

# Westmount Square, Sainte-Catherine Street West

Category: 1\*



View from the North-west Corner of Greene and de Maisonneuve Avenues



View of the Plaza Looking West



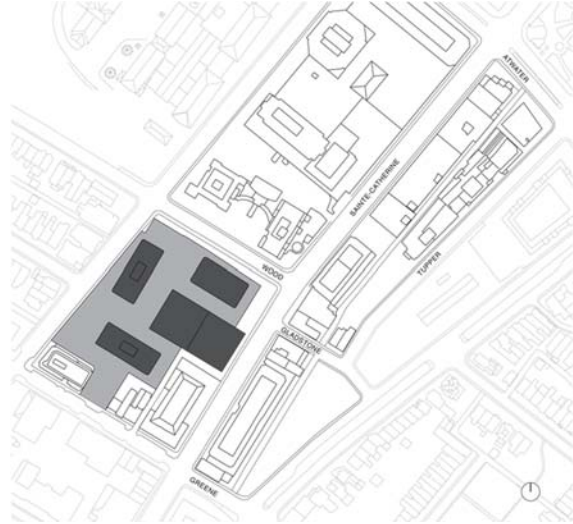
Detail of the Window Mullions



View of the Plaza Looking South-east Towards Tower 1



Aerial view:  
Source: Bing Maps



Key Plan

## Description

Westmount Square is a residential and office complex. It is constituted of one office tower (Westmount Square 1), two apartment towers (Westmount Square 2 and Westmount Square 3) and one other low-rise office building (Westmount Square 4) set on a plinth containing a shopping mall and underground parking. The residential towers are 21 storeys and the office tower is 22 storeys. The complex is designed in the international style. Completed in 1967, to the designs of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969), the buildings still fulfill their initial uses.

**Ludwig Mies van der Rohe** is considered to be one of the most influential architects of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and of critical importance in defining and promulgating the principles and language of modernist architecture. Born in Aachen Germany in 1886, his architectural training began in the studios of two important architects/engineers, Bruno Paul (1906 to 1908) and Peter Behrens (1908 to 1911). He started to develop his own architectural theory based on construction methods and classicism early in his career. After practicing as an architect for a decade in Berlin, in 1930 he became the director of the Bauhaus, one of the most important schools in modernist architecture. Under increasing pressure from the Nazi government, he closed the Bauhaus in 1933. Five years later, Mies moved to Chicago, to begin a twenty-year tenure as director of the architecture school at the Armour Institute of Technology. (In 1940, the school merged with another to become the Illinois Institute of Technology).

His arrival in the United States marked a new creative period in his career. Shortly after his arrival at his new academic post, he was awarded the commission to design the expanded campus of the Illinois Institute of Technology. Its layout and building design demonstrated in three dimensions, the Miesian theories unifying architecture and technology. His work during the 1950s concentrated on refining the single high-rise tower through projects such as the Lake Shore Drive Apartments (1954-1958) and the Seagram Building (1954-1958). In the next decade, Mies turned his attention to the problem of urban complexes, where several towers define a public plaza, often occupying a full city block. The results were three landmark projects: Federal Center in Chicago (1959-1974), the Toronto-Dominion Centre (1963-1969) and Westmount Square<sup>1</sup> (1965-1967). Of the three, Westmount Square is the only project by Mies van der Rohe to combine residential and office buildings. The office tower is adjacent to the busy commercial Ste. Catherine Street, while the two apartment towers address residential streets.

Westmount Square is an embodiment of the Miesian principles that are now recognized as defining the International Style. Mies created an architectural language with its own grammar. He embraced industrial forms and methods of production. He advocated for the union of architecture and technology making one the expression of the other through the rational use of material. In his work, there is a deliberate distinction between the skin and the structure: both are distinct and legible. At the same time in his urban complexes, he returned to the ideas of transparency that marked his earlier work. He emphasized the free-flow of space between the interior of the building and the exterior plaza. The flooring and paving materials were the same; large panes of glass, descending to the floor and held in thin frames,

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<sup>1</sup> It is exceptional to have three projects of such a celebrated architect in the Montreal region. In addition to Westmount Square, Mies designed a gas station and a residential tower on Île-des-Soeurs.

