Viewpoints:

Contemporary Design in Historic Districts
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The Greenest Building Is…One That Is Already Built
New Uses for Existing House Museums
Save the Guthrie! Again
Preservation in China
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Cover photos (clockwise from top left):
American Institute of Architects headquarters, Washington, D.C. Photo courtesy of QUINN / EVANS ARCHITECTS.
Bridge in Lijiang. Photo by Ronald Lee Fleming.
Hazelwood House, Maryland. Photo by Donna Ann Harris.
500 Park Avenue, New York, N.Y., formerly PepsiCo Building. Photo by Steven Semes.
As preservationists, we naturally spend a great deal of time thinking about the past. But it is useful to take a moment now and then to pause and look ahead to the future. Fifty years from now, what will preservationists be fighting to save? Buildings that went up after a beloved landmark was demolished? Revivals of past revivals? Ho-hum buildings that were designed to blend with the old?

Several contributors to this issue of the journal are thinking about the future, raising intriguing questions about our preservation policies today and what they mean for the years ahead.

Public administrator and educator Pat Tiller urges us to reconsider current notions about what form new construction should take in historic districts. Too often, as he points out, new construction in historic settings consists of vaguely historicized designs—designs that “fit in” and don’t call attention to themselves. If we don’t encourage quality contemporary design in historic settings, he argues, then perhaps we are robbing the next generation a record of our time.

Architect Steven Semes takes on the question of how to manage the relationship between historic buildings and new additions from a slightly different perspective. He suggests that a designer or preservationist has four options representing a range of responses to the call for “differentiated” yet “compatible” designs for additions or infill construction in historic settings. By providing a thoughtful account of how architects and designers have integrated new construction into historic settings throughout history, he sets the groundwork for a better understanding of the issues we face today.

The two articles by Tiller and Semes are an enticing warm-up for a special lecture on this topic, “Adding without Subtracting,” that will be held on Friday evening, October 5, at the National Preservation Conference in Minnesota’s Twin Cities. Make sure to join us for what promises to be a lively discussion about new and old and how they can best fit together.

On a lighter note, it is possible to have some fun imagining what preservationists will be fighting to save 50 years from now. Minneapolis architect Phillip Koski takes a humorous look at the year 2057 when a fictitious preservation group, SOGGY (Save Our Guthrie, Goodness, Yes!), opposes the plan to demolish the Guthrie Theater, designed by Jean Nouvel and constructed in 2006, and replace it with a “virtual-extreme-sports” facility. Many of you will remember that the old Guthrie building was demolished in 2006 and turned into a park and part of the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden.

The National Preservation Conference in the Twin Cities will also feature a number of sessions devoted to the topic of green architecture and sustainability. To get to the heart of the issue, read architect Carl Elefante’s article, “The Greenest Building Is...One That Is Already Built.” Elefante and others will discuss green architecture and sustainability during several sessions that will take place on Friday, October 5.

Donna Ann Harris also focuses on sustainability—in this case, sustainability for historic house museums. Following up on the research that she did for her book, New Solutions for House Museums, Harris presents case studies that highlight how three house museums are making a successful transition to a new use. For more on this topic, attend the conference session on Thursday, October 4, “New Models for Historic House Museums.”

In his article on preservation in China, Ronald Lee Fleming, vividly paints a picture of a society that is “re-creating” its historic landmarks in a way that is at odds with traditional American preservation practices. This topic will be explored in more detail during two sessions—“The Olympics and the New Beijing: Search for a Balanced Approach toward Urban Development and Conservation” and “Preservation Amidst Rapid Development: Lessons from Nanjing”—to be held on Thursday, October 4 during the conference.

Which brings us back to some of the issues and questions raised in Tiller’s article—there are clearly many ways to save our built environment for future generations. We need to think carefully about decisions we make today and hope that preservationists working in the year 2057 are not shaking their heads and lamenting, “What were they thinking?”
Obey the Imperatives of Our Own Moment: A Call for Quality Contemporary Design in Historic Districts

de Tiel Patterson Tiller

It is axiomatic that the heritage preservation business preserves the best of the past for the benefit of future generations. Why, then, are we so intent on denying the architectural exemplars of our own times to generations yet to come? Hyperbolic statement to be sure, but there is a grain of truth here. Heritage preservation as a profession, avocational interest, or regulatory process is often suspicious of (or downright hostile to) contemporary architecture when proposed as an addition to a historic building or within historic districts or neighborhoods. This is, sad to say, particularly true in the United States, where both heritage professionals and advocates tend to defer to bland, mediocre, vaguely historically referenced new design within historic context when given the prospect of contemporary additions. Best intentions of the most committed architectural review board aside, in doing so, we rob future generations of the record of our time, of what was important to us, of how we best built here and now, particularly in the rich setting of our nation’s historic districts and neighborhoods.

An old saw of an issue to be sure, the challenge is a hard rain that has fallen on both the greatest and the least of us. In 1951, American enfant terrible Frank Lloyd Wright was approached to design a building for what is arguably the most famous historic district in the West—Venice, Italy. The location of the proposed Masieri Memorial project could not have been more prominent. Visible from the Ponte del’ Academia and located at what is called by many the busiest intersection on the Grand Canal, its neighbors included major Gothic and Renaissance landmark palazzi. Wright was intrigued. However, once his design became public, the debate about its merits raged throughout 1953 into 1955, ranging far afield in the States and throughout Europe, engaging architects, critics, and the likes of Bernard Berenson and Ernest Hemingway. Supported by many prominent architects, Wright’s design was condemned as “a piece of inexcusable vandalism” by others. Ultimately the design was rejected by the city’s municipal council, citing both the loss of the vernacular historic building it sought to replace and the incompatibility of modern architecture in the ancient city. Author and Wright scholar Neil Levine, in recounting the tale of the Masieri Memorial in his book The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright (Princeton University Press, 1996), describes the heated exchanges as “one of the first important public debates around the issue of modern architecture and historic preservation.”

Who knows what the impact of Wright’s design would have been had the project been built? Many today are inclined to believe that it would be nothing short of joyous to see the now more-than-50-year-old landmark shimmering in the reflected light of the Grand Canal. Others remain horrified that the project was even considered. Levine is likely correct, however, in describing the imbroglio as one of the first “public” debates on the matter of how (or whether) contemporarily designed buildings can (or should) be integrated within historic precincts. In terms of international media attention and popular discussion, it likely was.

As an elitist inquiry among cognoscenti, however, the debate over how best (or if) to build within historic precincts has a long pedigree in Western thought, arguably stretching back to the Renaissance when concepts of antiqu-
The common understanding throughout these mid-20th-century, elite deliberations was that historicized additions were not only undesirable but that new architecture within a historic context should “obey the imperatives of its own historical moment.”

Reflecting perhaps the congruent thought line runs from the landmark Venice Charter of 1964 to the report of the third ICOMOS General Assembly in Budapest in 1972 to (closer to home) the National Trust for Historic Preservation-sponsored 1977 symposium focusing specifically on the issue of contemporary architecture within historic context.

Reflecting perhaps the influence of modernism in architecture and art under which many of the participants at the three gatherings were doubtless trained, they spoke to the matter of what additions should look like in terms of balance between old and new. To cite two of the four conclusions of the Budapest colloquy, “(2) Such contemporary architecture, making deliberate use of present-day techniques and materials, will fit itself into an ancient setting without affecting the structural and aesthetic qualities of the latter only in so far as due allowance is made for the appropriate use of mass, scale, rhythm and appearance.” Further, “(3) The authenticity of historical monuments or groups of buildings must be taken as a basic criterion and there must be avoidance of any imitation which would affect their artistic and historical value” (Resolutions of the Symposium on the Introduction of Contemporary Architecture into Ancient Groups of Buildings, ICOMOS, 1972).

The report of the Trust’s 1977 meeting, Old and New Architecture: Design Relationship (The Preservation Press, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1980), likewise affirmed an array of desirable attributes for additions characterized by differentiation from the historic property (now popularly called the “theory of disjunction”) and overall deference by the newer building to the older and the historic context in terms of size, footprint, massing, and detail.

The common understanding throughout these mid-20th-century, elite deliberations was that historicized additions were not only undesirable but that new architecture within a historic context should “obey the imperatives of its own historical moment,” as the 1977 Trust report stated.

The Impact of “Standard 9”

In America, the culmination of this discourse coalesced in the dominant (if not singular) U.S. public policy on the question—the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation. Born of earlier standards developed to meet the needs of administering a federal grants program, these provided regulatory direction for a program of federal historic preservation income tax incentives. The rehabilitation standards were first issued in the late 1970s with accompanying guidelines. Covering a wide range of advice on balancing preservation with revitalization and economic revitalization, the 10 standards are a homey combination of hortatory advice, platonic ideals, and specific admonitions.

Standard 9 in the 1978 version spoke specifically and familiarly about how additions to historic buildings and additions within historic contexts should behave and could (should) look, in words highly reminiscent of the discourse of the time: “Contemporary design for alterations and additions to existing properties shall not be discouraged when such alterations and additions do not destroy significant historic, architectural, or cultural materials, and such design is compatible with the size, scale, color, material, and character of the property, neighborhood, and environment.” Likewise the standard’s guidelines recommended “[using] contemporary designs compatible with the character and mood of the building or neighborhood.”

