember then-editor-in-chief Carolann Rule and I writing whole issues over the course of a week as I became an instant expert on topics like herbaceous borders or Palm Springs—this was eons before Google colonized our brains. I remember the Search for Style competition entries coming in, and the dozens of snapshots people always included of their evil cats, with their scary red retinas, sitting on chairs. I remember another editor, Mac Parry, screaming to the gods every time the computer system ate one of his pieces (long before autosave) and how glamorous the gals in ad sales always were—wherever they went, it felt like a party.

I remember a big meeting held once to see if everyone thought it would be okay to include pets in style shoots of people’s houses. Good Lord, there were, honestly, threats made and angry tears: “We will never, ever, ever get to the point where it’s okay to put animals in shots, ever.” A few years later I think I saw a black lab in one of the magazine’s spreads: take that, Wallpaper.

And I also remember looking out the windows into the alley and seeing who was shopping for what. The downtown neighbourhood where the office used to be was fuelled by the sex and drug trades in those days, overwhelmingly and seemingly unsalvageably so. A few blocks away, on Hamilton Street, I also had a sculpture studio I shared with a headbanger band in a space that, 24 years later, is now a restaurant’s cigar-smoking room. Back then, the thought of something like posh Yaletown emerging would have been as implausible as lunar habitation.

It’s all gone, of course, but I don’t get too wistful about that. The old two-storey “treehouse”—the grey, pebble-coated office building at the corner of Richards and Davie—was one of the last holdouts before the complete carpet bombing of gentrification. What the neighbourhood has now is infinitely better, more interesting and a million times more vital than secondhand furniture resales and 24-hour curbside commerce. And it’s not just Vancouver’s Yaletown that’s changed, is it?

I travel pretty much nonstop and have been able to witness similar transformations in Western Canada over the past decades. The sense of insularity is gone. So is the provincialism. What we once saw as boring is now a bit more grown up and is viewed by the world as the best place on Earth to live. That kind of snuck up on us while we were busy wondering how best to use chanterelles with pork loin.

We in the West are still racing down the path toward what we ultimately will become. I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again: this is one of the few places in the world that has yet to become what it will eventually be.

Oddly, Western Living has remained relatively constant through all of this, in format and in tone. I’d like to think it’s had a specific hand in guiding the West from its gawky adolescent years to its more rambling, glamorous and important life as a newly maturing region. It kills me I won’t be able to see the place in 100 years. Who knows what we’ll be by then, but whatever it is, it won’t be like what we are today. And I sure hope that, by then, they will have added another crossing alongside the Lions Gate bridge.
20 WOODWARD’S ’09
When the last Woodward’s closed, in 1993, a big part of the West’s history disappeared with it. But, in 2009, architect Gregory Henriquez rebooted a dilapidated HQ in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside and managed to bolster the country’s most destitute neighbourhood while resurrecting a Western icon.

21 WILLIAM SWITZER FURNITURE ’78
Handmade furniture in these parts tends to be decidedly contemporary or raw in form. Started in Calgary and later moved to Vancouver, the Switzer company has been a rare exception, delivering classic pieces plus French Moderne by Lucien Rollin.

22 MY WINNIPEG ’07
Guy Maddin’s 2007 “docufantasia” is both a critique of and a love letter to a city that punches far above its weight class in the arts. This year, Maddin’s film inspired Paris’s La Maison Rouge to showcase 70 Winnipeg artists.

23 CANOLA OIL ’78
Conceived and designed in the plant science department at the University of Saskatchewan, canola (it stands for “Canada’s oil”) is responsible for all of our expanses of bright yellow fields.

24 TERRY FOX ’80
Through his 1980 Marathon of Hope (which has, to date, raised $550 million for cancer research) the one-legged 22-year-old became a highly visible symbol of Western perseverance and hope. The image of his hop-run was immortalized this year in a series of Douglas Coupland-designed bronze sculptures in Vancouver.
More than 800 stores (plus two hotels, 100 dining venues and 17 waterslides) fill up the largest mall in North America. Since it opened in 1981, the West Edmonton Mall has reminded us that harsh weather can lead to truly monumental indoor spaces.

A bronze version of Bill Reid’s greatest sculpture—The Spirit of Haida Gwaii—sailed into Vancouver’s airport in 1994. It also lived, for a time, on the back of our $20 bill. (The West has owned the $20 bill for a long time; before the Reid sculpture, the vista from Moraine Lake was displayed there.)
Once a ragtag collection of industrial efforts, Granville Island in Vancouver was retooled into one of the West’s most adventurous and successful experiments in mixed-use design. Today, an art school, a concrete company, a brewery, markets, theatres, crowds and buskers all happily rub elbows alongside waterfront homes.

This Norman Foster-designed headquarters for oil giant EnCana in Calgary is a 58-storey testament to the city’s economic might and cultural savvy. Thank you, Fort McMurray.
The Agosta residence, designed by the Patkaus, is built on a 43-acre plot of land in the Gulf Islands. It easily laps up the sunshine there.
The Patkaus

The year this magazine was founded, 1971, a pair of young students named John Patkau and Patricia Gargett travelled from the University of Manitoba to summer jobs in Vancouver. John took a post at the burgeoning Arthur Erickson firm, working on a never-realized project that would have demolished the city’s Christ Church Cathedral. Patricia worked at a design firm just long enough to realize she wanted to be an architect, too. Both of them were young enough, smart enough and ambitious enough to see in Canada’s booming 1970s cultural landscape a real opening. It seemed possible to design a new world.

