The National Trust for Historic Preservation, a private, non-profit membership organization, champions preservation by providing leadership, education, advocacy, and resources to people working to preserve, improve, and enjoy the places that matter to them. Its Washington, DC headquarters staff, six regional offices, and 28 historic sites work with the Trust’s 270,000 members and thousands of local community groups in all 50 states. For more information, visit the National Trust’s website at www.nationaltrust.org.
Preserving Resources from the Recent Past

by Jeanne Lambin

The "recent past" is a term commonly used to describe historic resources younger than 50 years old. The number of resources is staggering; it is estimated that they make up approximately 70 percent of our built environment. The importance of mid-century, post-war, or "underage" resources has been the subject of numerous books, and there has been increasing interest and enthusiasm for the preservation of the recent past. Yet preservation of these resources poses significant challenges—some typical of most types of preservation efforts, some specific and unique.

The decades following World War II witnessed an explosion of architectural and engineering innovation and social change. As a result, the American landscape changed dramatically. Vast swaths of farmland disappeared beneath suburban-style ranch-house developments, new roads, and shopping malls. From the rubble of urban centers devastated by the Great Depression and urban renewal rose glass-and-steel skyscrapers, housing projects, modern municipal buildings, and public spaces. "Progress" was often synonymous with the destruction of historic architecture, which fell to make way for new schools, homes, strip malls, and factories.

The resulting legacy is an astonishing array of cultural resources. There are iconic buildings of international architectural significance such as Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House completed in 1951; designed landscapes such as Lawrence Halprin's Freeway Park in Seattle; Cold War sites such as the Titan II ICBM Launch Complex 373-5 Site in Arkansas; and sites associated with the Civil Rights Movement such as the Lorraine Motel in Tennessee.

The recent past story is certainly about the architectural icons and nationally significant historic sites, but it also needs to be told through the less prominent places that are equally important to a local community and its sense of place. From early fast-food restaurants and drive-through branch banks to post-war housing projects and suburban developments, these places have much to tell us about who we are today, who we were, and the many ways that we have lived during the past half-century.

Preserving and appreciating what remains of the recent past will be extremely important for telling the story of America after World War II. Unfortunately, many of these places are now seen as dated or unfashionable—and rarely valued as "historic." Far too often, these resources, whether simple or sublime, are perceived as expendable, unattractive, or unworthy of preservation.

Yet with these challenges comes a great opportunity to identify, interpret, and protect significant resources from one of the greatest building booms in the history of the world. Are extant preservation tools adequate or do we need new approaches? The answer is a little bit of both. This booklet looks at both old and new preservation tools. It identifies some of the unique challenges associated with preserving resources from the recent past, highlights innovative programs undertaken to preserve these resources, and outlines specific actions that organizations and communities can take to promote, protect, and save them.

Threats to Recent Past Resources

Resources from the recent past face many of the same problems that condemned the buildings that came before—lack of public appreciation, perceived obsolescence, demolition, development pressure, and insensitive alterations and additions. They also face threats that their pre-war counterparts did not. Many were constructed with fragile, experimental, or short-lived materials. In addition, because they are not yet 50 years old, many of the buildings and landscapes constructed during this post-war period are often mistakenly considered ineligible for historic designation. And finally, preservationists themselves often disagree on the significance of recent past resources. The following section looks at these threats in detail.

Lack of Appreciation

Every generation has a style of architecture that it considers expendable, unattractive, or associated with an unpleasant or challenging period of history. Today, many consider the architecture of the recent past to be as expendable as the architecture of the Victorian era once was.

Even within the preservation field, there is considerable debate on the preservation worthiness of the recent past. After all, these resources bear the stigma of an era that wiped out thousands and thousands of historic buildings to build...
What Style (or Type) Is It?

Architectural historians continue to debate how exactly to define Modernism, both stylistically and temporally, and don’t always agree on specific style names. One reason why few agreed-upon style names exist for this architecture is because architects were trying to create architecture without historical precedent, to honestly reflect technological advances and new materials.

In the past, architectural historians often used architectural details to define the style of a building. But many architects working in a modern idiom had certain distaste for ornamental details. Thus many “modern” buildings not executed in an easily recognizable revival style lack distinguishing clues and a neatly definable style. Just as the pattern and style books of previous generations encouraged architects to design in a particular fashion, “modern” architects were encouraged not to design buildings in an old established style.

In addition, many people forget that our current nomenclature took time to evolve. Decades of survey, evaluation, and documentation helped establish an agreed-upon nomenclature to describe the resources of the more remote past. We are still in the process of trying to develop that nomenclature for our more recent history.

Consequently, modern architecture is a term given to a number of building styles with similar characteristics, such as simplified forms and lack of excessive or applied ornament. However, the term does not begin to describe the broad range of styles that emerged during the mid-20th century.

To further complicate matters, people often use the terms Modern, modern, mid-century, post-war and the recent past interchangably. For the purposes of this guide, they are defined as follows:

**Modern**

There is much debate among scholars and professionals regarding the definition of Modern architecture and when the Modern Movement began in the United States. Some feel that Modern architecture (with a capital M) is different than modern architecture (with a small m). As a further complication, many people use modern and contemporary interchangeably to describe a more recent constructed building. Some feel that the term Modern casts too broad a brush and needs to be broken down into more specific style types. Others advocate for eschewing those style classifications. Scholars and professionals will no doubt continue to debate the use of the term Modern for decades to come. For the purposes of this guide Modern will be used as a general term to describe buildings built between the late 1940s and the mid-1960s. Characteristics include:

- Absence of historical references
- Use of new and experimental materials and construction techniques

**Mid-Century (1940s–1960s)**

Mid-century is useful term to describe the range of architecture from the 1940s to the 1960s. Because it is more of a temporal distinction rather than aesthetic, it encompasses the wide variety of types and styles built in the post-war decades. It often refers to resources constructed during or immediately after World War II.

**Post-war**

This is another useful term to describe the range of architecture built after World War II (although in some regions of the country, it might be more commonly understood to mean post-Civil War).
When it was constructed in 1961, the Pittsburgh Civic Arena was heralded for its innovative architecture and engineering. It was also part of a controversial urban renewal project that bisected a historically African-American neighborhood, and as time passed, the arena came to represent a painful chapter in the city's history.

— Photo by Adrian Scott Fine.

anew. It was the construction of many of these mid-century resources that caused preservationists to stand in front of the wrecking ball in the first place. Some preservationists don’t consider the resources of the recent past to merit much concern, while others wonder if an entirely new approach to preservation is needed because of the large number of sites to be preserved and the general lack of appreciation for these resources.

For some people, the recent past is just, well, too recent. Preservationists and the public alike have always debated how old a building must be in order to be “saved.” The refrain “It can’t be historic—I remember when it was built!” is commonly heard by recent past advocates.

Some resources from the recent past are associated with events that people would just as soon forget. Pittsburgh’s space age–style Civic Arena, for example, was constructed in 1961 as part of a controversial urban renewal project that bisected the heart of a historically African-American community, cut off part of the remaining community from downtown, and resulted in the displacement of more than 8,000 residents.

When it was completed, the Pittsburgh Civic Arena, today known as the Mellon Arena, was heralded for its innovative architecture and engineering. At the time of its completion, it was the largest retractable-dome-roofed structure in the world. Despite its architectural and historic significance, the Arena is not listed in the National Register, and despite the efforts of local advocates, it is not locally designated. Today the Arena is threatened with demolition and replacement with a new structure. Discussion of the preservation of the Arena provokes much debate that gets to the heart of very important issues.

How can the preservation of difficult sites be meaningfully and thoughtfully addressed when that history is recent, memorable, and, in some cases, still painful?

Much of the architecture of the recent past carries aesthetic baggage as well. For many, it is difficult to understand and appreciate. Most “old” and appreciated architectural styles have an abundance of ornament and decoration; the perceived “simplicity” of much post-war architecture conflicts with established notions of what “historic” architecture should look like. Modern architecture is very familiar, but it is often poorly understood. This can make it hard to distinguish a “good” or “bad” example of a resource and can make the critical process of survey, documentation, and evaluation subjective and challenging.
Alteration, Demolition, and Development Pressure

Just as homes, apartment blocks, factories, and office buildings that had weathered the Great Depression and World War II faced obsolescence after the war, so too do an increasing number of resources built in the post-war period. Many properties are now reaching or have already reached the age when they will be candidates for cosmetic changes, substantial alterations, or even demolition.

Many mid-century houses are being lost to the teardown trend—the practice of demolishing a smaller house and rebuilding a larger house on the same lot. Market forces and the lack of protection mean that homes from the recent past, from modest ranch houses to Modernist masterpieces, are particularly vulnerable to removal and replacement, often with much larger homes. In January 2007, a house designed in 1972 by Paul Rudolph (1918-1997), dean of Yale’s School of Architecture, was razed despite advocates’ attempts to halt its demolition. The new owners plan to build another house on the waterfront property.

The resources that do escape demolition, however, are often subject to inappropriate alterations. Depending on the scale of the building, these alterations can have a profound impact on the property’s appearance. Original materials are often removed or replaced because they are either difficult to repair, dated looking, or are no longer being manufactured.