But the picture changed less than 20 years later. In a 1995 revision to all the standards, the National Park Service revised Standard 9 to read, “New additions, exterior alterations or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work will be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and propor-
tion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.”

The Park Service stated at the time that the revision was undertaken for greater clarity. But missing now was a fundamental and important policy idea: that contemporary designs in historic context were not only okay but could be construed as desirable or at least on par with other design choices. It can be argued (as it has been) that nothing in the rewrite prohibits contemporary design. True, but eliminating any explicit mention of “contemporary design” in so important a heritage public policy can be considered a regrettable loss. Why does this matter?

The popular power of the Secretary’s Rehabilitation Standards cannot be overestimated. They have become nothing short of ubiquitous in the United States, serving as the statutory or regulatory bases for state and local historic district design review, for assessing or mitigating the effects of government or private-sector actions, or for determining design appropriateness in literally thousands of cities, towns, counties, and parishes nationwide. Often quoted directly or cited, referenced, or interpolated for local needs, the standards serve as the legal judgment basis for local architectural review boards, planning commissions, historic district commissions, and zoning boards. The standards (and, specifically for this discourse, Standard 9) influence the ethos of how new additions within historic contexts are judged in the local professional and avocational arena throughout the country—likely in ways undreamed of by the original framers. It is not glib to assert that the standards guide literally tens of thousands of state and local government decisions every year.

So change (any change) made by the Park Service to them affects not only the smaller regulatory arena of federal program administration but collateral influences how the nation thinks about and practices historic preservation at the state and local government levels. And so when such a change as happened to Standard 9 occurred in 1995, the potential ripple effect is worth noting.

Prejudice and Preferences

Why the change? Over the 20some years that preceded the revision, and since then, the collective national experience of contemporarily designed additions under the aegis of Standard 9 was (and is), by most accounts, checkered. In some instances the record is abysmal, with clumsy, ham-fisted, and inappropriate additions creating discord in historic settings. On the other hand, there have been remarkably successful designs that enrich the historic environment and mark admirably our generation’s stewardship of these places or buildings. But the overall impression of the many professionals and advocates that “use” the standards, particularly Standard 9, was (and is) negative. Contemporary architecture in historic settings is not, to most minds, desirable. It is better, so the argument often goes, to support vaguely historicized designs that “fit in,” call no attention to themselves, and serve largely as ciphers.

There are any number of likely reasons, including general aversion to and suspicion of contemporary architecture and urban planning in the minds and hearts of preservationists both professional and amateur. It was, of course, the destructive nature of modernism and theories of urban planning in the years immediately following the Second World War that gave rise to the U.S heritage preservation movement itself. The wanton destruction of so many thousands of historic properties and neighborhoods in the mid-20th century still looms large in the minds of many heritage proponents. Another cause that cannot be discounted is that most preservationists simply preferred historic times and styles over contemporary ones.

Importantly though, the architecture profession bears significant responsibility for so many inferior designs foisted into historic districts nationwide. Unlike in Europe, historic design contextualism remains largely ignored in most U.S. architectural school curricula today. The theoretic assumption is that good design is, de facto, good design. This is not the case; different skill sets are required.

The preservation decision-maker likewise does not escape culpability. Review staffs and managers in federal, state, and local government historic preservation offices overseeing design appropriateness reviews are rarely adequately schooled or prepared for these complex visual decisions. Frequently historians, anthropologists, archeologists, attorneys, and planners—not architects and architectural critics and historians—exert “up or down” decisions on new additions when they more than likely should not.

Greater citizen involvement has likely also added to the overall national aversion to contemporary designs in historic context. Over the last 20 years, the U.S. witnessed the exponential growth of general interest in heritage writ large. Untold numbers of citizen amateurs now serve on architectural review boards, design commissions, and planning commissions. Evaluating and negotiating the appropriateness of new architecture in historic context requires train-
ing and familiarity in visual criticism generally not readily at hand.

In the final analysis, however, it is all about making a safe choice. Contemporary architecture can be dangerous, controversial, even weird to the general public. Vaguely historicized additions are... safer.

**Our Role in the Historic Continuum**

Was the 1995 change to Standard 9 the cause of where we find this question today? Of course not. Were the changes reflective of a general policy and taste drift born of generally unfulfilling experiences? Or was it the result of increasing popular involvement and taste? Each is possible. Does it matter?

What frequently attracts us to historic places is the rich and oftentimes contradictory nature of the historic built environment. We experience a complexity of generations of occupancy expressed through architecture and material culture, layer on layer, generation by generation, tangible and intangible. Historic places have the power to speak to us as vital and living links between us and those that have gone before and those yet to come. Historic neighborhoods speak to the continuum of life and endeavor.

Our time in that continuum carries an important responsibility—important, yes, to steward conscientiously what we have inherited. But important also to speak to the future about what was significant to us at this time, what we thought about, what mattered to us. And good contemporary design is fundamental to that interaction with the future and the past.

Are there historic properties and complexes so sensitive or so significant that no additions, contemporary or otherwise, should be considered? Of course. Are there historic places and districts so visually homogenous or design sensitive that additions must be largely invisible or rendered in terms “historical,” as Ruskin advised? Yes again. But the overwhelming body of historic districts and properties in the United States evidence a rich tapestry of designs, styles, and history to which our generation’s voices are appropriately added.

Will just any contemporary design do? No, but what a delight it would be to see how our stewardship “watch” could best be enriched by today’s architectural stars—Rem Koolhaas, Zaha Hadid, Frank Gehry, Steven Holl, James Stewart Polshek, and Michael Graves. We need look only to the body of work of such masters as Hugh Newell Jacobson or Carlo Scarpa to understand what power contemporary architecture can have within a historic context and how exciting an intergenerational design conversation can be.

This is a call to revive the idea of those mid-20th-century theorists who encouraged us to obey the design and architectural imperatives of our own time. Contemporary design will not always be the best or most appropriate design choice in a historic setting. But it should have the first right of refusal and be the first option explored—not the last. Of course, it is the most complex choice and the hardest to achieve successfully.

And the architecture and historic preservation professions have far to go in training, skills building, and communication in order to meet the goal. But it is the most satisfying in the long run. And it is the duty of our time.

This ends where it began, La Serenissima—Venice. Beloved though it is to all, the 21st century finds serene Venice largely devoid of urban and economic vigor.

Trapped in history with little sense of future befitting its powerful and magnificent past, bereft of industry except tourism, it is a moribund museum piece devoid of good paying jobs for its youth and prohibitively expensive to newcomers. Frank Lloyd Wright’s Masieri Memorial, had it been built, would, of course, have had likely no impact on this outcome. And perhaps Venice is one such place to which contemporary architecture should never be added.

But the Masieri Memorial project is emblematic of a mindset that can consign historic districts and neighborhoods to similar atrophy. If, as a profession, preservationists do not encourage the best of our generation in terms of contemporary design within historic precincts then we consign them to a similar moribund future.

**[T]**he overwhelming body of historic districts and properties in the United States evidence a rich tapestry of designs, styles, and history to which our generation’s voices are appropriately added.

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“Differentiated” and “Compatible”: Four Strategies for Additions to Historic Settings

Steven W. Semes

In the post-war period, an important issue for preservation has been defining how new construction might appropriately support and enhance, rather than detract from, historic buildings and districts under regulatory protection. So long as new additions or infill buildings were likely to be designed in the same styles as their historic neighbors, “fitting in” was rarely an issue.

But since the ascendancy of modernist architecture in the United States in the 1950s—a style that defined itself in terms of opposition to traditional styles and assumptions about design—an important part of the preservationist’s mission has been to tame the ambitions of modernist architects and their penchant for setting off historic structures with contrasting new ones. At the same time, many preservationists either acquiesced in or actively embraced modernist aesthetics for new buildings, especially as a means of distinguishing new and old construction, which has been a preservation goal since John Ruskin called for it in the 19th century. Not surprisingly, much attention has been focused on the question of how we ought to manage the relationships between historic buildings and contrasting new additions in the context of contemporary architectural debates about style.

The 1964 Venice Charter—considered the founding document of the modern preservation movement—declares that the purpose of conserving and restoring historical monuments is to “safeguard them no less as works of art than as historical evidence.” But it also says any addition to the landmark must be “distinct from the architectural composition and must bear a contemporary stamp.”

The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings, first issued in 1977, were closely based on the charter and called for additions to be at the same time “differentiated” from the historic fabric and “compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.” Both the charter and the standards assumed that any new work would be modernist in style and would need to be monitored to ensure compatibility.

But today contemporary architecture has reintroduced traditional styles, and the focus of some preservation authorities has shifted to defending the differentiation of new and old construction as a means of preventing confusion in the public’s perceptions of the historic building and its site. Consequently, some preservation commissions and architectural review boards have seemed to prioritize differentiation over compatibility in numerous recent decisions. For example, all the New York City projects mentioned in this article were approved by that city’s Landmarks Preservation Commission, some of which have proved highly controversial.

Moreover, both the charter and the standards assume a narrow definition of the “resource”—the built work to be protected—that emphasizes the tangible, physical material of the historic structure over more intangible factors, such as the original architect’s design intent or the historic style, typology, or building culture embodied in the protected structure or district. This interpretation of the resource, in combination with potentially contradictory requirements for differentiation and compatibility, has resulted in considerable confusion as both national and local bodies grapple with changing ideas and tastes among architects and the general public. This article will consider how these conflicting values have played out, both historically and in current practice.

