

CF Polo Park

A VISUAL HISTORY OF CF POLO PARK

The Evolution of Winnipeg's Most Enduring Shopping Centre

Updated for October 2024



For more than sixty-five years, CF Polo Park has been one of the most iconic shopping destinations in Winnipeg. Established in 1959, we are one of the oldest Cadillac Fairview shopping malls. Today, we are also the largest indoor mall in Manitoba, and our property is host to around 200 retailers and services.

What follows is a visual history of the mall and the surrounding property—from our beginnings as an open-air shopping centre, through the roof enclosure, additions, and renovations—all the way up until today.



Polo Park logos throughout the years.

(Clockwise from top-left: '50s & '60s, late-'70s, early-'80s, mid-'80s to early 2000s, mid-2000s to 2010s, mid-2010s to present)

The Racetrack: 1925—1956

Polo Park was a horse racing venue situated at the corner of Portage Avenue and St. James Street in Winnipeg. It was built by R. James Speers, and operated from 1925 until 1956. Following the acquisition of the future grounds of Assiniboia Downs, the Polo Park venue was demolished.

David Slater Limited acquired the Polo Park property and developed it into a shopping centre with architectural firm Green, Blankstein, Russell & Associates (GBR). From the 1960s onward, it would be managed by the Fairview Corporation, and eventually as Cadillac Fairview following Fairview's merger with the Cadillac Development Corporation in 1974.



*Historical display regarding the Polo Park racetrack, located inside of Polo North.
Photo from CF Polo Park Guest Services.*



Polo Park racetrack, images from Heritage Winnipeg (heritagewinnipeg.com).



*Crowds at Polo Park racetrack on October 23 1943.
Photo by George Hunter, Canadian Heritage Photography Foundation.*

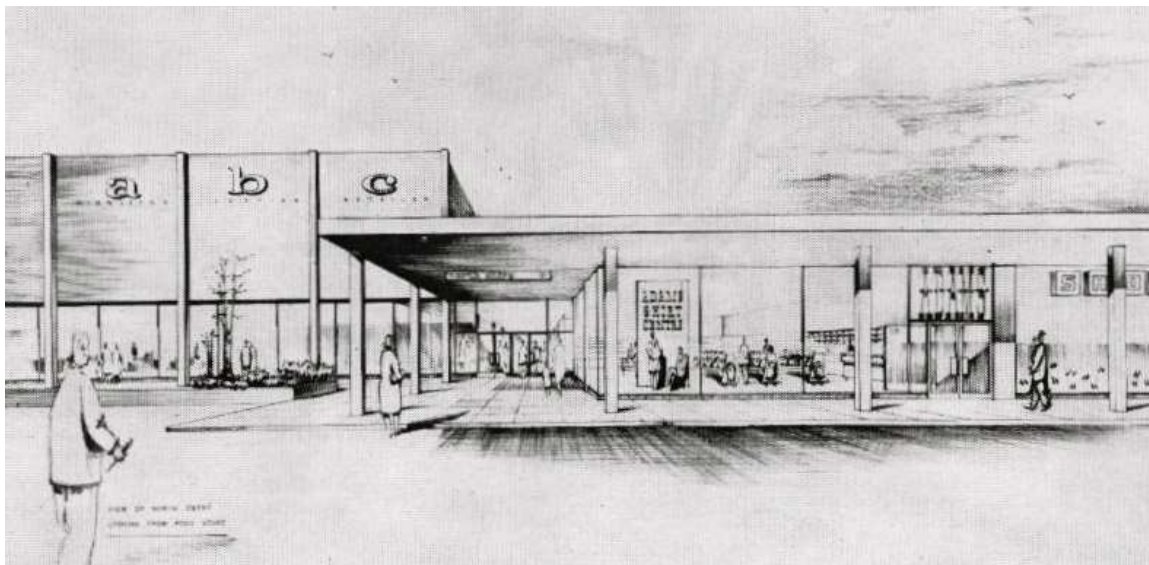


*Polo Park area panorama circa 1954
Photo provided by Jehare Stooke, from Retro St. James Facebook group*

The Open Air Era: 1959—1963



*Polo Park in the initial stages of construction.
From CF Polo Park archives*



*Concept illustration of the finished shopping mall
From Winnipeg Architecture Foundation*



*Scale model of the proposed shopping centre and surrounding development
Winnipeg Tribune, May 5 1959*

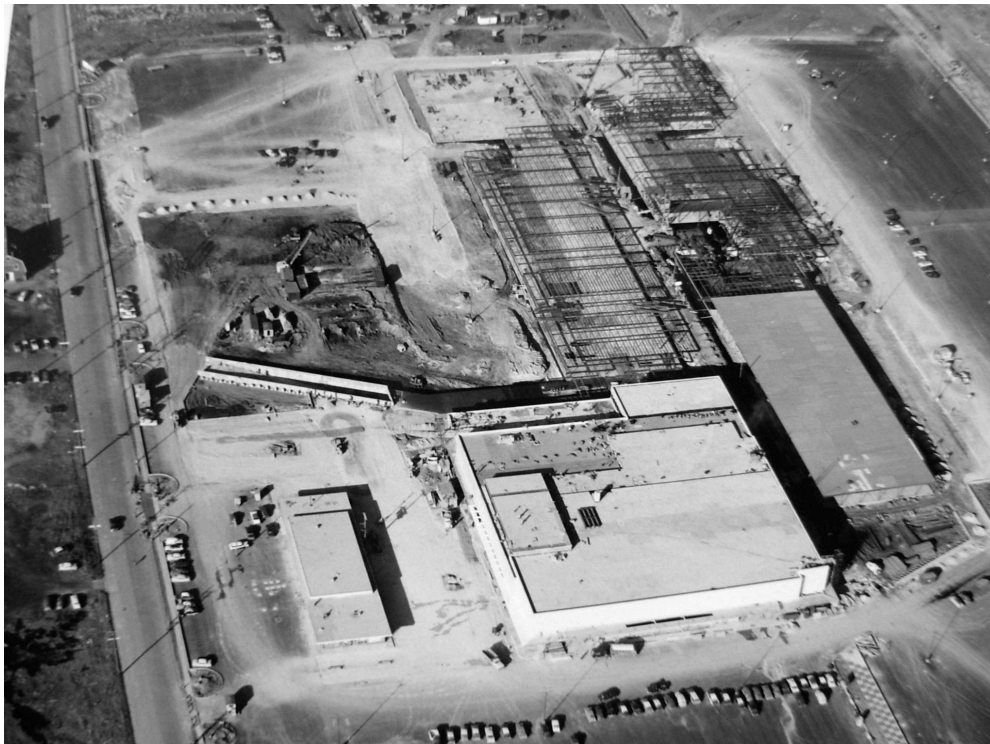
Simpsons-Sears

Working in conjunction with David Slater Limited was Polo Park's primary anchor, Simpsons-Sears. This 270,000-square-foot department store was constructed on the southwest side of the centre, and remains one of the oldest portions of the Polo Park complex. Groundbreaking took place in 1957, excavation and construction began soon after in 1958. The store opened on May 6 1959, three months before the rest of the mall was completed.

Simpsons-Sears also maintained an automotive service centre on the west side of their building. This would expand to include a garden centre and a marina.



*Simpsons-Sears under construction in 1958.
Photos from Retro St. James.*



*The Polo Park site while under construction
Photo from Old Manitoba, The Way It Once Was!*



*Polo Park Shopping Centre during final stages of construction in 1959
Here, Simpsons-Sears had already opened prior to the remainder of the mall being finished.
Photo from CF Polo Park archives*

Mall layout

Unlike today, the mall did not have a full second storey, nor was it enclosed. Instead, Polo Park began as an open air shopping centre which called to mind visuals of a town square or community market.

Designed by Hans Peter Langes and built by Peter Leitch Construction Limited, Polo Park consisted of a main concourse stretching from south to north, with Simpsons-Sears at the southwest corner, and Dominion and Loblaws at the northernmost point. More than thirty other retailers lined the walkways. In the centre court, there was a large rectangular fountain pool. Flower beds, benches, and garbage cans were placed throughout the mall. Loudspeakers were installed to play muzak. The support posts were a bright yellow, matching with the large Polo Park sign at the south entrance.

There were four entrances—one at the south next to Simpsons-Sears, another at the west on the other side of the Simpsons-Sears building, one just east of centre court, and one at the north between Dominion and Loblaws.

Like Simpsons-Sears, both Dominion and Loblaws opened before the rest of the mall. Dominion opened on June 10 1959, and Loblaws opened a week later on June 17.

Simpsons-Sears installed a ramp to their underground loading dock outside the west entrance. At the time, Ness Avenue did not go through to St. James Street. As a result, the west parking lot was likely not prioritized in the way it is today. The lots had animal-themed signage to help guests locate their vehicles.

The original second storey was a U-shaped office space just above centre court, which was accessed by a staircase on the east side of the building (behind the current Guest Services Centre).

Grand opening

THE WINNIPEG TRIBUNE, 1959, Aug. 19, 1959

OPENING TOMORROW

POLO PARK

SHOPPING CENTRE



40 FINE STORES

We, the merchants of Polo Park, extend a warm and personal invitation to the citizens of Manitoba to visit us on the occasion of our grand opening. The three days of celebrations have been planned for you and your family and we hope you enjoy the many events. Our aim is to make the Centre a pleasant and relaxing place to shop, and all facilities, from parking lot to Canada's most beautiful Mall, have been designed with this thought in mind. Come out and join the fun.

Stores:

POLO PARK MERCHANTS ASSOCIATION

DOMINION STORES LTD.	LOBLAW GROCERIES CO. LTD.	S. S. KRESGE CO. LTD.	ZELLER'S LIMITED
SALLY SHOPS LTD.	UNITED CIGAR STORES LTD.	G. TAMBLYN LTD.	BATA SHOE CO. OF CANADA
AGNEW SURPASS SHOE CO. LTD.	CANADIAN BANK OF COMMERCE	NATIONAL-RADEX LTD.	FABRIC CENTRE LTD.
THE LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION			

GENDER & SONS LTD.	PERTH DRY CLEANERS LTD.	DAYTON OUTFITTING CO. LTD.	WASSON'S BOWLING ALLEY
FLOORS MODERNE	RENE'S FOR GIFTS	HANFORD-DREWITT (SUBURBAN) LIMITED	REWARD SHOES LTD.
BROADWAY FLORISTS	EMPIRE WALLPAPER & PAINT CO. LTD.	TIP TOP TAILORS LTD.	HENRY BIRKS AND SONS (MAN.) LTD.
REITMAN'S LTD.	UNCLE JOHN'S HOBBY SHOP		

SWEET SIXTEEN LTD.	STRAINS CO. LTD.	PIA'S	FASHIONETTE HAIR STYLISTS
RICHARDSON BROS. LTD.	MONARCH LUMBER COMPANY LIMITED	PENNINGTON'S LTD.	GORDI'S DELICATESSEN
O'BRIEN WORLD TRAVEL SERVICE	CARDINAL SHIRT & TIE SHOPS	MARIO'S HAIRDRESSING LTD.	PAULINE JOHNSON CANDIES
D'ALLAIRD'S LIMITED			

POLO PARK SHOPPING CENTRE

The Centre will be officially opened by the Honorable Dufferin Roblin, Premier of the Province, on Thursday, August 20th

DOMINION STORES LTD.
 LOBLAW GROCERIES CO. LTD.
 S. S. KRESGE CO. LTD.
 ZELLER'S LIMITED
 SALLY SHOPS LTD.
 UNITED CIGAR STORES LTD.
 G. TAMBLYN LTD.
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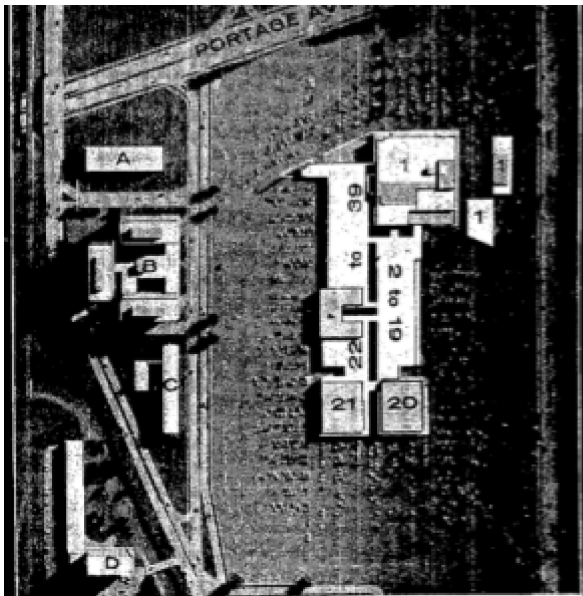
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 CARDINAL SHIRT & TIE SHOPS
 MARIO'S HAIRDRESSING LTD.
 PAULINE JOHNSON CANDIES
 D'ALLAIRD'S LIMITED

Polo Park grand opening announcement (left). Closeup of the tenant listing (right).

Winnipeg Tribune, August 19 1959.

Polo Park Shopping Centre opened to the public on August 20 1959, with forty retailers and services prepared for the crowds of excited shoppers.

Manitoba premier Duff Roblin and Winnipeg mayor Stephen Juba participated in the opening ceremonies, hosted by CBC presenter Fred Davis. During the ensuing week, Polo Park hosted attractions including pony rides, prize giveaways, clown performances, and a high-wire act performed by aerialist La Norma.



Polo Park family of fine stores

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 1. Simpsons-Sears Limited | 23. Empire Paint & Wallpaper Co. Ltd. |
| 2. Packard Shoe Store | 24. Zeller's Limited |
| 3. Tip Top Tailors Ltd. | 25. United Cigar Stores Ltd. |
| 4. Molyneux | 26. Polo Park Bowling Alleys |
| 5. Broadway Florists | 27. Fashionette Hair Stylists |
| 6. Strains Co. Ltd. | 28. Henry Birks and Sons Ltd. |
| 7. Sally Shops Ltd. | 29. Pennington's Limited |
| 8. Fabric Centre Ltd. | 30. Sweet Sixteen Ltd. |
| 9. Agnew Surpass Shoe Store Ltd. | 31. Gord's Delicatessen |
| 10. Reitman's Limited | 32. Reward Shoes Limited |
| 11. Bata Shoe Co. of Canada Ltd. | 33. Dayton Outfitting Co. Ltd. |
| 12. S. S. Kresge Co. Ltd. | 34. Gensel and Sons Limited |
| 13. National-Radex Limited | 35. Perth Dye Works Ltd. |
| 14. Uncle John's Hobby Shop | 36. Restaurant |
| 15. Richardson Bros. Ltd. | 37. Hanford-Drewitt (Suburban) Limited |
| 16. Tambllyn Drug Store | 38. Rene's for Gifts |
| 17. Monarch Lumber Co. Ltd. | 39. Canadian Bank of Commerce |
| 18. Canadian Food Products Ltd. | |
| 19. Floors Moderne | |
| 20. Loblaw Groceries Co. Ltd. | |
| 21. Dominion Stores Limited | |
| 22. Travel Agency | |
- A. B. C. — Office Buildings
D. — Motel

*Directory of tenants at Polo Park, along with proposed developments on the east side.
Winnipeg Free Press, June 9 1959.*

Among the original stores were a number of tenants that would stay with the mall for many years to come. These included Broadway Florists, Fashionette, Mario's Hairdressing, O'Brien Travel, Perth's, S.S. Kresge Co., Tip Top Tailors, and Wasson's Bowling Alley, and Zellers.

