

# Twentieth Century Women

“Everywhere present, crucial, but strangely invisible.”  
- Beatriz Colomina, architectural historian

In Canada, women have been largely left out of historical narratives on architecture and design. For this reason, one may be inclined to think that women did not participate in the architectural communities that built our cities during the twentieth-century. But this is not true. Through their roles as architects, landscape architects, and designers, women have been making significant contributions to Manitoba’s built environment for over a century.

That is not to say that women could easily enter the architectural profession in the twentieth-century. In fact, many women who studied architecture did not formally enter the profession. This is likely due to the numerous obstacles women faced in male-dominated places of work. Some women did manage to overcome these obstacles and their work ought to be celebrated and acknowledged. The architects and designers highlighted in this portion of the exhibition are only a selection of these women.



*Patricia Kettner*



*Marjorie Mutch*



*Debby Lexier*



*Evelyn Blankstein*



*Marjorie Pritchard*



*Joan Harland*



*Eleanor Brown*



*Margaret Stinson*



*Elizabeth Lord*



*Elizabeth Pilcher*



# Debby Lexier

Bachelor of Interior Design  
University of Manitoba, 1950

Upon graduation, Debby Lexier began employment with Green Blankstein Russell (GBR). Her professional work consisted of commercial and institutional projects that included the St. Boniface Hospital, Canadian General Electric, General Distributors, and Famous Players Theatre.

In the mid 1950s, her career took a turn. Lexier was writing a weekly article on interior design for the Winnipeg Tribune and she was a founding member and first president of the Interior Designer's Institute of Manitoba, later the Professional Interior Designers Institute of Manitoba. Lexier served as a juror, chair, and representative for numerous national and international interior design awards and organizations.

## You'll Want to Shop Carefully for That Sofa, Chesterfield or Settee

The sofa, chesterfield or settee is generally one of the most important pieces of furniture in the living area. It supplies the main seating space in the room. As such, it is often one of the first pieces to be selected when furnishing the living room.

Before setting out to shop, the buyer considers the sofa as a very uncomplicated, straightforward piece of equipment, with no attachments or extras to be too concerned about, and so anticipates no complications ahead. But when the salesman confronts him with such questions as "Do you wish a sectional or a one-piece? With or without arms? Two or three cushions? Foam rubber or springs?" he begins to realize there is more to consider in this one-piece furniture than he thought. Such questions present themselves when one is selecting to purchase a sofa, and added questions arise when one decides to have it made to order.

The question of a sectional sofa

versus a one-piece depends largely on the plan of the room in which it is to be used, as well as the layout of the furniture arrangement. The sectional pieces may be used with a table between or placed at right angles to each other in conjunction with a corner table. They may also be placed across from one another, such as grouped before a fireplace. They are advantageous where the wall space does not permit the use of one large continuous sofa. It is equally useful in the case where one is buying a sofa for apartment which is too small to take a long sofa. Here he selects a two-piece one which later will be used as one long unit in his future house.

When the pieces are butted together to form one piece, the arrangement isn't the most satisfactory. One is always prone to sit where the two meet and there is the chance of their pushing apart and the sitter falling through. As well, the pieces often drift or slide apart presenting the annoying necessity of having to push them together repeatedly.

With the one-piece chesterfield, there is not the same chance of falling through, unless, of course, the construction is faulty. This chesterfield supplies a single solid seating unit around which one may plan his seating and furniture grouping. It may act as the core of the arrangement.

Length of sofas vary a great deal with the most common size being

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from 6'-0" to 8'-0" long. The 6'-0" is fairly short, especially if you depend upon that piece of furniture for your main seating places. On the other hand, the 8'-0" long chesterfield is often too large for perhaps a small-size apartment living room, although it has a good seating capacity. A good-sized sofa would be one 7'-6" long, with a variation of six inches either way. This would provide comfortable seating for four, as well as pleasant proportion to the design of the sofa. The size of the sofa depends a great deal on the size and the shape of the room it is to be placed in, and on the design of the piece itself. Consequently, it is difficult to restrict the perfect size to a definite dimension.