A designer or preservationist contemplating new construction in a historic setting may adopt one of four strategies based on four possible attitudes toward the existing setting or resource: 1) literal replication, 2) invention within the same or a related style, 3) abstract reference, and 4) intentional opposition. These options represent a range of responses to the call for “differentiated” yet “compatible” designs for additions or infill construction in historic settings found in the Secretary’s Standards. Let’s consider each of these strategies in relation to both the standards and historic practices and with respect to the differing views of the resource implied by each strategy.

Literal Replication

The strategy of replication prioritizes compatibility and minimizes differentiation. This strategy will likely sustain the character of an existing setting as long as the historic elements to be replicated are well understood, the technical means to effect replication are available, and the scale of the replication is modest relative to the original building. Despite frequently expressed disapproval of this strategy by many contemporary preservation theorists and officials, it has the sanction of history. Architects have often chosen to add to existing buildings by reproducing a previous architect’s work, sometimes even centuries afterward, usually for the sake of completing an intended but unrealized symmetry or extending a pattern already established. In such cases, the resource is defined as the design concept as a whole rather than any isolated part of it as it appears at a given time.

Many great European monuments visible today were completed not by the original...
designers but by a series of successive architects willing to realize their colleagues’ designs. Filippo Brunelleschi completed his Ospedale degli Innocenti in Florence (1425) on the southeast side of the Piazza Annunziata. Over the course of the next two centuries the disparate buildings around the square were unified by a series of matching arcades that appear to be the work of a single hand. In mid-17th-century Paris, Jacques Lemercier replicated Pierre Lescot’s century-old facade on the Cour Carré of the Louvre to maintain the symmetry of the expanded elevation we see today.

The recent Jewish Museum addition in New York, designed by Kevin Roche and completed in 1993, continued the fabric of the existing Warburg Mansion (constructed 1909) by adding two bays to the north and replicating the materials, general design, and much of the ornament of the original building. Although this “seamless” addition was criticized by some preservationists, the resulting unity of the composition would not have been achieved had the architect introduced a different architectural style or material for this modestly scaled addition. (Figure 1)

For the Kennedy-Warren Apartments in Washington, D.C., Hartman-Cox Architects designed a new wing for the building that completed the unbuilt designs of the original architect more than 70 years after construction was interrupted by the Depression. (Figure 2) With a few almost imperceptible exceptions, the new wing replicates the forms, materials, details, and character of the original building. The National Park Service declined the project’s application for historic rehabilitation tax credits, however, finding that the new wing violated the proscription in the Secretary’s Standards against additions that create “a false sense of historical development.”

This literal and rather materialistic reading of the resource has been superseded in recent European conservation theory, which takes into account “intangible” aspects of cultural heritage—including the architect’s designs, or relevant historic styles and building cultures—as well as the “tangible” historic building fabric.

While the recent construction of the missing east stairway at New York’s Grand Central Terminal would have been an appropriate occasion for replication—the original stair is plainly visible across the room—the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission required the architects to alter the design for the new stair. The carved ornament was omitted from the newels and the profile of the balusters was simplified, resulting in a blocky and inelegant appearance. In this case, the Commission’s insistence on differentiation needlessly resulted in an inferior design that diminished the primary resource— the integrity of this historic interior.

Many historic preservation officials oppose replication, believing that new construction must, as the Venice Charter expressed it, “bear a contemporary stamp.” But a broader view of the resource would permit replication when the formal properties of the setting and the modest scale of the proposed construction make it appropriate. The “contemporary stamp” might then be supplied by a literal stamp on the added material, such as an inscription or other interpretive device identifying the addition and its date.
Invention Within a Style

This strategy, while not replicating the original design, adds new elements in either the same or a closely related style, sustaining a sense of continuity in architectural language. The intention is to achieve a balance between differentiation and compatibility, but weighted in favor of the latter. This strategy also has a long history: In fact, it is what most architects have always done.

Leon Battista Alberti, in his 15th-century treatise, urged architects adding to a preexisting building to work in the same style as the original builder and complete the work in the same spirit. He followed this principle to complete the facade of Santa Maria Novella in Florence, adding to its medieval first story in kind, then subtly transforming the style into a Renaissance flourish at the top. Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola and other Renaissance designers followed Alberti’s lead in their competition designs for the facade of San Petronio in Bologna, extrapolating the existing Gothic language without replication. Back at the Louvre, two hundred years after Lemercier, Louis Visconti, and Hector Lefuel designed the monumental facades on the Cour Napoléon in conscious imitation of his work. Our own United States Capitol in Washington, D.C. was greatly expanded in size over the course of two centuries without changing its style.

More recently, Quinlan Terry’s group of four new buildings at Market Square in Williamsburg adopts the language of Virginia’s 18th-century colonial capital but includes elements not previously seen in the restored town. (Figure 3) Similarly, the New York townhouse by Zivkovic Associates with John Simpson & Partners illustrates how a new building can display a traditional style and make a strong statement of its own identity without subverting the character of its setting.

Modernist landmarks also benefit from this strategy. For 500 Park Avenue, a 1960 “glass box” by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill in New York, James Stewart Polshek and Partners designed a sympathetic high-rise addition 25 years later that knits the older building more strongly into its urban setting without replication. (Figure 4) In these cases, the resource is defined as the continuity through time of the historic setting itself, which is then sustained through the use of similar or congruent formal language.

Invention within a style—so long as it is an informed and fluent exercise—leads naturally to new work that is both differentiated and compatible with respect to its pre-existing context. Unfortunately, some preservation authorities continue to resist the very approach most likely to yield the results called for by the charters and standards they are charged with applying.

Abstract Reference

The third strategy seeks to make reference to the historic setting while consciously avoiding literal resemblance or working in a historic style. This approach aims to balance differentiation and compatibility, but with the balance tipped toward the former. This is a difficult strategy to execute because it requires an artistry and skill that are not often available.

The abstract referencing of historic architecture is a modernist innovation in which the compatibility of the new and old is suggested by the reduction of composite form to abstract shape. An early example, Adolf Loos’s 1910 Goldmann & Salatsch Building on the Michaelerplatz in Vienna makes reference to its setting through massing, size, materials, and very restricted articulation, allowing it to be both “modern” (in the sense of using a minimum of historical detail) and “contextual” (in the sense of “fitting in” physically with the scale, materials, and massing of the surrounding buildings). Loos’s building may be the earliest—and is
perhaps still the best—example of the differentiated-yet-compatible formula enshrined in the Secretary’s Standards some six and a half decades later.

A more recent example of abstract reference in a historic setting is the Seamen’s Church Institute, an infill building in the South Street Seaport Historic District in New York, designed by James Stewart Polshek and Partners. (Figure 5) The new building’s brick and metal facade approximates the massing of the adjacent 19th-century structures, but its pipe railings and exposed steel connections recall early modern maritime design, the rounded corners of its windows resembling portholes. The flatness and industrial imagery of the building clearly differentiate it from its historic pre-industrial neighbors, but the general massing and color pass the “first glance test” for compatibility—the building does not jump out of its context or attract immediate attention.

Beyer Blinder Belle Architects took a similarly referential approach in their unbuilt design for the East 95th Street townhouse, in which similarities of abstract composition and alignments of horizontal features are used to relate the new and old buildings in the absence of a shared formal language. But this reduction can only be carried so far. In the Davis Brody Bond addition to the landmark Harvard Club in New York, compatibility is sought through alignments of curtain wall mullions and limestone projections alone, but such abstract references do little to mediate a conspicuous disparity in formal composition, predominant material, and scale. (Figure 6)

This strategy is limited by the fact that a formal language—classicism, for example—cannot be reduced to abstract shape and still retain its distinctive “composite” quality—its ability to subdivide into coherent sub-parts or to join with other parts to become a larger whole. Furthermore, many modernist architects resist compromising for the sake of “fitting in,” which is undoubtedly why the contextualism of the 1980s has been abandoned in favor of a newly aggressive oppositional posture toward historical architecture in the recent works of Frank Gehry, Rem Koolhaas, Steven Holl, and others. In any event, the strategy of abstract reference sees the historic urban setting as a resource to be conserved by means of deferential massing, but is typically unwilling to engage traditional formal language at the scale of the building or its constituent elements.

**Intentional Opposition**

Finally, the fourth strategy is one of conscious opposition to the context and the determination to change its character through conspicuous contrast, prioritizing differentiation at the expense of compatibility. Modern architects did not invent this idea. Andrea Palladio, who famously loathed Gothic architecture, wrapped the medieval town hall of Vicenza with elegant arcades to conceal the geometric irregularities of the older building. Palladio’s arcades became a model of urban amenity and there is no question that the center of Vicenza is the richer for this facelift. Sometimes contrast is the appropriate response to a context that is weak or otherwise unsatisfactory, but we must be careful making such judgments. The most suitable use of this strategy is to repair damage to the historic setting brought about by previous insensitive or oppositional interventions. The use of this strategy intentionally to diminish a valued historic context is usually inappropriate.

For example, Hugh Hardy’s cubistic reconfiguration of a bombed-out Greek Revival townhouse on West 11th Street in New York’s Greenwich Village is a dissimilar interruption in the civility of the historic street, perpetuating the violence that destroyed the original facade in the 1970s. (Figure 7) Norman Foster’s mediatique in Nîmes opposite the Maison Carré or his glass tower above
Recent years have seen the condemnation of historic buildings and districts to change in ways alien to their historic patterns and typologies. This policy, when consistently applied, leads to the gradual erosion of historic character as the inevitable consequence of the preservation effort itself—an unacceptable contradiction in contemporary preservation practice.