Of the original tenants, Fashionette Hair Stylists (now Revolutions), Tip Top Tailors, and Wasson's Bowling Alley (now Polo Park Bowling Centre) remain in 2024. Reitmans has also maintained spots in the mall over the years, most recently opening up a new location on the upper level in the north wing.



*Looking north toward centre court on opening day, August 20 1959.
Photo from CF Polo Park archives.*



*Crowds gathered on opening day (left).
Mayor Stephen Juba and Premier Duff Roblin at the opening ceremony (right).
Photos from CF Polo Park archives.*



*Looking west towards centre court.
Photo from CF Polo Park archives.*



*1959, looking southwest.
Photo from CF Polo Park archives.*

Artwork

A handful of artists were commissioned by GBR to design a variety of modern artworks for display in the shopping centre. The concept of a shopping mall was still relatively new, and Polo Park's developers believed that contemporary aesthetics were of great importance to the mall's presentation.

Each of these art pieces functioned not only as decoration but also as landmarks for shoppers throughout the mall. In total, there were four artists involved: George Swinton, Duane Eichholz, Richard Williams, and James Willer. Together, they produced eight works for Polo Park.



*Artists (from left to right): James Willer, Duane Eichholz, and Richard Williams.
Winnipeg Free Press, August 15 1959.*

George Swinton designed *Acrobats*, a tall concrete sculpture with abstract forms. This piece was displayed in the middle of the centre court fountain. Swinton also designed a blue glass mosaic for the exterior of the Simpsons-Sears building.

On *Acrobats*, Swinton said, "My sculpture is intended to be strictly functional. It is a fountain with the play of acrobats as subject matter. Nothing more nor less profound than this is intended. The play of the acrobats has a definite association with the play of water. No doubt those who cannot see the play of acrobats will recognize this piece as a fountain."



*Acrobats by George Swinton in centre court, looking north towards Winnipeg Stadium.
Photo from Retro St. James, colour-corrected.*

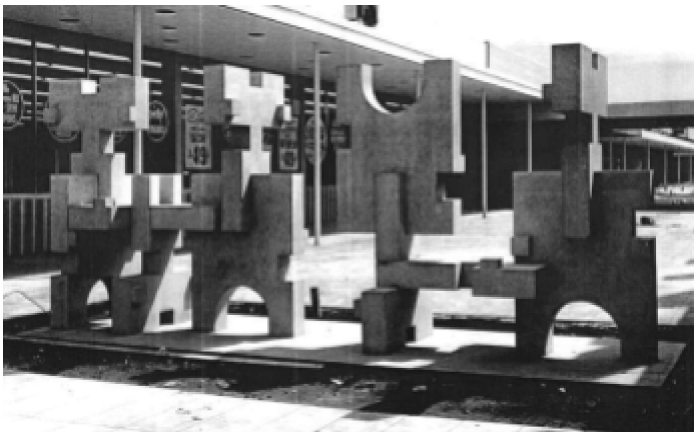


*Simpsons-Sears with the mosaic by George Swinton.
Photo from Old Manitoba, The Way It Once Was!*

Richard Williams designed *Mock Wall*, a concrete piece, and *Birds in a Bluff*, a wooden sculpture. Both of these were located at the north end of the mall, near the exit between the Dominion and Loblaws stores.

On *Mock Wall*, Williams said, “I was concerned with designing two simple interlocking elements which could be used to construct a wall-like sculptural unit—not a somber monument but a form to stimulate the imagination. The piece helps to define a walkway between two stores, and if at times it seems to participate in the bundle-laden rush from door to door, this is an aspect of both its function and its humour.”

On *Birds in a Bluff*, he said, “There should be no difficulty in recognizing the subject, but it must be remembered that this is a sculpture in wood and not an ornithological study. My intention was to express the simple charm of the subject in terms of robust form fit for this land.”



*Mock Wall (left) and Birds in a Bluff (right) by Richard Williams.
Photos from the University of Manitoba digital collections.*

James Willer designed *Screens*—a series of two concrete sculptures which were displayed on the west and east entrances to the centre. The eastern portion depicted two roosters crowing at the sun, and the west sculpture featured an owl taking flight.

Willer spoke on *Screens*, saying, “The screens are there to tell customers East from West. Two cocks crowing against a rising sun indicate East. Conversely, an owl preparing for flight shows the West entrance to the ‘Centre’. The function of orientating people fulfilled, I was happy enough to fling blocks of concrete across

suspension wires allowing them to hang vertically to form a transparent screen. I should not be disappointed if most viewers build visually block-by-block until they achieve a final comprehension of the screens. The body of the owl is negative, so is the sun. The cocks are cut out of the rays of the sun. Do not be confused by the play of negative and positive.”



Screens by James Willer. East portion (left), and West portion (right).
Left photo from CF Polo Park archives, right photo from Winnipeg Tribune, August 19 1959.

Duane Eichholz designed *Bronze Lady*, which was displayed close to the middle of the mall. Unfortunately, very little is known about this sculpture or its location, as it was not documented in detail.

On *Bronze Lady*, Eichholz was quoted as saying, “The ‘Bronze Lady’ is a ‘reality’ abstracted from nature and tradition. It is meant to be experienced as something richer than a nervous neon sign.”

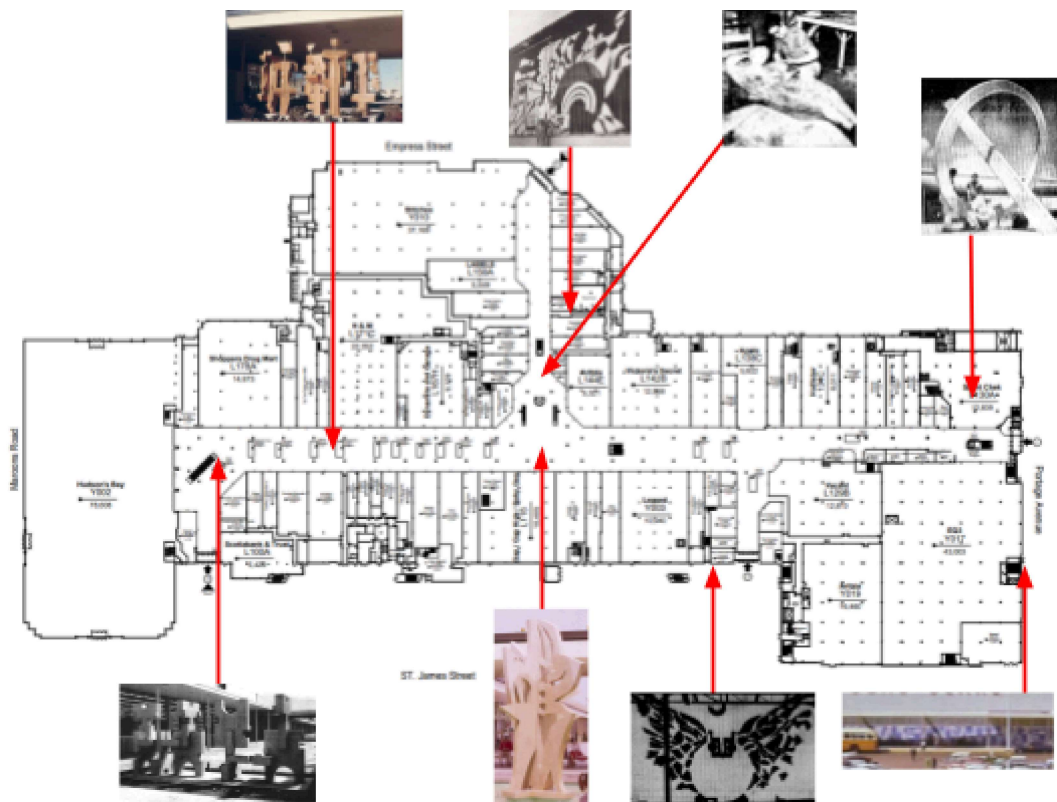
James Willer also collaborated with Eichholz for the *Sundial*, which stood at the south end of the complex, adjacent to the Simpsons-Sears building.

On the *Sundial*, Willer elaborated, “I tried to collaborate form and function. A sundial is a precise time machine (ideally anyway). I therefore conceived a clean and geometric form. Life or force or drama (whatever you like) I infused into these pure elements, (a rectangular blade and an elliptical ring), by throwing them unsupported into the air. For practical possibility of this, I am indebted to the engineers of Supercrete Limited. That is their achievement. Mine, I believe to be the separation of the blade from the ring, substituting thereby a forceful relationship in place of a physical one. Dramatic simplicity was my aim.”

The above quotes from the artists are transcribed from CF Polo Park archival documents.



*Eichholz works on his sculpture Bronze Lady (left), and Eichholz and Willer's Sundial (right).
Winnipeg Free Press, August 15 1959.*



*Diagram showing the approximate location of each piece in relation to the 2022 layout.
Note: the precise location of Bronze Lady is currently unknown, but has been documented as close to centre court.*

Cinema

Polo Park cinema opened in June 1962 on the St. James Street side of the building next to the west entrance.

The West portion of Willer's *Screens* was relocated inside of the cinema lobby, where it decorated the stairwell.



*The Polo Park cinema lobby (left). Cinema exterior (right).
Photos from Old Manitoba, The Way It Once Was!*



*Concessions (left), and auditorium (right) in the Polo Park cinema.
Photos from Old Manitoba, The Way It Once Was!*



*Closeup of the West segment of Screens, relocated to the cinema stairwell
Photo from University of Manitoba digital collections.*

The Original Pancake House



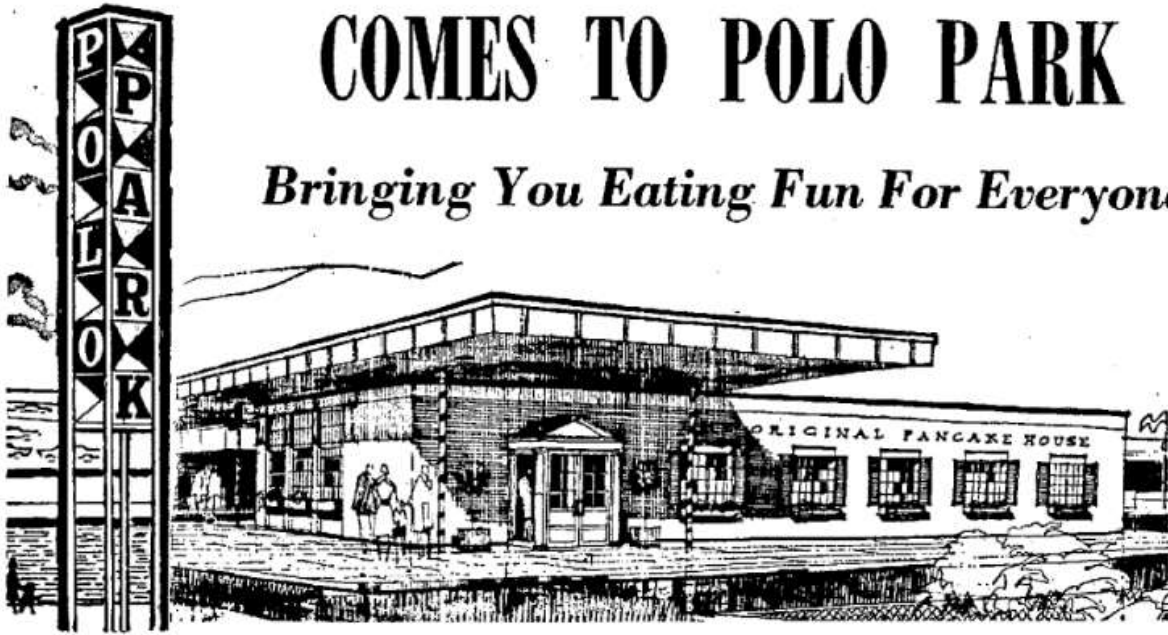
*The Original Pancake House, pictured here in the 1960s.
From the City of Winnipeg Archives*

On September 9, 1961, the Original Pancake House opened their Polo Park location on the southeast side of the mall. They would remain there until 2002, when they would move across Empress Street, attached to the new Clarion hotel.

The Original Pancake House

COMES TO POLO PARK

Bringing You Eating Fun For Everyone



Official Opening Tomorrow

Every 25th Bill will be paid for by National Cash Register all day tomorrow. First 500 Kiddies will receive FREE COKEs with meals

Opening announcement for the Original Pancake House in its Polo Park location.

Winnipeg Free Press, September 8 1961



Polo Park during the open air era, viewing the west side of the complex.

From a 1962 postcard, though photo likely taken in 1959.



*South wing towards Simpsons-Sears in 1959
From CF Polo Park archives.*



*In the early 1960s, Ness Avenue was extended to St. James Street.
This allowed for easier access to the mall and the surrounding Polo Park area.
Photo from Retro St. James.*

The Roof Goes On: 1963—1968

it's the talk of the town ...

the NEW! POLO PARK

HEATED and AIR CONDITIONED **ENCLOSED MALL** **SHOPPING CENTRE**



IMAGINE!
OUTSIDE — HIGH 20° ABOVE
With Light Snowflurries
INSIDE — CONSTANT 70° ABOVE
Weather Perfect

Photo at left shows the new fountain and pool at Polo Park taken during the recent Flower Show sponsored by the Metro-Winnipeg Florists' Association. Thousands of people viewed a spectacular display of fresh flowers and exotic blooms on the new heated mall at Polo Park Shopping Centre.

YES! IT'S POLO PARK ...

for Smart Easter Shoppers...

