Modernism + the Recent Past
The National Trust for Historic Preservation (www.PreservationNation.org) is a non-profit membership organization bringing people together to protect, enhance and enjoy the places that matter to them. By saving the places where great moments from history—and the important moments of everyday life—took place, the National Trust for Historic Preservation helps revitalize neighborhoods and communities, spark economic development and promote environmental sustainability. With headquarters in Washington, DC, eight regional and field offices, 29 historic sites, and partner organizations in 50 states, territories, and the District of Columbia, the National Trust for Historic Preservation provides leadership, education, advocacy and resources to a national network of people, organizations and local communities committed to saving places, connecting us to our history and collectively shaping the future of America’s stories.
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Introduction

CHRISTINE MADRID FRENCH

Over the past several years, preservationists have finally begun to devote serious attention to the immense challenge of documenting, evaluating, and conserving cultural resources from the twentieth century. This attention occurs not a moment too soon: it is clear that these are the issues that preservation professionals will be grappling with for the remainder of this century and well into the next millennia.

H. WARD JANDL, 1995

In 1995 the National Trust for Historic Preservation published its first Forum Journal dedicated solely to the issue of “Preserving the Recent Past.” In his introduction, Jandl, deputy chief of the Preservation Assistance Division at the National Park Service, made the prescient observation inscribed above. Indeed, as he predicted, preservationists continue to debate the merits of saving buildings and landscapes less than 50 years old, and argue over the historic significance of modernist designs, some dating from as early as the late 1920s.

Yet Jandl also noted that “the serious study of the recent past is a relatively new phenomenon; there have been few scholarly books on the subject, and articles in professional journals are few and far between.” That, fortunately, is no longer the case. A proliferation of articles, in popular news outlets such as USA Today and professional journals from organizations such as the Society of Architectural Historians, have provided both the scholarly information that is needed to prove significance and the public exposure required for successful historic preservation efforts.

In the 15 years since that first Forum Journal focusing on preserving modernism and the recent past, the National Trust has followed up with two more journals dedicated to the same topic, in 2000 and 2005. In that tradition, the National Trust is honored to produce the fourth journal exploring this concern. It expands upon the work featured previously while focusing on new ideas that will influence preservation policy today and in the upcoming years. All told, the four journals include the writings of nearly 40 prominent scholars, activists, architects, and practitioners, in essays discussing strategy, evaluation, and preservation of a diverse mix of American resources whose historical associations range from the Cold War to hip-hop culture to the internet age.

THE CHALLENGES TODAY

In theory, saving modern and recent past resources should be no different than preserving architecture from an older era, but persistent challenges exist. As architect Theo Prudon asserts in his essay, the critical markers and baseline information that preservationists have used for decades are losing relevance for our time. He notes that “shifting environmental, technical, and economic expectations,” are rapidly compressing the cycle of design, construction, and demolition. The end result is
a marked loss of our modern architectural heritage and a chronological imbalance in the cultural landscape that we present to succeeding generations.

The first hurdle to accurately documenting and preserving architecture of the recent past is a proliferation of temporal guidelines (at federal, state, and local levels) that hinder the designation and protection of buildings and landscapes less than a certain age. These time-sensitive policies have produced a distortion in our national list of significant structures and also obstruct grassroots efforts.

Elaine Stiles investigates the origins of the “50-year rule” and determines that, despite the assertions of critics, a revision of the age criteria for determining historic significance will not result in the wholesale inclusion of sites of mediocre importance, but will more effectively acknowledge the wonderfully diverse architectural and social legacy of the U.S. Her essay ends with a challenge to preservationists: We must “confront controversy” and question the validity of these restrictions. Doing so will realign current guidelines to ensure the equitability of eligibility standards throughout the country.

A persistent public reluctance to acknowledge buildings, landscapes, and structures from the previous generation as historic is an equally difficult issue that must be addressed. Selectively excising parts of our built environment obscures historic context and damages our long-term memories of a site. In some cases, subjective aesthetic arguments, rather than objective analyses, guide preliminary evaluations of a resource’s significance. Those buildings and landscapes that do not appear consistent with a community’s currently favored image are marginalized, their historic context ignored, and their architects’ motives questioned.

Two types of landscapes are frequently targeted under these arguments: the spaces that resulted from urban renewal, and suburbia. Alan Hess addresses our cultural ambivalence when discussing these sites, often regarded as the “most unsettling specters of 1960s architecture.” He argues for the continued relevance of mid-century suburbs and dismisses the deceptive generalizations of these landscapes as “unplanned automobile wastelands.” Coming to terms with our own past and conveying that knowledge to others is one of the valuable results of preservation; the
thoughtful evaluation of resources helps to dissolve preconceived assumptions and leads toward a more integrated knowledge of history.

Similarly, David Gest reveals the underlying historic significance of a 1969 urban renewal housing complex. In traditional preservation terms, the plain brick, unornamented 18-story building in the Bronx would not immediately stand out. Yet, Gest proved—and the New York State Historic Preservation Office agreed—that the site “contributed to the broad patterns” of American history as the birthplace of hip-hop music and dancing in the 1970s. The apartment complex was recently determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Although it is one of only a small number of sites recognized for its association with African American history and urban culture, there are concerns about its future. Securing the protection of unusual, large-scale historic resources is not exclusive to recent past preservation efforts, but will require the development of specialized solutions.

Paul Goldberger details one such exploration in re-use at the original Getty Museum, a “Roman” villa built at the height of 1970s exuberance above the beaches of Malibu, Calif. Like many institutions, the Getty Trust eventually outgrew its first home—once the pride of Los Angeles residents—and moved its operations to the custom-designed Getty Center, a thoroughly modern design by Richard Meier that rendered the old building extinct. Yet, rather than de-accession the structure and move on, the Getty Trust dedicated its considerable might to reinvigorating the old building. New structures were added and a respectful renovation ensued. In an inspired move, the villa was repurposed as a gallery for antiquities, thereby fulfilling the design intent hinted at by its architect and easing the landscape into the 21st century.

Preserving the resources of the recent past entails expecting the unexpected in other ways as well. The 1965 La Laguna playground in California, remarkable for its fanciful concrete sculptures in the shape of dinosaurs and sea creatures, nearly met its end before community activists rallied to the cause. Senya Lubischer details the grassroots efforts to save the park, which required both creative community approaches and strategic maneuvers at the local and state level to address historic integrity within contemporary playground safety standards.

As former National Trust President Richard Moe noted in a recent speech, “Our history is a continuum, and our heritage is constantly expanding to incorporate recent eras, new technologies, and new ways of looking at the world.” The City of Kent, in Washington, addressed these concerns as stewards of a number of significant “earthworks” sites dating from the 1970s. Cheryl dos Remédios writes about advocating for and preserving these innovative art and landscape creations, and the necessity of cooperating with federal
agencies—FEMA and the Corps of Engineers in this case—to achieve successful conservation of public spaces and ensure continued good stewardship practices.

**NEXT STEPS**

Keeping up with the concurrent cycles of history is a difficult endeavor, and there is no way to predict the direction of the next preservation challenge. Issues such as the long-term sustainability of restoration projects, modern materials conservation, and public safety in historic civic facilities require additional research and a coordinated effort between partners and advocates. Whatever the resource in question, preservationists must be prepared to work in tandem with a variety of groups and accept new perspectives to remain generationally relevant and continue in our leadership role as considerate community planners.

Now fully ensconced in the 21st century—closer to 2050 than 1950—preservationists cannot afford to alienate emerging constituencies that are passionate about saving buildings and landscapes, whether the rallying cry is for a suburban ranch house, a post office constructed of poured concrete, or a humble roadside motel aspiring to look like Mount Vernon.

With these essays, we hope to engage more people in these conversations and begin a series of focused discussions centered on the development of preservation practice in the 21st century.

**TRUSTMODERN**

As an advocate for saving modern and recent past resources, I am often confronted with misguided generalizations regarding the history and significance of 20th-century American architecture. Yet this challenge is also an opportunity: The debate about how to effectively steward our own architectural legacy is a chance to both broaden the preservation conversation and bring new people into the discussion.

To address what many consider to be a continuing crisis in historic preservation, the National Trust inaugurated the Modernism + Recent Past Program (also known as TrustModern) in 2009, funded in large part by a two-year start-up grant from the Henry Luce Foundation. With the official launch of the project last April, the National Trust is working to secure its position as the leader in an ongoing and ever expanding movement.

Headquartered at the Western Office of the National Trust in San Francisco, TrustModern seeks to reacquaint Americans with their living history by reframing public perceptions about American modern and recent past resources; creating stronger federal, state, and local policies to protect our modern architectural heritage; and fostering an action network of individuals and organizations interested in modern and recent past resource preservation and rehabilitation. The National Trust moves forward on these issues with the firm conviction that these places matter and that if we do not preserve the significant buildings, landscapes, and sites of the 20th century, our nation stands to lose a vital aspect of its architectural and cultural heritage.

Join us in this conversation and demonstrate the value of the resources that matter to you. TrustModern posts daily to Twitter and Facebook and maintains a comprehensive website with information that you need to protect and save buildings and landscapes. Visit www.PreservationNation.org/trustmodern.

CHRISTINE MADRID FRENCH is the director of the National Trust’s Modernism + Recent Past Program.
The “Modern” Challenge to Preservation

THEODORE H. M. PRUDON

Do current efforts to preserve modern architecture differ in any way from preservation practices as we have previously known them and, if so, what are those differences? The answer is both yes and no. When approaching this question from the point of view of methodology and process, at least at first glance, there does not seem to be much of a distinction. Yes, the same scholarly and technical steps are followed. However, philosophically and technically, the answer may be no. There are a great many differences, as will be discussed, and these may be the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

In arguing for the similarities with existing practices, many people—quite convincingly—point to earlier advocacy efforts that led to the acceptance of architectural styles once considered ugly and unworthy of saving. In this manner, such reactions to the preservation of modern architecture today are not that different from attitudes expressed decades ago to, say, Victorian architecture or Art Deco. However, it is not aesthetics that is at issue but the underlying fundamentals that have changed.

Today, in general, we are facing major changes in preservation due to shifting environmental, technical, and economic expectations (among others). This is further magnified for modern architecture by the sheer number of projects and, in many instances, their grand scale.

BUILDING FOR THE SHORT TERM

The shifts in economic attitudes are possibly the most easily and directly demonstrated. In the last 50 or so years, the financial expectations that guide return on investment—and thus expected longevity—have begun to drive the design and construction decision-making process much more aggressively. As an example, historically leases and mortgages were measured in terms of 99 or 30 years, with the expectation that the building (the asset) was going to be there as collateral for that term. With financial expectations becoming ever more short-term (such as mortgages and financing having short-term fixed rates) and with mobility, whether personal or business, becoming ever greater, return on investment and thus durability is measured in similarly reduced time frames.

The reduction in permanency, the elimination of redundancies, and the desire to make building materials ever thinner and more efficient and construction less costly and labor- or skill-intensive all lead toward an ever more temporal and potentially more vulnerable building stock. It is thus not difficult to predict that the building

WE ARE FACING MAJOR CHANGES in preservation due to shifting environmental, technical, and economic expectations.
inventory of the recent past and that of the foreseeable future will deteriorate more rapidly and will become an ever-greater problem requiring more speedy intervention.

This shorter term, from a financial and physical perspective, is precisely the opposite of the intent for preservation. Preservation seeks to extend the life of a structure and turn it over to the next generation in toto, rather than as an empty site for future and new investment or, if the building is still standing, to short-term occupants or investors who undertake a complete (gut) renovation or rebuilding of their own.

For instance, the Parthenon in Nashville, Tenn., built in 1897 for the Tennessee Centennial Exhibition in plaster, wood, and brick, was rebuilt in concrete starting in 1920 and finally completed in 1931. A similar case is the Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park, designed by Bernard Maybeck and erected originally as part of the Panama-Pacific International Exhibition in 1915 in celebration of the opening of the Panama Canal. The deteriorated plaster and wood structure was rebuilt in its entirety in the 1960s in reinforced concrete matching the original in detail.

However, our dilemma is not just technical or philosophical; the need to rebuild with greater permanency also raises issues of scale, economics, and time. To apply that principle of replication to the many buildings that were constructed with all sorts of experimental and less-than-permanent materials—a process that is not just limited to earlier decades of the 20th century but continues in full force today—within a limited time horizon, would simply be overwhelming culturally and financially.

It is here that it is necessary to return first to the subject of time, not as a financial indicator, but as a factor, historically, in the determination of human and cultural val-
ues. These earlier—more permanent—replicas had achieved a cultural and social significance but had become the responsibility of a subsequent generation. For many “modern” buildings, however, the time for preservation intervention is now, in our own lifetime—forcing decisions that were previously left to Father Time, Mother Earth, and the next generation. It is this very lack of distance that precipitates the associated questions and controversies.