The doctrine of differentiation has too often been used to mask simple stylistic bias. The Secretary's Standards and the Venice Charter both assumed that the modernist aesthetic would remain normative for contemporary building indefinitely. But current practitioners have revived traditional architecture and urbanism so that "contemporary" no longer necessarily means "modernist." Preservation regulations, including the Secretary's Standards, should not be construed to support the acceptance or rejection of any proposed project solely on the basis of style. Consequently, alterations or additions to historic settings that improve or strengthen the pre-existing character should be welcomed, regardless of their style; changes that weaken or diminish the historic character should not be permitted, again regardless of style. Additions or new construction may be in the same style as the historic buildings, provided that the new construction is consistent with the typology, composition, scale, proportion, ornament, materials, and craftsmanship typical of the setting. Violation of these attributes for the sake of a questionable principle of differentiation leads inevitably to the loss of historic character and, thereby, loss of the resource in its truest sense.

Rethinking Differentiation and Compatibility

These strategies represent four variations on the relationship of differentiation and compatibility, two terms that represent a logical contradiction if we treat them as equally important values. In my view, the fundamental interests of preservation can only be served if compatibility is given greater weight, since it alone allows us to sustain valued historic character in the face of the many forces threatening it. To insist on differentiation by means of a contrasting modernist style for new construction, as some authorities have done, confronts older masonry landmark buildings with contrasting metal and glass structures that have been widely imitated in historic settings worldwide. The Polshek firm, whose reputation was made by deferential additions like those at 500 Park Avenue and the Seamen's Church Institute in the 1980s, embraced the new oppositional stance in their recent entrance pavilion at the Brooklyn Museum, a discordant intervention that deliberately violates the classical composition of the landmark building. (Figure 8) In these cases, the resource is seen as an artifact from a vanished world, something to be isolated in a museum setting or set off by contrast with a radically different modernist expression. Such designs are inherently incompatible with adjacent traditional buildings and inevitably lead to the erosion of historic character as increasing numbers of intrusive and alien forms challenge the qualities that made our protected settings valuable in the first place.

Figure 7. Greenwich Village Townhouse, New York, N.Y., by Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Architects, completed 1978. Photo by Steven Semes.

Figure 8. Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, N.Y. (McKim, Mead & White, 1897) with addition by the Polshek Partnership Architects, 2003. Photo by Steven Semes.
Compatibility ... must be a primary objective of the designer and an integral part of the design process for projects in historic settings.

entiation should be made that would result in an incongruous appearance or a ruptured integrity. Where the new construction might not be readily distinguishable by the public at large, interpretive materials should clarify the construction history of the site rather than expecting this to be self-evident from the appearance of the new construction alone. De-emphasizing differentiation and prioritizing compatibility would allow historic buildings and districts to grow and change in accordance with their historic patterns and styles, thereby assuring a continuity of character through time. This, in my view, is the proper way to protect the resources to be conserved in our historic buildings and districts.

Compatibility requires more than similarities of massing or abstract references; it must be a primary objective of the designer and an integral part of the design process for projects in historic settings. What makes buildings from different eras and styles compatible is that they share the same underlying principles of space, structure, elements, composition, proportion, ornament, and character. If these principles are consistent among the buildings along a street or around a square, they will be compatible, regardless of style. Compatibility is not uniformity; however, if the principles embodied by neighboring buildings are antiethic, no alignment of cornices or adjustments of massing will be sufficient to maintain a relationship of civility among them.

The decision about which of the four strategies to follow cannot be made lightly. It is a question of what is most respectful of the existing architectural and urban conditions or, if these are not suitable, what will produce the greatest degree of harmony and wholeness in the built environment. Such decisions cannot be made one building at a time, but must recognize the potentially exemplary nature of every architectural act. If we pay more attention to the historic urban setting than to the individual building and move beyond an obsessive concern with the chronology of construction, our choice of strategy can fulfill our obligation as citizens to make the city more beautiful, sustainable, and just. If we adopt this ethic, we will naturally seek not the architecture of our time but, more importantly, the architecture of our place.

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NOTES:


3 See National Park Service publications such as Preservation Brief 14: New Exterior Additions to Historic Buildings: Preservation Concerns.


5 The Venice Charter, 1964, Article 9.


9 See Semes, 2006.

The Greenest Building Is...One That Is Already Built

Carl Elefante, AIA, LEED AP

A page has turned. In decades hence, 2006 may well be regarded as the year when the national discussion about the future of our cities, perhaps our civilization, changed from a debate over whether human impacts on the environment are leading to potentially severe problems to one focused on what we can do to diminish and even reverse them. Hal-le-lujah!

Evidence for this supposition is widespread. Certainly, Al Gore’s Oscar-winning film, An Inconvenient Truth, has been singularly important in raising public awareness and defining environmental stewardship as a fundamental trait of American patriotism. Today, preventing climate change is the rallying call for millions, not just the environmental intelligentsia. There are hundreds of examples of how deeply our sense of national purpose has transformed. My profession accepted the Architecture 2030 Challenge laid down by Ed Mazria at the 2006 AIA National Convention to cut in half fossil fuel consumption in architect-designed buildings by 2010, yes 2010, and create carbon-neutral buildings by 2030 (thus the name). Green building is maturing. “Green Buildings and the Bottom Line,” published by Building Design + Construction states the business case for green building, documenting increases in productivity, performance, and profitability and reductions in risk, insurance premiums, and financing costs. Green has found its way into the boardroom.

However, this growth process is far from complete. Largely, the green building movement remains blind to its most troubling truth: We cannot build our way to sustainability. Even if, with the wave of a green wand, every building constructed from this day hence has a vegetative roof, is powered only with renewable energy sources, and is built entirely of environmentally appropriate materials, sustainability would still be far from fully realized.

Seeking salvation through green building fails to account for the overwhelming vastness of the existing building stock. The accumulated building stock is the elephant in the room: Ignoring it, we risk being trampled by it. We cannot build our way to sustainability; we must conserve our way to it.

Consider the numbers. The U.S. Department of Energy maintains a database of America’s nonresidential buildings, its Commercial Building Energy Consumption Survey. As of its latest update in 2003, there are some 65 billion square feet of nonresidential buildings in the U.S. According to economic projections reported by Architect magazine in 2006, a prolonged building boom of historic proportions will produce an estimated 28 billion square feet of new construction by 2030, an increase of more than 40 percent. The report also notes (almost as an aside) that during the same period, more than 54 billion square feet of the existing nonresidential building stock, about 84 percent of it, will undergo substantial modification.

Picture it this way: Four out of every five existing buildings will be renovated over the next generation while two new buildings are added. Can sustainability be achieved if our green vision extends only to new buildings, ignoring the enormous challenges of existing buildings and communities? After two decades working to promote green building within the architectural and environmental policy sectors, I believe that it is up to the preservation community to call attention to the elephant in the room.

Sustaining the Existing Building Stock

About 6 percent of the existing building stock was constructed before 1920. This small slice contains America’s best-loved historic buildings, the “poster children” of historic preservation. From a green design viewpoint, this segment also includes those structures built before the introduction of climate-control and lighting systems powered with fossil fuels. There is a wealth of traditional, vernacular, and indigenous structures that deserve close study, by preservationists and green building professionals alike.

Another 11 percent of the nonresidential building stock consists of mid-20th-century buildings constructed up to the close of World
methodical effort to measure, need to make a much more in their own right. Indeed, we achieve as sustainable justified in heralding these structures. Preservationists are to sustain these traditional remarkably efficient methods have been developed that employ conservation treatments have over the past four decades, tried-and-true preservationists. Over the past by far the most attention from the building stock garner by far the most attention from preservationists. Over the past four decades, tried-and-true conservation treatments have been developed that employ remarkably efficient methods to sustain these traditional structures. Preservationists are justified in heralding these achievements as sustainable in their own right. Indeed, we need to make a much more methodical effort to measure, document, and report the effectiveness of preservation as a green building strategy based on the work we have accomplished with these core elements of the historic building stock.

However, it must also be acknowledged that the buildings preservationists most frequently address represent a very small percentage of the entire stock. Preservation will become more relevant to sustainability by expanding the scope of the buildings we conserve. In my view, this expanded role should be paralleled by a shift in priorities among preservationists toward neighborhood revitalization models, where ordinary buildings are embraced for their contribution to a larger context. I see it as emphasizing more of our Main Street preservation culture.

The Modern-era Building Stock

By the sheer force of numbers, preservation will have to address a much larger building stock when modern-era buildings become more fully the stuff of preservation. The buildings of the 1950s, ’60s, ’70s, and ’80s constitute more than half, about 55 percent, of the existing nonresidential building stock in the United States, a whopping 36 billion square feet. In part, the post-war building boom was made possible by new design attitudes, ones that emphasized the new building forms and the application of new technology over traditional building types and craft.

Modern-era architecture is markedly different aesthetically from its traditional predecessors and generally performs very differently as well. Both preservation and green building advocates readily agree that modern-era buildings present greater challenges to both disciplines. Preservation professionals have begun to wrestle with the problems of modern-era structures, including their construction using materials and assemblies that often lack durability and their absolute reliance on equipment that consumes fossil fuels.