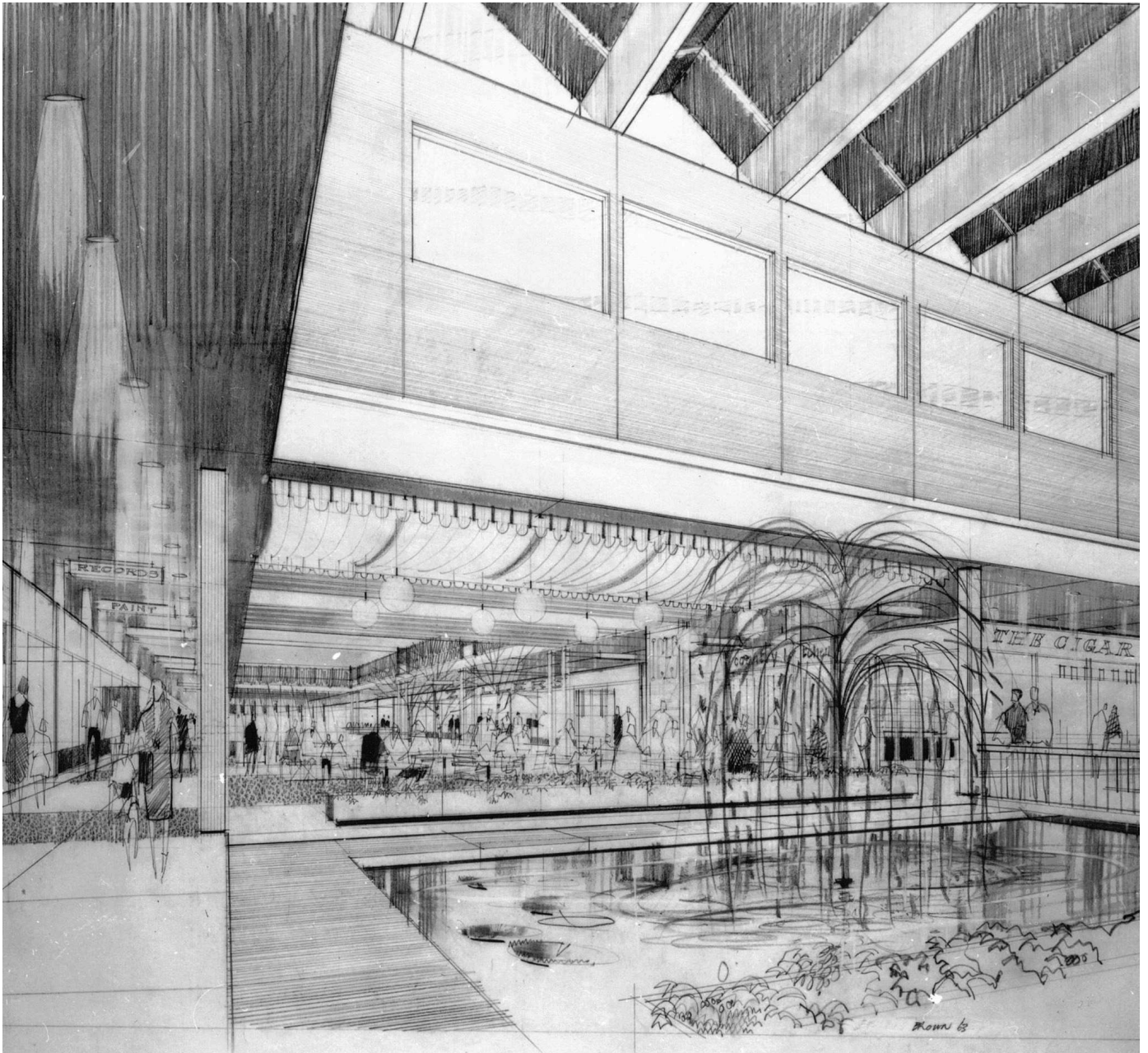
Everyone's talking about Easter Shopping in the warm, wonderful atmosphere of Polo Park's fully enclosed shopping mall. The flowers, plants, fountain and pool together with attractive decor will delight everyone who visits Polo Park. Join the thousands who shop regularly in heated comfort at Polo Park Shopping Centre.

FREE PARKING
FREE and EASY
PARKING
FOR
4,000 CARS

EASTER HOURS

March 23rd	— 9:30 am to 9:00 pm
March 24th	— 9:30 am to 5:30 pm
March 25th	— 9:30 am to 9:00 pm
March 26th	— 9:30 am to 9:00 pm
March 27th	— Good Friday
March 28th	— Closed All Day
March 29th	— 9:30 am to 5:30 pm

*Advertising the new advantages of a heated and air conditioned shopping centre
Winnipeg Tribune, March 19 1964.*



*1963 enclosed Polo Park concept illustration from GBR archives
via Winnipeg Architecture Foundation*

In the early-1960s, it was decided to enclose Polo Park Shopping Centre with a roof, along with modern amenities like heating and air conditioning.

This project cost \$500,000, which would be equivalent to more than \$4.9 million in 2024! Polo Park became one of the first malls to be enclosed in Canada.



Initial stages of the roof addition in the south wing. Basement offices staircase still enclosed.

December 14 1963.

Winnipeg Free Press, September 4 2019.

The roof installation began in 1963, so the shopping centre would be shielded from the elements for the holiday season.

During this renovation, some of the existing artwork was moved or scrapped. For instance, both contributions by Richard Williams, *Mock Wall* and *Birds in a Bluff*, were demolished.

George Swinton's *Acrobats* was moved from centre court to the western exterior outside Entrance #2. Duane Eichholz's *Bronze Lady* is thought to have been removed around this time as well, though its ultimate fate is unknown.

The mall installed a new fountain jet in the centre court pool with new floral decor surrounding it. Planters remained throughout the shopping centre. Many of the support posts in the mall were repainted or enclosed.

Around this time, the basement offices were constructed. The Offices 66 section was built below the south wing near centre court, with its entrance steps installed in front of Agnew Surpass. The Offices 100 section was built below the southeast corner near the Portage Avenue entrance, and was accessed by a set of stairs across the hall from Simpsons-Sears.



*Centre court in the mid-1960s after the mall's enclosure.
Photo from University of Manitoba digital collections.*



*South wing and basement offices staircase during the 1960s, following roof completion.
City of Winnipeg Archives Photograph Collection.*



*Patrons wait around the Sundial at the south entrance.
Photo from CF Polo Park archives*

Arrival of Eaton's: 1968—1978

Relocation of Dominion and Loblaws, and refurbishment

1968 marked a major change for Polo Park—the arrival of a new anchor store, Eaton's.

To accommodate this 212,000-square-foot department store, the mall underwent a large expansion on its north side. The Dominion and Loblaws stores closed and relocated to the east wing. In their place, the mall added new tenant spaces, an additional entrance, and a court area in front of the new Eaton's store.

Furthermore, the mall was given a makeover with brand new terrazzo-style tilework. This replaced the mall's plain concrete floors it had inherited from its open air days. Bird Construction carried out these renovations in conjunction with Trevi Tile, Randall Plumbing & Heating, among others.

A semi-permanent Customer Service Centre was also built in the middle of the east wing, beside the basement stairs to the bowling alley.



*Construction of the new Eaton's building at the north end of the mall.
Photos from Retro St. James*



*Construction crews dig the foundations of Eaton's court
From Retro St. James*



*The completed Eaton's store at the north end of Polo Park
Photo from Retro St. James*



*East side of Polo Park in 1967. Panorama showing the construction of the new east wing, containing the Dominion and Loblaws locations on the right-hand side of the photo.
From the City of Winnipeg Archives.*



*Completed Dominion and Loblaws stores in the east wing expansion.
1974 - Archives of Manitoba, CH 0267 Government photographs.*



East wing, facing the Empress Street entrance, during the holidays. From CF Polo Park archives.



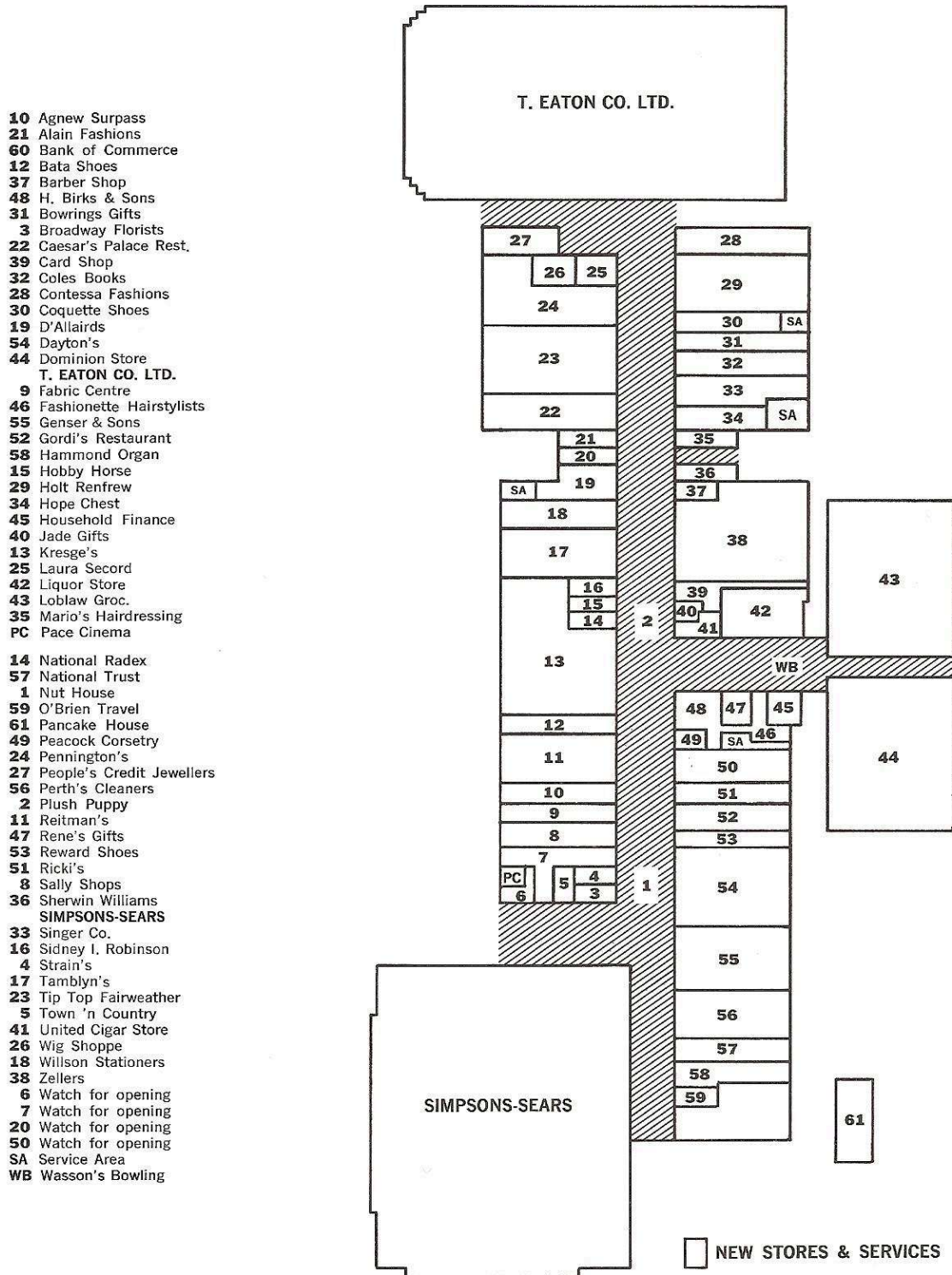
*Polo Park aerial photo from the late-1960s.
 From the Canadian Heritage Photography Foundation, photo by George Hunter*



*South wing towards Sears court
 From CF Polo Park archives*

The Wonderful, New World of Shopping...

at POLO PARK



The 1968 Polo Park directory, following the addition of Eaton's at the north.
From a May 1968 press kit, CF Polo Park archives.



Another angle of the then-new Eaton's department store at Polo Park.



*Eaton's court and the northwest entrance shortly after construction.
Photo from CF Polo Park archives.*



Eaton's Polo Park grand opening, May 2 1968.



*The revamped centre court following the 1968 refurbishment (left).
North wing looking south (right).*



Shoppers in Eaton's court. Eaton's 100th anniversary banners visible over store entrance, 1969.



*Looking north outside Agnew Surpass and Reitmans, in 1969.
From Retro St. James. Archives of Manitoba, CH 0267 Government photographs.*



*Simpsons-Sears and Entrance #2 in 1969.
Photo from Retro St. James. Archives of Manitoba, CH 0267 Government photographs.*

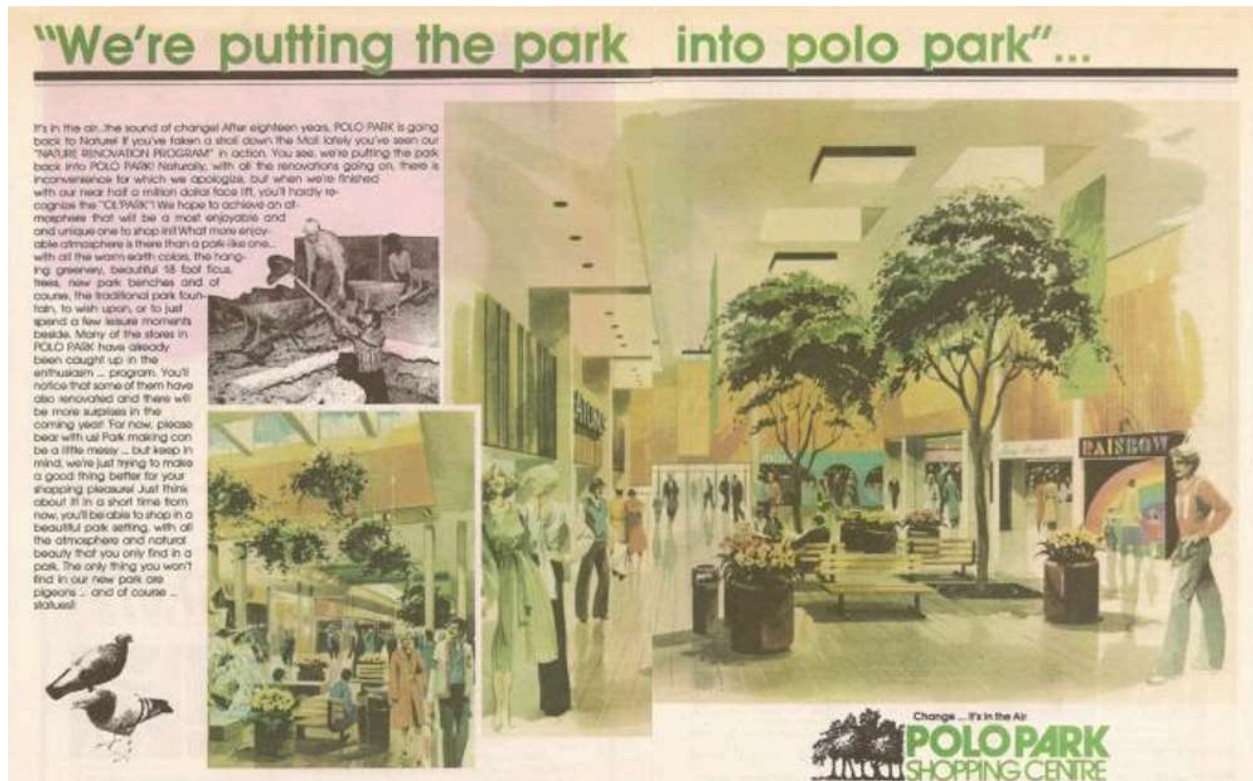


Scan of a Polo Park postcard circa 1968, looking northwest.