**MATERIAL VS. CULTURAL AUTHENTICITY**

For instance, the desire to preserve and the resulting need for greater permanency (part of the true grit of preservation) sets up a new dichotomy: that of material versus cultural authenticity. In other words, to make the building more permanent, the existing materials have to be replaced with more durable ones, removing the less durable and more temporal but original and authentic materials. That is, material authenticity is abandoned to achieve the building’s permanence, maintain its long-term (cultural) presence, and achieve a new material authenticity in the future.

This raises the relativity of the perception of time and the speed of time. A program of masonry repair and replacement executed over centuries probably results in the replacement of a substantial amount of (very) original material. No one would dream of questioning that process or challenge the material authenticity of the building as it appears afterwards. For a more recent building this process may take place in a much shorter time frame and the question of authenticity is often raised—but the physical facts are not that dissimilar. Moreover, this difference in appreciation is colored by the reverence that an old building engenders. The issue is not change, but rather concerns the rate of change. Deterioration measured over 500 years is called aging, while deterioration of a more recent building in a matter of decades would be described as failure: In both instances what was there originally has been replaced in its entirety.

However, the issues are not that clear cut. The Glass House by Philip Johnson may have little or no original glass left—which represents almost its entire exterior envelope—but no one would argue that this makes it any less historic. Or consider the entirely new exterior walls of such skyscrapers as the Lever House, which reflect the ratios and dimensions as envisioned by Gordon Bunshaft in his design but not the particular materials he selected. Nevertheless, this building is considered a landmark. On the other hand, a complete reconstruction of Chartres Cathedral in EIFS (Exterior Insulation Finish System), a contemporary foam insulation material finished with a thin layer of stucco in painstaking detail, would seem to be entirely unacceptable.

Even if the answer is to rebuild and to introduce more permanent and more technically advanced structural or building systems, the resulting physical presence and visual appearance may be significantly different because of changes even for in-kind materials. Replacing glass of the 1950s with glass of 2010 may be authentic in its choice but the visual outcome is entirely different, as a number of recent restorations have demonstrated. These necessary technical “upgrades”—the original materials being simply no longer manufactured the same way—are often justified by the statement that had the technology been available at the time, the original architect without any doubt would have specified it. While this may
be true, somehow that argument leaves unresolved the charge and responsibility of stewardship of patrimony in its transfer to a consecutive generation.

This ever-increasing vulnerability as well as economic and physical temporality may also force an increase in replications of the past, which may in some ways become more and more “perfect” in their appearance and stylization as a result of the “perfection” of newer materials. This will require a reconsideration of the concepts of reconstruction. In a way we may inch ever closer to an alignment with Japanese reconstruction principles, which are more concerned with the meaning and significance of a building and site, rather than maintaining a material authenticity.

In short, the preservation principles and certainties that guided earlier generations have gone. The orthodoxy of the Scrape versus the Anti-Scrape debate seems less relevant in a debate over the replacement of temporal construction materials. Stone-by-stone replacement of the craftsmanship of the past, continuing to build on its age and patina, will cease to be the sole operating principle.

**THE CHARGE OF FUNCTIONAL OBSOLESCENCE**

Another threat to buildings of the more-recent past is functional obsolescence—that is, they no longer serve the purpose for which they were designed or built.

Back in the 19th century, the influential French architect and theorist Viollet-le-Duc opined that what kept a building alive and important was continued use. His argument was not an economic one, rather social and cultural, but fundamentally remains correct. Much of the current discussion, including the writings of this author, has focused on the concept of the obsolescence of function—the operating theory being that with changes in use and program requirements, the building’s (economic) function is no longer served. This argument is presented as something that has evolved only over the last few decades, culminating in that “tax act”–inspired misnomer “adaptive use.” A better term would be simply “use” or “continued use” because *every use evolves* and is therefore by definition *adaptive*. There is no doubt that the specificity of function increased with the economic developments of the Industrial Revolution, but this is certainly not unique to that time. Buildings have been adapted and modified to accommodate changes in use—if not in function—since time immemorial.

A house from 1950, for instance, which has remained residential is still a house in 2010, but no one would argue that it is the same house. The function (residential) is the same, but the particular use is not. The expectations for that function are entirely different because of changes in lifestyle and perceptions of comfort to name just a few (accommodating, for instance, a different type of family life that may require a home office, home gym, and kitchen where meals are prepared by more than just mom. Regardless of the economic or philosophical considerations, for any
building to remain viable, its use will change—as it always has.

ISSUES OF DENSITY AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY
The presumed social, political, technical, and sustainability failures of modernist architecture are often cited as reasons for the demolition of recent buildings. While the social and political arguments are particularly applied to social/public housing (citing most frequently the case of Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis as an example), the bigger and newer part of the discussion concerns sustainability, as “density” and “carbon footprints” become our buzzwords.

Here, also, the preservation of architecture from the recent past will face considerable added pressures because of the ubiquity, generous proportions, and substantial footprint of so many of the post-war projects. Density and carbon footprint are intensely intertwined in the minds of most planners and developers, but seem to be disconnected concepts in the eyes of most preservationists.

Large projects with densities lower than what is possible today will become targets for either additional densification or demolition to make way for more buildings and units. While buildings of the last hundred years are larger and taller and occupy a greater (carbon) footprint than any period before, they are still smaller and less densely placed than that which is possible or desired today. To accommodate growth, it will be argued, these early behemoths will need to make way for new (and even larger but more carbon efficient) behemoths. The argument will be that on some basis—be it by square foot, per capita, or some other measure—these new buildings will be far denser, more energy efficient, and thus more sustainable. Residential projects such as Parkmerced in San Francisco or Silver Towers in New York City are examples where greater densities have been sought.

Aside from the question of density, the intense focus on operating costs will bring the actual physical construction and the designs of post-war buildings into question—having been built in a time when energy was cheap and abundant. In response, many preservationists argue for the fundamental sustainability of the act of preservation and reuse, emphasizing the concept of embodied energy.

Because of the greater focus on construction and operating efficiencies for today’s buildings, however, the impact will be particularly severe for the buildings of the recent past. Their size and ubiquity

Many post-war residential developments are sited in considerable open space, raising the possibility of additional construction to increase density. A fourth tower is being contemplated for Silver Towers in New York City (I. M. Pei, 1966).

PHOTO BY THEODORE PRUDON
combined with their prime (development) locations make them easy targets. The early modernist curtain walls with their single glazing and their air and water infiltration issues are examples of what is perceived to be wrong and inefficient compared to earlier architecture. While this singular focus may not be entirely correct, the net result will be substantial replacements or demolitions to make way for more efficient solutions, reintroducing the question of cultural significance and material authenticity.

The arguments for preservation need to be broadened and go beyond a mere justification of embodied energy. While trying to make buildings as durable and efficient as possible, it is important to reiterate why we preserve buildings of any period. They add to a sense of self, a shared identity, and a collective memory and culture. It is these qualities that sustain human beings, and such an argument needs to be forcefully reintroduced into the preservation debate. Building codes have been adapted and structured to deal with the fact that earlier buildings do not comply per se with our contemporary safety requirements, but duly realizing that they are not any less safe. So why not approach sustainability requirements in a similar manner?

**HOW TO PROCEED?**

Having looked at the recent past, it is now time to look at questions for the future. Modern architecture, representing the world’s largest percentage of the built environment post WWII, will lose more buildings than any other period. But so far, preservationists have paid little attention to that period.

With all these synergies converging, where does that leave preservation, and in particular, the preservation of modern heritage? Preservation has arrived at a curious but important crossroads. People’s lifetimes are extended, but the lifetime of buildings has been reduced. This is a complete reversal of that which was customary in the 19th century when preservation principles were first formulated. It means that ever more of our cultural heritage will appear and disappear in a generation’s lifetime and memory. The permanence and stability of perceived history will completely change, and what is transferred physically to the next generation will evolve within one lifetime. It is possible that preservation may evolve into a more fluid interpretation of the past, perhaps more reminiscent of the world of 1984 rather than William Morris.

Life spans of buildings will continue to speed up, requiring earlier and quicker selections and decisions, and increasing the associated pressures. The dichotomy, contradiction, or conflict between permanence and durability on one hand (as the ultimate concern for preservation) and what seems to be an ever-larger degree of temporality on the other, will only become more pronounced.

Maybe this is not just a major philosophical and/or technical issue, but also a giant challenge for preservation management. It will certainly force an expansion of our practices as well as our thinking.

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50 Years Reconsidered

ELAINE STILES

Advocates, practitioners, and scholars concerned with the preservation of historic resources from the recent past have often debated the tenet that saving recent past resources may require changing the basic framework of professional preservation practice in the United States. One of the prime candidates singled out for change is the use of the so-called “50-year rule,” a criterion established for the National Register of Historic Places stating that “properties that have achieved significance within the past 50 years shall not be considered eligible for the National Register” unless the property is of “exceptional importance.”¹

The use of the 50-year guideline is intended to provide “the time needed to develop historical perspective and to evaluate significance,” guard against “the listing of properties of passing contemporary interest,” and ensure that “the National Register is a list of truly historic places.”² As a model for state and local preservation programs around the country, the National Register evaluative criteria, including the 50-year age restriction, repeat themselves in myriad forms in the more than 1,000 state and local preservation ordinances in the United States.

The 50-year “waiting period” for evaluation of historic resources and the exceptional importance criterion are of central concern because of the remarkable rate at which younger resources are being lost with little or no consideration of their significance. Densification of suburban and urban environments, real estate markets where land is worth more than existing buildings, and the continual cycle of rehabilitation for commercial and retail structures threaten scores of recent past buildings and landscapes. It is rare that a contemporary historian has the luxury of 50 years to evaluate the significance of a resource. Without access to the incentives and protections that come with eligibility for or listing in historic registers, as well as the public endorsement of significance that designation carries, advocates for recent past resources often cannot find preservation solutions for important sites before they are lost forever.

WITH THE 50-YEAR TIME LIMIT in place across much of the nation, preservationists have few options or tools at their disposal to protect those resources that fall through the 50-year crack.

The 50-year age guideline also increasingly places a barrier between preservation professionals and the public as our field increasingly seeks to help people protect the places that matter to them, rather than those that matter to scholars and critics. From Phillips Oil “76” Ball Signs to mid-century elementary schools, traditional and nontraditional preser-
Preservationists are working to save places that they identify with personally and generationally. It is a mathematical fact that most of these places will be less than 50 years old, and an almost equal certainty that they will not qualify as “exceptionally important.” With the 50-year time limit in place across much of the nation, preservationists have few options or tools at their disposal to protect those resources that fall through the 50-year crack.

As the field of preservation increasingly embraces the recent past and the 50-year restriction approaches its own 50th birthday, it seems a fitting and worthwhile time to reexamine the 50-year waiting period. Understanding where the guideline came from, how we use it, and its advantages and disadvantages can help in deciding whether it is a help or a hindrance in stewarding the significant built environment. Important questions include whether the 50-year

Lift #1 was the longest chair lift in the world when it opened in 1947. The City of Aspen/Pitkin County designated Lift #1 as a local landmark in 1974.

PHOTO BY FERENC BERKO, WWW.FERENCBERKO.COM
restriction is as useful and valuable at the local level as at the state and national levels, and whether our current standards for evaluative scholarship are sufficient for making sound preservation decisions. An essential part of this examination calls for considering what the preservation world would look like without a time-centered guideline, and how preservation as a movement and profession may need to change if significance is not necessarily correlated to age.

As a starting point for the discussion, this article offers a brief look at the origins and function of the 50-year guideline, its practical and philosophical functions, and some preliminary observations about what the preservation landscape might look like without the 50-year criterion by means of a brief survey of communities with no age criteria for historic designation.

ORIGINS

Many preservationists assume that the 50-year criterion was developed in conjunction with the National Register program after passage of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA). National Park Service historian John Sprinkle’s comprehensive history of the 50-year time limit, however, shows that the restriction was developed as part of the Historic Sites Survey, a predecessor of the National Historic Landmarks program created by the Historic Sites Act of 1935. Overseen by the National Park Advisory Board, the Historic Sites Survey was charged with identifying nationally significant sites worthy of both preservation and potential inclusion as federally operated sites within the National Park System. Over the 30-year period between 1935 and 1966, the Historic Sites Survey and National Park Advisory Board developed most of the criteria for significance and integrity that were later adopted for the National Register of Historic Places.3

The Advisory Board and Historic Sites Survey instituted an initial time parameter for the review of historic sites in 1937, narrowing its focus to properties dating from, or associated with events from, before 1870. The Advisory Board’s rationale for this narrowing in scope was to avoid “controversy, or the perception of controversial issues” associated with properties “pertinent to current or near current history.”4 Much like the 50-year criterion today, the Advisory Board’s 1870 cut-off date drew criticism. The American Society of Architectural Historians argued before the Advisory Board that highly significant examples of then “modern” architecture were frequently destroyed with no recourse because of the 1870 guideline, and further pointed out that the chosen date in no way represented a terminus for architectural value.5

The Advisory Board revised the 1870 cut-off date in 1952 in the course of reassessing the Historic Sites Survey program review practices. A board committee report determined that “structures or sites of recent historical importance relating to events or persons within the last 50 years will not, as a rule, be eligible for consideration under the standards,” thereby initiating what we recognize today as the “moving window” of 50 years.6 There is no evidence in the record as to why 50 years was initially chosen as a waiting period.
period; it appears the board decided upon this as an arbitrary period because, in its judgment, this was sufficient time for proper historical perspective and a subsidence of controversy. The Advisory Board included the Historic Sites Survey 50-year age guideline in the 1965 criteria for the successor National Historic Landmarks Program, adding an exception to the criterion for properties of “transcendent significance.” Less than five months after the passage of the NHPA, the NPS instituted criteria and guidelines for the new register program, including the 50-year time limit, based on those developed by the Advisory Board.