Patricia took herself to Yale’s architectural school before Patkau Architects was founded in Edmonton in 1979, launching more than 30 years of stellar and uncompromising practice. The firm is now recognized as a cornerstone of West Coast architecture. Yet the Patkaus, with their black dress and soft voices, have not emerged as the titan-like personalities their CVs would suggest. Says Patricia: “If we ever have to sell our designs to someone in person, it never works. We’re just not salespeople.” In a market-driven city like Vancouver, where design is dictated by developers more than architects, refusing to be “salespeople” is a risk that would thwart most careers.

But there is another way. In Europe, choosing a building’s design is largely a process of competition. (This means that younger and less flashy firms get a fair shake.) “In North America,” explains John, “it’s about the firm’s track record rather than the actual design.” In the last 15 years, the Patkaus have focused on those open (and blind) competitions—handily winning seven of the eight they’ve entered. Most recently, their firm beat out dozens of other international players with their design of a series of serene cottages to be built at the site of Frank Lloyd Wright’s famous Fallingwater house. (Construction begins in late 2012.)

There’s a conspicuous lack of commercial projects in the Patkaus’ oeuvre. The focus is instead on universities, libraries and community centres, projects that have won them 11 Governor General’s Medals and served as lessons in design for a generation of young architects. (We have yet to discover an under-40 Vancouver architect who doesn’t cite the Patkaus as an influence.) It is private houses that serve as the experiments, the object lessons, that lead to those public buildings. The Patkaus build dwellings only rarely, and they never repeat themselves. Each house, from the muscular Shaw Residence to the smartly geometric Agosta shown opposite, is a distillation of a concrete philosophy. These buildings hardly require the salesmanship the Patkaus never bothered to learn.—Michael Harris

30 MOLO

Float Tea Lantern ’04

The boutique Vancouver design studio is known for its groundbreaking “Softwalls” (modular, accordion expanses of sculpted white paper), but it was this minimalist teapot, with an ingenious cavern below for a warming tea-light, that first made the world fall in love with Molo.

31 JOE EAFARD ’86

The unofficial ambassador of Pense, Saskatchewan, and the country’s favourite creator of public art, has placed more cows in more spaces than Canada Packers.

32 MISSION HILL WINERY ’86

Anthony von Mandl built a winery grander and more ambitious than any that Western Canada had seen before. In 1994 he produced the International Wine and Spirit Competition’s Best Chardonnay, which focused attention on the still-burgeoning Okanagan.
he 1980s, the most embarrassing decade (designwise) in recent history, was also the decade in which Robert Ledingham’s interiors became a Western Living mainstay. He became a hero of ours precisely because he had style that circumvented whatever was in style.

The rest were toying with a motley crew of looks. Early styles rooted in the American Southwest vied with colourful postmodern conceits, and then Tuscany and Provence fought for provincial prominence even as geese carrying baskets capped the triumph of all things country. Unlike almost all other designers, Ledingham (whose education straddled Manitoba and Saskatchewan before he set up shop in Vancouver) declined to play along, a stance that he maintained as the 1990s arrived and industrial and Craftsman became looks du jour.

Instead, Ledingham remained the Burt Bacharach of interior design, specializing in a pop purity that wasn’t always fashionable but always impressed the cognoscenti with the subtlety, refinement and distinctive personal touches that elevated the work. Equally comfortable with contemporary and traditional modes, he was among the first interior designers to recognize that homes on the West Coast work best when their interiors embrace the out-of-doors, and he responded early to the trend toward open plans by “hiding the things that you don’t want to see,” using pantries, drawers and under-counter locations for appliances such as the microwave.

There is definitely a signature Robert Ledingham look: the palette will be muted but interesting; finishes and furnishings will emphasize carefully selected materials of the highest possible quality; clutter and bric-à-brac will be nonexistent; design and function will be planned and integrated, as he says, “to the nth degree.” In the West Vancouver house on these pages, for example, an industrial-style range and fireplace face each other from opposite ends of the great room, as might hearths in an English cottage.

Today, Ledingham’s practice remains busy in a Vancouver market that has slowed a little from the frantic pre-Olympic period. Although commissions for large detached dwellings still come along, half his work involves personalizing the city’s bumper crop of condos. With these, as with all else, the Ledingham approach will prevail, ensuring that behind those glass-curtain walls will be homes as timeless and comfortable as anything anywhere.—Jim Sutherland
34 GROUSE GRIND ‘81 It’s a packed trail up a mountain that for the most part has marginal views. Yet it’s become Vancouver’s Stonehenge, mysteriously drawing devoted pilgrims season after season.