The height of the piece from the ground as well as the depth of the seat from front to back are prime considerations. The greater the depth, the more loungy the chesterfield is. Too great a depth makes the getting in and out, difficult. Older people prefer sofas with not much depth as it is easier for them to manage sitting down. The use of the sofa also governs the depth. One used in the home can afford to be deeper and more relaxed than one that is used in public areas such as in a waiting room, etc. Here the need is for a sofa that gives a more erect seating position.

The height of the seat from the ground influences the seating comfort to the point that short people do not like to be left with their feet dangling off the ground.

The number of cushions the seat is divided up into, depends upon the length and design of the chesterfield itself. The upholstery material on the single cushion tends to get a wave effect as the material stretches. Often the seat is divided into two or more cushions depending upon the length of the seat.

The question of curved or irregular shapes, armed or armless sofas, buttoned cushions and many other features, are all part of the design which should incorporate comfort and pleasant proportion into a sofa which is authentically pleasing as well. Equally important, if not more so, is the construction of the sofa.



# Eleanor Brown

**Bachelor of Arts**  
**University of Manitoba, 1939**

**Teaching Diploma**  
**University of Manitoba, 1941**

**Bachelor of Architecture**  
**University of Manitoba, 1949**

Brown began her career as a teacher in rural Manitoba. After serving with the Canadian Army during the Second World War, she returned to school to study architecture. Brown then worked in drafting and architecture for several years. In 1955, she began working for the architectural firm Green Blankstein Russell (GBR) and remained there until 1960. One of the most significant projects Brown worked on during her time at GBR were the plans for the Winnipeg Air Terminal.



*image:*  
*Winnipeg International Airport (James Armstrong Richardson Airport), demolished. Photo credit: Henry Kalen.*



# Elizabeth Lord

**Bachelor of Architecture**  
**University of Manitoba, 1939**

As Manitoba's first registered woman architect, Elizabeth Lord was a trailblazing figure on the provincial architectural scene. Lord registered with both the Manitoba Association of Architects and the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada in 1944. Lord's early work indicates a clear interest in housing; one of her earliest projects was her own home at 582 McNaughton Drive. Lord remained passionate about housing throughout her career, which was made clear through her work as the Chairman of the Welfare Council committee on housing. In 1971, Lord was the only woman running her own architectural practice.

Lord was vocal about her position a woman architect in the local news. In an article from The Winnipeg Tribune from 1967, Lord commented "Your decisions depend on your tastes and your training—there's no defining line between thinking like a man or a woman. You think as a lawyer, or a doctor, or as in my case, an architect."