50 YEARS IN ACTION
In reflecting on the origins of the 50-year criterion, it is clear that an age-based criterion served distinct political and practical purposes for the Historic Sites Survey and National Register program, some of which remain relevant today, some of which do not. The criterion limited pressure to review or designate properties associated with contemporary values and living persons, and offered a pragmatic solution for how to prioritize and review a large backlog of potentially historic sites. It is also important to note that the focus of the Historic Sites Survey was in no small part to identify potential National Park units, a substantially higher standard than is typically employed in recognizing historic sites under most preservation programs.

As currently employed in the National Register program, the 50-year restriction upholds the concept that the passage of time enhances our ability to understand, contextualize, and responsibly evaluate the significance of a resource. The passage of time (at least in theory) helps prevent designation from catering to architectural nostalgia rather than architectural history and ensures preservation of well-documented, well-understood, and meaningful history rather than that which is merely interesting or noteworthy. The requirement for “exceptional importance” also serves a distinct purpose, holding “underage” resources to a higher standard to ensure that recognition afforded the resource will stand the test of time.

The 50-year guideline continues to serve as a practical and philosophical threshold for evaluating significance and as such exerts tremendous influence on the workings of American preservation practice. The criterion has evolved to guide a wide array of preservation activities, including determining the scope of historic resource surveys, the level of consideration afforded in environmental and design review processes, and whether properties are subject to demolition delay review. As a common baseline threshold for historic designation at the federal and local level, the 50-year guideline also has power to influence eligibility for programs such as historic building codes, historic rehabilitation tax credits, facade improvement and rehabilitation projects, and grant funding.

While the rationale for the 50-year time limit and exceptional importance criterion reads quite sensibly, recent-past preservationists can attest that these standards have perhaps unintended negative effects

AS A TIME PARAMETER, the 50-year cut-off stands as a philosophical boundary for preservation activities, indicating, however imperfectly, where we believe that the past typically “ends” and the present “begins.”
on how the preservation field views and values the recent past. As a time parameter, the 50-year cut-off stands as a philosophical boundary for preservation activities, indicating, however imperfectly, where we believe that the past typically “ends” and the present “begins.” Preservation is a movement rooted in time, and the reasons why society seeks to preserve past aspects of the built or designed environment stem from an underlying belief that what is old is valuable and meaningful to modern society. Unfortunately, many preservationists see the 50-year cut-off not only as a necessary period of distance for reliable evaluation but also as a philosophical line separating quality from inferiority. The concept of “old” being valuable and meaningful can easily transform into a less-defendable value judgment that what is old is inherently better than what is new.

The “exceptional importance” criterion serves to further segregate the recent past by holding more-recent resources to a higher standard than their peers. In some modes of interpretation, the requirement is understood as meaning that only iconic, critically acclaimed, or nationally significant resources from the recent past are “good enough” for protection, while the vernacular fabric we so highly value in other historic contexts has less worth if it was developed during the last two generations.

While the National Register program clearly states that the 50-year criterion is not meant to exclude or prohibit resources from being considered for listing, in practice, the percentage of resources in the National Register with periods of significance ending in the previous 50 years is quite small. Since the mid 1970s recent past resources (those less than 50 years old at the time of their inclusion) have made up approximately 3 percent of National Register listings, with 40 percent of that number holding significance at the local level. The percentage of resources listed in the National Register built less than 50 years ago as of today (i.e., during or after the 1960s) is presumably even lower. There is no research available, or even easily compiled, on the number of designated properties less than 50 years...
old at the state or local levels, but it is likely that the percentage is similar to the National Register, with higher and lower percentages corresponding to differing patterns of historical development and concentrations of resources.

**WHAT IF DATES DIDN’T MATTER?**
While some preservationists welcome an end to the 50-year and exceptional importance concepts, others view their loss or liberalization with concern. Some preservationists foresee unending review, overwhelmed preservation commissions and staff, blown budgets, controversy sparked by groups vying for validation via the historic designation process, and public relations disasters as the broadened scope of potential significance collides with the public’s concept of what is, or should be, “historic.” All of these issues are important to address in any reconsideration of the 50-year criterion.

A number of communities in the United States, by chance or design, have already forded the 50-year gap, and manage preservation programs with relaxed or no age criteria for designation. These communities can offer an instructive look at how removing age from the significance equation affects program administration, preservation of recent past resources, and public perceptions. The group includes some of the country’s largest cities, such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Raleigh, N.C., all of which have no age guidelines in their preservation ordinances. The list also includes places as diverse as Palm Springs, Calif.; Fairfax County, Va.; and the Colorado communities of Boulder and Aspen. Notable cities with age guidelines of less than 50 years include New York City and Seattle (30 years and 25 years, respectively).  

A brief survey of programs in communities with age standards differing from the National Register model revealed several threads for further inquiry. Most of the surveyed communities have designated properties from the recent past with signifi-
The resources include nationally recognized and regionally important architecture, as well as sites associated with notable local or wide-reaching history. A fair number of the locally designated sites were also listed in the National Register, though many were not. For instance, Palm Springs maintains a number of locally designated modern-era sites, but counts no structures in the National Register.

The number of recent past properties designated locally, however, is not significantly greater than at the national level, remaining between 2 and 4 percent of total designations. In several communities, there were no resources at all less than 50 years old listed in the local register. These data can be viewed in several ways. On the one hand, it shows that removing an age criterion does not necessarily lead to a flood of nominations and listings, or listings of questionable quality. It demonstrates that solid scholarship and evaluation can reliably ensure that historic designations have lasting value.

On the other hand, the relatively low number, and in some places the dearth of listings, may again testify to the undue influence of the 50-year criterion on the conceptual framework of preservation. Survey, scholarship, advocacy, regulatory review, and nominations for listings may be similarly low or absent.

The survey of communities with relaxed or no age criteria also showed that operating without an age guideline is not without its pitfalls. Staff in the local preservation program in Aspen, Colo., for example, have worked proactively for more than ten years to designate some of the city’s later 20th-century heritage, including examples of modern, rustic, and chalet-style homes. Their efforts have unfortunately stirred up public controversy over why the sites proposed for designation should be considered historically significant. In response, the Aspen municipal government has redeveloped and refined criteria for designation of recent past heritage a number of times, relying on detailed context studies, analytical scoring of integrity, tiered significance matrices, substantial incentives, and owner consent requirements for designations of some properties. A local task force has been convened to do more major revamping of Aspen’s designation criteria. Aspen’s experience underscores the fact that education, outreach, and solid scholarship—foundational elements for any preservation program—are even more critical when a local preservation program begins to expand beyond the boundaries of what the community traditionally (but perhaps inaccurately) considered “historic.”

More detailed study of communities without the 50-year age guideline would serve to inform development of preservation policy regarding resources from the
recent past in a number of ways. Important questions to explore include what kinds of obstacles local historic preservation commissions and staff encounter from an administrative, historical, and public relations point of view when there is no recommended or mandatory waiting period for examination of a resource. It would also be worthwhile to investigate whether the relaxed age guidelines have been useful in saving or preserving recent past resources, and how designation of more-recent resources affected public perceptions of preservation. A compilation of best practices now being used by communities to review and evaluate, designate, and manage traditionally “underage” historic resources would help pave the way for other communities to consider similar relaxation or removal of age criteria from their historic preservation program.

THE NEXT 50 YEARS

Questioning the validity of the 50-year criterion is a critical expansion in our conceptualization of significance and the cultural value of preservation, marking a desire to preserve a continuity of resources that link us to a time we no longer relate to.\(^\text{13}\) Reexamining an evaluation standard that is so philosophically and practically influential is challenging, and must include an understanding of the functional, conceptual, and historic context of the standard, as well as a weighing of the potential benefits and detriments of change. Yet there exists no better opportunity to undertake these efforts.

We must move forward, confident in the wisdom that we have much more to gain from employing a spirit of inclusiveness in preservation than we may lose in confronting controversy. Almost 50 years after the institution of the National Historic Preservation Act, preservation finds itself repeatedly grappling with overly restrictive regulations that effectively hinder historic preservation of significant American properties. It is our responsibility, as the stewards of historic resources, to re-assess the purpose of this restriction and discuss practical modifications that are needed to ensure higher efficacy and wiser implementation of preservation standards throughout the country. FJ

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4 Ibid., 83-84.
5 Ibid., 87 and footnote 15.
6 Ibid., 84.
7 Ibid., 87.
8 Ibid., 99.
9 Ibid., 83.
12 This is not a comprehensive or complete list of communities with relaxed or no age criteria for designation of historic properties. Undoubtedly more exist; this list was compiled based on easily available information in preservation-related publications, secondary source materials, program interactions, and announcements of landmark designations.
Coming to Terms with the Sixties

ALAN HESS

The most unsettling specters of 1960s architecture for preservationists are those twin horsemen of the Apocalypse: urban renewal and suburbia.

The former decimated the traditional urban centers we now revere; the latter replaced them with an alternate universe of shopping malls, housing tracts, freeways, and business parks that historic preservation still does not fully understand or embrace.

This ambivalence is understandable. Countless historic preservation organizations owe their births to struggles defending charming Victorian neighborhoods in the 1960s from a new civic center, arts complex, or shopping center by a 1960s Corporate Modernist architect. Why should the same blood, sweat, and tears be devoted to defending those interlopers today? Still, if one purpose of historic preservation is to encourage diversity and a respect for historic patterns before new development, we must now face the 1960s.

Of course, certain individual designs from the 1960s are easy for preservationists to embrace, such as Eero Saarinen’s 1962 TWA terminal at JFK Airport, Louis Kahn’s 1965 Salk Institute in La Jolla, Calif., and John Lautner’s 1968 Arthur Elrod House in Palm Springs, Calif. It is easy to advocate for buildings by major architects that have been part of the modernist narrative in the history books since the client first turned the key in the front door lock. We’ve grown accustomed to their facades.

The 1960s, however, present other buildings that some preservationists find challenging to square with traditional views of historic significance. There is something disquieting about facing this era’s suburban development, its tense disputes about the direction of modernism, and the enormous increase in the scale of almost everything.

The 1960s marked a turning point in architecture and city planning that alters the role of historic structures in a livable city today. Certainly these changes began before the 1960s, but they culminated in the 1960s on a wave of unprecedented economic and urban growth, shifting social attitudes, the maturing of modernism, the increasing sophistication of commercialism, the reorganization of corporate architecture firms, and the self-assurance of suburbia. Housing tracts had been counted in the dozens; now mass production created subdivision houses by the hundreds and thousands. Prototypes became a standard in commercial
architecture, creating a new nationalized landscape. More pointedly, the 1960s marked the emergence of historic preservation as a force in urban politics, economics, and planning. Examples of adaptive use—such as San Francisco’s Ghirardelli Square (Wurster Bernardi & Emmons and landscape architect Lawrence Halprin) which turned a blue-collar factory into a tourism venue—helped launch an ongoing architectural, preservation, and urban trend in 1962.1

Even today, these phenomena are still unsettling to many. In many respects they introduced the world we live in today. We are still grappling with their consequences, and we are still not certain how we got here.

THE MATURING OF MODERNISM
Consider one complicating aspect of the 1960s: the maturing of modernism. No longer the unruly upstart avant garde of the 1920s, modernism had become the official style of major corporations, major cultural institutions, and major architecture schools. But even as the self-assured International Style became entrenched in the establishment, cracks appeared in the foundation of modernism, especially in the United States. Many architects were no longer satisfied to repeat the canonical motifs of flat roofs, glass walls, and exposed structure. This gave rise to an assortment of solutions: Brutalism offered a raw, muscular, masculine variation; neo-formalism tempered the abstraction of modernism by re-integrating ornamentation and historicist symmetries; organic architecture (shaken by the death of Frank Lloyd Wright on the eve of the new decade, but reinvigorated by the inauguration of Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer’s Brasilia in 1960) still presented a richer, more expressive set of forms, textures, and concepts rooted in nature rather than the machine. Meanwhile the dominant corporate architecture firms offered their own, often controversial, Corporate Modern solutions that drew on formalism and a softer ornamental sense. On the horizon rose post-modernism, and the early careers of Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, Charles Moore, Frank Gehry, Robert Stern, Richard Meier, and other major American architects of the late 20th century.