	<p>minimized the perception of boundaries between the inside and the outside worlds. All of these elements and ideas can be found in Westmount Square.</p> <p>The construction of Westmount Square marked the beginning of a new period in the transformation of the city of Westmount. By the 1960s, the development of the downtown reached Westmount. A change in the by-law during that period allowed the construction of high-rise buildings. The demolition of older two or three-storey residential buildings and their replacement by higher structures began. Shortly after the construction of Westmount Square, the first phase of Place Alexis-Nihon started construction in 1967.</p>
<p><b>Heritage Values</b></p>	<p><b>Historical Values:</b> Westmount Square derives its historical values from its associations with the internationally famous architect, Mies van der Rohe and from its special status as being his only mixed-use complex. Its construction marked the beginning of a new phase of densification in Westmount in the 1960s.</p> <p><b>Architectural Values:</b> Westmount Square derives its architectural values from it being a complete architectural work by a master architect, with a very high degree of integrity and authenticity.</p> <p><b>Environmental Values:</b> Westmount Square derives its environmental values from its setting within Westmount, comprising almost an entire city block, with its towers set upon a publically accessible podium, and the whole connected to the underground city.</p>
<p><b>Heritage Character Defining Elements</b></p>	<p>The key elements which contribute to the heritage character of this site include:</p> <p><u>Setting:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Site extends over almost an entire city block: 3 towers and 1 low-rise building disposed in a deliberate way on a raised plinth;</li> <li>▪ Three types of designed connections to the complex: (a) off-street entrances, giving access to the underground mall and to Tower 4; (b) off-plaza entrances to Tower 1,2,3 and (c) entrance to the underground subway system</li> <li>▪ Commercial towers address Ste-Catherine Street, a major commercial artery and Greene Avenue, a secondary commercial street; Residential towers address the surrounding residential neighbourhood.</li> </ul> <p><u>Plaza:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Large open plaza with fountains;</li> <li>▪ Easy access from surrounding streets and street entrances to towers 1-3, promoting pedestrian activity;</li> <li>▪ The plaza performs two important functions: it is a public space and it provides a vista from the towers; From any appreciable height, the roof of Tower 4 becomes a flattened part of the composition of the plaza;</li> <li>▪ Original steel handrails</li> </ul> <p>[Granite pavers have replaced the original travertine; the granite has performed poorly and will need to be replaced. Consideration should be given in future projects to how the visual connection between interior flooring and exterior paving can be reinstated.] [Skylights providing natural light to the underground mall are not original.]</p>

Underground Mall:

- Public circulation, entries and shopfronts: Miesian material and detail palettes

Exterior:

Westmount Square 1, 2, 3 and 4:

- Recessed ground floor plate, ringed by steel-clad columns;
- Expressed steel structure;
- Black anodized aluminum curtain walls with floor-to-ceiling windows. H-shaped vertical mullions
- Towers 1, 2, and 3 are hi-rises; Tower 4 is two-storeys.

Westmount Square 1: 22 storeys

- Wide floor plate, indicative of its office use. The bulk of the building floor plate is off-set by the additional height of the tower;
- Non-operable windows providing floor to ceiling glazing;
- Mechanical penthouse floor is differentiated from the rest of the floors and provides a deliberate termination to the tower.

Westmount Square 2 and 3: 21 storeys

- Narrow floor plate, indicative of its residential use.
- Combination of non-operable and hopper windows;

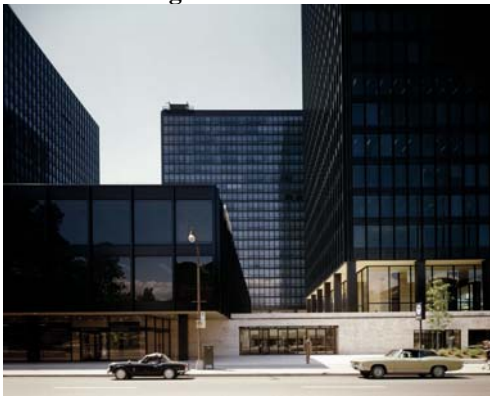
Interiors:

- Ground floor of each tower is not dedicated to any function, except entrance; the space is visually separated only by the vertical circulation cores (elevators, stairs)
- Vertical circulation cores, entrance lobbies and any surviving hallways;
- Travertine flooring and wall covering (ground level of each tower); originally the travertine was also used for the plaza paving.
- Flat ceiling planes

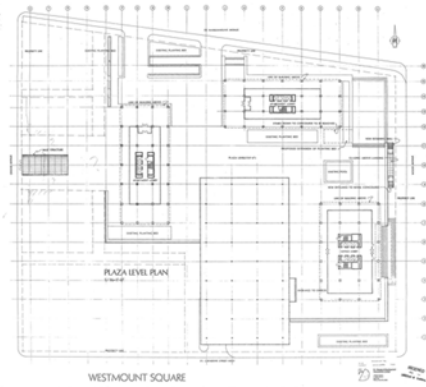
<b>Date of Construction</b>	1965-1968
<b>Persons of Significance</b>	Consulting architect: Mies van der Rohe Architects of record: Greenspoon Freedlander Dunne Platcha Kryton
<b>Stylistic Influences</b>	International Style
<b>Building</b>	
<i>Number of stories</i>	Westmount Square 1 (Office tower): 22 Westmount Square 2 and Westmount Square 3 (Apartment towers): 21 Westmount Square 4 (Offices): 2 Plinth: 4
<i>Plan/Footprint</i>	Westmount Square 1 (Office tower): 35 metres by 25 metres Westmount Square 2 and Westmount Square 3 (Apartment towers): rectangular 28 metres x 20 metres Westmount Square 4: rectangular 37 metres x 69 metres Plinth:
<i>Height</i>	Westmount Square 1(Office tower): 83 metres