# Elizabeth Pilcher

**Bachelor of Architecture  
University of Sydney, 1935**

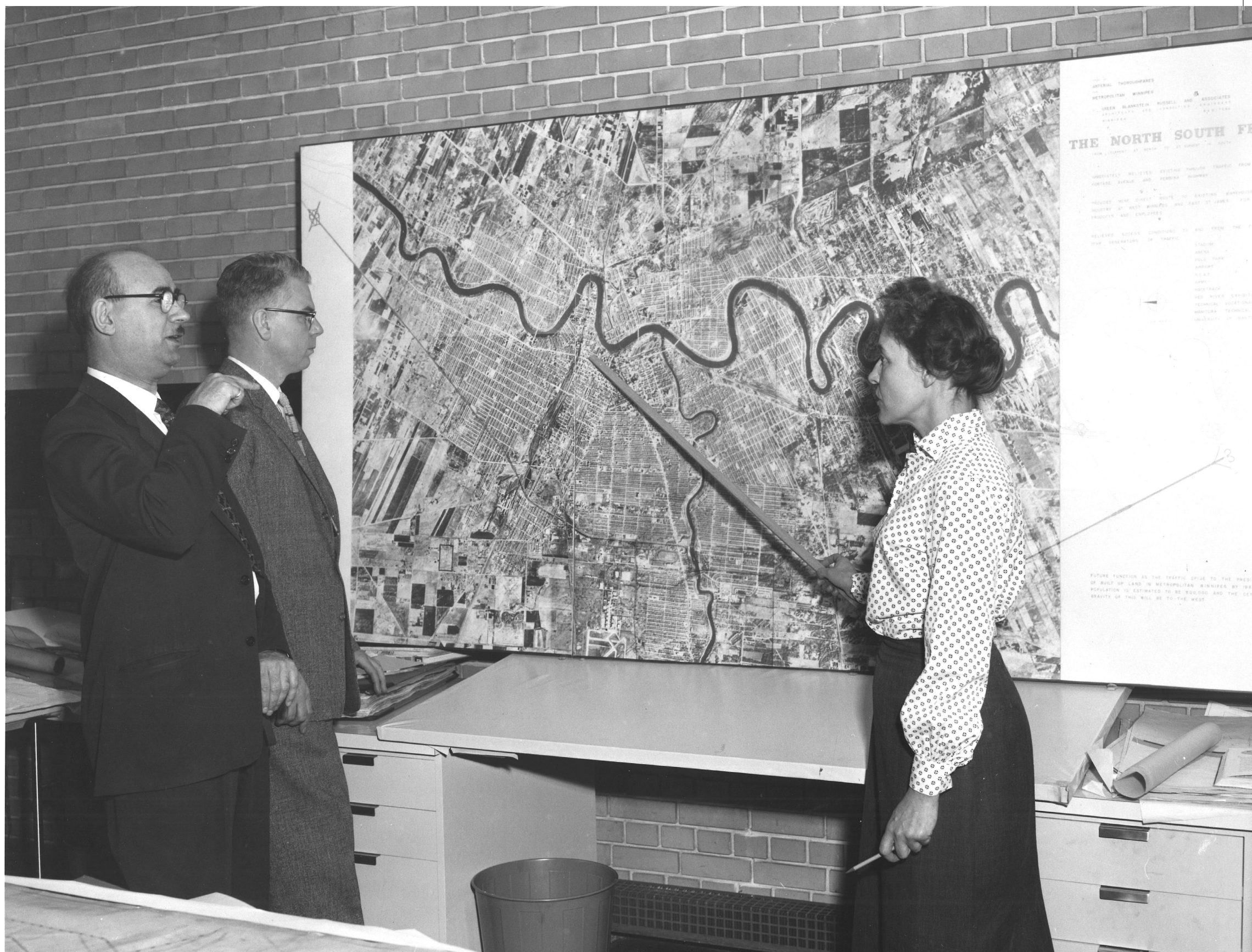
Elizabeth Pilcher (1920-1991) was an Australian born architect and city planner. Following her undergraduate degree, Pilcher studied under Walter Gropius at Harvard University and completed a post-graduate course in town planning at the Edinburgh College of Art. Having worked in both North America and Europe, Pilcher returned to Australia shortly after her studies.

In 1958, while living in Australia, Pilcher received an invitation to work for the Winnipeg-based architectural firm Green Blankstein Russell (GBR). She accepted and became the chief of their planning department, possibly the first person to hold such a position in a private architecture firm in Canada. Pilcher's early projects with GBR included the Winnipeg International Air Terminal, the International Duluth Seaport Corporation's harbour installations, and the North South Freeway.

It is unclear how long Pilcher remained with GBR, but it is known that in 1964 she moved to Jamaica where she was employed as a government planner until 1980.

*top image:*  
GBR team working on the North South Freeway. Pictured from left to right: Cecil Blankstein, Skapti Borgford, and Elizabeth Pilcher. Photo credit: Winnipeg Architecture Foundation archives.

*bottom image:*  
GBR team working on the North South Freeway. Pictured in the foreground from left to right: Elizabeth Pilcher and Kurt Furst. Background from left to right: Skapti Borgford, Cecil Blankstein, Mike Weller. Photo credit: Winnipeg Architecture Foundation archives.