This tumult leaves today’s cities with something to offend nearly everyone, especially proponents of International Style minimalism. Yet current taste cannot be the measure of architectural significance. There is no Darwinian proof legitimizing what “survived” the cycles of fashion and rejecting what did not. If anything, history shows us that concepts and styles rejected by one period will almost inevitably be embraced later by another. The critic in 1993, taking square aim on the 1960s, who bemoaned that “eighty percent of everything ever built in America has been built in the last fifty years, and most of it is depressing, brutal, ugly, unhealthy and spiritually degrading” is not to be taken at face value.

For example, the reputations of Neo-Formalists Edward Durell Stone and Minoru Yamasaki were as prominent as Eero Saarinen or Skidmore Owings & Merrill in the 1960s, yet they have declined in the intervening decades. Brutalism (or beton brut) likewise has fallen

IF ANYTHING, history shows us that concepts and styles rejected by one period will almost inevitably be embraced later by another.
by the wayside; though it took modernism’s expression of structure and raw material to one logical extreme. *Beton brut* buildings are so starkly unambiguous that they attract controversy even today.

Already, several major buildings of the 1960s have been demolished or threatened because they are at odds with present fashion. Note the ease with which many architects and historians argued for defacing Stone’s Huntington Hartford Gallery of Modern Art (1965) in New York. Today Stanford University is ready to demolish Stone’s Stanford Hospital (1959) in Palo Alto, along with its gardens by Thomas Church. The Brutalist icon Boston City Hall (1969) by Kallmann McKinnell & Knowles sustains attack regularly. I. M. Pei’s Brutalist Third Church of Christ, Scientist (1971) in Washington, D.C., gains headlines today as an “ugly” building that does not warrant preservation. Mario Ciampi’s Berkeley Art Museum (1970) has withstood earthquakes and critical venom to remain standing, so far.

The very term Brutalism has become so toxic and imprecise that buildings labeled as such, even mistakenly, are easy fodder for alteration: A campus historian misinterpreted the original design of the University of California, Irvine (1965), by William Pereira Associates, as Brutalist simply because the buildings are concrete. Their weightless volumes floating above a natural landscape, and their smooth, sculpted surfaces, however, have little to do with the weighty, rugged architecture of Brutalism. Yet insensitive alterations in 2008 destroyed the climate-responsive pre-cast concrete sunscreens of UCI’s Steinhaus Hall, turning a vivid 1960s building into a bland 2008 building.

Clearly, accurate historical analysis is essential as we approach the 1960s.

**THE RISE AND SPREAD OF CORPORATE MODERN**

Beyond this clash of styles and taste, another nettlesome issue raised by 1960s architecture is the prominent role of large corporate architecture firms. Are their massive complexes to be considered serious architecture, or can they be dismissed as a commercial product churned out by an assembly line approach?
By the 1960s, many architecture offices had reorganized themselves to meet the needs of rapidly expanding rosters of private and public clients. Corporations in new industries such as aerospace and electronics needed new campuses of great complexity (such as TRW’s Space Park Campus by A. C. Martin, 1960, in Redondo Beach, Calif.); major universities built entire new campuses (including University of California, Irvine, and University of California, Santa Cruz); cities and states built new civic centers to match expanding bureaucracies and cultural aspirations; new regional shopping centers grew in size; the recreation, sports, and entertainment industries (including Disneyland) demanded new facilities. “Total Design,” as the nation’s largest architecture firm in the early 1960s, Welton Becket and Associates, described its approach, included the ability to offer unified planning, architectural and interior design, engineering, construction supervision, and landscaping services for large-scale, multi-year, multi-phase projects that might include research and manufacturing facilities, offices, auditoriums, and residences.

Because of the efficiently organized, production line methods used by Corporate Modern firms, the high-rise offices, educational campuses, and manufacturing complexes they designed often used repetitive features spread over acres of property that sometimes tended toward bureaucratic monotony—characteristics that shade our opinions today. But poor examples should not cause us to ignore the many truly distinctive and creative contributions of large firms. Certainly for the purpose of historic preservation, Corporate Modern buildings accurately reflect many of the economic, cultural, and popular trends of their times.

Let us consider one example of Corporate Modern design to examine how this controversial 1960s phenomenon might be analyzed. Among Los Angeles–based Welton Becket Associates’ wide array of projects—some more successful than others—the Los Angeles Music Center (1964) sums up the office’s approach to aesthetics, urban planning, and unified “Total Design.” With the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA, 1964) by William Pereira Associates, the Music Center is one of the great trophies of that city’s cultural aspirations in the 1960s, and so is worth our attention today.

Both are large complexes incorporating several buildings carefully arranged at prominent locations. The space between the buildings is as important as the architecture itself, incorporating fountains, terraces, and plantings. The pride and prominence of these complexes made them easy targets for criticism as oversized, ornamentalist, anti-urban, and even vulgar. As products of large commer-

The curving sides of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion of the Music Center, Los Angeles, Calif. (1964, Welton Becket Associates) give energy and movement to what would otherwise be a static facade. Curving forms are picked up by Frank Gehry’s Walt Disney Hall (2004), across the street (foreground).

PHOTO BY ALAN HESS
cial firms, they were often dismissed by high-art critics. Despite their significance, both have been endangered (as is LACMA currently) by the overt bias against 1960s and Corporate Modern architecture.

Yet an analysis of the Music Center in the light of its times suggests another view of its architecture and planning. Set on the top of Bunker Hill, the complex’s grand dimensions and neo-formalist symmetries must be read at the scale of the entire downtown, and as reflecting the confidence of the entire city. Nonetheless, choices of materials, details, and graphics also relate the buildings to human scale: The concrete-aggregate-clad structural columns are energized by an elastic taper, and their weight is visually lightened by the small aluminum footings on which they stand, en pointe. The sides of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion curve outward, giving energy and movement to what otherwise would be static symmetry; Frank Gehry acknowledged the power of these forms in the sweeping arcs of Disney Hall (2004) across the street.

There is no question that the Music Center is a design from an era when new cultural complexes and sports stadiums redefined downtowns for a confident new age. It looks unabashedly to the future. Like many other 1960s Corporate Modern buildings, it is an unambiguous reminder of what we once firmly believed.

**SUBURBIA AND PLANNED COMMUNITIES**

The question of style must always be a part of the conversation about architecture and preservation. But even more confounding than currently unpopular styles are the broader issues of 1960s urban planning and urban design.

None is more controversial than the issue of suburbanization. Today its negative aspects are highlighted under the rubric “sprawl,” while suburbia’s progressive roots are forgotten. An odd dearth of useful scholarship (until fairly recently) compels us to operate on myths, instead of facts, about suburbia.

Many aspects of suburbia rub the sensibilities of 2010 the wrong way: Its reliance on commercially mass-produced housing tracts; on the automobile and its freeways, parking lots, and cul de sacs; on regional shopping malls that suck the life out of Main Streets and downtowns. This distaste allows us to paint a one-dimensional picture of the 1960s.

Far from being static, suburbia’s design advanced continually in response to the desires of millions of center-city residents for neighborhoods that were green, spacious, and accessible, not congested, polluted, and crime-ridden. Above all, suburbia was new. The arrangement of its buildings and the style of its architecture looked different than traditional cities. Its new building types included regional shopping malls, jetports, freeways, and mass-produced housing tracts, and its new urban forms included business parks and commercial strips. All of these had precedents that had been evolving for decades, but the prosperity of the 1960s brought them to a new scale and prominence.

One of the greatest myths about suburbia is that it was unplanned, respond-
ing to short-term commercial profit rather than rational planning. Suburbia’s remarkable unfurling horizontality, its bright populism, and its commercial vitality look like nothing so much as chaos to eyes trained to appreciate the traditional center city. Yet in population, area, and innovative urban concepts, the growth of decentralized suburban metropolises was the United States’ most significant urbanist trend in the mid-20th century.

Suburbia’s new conceptions of the city and architecture mean that historic preservation must seek new ways of evaluating its significance. With recent scholarship by Robert Bruegmann, Grady Gammage Jr., Greg Hise, Richard Longstreth, the Los Angeles Planning Department’s SurveyLA, Merry Ovnick, Hal Rothman, D. J. Waldie, Gwendolyn Wright, the current author, and others (not to mention earlier cries in the wilderness by J. B. Jackson, Denise Scott Brown, Robert Venturi, and Steven Izenour), we are beginning to understand the patterns and logic in the buildings, styles, and plans of the 1960s. Will historic preservationists learn from this history?

Some suburban architecture can still be evaluated by the established criteria of identifying the first, or the most influential, examples of a type. But another argument must also be made beyond historicity: Historic suburban buildings are part of a broader urban fabric that reflects strong and logical intentions. Just as the preservation of key urban anchors such as New York’s 1913 Grand Central Station and Century City’s 1966 Century Plaza Hotel (in Los Angeles) also strengthens their surrounding urban fabric, the preservation of a 1960s suburban shopping center may help save a neighborhood.

The Edgewood Plaza shopping center (1954-1958) in Palo Alto, Calif., by Jones and Emmons for developer Joseph Eichler, is one such example. As a historic artifact, its existence undermines the myth that post-war suburbia was an unplanned commercial product of one-dimensional bedroom communities. The planning concept that included the shopping center demonstrates how 1950s suburban design could unite housing, shopping, and employment in a livable, pedestrian-scaled neighborhood.

Built in a modern wood post-and-beam style, Edgewood Plaza includes a market and shops, gas station, and office building adjacent to a housing tract. This pattern of suburban development was repeated more times than we now generally credit. At the time of this writing, Edgewood Plaza’s future is still unresolved. Its preservation would ensure the survival of a valuable historic document, as well as a workable design for suburban life today.

Edgewood Plaza’s concept is only one small example of how suburbia was planned. The 1960s also saw an emerging trend of sophisticated master-planned communities. The small-scale experiments in suburban theory at Radburn, N.J., and the Greenbelt cities in the 1920s
and 1930s came to fruition first in the large-scale mass-produced housing tracts in Panorama City and Lakewood in California, and the Levittowns on the East Coast in the 1950s; these in turn evolved into increasingly multi-faceted master-planned communities in the 1960s at Irvine, Calif.; Reston, Va.; and Columbia, Md. They set standards nationally by integrating housing, shopping centers, libraries, schools, greenbelts, and other amenities into a large, complete, well-researched, socially sophisticated, and well-detailed community design.

The 1960s also applied master planning concepts to a new kind of suburban-urban downtown, typified by Century City (1965) in Los Angeles. Built on the former back lot of Twentieth Century Fox studios, it created a car-oriented, high-density high-rise office, apartment, hotel, shopping, and cultural center by organizing the elements of a traditional downtown into a very different form. The Las Vegas Strip, which also achieved a sophisticated linear urban form and complementary architecture in the 1960s, is another example of de facto planning based on the forces of the entertainment economy, the auto, and suburban commercial strips.

**GOOD MASTER-PLANNED COMMUNITIES** represent a careful balance of housing, services, employment, and parks; can one element be removed thoughtlessly without upsetting that equilibrium?

These influential projects remain a lightning rod for criticism, in some quarters, of the entire demographic shift to suburbia. Yet they are an undeniable part of urbanism and architecture in the 1960s. Now mature, they face destruction by a thousand small cuts. Good master-planned communities represent a careful balance of housing, services, employment, and parks; can one element be removed thoughtlessly without upsetting that equilibrium? The recent agreement to save the Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles, a keystone to the entire Century City plan, represents one step in the right direction. Historic preservation

Begun in 1965, Irvine, Calif., is one of the largest master-planned communities in the United States, with parks, lakes, houses, and shopping centers all designed into a unified plan. Modern architecture was central to the original concept.

PHOTO BY ALAN HESS
faces the challenge of preserving not only individual buildings but entire large-scale urban concepts.

**COMING TO TERMS WITH THE SIXTIES**

No matter how widely held today, the opinion that architecture since 1945 is “depressing, brutal, ugly, unhealthy and spiritually degrading” can hardly be supported by the facts. The 1960s were a period of expansion, confidence, invention, and prosperity akin to the boom years after the Civil War and World War I. No matter how different the 1960s are from the 2010s, 1960s architecture mirrored its society well. Indeed, the era’s self-assurance gives its buildings the clarity and vividness that make them targets for controversy today.