*North wing towards Eaton's court
Photos from CF Polo Park archives*

“Putting the ‘Park’ into Polo Park”: 1978—1986



Concept illustrations for the 1978 renovation.

Scan from CF Polo Park archives.

In 1978, the mall underwent a handful of smaller-scale changes, namely the introduction of more greenery into the shopping centre. This was nicknamed the “nature renovation program” and also included skylights, a new paint scheme, along with park style benches.



South wing near the 66 Offices staircase following the 1978 renovation

From CF Polo Park archives



The new centre court fountain piece during the remodel (left), and after (right)



*South wing towards centre court after the 1978 remodel
Photos from CF Polo Park archives.*

In Fall 1980, Crock & Block Restaurant & Tavern opened on the northwest corner of the property. In January 1982, Chi-Chi's restaurant opened beside it. By 1983, Crock & Block would be replaced by Finger's restaurant, and by 1994, Chi-Chi's reopened as Gringo's.



East wing of Polo Park. Safeway took over the former Dominion space in 1983.



*South entrance in 1985.
From Dave Johnson, Winnipeg Free Press, March 7 2022.*

“Share The Excitement” - The Upper Level Expansion: 1986—2006



From 1985 until 1986, Polo Park underwent its most ambitious expansion to date. This \$75-million project added a second floor to the mall and took eighteen months to complete. Polo Park Shopping Centre and the retailers within remained open during the process.

The renovation included:

- More than 100 new retailers
- A food court on the second level.
- A massive two-level parking garage on the east side.
- Repaved and rezoned ground-level parking.
- Three large glass domes over each of the major court areas.
- Skylights over the main concourse.
- Seven escalators, a 'panoramic' glass elevator, and a spiral staircase.
- A brand new facade and decorative mall entrances.



*Architectural scale model displaying the proposed interior redesign for Polo Park.
Photo from University of Manitoba digital collections.*







*Polo Park during construction for the 1985/1986 remodel.
Photos from CF Polo Park archives.*

Transit terminal

At the same time, Cadillac Fairview worked in conjunction with Winnipeg Transit and the Manitoba Department of Urban Affairs on a new bus terminal installed in the south parking lot. This change centralized many of the bus routes that had stops in and around the Polo Park property. It aimed to reduce traffic congestion around the mall and to streamline the bus service.



*Opening of the Polo Park Winnipeg Transit terminal, July 31 1986.
Photos from CF Polo Park archives.*



*The Polo Park transit terminal in the late-1980s.
Photo from Retro St. James.*

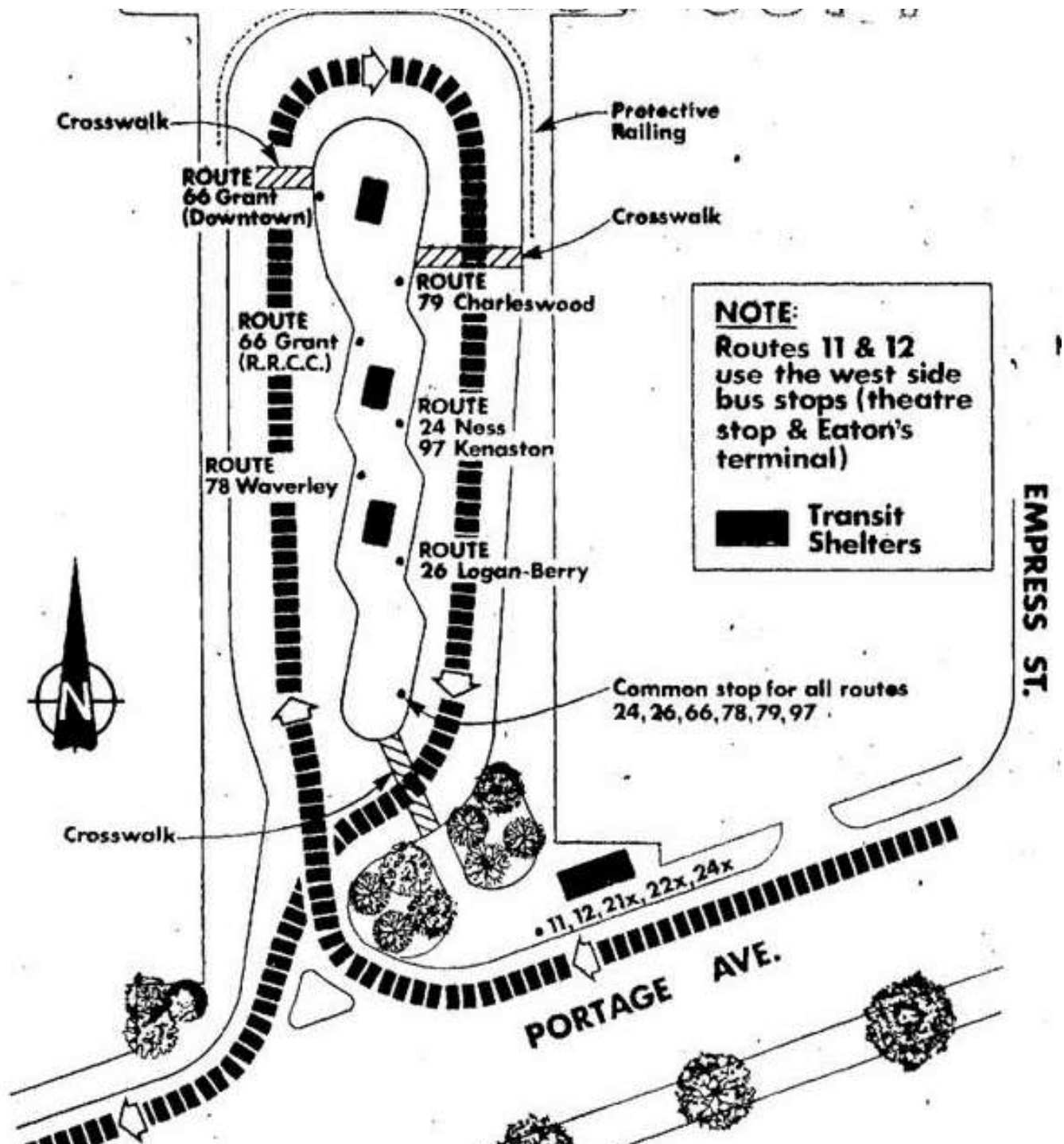


Diagram of the new transit terminal.
Winnipeg Free Press, August 12 1986.

Mall layout

The second floor consists of a large mezzanine open to the ground level below, as was common for shopping mall designs of the 1980s. This second level was built above the roofs of the original tenant spaces, with short staircases and ramps that lowered to match the second levels of Sears and Eaton's.

A pair of escalators was installed at the north end outside of Eaton's, another set was installed in centre court on either side of the glass elevator, and a third set stood just outside of the Sears interior entrance. Finally, a single escalator and a spiral staircase attached to the walkway halfway between Eaton's and centre court.

The northeast mall entrance was closed to accommodate new tenant spaces. Two additional mall entrances were installed, leading from the upper deck of the east parking garage. Entrance #5 would lead into the food court, and Entrance #6 would enter near Eaton's. Additionally, both Brettons and Zellers had their own dedicated entrances from the parking garage.

The 66 Offices received a new set of stairs shifted closer to the middle of the hallway. There were also gazebo-style tenant spaces built along the main concourse.

The east wing was almost completely rebuilt. Safeway relocated across the hall to the former Loblaw's space, and the existing Safeway unit was demolished to make room for new tenants in the expanded wing. The Customer Service Centre was removed and replaced with an Information booth south of centre court. The staircase to the bowling alley was also reconfigured during this time.

The Eaton's building received a rear expansion which increased floorspace and also connected the back of the building to the new parking deck.



*The redesigned centre court
From CF Polo Park archives*



*New 66 Offices staircase and sign (left), retailer Bandits in the gazebo unit, north side of centre court (top right)
One of the glass domes (bottom right).
Photos from University of Manitoba digital collections.*



*Spiral staircase and north wing ascending escalator, 1986.
Photos from University of Manitoba digital collections.*

Numerous planters and fountains were placed throughout the mall. There was a circular fountain in front of Sears, a smaller one was situated in the middle of the spiral staircase, and the largest fountain was in centre court between the escalators and the glass elevator.

Willer and Eichholz's *Sundial* sculpture was removed. This made way for a garden area and two large glass towers at the south entrance. Situated inside the largest tower was the restaurant Pete & Marty's, part of the mall's selection of vendors in the new food court on the second level. The smaller glass tower, east of the entrance, contained the staircase and after-hours doors to the restaurant.

Among the food court tenants were New York Fries, Orange Julius, and Taco Time—all of which still occupy the same spaces in the food gallery today!

P2 Winnipeg Free Press, Tuesday, August 12, 1986

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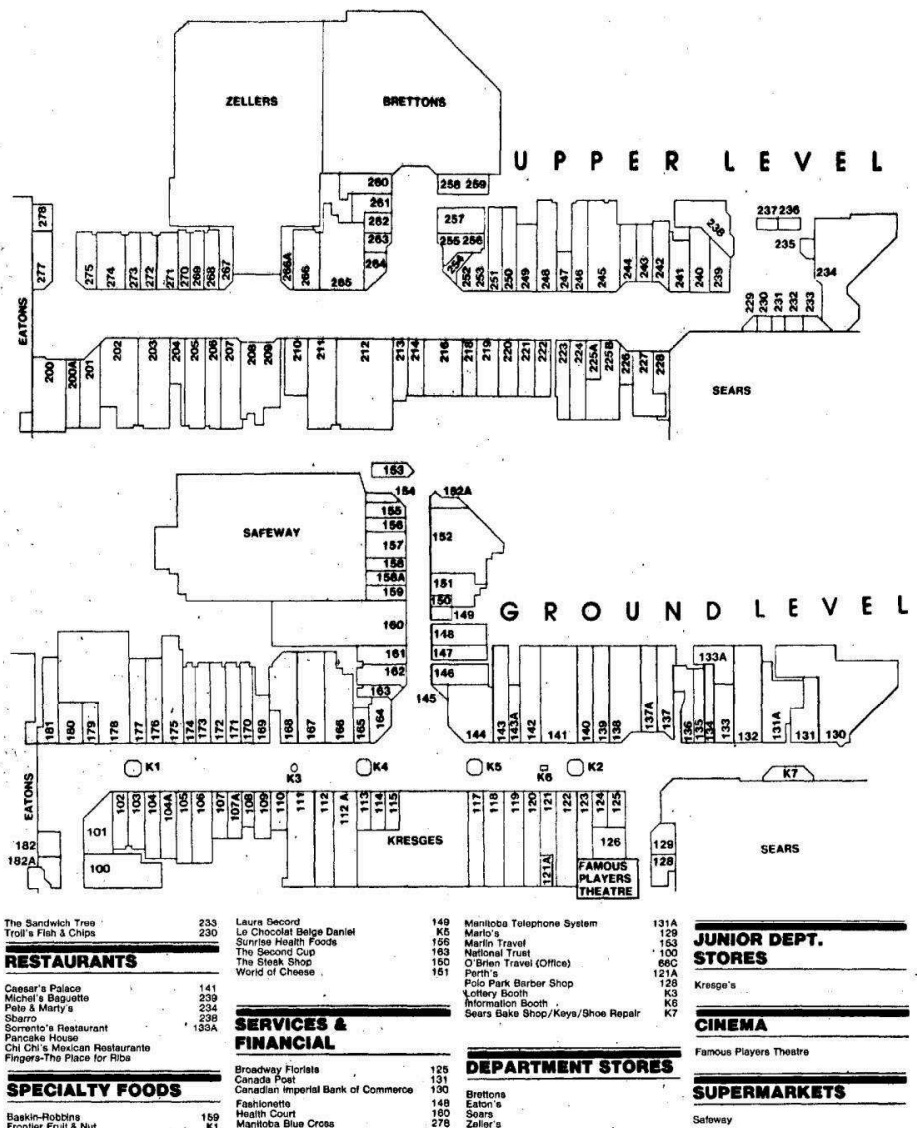
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The new directory of stores as printed in the Winnipeg Free Press, August 12 1986.



*The new pylon sign along Portage Ave advertising the reopening, 1986.
Photo from CF Polo Park archives.*



*The grand re-opening ceremony in the brand-new centre court, August 13 1986.
Winnipeg Free Press, September 4 2019.*



Ribbon cutting during the grand re-opening, August 13 1986.



*Shoppers gather around the Sears court fountain during the grand re-opening festivities.
Photo from CF Polo Park archives.*



*The Sears Shoe Repair, Key cutting & Bake Shop near Entrance #1
From CF Polo Park archives.*



*Shoppers descend the spiral staircase at Zellers court, 1986.
From CF Polo Park archives.*



*Patrons seated in the new food gallery.
From CF Polo Park archives.*



*Patrons at the new Brettons store.
From CF Polo Park archives*



*Angles on centre court, late-1980s.
From Retro St. James.*



*South entrance after the 1986 renovation.
Photo from CF Polo Park archives.*



*St. James Street side of the building, 1986.
Photo from University of Manitoba digital collections.*

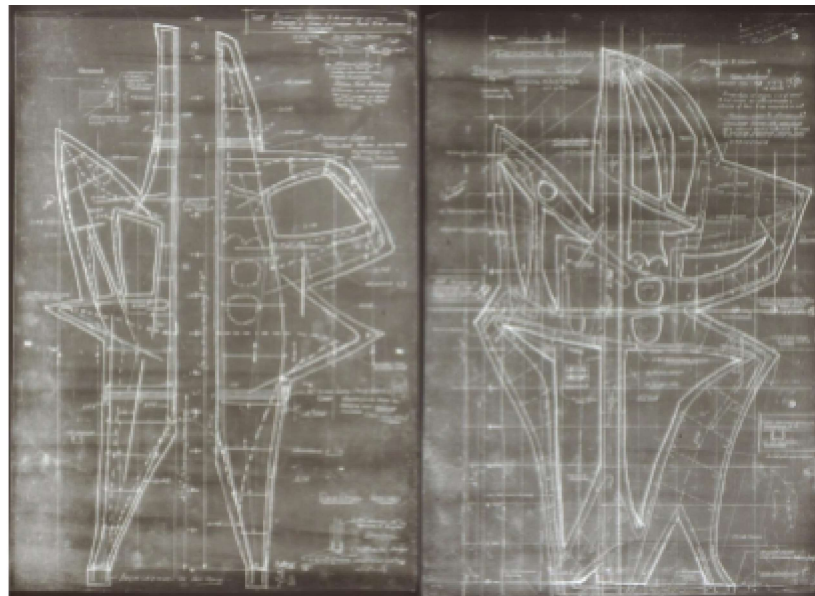


Aerial view of Polo Park Shopping Centre from 1986.