For example, the Florsheim Building in Chicago underwent a dramatic redesign during its conversion in 1997 to residential use. Designed by the firm of Shaw, Metz & Dolio and completed in 1949, it was one of the first buildings constructed in downtown Chicago following World War II and was described in the AIA Guide to Chicago as “the first major Chicago structure to emphatically embrace the design elements of European modernism.” Unfortunately the new owners failed to preserve the design elements that distinguished the building, and it was irreparably and unsympathetically altered.

More and more soon-to-be-historic resources could face a similar fate. The United States is experiencing a building boom that rivals that of the years following World War II. According to a 2004 study by the Brookings Institution, Toward a New Metropolis: The Opportunity to Rebuild America, by the year 2030, half of the buildings in which Americans live, work, and shop will have been built after 2000. Improperly managed, this building boom could result in the destruction of much of our existing built environment. The study estimates that 20.1 million units of housing will be lost to demolition and that new construction will cover an area the size of Colorado.
The "50-Year Rule" and Other Local Age Restrictions

Part of the challenge in recognizing the significance of and protecting these properties is the so-called "50-year rule," which refers to the National Register of Historic Places criterion that ordinarily requires that a property be at least 50 years old to be listed in the National Register. Properties younger than 50 years old can be listed if they satisfy what is called Criteria Consideration G, which states that a property achieving significance within the past 50 years is eligible if it is of exceptional importance. Because the National Register allows for buildings to be nominated for their national, state, or local significance, it greatly expands the category of what can be considered exceptionally significant.

Despite this provision for underage resources, many people mistakenly believe a building must be 50 years old to be listed in the National Register and therefore don't pursue designation. In some cases, the state historic preservation office does not support or encourage the nomination of underage resources. This lack of support can result in bias in evaluating National Register applications or their outright rejection.

But while the National Register allows for properties less than 50 years old to be listed, many local governments impose a 50-year rule without exceptions. Thus, a property could be listed in the National Register but not be eligible for local landmark designation. Consequently, one of the biggest barriers to preservation is that many of these resources lack protection at the local level. Furthermore, the 50-year rule often contributes to a general perception that these resources don't merit preservation efforts or are "too young to be historic" even if they are eligible.

The issue of age is highly controversial. The age limit was established because it was felt that time and distance are needed to assess the significance of a resource. In some cases, builders and designers are still living, making it difficult to make objective assessments. Unfortunately, the current pace of development means that many resources never make it to the 50-year mark.

In spite of these challenges, communities across the country are finding innovative ways to draw attention to their post-war resources and to bring about their preservation. The following section will examine strategies and solutions that local advocates, organizations, and agencies have used to preserve and protect cultural resources from the recent past.

Engaging the Public and Policymakers

Educating the general public, policymakers, and others about the significance of the recent past, and raising their interest and concern, are critical components of any effort to preserve recent past resources.

As in all preservation efforts, advocates for the recent past must be prepared to counter indifference, apathy, and lack of appreciation. Yet there has been a tremendous increase of interest in mid-20th-century culture in recent years. From television programs to product design to advertising, popular culture clearly illustrates this comeback. "Retro Modernisms" was the theme of Time magazine's 2004 special style and design issue.

Many of the people attracted to the architecture and design of this era do not necessarily consider themselves to be preservationists or are unaware of the greater preservation movement. That doesn't mean they can't be converted. Preservation organizations throughout the country are capitalizing on this interest. They are coming up with innovative programs—or twists on old ones—to raise awareness and appreciation of the recent past, to preserve and protect resources, and to engage a new audience.

Tours and Special Events

Tours are a tried-and-true method of building appreciation for historic resources. Organizations such as the LA Conservancy, the DC Preservation League, Preservation Dallas, the Palm Springs Modern Committee, and many others have found tours to be a great way to instill appreciation of not-yet officially "historic" resources, to attract new members, and to raise funds.

The LA Conservancy Modern Committee, or ModCom, is a volunteer group that was formed in 1984 in response to the rapid destruction of Los Angeles's post-war heritage. The Modern Committee researches and nominates buildings for landmark designation, serves as an advocate for Modern design, maintains an active discussion board on its website, and, with its parent organization, has engaged in a number of high-profile advocacy battles.

In addition to all these activities, ModCom runs a popular tour program highlighting the rich modern heritage of the region. Past programs include a sold-out bus tour and self-driving tour called How Modern Is My Valley: Touring Post-War San Fernando Valley, created for the 2000 National Preservation Conference in Los Angeles. In 2003 ModCom offered Built by Beckett, a tribute to the celebrated architecture of the Los Angeles firm of Wilson and
Beckett and its founder Welton Beckett. More than 700 people attended this centennial celebration at Beckett’s Cinerama Dome. The following weekend, revelers could enjoy docent-led tours of classic Beckett-designed buildings.

Spectacular Vernacular, its most recent tour, featured a lecture by Alan Hess, author of *Ranch House*, and a self-driving tour that, as described in promotional materials, illustrated “some of the tangible and philosophical linkages between high-style (unique, architect-designed) modernism and everyday modernism.” The self-guided tour booklets produced for the driving tour can continue to be used by visitors and residents.

Preservation Dallas introduced its highly successful tours in 2001. The first tour, Mid-Century Modern, attracted 250 people and featured seven houses and a panel lecture on modern architecture in Dallas. Every year more and more people attend the event, which presents a different set of houses each year. The organization is now developing a tour showcasing ranch houses.

Noting the popularity of the tours, in 2004 Preservation Dallas launched its annual Dallas Modern Expo: A Celebration of Modernism—an exhibition and sale of 20th-century modern furniture and decorative arts. In 2005 more than 500 people attended the two-day fundraising and friend-raising event. The Modern Expo opening night party provides an opportunity for those interested in mid-century architecture and design to meet like-minded people. The Dallas Modern lecture series, held in conjunction with the Expo, features nationally known speakers who give presentations on topics ranging from architecture to fashion to landscape design and preservation.

These events are hosted by the Dallas Modern Committee of Preservation Dallas, which works with both private and public entities to ensure that the legacy of 20th-century architecture and design does not go unnoticed. As a result of promoting the recent past, Preservation Dallas has experienced a growth in younger members. These new members have inspired the organization to recognize a broader cultural history that includes roadside architecture and the more unusual residential designs from the post-war period.

**Endangered Places Lists**

Tours can be a great way to raise general awareness of a community’s significant architecture, but more focused attention may be needed when such properties are threatened by demolition, alteration, or neglect. Producing annual or regular “watch lists” of endangered historic places can be an excellent way to generate publicity, raise awareness of threatened resources, explain why the are significant and worthy of protection, and advocate for their preservation.

In recent years, dozens of organizations, such as Landmarks Illinois, Preservation New Jersey,
the Tennessee Preservation Trust, Preservation Texas, and the Florida Trust have included resources from the recent past on their endangered lists. Some organizations make a conscious effort to list more recent properties, as a way to keep the awareness of the recent past in the public eye.

In 2003 the Preservation League of New York State listed the 2 Columbus Circle building in New York City on its annual Seven to Save list. The famed building, designed in 1964 by Edward Durell Stone as Huntington Hartford’s Gallery of Modern Art, was threatened with a dramatic alteration of its distinctive facade by its new owners, the Museum of Arts and Design. The National Trust for Historic Preservation also placed 2 Columbus Circle on its annual list of America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places in 2006. Listing the property helped draw nationwide attention to it and sparked intense debate as to its preservation worthiness. Like many buildings from the period, it was not protected by any landmark designation. Despite an international outpouring of concern and a number of lawsuits, the NYC Landmarks Commission refused to hold a public hearing and declined to consider the building’s eligibility for landmark status.

The battle to save the building’s facade has been lost, but the extensive media coverage of the effort to save it brought national attention to the importance of mid-century resources. New York Magazine called the effort the biggest landmarks coalition since the successful battle to save New York’s Grand Central Station.

Workshops and Other Outreach

Workshops and seminars are useful ways to educate specific audiences about resources from the recent past. In 2006 the Midwest Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation in cooperation with the Midwest Preservation Institute conducted a workshop for homeowners called Preserving Your Rambler from the Inside Out. During the evening workshop, participants learned the basics of historic preservation and the larger history of post-war residential architecture, and then discovered how to diagnose problems, prioritize projects, and find the appropriate replacement materials to keep their homes looking true to their original architecture.

It is equally important to educate those involved in the decision-making process about the importance of mid-century resources. That includes the state and municipal historic preservation officers who will be deciding on the validity of national and local historic registrar nominations, the local planning agency staff who will be making relevant zoning and permit decisions, and the preservation commission members and planning staff that will be reviewing and enforcing the applications and actions of individual property owners.

Some state historic preservation offices have created a training program to educate historic preservation commission members who might not be as familiar with the architecture of the mid-century and not as adept at assessing its significance as they are more mature resources. In 2006 the Illinois

Listing a site on a “watch list” of endangered historic sites is a good way to raise awareness of recent past resources that are threatened with demolition. Colorado Preservation Inc., listed Hangar 61 (above left) on its endangered historic places list when the building was threatened by the construction of the new Denver airport. Prentice Hospital, designed by Bertrand Goldberg and completed in 1974, was listed on Landmarks Illinois’ Chicagoland Watch List in 2005.