We have not yet come to terms fully with our suburban history. It is still shrouded in conventional wisdom and myth: suburbia as a place of soulless anomic, unplanned automobile wastelands, little boxes made of ticky-tacky. We need to base our opinions instead on solid documentation and clear-eyed analysis about the forces, concepts, and patterns that shaped it. We need to find new ways to think about the suburban metropolis that are more in keeping with what was actually built, rather than preconceived assumptions.

Preservationists must continue to defend individual masterpieces of design, but must also expand their concerns to include large-scale campuses, and large-scale patterns of organization for shopping, housing, employment, or recreation—in short, the complexity of the suburban metropolis. By recognizing these patterns, historic preservation becomes a valuable part of the ongoing process of change by which cities live and evolve. 


In the 1970s, the Getty Museum built itself a home in Malibu, Calif., in the form of an imitation Roman villa from the first century. There was something undeniably kitschy about the notion of putting a make-believe classical villa atop a hillside overlooking the Pacific Ocean and calling it a museum, but nobody seemed to mind. This was Los Angeles, after all, and so what if the over-decorated galleries, with their damask wall coverings and trompe-l’oeil murals, gave the museum’s interior the feeling of a mogul’s mansion in Bel Air? Then the Getty grew up. In 1976 its eccentric founder, the oilman J. Paul Getty, died, leaving the bulk of his multibillion-dollar estate to the museum, which suddenly became the world’s richest cultural institution. The museum morphed into the Getty Trust and spent a billion dollars constructing the Getty Center, a pristine modernist campus by Richard Meier, atop a steep hill in Brentwood, 13 miles east of Malibu.

The trust was obviously eager to leave behind its arriviste beginnings, and the villa could easily have become the most upscale condo conversion in Los Angeles history. Instead, the Getty came up with a more imaginative, and more costly, idea:

Once merely an imitation of an ancient Roman villa, the Getty Museum has been elevated through the addition of modernist companion buildings, interior changes, and a more appropriate use.

PHOTO © 2005 RICHARD ROSS WITH THE COURTESY OF THE J. PAUL GETTY TRUST
It decided to give its strange building a chance to be taken seriously. The trust announced that it would turn the Malibu villa into a museum of antiquities, filling it with objects that were created in the period that the building—a replica of the Villa dei Papiri, in Herculaneum—was intended to evoke. It was a risky move, since it wasn’t clear if this approach would make the building look more dignified or even sillier.

It took a dozen years and $275 million to renovate the villa and surround it with a series of modernist buildings, including an entry pavilion, an amphitheater, a parking garage, a cafe, an auditorium, an education center, and a shop. The project’s architects are Rodolfo Machado and Jorge Silvetti, of Boston—rigorous modernists who have a love of classicism and believe that an architect best respects history not by imitating it but by teasing its spirit into new forms. Machado and Silvetti are about as far as you can get from Norman Neuerburg, who designed the original villa, and it seemed an odd match: There is nothing overtly charming about Machado and Silvetti’s work, while Neuerburg’s design was a vast, sprawling exercise in cuteness.

The campus that Machado and Silvetti have created is a bracing collage of the old and new, and the villa has been almost magically transformed. The task was surely made easier by the fact that the French furniture and Old Master paintings are gone from the villa, and its new contents have a genuine connection to ancient Rome. (In fact, some items in the collection may belong to Rome; the Getty has been accused of acquiring a significant number of looted artifacts.) But it takes more than hauling away some gilded frames to make a ponderous building into a gracious one. This is not a slavish replication of Roman architecture, although various touches (such as new floors of bronze, mosaic, and marble) reveal a high level of scholarship. Instead Machado and Silvetti have acknowledged the past without imitating it. They have boldly reorganized the villa, creating more logical routes through it, and adding 58 windows and three skylights to bring natural light into the galleries.

One of the best things in the villa now is a new main stair of bronze, glass, and hand-carved Spanish stone; a meticulous modernist composition, it is broad, sumptuous, and serene, and a crisp counterpoint to the classical-looking environment around it. The effect is playful and knowing; in Italy, contemporary alterations to ancient Roman structures are often made in such a bluntly modern style, to make clear which elements are authentically old. Here, of course, the “original” details date from 1974.

By treating the barely old as a revered object, Machado and Silvetti somehow make visitors feel that this building is no longer an object of ridicule but, rather, worthy of respect.

By treating the barely old as a revered object, Machado and Silvetti somehow make visitors feel that this building is no longer an object of ridicule but, rather, worthy of respect. It is an understated, sly maneuver, and they do it without taking the easy path of irony. Machado and Silvetti have recast the villa not only through their upgrades but in the way they have surrounded it with a series of new structures, changing its context. The
villa is no longer its own little theme park: It is now its own architectural folly in the center of a carefully conceived, impeccably wrought modern campus. In the English landscape tradition, the folly was not a trivial object but a noble act of historical connoisseurship, playing off against a great manor house that was designed in a more contemporary style. Machado and Silvetti have saved the once outlandish villa by connecting it to this honorable architectural heritage.

The ring of modernist structures doesn’t intrude on the villa, nor do the buildings form a neutral backdrop. They are the architectural equivalent of cupped hands, holding the original structure within a firm, protective grasp. In this scheme, the new buildings—mainly horizontal structures, some of which are set into the side of the canyon—are gateways that deliver you to the old. You start with Machado and Silvetti’s monumental entry pavilion, and then zigzag up a series of staircases, through a carefully choreographed sequence of modernist areas, until you reach the amphitheater where the space finally opens up. Only then does the renovated, painted concrete villa come into view—brilliant in ivory and white, with a glistening red tile roof.

The facades of Machado and Silvetti’s new buildings contain a few portions of travertine, a warm and handsome stone that here serves as a deft allusion to the dominant material on Meier’s Getty Center campus. But the new buildings are clad mostly in striated concrete, a more proactive material that is at once harsh and delicate. Here, it is sometimes layered with marble, bronze, wood, and other forms of concrete, to create what architects call a “strata wall.” The details are exceptionally refined—the retaining walls around the entry pavilion are capped by floating panels of translucent onyx, for example—and there are lots of climbing vines, lest anyone get the idea these architects were trying to surround the villa with the rough and austere Brutalism that was fashionable in the 1970s. (Using the modernism of the villa’s own period would have been a nasty, if clever, joke.)

Machado and Silvetti seem determined to show that modernism can have texture, richness, sensuality, and scale. Their architecture recalls that of the great Italian
modernist Carlo Scarpa. Like Scarpa, Machado and Silvetti can slip a sheet of glass or a crisp bronze rail into a stone facade and make it seem not a coy juxtaposition of different periods but a real engagement of the modern with classical, so that the architectural styles separated by 2,000 years appear to have something to say to each other.

One of the new sections, a tall structure containing the cafe and the museum store, has a large outdoor colonnade. Little slabs of onyx are set atop each column, forming modernist versions of capitals. The arrangement of the onyx layers varies with each column, and the effect is of piles of books stacked at random atop cylinders. A beautiful flourish, it’s as subtle, and as gently witty, a comment on the dialectic between modernism and classicism as I’ve ever seen.

Elevating an object of architectural derision into something serious is no small achievement. This act seems particularly noteworthy in Southern California, where the line between good and bad taste has often been blurred beyond recognition, and public space is often experienced as a kind of artificial environment. At the Getty villa, you still park your car and enter a fantasy world, but it is no longer a glib one: It’s sincere, cerebral, and elegant. By adding modern buildings, Machado and Silvetti haven’t made the Getty’s Roman villa any less a part of Southern California, and they haven’t made it any less entertaining. They have given it the one thing it always lacked: a proper sense of history. FJ

The new amphitheater set beside the villa exemplifies the engagement of the modern with the classical.

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Preserving the Birthplace of Hip-Hop

DAVID GEST

On May 21, 2007, the New York Times’ David Gonzalez wrote an article entitled “Will Gentrification Spoil the Birthplace of Hip-Hop?” It described the plight of 1520 Sedgwick Avenue in the Bronx, a low- to middle-income housing development built in the late 1960s as part of New York State’s Mitchell-Lama affordable housing program. As a fan of urban history, hip-hop, and historic preservation, I had always marveled that oral histories pinpointed the exact genesis of hip-hop music and culture to a series of parties held in a Bronx housing complex in the early ’70s. Now that the state’s contract with the landlord (a management corporation) permitted it to opt out of Mitchell-Lama, the corporation sought to abandon its tax breaks and subsidized mortgage—which had allowed for 20 years of affordable housing—and sell the property.

After reading the article, I contacted the Urban Homesteading Assistance Board, a nonprofit group organizing the tenants’ opposition to the proposed sale and likely loss of affordability under new ownership, and tried to help the cause by writing a narrative description of this building’s historic significance. Based on this research (composed in 2007, some of which is presented here), the New York State Historic Preservation Office determined that 1520 Sedgwick is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, possibly even as a National Historic Landmark. Although this historic documentation may not legally prevent any changes (including demolition) to the building, it may serve as a rallying point for public awareness of our need to preserve this unique, tangible element of American history.

In the fall of 2008, the building was sold to a private real estate developer for $7 million. However, the economic recession has temporarily made conversion of the building to market-rate units unfeasible, and the new owner has let the building fall into disrepair, with a 600 percent increase in the number of housing violations since the change in management (from 82 to 598 violations).¹

HIP-HOP: AN INTRODUCTION

Scholars, musicians, and the media widely recognize Sedgwick Towers, the building located at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue in the Bronx, as the birthplace of “hip-hop,” a uniquely American musical genre and culture that over the past 34 years has become one of the most popular in the world. Hip-hop developed in the context of the urban South Bronx, where a complex maelstrom of social and political forces at play in the 1950s, ’60s, and early ’70s left the African American and Hispanic communities searching for a way out of lives of poverty, gang-dominated crime, and drugs. Since its inception, hip-hop has consisted of both music—usually instrumental break-beats
with a heavy bassline, created by a disc jockey (DJ) manipulating vinyl records on dual turntables (DJing), and a vocalist using a microphone to rhyme in time with the beat and entertain the audience (acting as a master of ceremonies, or MCing, also known as rapping)—as well as an urban culture centered on dancing to the break-beats (breakdancing), vocal percussion (beatboxing), graffiti art, and unique styles of communication and fashion. These cultural expressions are often associated with the competition and boastfulness of rival hip-hop DJs, MCs, and breakdancers, either as individuals or groups.

Three of the fundamental elements of hip-hop—DJing, MCing, and breakdancing—evolved directly from a series of events held by Clive Campbell (born in 1955), stage name DJ Kool Herc, in the recreation room of the low- to middle-income apartment complex known as the General Sedgwick House, or Sedgwick Towers, beginning in 1973. In 1974, as these rec room parties became increasingly popular, Campbell decided to transition to outside “block parties” approximately three-quarters of a mile to the northeast in Cedar Park, near the intersection of Sedgwick Avenue and Burnside Avenue.

THE GENESIS OF 1520 SEDGWICK
The City of New York Housing and Community Development Administration constructed the General Sedgwick House, a building complex of 100 apartment units, in 1969 as part of the Mitchell-Lama (state-financed) housing program. The plain, brick, 18-story building is a typical example of the type—a mid-rise, public housing complex with little ornamentation or embellishment built to house low- to middle-income residents. (Currently two-thirds of the residents earn less than 80 percent, and in many cases less than 50 percent, of area median income, and qualify for Section 8 Vouchers). The building is located on a narrow parcel of flat land in the Morris Heights neighborhood, wedged between U.S. 101/95, U.S. 87, and an off-ramp, with the George Washington Bridge on the south side, and Major Deegan Expressway and the East River on the east.

Beginning in the 1930s, when banks routinely “redlined,” or excluded, services to much of the South Bronx, preventing residents from obtaining home mortgages, a host of social and political developments combined to leave the South Bronx a national symbol of poverty and urban decay by the 1970s. After World War II, thousands of African Americans and Puerto Ricans moved to the Bronx, as federal housing and urban renewal policies encouraged...
mostly wealthier whites to purchase single-family homes in the suburbs. The Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954 also provided federal funding for the clearing of “blighted” inner-city areas in favor of modern, Le Corbusier–influenced “tower in the park”–style apartments. The resulting residential superblocks did not enable or invite contact or interaction among neighbors, creating a now notoriously impersonal environment.

Between 1947 and 1976, the city of New York lost 500,000 factory jobs, and education and language barriers kept many African Americans and Hispanics from entry-level service, school, and government jobs. Compounding the problems of the increasingly poor, minority population of the South Bronx, city officials piled up debt and drastically reduced basic services in the borough.

In the ensuing years, more than a dozen gangs developed, with thousands of members fiercely defending specific drug-dealing territories, aided by a sometimes corrupt local police force.