Photo from CF Polo Park archives.

Artwork

During construction, the *Sundial* was demolished. Meanwhile, *Acrobats* was relocated at the request of George Swinton's family. Today, *Acrobats* is the only surviving art piece commissioned for Polo Park when it first opened. You can see it in its current home on Webb Place, behind Portage Place Shopping Centre.



Acrobats in 2022, relocated to Webb Place in downtown Winnipeg (left)

Original diagrams for Acrobats (right).

Left photo from CF Polo Park Guest Services, diagrams from Retro St. James.

The renovation also included a new piece of artwork. Created by William Lishman, the *Polo Pony* pays tribute to the horse racing venue that once stood on the property. *Polo Pony* was displayed in the middle of the food court, before a later relocation to the spiral staircase between centre court and Eaton's.



Lishman's Polo Pony in its original location in the food court (left), and after it was moved to the spiral staircase (right).

Photos from CF Polo Park archives.

Further alterations

After the departure of Pete & Marty's, the restaurant space in the food court was then divided into Moxies and A&W. Moxies took up the majority of the Pete & Marty's floorspace while the A&W was situated in the glass tower above Entrance #1.

In 1996, Brettons went out of business. Their Polo Park store closed in 1994, and the unit that housed them was amalgamated into the Zellers unit. The Zellers main entrance was moved over to the former Brettons entrance, and more retailer space opened where Zellers once led into the mall.



East wing in 1994 after Brettons closed



Centre court in the 1990s. Zellers entrance visible after its relocation.



*South entrance with A&W in the upper level (left), and upper level of centre court (right).
Photos from CF Polo Park archives.*

During the 2000s, a number of planters and tree pits throughout the centre were removed to increase walkability and floor space for events. Similarly, the Sears court fountain and the spiral staircase fountain were both taken out. The centre court fountain was also filled.

In 2003, the ascending escalator by the spiral staircase was removed to increase kiosk tenant space. The centre court escalators were replaced in spring 2005.



*Centre court after the fountain was filled (left).
The gardens outside of Entrance #1 (right).
Photos from CF Polo Park archives.*



*Atop the south escalators facing northeast in 2005 (left)
Spiral staircase area after the escalator, fountain, and planters were removed (right)
Photos from CF Polo Park archives*



*The food court in the 2000s.
Photos from CF Polo Park archives.*



The Original Pancake House in 2001, before its move across the street (top).

And after its move to the Clarion hotel (bottom).

Top photo from Retro St. James.

Bottom photo from Clarion Hotel and Suites Winnipeg.



*Polo Park Guest Services Centre in 2006
Photo from CF Polo Park archives.*

Cinema closure & Silver City



Closer view of the cinema doors and Entrance #2, winter 1986.

Photo from University of Manitoba digital collections.

Polo Park Cinema closed in 1995. For many years the space was left vacant, with the main level lobby closed off to the public and the basement auditorium used for storage.

In the late-2000s, the main floor of the unit was redeveloped into its current tenants: an insurance brokerage (then Ryan Gateway, now Hub International) and Stitch-It Clothing Alterations & Dry Cleaning. The basement auditorium would later be partially repurposed for the new Aritzia location in 2022, and otherwise used for storage.

Four years after Polo Park Cinema's closure, another movie theatre arrived at the mall. The theatre was constructed at the northwest edge of the property, in the former location of Gringo's and Finger's restaurants.

In December 1999, the 14-screen, 90,000-square-foot Silver City multiplex opened to the public. With an arcade, food vendors, and room for more than 3,000 patrons in stadium-style seating, Silver City became one of the dominant movie theatres in Winnipeg. In 2016, it would be rebranded as Scotiabank Theatre.



*Silver City multiplex under construction in 1999 (left). Silver City, pictured in 2010 (right).
Photos by Modern Acrylic Systems (modernacrylic.com).*

Eaton's closure

With the bankruptcy of Eaton's in 1999, the chain began closing a number of their stores. The Polo Park location would close in 2002, after an attempt at rebranding as "eatons" (in lowercase with no apostrophe) following an acquisition by Sears. The building also housed Sears during their refurbishment. Sears relocated back to their original space before the end of 2003. The Eaton's building was then leased to the Hudson's Bay Company.

During the 2003 makeover of the Sears building, George Swinton's glass mosaic was torn down. The Sears automotive service centre in the west lot closed the same year, and was demolished soon after.

Hudson's Bay (then simply "The Bay") would host its grand opening on October 30 2003.



*Sears, temporarily occupying the Eaton's building.
Winnipeg Free Press, July 5 2003.*



*Concept illustration for The Bay in the former Eaton's building.
Winnipeg Free Press, July 5 2003.*



*Sears building in 2003, after its renovation.
Photo by John Dobbin from Observations, Reservations, Conversations.*

Earls, Pier 1 Imports, Joey's, and EQ3

In 2001, Earls restaurant opened on the southeast corner of the property.

In 2004, two new stores were erected on the pad site on the southwest corner of the property: Pier 1 Imports and EQ3. A year later, the Joey's restaurant (now simply 'Joey') was built next to them.

Pier 1 Imports would close in late 2019, redeveloped into a TD Bank by spring 2023. EQ3 would move into the mall in autumn 2021, leaving the building available for temporary tenants such as Spirit Halloween in 2022.



*Earls restaurant in 2009.
From Google Maps, Google Street View.*



*The Pier 1 Imports, EQ3, and Joey's pad site in 2009.
From Google Maps, Google Street View.*

“The Evolution Has Begun” - The New Face of Polo Park: 2006—2014



South Entrance under redevelopment in early 2007.

Photo from CF Polo Park archives.

Between 2006 and 2008, Polo Park underwent another major renovation. This included an expansion to the south end of the building, which reorganized the food court, the south escalators, as well as the retailers in the south wing.



South entrance (Entrance #1) following the renovation.

Photo from CF Polo Park archives.



The redesigned interior in 2007 during the later phases of construction.

Photo from CF Polo Park archives.

Mall layout

This \$30 million renovation provided a new space for Sport Chek on the main level. The south escalators were moved from beside Sears to where Entrance #1's glass tower once stood.

The A&W housed in the tower relocated to where the south escalators were. This required the floor and a portion of the skylights to be filled in. Moxies relocated to a larger space above the new Sport Chek store, increasing the seating area in the food court and allowing for a number of new food vendors.

The Offices 100 space below the southeast end of the mall was converted into the new basement shop floor for Sport Chek.

In addition to the structural overhaul, the mall was given a new colour scheme which eschewed the '80s-style decor in favour of a sleeker, more modern design. The existing floor tiles were completely ripped up and replaced. The majority of the remaining greenery throughout the mall was also removed to improve walkability and wayfinding.

The spiral staircase was torn down. Its accompanying walkway was widened to accommodate new soft seating and increase walking space.

William Lishman's *Polo Pony* sculpture was relocated once again, this time finding a home just south of centre court near the 66 Offices basement staircase, where it stands today.



*The Polo Pony following its relocation to its present home.
Photo from CF Polo Park archives.*

Safeway move

In 2008, Safeway moved out of Polo Park, relocating to a new building in the Madison Square shopping centre on Ness Avenue. The vacated space provided another major opportunity for redevelopment. This renovation altered a number of tenant spaces in the east wing on the main level.

Starting in 2009, the hallway was expanded, removing five existing tenant spaces in front of the Safeway unit. These retailers and services—Ryan Gateway Insurance, Nutrition House, Regis Hair Salon, Independent Jewellers, and Marlin Travel—all relocated as a result. The Safeway unit itself was divided into two separate units: the largest became Forever 21, and the smallest was occupied by BCBG Max Azria.



*Shoppers queue for the grand opening of Forever 21 in the newly renovated east wing.
Photo from CF Polo Park archives.*

50th Anniversary



*Preparations underway for the 50th Anniversary celebration in centre court
Photo from CF Polo Park archives.*



*Polo Park staff unveil the 50th anniversary plaque.
From Winnipeg Free Press.*

2009 marked Polo Park's 50th anniversary. The mall hosted a celebration for the occasion.

The celebrations congratulated the tenants that had been in the mall since it opened in August 1959. These tenants were:

- Broadway Florists
- Fashionette Hair Stylists
- Perth's
- Polo Park Bowling Centre
- Sears
- Tip Top Tailors
- Zellers

The anniversary events also included a sculpture garden, historical displays, a fashion display, and a performance by children's entertainer Al Simmons.

Sixteen plaques now encircle the base of the *Polo Pony* sculpture, each documenting a segment of Polo Park history and commemorating the long-term tenants.



*The Polo Pony after the installation of the 50th Anniversary plaques.
Photo from CF Polo Park archives.*



*Garden display in centre court for the mall's 50th anniversary.
Photo from CF Polo Park archives.*

Former Sport Chek / Eaton's Downstairs

With Sport Chek relocated to the south, the 24,000-square-foot unit they once occupied (previously Eaton's Downstairs and S.I.R. prior to that) was redeveloped into a space for the McNally Robinson bookstore in 2008. Included in the new store was the Prairie Ink cafe, located on the west side of the mall.



Sport Chek exterior in 2006 before the renovation.



McNally Robinson exterior and Prairie Ink cafe (bottom left).

Interior entrance in 2008 (bottom right).

Photos from CF Polo Park archives.

This McNally Robinson location only lasted for two years before they vacated the unit in 2010. However, the expansion remained, acting as temporary leasing for seasonal retailer Calendar Club. The space was taken over by Urban Planet in 2011.



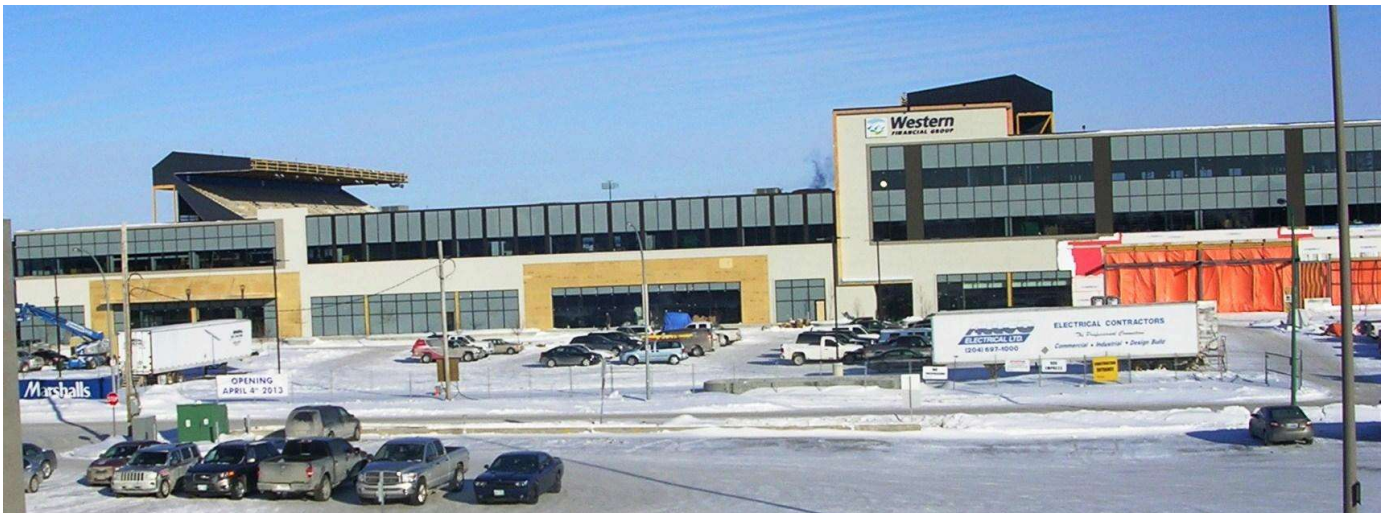
Calendar Club inside the former McNally Robinson space.

Photo from CF Polo Park archives.



*Urban Planet exterior (left). Interior entrance (right). 2011.
Photos from CF Polo Park archives.*

Polo North



*Polo North under construction, 2013.
Photo from CF Polo Park archives.*

Since its closure in 2004 and demolition in 2006, the former site of the Winnipeg Arena remained vacant. Similarly in 2006, CTV left their neighbouring studio building (previously branded as CJAY-TV and CKY-DT) just north of The Bay.

Between 2011 and 2013, both of these sites were redeveloped by Cadillac Fairview into an outdoor shopping complex called Polo North.

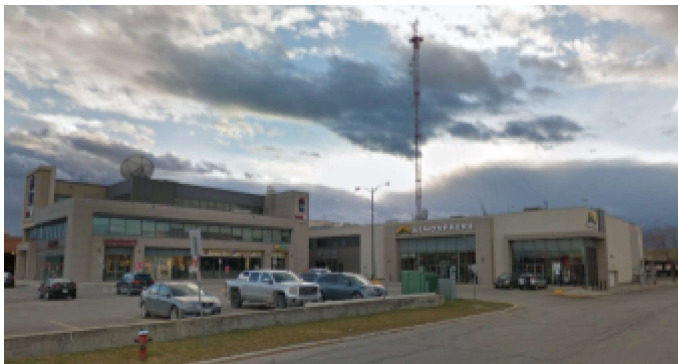
The former Winnipeg Arena site features Marshalls, Mark's, and Western Financial.

The former CTV property housed Corus Radio and their stations 680 CJOB, Power 97, and Peggy 99.1. It also contains Cora's Breakfast restaurant, and Polo Park Dental Centre.

Like the theatre adjacent to it, Polo North is considered part of the Polo Park property.



*Broadcast building as CJAY-TV (right), and as CKY-DT (left).
Photos from Retro St. James.*



*Polo North as viewed from Empress Street (top).
Corus building site (bottom left), Winnipeg Arena site (bottom right).
From Google Maps, Google Street View.*

CF Polo Park rebrand, anchor redevelopments: 2014—2024

The mall faced some major challenges through the 2010s and early 2020s.

Zellers closure & new upper level east wing



*Hoarding in front of the former Zellers with concept art depicting the planned development.
Photo from CF Polo Park archives.*



*Architectural render of the redevelopment connecting the north wing to the east wing.
Photo from CF Polo Park archives.*

In the early-2010s, Zellers began closing a number of its retail stores, which included the Polo Park location. The large unit that Zellers once occupied became vacant, and Polo Park embarked on another major project to repurpose the area.

The new expansion opened in October 2014, and included space for more than twenty tenants, new washroom facilities, and new skylights.

The expansion utilized the existing area to create a U-shaped hallway that led between where Zellers and Bretttons previously exited into the mall. A large awning was erected over the entrance closer to Hudson's Bay, where Eddie Bauer previously was.

The former Zellers exterior entrance was covered up, with Anthropologie taking its place in the corner. The other parking lot entrance into the former Bretttons space was reconfigured into Entrance #7.