Historic Preservation Agency and the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions organized a one-day training workshop for historic preservation commissions on preserving modern architecture. More than 100 commission members and staff from throughout the state attended.

Training programs and classes for real estate agents are helping agents to realize the potential of the post-war market and promote these properties to their clients. For example, Preservation Dallas expanded its Historic House Specialist classes for real estate agents to feature post-war houses and information on forms and styles for modern architecture. Agents now describe the properties they list as “Exquisite Mid-Century Modern,” and “Mid-Century Style.” These professionals are turning up around the country. The advertising section of Atomic Ranch—a quarterly magazine devoted to 1940s to 1970s ranch houses and modernist designs—features dozens of agents who now specialize in mid-century properties. Hundreds more can be found by searching on the internet.

Surveying Resources from the Recent Past

One of the first steps toward preserving and protecting cultural resources is identifying which resources merit protection. An architectural survey is a valuable tool for identifying potentially significant resources before they are threatened. Surveys can establish priorities for pursuing historic designation now or in the future, and for planning further research. The survey process and findings can also be used to increase public awareness and appreciation of more recent resources.

As more resources are coming of age, there is a clear need to embark on new surveys and to update existing ones. However, limited budgets make this increasingly difficult for many preservation organizations and agencies. Getting the funding for or finding the staff time to manage a survey of the obviously old and historic resources is challenging enough, never mind securing funding for a survey of ranch houses, gas stations, and strip malls.

Furthermore, the prospect of surveying these resources can be daunting. Not only is the number of resources to be evaluated staggering but the variety of types and styles is also tremendous. The recent past is not some great homogenous mass of stylistic similarity. It abounds with regional variations, local interpretations, and individual expression.

Despite these challenges, many communities are forging ahead, embarking on new surveys, updating existing ones, or developing new methodologies to address the vast number of buildings to be surveyed.

Survey 101: Understanding the Basics

In order to better comprehend the challenges of surveying the recent past, it is important to understand the basics of cultural resource surveys. National Register Bulletin No. 24: Guidelines for Local Surveys: A Basis for Preservation Planning defines survey as the “process of identifying and gathering data on a group of historic resources. It includes field survey—the physical search for and recording of historic resources on the ground—but it also includes planning and background research before the field survey begins; organization and presentation of survey proceeds; and the development of inventories.”

The Secretary of the Interior’s Guidelines for Identification describes two general types of surveys: reconnaissance and intensive. A reconnaissance-level survey is intended to identify general types and styles of properties and locate some specific examples of those types and styles. By contrast, an intensive-level survey is intended to identify precisely and completely all historic properties in the survey area.

Surveying should be seen as an ongoing process. All surveys need to be added to and amended over time to reflect the current state of resources included in the inventory. Ideally, the results of the survey should be integrated into the community’s overall planning process. In addition to being used to create an inventory of resources, a survey should have multiple objectives, which can include establishing a historic context, educating and involving the community, and identifying areas for future research. Such was the case in Las Vegas.

Rediscovering Lost History in Las Vegas

In 2002 researchers working for City of Las Vegas Planning and Development Department on a survey of the Historic Westside Area discovered two newspaper articles published in December 1949 announcing the opening of a new subdivision named Westside Park (today known as Berkley Square), which featured 155 homes designed by noted African-American architect Paul Revere Williams. Prior to the discovery of the articles, there was no known documentation of Williams’ role in the development of the subdivision. Although the information was intriguing, the subdivision was outside of the researchers’ survey boundaries. The informa-
tion was included in the historic context statement for the Historic Westside Area.

In 2004 discussions about moving a portion of Williams' La Concha Motel, which was slated for demolition, sparked renewed interest in the architect's work. The Las Vegas Historic Preservation Commission voted to include the subdivision in a 2004 survey and hired a consultant to research and document the neighborhood.

The intensive-level survey included the entire subdivision as it was originally plotted in 1949 and recorded in 1954. A survey form was completed for each of the sites within the subdivision and a historic context statement was prepared that established the history and value of the buildings within the context of Las Vegas history and mid-20th-century residential design.

The survey found that Berkley Square is significant as the first minority-built subdivision in Nevada. It is also important for its association with Williams as well as one of its financiers, Thomas L. Berkley, an African-American attorney, media owner, developer, and Civil Rights advocate from Oakland, Calif.

The consultant's report established Berkley Square's eligibility for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. The City of Las Vegas Historic Preservation Commission plans to work with the Neighborhood Services Department to produce an educational brochure on the area's historic significance and provide information to the local and National registers. Area residents have expressed interest in obtaining historic designation for the area, and the historic preservation commission is excited about the prospect of designating this historically rich African-American neighborhood.

**Updating an Existing Survey in Chicago**

As said before, surveying should be an ongoing process. Between 1984 and 1997, the City of Chicago Commission on Chicago Landmarks completed an architectural survey of every property in Chicago built before 1940. Even though the Chicago Landmark Ordinance imposes no age restriction on properties eligible for local landmark designation, the commission selected a 50-year cut-off date for the survey to ensure that enough time had passed to evaluate a property in a historic and architectural context. The commission also anticipated that this survey would be augmented and added to in the future as more properties came of age.

In 1998, using a grant from the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, the commission began a citywide survey of resources built between 1940 and 1976. Commission staff chose to conduct a reconnaissance-level survey. That's both because the commission lacked the resources to conduct an intensive-level survey of all post-1940 resources in the city, and because the goal of the survey was to locate properties likely to possess architectural significance and not just every resource constructed between 1940 and 1976.

The challenge was to locate potentially significant resources with only a limited amount of field investigation. The survey relied more on background research, rather than field investigation, as the primary means to locate spe-
Several Illinois preservation organizations have worked together to set up an online survey to gather information about Illinois properties from the recent past. The information will help in locating communities with concentrations of significant resources.

- Illustration courtesy of Landmarks Illinois.

cific examples of resource types and styles. For example, Architectural journals from the period were examined to identify resources that received critical acclaim when they were completed. These resources were then added to the database. Using this methodology, the background research also served to develop the context for the resources and create a model for predicting where similar resources might be found. To better understand the significance of the resources, surveyors developed a general historic context and timeline which outlined the architectural development that took place during the period. Primarily through background research, the survey identified almost 500 resources. At the conclusion of the survey it was recommended that the commission create an advisory committee and culled from the inventory a list of 20 landmarks of exceptional significance and target them for future landmark designation.

The Illinois Initiative on Recent Past Architecture

Landmarks Illinois, a statewide preservation organization, has facilitated a cooperative effort among several Illinois preservation organizations to launch a survey of recent past resources. The Illinois Initiative on Recent Past Architecture (IIRPA) has set up an online survey to gather information on Illinois properties from the recent past. Preservation advocates can go to a website (www.landmarks.org/cgi/forms/forms.cgi?form=8) to fill out survey forms and submit them for inclusion in the database. The survey helps Landmarks Illinois identify threatened resources and also locate communities with concentrations of resources and an interest in preservation. Through the survey, Landmarks Illinois has identified two communities in suburban Chicago, Olympia Fields and Riverwoods, as potential National Register historic districts. Landmarks has submitted information to the state historic preservation office for a Determination of Eligibility for the National Register.

Discover Dallas!

Preservation Dallas made use of its survey to promote understanding and appreciation of underused resources. In 2002 the organization launched Discover Dallas!, a city-wide architectural survey to identify significant properties from the 19th century through the mid-1960s. The impetus for the survey was board members’ frustration with the city’s architectural surveys, which were scattered, out-of-date, and hard to access. Results of the Discover Dallas! survey will be compiled into a comprehensive database documenting all the properties within the Dallas city limits built before 1965.

The challenge? How to collect all the information for the database. The task of surveying Dallas was a monumental one. How could it be accomplished in a rea-
sonable time frame, raise awareness and appreciation of Dallas’s architectural history, engage new audiences, and not break the bank?

Rather than hire a team of consultants to conduct the survey, Preservation Dallas hired a survey coordinator and tapped into the power, enthusiasm, and community knowledge of volunteers to complete the task. The survey coordinator created a volunteer training program, and volunteers participated in different workshops to prepare them for their research and fieldwork. To provide expertise and oversight, a committee structure was created. The research committee documented the history of individual properties using fill-in-the-blank forms. The photo committee helped develop photographic standards for the survey and web posting and helped the surveyors master the camera equipment and archive the photos. The architecture committee, composed of architects, architectural historians, and preservationists, reviewed survey forms for accuracy and assigned style names to the properties surveyed. An online form on the Preservation Dallas website made it easy for interested individuals to sign up to volunteer.

The survey began with documentation of existing landmarks and historic and conservation districts and then expanded to include neighborhoods that had never been documented. Many of the neighborhood surveys were undertaken by neighborhood groups which were eager to participate in the program. Many of these groups represented neighborhoods with a rich architectural history, populated by residents who cared not only about documenting their community but about protecting it for future generations.