In an attempt to stem the flood of middle-income whites from New York and retain “the heart of the productive workforce,” the city utilized funds from the state’s Mitchell-Lama program to build housing affordable to middle-class residents. Beginning in 1955, the program provided low-interest mortgage loans and real property tax exemptions to owners of newly built housing, securing 35-year agreements with the owners to set low- and middle-income limits on tenants, limit profits, and accept supervision by the state Department of Housing and Community Renewal. By 1961 the Bronx contained six of the 17 Mitchell-Lama cooperatives completed in the city. The borough added the General Sedgwick House at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue in 1969.

CLIVE CAMPBELL

At age 15, around 1970, Clive Campbell moved with his mother, Nettie, into the building at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue, three years after arriving in the United States from the Jamaican slum of Trenchtown. Eventually joined by his father, Keith, and sister, Cindy, among other siblings, Campbell pursued athletics in junior high and high school, and his height and muscular physique earned him the nickname “Hercules.”

After spending some time in a few of the smaller Bronx gangs, and participating in the nascent graffiti movement (which spread from Philadelphia to New York in the late 1960s) using the “tag” CLYDE AS KOOL, Campbell began to focus on building his home sound system and playing new kinds of music.

A wide array of musical genres, too complex to document fully here, influenced the music Campbell would create. His sources of inspiration dated back centuries to African drumming techniques and call-and-response storytelling, but centered on Jamaican dub sounds and American rhythm-and-blues and “funk” in the second half of the 20th century. According to Jeff Chang, author of *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*, in the 1960s, “Jamaican musicians began to blend the popular New Orleans rhythm-and-blues with elements of folk mento, jonkanoo, kumina and Revival Zion styles into a new sound.” In 1967 a Jamaican sound engineer created the first “dubplate” after forgetting to turn up the vocals on a recording; as Chang explains:
A single band session with a harmony trio could [thus] be recycled as a DJ version for a rapper to rock *patwa* rhymes over [also known as *toasting*], and a dub version in which the mixing engineer himself became the central performer—experimenting with levels, equalization and effects to alter the feel of the *riddim*, and break free of the constraints of the standard song.\(^{16}\)

Although the advent of such dub music occurred as Campbell moved out of Jamaica, toasting, reggae beats, and rival musicians competing to host parties with superior sound systems had already been a part of Jamaican music culture.

In the U.S., the boasting 1950s albums of Bo Diddley\(^ {17}\) and 1960s and early '70s rock, soul, and funk recordings contained elements of break-beats and rhyming styles that would also come to inform hip-hop.

On August 11, 1973, in the first-floor recreation room of 1520 Sedgwick Avenue, Campbell DJed the first of a series of parties that would spawn hip-hop music and culture. Campbell’s sister Cindy wanted to throw a “back to school jam” to help pay for some unique fall outfits. Distributing hand-written invitations on index cards, the siblings charged 25 cents for girls and 50 cents for boys, hoping to collect more than the roughly $100 cost of renting the room.\(^ {18}\) Campbell, having adopted the DJ Kool Herc moniker, had been DJing house parties since 1970, but the rec room get-together would be his first public appearance.\(^ {19}\)

At the party, using his father’s Shure P.A. sound system, a Mackintosh amp, and spinning records on dual Technics 1100A turntables,\(^ {20}\) he noticed that dancers in the audience particularly enjoyed brief instrumental sections of records when the singer and most of the band took a break while the rhythm section continued. In order to capitalize on the crowd’s enjoyment of such breaks, Campbell had the idea, which he would later call the “merry-go-round,” “to work copies of the same record, back-cueing a record to the beginning of the break as the other reached the end, extending a five-second breakdown into a five-minute loop of fury, a makeshift *version* excursion.”\(^ {21}\)

Focusing on songs with particularly strong breaks, including The Incredible Bongo Band’s “Apache” and “Bongo Rock,” and James Brown’s “Give It Up Turn It Loose,” Campbell thus remixed break-beats to create new pieces of music by using the turntables for what may have been the first time as a musical instrument.

Campbell’s rec room invention immediately generated further musical innovations, as he continued DJing at 1520 Sedgwick almost once a month for nearly a year.\(^ {22}\) Equipped with an echo box for his microphone, Campbell and friend Coke La Rock would act as MCs, entertaining the crowd with now staple hip-hop phrases like “To the beat y’all!,” “Ya rock and ya don’t stop!,” and “This is the joint!”\(^ {23}\) Campbell also named the unique dance styles employed to accompany break-beats—hopping and spinning to the floor, using arms, bottoms, and even heads for leverage—as “breakdanc-
ing,” performed by “break boys,” soon known as b-boys and b-girls.

In the summer of 1974, to accommodate larger crowds, Campbell moved the parties to Cedar Park, plugging his superior sound equipment into lampposts, a source he discovered while observing construction workers. He called his new entourage The Herculords, including Coke La Rock and performers DJ Timmy Tim with Little Tiny Feet, DJ Clark Kent the Rock Machine, the Imperial JC, Blackjack, LeBrew, Pebble Poo, Sweet and Sour, Prince, and Whiz Kid.
**HIP-HOP’S EVOLUTION**

Musicologists and historians have traced and documented hip-hop’s evolution back to Campbell’s creative period from 1973 to 1974, as attendees of the rec room and block parties—particularly Afrika Bambaataa, Joseph Saddler (a.k.a. Grandmaster Flash), and Theodore Livingston (a.k.a. Grand Wizard Theodore)—developed pioneering innovations of their own. Bambaataa founded the electro-funk hip-hop collective Zulu Nation, Saddler invented break spinning (“alternately spinning both records backward to repeat the same phrase over and over”), and Livingston developed a musical form of record scratching that highlighted the sound of the needle dragging back and forth on record audio clips.

Into the late 1970s and early 80s as Campbell’s popularity waned, hip-hop’s exploded with hits such as The Sugarhill Gang’s “Rapper’s Delight” and Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five’s “The Message.” Hip-hop continued its meteoric rise in popularity and cultural influence to the present day, as hundreds of musicians across the country and around the world began telling their own stories through its music.

Recently, major American institutions formally recognized hip-hop’s influence on American culture. In 2006 the National Museum of American History announced an artifact-collecting effort called “Hip-Hop Won’t Stop: The Beat, the Rhymes, the Life,” which “document[s] the undeniable reach of hip-hop and commemorate[s] it as one of the most influential cultural explosions in recent history.” In March 2007, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five became the first hip-hop musicians inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, with near universal acceptance. Ultimately, hip-hop has grown from its Bronx roots as an amalgamation of a homemade, urban style, combining elements of music, dance, fashion, language, and art, to a widely respected and uniquely American culture and brand.

**MEETING THE NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA**

The importance of the General Sedgwick House cannot easily be judged by the exterior appearance of the building. But hip-hop can now be viewed in a historical perspective, and as such, this property of such seminal importance to the creation of the musical genre warranted inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

1520 Sedgwick Avenue was deemed eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, for its direct association with the original public parties during which prototype DJ Clive Campbell innovated essential elements that became hip-hop music and culture. Given a period of significance of 1973 to 1974, when Campbell performed in the Sedgwick Towers recreation room, the building also met Criteria Consideration G as a property of exceptional importance that achieved significance within the past 50 years.

The context statement noted that the physical integrity and also the feeling and association of the building have remained
intact. It is still a community of low- to middle-income apartments, inhabited by families striving to survive in an otherwise inhospitable environment. But if the building were to lose its low- and middle-income residents, it would lose the feeling and association of its period of significance, essential elements of its integrity.

The National Register includes few properties associated with African Americans and urban culture. This is the only existing building of such importance to the hip-hop movement (another important example, the Sugar Hill Studios in Englewood, N.J., where early hip-hop hits were recorded, was razed by a 2002 fire), and so it is almost certain that no other properties currently listed in the National Register are significant for their association with hip-hop culture. The National Register resource evaluation acknowledges the General Sedgwick House property as the birthplace of this unique American style of music, and recognizes the extraordinary impact that hip-hop has had on American culture, affecting the broad patterns of our history. FJ

DAVID GEST recently received degrees in law and city planning from Columbia Law School and the University of Pennsylvania School of Design, respectively. The author wishes to thank Dina Levy of the urban Homesteading Assistance Board for the opportunity to prepare this context statement for the National Register nomination and architectural historian Francesca Smith for providing the building description and analysis of National Register eligibility.

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5 Gonzalez, 109.

6 Gonzalez, 115; Chang, 10-15.

7 Gonzalez, 118.

8 Gonzalez, 121.


10 Gonzalez, 116.


12 Gonzalez, 116.

13 Chang, 71-72, 76.

14 Light, 6.

15 Chang, 25.

16 Chang, 30.


19 Light, 16.

20 Chang, 69, 79.

21 Chang, 79.

22 Chang, 78.

23 George, 18; Ogg and Upshall, 39.

24 Chang, 79.

25 Chang, 81.

26 George, 19.

Preservation Is Child’s Play: Saving a Mid-century City Park

SENYA LUBISICH

In 2006, with construction documents for a park renovation at 30 percent completion, all environmental reviews in order, and demolition scheduled, four neighbors joined forces and jumped into preservation and advocacy for a modern resource. While preservation and advocacy were new to us, we did have a unique set of skills: Of the four founding members of “Friends of La Laguna,” two were professional historians (of the ivory tower ilk), one was a contractor (who also holds a law degree), and one was an engineer (married to a Parks and Recreation commissioner). The threatened resource that had sparked our rapid-fire, grassroots advocacy effort was a modernist, folk-vernacular playground created by a Mexican concrete artist, Benjamin Dominguez. The playground is formally named La Laguna de San Gabriel although it is most commonly called “Monster” or “Dinosaur” Park. Admittedly, it is much easier to advocate for a modern resource that smiles at you.

La Laguna playground was built in 1965 and was intended to serve as an attraction for San Gabriel residents and visitors alike. It embodied the prevailing principles of playground design, blending recreation and aesthetics. In the words of Frank Caplan, the founder of Creative Playthings and a figure at the forefront of post–World War II playground design, parks should provide, “an opportunity to observe sculpture and examine the arts and crafts of the community. The park is a museum, zoo, native folklore center....” For 45 years, this playground has been a meeting place for the community and an icon for the city, yet it was an icon for a particularly unique play experience and little more. The artist and story of its creation faded and the playground was simply considered a hidden treasure by residents.

In 2004, two years prior to our entry into preservation, my husband and I (the ivory tower historians) chanced to meet the son of Benjamin Dominguez, the playground’s creator. Although the playground had been part of my husband’s experience for more than three decades, the idea that the playground was also art was a revelation. Fernando Dominguez was visiting Laguna playground because his father’s Las Vegas playground had just been demolished. He was looking to see if any others remained. We exchanged addresses and assured him that our community would never let such a unique and remarkable playground be demolished. Two years later, we were calling Fernando in a panic and driving

WHILE IT MAY NOT BE LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT, you can educate the broader public by helping them appreciate the function and use of a modern resource.
to his home in Las Vegas to collect oral histories, documents, and photographs. We’d been informed that the playground that had charmed us for years was no longer safe and needed to be replaced.

Within three months of our frantic phone call and research trip, the City of San Gabriel had signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the newly formed nonprofit organization Friends of La Laguna (FoLL), and plans for demolition had shifted to plans for preservation. Like our resource, our effort to save the playground is not typical, but when considering advocacy for resources that are not “yet” or not “readily” on the radar screen of what is considered historic, there are lessons that we can draw:

First, our advocacy for “Monster Park” confronted, front and center, the “safety issue.” This is a common phenomenon: Modern resources and the spaces associated with them are blamed for social problems, whether they are safety issues, access, lack of accommodation for the disabled, crime, homelessness, etc. As we organized to save the resource, we heard concerns about crime, drug use, and safety. The playground does not cause these problems, yet it is blamed for these problems. One task was to separate the resource from the hand-wringing over the social problems that it purportedly caused.

Communicating historic relevance to the community is another challenge for advocates of modern resources. “Monster Park” is located in San Gabriel, home to a Spanish Mission that was founded in 1774. For our community, the Mission is the measure of what is historic. Our goal was to communicate that history includes change over time. We worked with our community to articulate the trajectory of San Gabriel’s history through its post-war development and population boom. Age may speak for historic relevance, but it does not communicate significance.

Lastly, bringing the community on board with an advocacy effort is essential when it comes to modern resources. While it may not be love at first sight, you can educate the broader public by helping them appreciate the function and use of a modern resource. If you can do that, you will better be able to communicate value. If the value is understood in terms of how the community can experience the resource, you can create the leverage necessary to protect modern resources.

Mexican-born artist Benjamin Dominguez created La Laguna playground in 1965. His whimsical “children’s play-sculptures” were also commissioned for other parks in California as well as in Nevada and Texas.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE CITY OF SAN GABRIEL
**THE “SAFETY” SCAPEGOAT**

La Laguna playground showed its age when the city made plans for a larger park renovation. In the words of the city newsletter: “...the once vibrant, eye-catching Dinosaur Park has received a lot of wear and tear over the years, and due to safety and maintenance concerns, the climbing structures must be removed.”