# Evelyn Blankstein

**Bachelor of Architecture**  
**University of Manitoba, 1935**

Evelyn Blankstein (1913-2001) worked as an architect for nearly forty years and was a leader for women in architecture and design. Blankstein, who comes from a family of architects, briefly worked at her brother's firm Green Blankstein Russell before taking a job with Hobbs Glass (later Canadian Pittsburgh Industries). Blankstein designed and facilitated the use of architectural glass for stores, movie theatres, offices, and factories for the company.



*image:  
Evelyn Blankstein in front of the house her father, Max Blankstein, designed and built.  
Photo credit: Blankstein family collection.*



# Joan Harland

**Bachelor of Architecture**  
**University of Manitoba, 1938**

**Masters of Fine Arts**  
**Columbia University, 1947**

Only a year after graduating, Harland took a position at the University of Manitoba's School of Architecture, becoming the first instructor in interior decorating at the university. By 1949, Harland had convinced the university to develop a four-year degree in Interior Design. Harland became the first chairman of the department and later, department head. She led the department until she stepped down in 1967, but continued to lecture until her retirement in 1980.

In addition to her career as a professor, Harland continued to work on design projects. One of the seminal projects on which she participated was the 1958 expansion of St. George's Anglican Church. She headed the committee that selected the firm Green Blankstein Russell for the work and also headed the committee that worked out a magnificent design and furnishings for the interior. The result was a beautiful and relevant reflection of life and faith in the modern world.



image:  
St. George's Anglican Church, interior. Photo credit: Winnipeg Architecture Foundation



# Margaret Stinson

**Bachelor of Interior Design  
University of Manitoba, 1960**

Shortly after graduation, Margaret Stinson was hired by Green Blankstein Russell to complete the interior design work on the new Winnipeg Civic Centre. Stinson's design for City Hall, one of many she designed for the firm, was her first major project. The interior reflected the natural materials used in the building through colour selection, creating an open and contemporary space, reflective of the city's ambitions at the time. Stinson went on to do contract work and consulting for other major Winnipeg firms, including LM Architectural Group and IKOY. Stinson is a longtime member of the Interior Designers of Canada and was named a Fellow in 1995.