The Discover Dallas! survey demonstrates that it is possible to conduct a large-scale survey using volunteers. It also showed how volunteer participation can increase awareness and appreciation of buildings of the recent past, which is the key to their preservation. There is now greater concern for the post-war neighborhoods that were included in the survey. For example, the Wynnewood North (1947-1960) neighborhood has been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and the neighborhood leaders are using its eligibility status to make sure that an interstate highway project—the Southern Gateway—does not adversely affect the neighborhood.

**GIS Analysis in Scottsdale, Ariz.**

Technological tools can also play an important role in the survey process. The City of Scottsdale, Ariz., recently undertook a survey of post-World War II multi-family housing using Geological Information System (GIS) analysis. GIS is a collection of computer hardware, software, and geographic data used for capturing, managing, analyzing, and displaying all forms of geographically referenced information.
GIS information on building materials and construction dates, for example, can be linked to addresses, parcels, or streets within a network. That information can then be layered to give users a better understanding of how all the data work together. For example, GIS could be used to identify all the brick, multifamily housing units built in 1945 on a particular set of streets.

In the Scottsdale survey, surveyors used the Maricopa County Assessor’s records to create a database that contains information about the physical characteristics of the individual buildings and associated subdivision development. This information was then used to establish the overall pattern of development and the character-defining features of the resources in advance of extensive fieldwork. It also facilitated evaluation. The physical patterns of development could be matched with historical trends, and important development influences and themes were easier to identify. During the study, 101 post-World War II multi-family projects were surveyed and documented on Arizona Historic Property Inventory forms. Of those, 38 were determined potentially eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

**Evaluating and Designating Resources**

Once a property has been surveyed, it needs to be evaluated to see if it meets the criteria for National Register listing or local designation. Listing can not only provide some protections for these resources, as well as some financial incentives for owners to maintain and improve them, but it also legitimizes resources in the public eye. Gaining historic designation, whether at the national, state, or local level, provides credibility—a key tool for building public support. Without this, advocating for an underaged resource is far more challenging.

*National Register Bulletin No. 22: Guidelines for Evaluating and Nominating Properties that Have Achieved Significance Within the Past Fifty Years* (www.crnp.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb222/) offers directions for evaluating the significance of resources of the recent past and provides instructions on preparing statements of significance for National Register nominations. Although these guidelines were written for preparing National Register nominations, they can also be useful in helping to prepare a nomination for local landmark designation.

The bulletin sets out eight guidelines to help evaluate resources:

- historic context
- scholarly evaluation
- fragile or short-lived resources
- time
- comparative evaluation
- associations with living persons
- properties in historic districts
- justification

**Historic Context**

The first step in evaluating underaged properties is to establish and describe the historic context of the resource. A historic context statement describes the larger environment or situation in which a property or group of properties evolved and all the historic circumstances, factors, and larger trends or patterns that influenced its development. As stated in the bulletin, “knowledge of historic context permits us to understand the relative importance of the resource in question. Evaluating a property within its historic context ensures accuracy in understanding its role and in making comparisons among similar resources.”

Properties can have multiple contexts as well. For example, the U.S. Department of Energy’s Hanford site, which encompasses 560 square miles straddling the Columbia River in southeastern Washington State, has been determined eligible for the National Register. Since 1943, the Hanford site has existed as a protected area for activities primarily related to the production of radioactive materials for national defense. In addition, the Hanford site contains an extensive number of aboriginal archeological sites and Native American traditional cultural properties, along with pre-Hanford Euro-American sites (primarily archeological in nature), and a considerable number of Manhattan Project/Cold War-era buildings and structures. As a result of its complex and layered history, the site has five associated historic contexts.

Determining the historic context of recent past resources can be challenging for other reasons too. Scholarly research on the key historical themes of the recent past is still being developed. And it can be difficult to tease out the hidden histories that often unfold within the walls of seemingly non-descript buildings.

**Scholarly Evaluation**

A key aid in developing the context and establishing the significance of the building is to determine if the resource has been the subject of some type of scholarly research. This research is found in journals of architectural history, social history, landscape architecture, designing, industrial architecture, and urban development as well as previous National Register nominations.

Establishing the significance of well-researched and documented resources can be comparatively straightforward because of the
amount of documentation available. For example, the glass-and-steel apartment towers at 860-880 N. Lakeshore Drive in Chicago, designed by Ludwig Mies Van der Rohe and completed in 1952, have long been the subject of scholarly evaluation. The apartments were listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1980 and listed as a City of Chicago Landmark in 1996.

Less straightforward is the problem of how to evaluate the context and significance of resources that are not well documented and have not been the subject of scholarly evaluation. Fortunately, in recent years there has been a tremendous increase in the amount of information available to assist in the process. Although the body of available scholarship still needs to be developed, more and more scholars are turning their attention to the period. There are websites devoted to the history and evolution of supermarkets, inventories of drive-in movie theaters, books on tiki-bars, and journal articles on the evolution of the ranch house. Many cities now post their surveys online. Other organizations post architectural style guides, local designation forms, or National Register forms.

Fragile or Short-Lived Resources
Sometimes a resource can be significant because it has survived when others of its kind have not. For example, commercial buildings and chain stores are often continually updated as design prototypes change. A notable survivor is the McDonald’s in Downey, Calif. Built in 1953, the Downey McDonald’s was the prototype for the franchises that followed. The Downey McDonald’s was determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places in 1984. The building was damaged by an earthquake and threatened with demolition in 1994. Following a spirited advocacy campaign by the LA Conservancy and inclusion on the National Trust’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places list, McDonald’s Corporation repaired and reopened the restaurant. Now a popular tourist attraction, the Downey restaurant is the oldest surviving McDonald’s in the world.

Time
The 50-year period is an arbitrary duration established to ensure that enough time has passed to be able to evaluate a property in its historic context. Generally we tend to understand the passage of time not one year at a time but in segments or periods. Has sufficient time passed in order to enable evaluation of the period in which the resource is significant? When did the property achieve significance? Architectural significance is usually tied to construction dates but if the resource is historically significant, its date of construction
Although nominating properties associated with a living person is generally discouraged, there are exceptions, such as Philip Johnson’s Glass House, completed in 1949. The house has national significance for both its architecture and its association with Johnson, whose work as an architect and critic has had a profound effect on the course of 20th-century architecture.

— Photo by Carol Highsmith.

doesn’t always correspond neatly with its period of significance. Sometimes the more recently a property has achieved significance, the more challenging it is to demonstrate exceptional importance.

**Comparative Evaluation**

How does a resource compare to other similar resources of the same style, type, or time period? Exceptional significance is defined as the measure of a property’s importance within the appropriate historic context.

In understanding comparative evaluation, it is important to remember that for National Register listing, significance can be established at the national, state, or local level. A building may not be considered exceptionally significant at the national level, yet it can be exceptionally significant at the local level. Is it the best example of an apartment building of its era at the local, state, or national level? How does it compare to similar types of property from the era in the same geographic area?

The Town House Apartments in Springfield, Ill., completed in 1958 and listed in the National Register in 2005, were designed by the Chicago firm of Shaw, Metz & Dolio. In the nomination form, the building is described as “an exceptionally significant example of 1950s urban, high-rise design and planning. It is rare to find such a large example of stylish luxurious Modernist design in cities the size of Springfield.” The Town House is a splendid, exceptionally significant example of Modernist design at the local level. Making a case for local significance can be a much more manageable goal than establishing national or even statewide significance.

**Association with Living Persons**

Nominating properties associated with a living person is generally discouraged to avoid using the National Register to “endorse the work or reputation” of a living person. In some instances, such as with Philip Johnson’s Glass House in New Canaan, Conn., sufficient scholarship and historic perspective existed to assess the significance of the property. Considered one of the masterworks of modern American architecture, Philip Johnson’s Glass House was completed in 1949 and listed in the National Register in 1997. The house has national significance for both its architecture and its association with Johnson, whose work as an architect and critic has had a profound effect on the course of 20th-century architecture.

**Properties in Historic Districts**

Properties younger than 50 years old can be listed in the National Register if they are an integral part of a National Register district. They do not need to be individually eligible or exceptionally significant to be listed as a contributing resource if they fall within the period of significance for the district and are associated with one or more defined areas of significance. For example, if the period of significance for a residential district is 1900–1959 and there is a ranch house in the district that was built in 1959, because it falls within the period of significance, it does not need to be an exceptional example of a ranch house to be considered part of the district. However, if the majority of buildings within the district are younger than 50 years old, exceptional importance must still be demonstrated for the district as a whole to be listed.

**Justification**

When nominating an undergraduate property to the National Register, a clear, compelling, and documented case for establishing its exceptional importance must be presented. The Statement of Significance must contain a straightforward explanation of the property’s significance as it relates to the specific Register criteria as well as the justification of the determination that the property is exceptionally significant. Referring to nomination forms for properties that were successfully listed in the National Register can provide examples of how to establish the exceptional significance of a property.
Pursuing National Register Listing

Establishing the significance of a cultural resource is an important part of protecting it. The National Register generally does not provide properties protection from privately funded actions; however, it does trigger consideration in the planning for federal or federally assisted projects. Because there are potential tax benefits for commercial properties (and, in some states, also for residences) and because it does not impose limitations on what owners can or cannot do to their property as long as no federal funding or permits are involved, National Register listing can sometimes be more palatable to property owners than a state or local designation, especially in a pro-property rights environment.