This large and problematic segment of the building stock is going to require new thinking about both preservation and green building. I see it as both a challenge and an opportunity. In practical terms, the quantity of the modern-era building stock dictates that we find ways to use these buildings far into the future. Their (lack of) quality requires that we find efficient yet effective ways to transform them, elevating their performance to sustainable levels.

The need to transform the modern-era building stock is an important point deserving more elaboration. Quite frequently, with the preservation of 18th-, 19th-, and early 20th-century buildings, we endeavor to retain or restore their original function as well as fabric. Repairing operable windows, shutters, and awnings on a Victorian house in a historic neighborhood overarched with 100-year-old trees is so obviously a win-win for both preservation and sustainability. The character of a historic resource is preserved and effective weather- and climate-responsive devices are returned to their intended function. But it is hard to discover such win-win scenar-
ios with many, if not most, modern-era buildings. Far too frequently, the windows never operated and the mechanical system never performed efficiently. Something different, something new, something layered on to what already exists is needed.

By accepting the need to transform modern-era buildings, we may also need to accept that preservation will transform as well. In my view, preservationists have been somewhat too quick to embrace historic exemptions, most relevantly, from standards like the National Energy Code. As we face our responsibility to sustain the existing building stock, we should challenge ourselves to meet every high-performance benchmark possible. There are alternatives to historic exemptions. Achieving reasonable accommodation and proposing alternative compliance methods are two.

For both preservation and green building professionals, it is absolutely critical to study in detail and truly appreciate the characteristics that define the existing building stock. The preservation community needs to invest more resources into this endeavor. Even a brief overview makes it obvious that the scope of the challenge is monumental and that the issues we must tackle together are complex and varied. Although emerging green building principles and practices must be duly credited for identifying solutions to many of the unintended consequences of the industrial age, we cannot ignore the necessity to both preserve and transform the buildings and communities we already live in.

What Is Sustainable, Really?

If preservation is going to make a valuable contribution to sustaining our communities, it needs a deeper understanding of what constitutes sustainability. In today’s “green marketplace,” where green claims are made about virtually every product and service, clarification is required. What makes clarity most elusive is that our perspective on sustainability is evolving so rapidly.

Take recycling as an example. Most everyone recognizes that recycling is an effective and productive sustainable strategy, which it is. However when recycling is studied in more detail, it becomes apparent that things are not as simple as they seem. Much of what is called “recycling” is more accurately “down-cycling,” where high-value materials are cycled down to low-value ones. While this approach may divert millions of tons of waste from landfills today, how many more cycles can these materials endure into the future? With the expenditure of energy, glass bottles can be recycled into glass bottles time and again; however, plastic bottles are reduced to a pulp material that can only be formed into the most elementary objects. Can it be said that both examples of recycling are sustainable?

What is sustainable, really? There is no easy answer. Study the partnership between The Natural Step and Interface Carpets. For more than a decade, Interface has been leading a revolution in the building products industry. It has conducted perhaps the most complete analysis of its products and processes of any company in history. Yet Interface is still looking quite far into the future, 2020, to realize its mission of eliminating all negative impacts on the environment.

Both scientifically and culturally, we simply don’t know everything we need to know to say with authority what constitutes sustainability. Then how does the preservation community proceed toward sustainability? I believe there are three fundamentals which translate directly into new directions that will help bring preservation into partnership with green building.

As biological creatures we are, literally, one with the environment. To appreciate this best, study the work of Dr. David Suzuki, who documents in scientific terms our direct connection with nature’s four elements: earth, air, water, and energy. What we do in the environment, we do to ourselves. To create sustainable communities, we must fully appreciate that they are seamlessly part of the natural world.

To paraphrase architect and industrial philosopher William McDonough: “Being less bad is not being good.” Today, we are taking the first steps toward sustainability, reducing our “environmental footprint” by consuming less energy, releasing fewer harmful substances, and increasing the efficiency of technology. Such retooling is important; however, sustainability goals must reach beyond doing less harm. To be sustainable, human activities need to increase the vitality of the planet, not diminish it. Increasingly, green building professionals seek regenerative...
Taking into account the massive investment of materials and energy in existing buildings, it is both obvious and profound that extending the useful service life of the building stock is common sense, good business, and sound resource management.

solutions that restore the natural environment. We need to break through to new plateaus. Why can’t buildings produce safe, affordable, reliable, and renewable energy instead of consuming fossil fuels? Why can’t buildings harvest rainfall and recharge aquifers with drinkable water instead of releasing “stormwater” and “wastewater”? (Listen to the language!)

Over the past decade I have coined a phrase: The greenest building is…one that is already built. Many who hear me say it assume that I am being metaphysical. I’m not. In the same way that the wisdom of indigenous cultures taught David Suzuki to see the links between humans and nature, preservation philosophy has sensitized me to see the value in the existing world, especially the built world. Taking into account the massive investment of materials and energy in existing buildings, it is both obvious and profound that extending the useful service life of the building stock is common sense, good business, and sound resource management. To fully capture the value of the existing building stock requires merging two disciplines: historic preservation and green building. It requires an understanding of how to respect and renew what is already here and a vision for where and how to transform the legacy of the past into the promise of tomorrow.

Practicing Green Preservation

The intersection between preservation and green building is becoming well traveled. Significant cross-pollination has occurred and the rate of collaboration is exploding. The inherently green aspects of historic and traditional buildings are being assessed and documented.9 Greening existing buildings, including important historic structures, is gaining recognition in green building circles.10 This body of work contains many exciting projects involving traditional buildings that protect their material and cultural value while significantly improving their energy and environmental performance characteristics. Many well-publicized examples are worth “Googling.”11 I leave it to you to explore.

Building Life-Cycles

As we conserve buildings, which treatments are undertaken is often determined by careful, even exhaustive, assessment of the conditions of each material and element. Buildings are complex assembles. Conservators pick apart each assembly into its components and repair or replace what needs to be attended to. Following this process gives preservationists a very clear view of the life-cycles of buildings.

Life-cycle analysis (LCA) and life-cycle cost analysis (LCCA) are considered fundamental tools of green building. There are quite a number of well-developed LCA protocols for rating the cradle-to-grave performance and environmental impacts of construction materials and products.12 However, there are considerable obstacles to applying LCA to entire building projects. The number of variables is simply overwhelming. Few tools have been developed that even attempt to encapsulate all the elements of a building project into a single impact assessment.13

For those of us with an ingrained preservation outlook, more frequently than not, we find the use of LCA tools in green building practice to be short-sighted and shallow. Even the most rigorous LCA standards ignore any after-use impacts other than demolition and disposal. What about restoration and renewal?

Where is the work of preservation that gives buildings new life?

In my architectural practice, I am working to codify building life-cycles by drawing from preservation. The overall outline is a simplification of one posed in Stewart Brand’s thought-provoking book How Buildings Learn.14 The process begins with sorting building elements into four categories: structure, building envelope, interior elements, and systems. I have found this to be a workable list that differentiates building components according to their life-cycle.

Preservation teaches first-hand the practical limits of durability. Structural elements can, and really should, be constructed to last for a very, very long time. By code and for life-safety reasons, structural elements must be constructed for survivability, that is, the ability to survive fires, earthquakes, and storms. (Oh, add to the list terrorist attacks!) In most cases, when survivability is achieved, almost unlimited durability is achieved at the same time. Doesn’t life-cycle design suggest that there should be an intentional relationship between survivability and durability?

On the other hand, building envelope elements are
exposed to weathering. Periodic renewal is an unavoidable reality, ranging from simple routine maintenance, like painting, to more substantial reconditioning and selective replacement. Preservationists familiar with the restoration of traditional wood windows know every trick to restore their operation and material integrity with the most minimal means possible: a segment of rotted wood replaced here, a patch of glazing compound there, replace a broken pane with salvaged glass that matches the characteristics of the original glass. Many of us have experience restoring 100-year-old windows through such straightforward means.

For preservationists, it is an absolute mystery why so many “high-performance” windows are designed without any consideration for their renewal. Such systems are sold as maintenance-free. In fact, they cannot be repaired. For example, today’s glazing systems are complex, multi-component assemblies. While their thermal and solar heat-gain performance characteristics may be admirable, window assemblies made out of materials that last for hundreds of years (aluminum, glass) are doomed to early retirement due to “differential durability” problems, for example edge seals that fail in a couple of decades. A 20-year guarantee should not mean that a building element is guaranteed to need replacement in 20 years.

Currently, we are designing our first new-building project using an aluminum window wall system that allows the glazing stops to be removed, exposing the entire internal water management system. All gaskets and seals can be inspected, accessed, and replaced if needed. Even the frames’ thermal break elements can be replaced. You see, progress is possible.

Energy Performance
Preservationists must accept the need to improve the energy performance of the existing building stock. We simply cannot ignore the fact that the electrical power that runs our buildings contributes substantially to global warming and climate change. Seeking exemption from this requirement does nothing more than marginalize preservation. We must rise to the challenge. The carbon-neutral goals that have been adopted across a wide spectrum of the green building world are not beyond reach. However, let’s be clear that meeting sustainable energy targets will require substantially improving building envelope performance, upgrading the effectiveness of all energy-consuming systems, and converting to renewable energy sources both on and off site.