The new tenants included Urban Outfitters, Tommy Gun's Original Barbershop, Bestseller, Bench, Fossil, Teavana, and Disney among others.

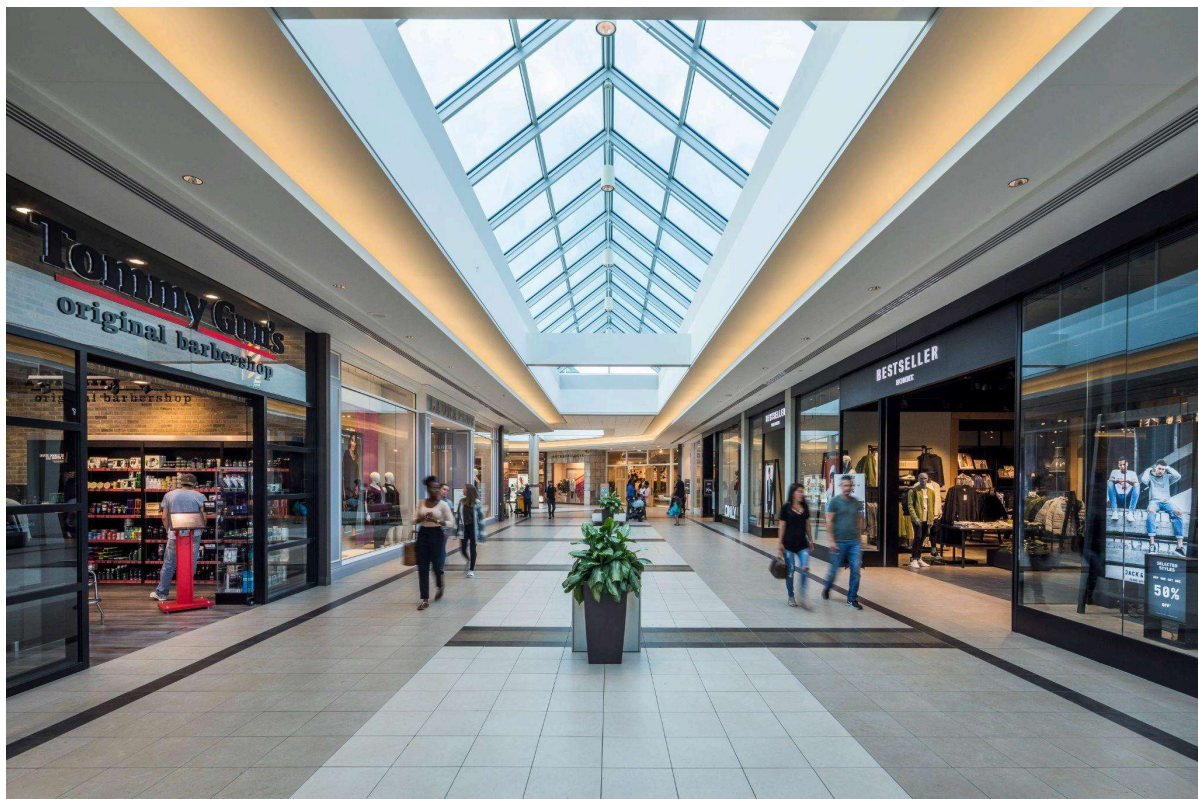


The second floor east wing, in the space formerly occupied by Zellers and Bretttons.

Photo by Exco Electric Ventures (excoelectric.ca)



*Property manager Deborah Green cuts the ribbon with the retailers, opening the new wing.
Photo from CF Polo Park archives.*



*Second floor east wing in 2016.
Photo from CF Polo Park archives.*



Entrance #7 following the redevelopment.

Photo from CF Polo Park archives.

Rebrand and The Plaza @ Polo Park

In September 2015, Cadillac Fairview rebranded its malls to include “CF” in their name. Polo Park Shopping Centre became CF Polo Park. This was done for brand consistency across all Cadillac Fairview malls.

Also around this time, Cadillac Fairview worked with Shindico Realty to repurpose the former Target building north of the mall. The Target had been built on the old Winnipeg Stadium grounds. Unlike Polo North, this property would be developed separately as “The Plaza @ Polo Park” or alternatively “Plaza at Polo.”

Currently, the Plaza at Polo is home to 24-7 Intouch, HomeSense, P.F. Chang’s, Urban Behaviour, and Winners.



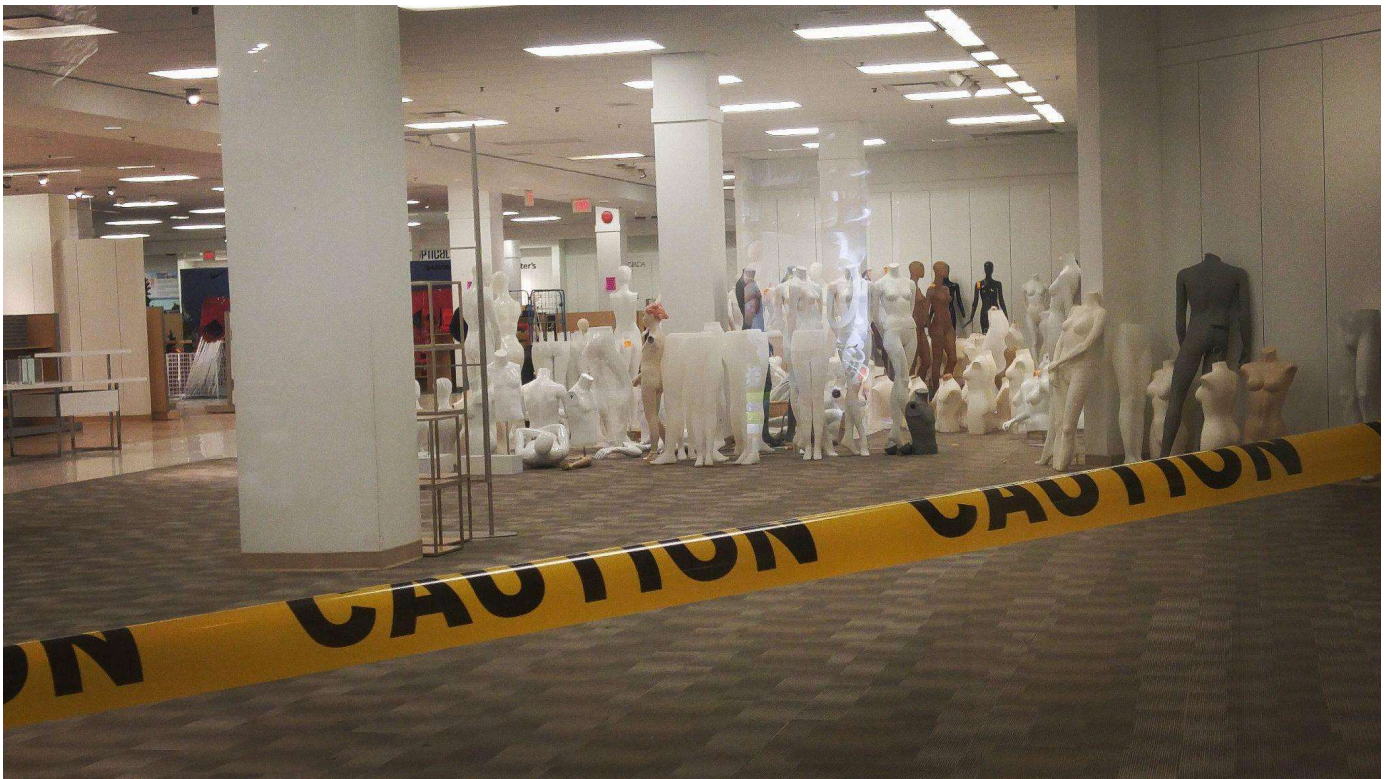
Target opened in October 2014. It closed in 2015 after Target Canada ceased operations.

From CTV News Winnipeg.



*Plaza at Polo in 2021 (bottom)
From Google Maps, Google Street View.*

Sears closure and redevelopment



*Sears during its final days, November 16 2017.
Photo from CF Polo Park Guest Services.*

Sears Canada went out of business in January 2018. The CF Polo Park store liquidated their stock and fixtures before closing the preceding December. This presented another huge opportunity for redevelopment.

Construction began in 2020. The Sears space was divided into several new units, the largest of which was the new EQ3 location on the main level. This new EQ3 store would open on October 29 2021.



*The EQ3 store after the Sears building redevelopment in 2022.
Photo from CF Polo Park Guest Services.*

In March 2022, the CF Polo Park management office moved from the 66 Offices in the basement to the second level of the redeveloped Sears building.



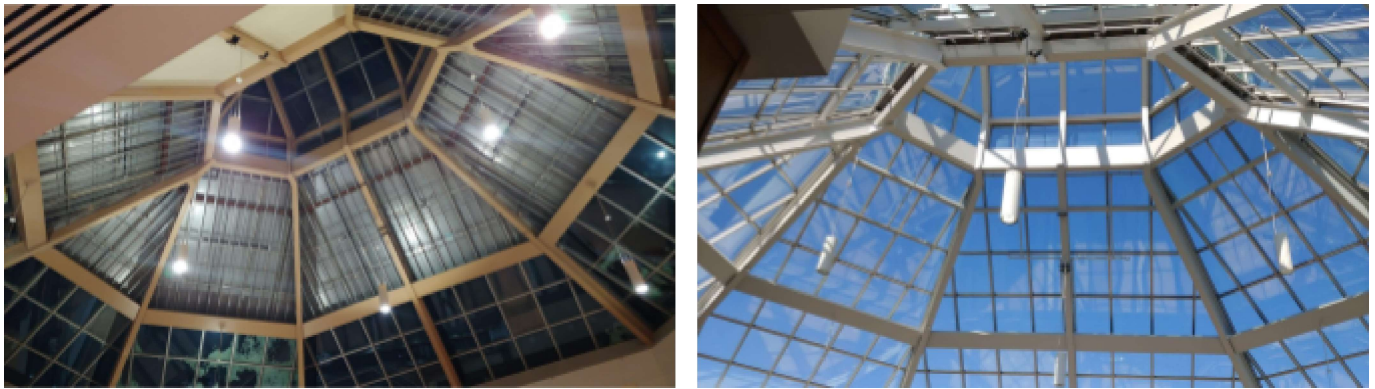
*The new management office entrance, adjacent to the food gallery.
Photo from CF Polo Park Guest Services.*

In November 2023, Zara also opened a location in the main level of the former Sears building, situated in Apple Court (formerly Sears court).

Skylight project

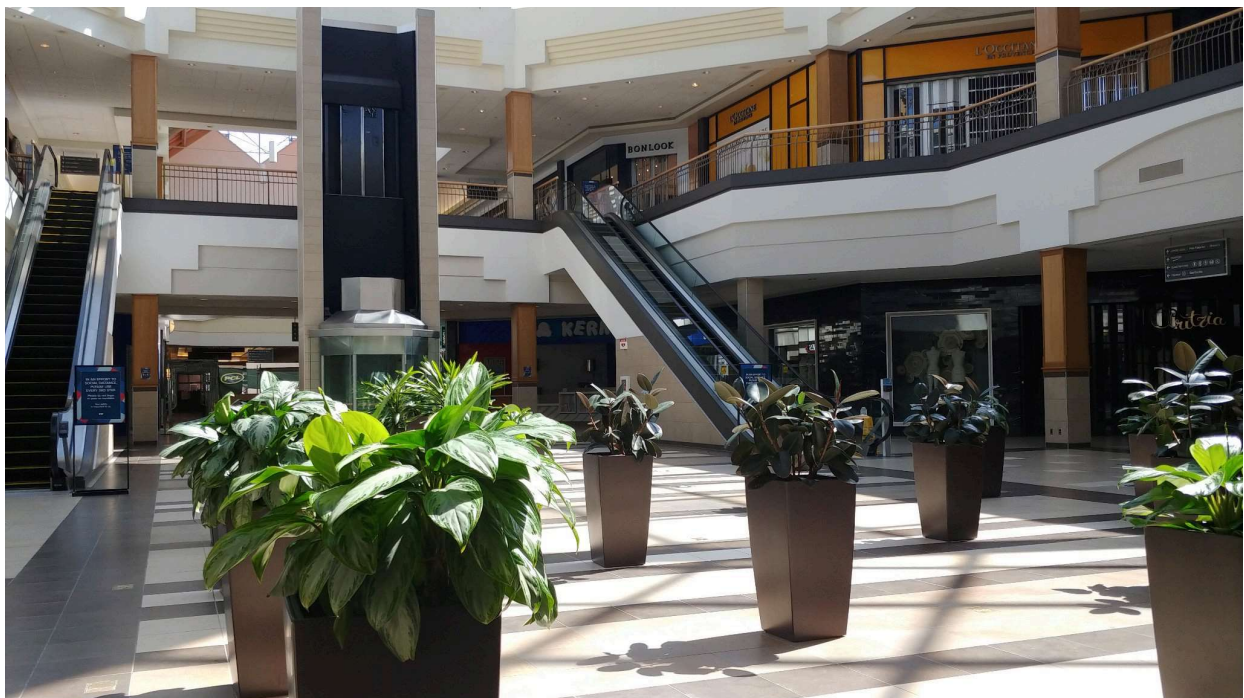
At the turn of the decade, CF Polo Park began work on the skylights throughout the mall. This included replacing existing panes and sealant, as well as adding new windows where there previously were none. The new skylights allow more natural light into the mall.

This process removed the drywall panels and fluorescent lights that illuminated them. The decorative flag poles atop the glass domes from the 1986 expansion were also dismantled at this time.