*top image:  
City Hall, exterior. Photo credit: Henry Kalen.*

*bottom image:  
City Hall, interior. Photo credit: Henry Kalen.*

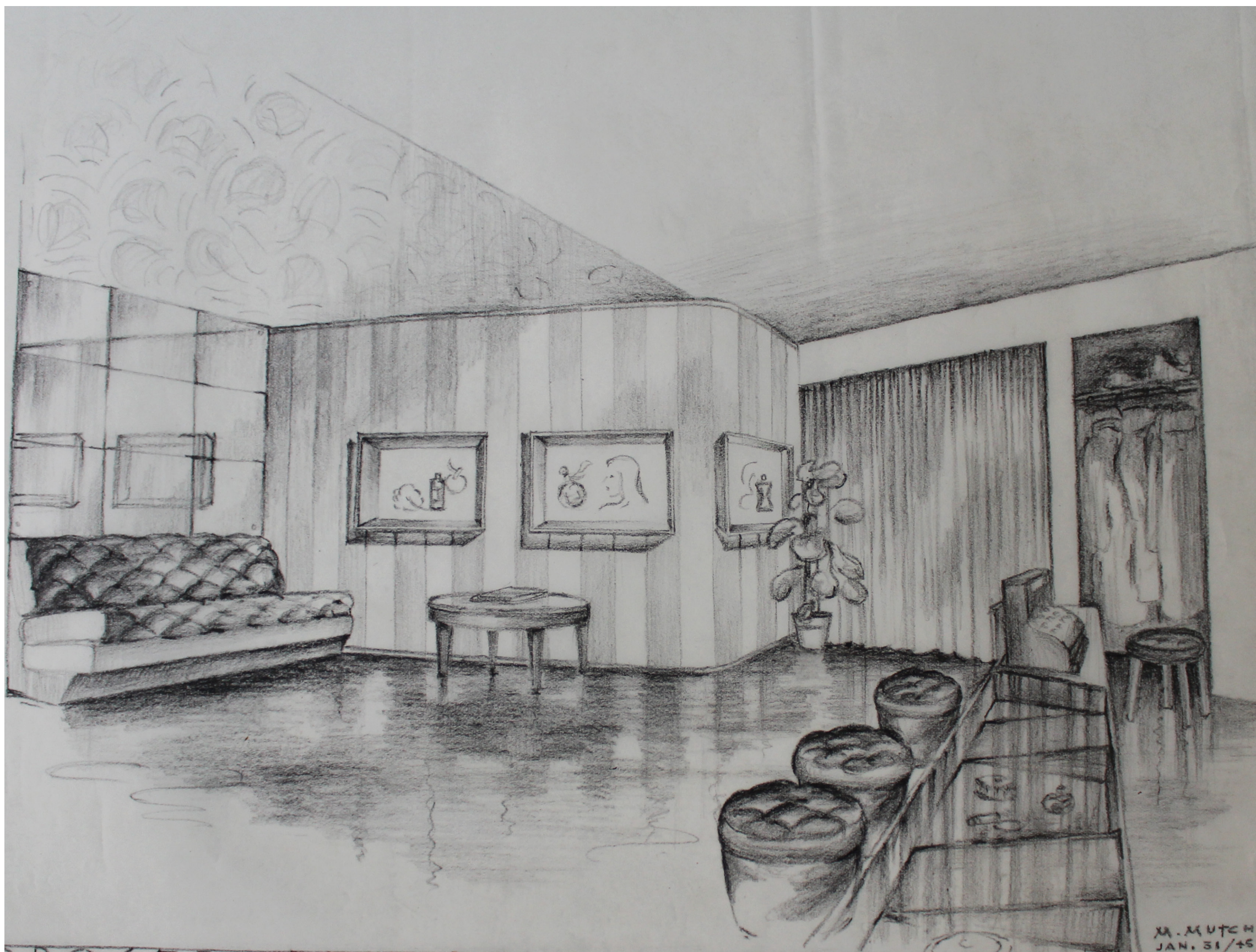
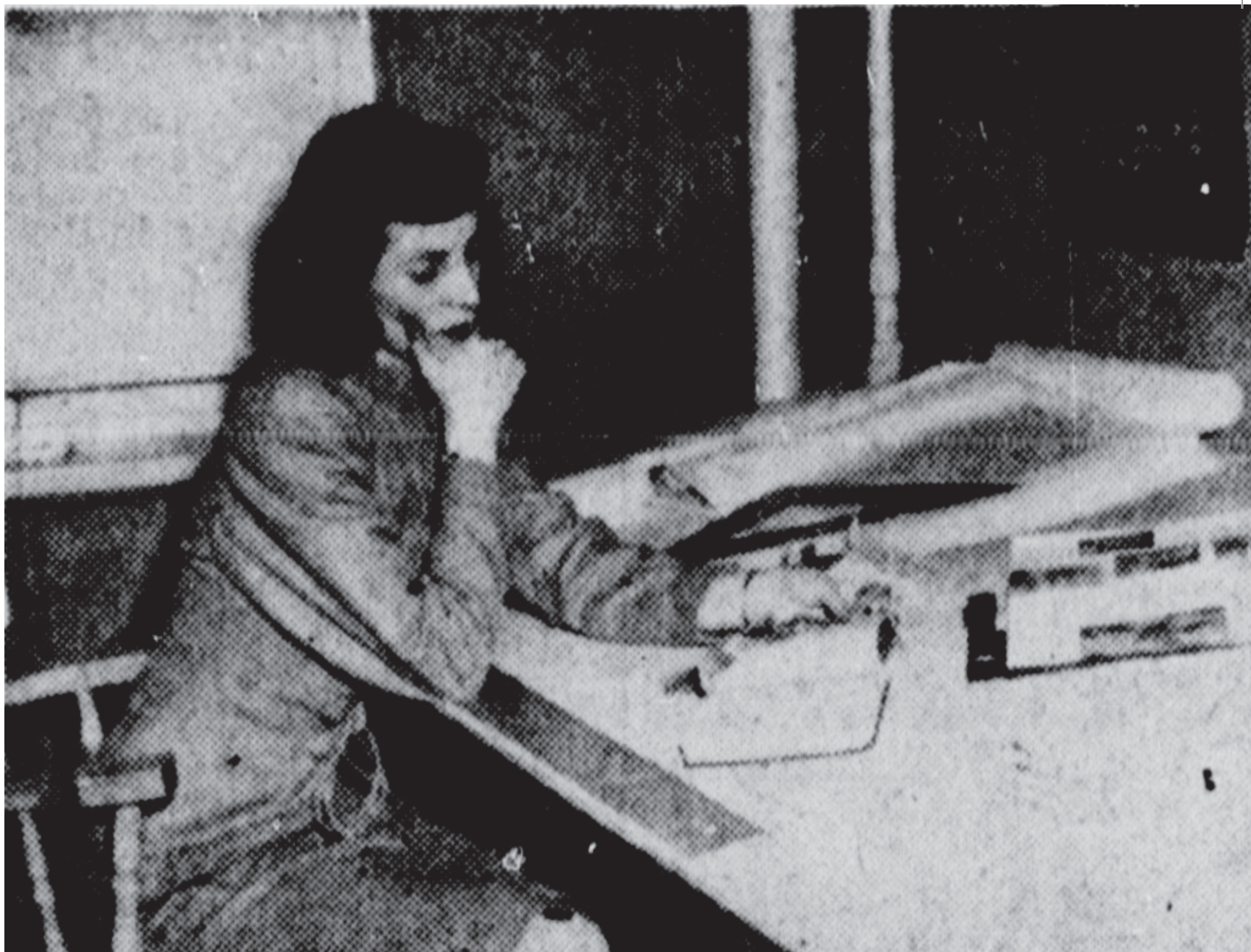