The safety problem is a common charge levied against modern resources and often the sole complaint against historic playgrounds. In San Gabriel, the city had done its due process and notified residents living in the vicinity of the park. On two occasions, groups organized to stop the demolition. However, the “safety argument” proved insurmountable.

The advent of “no-risk” playground design in the 1980s spelled demolition for most post–World War II playgrounds. The playgrounds built in the 1950s, ’60s, and ’70s represented a creative period in playground design during which artists (such as Isamu Noguchi) and architects (such as Robert Royston) designed play areas in public spaces that would blend aesthetics with recreation. Efforts to comply with the modern safety standards have resulted in the wholesale demolition or neutering alteration of these landscapes.

The scenario at La Laguna playground was no different in this sense. In our first meeting with the director of Parks and Recreation, we learned that La Laguna did not comply with modern safety standards, as shown by a safety assessment. Efforts to bring it into compliance would be cost-prohibitive and, in some cases, impossible. Therefore, demolition and replacement was the only option.

Our first strategy was to move the conversation from potential, possibility, and hypothetical to actual. We asked for the safety claims that had been brought against the city. We asked for the records of injuries. When the city provided none, we were able to turn the conversation from “safety” to liability. Liability can be managed and interests can be protected.

Safety is important. The board members of FoLL are parents to 11 children; we too have an interest in keeping children safe. However, this playground was designed with child’s play in mind, as are most. We spent a great deal of time talking to child development experts about children’s need for play. Within that discipline and within the scope of playground design is the principle of “self-selecting play.” This is the play experience that we seek to preserve.

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Playgrounds built to modern specifications embrace prescriptive play: The equipment should guide each child through the activity. That strips away a creative engagement in play. It prevents children from testing their limits and measuring their development. As I worked on this article, my fourth child reached the critical milestone of climbing the whale “all by my sel-fes!” We are working with the city to take baby steps on this issue and will find a solution that protects the resource, protects the child, and protects the experience.

**WHAT BOtherED US AND MOTivated US was the fear that our grandchildren might be deprived of a chance to play in this uniquely designed playground.**

Showing photographs of the playground in use, to demonstrate how well it serves its function, helped to generate greater appreciation for it.

PHOTO BY RON BROWN
AGING, BUT NOT OLD
A second shared challenge is the perception that modern resources are old yet lack any historic significance, in part because their creation falls within living memory. Our advocacy effort received vital support from the Los Angeles Conservancy’s Modern Committee and, through its work, we learned a great deal about how to educate the public about modern resources. However, we did not earn the “ear” of our local historical association until after we had entered into a MOU with the city. When we did meet its leaders, hostility and dismay best describe their comportment. From their perspective, four young residents were wasting energy trying to save a decrepit playground when time could be better spent saving the remaining adobes in San Gabriel. We engaged our community in a discussion about “book-ends” and the need to physically frame the historical narrative. We asked them to call out the significant buildings and places that have marked the full arc of the city’s history, including their experience and place in it. This allowed us to talk about the “Modern Period.”

One of the most fundamental traits of modern resources is that they are designed with a diverse and large population in mind. The 1960s was a time when society as a whole became more inclusive. “Public” was intended to be more open and representative. All types of people were supposed to feel included and recognized in the public sphere, and they could do so because public spaces began to incorporate broader social
and cultural trends. As suburban areas grew and developed, public spaces emerged to distinguish one city from the next and to be truly public spaces—not simply civic spaces. In a letter to Los Angeles County Supervisor Frank Bonelli, Benjamin Dominguez argued that with his sculptures, “The Los Angeles Area…can have in its public parks the distinction and excellence of their ancestry.”

Eventually, what we were able to communicate was that playgrounds are generational and cyclical. La Laguna playground represents a particular period in time and an important phase of the city’s history, yet the experience of play knows no bounds. The playground is a place where the center of energy does not change. Children continue to interact and function in the play space just as they have for the last 45 years. In that generational cycle, as children become adults, their experience of the space changes yet their understanding of its function does not. What bothered us and motivated us was the fear that our grandchildren might be deprived of a chance to play in this uniquely designed playground. A historic playground can unite generations through a shared experience of play.

**FALLING IN LOVE WITH CONCRETE**

As I mentioned before, it is much easier to get people to fall in love with a modern resource that actually smiles at you. Our efforts captured considerable media attention, in part because when you say that the city is going to destroy a lagoon, journalists perk up. When you stand next to Ozzie the Octopus or Sandy the Sea Serpent and ask how the city could bulldoze a grinning face, reporters take a photo. Mostly, though, when you show children running through sand, hugging a seal, or clambering into a lighthouse (to escape, of course, down the back of a dragon), people want to know why that experience is being taken away.

It is one thing to compose an impressive photo that captures the “artist’s eye”...
for a building or landscape. It is quite another to also communicate the function and use of a space. In the case of La Laguna playground, a still photo can simultaneously communicate artistry and function. We did have our detractors who felt that the park would be better served by replacing La Laguna with modern play equipment that was “clean,” “safe,” and “new.” But when we were able to demonstrate the different experience that children have playing on play-sculptures, we were able generate an appreciation rooted in use.

SAVING LA LAGUNA
During the three months of advocacy before Friends of La Laguna turned the city from demolition to preservation, every day was a scrambled blur of talking to anyone who would listen. We kept constant public and media pressure on the city, strategized incessantly, and explored any and all opportunities that presented themselves. Very quickly we determined that the value of La Laguna extended beyond nostalgia. (We were not going to save La Laguna simply because my husband played there as a child.) Once we knew that the value was greater than our own individual experience, we prepared for drastic action: If we needed to bring a lawsuit, we would; if we need to change the law, we will. It is our intent to turn stewardship of the resource over not to our children but to our grandchildren’s children. Simply put, a ribbon cutting doesn’t mean our work is done.

In hindsight, we can identify three strategies that served us well: First, our ability to move people. While those living in the immediate proximity of the playground were notified, the announced demolition of the playground came as a surprise to our community. If we could not mobilize people to speak up for the resource, we mobilized them to speak out about their concern that due process may not have been followed.

Second, we consistently brought solutions. We were adamant that we would not simply raise objections, but that we would work toward solutions. When the city indicated that there were not funds to preserve and protect the playground, we got to work and started fundraising. When the city indicated that it did not have the staffing to manage preservation, we organized and sought training. We have found support and advice from any and every community and preservation organization. We also talked to the “usual” opponents of preservation, trying to understand their position. It serves us well in navigating a course toward a capital campaign to save our resource.

Lastly, by bringing people in, making the process public, and offering solutions, we were able to hold our elected officials accountable. A few months ago, as I sat at “Monster Park,” a four-year-old boy burst through...
the landscaped “Island Berm” and into the Sandy Lagoon. Repeatedly he yelled, “Whoa!” as he wove his way around the concrete sea creatures. Following behind him was his grandmother who exclaimed, “I can’t believe it is still here!” She had raised her family in San Gabriel, moved to Northern California, and was back visiting friends. She had hoped to bring her grandson to play at the “best playground around” before heading to Petrillo’s Restaurant to get a pizza (which would travel home to her husband). Petrillo’s turns 50 in 2016…and happens to be housed in a “quirky” International Style building. These are the places that matter. Guided by those values, Friends of La Laguna will remain vigilant. FJ

SENYA LUBISICH is a professor of history at Citrus College. She is co-founder and president of Friends of La Laguna (FoLL). Learn more at www.friendsoflaguna.org.

1  Frank Caplan, Parks and Recreation, January 1960.
2  San Gabriel Grapevine Newsletter, Autumn 2006.
3  Benjamin Dominguez, letter to Los Angeles Supervisor Frank Bonelli, 1962, Dominguez Family archives.

Friends of La Laguna

FoLL entered into an MOU with the City of San Gabriel in 2007 and serves as the steward of La Laguna Playground. With private and state grants, FoLL has commissioned a historic structures report and preservation plan available on its website. This report was honored with preservation awards from the Los Angeles Conservancy and the California Preservation Foundation in 2009. FoLL has also been recognized for its community service by the California Parks and Recreation Society, district 13. Presently, FoLL is co-sponsoring legislation (AB 2701) that will place language in the Playground Health and Safety Code to clarify the jurisdiction of the State Historic Building Code for historic playgrounds. A recent grant from the California Cultural and Historic Endowment has galvanized FoLL’s fundraising for a capital project that will rehabilitate the playground. FoLL remains an all-volunteer organization at present.
Earthworks: Art and Landscape in Washington’s Green River Valley

CHERYL DOS REMÉDIOS

In 1936 the city of Kent, Wash., was primarily an agricultural community, famous for lettuce. Time magazine noted that Kent produced half of the state’s bumper crop, which then ranked third in the nation. But, as in many agricultural areas, the technological changes that defined the last half of the 20th century also changed land-use patterns in Kent and the surrounding farmland. An increase in automobile ownership led to an exodus from nearby Seattle, with rural lands giving way to suburban sprawl. More roadway construction required digging more gravel pits, and increased runoff from paved surfaces required more storm water detention basins. Commercial and industrial development moved in. By 1965 Kent was home to the Boeing Aerospace Center, where the Apollo moon buggy was built. Now Kent is fast becoming one of the nation’s largest distribution centers for companies such as Whirlpool and General Electric.

These burgeoning industries have added to Kent’s tax base, which supports, among other amenities, one of the largest park systems in King County. But “park” doesn’t begin to describe the critically acclaimed land art to be found there. For the last 40 years, forward-thinking arts commissioners and government employees have explored creative alliances, nontraditional funding sources, existing land-use regulations, and a public process to reclaim and reshape these lands.

Three of their crowning achievements can be found within a 15-mile stretch in the Green River Valley: Johnson Pit #30 (also known as the Robert Morris Earthwork), Mill Creek Canyon Earthwork (also known as the Herbert Bayer Earthwork), and Lorna Jordan’s Waterworks Gardens.

ENVIRONMENTAL ART AND ITS ROOTS

In the 1960s several strands of environmental art activities emerged in the U.S. as artists sought to move out of the art gallery and to respond to growing consciousness about ecological issues. “Environmental art” encompasses earthworks (also known as land art), ecological art, land reclamation, and other evolving categories.

In New York, artist Agnes Denes was a founding voice of the ecological art movement, which focused on creating awareness of ecological concerns. In 1968 she explored the relationship between food scarcity and environmental degradation in the Rice/Tree/Burial Project. The same year, Mierle Laderman Ukeles launched Manifesto Maintenance Art in a visceral way.
response to motherhood, addressing the minutiae of household tasks related to child-rearing alongside large-scale issues of air, water, and earth pollution in New York City. In 1969 Patricia Johanson was commissioned by *House & Garden* magazine to create designs for gardens. She responded with more than 150 ideas for restoring industrial sites, including a design for a landfill. Over the next 40 years, these and other artists continued to explore the nexus between art and environmental activism. Visit greennmuseum.org to see work samples and descriptions.

Two important shows which took place in 1968 are considered to mark the beginning of these land art movements: the Cornell *Earth Art* exhibit and *Earthworks* at the Dwan Gallery in New York, which included works by Herbert Bayer and Robert Morris. These exhibits documented artists’ efforts to make large-scale art in the western United States. Most of the works explore geometric shapes at a larger scale with a variety of inspirations: archeology, astronomy, the experience of expansive space, and minimalism. When land artists did work under the title of “restoration,” they were more interested in exploring the potential of the available landscape than doing ecological remediation.

One well-known earthwork by Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty* (1970), involved sculpting 6,550 tons of rock and earth into a spiral form at an abandoned industrial site on the Great Salt Lake in Utah. Smithson made no attempt to remediate polluted waters, but his work directly engaged the complex issues surrounding industrial land use. Restoring gravel pits was another idea that Smithson conceived and pursued before his untimely death in 1973 at age 35.

Both King County and Seattle adopted percent-for-art funding mechanisms in 1973, meaning that a percentage of the cost of publicly funded capital improvement projects is allotted per year for the commissioning of public artworks. These ordinances defined “art” broadly enough that artists could take a conceptual approach, even rethink infrastructure, rather than simply ornamenting existing designs. The Seattle Arts Commission set an influential precedent in 1979 by teaming three artists with engineers and architects on the design team for the Viewland/Hoffman electrical substation: Andrew Keating, Sherri Markovitz, and Buster Simpson. When I asked Simpson what inspired that collaboration, he replied: “The Bauhaus.”

The Bauhaus ethos translated well to the collaborative processes required by projects that blended art, public works, land reclamation, and, in some cases, ecological restoration. The Viewland/Hoffman...
artists talked to neighborhood residents to find out what they wanted, in the hope of creating a truly “public space.”