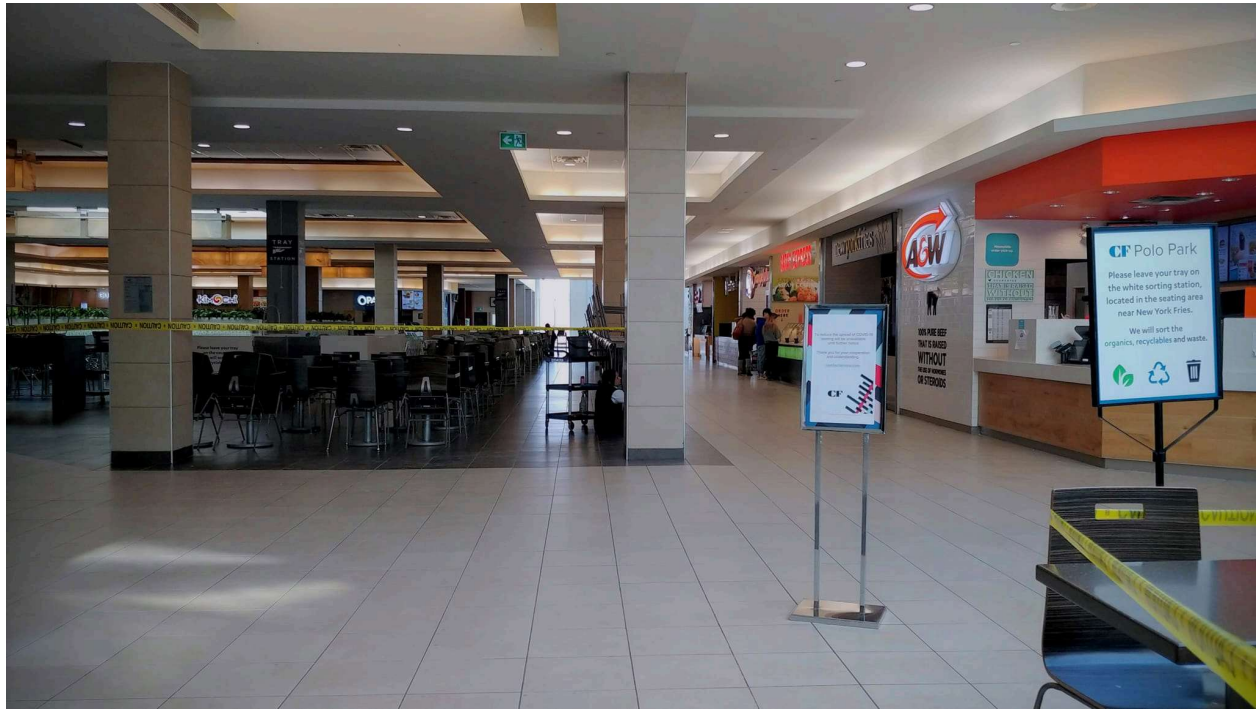


*Centre court skylights during (left) and after construction (right).
Photos from CF Polo Park Guest Services.*

COVID-19



Centre court during COVID-19. Plants spaced to encourage social distancing.



*Food gallery closed during COVID-19.
Photos from CF Polo Park Guest Services.*

In the early 2020s, the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 pandemic led CF Polo Park to implement measures to decrease its spread. The food gallery seating was closed and briefly removed in accordance with local guidelines. During this period, the food gallery vendors operated as take-out and delivery only.

Throughout the mall, staff installed directional signage and decals encouraging social distancing. The mall also worked with retailers to establish a curbside pickup program so customers could safely purchase items.

When local restrictions tightened, CF Polo Park entered a state of semi-lockdown, where only essential retailers remained open. Over the course of the next two years, the provincial government continued to make adjustments to the restrictions, eventually loosening them. The majority of the public health orders ended by early 2022.

Reitmans returns

In April 2023, CF Polo Park welcomed back one of our original tenants: Reitmans. They opened their new store on the upper level, close to Hudson's Bay, in a combined space formerly occupied by Browns Shoes and Godiva Chocolates.

The Future of CF Polo Park



Proposed development showing the west side & Entrance #2

On January 12 2023, Cadillac Fairview announced the next phase of developing the CF Polo Park property.

A news release stated, “CF and Shindico have collaborated on a renewed Master Plan vision for CF Polo Park and the surrounding lands bounded by Portage Avenue, St. James Street, St. Matthews Avenue, and Empress Street. The Polo Park lands encompass 84 acres, including the vacant former Canad Inns Stadium, and the Master Plan vision will create a complete community including a mix of residential, amenity and retail uses, a range of new parks, open spaces, a combination of private and public streets, as well as pedestrian and cycling connections centred around CF Polo Park, the largest shopping centre in Manitoba.”

This ambitious development will completely transform the area around the mall. The most noticeable features are the replacement of many ground-level parking lots with walkable paths, green space, and new mixed-use buildings.

Construction is set to begin at the Plaza at Polo, and will continue throughout the rest of the property in the coming years.



Aerial view of the proposed development.

Then and Now

Below are a series of images comparing the CF Polo Park and its surrounding property from different time periods to how it appears today!



Aerial of Polo Park, looking northeast.

Top: Racetrack, photo from Vintage Winnipeg.

Bottom: Polo Park Shopping Centre in 2015, Google Maps.

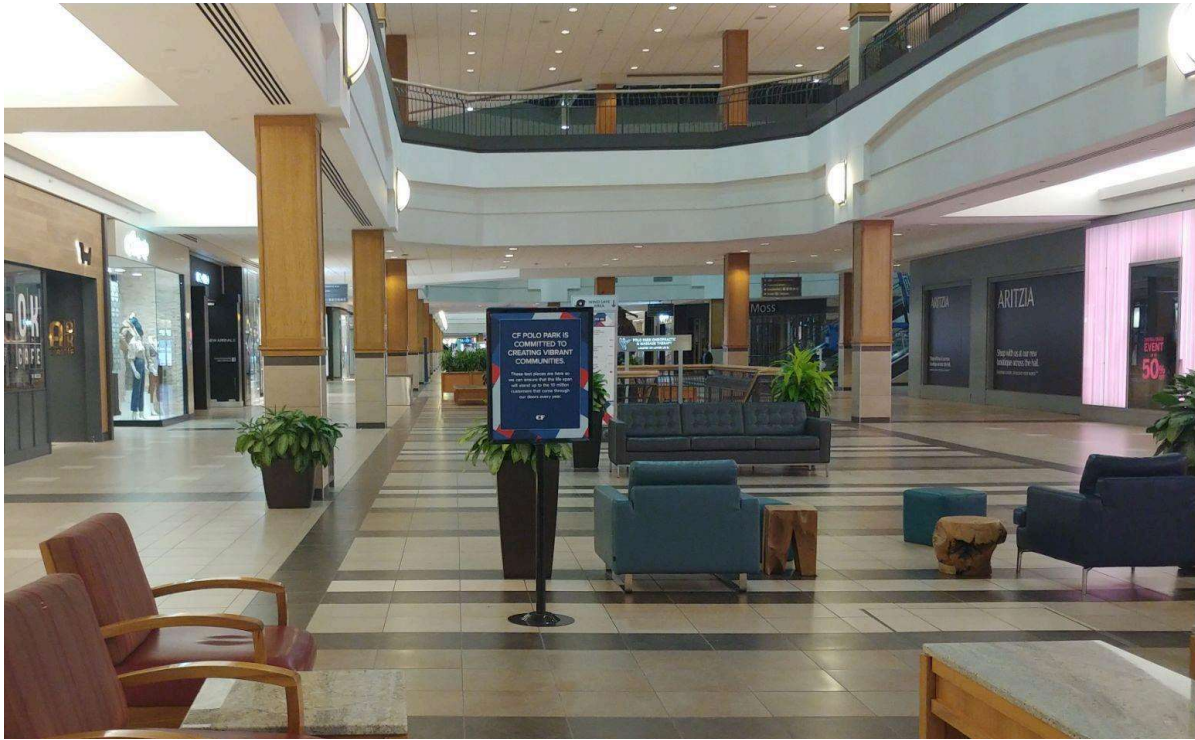
Three views towards centre court from the south wing, including 66 Offices stairs:



*Early 1960s after the roof was added.
From CF Polo Park archives.*



*Early 1970s after the new flooring was installed.
From University of Manitoba digital collections*



*Same area seen in 2022. Staircase was relocated in 1986.
From CF Polo Park archives,*



*View of centre court looking northeast circa 1969 (left), and 2023 (right)
Left photo from Archives of Manitoba via Retro St. James
Right photo from CF Polo Park Guest Services.*

Three views towards centre court from the north wing:



Circa 1959



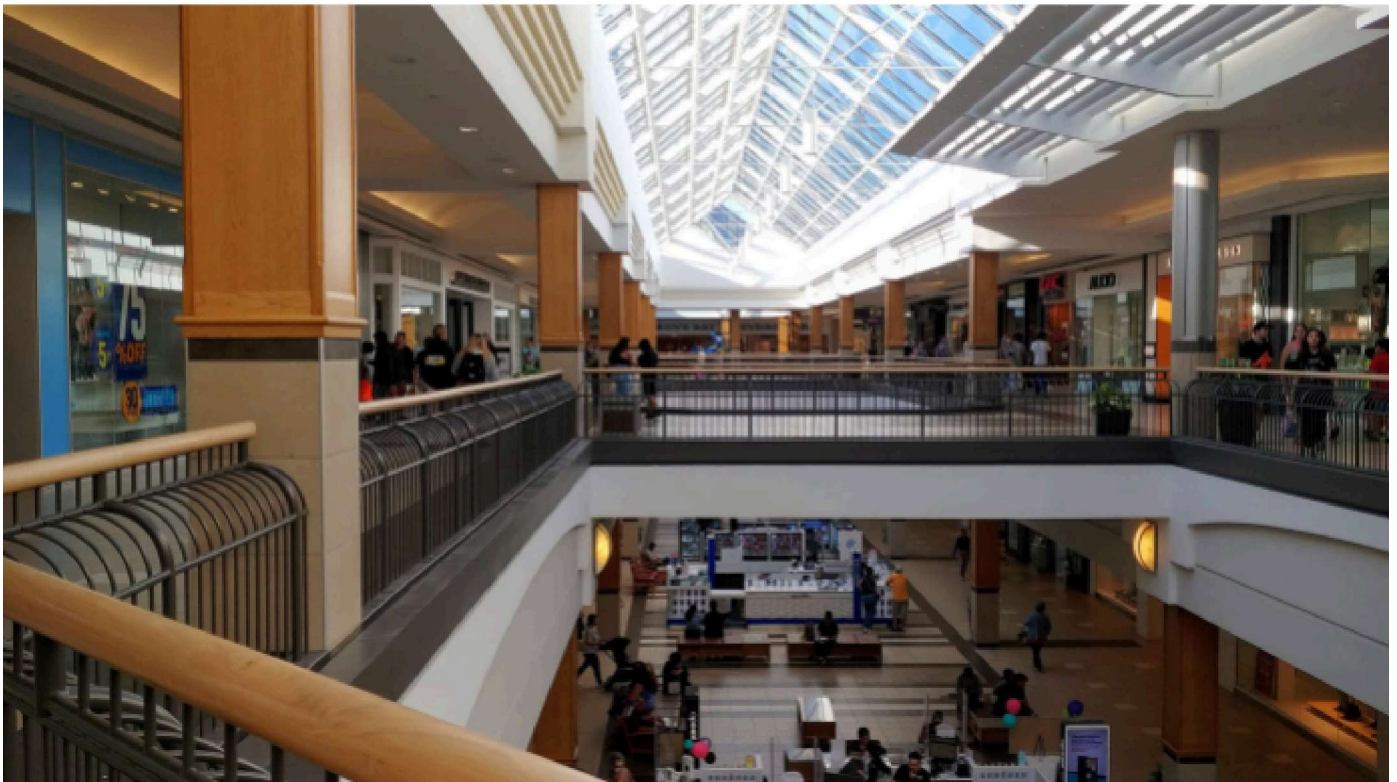
Circa 1970



*The same area in 2022.
From CF Polo Park archives*



*View of centre court from second level, late-1980s (left), and late-2010s (right).
Left image from University of Manitoba digital collections.
Right image from CF Polo Park Guest Services.*



*Upper level facing north, before and after the spiral staircase & escalator removal.
1990s (top), and 2022 (bottom).*

Top image from CF Polo Park archives.

Bottom image from CF Polo Park Guest Services.

The Holidays

The holidays are always a special time at shopping malls, and CF Polo Park is no different. Since its open air era, the mall has celebrated the holidays with seasonal displays, Santa pictures, and more!

Canada's Tallest Santa Claus (1959—1963)



The Santa Claus display during the open air era.

Winnipeg Tribune, 1959.

Image from Retro St. James.

In the mall's open air days, Polo Park displayed a sixteen-foot Santa Claus. It was set up in the north wing of the mall. This gigantic Santa prop actually spoke to guests, likely via a speaker system with a hidden operator. During this period, the oversized Santa Claus was also accompanied by a display of large animated toy figures.



Open air era Polo Park holiday advertisements.

Winnipeg Free Press, November 17 1960 (left), Winnipeg Tribune, December 2 1959 (right)

Centre court tree (early 1960s)



*Centre court during the holidays in 1963. Roof construction was still ongoing.
From Vintage Winnipeg.*

After the mall became enclosed, the holiday display was set up in centre court. It consisted of a large Christmas tree surrounded by gifts. It appears that during this time, the fountain was drained to accommodate the display.

Fairview **Winnipeg's First** **SIMPSON'S SEARS**
Fully Enclosed — Fully Heated
Shopping Centre

Polo Park

Announces The Completion Of Stage No. 1
In Enclosing The Mall!

WIN
\$1,000.00
SANTA'S
SURPRISE!
EASY TO ENTER — EASY TO WIN

COME IN... Leave The Weather Outside!
Our Christmas Present To
Winnipeg Shoppers!

*Advertisement for holiday shopping at Polo Park featuring an illustration of the tree display.
Winnipeg Free Press, December 11 1963.*

During the 1960s, Polo Park would sometimes incorporate carnival rides into the holiday celebrations, bringing in small attractions to entertain families and children.

Santa's igloo (late 1960s to 1970s)

In the late '60s, Polo Park featured an igloo Santa set with animated characters and animals. This was displayed in centre court near the fountain.



*Santa's igloo display and animated figures.
From rrob167 on YouTube.*

Santa's Magic Castle and Santa express (late 1970s)



*Santa's Magic Castle (left), and the miniature Santa express train (right).
As featured in a 1979 television advertisement. From RetroWinnipeg.*

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, Polo Park's holiday display consisted of a large Santa castle set as well as a miniature train set to entertain guests.

This also included the addition of a children's play area in the form of the Merry Mushroom Slide located just outside of Sears, as well as a 'Lady Bug' carnival ride.



*The Merry Mushroom Slide, as featured in a 1979 television advertisement.
From RetroWinnipeg.*



*Closeup of the train display from the 1970s.
Photo from CF Polo Park archives.*

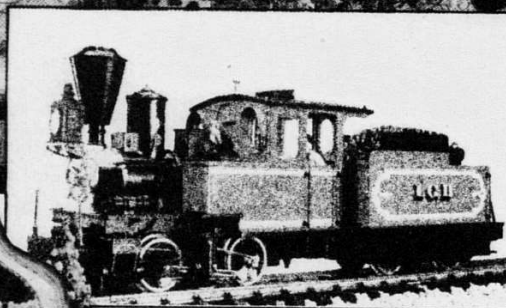
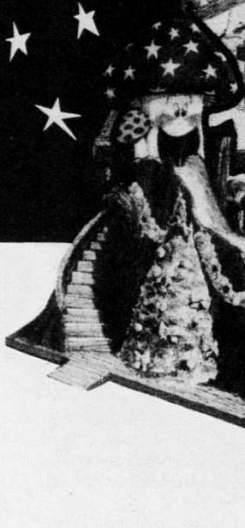


*'Lady Bug' carnival ride just north of centre court during the holidays, late 1970s.
Photo from CF Polo Park archives.*

VISIT SANTA'S *Magic Castle*

Santa has a brand new home at Polo Park which they say is filled with magic. So come on down and visit Santa in his new castle and make a Christmas wish. If you've been good Santa's got a special treat for you!

