

# 'Old School' courses from heritage foundation teach preservation values

Too many older buildings have already fallen



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SPECIAL TO WESTCOAST HOMES

## REAL ESTATE MATTERS

Recycling newspapers, wine bottles and aluminum cans has become commonplace in most households nowadays. But in an urban region as young as Metro Vancouver, we haven't done a very good job yet of figuring out how to recycle our historic buildings. Part of that failure comes from a lack of appreciation for what our historic buildings represent as tangible cues to how our modern-day culture has evolved.

A new series of courses for building conservation will hopefully help change our attitudes about the rich heritage resources that are the collection of old houses and commercial and institutional buildings throughout not just Vancouver, but in our suburbs as well.

Demolishing a 2,000-square-foot house sends 60 tons of waste to the landfill. In fact, 20 per cent of all of the waste accumulated in landfills is made up of construction waste.

Usually we tear down an old building because it doesn't fit with our current tastes or is deficient in its functional design. It is rare that we elevate the historic, social, cultural or spiritual value of a building to a level that makes that building too precious to demolish.

The parents of young students at a new school in my suburban hometown couldn't understand a few years back why anyone would want to save the old schoolhouse that sat in a corner of the new school's playing field. That 75-year-old simple, small, two-storey building was the place where my grandfather and I both went to elementary school. It was also the first school in Steveston that integrated students of different ethnicities, bridging the ethnic chasms that existed in the early part of the last century.

Few could figure out what it would

take to conserve the old building, struggling with the unfamiliar architecture and the outdated building systems. Planning to adapt the building for a modern-day use dragged on without resolve. Unfortunately, that building that meant so much to me, and an awful lot in terms of the history of the community that has evolved around it, fell to the wrecking ball.

The Vancouver Heritage Foundation has established "Old School" — courses for building conservation that will hopefully engage a wide audience with the theoretical and technical tools to consider how heritage conservation can help build more sustainable communities.

The Old School courses involve hands-on learning, using local case studies, illustrated on-site lectures and workshops in actual heritage buildings and walking tours to provide homeowners, renovation contractors, realtors, architects, engineers, planners and others with the practical knowledge and skills to tackle every stage of the conservation of heritage buildings.

You live in an early 20th-century house with "good bones" that seem to have aged well, but clearly it's time to strip the cosmetic changes made over the years to bring the true beauty out. But you have no idea where to start.

Old School is the place to start.

The learning program is a series of concise individual courses, including a one-day core overview course, three key elective courses on topics like project planning and managing, building exteriors and building interiors.

All the courses are taught by well known local heritage conservation practitioners — people who have actually saved some of the real historic gems in this area.

The upcoming fall series of courses begins with the mandatory core course: Heritage 101 - Understanding Heritage Buildings on Oct. 25.

Further information is available at [vancouverheritagefoundation.org](http://vancouverheritagefoundation.org) on the Internet or by calling 604-264-9642.

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