# Marjorie Mutch

**Diploma of Interior Decorating**  
**University of Manitoba, 1944**

Marjorie Mutch was hired by the Winnipeg-based architectural firm Green Blankstein Russell in 1946. At the time of her hiring, Mutch was the only interior designer to be retained on staff by an architecture firm in Western Canada.

During her time with the firm, Mutch worked on a wide-range of GBR's interior design projects. She also gave a series of lectures on interior decorating at the YWCA. In a Winnipeg Free Press article from 1946, Mutch expressed that she would only work with modern designs, as "they are the only truthful expression of our times."



top image:  
*The Winnipeg Tribune, January 26, 1946.*

bottom image:  
*Drawing by Marjorie Mutch. Proposed Reception Area for Nugget's Beauticians Salon, Green Blankstein Russell & Ham. January 31, 1946.*



# Marjorie Pritchard

**Diploma of Interior Design  
University of Manitoba, 1951**

Marjorie Pritchard was described as a uniquely talented, creative, and colourful designer. She moved to Montreal following her graduation but returned to Winnipeg in 1958 and began working for Green Blankstein Russell (GBR). One of the GBR projects Pritchard worked on included the Mutual Life Building (1111 Portage). She worked closely with Bernard Brown and David Thordarson to plan the furnishing and colour schemes for the interior.

Pritchard went on to work with the Government of Canada where she completed the design of several significant public and residential projects across the country. She ultimately moved in to private practice where she applied modernist ideas to residential interiors.



*image:  
GBR Drawing for Mutual Life. The Winnipeg Tribune. Monday, September 14, 1959.*