Preparing a National Register nomination form is a time-consuming and labor-intensive process. Nomination forms can be submitted by anyone. One need not own the building to submit a form, but owners must consent in order for a building to be officially listed in the Register once it has been determined eligible for listing. Forms are prepared by a variety of people including local preservation organizations, property owners, consultants, local government staff, and state historic preservation office staff. Prior to beginning the National Register nomination process, it is important to contact the local historic preservation commission (if there is one) and the state historic preservation office to discuss the project. Many states offer a preliminary determination of eligibility, so it is possible to find out if a property is potentially eligible before going through the nomination process.

Not all state historic preservation offices or National Register review boards view recent past properties the same way. Some prefer not to consider properties until they come of age; others actively encourage nominations for significant underage properties or properties that have just come of age. Even with the provision for exceptional significance, listing an underage property can be a challenge. Currently, properties that were less than 50 years old at the time of listing make up about 3 percent of the total listings in the National Register.

Seeking Historic Designation and Other Protections at the Local Level

The best way to protect a historic property is at the local level. More than 2,300 municipalities have enacted ordinances creating preservation commissions or architectural review boards with the power to regulate exterior changes to all buildings designated for their historical or architectural significance. When many communities established their historic preservation ordinances, they followed the National Register guidelines but did not create a provision for exceptional significance. As a result, in communities with an age restriction, the “50-year rule” (or other cut-off number) for historic designation can be an obstacle for preserving many recent past resources. If a building cannot achieve national, state, or local designation, it can be difficult to convince the public of its quality and value, or to build proactive support for it at the local level.

If a local commission has an age restriction, attempting to roll it back can be a risky undertaking, because, in amending the ordinance, the entire ordinance is usually scrutinized. Opponents of the historic preservation ordinance might view this as opportunity to weaken or rescind the existing ordinance. In order to prevent this tampering, there needs to be solid political and public support for amending the age restriction. Some communities misread the political climate and level of public support, and not only fail to roll back the age restriction but also end up with a weaker ordinance than they started with. Other communities have crafted a successful strategy, garnering political and public support and making a compelling case for amending the ordinance. In 2002 the City of Ormond Beach, Fla., successfully decreased its age restriction from 75 years to 50 years to be in keeping with the national standards.

If amending the local ordinance isn’t an option, what is the best way to work with the existing system? The first step is to remember that properties younger than 50 years old can at least be nominated
to the National Register if they are of exceptional significance at the local level. National Register listing can raise awareness of the importance of a resource and be used to garner public support while waiting for the resource to come of age for local designation.

Preparing in advance for future listings, such as having an up-to-date survey of the community’s recent past resources, is also key. New York City, for example, maintains a waiting list of significant resources to be considered for designation once they cross the temporal eligibility threshold of 30 years. Many communities actively gather information, prepare research and documentation, and work with property owners, so that they are prepared to move forward with designation when the resource comes of age. This information can also prove valuable in 11th-hour legal battles, helping to convince property owners and community leaders that the property is worth saving.

Advocacy groups might follow the example of architect Robert A. M. Stern, who prepared a list of 35 buildings that he thought should be New York City landmarks. His list of “Modern Landmarks in Waiting” was announced in 1996 at a lecture sponsored by the New York Landmarks Conservancy and included buildings not yet 30 years old as well as ones that had crossed the age threshold. Stern remarked that landmarking should not be done “only at midnight, when some building is about to be torn down but should serve as a signal that a building has architectural importance.”

Ultimately, the intensity of development pressure will be a major factor in determining an appropriate strategy for protecting recent past resources in a community. In areas that are experiencing rapid development and the loss of significant resources, other regulatory tools, such as new zoning, overlay zones or districts, and conservation districts, might be needed to protect important properties while they can still be protected—whether or not historic designation is also being pursued. While a detailed discussion of all the regulatory tools available is beyond the scope of this booklet, such approaches are worth exploring if development pressures are threatening large tracts of post-war resources. For more information see the Resource Guide on page 22.

In other communities, where there is less development pressure or perhaps where there is community resistance to preserving more recent resources, a more gradual approach is needed, which often should include obtaining historic designations.

Advantages of Historic Designation for Property Owners

Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits
Since 1986, federal historic rehabilitation tax credits have been available to encourage private investment in the rehabilitation of income-producing historic properties. This program provides a 20 percent federal income tax credit for the rehabilitation expenses of a certified historic structure (one that is listed individually in the National Register or located in a registered historic district and certified as being of historical significance to the district). The rehabilitation must be done according to the standards set by the Secretary of the Interior. Many states offer state tax credits to augment the federal tax credit and some states offer historic homeowner tax credits.

Using the rehab tax credit for the rehabilitation of recent past resources can be tricky. Many of the resources were constructed with experimental materials or materials that are no longer in production. Repair and, if necessary, replication and replacement can be difficult. And, as noted earlier, getting undergarage buildings listed in the National Register—a requirement for receiving the credit—can be tough.

Despite these obstacles, there are some success stories. With the help of the federal rehab tax credit, the TWA headquarters in Kansas City, Mo., constructed in 1955, was rehabilitated for office and retail space in 2006. The Gas Company Lofts in Los Angeles, constructed in 1960 as part of a complex of buildings that served as the headquarters of the Southern California Gas Company, now feature apartments and retail space. The Hilliard Homes in Chicago, constructed in 1966 and designed by architect Bertrand Goldberg as public housing, were listed in the National Register in 1999, even though they were not yet 30 years old. The Hilliard Homes were rehabilitated in 2006 for continued residential use with the help of the federal historic rehabilitation tax credits.

Constructed in 1955, the 12-story Superior Oil building in Los Angeles was designed by Claude Beelman, who was responsible for many high-rise office buildings in Los Angeles. The federal rehab tax credit was used to help transform the modern-era office building into a hotel, complete with roof-top pool and bar. The innovative project was written up in dozens of magazines including Vanity Fair and Travel and Leisure.

General Motors is using the federal rehab tax credit to renovate its modernistic Technical Center, which is located in Warren, Mich.
Completed in 1953, the 1,000-acre complex was designed by Eero Saarinen and landscape architect Thomas Church. David Witt, program manager for the Warren Campus of General Motors, points out that “the financial potential that the 20 percent rehabilitation tax credit brings has allowed us to pursue types of renovation and restoration that would ordinarily be cost-prohibitive. We are trying to duplicate a number of the Center's original features, such as the original curtain wall. But these types of features often have related costs: they can be difficult to obtain and usually require special fabrication. But we can point to the fact that the 20 percent federal tax credit on all renovation work on historically significant buildings will more than offset these premiums.”

Schools, hospitals, commercial buildings, industrial facilities, gas stations, car dealerships, hotels, office buildings, municipal buildings, parking garages, and military bases just scratch the surface of potential projects. Increasingly, even developers who have never used rehabilitation tax credits for “older” buildings are now looking for opportunities to rehab mid-century properties with the help of the credit, to capitalize on the renewed popular interest in this design era.

Thousands of residential properties are also prime candidates for rehab, especially in states that have a historic homeowner tax credit. Perhaps the greatest potential lies in post World War II-era suburban developments. Many garden apartment complexes and single-family subdivisions are worth a second look. While the properties might not be individually significant, they are often cohesive communities linked by design and landscaping and, although the architectural and cultural merit of these suburban communities has not been universally embraced, many have already been listed in the National Register or designated as local or state historic districts.

**Protective Easements**

If there is a sympathetic owner, historic preservation easements can also be brought into service to protect a younger historic property from demolition and/or alteration. A preservation or conservation easement is a private legal right given by the owner of a property to a qualified nonprofit organization or governmental entity for the purpose of protecting the conservation and preservation values of the property. Under the terms of a preservation easement, a property owner grants a portion of, or interest in, his or her property rights to an organization whose mission includes historic preservation.

In exchange, property owners who donate qualified preservation easements to qualified easement-holding organizations may be eligible for a charitable contribution deduction from their federal income taxes for the value of the historic preservation easement—provided that the contribution meets the standards of the Internal Revenue Service.

Once recorded, an easement becomes part of the property’s chain of title and usually “runs with the land” in perpetuity, thus binding not only the owner who grants the easement but all future owners as well. This provides assurance to the owner of a historic or cultural property that the property’s intrinsic values will be preserved through subsequent ownership.

**Protecting Post-War Neighborhoods**

According to the 2000 census, half of the extant houses in the United States were built between the 1940s and 1960s. After World War II, home building and suburban development took place at an unprecedented rate. Patterns of spread-out residential development began with the railroad and surged with expansion of the interstate highway system. Increased automobile ownership and new roadways meant that architects, builders, and developers were no longer bound to build housing along public transit networks, and low density auto-centric suburban development became the norm. Thanks to federal loan programs and a massive federally subsidized home building program, home ownership was a reality for more and more Americans.
Dedicated and hardworking residents played a key role in getting Arapahoe Acres in Englewood, Colo., listed in the National Register in 1998. The neighborhood is composed of 124 homes built from 1949 to 1957.

Photo by James Lindberg.