Far too many preservationists bristle at the mention of using renewable energy at historic sites. Images of solar collectors that are promoted as looking absolutely just exactly like a slate roof immediately come to mind. (Believe me, I’ve heard it all.) But preservationists should understand more than most that good solutions come from well-integrated design. Our office has installed ground-coupled heating and cooling systems at two National Historic Sites where open land made the requisite well-fields practical.

Over the past 20 years, green building practitioners have developed technologies that make changing the energy performance of existing structures achievable. Many preservationists are adopting them today. In my experience, energy modeling has become a routine step in our project development protocol. Energy models are simulation tools that predict the energy performance of a building using computers. The characteristics of the building are entered including climate data, building orientation and form, roofing, wall materials, insulation, fenestration, etc.

Energy modeling shows that there is no “one size fits all” solution to improving energy efficiency. It demonstrated that a repair-in-kind approach to window restoration would have no adverse effect on energy performance of Washington, D.C.’s Eastern Market. But major window alteration or replacement is called for at another Washington, D.C., building, the American Institute of Architects National Headquarters (page 34).
and window sizes and types. The performance characteristics of all energy-consuming systems are input, including mechanical systems, lighting, and plug loads. Finally, operational and interior environmental settings are entered. The program predicts energy use around the clock and year. Energy simulations can be calibrated to provide amazing accuracy. Many scenarios can be simulated so that trade-offs between building alterations and system design can be tested.

Over the past few months, our office has used energy modeling to help design two very different preservation projects that serve as revealing examples of its use. The first project is the restoration of Eastern Market in Washington, D.C. The energy model showed that implementing a repair-in-kind approach to window restoration did not have an adverse impact on the energy performance of the building. Window “upgrade” scenarios were shown to reduce energy consumption by no more than 3 percent, nowhere near justifiable using an LCCA cost-benefit analysis.

The second project is the stewardship and greening of the American Institute of Architects National Headquarters Building, also in Washington, D.C. Quite to the contrary of the Eastern Market example, energy modeling showed that achieving energy goals was, essentially, impossible without making significant upgrades to window performance. Nearly 60 percent of the annual heat loss and gain is directly attributable to the window system. However, this does not necessarily require window replacement. We studied alternatives for achieving the required performance upgrades both with and without window replacement. Energy modeling gives us choices.

A Final Thought

“The earth is not given to us by our parents, it is lent to us by our children.”

My professional immersion in preservation has revealed to me something about our culture that I believe to be of the very greatest importance in the pursuit of sustainability. Our culture is drunk on the new and now. This intoxication clouds our judgment, causing us to profoundly undervalue the legacy of our forbearers. Clearly, preservation itself is a calculated reaction to our culture’s insensitivity to the past and to the vandalism that it has perpetrated in the name of progress. I am certain that all preservationists recognize truth in this observation.

Beyond regretting these blows to history’s legacy, my deepest concern is that our intoxication blurs our vision of the future. I worry that our culture equally under-appreciates the significance of our actions today on the future; not a distant future, but our children’s. As preservation teaches us all to better value the past, it is my hope and prayer that it also helps us to fully awaken to our responsibilities to the future.

In my eyes, this is the unbreakable bond between preservation and sustainability.

As preservation teaches us all to better value the past, it is my hope and prayer that it also helps us to fully awaken to our responsibilities to the future.

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NOTES

1 For information about Architecture 2030 founded by Edward Mazria, AIA, go to www.architecture2030.org where his speech laying out the 2030 Challenge can be downloaded.


3 United States Department of Energy, Energy Information Administration, Commercial Building Energy Consumption Survey (CBECS), 2003 Detailed Tables, Table B1. Summary Table: Total and Means of Floor-space, Number of Workers, and Hours of Operation for Non-Mall Buildings. 2003, can be found on the internet at www.eia.doe.gov


6 For information about the sustainability program adopted by Interface Carpets, go to www.interfaceinc.com/goals/sustainability.

7 David Suzuki is a prolific writer and lecturer. The David Suzuki Foundation website is a good source of information about his activities promoting the science of sustainability, at www.davidsuzuki.org.


9 For a good sampling of recent green preservation articles, see the APT Bulletin Special Issue on Sustainability and Preservation, 36, no. 4 (2005), Mount Ida Press.

10 Two widely recognized sources for green building case studies are the American Institute of Architects Committee on the Environment Top 10 Green Buildings (www.aiap.org) and the United States Green Building Council Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Green Building Rating System Project List (www.usgbc.org). Both green building lists include quite a few existing building projects including historically designated ones that demonstrate the best practices in green preservation. However, I cannot help but note that neither list specifically acknowledges building reuse and historic projects in their database.

11 Google these four projects which present an informative spectrum of green preservation:
Draper Hall at Berea College by Sim Van Der Ryn, Jean Vollum Natural Capital Center (Ecorust headquarters) in Portland, Ore., by Green Building Services, California College of Arts and Crafts (former Greyhound Bus Maintenance Facility) in San Francisco by Ledyard Maytum Stacy, and Chicago Center for Green Technology by Farr Associates.

12 Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) tools are largely targeted at products and, more specifically, the impacts associated with their manufacture and use. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) have developed the Building for Environmental and Economic Sustainability (BEES) software tools for rating environmental performance, in essence the “official” U.S. government LCA tool.

13 In my experience, the most comprehensive LCA system to address entire building projects is the Environmental Impact Estimator (EIE) program developed by The Athena Institute, a Canadian nonprofit organization. Athena has applied EIE to two existing building renovation projects, testing contrasting approaches to assessing the value of reusing buildings: “bench-marking” and “avoided impact.” It should be noted that even the EIE does not capture the life-cycle implications of future building renewal regimens.


New Uses for Existing House Museums

Donna Ann Harris

On December 31, 2006, a front-page article in the New York Times announced that Colonial Williamsburg Foundation had decided to put its property Carter’s Grove on the market. The 400-acre riverside estate with a grand 18th-century Georgian mansion is a renowned example of a Virginia plantation. Once open to visitors, the Foundation closed it due to “declining attendance and changing priorities,” according to the article. The announcement sent shudders throughout the preservation movement, if only because it confirmed what most already knew: Historic house museums are in trouble.

Despite the maturation of the preservation movement, house museums are still the most common end use for a local preservation project, whether or not there is a well-funded preservation constituency that can assume the responsibilities of preserving and interpreting a house museum for public visitation.

Today no one knows how many house museums there are in the United States. The last count, taken in 1999 for the Directory of Historic House Museums published by the American Association of State and Local History, listed 8,000, and many sites were missing from that volume. In the intervening years, we have seen many more house museums created by well-meaning people who want to set aside a tangible piece of community history for public visitation. Perhaps, as Moe stated, there are too many house museums.
But what options are available to historic site owners if they conclude they can no longer sustain their property as a house museum?

**Generational Shift**

We are in the midst of a generational shift. As committed volunteers and board members at historic sites are retiring, they are not being replaced by younger people. For want of money, simple maintenance tasks have been put off at house museums, creating ever more expensive repair and restoration needs over the long term. Lacking endowments, the vast majority of these historic sites depend entirely on the current fundraising ability of the board and staff (if there is one) to sustain them year to year. Add to these challenging predicaments the slow but steady decline in attendance, and one sees a clear crisis ahead for many historic sites.

Colonial Williamsburg, wrestling with these issues on a broader scale, decided to act. Its recent decision to sell Carter’s Grove to someone with the financial capacity to properly care for the property, subject to an easement restriction, will assure the permanent protection of the building and its open space. Many house museum organizations are beginning to look for ways to address similar dilemmas, but need to see a range of solutions so they can choose one that best suits their specific situation.

Sales with easements are one of eight solutions that I uncovered while researching successful transitions made by historic house museums to new owners and users. These solutions are presented in New Solutions for House Museums, published by AltaMira Press in April 2007. Three of the eight solutions are profiled briefly here along with case studies.

**Option 1. Reprogram the Site for a New Mission-based Use**

For this solution, the house museum board decides to close the house museum and use the site for a mission-based purpose. There are a wide range of possible operational uses for these properties, including staff housing, library, guest house, museum shop, organizational offices, educational setting, or artifact or other storage. The house museum organization continues to own, manage, and maintain the property. Considerable restoration or rehabilitation costs may be incurred to change the use of the building, including bringing the building up to local building code standards.

The board would make an internal decision to reprogram the site for a mission-based use, and inform the local tourism agency and the community that the site will no longer be open to the public. This decision can be made at the board level and communicated to the organization’s membership, as there is no transfer that might trigger a formal membership meeting and vote. Because the board is motivated to assure the continued preservation of the property, the transition should go smoothly.

**Case Study: Nantucket Historical Association, Massachusetts**

Since its founding in 1894 the Nantucket Historical Association has been the steward of a number of historic properties. It has acquired properties on the island through purchase at auction, deed of gift, private sale, and by bequest. All but one site came without any endowment for maintenance or preservation. The properties vary widely: open space and fields, memorial tablets and plaques, 19th-century warehouses, the old jail, a fire hose cart house, a grand Greek revival mansion, a converted livestock barn, and other rare as well as humble domestic buildings from the 17th through the 19th centuries. By the 1980s the restoration needs of these properties were skyrocketing, and the organization decided to rent three of them to provide a revenue stream for restoration and maintenance of its 22 other properties.