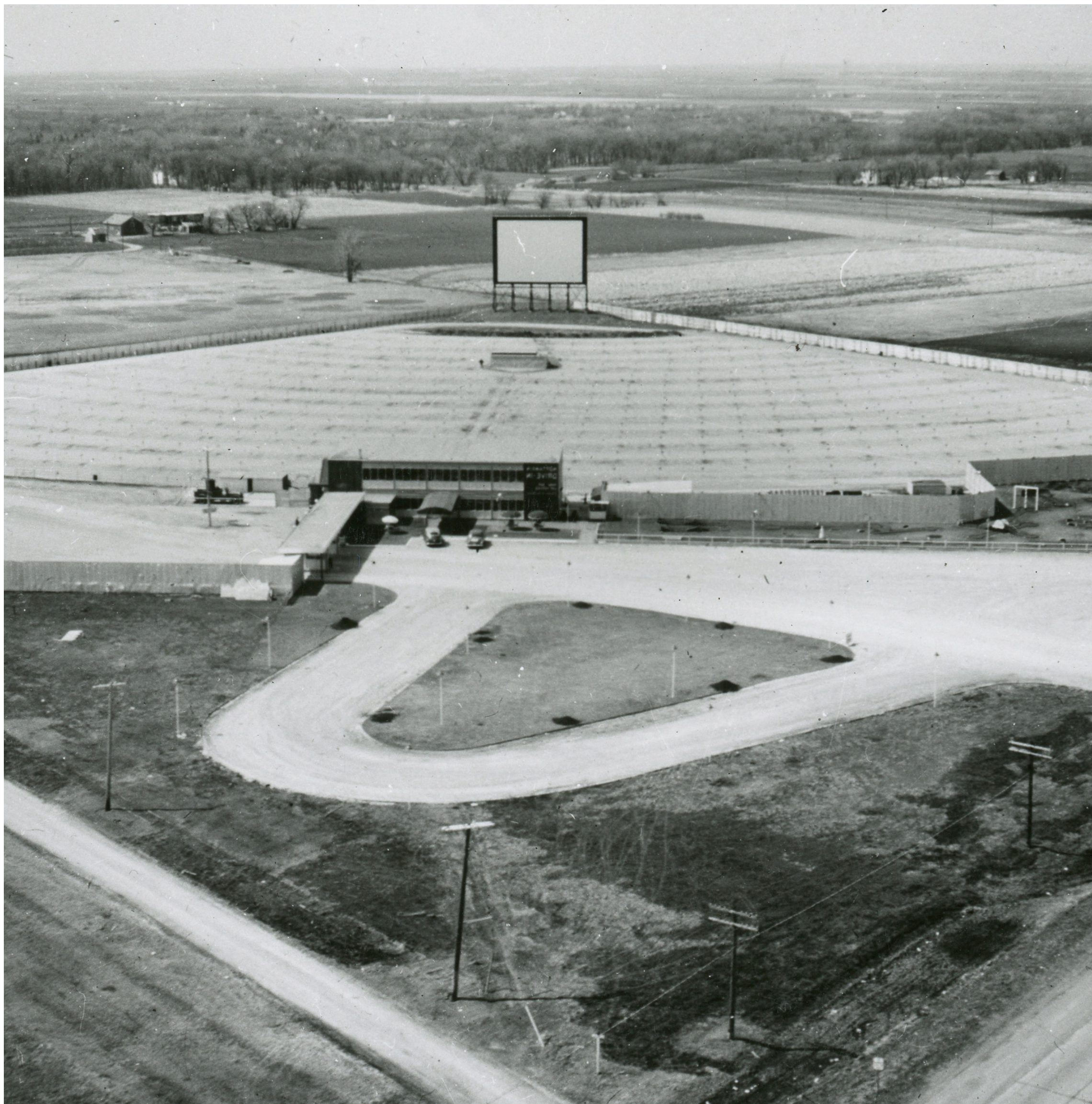
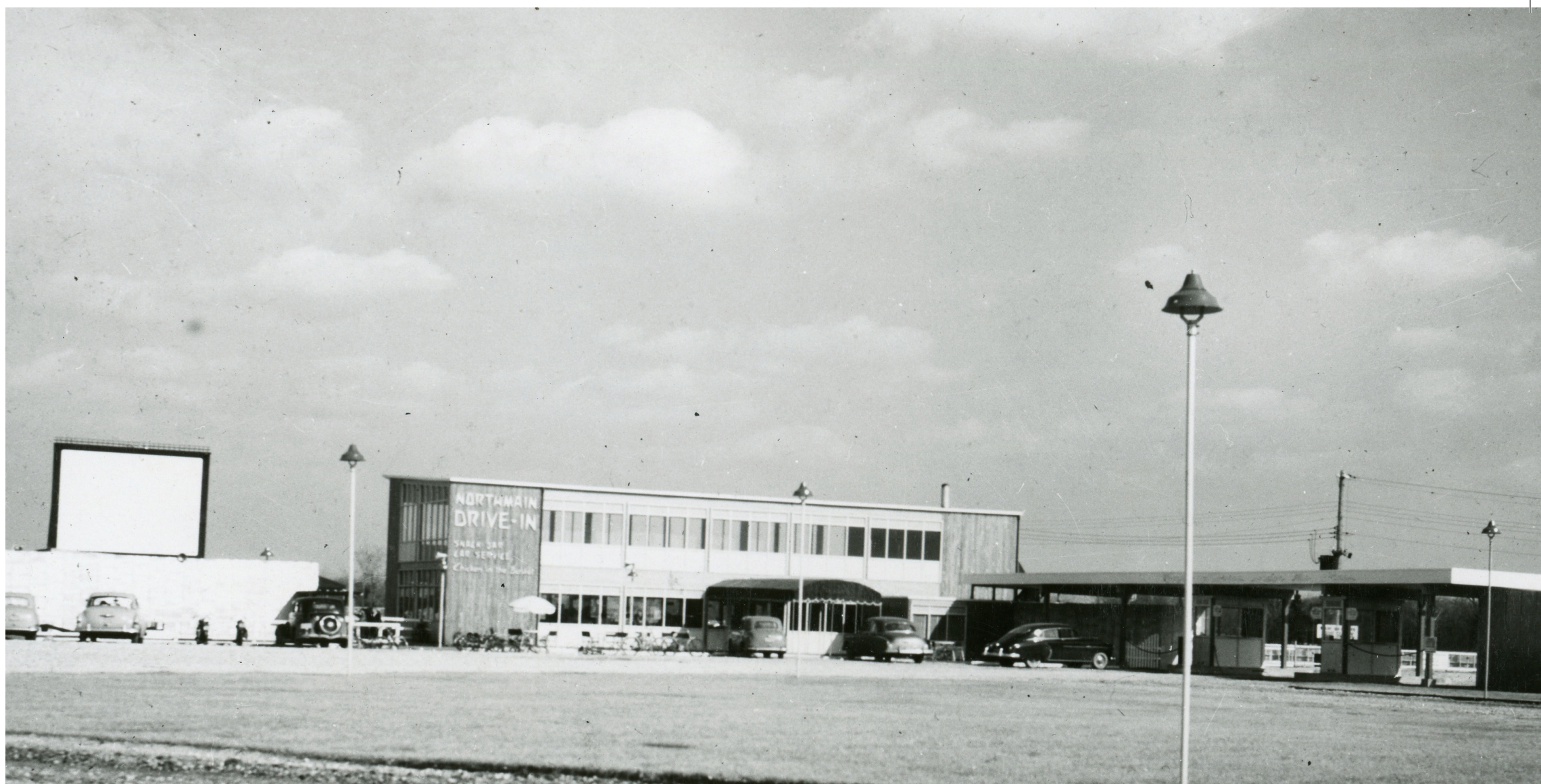


# Patricia Kettner

**Bachelor of Architecture  
University of Manitoba, 1948**

Patricia Kettner grew up in Alberta but moved to Winnipeg as a young adult to study architecture. Shortly after her graduation, she began working for Green Blankstein Russell (GBR) as an architect. During her time with GBR, Kettner worked on the designs of many schools and hospitals. She also designed the North Main Drive-In while working with the firm. In 1958, Kettner designed her family home. The one-story, modern home is located in the suburb Garden City.

In 1970, Kettner went back to school after deciding to pursue the fine arts. She is known for being one of the original co-op members of the Medea Gallery in Winnipeg. Kettner's work can be found in private collections in Canada, the United States, and England.



*top image:  
North Main Drive-In, designed by Patricia Kettner. Photo credit: Winnipeg Architecture  
Foundation archives.*

*bottom image:  
North Main Drive-In, designed by Patricia Kettner. Photo credit: Winnipeg Architecture  
Foundation archives.*