As development patterns continue to ripple out, the older, post-war subdivisions are particularly vulnerable to the whims of public taste and larger economic trends. Although some mid-century residential resources are being surveyed, relatively few post-World War II subdivisions and neighborhoods have been listed in the National Register of Historic Places or locally designated.

As the Discover Dallas survey demonstrates, neighborhood groups are well poised to be preservation advocates. As residents, they are invested in the community, and as fellow property owners, they often can make a compelling case for preserving and protecting mid-century neighborhoods for future generations. The efforts of the neighborhood groups highlighted below provide models for success.

Arapahoe Acres, Englewood, Colo.

Arapahoe Acres, in Englewood, Colo., is composed of 124 individually designed homes built from 1949 to 1957. It was the first post-war subdivision to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and area residents played a key role in getting it designated.

In 1990, recognizing the importance of their community, a group of neighborhood residents prepared a history of Arapahoe Acres. This information was included in a booklet for homeowners which also contained information on understanding the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation as they applied to Arapahoe Acres. This neighborhood history was used as the basis for the successful application to the National Register.

The group then decided not to pursue local designation. Instead it created an informal organization named the Arapahoe Acres Historic Preservation Network to instill a preservation ethic in the community and promote the preservation of the unique character of the architecture in a “friendly, informative, and non-confrontational manner.”

In 1999, in partnership with Historic Denver, Inc., the Arapahoe Network successfully applied for a $60,000 grant from the Colorado Historical Fund. The grant allowed the group to create an illustrated companion volume to the existing history book, which helped homeowners understand how to preserve the architectural integrity of their homes. The new publication was distributed to all property owners. The Arapahoe Network established a mini-grant program that could be used by homeowners to assist with planning home preservation projects. The organization created a website (www.arapahoeacres.org) and held an educational workshop to share information about home preservation projects with the neighborhood and community at large. The Network also established an advisory group of design and preservation professionals and contractors sensitive to the architecture of Arapahoe Acres who can assist in making informed individual and neighborhood preservation plans.

The group recently changed its name to Arapahoe Acres, Building Community and Promoting Historic Preservation. It currently enjoys strong community support. Residents value the character of their homes and appreciate the access to expertise to help them make the “right” preservation decisions. A culture of preservation extends beyond the community; area real estate agents now market homes in Arapahoe Acres as “historic.”

Preserving Eichler Neighborhoods in Palo Alto, Calif.

In 2005, after a four-year effort, preservationists in Palo Alto, Calif., were successful in getting two neighborhoods created by noted developer Joseph Eichler—Green Gables and Green Meadows—listed in the National Register of Historic Preservation. The neighborhoods are considered among the earliest and best preserved ones developed by Eichler.

The effort to have the properties listed in the National Register began in 2001 with the formation of the Historic Quest Committee by Barry Brisco, owner of an Eichler home in San Mateo Highlands, and Marty Arbo, founder of the for-profit Eichler Network, a publishing venture which includes a website, newsletter, and other resources for Eichler owners. The initial group was composed of other Eichler owners and aficionados from northern and southern California. Eventually, the group dwindled to eight core members who set an ambitious work plan for themselves, seeking historic designation for four neighborhoods and
two individual homes including the all-steel X-100 House in San Mateo Highlands. The X-100 was the only all-steel house designed for Eichler Homes. The purpose of the house was two-fold: to showcase new technology, such as the Waste King’s super-lush pulverizer (garbage disposal), and to serve as a promotional house to attract would-be homebuyers to the Highlands. After several discussions with the state historic preservation office, committee members decided to reduce the scope of their project and create a more reasonable and achievable work plan, narrowing their focus to what one committee member called “the cream of the crop.” In order to determine which neighborhoods were the “creamiest,” committee members toured every Eichler development built before 1960, and scored each one based on criteria they developed in conjunction with the SHPO. Using the criteria, they determined which buildings were contributing and non-contributing to each neighborhood as part of the district. Preparing the National Register nomination forms for just two of the neighborhoods still proved to be a monumental task for the all-volunteer team, which spent hundreds of their own hours and dollars to complete them. “This is a major process,” says Barry Brisco, co-chair of the committee. “It’s much more than just filling out a form.”

The Historic Quest Committee demonstrated that, although it takes time, motivated community activists can successfully nominate properties to the National Register. Although Eichler homes are experiencing a surge of popularity and an often dramatic increase in value, far too many are still subject to unsympathetic alteration and demolition. Eichler designed 58 other subdivisions in the 1950s and ’60s, mostly in the Bay area. National Register listing and local designation can help in the efforts to preserve more of these unique homes for future generations.

In November 2002 the Historic Quest Committee organized a special event, Celebrate Eichlers, in Palo Alto, where Eichler homes account for about 10 percent of the housing stock. The committee honored the nominations to the National Register of various Eichler homes, the 50th anniversary of the founding of Joe Eichler’s company, and the publication of a new book, Eichler: Modernism Rebuilds the American Dream. The event was a big success with approximately 3,000 people attending.

The Eichler Network continues its program of community outreach and education by maintaining an active website (www.eichlernetwork.com) which contains an array of valuable information for homeowners on topics ranging from history to help with finding contractors qualified to work on Eichlers.

Retention Versus Re-creation on Main Street

From tiny isolated towns to dense downtowns, Modernism made many appearances on Main Streets in the mid-20th century. New buildings were constructed, older buildings updated, and pedestrian malls and streetscaping fashioned to reflect the new design aesthetic. Unfortunately, many of these mid-century additions, updates, and modifications located in existing historic districts are now considered disposable intrusions, especially if they are outside of the period of significance of the district or clash with its overall visual character.

Yet these newer resources often tell part of the story of the evolution and development of the downtown retail district. Resources in commercial districts reflect periods of growth and prosperity, and changing tastes and architectural trends. The story of modernism on Main Street is a fascinating one; a retail struggle for survival played out in plate glass and anodized aluminum, pocket parks, and pedestrian malls. Throughout America, small towns and downtowns struggled to survive in a rapidly changing retail environment. These changes and additions expressed the belief that updated architecture, new landscaping and street furniture, and altered traffic patterns could influence retail preferences and stem the tide of shoppers abandoning traditional retail areas for shopping malls and peripheral commercial strips.

---

Two neighborhoods in Palo Alto, Calif., created by developer Joseph Eichler, have been listed in the National Register thanks to an intensive survey and research effort by local preservationists.

— Photo courtesy Atomic Ranch.
Some preservation organizations encourage the removal of these elements. One website declares, “Typical storefront ‘modernizations’ covered over the architectural features and should be removed.” Many of the design guidelines for downtown districts were written when the resources in question were outside the established period of significance or were under the 50-year mark, and they haven’t been changed to reflect the sliding 50-year window or new interpretations of the period of significance. For example, preservationists once encouraged the removal of Carrara glass from historic storefronts. This building material, which reached its zenith of popularity in the 1930s, is now viewed as historic in its own right.

Other communities are making an effort to draw attention to their commercial architecture. The city of Niles, Mich., created a walking tour brochure highlighting the history of Kawneer storefronts, which were constructed between 1909 and 1968. The Kawneer Company, established in 1906, manufactured prefabricated storefronts and components which were usually applied to existing buildings. These storefronts reflected the company’s rich design history and had a profound impact on American commercial districts.

If the community contains significant examples of post-war stand-alone buildings, storefronts, and so-called slip covers (ornamental facades placed over an existing facade, like a slipcover on a piece of furniture), communities should think carefully before allowing them to be modified or removed. Other period elements can include landscaping and streetscaping, such as pedestrian malls. If the elements are significant and retain sufficient integrity, property owners should be encouraged to retain existing fabric rather than adding conjectural re-creations, even if those elements are outside of the period of significance for the resource or the district. Perhaps the resource now meets the criteria for designation? Could it now be considered a contributing resource to the district? Does the period of significance for the district need to be amended to include more recent buildings? Protecting resources from the whims of popular taste in the present moment is a critical step toward their preservation.

In addition, preservation rather than removal and replacement can be a significantly less expensive alternative, a fact recognized by the Downtown Ames (Iowa) Design guidelines which state, “from the 1910s to the 1950s, most of Ames’ Victorian buildings were face-lifted to reflect a simplified Commercial Style of architecture. …Today, these four decades of Commercial Style designs possess historical significance. To replicate the Victorian facades would be incompatible with this period of significance and very expensive.”

Preserving Mid-Century Landscapes

Very few mid-century landscapes are locally designated or listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Many National Register nominations in recent years for buildings that are less than 50 years old have not included their associated landscapes.

Deferred maintenance, changing perceptions of how public spaces should be used and what they should look like, as well as a lack of understanding or appreciation of the historic significance of these landscapes has led to gradual degradation of some and the outright destruction of others. As Charles Birnbaum FASLA, FAAR, founding president of the Cultural Landscape Foundation, observes, “site furnishings, materials, and features were one-of-a-kind, site specific elements designed by the landscape architect. Far too often, these unique elements are casually replaced with off-the-shelf items from a catalog, and original planting schemes are replaced with varieties more easy to maintain or removed entirely.”