Through a strategic planning process and the creation of its first-ever interpretive plan, the board and staff iden-
tified five themes to broaden the types of stories told by the organization beyond the era when Nantucket was the world’s largest whaling port, from 1740 to 1840. All of the organization’s properties were reviewed to see how they fit into the five broad themes. Three properties were considered “non-essential to the plan,” and the board’s property committee was charged with discussing various options for them. Two of the properties, the 1800 House and Greater Light, had been shuttered since 1997 and needed considerable restoration.

The NHA staff developed a proposal for the 1800 House as a site for a “Lifelong Learning Program” on Nantucket Island devoted decorative arts and crafts. The board allocated $250,000 from unrestricted capital campaign gifts toward the nearly $900,000 needed for the restoration and refitting of the 1800 House for this new educational use. Additional funds specifically for the conversion of the structure came from a newly instituted real property transfer tax that supports preservation projects. All the important original features on the interior and exterior were restored, and a small catering kitchen and a handicapped-accessible restroom were installed along with state-of-the art AV and other equipment for a high-quality educational and small-meeting facility. The property opened in 2005 and is used year-round. It hosts popular hands-on workshops and seminars for all ages on traditional Nantucket arts and crafts such as sailor’s valentines, Nantucket baskets, quilting, samplers, etc.

**Option 2. Resident Curatorship**

This option may be especially appealing to owners of historic sites that have partially restored buildings or ones needing considerable investment that the organization is unable to support through its own fundraising. The house museum use is abandoned and the site is leased to a resident curator for nominal or free rent. In turn, the curator restores the property over a long lease, typically 20 to 40 years. The house museum organization’s role is reduced to being a titleholder, collecting rental fees (if any), and monitoring and interacting with the resident curator.

A formal Request for Proposals (RFP) process can help the board select potential resident curators. The board may need assistance to prepare a quality RFP document and should be advised by someone knowledgeable about the local commercial real estate market. How many potential bidders come forward will be determined by the physical condition of the property as well as the classic rule of real estate: location, location, location. Finding an acceptable curator could still take many months, even if the property is in good condition and in a good location.

**Case Study: Hazelwood House, Upper Marlboro, Maryland**

Hazelwood House sits amid 143.8 acres of parkland which was acquired in 1976 by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) to add to the Patuxent River Park System. The Commission is responsible for parks, recreation, and planning in Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties in Maryland. The Prince George’s County Parks and Recreation Department owns 23,000 acres and 24 historic properties. Its historic sites range from monuments to mansions and span more than 300 years of county history. Several of the sites in this inventory had been allowed to deteriorate due to lack of funding and required serious restoration and rehabilitation work.

The Historic Curatorship Program was initiated in 1999 after two studies of the department’s historic resources indicated that it needed a new and innovative program to promote public/private partnership investment in endangered public properties. The program was modeled after successful resident curatorship programs in Massachusetts, Delaware, and notably the Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

Hazelwood House is the commission’s first curatorship agreement to be signed. The house is a large three-part frame structure with 13 designated National Register properties and 29 other designated historic properties. It hosts popular hands-on workshops and seminars for all ages on traditional Nantucket arts and crafts such as sailor’s valentines, Nantucket baskets, quilting, samplers, etc.
and including Hazelwood House was acquired for its open space values in the 1970s. The resident curatorship program will allow this historic structure to be restored and maintained without public funds. Photo by Donna Ann Harris.

The property surrounding and including Hazelwood House was acquired for its open space values in the 1970s. The resident curatorship program will allow this historic structure to be restored and maintained without public funds. Photo by Donna Ann Harris.

option 3. donation to a governmental or nonprofit entity

For this solution, the house museum organization donates the historic house museum to a state, county, or municipal governmental entity or to another nonprofit organization that has the financial resources to maintain and perhaps restore the building. The historic house museum would need to be a major architectural or historic landmark in the community to warrant this kind of transfer. In addition, the house museum board would need many influential friends to convince the accepting organization or government to take on the burden of ownership. Some may believe that donation is a desperate move, perhaps the last step before the property is abandoned by the organization.

The board of directors or the members can make this decision to act, according to the organization’s bylaws. An attorney should advise the organization on the merits of this solution. The organization will need to contact elected government leaders as well as the government staff to discuss the donation informally before making a public case for the government to accept. An elected official will have to serve as the champion for this proposal for there to be any hope of the governmental unit accepting the property.

Given the budgetary crises of most governmental entities and many nonprofit organizations, it may be very difficult or even impossible for the organization to interest government or another nonprofit to accept the donation of a house museum, especially if it is in poor condition. The discussions may take years. Since it is a donation, the government or other nonprofit can decide not to accept the property under any circumstances.

Case Study: Adel Historical Museum, Adel, iowa

The Adel Historical Society bought an old school house in 1973 to house its collection of Adel and Dallas County artifacts and archival materials. The society intended to open the building as a museum for this small rural central Iowa community. Built in 1857, this two-story brick building was one of the earliest houses in the community, and for 20 years served as the local schoolhouse. The property was cared for by the board of the historical society. They used the building to display local artifacts donated to the society and as a “card party house” for a seniors group, who set up card tables inside the building a few times a year.

By 1998 the Adel Historical Society board of directors determined it could no longer manage the building due to lack of funds and diminishing membership. The society offered to donate the property to the city. The building had various condition problems, including a nonworking furnace, no air conditioning, and extensive termite damage. The society did not require or place an easement on the property prior to its donation to the city.

The city agreed to accept the donation and perform ongoing maintenance with the condition that the local Main Street organization, Adel Partners, move its offices to the site and staff the museum during regular public hours. Adel Partners formed and chaired a museum steering committee which included representatives from the Adel Historical Society and the local historical commission. Adel Partners managed the restoration project on behalf of the city with advice from its design committee. All construction work was completed by local firms or volunteers to meet the Secretary of Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation.

A community-wide fund-raising campaign began in 1999 and raised just over $60,000 to pay for restoration and repairs—a significant accomplishment in this city of 3,400. The city manager was successful in obtaining a $14,271 grant from the local casino’s foundation. An additional $7,000 was obtained from the Historic Resources Development Program of the State Historical Society of Iowa. The city’s initial $7,500 contribution increased to almost $18,000 when other sources of donations appeared to be exhausted. Families and institutions were encouraged to give larger gifts to sponsor rooms in the structure. Individual donations ranged from $10 to $500.

Opened with fanfare in 2002, the Adel Historical Museum building hosts changing exhibits about local history and accepts donations...
to its small collection for display. The local Main Street manager provides tours of the museum during its open season from April 15 to October 15 and during winter holidays. Members of the local historical society continue to manage the objects on display and the archives.

An Evolving Trend

Historic site stewards struggling with sustainability concerns have additional options for changing the use of their property, in addition to the three options described above. These include:

- Designate the property a “study house,” open by appointment only.
- Sell the property with easement restrictions to another nonprofit stewardship organization.
- Merge with another historic site.
- Lease the site to another entity for use as a house museum.
- Create a co-stewardship arrangement with a neighboring site.

As the challenges continue to grow, and as they spread to more and more institutions, so too will the range of creative solutions tried by stewards committed to maintaining their historic building for generations to come.

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Save the Guthrie! Again

Sometimes writing about built environment issues requires a little extra imagination. Minneapolis architect Phillip Koski takes a humorous look at the year 2057, when a fictitious preservation group opposes plans to demolish the by then 50-year-old Guthrie Theater.

Dateline: March 15, 2057

Apple Valley, Minnesota

Under the blazing sun of a typical March afternoon, a dozen dignitaries and philanthropists joined the Guthrie Theater’s creative director, Shamus O’Malley, on the southern bank of the Minnesota River to break ground on the new home for the world-renowned entertainment-arts and virtual-extreme-sports complex.

A large crowd of Guthrie patrons and civic boosters looked on as the esteemed group dug their gold spades into the crumbling asphalt of the long-abandoned Valleyfair amusement park.

Clapping the dust off his translucent white, UV-resistant gloves, Mr. O’Malley mounted the stage to address the crowd with Guthrie president Persephone Cowles-Dayton, the willowy heiress, who sported her trademark deep-rimmed, switchgrass hat. “And thus the curtain is raised,” boomed O’Malley, “on the next act in this theater’s dramatic evolution. Here we build a new Guthrie on the Minnesota!”

“Bravo! Bravo!” Ms. Cowles-Dayton chimed in. “This is a great day for theater and virtual-sports enthusiasts across the Minnesota Metro and around the globe. From Doha to Calcutta, from Tokyo to Mexico City, the eyes of all the world’s cultural capitals are watching in anticipation as we usher in a new era of creative-class, popular entertainment.”

Plans for the new complex were unveiled the preceding day at a fundraising event in the highly exclusive Crystal Court lobby of the IDS Residences Tower in Minneapolis. Designed by Indian starchitect Theodore “Teddy” Singh, the new facility will include a...
Rubenstein made her case for preservation. “While the new design unveiled yesterday may be quite lovely, we are adamantly opposed to the Guthrie’s plans to demolish Jean Nouvel’s masterpiece,” Lucinda Wu Rubenstein explained. “If anything, the building should be historically designated and restored to its previous architectural glory. It is Nouvel’s greatest achievement in the Western hemisphere and a dearly loved landmark that would be sorely missed by the quarter-million high-rise residents living on either side of St. Anthony Falls.”