	<p>Westmount Square 2 and Westmount Square 3 (Apartment towers): 69 metres  Westmount Square 4: 8,5 metres  Plinth: at ground level on the north west corner, 3 metres on the south-east corner</p>
<b>Architectural Elements</b>	
<i>Foundations</i>	Concrete
<i>Walls</i>	<p>All facades of all three towers and the building are articulated. The ground floor walls of each tower are recessed and enclosed with large glass windows.  A curtain wall that differs in its window design depending on the function of the tower it encloses.  Black anodized aluminum mullions</p>
<i>Roof</i>	<p>Flat roofs;  Office tower is crowned by a gridded mechanical penthouse, while the residential towers are bluntly terminated</p>
<i>Windows</i>	<p>Office tower: Each floor has floor to ceiling non-operable smoked glass windows;  Residential towers: Each floor is fenestrated from floor to ceiling with a horizontal line of hopper smoked glass windows and a horizontal line of non-operable smoked glass windows</p>
<i>Others (entrance, porch, chimneys...)</i>	<p>Canopy over the entrances;  Fountains on the plaza</p>
<i>Construction Methods</i>	Steel structure
<b>Composition</b>	
<b>Context</b> <i>(setbacks, surroundings, landscape, landmark status)</i>	<p>Westmount Square occupies almost an entire city block, but the assembly of the different volumes and the transparency of the ground floor of each tower permit view of the surrounding streets and porosity into the complex.</p> <p>Westmount Square constitutes a transition between the dense city centre with high-rise buildings and the more residential area constituted of low-rise buildings. The office tower is closer to the more commercial streets -Sainte-Catherine Street and Greene Avenue, while the residential towers are along the secondary streets.</p> <p>The complex is designated as a Category 1* building by the City of Westmount and is an important visual landmark within the city.</p>
<b>Additions/Alterations</b>	<p>1988: Renovations  1990: Renovation of the promenade by Lemieux Architecte, urbaniste  1990: Addition of the skylights to the shopping mall</p>
<b>Integrity</b>	<p>High. Very few modifications have been done to Westmount Square. The most significant transformation was the replacement of the travertine on the plaza with granite pavers, which disrupted the material continuity between the interior and the exterior.</p>

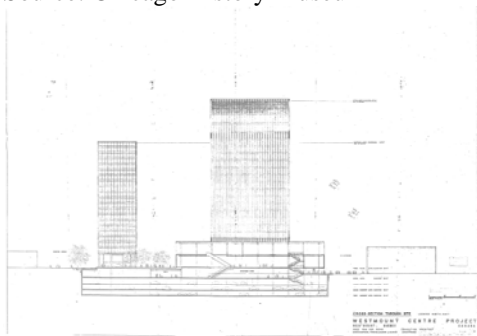
**Historical Images**



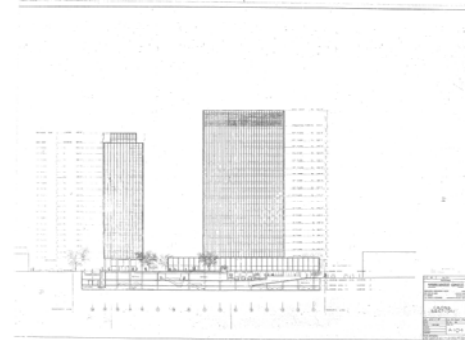
1968  
Source: Chicago History Museum



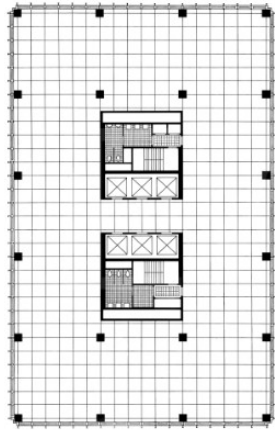
Plan  
Source: Westmount City Hall



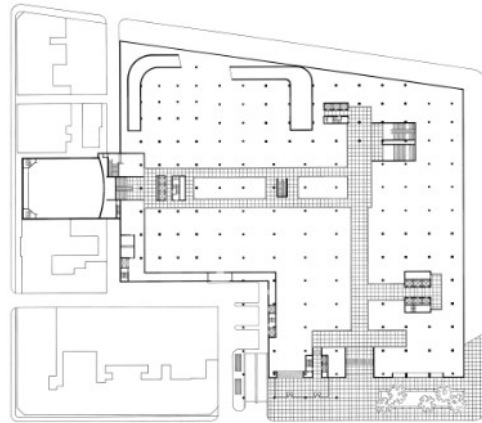
Section  
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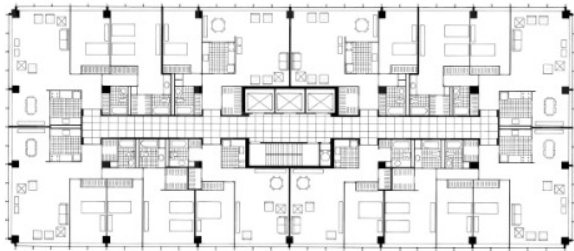
Section  
Source: Westmount City Hall



Typical Floor Plan: Tower 1  
 (©Chicago Historical Society, Restricted use)



Plan: Underground Mall  
 (©Chicago Historical Society, Restricted use)



Typical Floor Plan: Tower 2, 3  
 (©Chicago Historical Society, Restricted use)

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