Outside a small community of dedicated enthusiasts, often these changes go relatively unnoticed. Far too often landscape preservation is an afterthought, if even a thought at all. What can be done to recognize the importance of these mid-century marvels, adapt them for changing uses, and protect them for future generations?

Birnbaum suggests the following strategies for preserving post-war era landscapes:

- Pursue nominations to the National Register of Historic Places for modern landscape architecture. For example, in 2000 Dan Kiley’s Miller Garden in Columbus, Ind., was designated a
National Historic Landmark and Thomas Church’s General Motors Technical Center in Michigan was added to the National Register.

- Publish or landscapes will perish: Establish a greater context for modern landscape architecture through published books, monographs, and oral history projects. Scholarly evaluation is a critical component of establishing the significance of these resources.

- Document threatened work in measured drawings, photography, and video. Record the work as existing, as originally designed, as executed, or with any changes over time. The Historic American Landscapes Survey of the National Park Service retains permanent documentation for landscapes threatened with demolition or alteration. For example, Lawrence Halprin’s Skyline Park in Denver was documented before it was demolished.

- Consult with the original landscape architect, client, and caretakers when possible.

- Educate owners, public stewards, and the general public to make these landscapes less “invisible.”

- Establish creative partnerships to ensure their ongoing preservation and management.

- House, catalog, and conserve landscape drawings and related historic materials in accessible archives. The University of California at Berkeley, the University of Pennsylvania, and Harvard University are developing archives that are essential to rehabilitating sites and inspiring scholarship.

- Apply the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes to all project work and all ongoing management projects in historically significant modern landscapes. Such research records the works in detail and informs management decisions.

**Conclusion**

In 1978 Chester Liebs wrote an article for *Historic Preservation* magazine, entitled “Preserving Our Not So Distant Past,” advocating for the preservation of roadside and commercial architecture. Almost 30 years later, many of the resources Liebs wrote about are gone. Our not so distant past is becoming more distant, and rapidly disappearing or being altered beyond recognition. The destruction continues. If preservationists are not proactive, much of the best architecture of the mid-century and beyond will be lost. Preservationists have an unprecedented opportunity to apply lessons learned since the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966. It is important to remember that, at one time, all resources were resources from the recent past. The challenge is to preserve significant examples of our recent past so that they may become part of our far-reaching past.

*Photo by Adrian Scott Fine.*
About the Author

Jeanne Lambin is the program officer in the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Midwest Regional Office in Wisconsin. Many people contributed to the creation of this booklet. The author wishes to thank everyone who provided information and responded to inquiries, especially Debbie Abele, City of Scottsdale, Arizona; Charles A. Birnbaum, Cultural Landscape Foundation; Lisa DiCheria, Landmarks Illinois; Dwayne Jones, Galveston Historical Foundation; Anna Mod, historic preservation consultant; Diana Painter, Painter Preservation; Anthony Rubano, Illinois Historic Preservation Agency/Illinois Main Street; Katherine Seale, Preservation Dallas; Helen Lambin; and Adrian Scott Fine, Anthea Hartig, James Lindberg, and Royce Yeater of the National Trust.

Resources

Organizations

The Cultural Landscape Foundation is dedicated to increasing the public’s awareness of the importance and irreplaceable legacy of cultural landscapes. Through education, technical assistance, and outreach, the Cultural Landscape Foundation broadens the support and understanding for cultural landscapes nationwide in hopes of saving our priceless heritage for future generations. Publications of interest include Preserving Modern Landscape Architecture and Preserving Modern Landscape Architecture II: Making Postwar Landscapes Visible among others. For more information go to www.telf.org.

DOCOMOMO stands for DOcumentation and CONservation of buildings, sites and neighborhoods of the MOdern MOVement. DOCOMOMO promotes the study, interpretation and protection of the architecture, landscape, and urban design of the Modern Movement. DOCOMOMO US is a network of regional chapters that share their members’ knowledge and enthusiasm for the Modern Movement, promote public interest in it through lectures and walking tours, and organize advocacy efforts to protect endangered sites and buildings. For more information go to www.docomomo-us.com.

Doo-Wop Preservation League is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to foster awareness and appreciation of the popular culture of the 1950s and 1960s and to promote the preservation of midcentury or “Doo Wop” resort architecture found in Wild Wood, N.J. For more information go to www.dowopasa.org.

The Los Angeles Conservancy Modern Committee is a volunteer group that plans tours, exhibitions and lectures; researches and nominates buildings for landmark designation; and serves as an advocate for Modern design. Its website has a useful reading list on resources from the recent past. For more information go to www.codcom.org.

The National Park Service increases awareness of our built history and encourages the sensitive rehabilitation of historic properties throughout the United States by producing a variety of technical publications, hosting national conferences, and administering programs such as the National Register of Historic Places and the Historic Tax Incentives Program. The website of the National Park Service’s Recent Past Initiative offers links to numerous articles and publications relating to the preservation of the recent past. For more information go to www2.crnp.gov/tps/recentpast/index.htm.

Useful publications include:


The National Trust for Historic Preservation champions preservation by providing leadership, education, and advocacy to people working to preserve, improve and enjoy the places that matter to them. National Trust’s Preservation Books series includes several publications and journals relating to the preservation of the recent past. Go to www.preservationbooks.org.

The Recent Past Preservation Network is a valuable resource for building public education and awareness of recent past resources. The organization generally defines the recent past as a moving window of approximately 50 years. In particular it focuses on those buildings that are not considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places because the structures are less than 50 years old. The website of the Recent Past Preservation Network provides technical information and advocacy assistance and maintains a list of endangered properties and has a listserve for its members. Particularly useful is A Historical Bibliography of Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and Urbanism in the United States Since World War II. For more information go to www.recentpast.org.

The Society of Architectural Historians is an international membership organization that pro-
motes the study and preservation of the built environment worldwide. The Society’s members include architectural historians, architects, preservationists, students, and professionals who are interested in the study, interpretation, and protection of historically significant buildings, sites, cities, and landscapes. For more information go to www.sah.org.

The Society for the Commercial Archaeology (SCA) was established in 1977. It is the oldest national organization devoted to the buildings, artifacts, structures, signs, and symbols of the 20th-century commercial landscape. For more information go to www.sca-roadside.org.

State Historic Preservation Officers locate and record historic properties, nominate significant historic properties to the National Register, foster historic preservation programs at the local government level and the creation of preservation ordinances, provide matching funds for preservation projects, comment upon preservation projects under consideration for the federal rehabilitation tax credit, review all federal projects for impact on historic properties under Section 106 of the Act and the regulations of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and provide technical assistance on restoration and other preservation activities to federal agencies, state and local governments, and the private sector. For a list of state historic preservation office websites go to www.crpa.gov/hr/shpolist.htm.

Selected Websites

Recent years have witnessed an astonishing increase in the number and quality of websites and publications relating to the architecture of the recent past, documenting everything from Howard Johnson’s Restaurants (www.hojoiland.home- stead.com/index.html) to drive-in movie theaters (www.drivetheater.com/index.htm).

Since 1993, the Eichler Network has been dedicated to supporting the lifestyle of the homeowners in California who own an Eichler Home. Go to www.eichlernetwork.com.

Lotta Living explores design, architecture and related fields which reflect Modernism along with 20th century kitsch popular culture. Go to www.lottaliving.com/index.shtml.


Great Buildings Online, an extensive architecture reference site, is a useful way to locate examples of the work of a known architect. This gateway to architecture around the world and across history documents a buildings and architects, with 3D models, photographic images and architectural drawings, commentaries, bibliographies, web links, and more. It is searchable by a number of fields including architect, type, style, location, and construction. Go to www.greatbuildings.com.

The Survey and Inventory section of Colorado Historical Society Office of History and Historic Preservation website includes a special section on documents. Available documents include the Database of the Denver Area Annual Parade of Homes, Selected Post-WWII Architectural Styles, Sample Reconnaissance Level Survey Forms, Local Landmark Designation reports, and a PDF of the National Register form for Arapahoe Acres. For more information go to www.coloradohistory-ohhp.org/ programareas/infoman/pwwIII.htm.

The “Introduction to Postwar Modern Housing Architectural Styles” provides a comprehensive architectural style guide put together by the Scottsdale, Arizona Historic Preservation Commission. It includes photos and details of typical characteristics of the variety of housing types in Scottsdale. www.scottsdaleaz.gov/historiczoning/neighborhoods/pdf/IntroPostwarHousingStyle.pdf.

Periodicals


Recent Past Style/Type Guide

There is much debate between the use of architectural style versus architectural type. Generally speaking, architectural styles describe architecture in terms of form, materials, time period, region, etc. It is a way of classifying architecture that gives emphasis to its design characteristics. Building type often refers to a building’s use or its method of construction. For example, a gas station is a type of commercial building, but it can be executed in an array of styles. Not all distinctions between style and type are so easy. Many resources are examples of both a type and a style of architecture.

The following is not intended to be a definitive style guide, rather it is a brief compilation of dozens of print and online style guides, architectural guides, and monographs. While many resources from this period will fit neatly into some of the categories described below, others will not. Style names and building types will continue to evolve as preservationists gain more experience surveying, evaluating, and documenting the resources of the recent past. Please note that time frames are approximate.