Herbert Bayer also embraced the idea that public art should make public space physically and psychologically accessible, but Robert Morris’s views were more in line with those of his contemporary Robert Smithson: Morris and Smithson both argued that art should challenge the viewer’s perceptions.

THE 1979 EARTHWORKS SYMPOSIUM
When the King County Arts Commission was established in 1969, it was one of the first county arts agencies in the country. The commission hired sculptor Jerry Allen as visual arts coordinator in 1978. He proposed a sculpture symposium to the King County Arts Commission, but it took additional urging from new arts commissioner Parks Anderson to explore “land and the elements” before Allen’s idea took off. A later report by the commission explains:

King County was in the midst of a polarizing struggle over land use, with endangered farmland a critical issue... Jerry Allen...made a crucial discovery: [As the major road builder] King County itself owned over 100 sand and gravel pits for which no reclamation planning had been done. Ironically, he also found that the County had exempted itself from its own reclamation laws. From here Allen took the next logical step, proposing that the [Earthworks Symposium] focus on the issue of earthwork art as a land reclamation tool.7

Natural restoration of sand and gravel pits involves replacing and re-grading the land to its original contours. Allen recognized that artists could be hired to reclaim these sites at lower cost because, instead of restoring the land, the artists could work with the resources at hand.

In 1979 the King County Arts Commission sponsored Earthwork: Land Reclamation as Sculpture, hosted at the Seattle Art Museum. The current director of the county’s public art program recalls:

The symposium...was a remarkable turning point in public art program management...thirty-some years later, we’re still looking to it as an example of how to combine artists working with public works departments [and] civil engineers. We take that practice a little bit for granted here in the Pacific Northwest because we’ve had this remarkable history...building upon works like the Herbert Bayer Earthwork.8

Commissions for both the Robert Morris Earthwork and the Herbert Bayer Earthwork resulted from the 1979 symposium.

THE ROBERT MORRIS EARTHWORK
When Robert Morris received the commission to restore a gravel pit overlooking the Kent Valley in 1979 (Johnson Pit #30), he was already at the forefront of both minimalism and land art, having completed land art projects in Ijmuiden, the Netherlands (Observatory, 1971), and in Grand Rapids, Mich., (Grant Rapids Project X, 1974), that were fully or partially government funded.

Exploring human perception interested Morris more than reclaiming land. He chose to work in “a place where the perceiving self might take measure of certain aspects of its own physical existence.”9 He chose to produce outdoor works because he wanted to work with time, an element not previously considered a formal aspect of sculpture:

Outside works expand and articulate this much further, and because
site works are inseparable from their places, an element like time or space is not bound entirely as a formal element within the object properties of the work. Such elements must be acknowledged as existential properties of the complex work and site together, and can’t be separated from such features as changes of topography, of light, of temperature, of the seasons.  

Morris cleared the site of volunteer trees (trees that weren’t purposely planted) and left creosoted stumps intact to remind visitors of the site’s industrial history, which antagonized local residents. Over time, though, the context of the Morris Earthwork has changed. Today tract homes surround the site, replacing the bucolic farmland that contrasted so sharply with Morris’s stark minimalism. Residents now appreciate the Morris work as a green space and let their dogs run along the terraced slopes. Yet the perceptual shifts that Morris engineered hold fast when one walks down into the former gravel pit.

Despite its initial, “unsettling” effect on the King County Arts Commission, the project provided “a new awareness…of its role in County government, and the need to hold dialogue and form working relationships with other branches of the government, all of which are public-serving bodies.”

**THE HERBERT BAYER EARTHWORK**

In 1975 Kent Mayor Isabel Hogan was inspired by what she saw happening at the county level, and asked gallery owner Laurel Whitehurst to start the Kent Arts Commission. Initially it was staffed by volunteers, but they were determined to secure professional staff and their own public art ordinance. A local consultant advised them that they’d need to succeed at an ambitious project in order to convince the Kent City Council to support their funding requests, so they were poised to think big. He also told them to “never overlook the unlikely alliance.”

Herbert Bayer’s commission was an add-on to the King County Arts Commission’s original plans. The City of Kent had purchased land for the 96-acre Mill Creek Canyon Park with government funds that stipulated public access. Later it was determined that a water detention dam at the mouth of the canyon was needed to prevent both flooding and erosion. Mayor Hogan asked the County to reconvene the Earthworks symposium’s artist selection panel, so engineers could work with an artist to design an earthen dam that would also function as a public park.

**Mill Creek Canyon Earthwork** exemplifies Bayer’s talent for integrating art into the everyday. “A dam in the ordinary sense constitutes a radical interference with the natural configuration of the land,” he explained. “My intent was, therefore, to give the dam a natural appearance conforming to the landscape (surroundings) and to become integral parts of the landscape being created.” The visual cohesion of the 2.5-acre Bayer Earthwork belies its multiple functions. Conceptually and physically, this landscape stretches far beyond its Bauhaus origins to encompass its contemporary, suburban context. King County administrators now plan for
the Earthwork to serve as a portal to a regional trail system.

Kent Arts commissioners supported the Bayer project with an exemplary fundraising effort that brought in $120,000, receiving grants from the county, state, and federal arts agencies, and an appropriation from Kent Parks, as well as funds from nontraditional public art sources such as a Housing and Community Development Block grants and direct donations from private citizens. Unlike the Morris Earthwork, which had no community engagement component, the fundraising effort and local editorials built support for the project over time.¹⁴

Lorna Jordan’s Waterworks Gardens

Waterworks Gardens, located at the Renton wastewater treatment plant, is an ecological artwork analogous to the Bayer Earthwork in that it imbues large-scale infrastructure with natural processes. The King County government selected Lorna Jordan to work on the design team of the treatment plant’s expansion with no art program or implementation funds in place. She built support for the creation of an artwork that was part of the plant’s infrastructure, using natural—rather than industrial—systems to treat water. Dedicated in 1996, the project clearly builds on the legacy of King County’s 1979 Earthworks symposium.

Lorna Jordan identifies herself an environmental artist who often combines green infrastructure, habitat restoration, and places for people:

When I joined the design team, [King County] was trying to figure out how to disguise a 95-acre wastewater treat-
ment plant. Instead of an “out of sight, out of mind” approach, I proposed an environmental art/public works project that invites people to observe the natural processes of water purification while connecting them to the cycles and mysteries of water.15

Oil-polluted water is collected from 50 acres of parking lots. As required by the City of Renton, it is then pumped to drain into Springbrook Creek. The storm water flows downhill through 11 ponds where contaminants and sediments are allowed to settle. Cleansed, the water is released into wetlands which sustain plants, microorganisms, and wildlife. Waterworks Gardens is so attractive that couples choose to marry in the “Grotto,” a stone mosaic art masterpiece and one of five garden rooms that theatrically move visitors through the space.

MAINTAINING UNIQUE PROPERTIES
The dual nature of Waterworks Gardens as both art and infrastructure has created confusion around maintenance roles and responsibilities. The county tends to groom parts of the gardens to park standards, which is in keeping with its budget, but this does not extend to honoring the artist’s vision by maintaining the specific plantings and layout of the beds she designed for the garden rooms. Encroachment of weeds and invasive plants is an ongoing challenge.

The Bayer Earthwork is also in disrepair, its modernist forms overgrown by blackberry and alder. Original goals included fish restoration, yet now that salmon have returned, the attendant regulations make it more difficult to remove vegetation. Sculptural sightlines disappear into the trees, blurring the contrast between groomed elements and the naturalized canyon trail, which itself needs maintenance. Closed for lack of funding, the trail still rises through a remnant of forest where berries drape the path in early spring, and traffic noise from the adjacent roadway gives over to the rushing creek.

Meanwhile, FEMA has changed the status of the levees along the Green River, requiring industrial sites and residences
built in the floodplain to carry insurance. The Corps of Engineers is calling for extensive repairs to the Howard Hanson Dam on the upper reach of the Green-Duwamish River (about 30 miles east of Kent), but David Montgomery, a University of Washington geomorphologist and MacArthur Fellow, published an article in April 2010 recommending building more, smaller dams, since large dams pose a catastrophic risk in earthquake zones.16

His recommendation comes too late for the Bayer Earthwork. The state required that Bayer’s dam, designed to meet a 100-year storm requirement, be redesigned to accommodate a 10,000-year storm. Although the Kent Arts Commission engaged the University of Washington Department of Landscape Architecture Construction/Hydrology Studio to look at alternatives to redesigning the dam, ultimately the Corps of Engineers raised the berm two feet, changing its proportional relationship to the other sculptural elements. Nevertheless, as a Bauhaus masterpiece and beloved park, the Bayer Earthwork offers a model for future integrated dam designs.

4Culture Public Art, previously the King County Arts Commission, renovated the Robert Morris Earthwork in 1995-96, with input from the artist. Restoration included repairing erosion on the terraces, replacing the “ghost tree” stumps, replanting the meadow, correcting drainage issues, installing a locking gate at the parking lot and interpretive signage, removing invasive plants (blackberries, alders, and scotch broom), re-hydroseeding with native grasses, installing benches in the meadow area, and completing a path to the bottom of the pit that Morris sanctioned and designed.

4Culture provides annual maintenance which includes removing invasive plants (some done by a regular maintenance crew and some by goats), removing illegally dumped trash, power washing the parking area, replacing the perimeter fencing, and improving signage.

In future projects, it would be wise to include funding for an endowment with the initial commission, perhaps as a partnership with a parks foundation or other 501(c)(3). That would enable stewards of the land, such as “friends” groups, to maintain the sites as a public resource, even during an economic downturn. Such a group would still want to encourage community involvement and volunteering and pursue funding and grants for significant restoration projects, but multiple means of support would guarantee the maintenance of the property over time.

ONGOING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND STEWARDSHIP

Stewarding the art and the land requires ongoing collaboration between multiple governmental divisions dedicated to preserving the site as a public space. Only the public’s direct involvement will continue to justify these sites’ existence.

Over the years, contemporary artists have become increasingly engaged in the relationship between art and the landscape. At the Herbert Bayer Earthwork, we invite contemporary artists to renew these cultural landscapes with their energy. The Kent Arts Commission regularly partners with 4Culture Site Specific to host contemporary art installations and dance and music events. More recently, the commission has added community performances to the mix: Youth marimba and ukulele groups, Hawaiian dancers, and local poets contribute to a program that includes hands-on ecological art projects. During events, we provide tours...
of the site, and at the end of each event, a contemporary dance troupe leads the audience to the front of the park, mixing and moving through the Earthwork sculptural elements in a site-specific piece that allows visitors to see the land anew.

The Bayer Earthwork was conceived as a grand collaboration, and keeping the collaborative spirit alive keeps the space itself vital. The Earthwork’s 25th anniversary celebration in 2007 included the channeling herbert exhibition which presented Bayer’s influence through photographs, drawings, and essays by artists, landscape architects, and historians.

In 2008 this exhibition helped support the Earthwork’s local landmark nomination, resulting in an “exceptional significance” designation. This year the Herbert Bayer Earthwork was one of 25 historic sites selected to participate in the Seattle-Puget Sound Area Partners in Preservation Initiative. You can read the landmark nomination, explore the essays, learn about our events, and watch the video online at www.KentArts.org/Earthwork and www.facebook.com/GreenRiverEarthwork.

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3 Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring, published in 1962, raised awareness about the dangers of pesticide use and inspired a grassroots environmental movement in the United States.
5 The adoption of a percent-for-art funding mechanism in King County and Seattle preceded wide adoption of similar programs elsewhere. Philadelphia had established a percent-for-art program in 1959 called “Aesthetic Ornamentation of City Structures,” but Seattle and King County ordinances didn’t define the idea of art as ornament or object.
7 Ibid.
8 Cheryl dos Remédios, A Place for People: The Herbert Bayer Earthwork, 2009, color, 22 minutes, digital video. Interview with Cath Brunner, current director of 4Culture Public Art (previously the King County Arts Commission).
10 Earthwork: Land Reclamation as Sculpture, exhibit catalog, a project of the King County Arts Commission, published by the Seattle Art Museum, keynote address by Robert Morris, page 13.
12 A Place for People: The Herbert Bayer Earthwork. Interview with Kent Art Commissioner Carolyn Wiley.
13 Herbert Bayer, King County Arts Commission newsletter, August 1982.
14 In 1985 the City of Kent adopted a unique $2 per capita public art ordinance. This has proven to be a slow, yet steady, approach to public art acquisition, since projects are not based on capital project budgets that rise and fall, nor are they tied to a specific site. Ideally, municipalities should combine both systems: the $2 ordinance provides stability for administration and maintenance, as well as funding for underserved areas and special projects, while the percent-for-art mechanism funds art for capital projects in proportion to their scale.
ON THE COVER: Saint John’s Abbey Church, Collegeville, Minn., designed by Marcel Breuer in 1961.

PHOTO BY CHRISTINE MADRID FRENCH