35 21 JUMP STREET ‘87 The 1980s crime drama (and launching pad of Johnny Depp) jumpstarted Vancouver’s—and Western Canada’s—transformation into “Hollywood North.” Our versatile landscape has since been the stage for FBI agents solving X-files, a martial arts master rumbling in the Bronx, and cowboys falling in love.

36 VIJ’S ‘94 Celebrities fly to Vancouver (and wait in line) just for dinner at this internationally renowned Indian restaurant. Chef and owner Vikram Vij distills centuries of culinary history into a tiny Vancouver room.

37 CAPTAIN CANUCK ‘75 Canada’s flag-wrapped superhero was created by 24-year-old Winnipeg artist Richard Comely.

38 THE GARDENS AT SOOKE HARBOUR HOUSE ‘79 Now that everyone gushes about their three-month-old hobby garden, it’s easy to forget that, when Sinclair and Frederique Philip first served guests homegrown tomatoes in their fledgling inn, they were starting a revolution in food.

39 RIBBON CHAIR ‘75 Niels Bendtsen’s breakthrough piece was accepted into the Museum of Modern Art’s permanent collection and heralded a brilliant career in furniture design and sales. Bendtsen went on to open the indispensable store, Inform Interiors.

40 MARTHA STURDY’S RESIN ‘92 The titanic influence of Sturdy’s vases, vessels and furniture comes thanks to her deep understanding of a signature element, resin. First she used it for organic accessories, then for more dramatic furniture. Many have copied; none have surpassed.
Memories—they stack up over the years like dusty boxes in the attic, waiting to be opened. Forty years ago? It can’t be possible. But there we were, me fuming over the lack of a B.C. magazine for which to work and my husband Jack realizing he did not want a future in the contentious groves of academe, despite his newly minted PhD.

“What would it take to start a magazine?” he asked at the kitchen table one morning. “Lots and lots of money,” I said, “or at least enough to pay the printer for the first issue. And some means of distribution, so we could attract advertisers.” “Well, then,” he said, “let’s do it.”

Really? We’d just bought our first house, had two kids in school, and were totally naive about business. But we knew we could, between us, produce a magazine, one that we hoped would extol the virtues of the province in which we’d chosen to live. I’d always been a writer, and Jack took photos and had a background in draftsmanship.

There were, of course, many problems to solve. Circulation: I persuaded Bill Forst of the Kerrisdale Courier to distribute our new magazine as a supplement. And I asked Nelson Groves, who ran the Vancouver Home Show, if our proposed magazine could somehow be involved. We became the official program: all we had to do was include a map and a list of exhibitors. These exhibitors, some of them, were keen to advertise.

As for the printing costs, I’d worked for Mitchell Press’s original Western Homes and Living and they agreed to give us credit for a couple of months.

We were in business. I wrote stories, Jack took photos; type went out for setting and we pasted up the magazine (yes, on our kitchen table) page by page. Jack’s drafting expertise helped in putting the ads together. We made it in time for the February 1971 home show. The kids put stamps and labels on the invoices, and money started to dribble in, just enough to pay the bills. Looking back, it wasn’t much of a magazine. But Western Living was born, and when something is born, you keep it alive.

Two months later, the second issue came out, again produced on the kitchen table, this time with additional circulation in the North Shore News. And on from there. A year later, we went monthly, rented a small office on Hornby Street and began to acquire help: an ad salesman, a typesetter/receptionist. We persuaded other people to write for us, for minimum wage. Most notable among these was the wonderful interior designer Luis Posse, who gave Western Living a decidedly international flair; Jurgen Gothe, who covered both wine and music; and James Barber, whose irreverent food columns added spice.

The magazine grew and prospered, especially when, a few years later, we expanded to Alberta. It grew so big that I didn’t have time to write anymore (except for the travel columns) and Jack was away much of the time, photographing in Alberta. Oh, there were setbacks along the way. Shipping by Canada Post to Alberta seemed a sensible thing to do, until the train carrying the magazines was wrecked in the Fraser Canyon and all magazines were lost (no insurance from the Crown corporation). Another time, Jack and our sales manager, lovable Don Sacks, had to hastily put together the “Over the Hill Gang” for a night heist—retrieving the whole B.C. issue from a warehouse, where the magazines were being held hostage by a disgruntled distributor who had just been fired for throwing unopened boxes of magazines into the city dump. Then there was the salesman who “invented” contracts, the receptionist who forged company cheques, the alcoholic artist who fell off the wagon in rather dramatic fashion.

There was also personal tragedy. In 1977 our 19-year-old son, Johnny, was killed in a helicopter crash. Life turned suddenly bitter and the magazine, so big and healthy, demanding all our time and energy, became too much for us. We knew that for Western Living to survive, it had to be passed on to someone else, and we had to move on with our lives.

Jack died of brain cancer in 1989. I now live alone, in the “House That Jack Built,” on a hill in the grasslands of Boundary Country. Sometimes I still miss the hurly-burly of publishing. I travel, I write books and columns, I take long walks with my dog. It’s gratifying that a magazine born on our kitchen table 40 years ago has become a Western Canadian standby. It’s grown and changed, of course, as every healthy child does. But in middle age, in trying times, Western Living lives up to its legacy: it’s local, it’s Canadian, and it speaks to its readers. It’s us.