---

A-Frame (1934–1960s)
The design was popularized by Austrian-born architect Rudolph Schindler, who designed a vacation cottage for a client. The design was quickly standardized and adopted as a vacation-type home. A-frame roofs were also seen in other building types such as churches, restaurants, motels, and gas stations. It reached its greatest popularity in the mid-1960s and is characterized by:

- Low hanging eaves, often at or just above grade
- A-shaped, steep pitched roof
- Windows in gable ends

Brutalism (1953–mid-1970s)
The term originates from the French béton brut, or “raw concrete.” Brutalism was a relatively short-lived architectural movement which reached its apex in the 1960s (although there are plenty of classic examples from the 1970s). Proponents of the style advocated the brutally frank expression of the nature of modern materials. This was often a popular style for governmental and institutional buildings. Characteristics include:

- Massive weighty buildings, with irregular massing
- Rough exterior surfaces, undorned exposed concrete walls
- Blunt detailing of joints and openings
- Broad wall surfaces
- Window openings that are rarely flat with the wall plane, but often either recessed or protruding from the wall plane
Billboard Architecture/Logo Building/Signature Architecture (c.1920s–present)
These are self-identifying buildings that act as a sign or billboard for the business inside, for example a hotdog stand designed to look like a giant hotdog. Corporations such as McDonald’s expanded on this idea and created signature structures that were easily recognizable and that could be adapted for different climates but that contained the same signature elements, such as a mansard roof or golden arches.

Exaggerated Modern/Googie (1940s–1960s)
Also known as coffee-shop modern, Googie originated in southern California in the late 1940s. It was designed to attract attention with its flamboyant forms. Motels, coffee shops, bowling alleys, car washes, and a variety of other building types were erected in this style. Some debate exists as to whether Googie is an appropriate name for the style. The style is also called exaggerated modern because it exaggerates the structural components of the building and was ideally suited for commercial strips. It first appeared in the late 1940s and reached its zenith in the mid-1960s. It is characterized by:

- Exaggerated, sweeping, cantilevered and oversize roofs, and dynamic rooflines
- Large signs (often neon)
- Canopies soaring at raking angles
- V-shaped columns and metal framed angular designs and curvaceous geometric shapes
- Visual fronts and large sheet-glass windows
- Materials include steel, glass, plywood, glass block, plastics, and stone

Builders Economic House/Economical Small House (c.1945–1965) and Minimal Traditional
Builders Economic Houses and the Economic houses were frequently built from mail order plans, kits, and catalogs, such as those made by the Michigan-based Aladdin homes, which offered buyers “redi-cut homes.” These homes were built according to a size, style, and price that was most in demand during the period. Minimal Traditional houses represent a composite style that features traditional plans and forms but with min-
imal decorative details and without the ornamental exuberance of pre-World War II styles. The size and style changed to reflect market trends but the houses shared many of these characteristics:

- Often built in large-tract housing developments on smaller plots
- Or small and compact “stand-alone” houses
- Built of wood, brick, stone, or a mixture of wall-cladding materials
- Eaves and rake not overhanging
- Usually one story
- Traditional designs
- Small houses
- Minimal decorative details that evoke historic architectural styles
Expressionism (1920s–1970s)
Expressionism, which first appeared in Europe, sought to express or embody ideas and concepts such as movement or flight. It is characterized by:

- Sweeping, curved rooflines and wall surfaces
- Non-existent or minimal use of symmetrical or geometric forms
- Faceted, concave or convex surfaces
- Arched or vaulted surfaces

International Style (1925–mid-1960s)
The International Style derives its name from an exhibition of modern architecture and design curated by Philip Johnson and Henry Russell Hitchcock which took place at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1932. Some architectural historians use the term interchangeably with Modernism. Others use it very loosely to describe the wide range of architecture that embraced the new aesthetic, while still others feel that it describes a very specific style of architecture whose characteristics include:

- Volume rather than mass (think empty box rather than a solid brick)
- Smooth wall surfaces
- Proportion versus symmetry
- Horizontal bands of windows/large expanses of windows
- Absence of ornament
- Cantilevered building extensions such as entryways and balconies
- Flat roof

Formalism (also Neo-Formalism or New Formalism)
Perhaps one of the most visually striking and recognizable modern styles, Formalism emphasizes highly structured, symmetrical visual relationships rather than theme or ornament. It is characterized by:

- Flat, projecting rooflines
- Smooth wall surfaces
- High-quality materials
- Columnar supports
- Strict symmetry
- Vertical lines

Prefabricated
Although many prefabricated or kit buildings existed prior to World War II, after the war there was a surge of interest in prefabricated buildings, which is a building type rather than a style. It was hoped that post-war
technology could help meet the massive housing demand quickly and economically. Commercial companies such as Valentine Division of Pyramid Manufacturing Company in Wichita, Kans., hoped to meet the commercial demand by offering products such as prefabricated “food-service units.” The all-steel Lustron House was perhaps one of the most well known of the post-war prefabricated residential designs. Initially viewed as the answer to the post-war housing crisis, the company closed in 1951 after having manufactured only about 2,500 houses.

**Ranch House**

Based loosely on the Spanish-colonial precedents in the southwest and borrowing elements from Craftsman houses and Frank Lloyd Wright’s Usonian house, the ranch house was a truly American building type. Its sprawling design reflected the abundance of available land and the ability to get to it via automobile. California architects introduced the ranch house in the 1930s, and it gained popularity in the 1940s. By the 1950s it was the dominant residential building type. Ranch Houses were executed in a variety of styles including Early, Transitional, Simple, California, Prairie, American Colonial, French Provincial, Spanish Colonial, Swiss Chalet, English Tudor, Dutch Colonial, Cape Cod, California, Contemporary, and International. Although the homes are rich in regional and stylistic variations, they share many of the same characteristics:

- One story
- Low, horizontal form
- Rectilinear or L-plan
- Low-pitch gable, hip, or modified hip roof
- Broadside to the street
- Carport or garage
- Overhanging eaves
- Rectangular or square window openings, often featuring steel casement or aluminum windows
- Variation in type and use of exterior wall materials
- Variation in ornamental details; ornamental details often used to give house stylistic character: Tudor, French Colonial, etc.

**Split-level (1955–75)**

A multi-story modification of the ranch style, in which the floor level of one part of the house is about halfway between a floor and its ceiling of the other part of the house, thus splitting the levels. The division of space typically creates three separate living spaces, usually with a garage or family room in the lower level and bedrooms above. Other characteristics include:

- Variety of roof types, however gabled and hipped roofs are prevalent
- Variety of exterior cladding materials, often mixed on a single house
- The majority of split-level homes were built in residential subdivisions and designed by contractors and home building companies
- Three stories of living space
- Garage and family room on the first story

**Sputnik Modern/Space-Age**

Closely related to Googie and Exaggerated Modern, this style was inspired by science and technology and the launch of Sputnik in 1957. This genre incorporates popular space-age imagery and bold geometric designs. It is characterized by:

- Signage featuring shining globes and antennae
- Buildings shaped like spaceships
- Uses representational architecture and shapes that invoke the images of space travel and the atomic age
Visual Front/Open Front (1930s–present)
A style of commercial architecture that offers shoppers an alluring view of the interior sales space, while the exterior of the building can be used for striking signage. This effect is often accentuated at night by dramatic lighting schemes. The visual front began appearing in downtowns in the mid-1930s but it did not gain widespread popularity until after World War II. It is characterized by:

- Exterior of the building “frames” the display windows
- Large display windows or expanses of glass at ground level, occasional upper-story framed display windows
- Dramatic lighting schemes
- Interior spaces designed to highlight merchandise

Recessed Open Front
Like the open front, the street front wall features large display windows or large expanses of glass. Recessed storefronts provided an opportunity to attract pedestrians and shelter window shoppers from the elements. Characteristics include:

- All or part of the building front is recessed several feet back from the building line
- Sometimes features corner windows or display cases within the recessed space

Sources


General Services Administration. Growth, Efficiency and Modernism: GSA Buildings of the 1950s, 60s and 70s. GSA, 2003.


National Trust Forum is a membership program for preservationists—from board members to students, from architects to educators, from preservation commissioners to planners, from volunteers to restoration contractors. Forum membership provides you with the knowledge, tools and resources to protect your community. As a Forum member you receive a subscription to Preservation magazine, Forum Journal, and Forum News. Benefits also include discounts on conferences and all publications listed in the Preservation Books catalog as well as participation in financial/insurance assistance programs, technical advice and access to Forum Online, the online system designed for the preservation community. To join send $115 to:

National Trust Forum
National Trust for Historic Preservation
1785 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 588-6296
www.forumnthp.org

Preservation Books are published by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. For a complete list of titles call or write:

Preservation Books,
National Trust for Historic Preservation
1785 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 588-6286
FAX (202) 588-6223,
or visit our web site at

Copyright 2007 National Trust for Historic Preservation

Richard Moe
President
National Trust for Historic Preservation

Peter Brink
Senior Vice President
Programs

Katherine Adams
Director
Center for Preservation Leadership

Elizabeth Rysd Wood
Editor

Ron Woods
Business Manager

NATIONAL TRUST for Historic Preservation®