**Santa
arrives
Saturday,
November
18th
10 a.m.**



The Mall is all decked out with lots of Christmas things to see and do, like ... the Santa express ... a super large train set that will thrill young and old alike. Or let the kids enjoy happy landings as they zoom down the Merry Mushroom slide ... or take a spin on the Ladybug ride.

So join us at Polo Park where the spirit of Christmas is in the air.

The Spirit of Christmas
is in the air ...



POLO PARK
SHOPPING CENTRE

Shop every night
including Tuesday
and Wednesday
until 9:30 p.m.
Saturday 6 p.m.

New Santa castle (1986—1990s)



*Angles of centre court with the 1986 holiday display.
Photos from University of Manitoba digital collections.*

Following the 1986 renovation, Polo Park had several carousel and toy-themed holiday decorations in addition to a brand new Santa's castle. Wreaths and other seasonal decor were placed throughout the shopping centre.



*Polo Park property manager Don Knight in front of the centre court holiday display.
Winnipeg Free Press, December 18 1986.*



*Holiday decor. Looking towards centre court on the main floor from Entrance #4, late-1980s.
Photo from CF Polo Park archives.*

New Santa castle and Polo Bear (1990s to 2000)



*The new Santa castle display and Polo Bear in 1994
Photo from CF Polo Park archives*



Marc Gallant / Winnipeg Free Press / Originally published Nov. 19 1996 / Image shared with permission.



Marc Gallant / Winnipeg Free Press / Originally published Nov. 19 1996 / Image shared with permission.

*Polo Bear and his display during the 1996 holiday season
Winnipeg Free Press, photographer Marc Gallant
Originally published November 19 1996*

Polo Bear was a ten-foot-tall animated display piece in Polo Park's holiday setup during the 1990s. Polo put on hourly shows, singing songs and reading stories. He was controlled by a performer in a hidden operator box equipped with a two-way mirror.

The display utilized a unique Santa castle with white towers, golden spires, and multicoloured stripes and streamers. Large elf or "pixie" figures accompanied Polo Bear, perched on the castle set and suspended from the ceiling nearby.

Polo Park offered giveaways of miniature Polo Bear plush toys during this period.



One More Reason To Spend Christmas With Us

STILL
1
THE ONE

Sundays are Special...

Because every Sunday you could win a cuddly Polo Bear of your own when you visit Santa.* Because we have every gift you ever imagined and hundreds you never thought of yet. Because we have Polo Park Gift Certificates and cash check and gift wrapping to make your shopping even easier. Because the parking's always convenient and free. Because there's more for you. More reason to spend this Christmas at Polo Park.

Polo Park Gift Certificates Now Available at the Info Booth.
Santa is here all mall hours too!

Win \$200 In Polo Park Gift Certificates.

Polo Park

* 50 Polo Bears awarded every Sunday.

OPEN Monday to Saturday 10 A.M. to 9:30 P.M. Sunday 11am to 5 P.M.

Advertisement for Polo Bear plush toy giveaway
Winnipeg Free Press, December 1 1993.

Polo Bear was likely a custom piece built for Polo Park's holiday displays. He was used interchangeably as both a bear dressed in a Santa suit and as an Easter Bunny, equipped with ears and a tail. He was placed alternately in Sears court, centre court, and the north hallway depending on the occasion. He was so big, his head alone required up to four people to carry!

Polo Bear also appears as an illustration on the Santa picture cards from this era.

In November 1998, Polo Bear was accompanied by a smaller bear affectionately named Polo Junior.



Polo Bear on the 1990s Santa picture card (left). Polo Junior, hard at work during the off-season (right)

Left scan from CF Polo Park Guest Services.

Right photo from CF Polo Park archives.

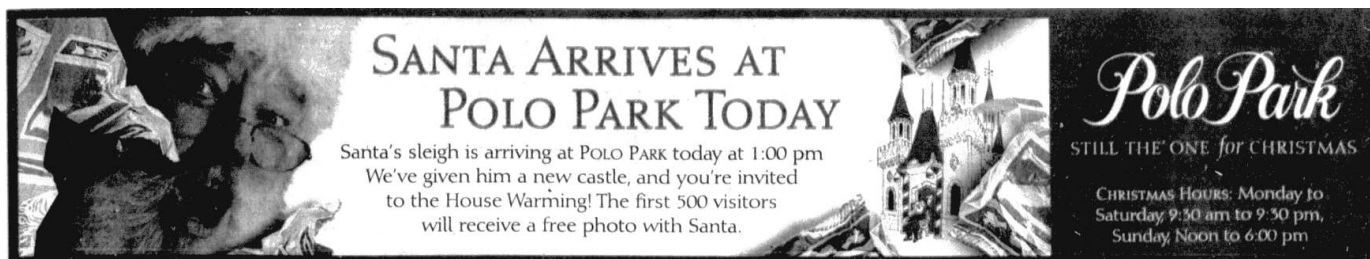
A black and white advertisement for Santa's arrival at Polo Park. The main headline reads "SANTA arrives today!" in large, bold letters. Below it, smaller text says "He arrives today at 6:30 pm, but come early to welcome Polo Bear and his new friend at 6 pm." To the right, the "Polo Park" logo is displayed with the tagline "STILL THE ONE for Christmas". On the far right, a vertical text block reads "Entertainment and Magicians from 5 pm to 8 pm. for the first 300 children to visit Santa today." The background of the ad features a close-up of a person's face, possibly Santa, looking through a camera viewfinder.

Advertisement for Santa's arrival, Polo Bear, and Polo Junior.

Winnipeg Free Press, November 12 1998

The Polo Bear display was retired after his Easter Bunny performance of 2000 and placed into storage. Later, Polo Bear along with Polo Junior were given to the Manitoba Children's Museum. Unfortunately, after contacting the museum, it appears the bear props are no longer in their possession.

Santa's castle (2000—2016)



*Advertisement for the new Santa castle display.
Winnipeg Free Press, November 12 2000.*



*Santa's castle in the early 2000s.
Photos from John Henry Creations Inc.*

The Santa castle used throughout the 2000s and early-2010s was supplied by John Henry Creations Inc. It originally comprised four outer walls that guided the queue around a central building with puppet vignettes depicting Santa's elves. It had five multicoloured spires and two red roofs. It also utilized the fence from the previous Polo Bear display. This large castle was erected in Sears court.



*Elf vignettes in the early 2000s Santa setup.
Photos from John Henry Creations Inc.*



Santa's castle in centre court, 2006.

Photo from CF Polo Park archives.

Over time, the display was reduced to only the front section of the castle. This section received a new paint job and would continue to be used until the mid-2010s. After the removal of the centre court fountain, the Santa castle was constructed in front of the glass elevator.

In 2007, the Santa castle was placed on the other side of centre court. The expanded space allowed for a much larger Santa setup including a park for families, complete with a new animal-themed fence, tree props, tables, and a television playing seasonal movies.



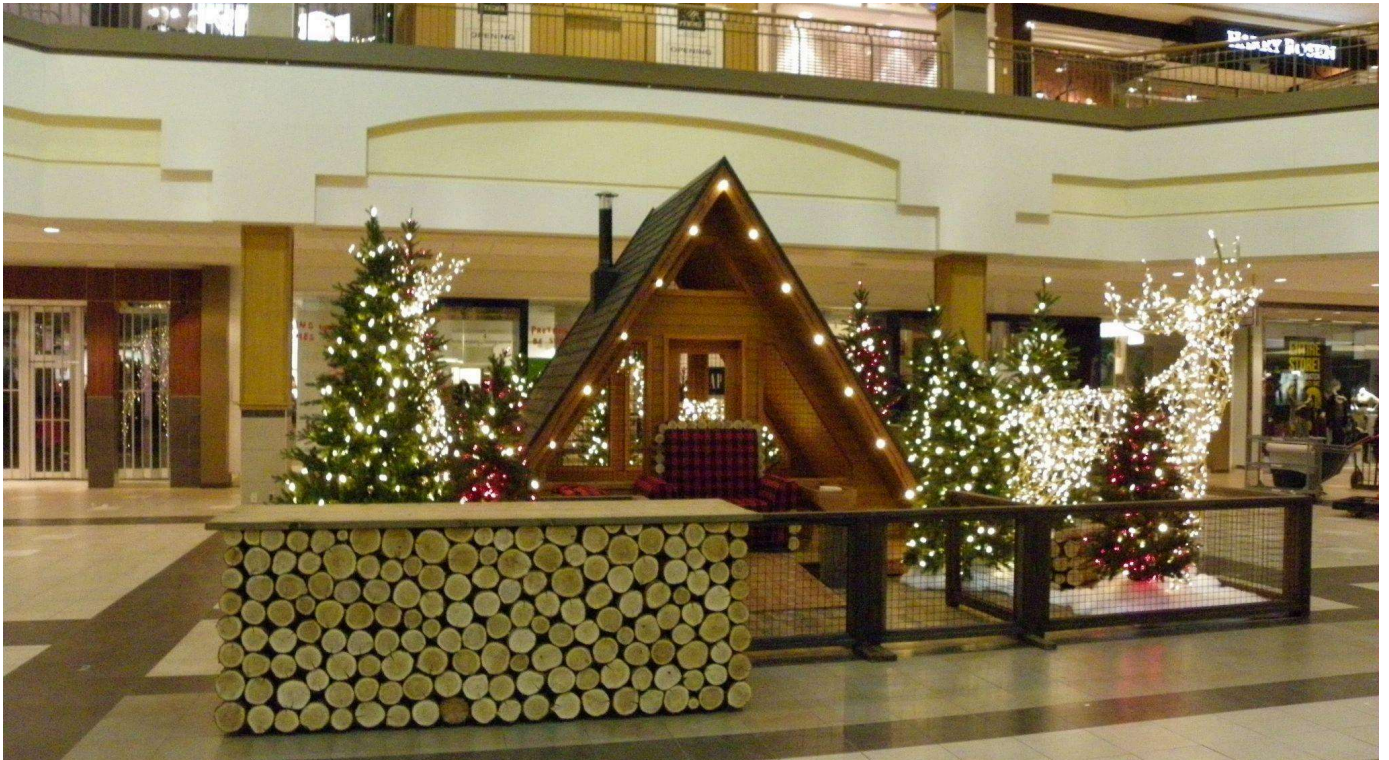
*Santa's castle and Santa's park in 2007.
Photos from CF Polo Park archives.*

In 2010, the Santa castle display once again received a new fence, paint, lights, and carpeting. This would remain the holiday setup until it was retired in 2016. Through this period, the holiday display was assembled and maintained by Creating A Scene Inc.



*Santa's castle following its makeover.
Photo from Creating A Scene Inc.*

Santa's cabin (2016—present)



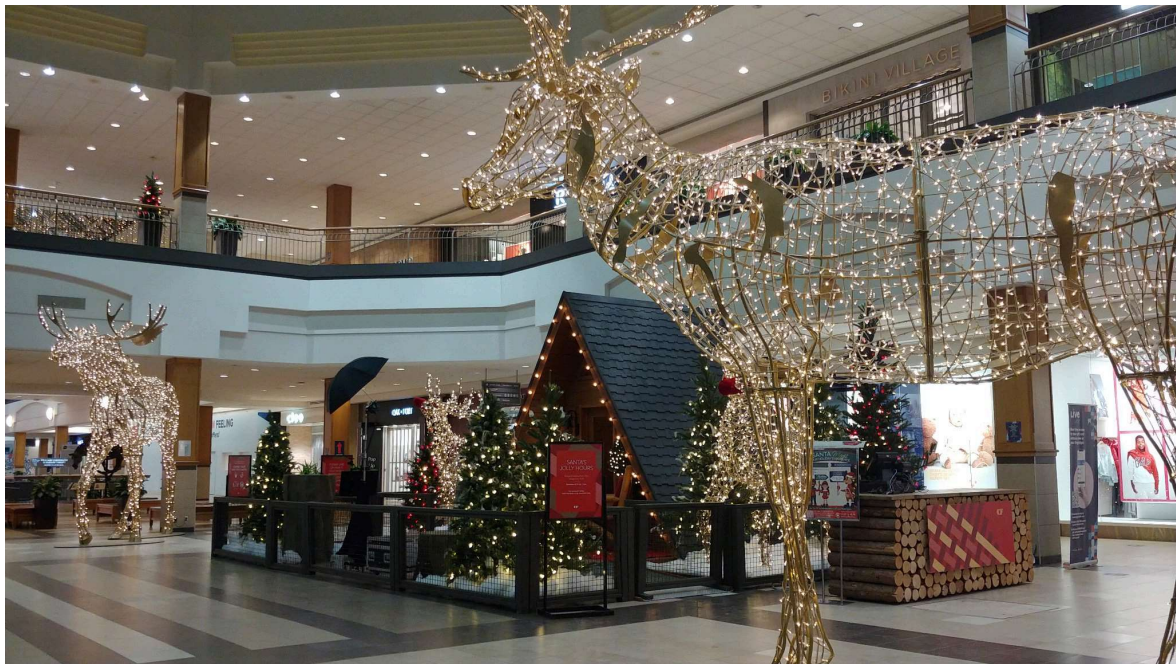
*Santa's cabin in November 2016.
Photo from CF Polo Park archives.*

In 2016, Cadillac Fairview replaced the Santa castle with a triangular cabin display. Accompanying this setup were a series of large reindeer props covered in lights. This is the current display and has been used every year since 2016 with the exception of 2020, when Santa pictures were not available due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to the cabin display, large wire ornaments decorated in lights were also placed around the mall, including one that patrons could walk through. Hanging illuminated pinecone props also decorated the south entrance. These pieces continue to be our current set of holiday decorations.



*Hanging reindeer decorations in centre court.
Photo from CF Polo Park Guest Services.*



*Santa's cabin display during the 2021 holiday season.
The smaller reindeer were dressed in face masks to encourage COVID-19 safety.
Photos from CF Polo Park Guest Services.*

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the following resources for the above photographs and information:

- Retro St. James Facebook group
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- Old Manitoba, The Way It Once Was! Facebook group
- If you grew up in Winnipeg Manitoba you remember... Facebook group
- RetroWinnipeg YouTube channel
- Heritage Winnipeg
- Canadian Heritage Photography Foundation
- University of Manitoba digital collections
- City of Winnipeg archives
- Winnipeg Architecture Foundation
- Winnipeg Free Press and Winnipeg Tribune archives through Winnipeg Public Library
- CTV News Winnipeg
- John Dobbin, from Observations, Reservations, Conversations
- Winnipeg Architecture Foundation
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- CF Polo Park Guest Services and Marketing archives

Thank you for your time and interest in the history of CF Polo Park!



Compiled by Alex Hamade, CF Polo Park Guest Services.

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