In response to a reporter’s suggestion that the structure no longer serves the needs of a contemporary entertainment-arts institution, Rubenstein shot back, “The current Guthrie is more than a machine for making theater in! We need to save this building so that future generations can enjoy the beauty of its dark, mysterious hallways, the thrilling crush of people funneled up and down its two escalators, and the unrivaled views of the Dasani Falls Waterpark from the tip of its Endless Bridge. To say these experiences don’t matter is shortsighted.”

A key actor in the pending demolition and a longtime Guthrie partner is the enormously endowed McGuire Foundation. Remaining strategically quiet as the preservation debate unfolds, the foundation owns the Minneapolis Guthrie complex as well as the land it was built on—the property acquired during the economic depression of the early 2030s when the theater was on the verge of financial collapse. Since that time, the McGuire Foundation has leased the building back to the Guthrie organization for one dollar a year. The demolition of the Nouvel building will allow the foundation to move ahead with its plan to expand the adjacent Dowling Memorial Theater to demolish Jean Nouvel’s original design. erasing many of the unfortunate and disfiguring alterations the actual building has endured over the decades.”

Ms. Cowles-Dayton has stated publicly that, while she regrets that the move will result in the original theater’s demolition, many of the historically significant elements of Nouvel’s design were irreparably altered by previous renovations and additions. “The building that was designed is not the building we see today,” she

Who knows what the future holds? Fifty years from now, preservationists might be campaigning to save the new Guthrie Theater, designed by Jean Nouvel and constructed in 2006. Only recently, advocates fought unsuccessfully to save the original 1963 theater, which was designed by Ralph Rapson, a leading contributor to architecture’s modern movement. Photo by Roland Halbe.
explains, “Nouvel’s innovative metal-panel cladding with its midnight blue color and ghostly images was removed in the 2012 renovation because of severe UV degradation. Unfortunately, it simply wasn’t designed to resist the severe changes in our climate.”

According to the records of the Northwest Architectural Archives at the University of Minnesota, the building has endured a number of architectural modifications over its 50-year history—so many, in fact, that only a few of the area’s older residents clearly remember the gleaming luster of Nouvel’s original vision. The familiar beige-brick exterior with square punched windows, the mirrored-glass observation silo on the top of the building, and the bulky, concrete virtual-silo all represent drastic modifications to the original design.

With so little of the original intact, Cowles-Dayton argued successfully before the state historic preservation office (SHPO) last May that it should deny historic designation, a decision that is now facing multiple appeals within the state’s court system. It was during the SHPO hearing that Cowles-Dayton famously said, “Frankly, tearing the whole thing down is the only humane thing to do.”

It was this callous statement, says SOGGY’s Rubenstein, that energized the ad-hoc preservation cause she now leads. “Tearing down the Guthrie and replacing it with sanitized hologram fakes does not qualify as preservation. No matter how many optical-nerve stimulators you strap to my head, nothing beats bricks and mortar for a quality architectural experience.” Rubenstein, who says she’s spoken frequently with Nouvel in recent days (now the oldest living man in France), remains inspired by the optimism of early 21st-century culture and architecture—a time when architects were chiefly concerned with making interesting forms and keeping the water out, and not with the number of terabytes per square foot. “We’re real people fighting for real buildings with real history,” says Rubenstein. “That’s the message we’ll be taking to the Minnesota Supreme Court.”

A Planner Looks at Preservation in China (or the Simulacrum Thereof)

In October 2005, I had the opportunity to visit the ancient city of Xi’an, where, at the invitation of ICOMOS China, ICOMOS held its 15th General Assembly and Scientific Symposium. This marked the second General Assembly in Asia; the first was held in Sri Lanka in 1993. The theme of the symposium was “Monuments and Sites in their Settings: Conserving Cultural Heritage in Changing Townscapes and Landscapes.” Delegates participated in multiple sessions and attended special events marked by great pomp and ceremony, which were orchestrated by the Chinese Committee.

Yet as delegates convened in Xi’an’s sparkling new conference center to consider the theme of preserving the setting of heritage structures, sites, and areas, historic buildings and their settings were being destroyed nearby. And for those of us who visited other cities during a post-conference tour, it became clear that much of the cultural heritage of China is at risk.

During our visit, the city government was demolishing the ancient streets and buildings that framed the city’s historic Drum Tower. This tower, built in 1380 near the center of the city and adjacent to the ancient Muslim Quarter, is now confronted with a McDonald’s built without the benefit of significant design review. Through an adjacent gateway, the Mosque Quarter has been decimated to a Potemkin-like street of tourist shops. The density of housing that gave the district vitality has been bulldozed in the last seven years, and indeed the bulldozers were still at work when we were there. About the only authentic and tranquil place in Xi’an that still remained was the adjacent Great Mosque dating from 742 A.D., where ancient linked courtyards revealed a combination of Islamic gateways with scriptures and Chinese architectural motifs. But around the Drum Tower less
The demolition of centuries-old structures in cites such as Kunming is changing the face of modern-day China. Photo by Ronald Lee Fleming.

The bridge near the market square in Lijiang, which used to be a simple sloping structure crossed by horses and camels at this terminus of the Silk Road caravan route, is now an elaborate stepped white marble affair, resembling those of the gardens of Suzhou near Shanghai. The new bridge is the work of a “restoration” architect four years ago who also added white marble dragons at the edges of the stream bed. The view of the bridge and stream is a most popular postcard, but the cofferdam

cloverleaf freeways. However, the post-conference excursion planned by the Chinese travel agencies for the convention delegates revealed that the result of this mentality is rapidly changing the face of old China.

The Post-Conference Tour and Other Cities

In city after city that we visited, a few monuments, often re-created or restored beyond all evidence of authenticity, were all that remained. The settings were largely gone or were re-created simulacrums. There was little interpretation to tell visitors what had changed, what was real, and what was created.

Certainly there were extraordinary new things to see. The roads to the airports at Shanghai, Beijing, and Kunming were lined with millions of trees. New parks showed sophisticated designs which were astonishingly well executed and brilliantly maintained, such as the new park on Hengshon Road in Shanghai or the police memorial park in downtown Kunming. New pedestrian walkways in Beijing and Kunming were lined with gleaming towers. A long march of high rises from the domestic airport in Shanghai into the downtown makes the relatively tight cluster of Manhattan skyscrapers seem like a village.

But the preservation of settings appeared to our delegation of planners, architects, and archeologists to be an exercise in creating marketing opportunities. The charming old towns that delegates did see, Dali and Lijiang in Yunan Province, feature wall-to-wall shops, and the low-hanging tiled roofs and paved stone streets with fresh streams running alongside are merely a backdrop for the bustling shops and restaurants marketing to the increasing numbers of tourists. Since its designation in 1997 as a World Heritage site, Lijiang, with some 17,000 residents in the old town, has seen its annual number of tourists (mainly from China) rise from half a million to four million a year, and that number continues to increase.

Both towns are rebuilding historic monuments dating from the 17th century. A gateway tower destroyed when the Moguls breached the walls in Dali, and the entranceway to the reigning Mu family’s palace complex in Lijiang demolished during the Cultural Revolution in the 1950-1960s, are now crisply back in situ. But the bridge on the edge of the market square in Lijiang, which used to be a simple sloping structure crossed by horses and camels at this terminus of the Silk Road caravan route, is now an elaborate stepped white marble affair, resembling those of the gardens of Suzhou near Shanghai. The new bridge is the work of a “restoration” architect four years ago who also added white marble dragons at the edges of the stream bed. The view of the bridge and stream is a most popular postcard, but the cofferdam
below the bridge that used to be employed to flood the descending square after market days to clean the streets is now gone—and with it, the memory of a centuries-old custom.

On a more dramatic level, Kunming, the terminus of the Burma Road, is awash with new buildings, and all that is left at the city center, which is marked by restored heavenly gates, is a new entertainment precinct composed of replicas of generic architecture—a kind of consumer district for young trendies going to clubs and restaurants at the city core.

Buried in this district is one old mansion which serves as an office for the development corporation that has done over this little district. Only blocks away, two ancient pagodas have been linked by a new street of “old buildings” (not yet opened) which will house shops and restaurants. This and a few crumbling streets where the old market still thrives are about all that remains to remind one of the low-scaled Chinese city that stood here only 20 years ago. Instead of being able to experience an authentic Chinese city, our group was taken to a theme park where, in true Disney World fashion, we were treated to re-creations of village complexes by the different minority groups that make up much of Yunnan Province’s population.

Our guide, who, like several other Chinese we met, had parents who were banished to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution, seemed apologetic when he said farewell at the airport. He mourned the loss of the old buildings and said, “How can we face the next generation after all of this destruction? Please help us. Let the world know our concern.”

At the conference we had learned from a Norwegian scholar, Amend Sanding-Larsen, who had documented the setting of Lhasa in Tibet, that of the 700 whitewashed buildings that stood at the foot of the Portola Palace 20 years ago only 150 still stand.

And some of us who went to Beijing after our tour were told that only 1,000 of the 3,000 hutongs (narrow streets or alleyways surrounded by courtyard houses) were still left. The walls around Beijing were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and replaced with a ring road. The hutongs, which accommodate the intricacy of life in courtyard houses (that could be modified to reflect a variety of living arrangements), are belatedly being recognized by the Beijing planners as an important tourism resource for rickshaw tours. However, of the remaining 1,000 hutongs, some 40 percent are still scheduled to be demolished.

The government is spending $90 million restoring the Forbidden City and other Beijing monuments, but the newly lacquered pavilions in glossy mandarin red and the new paving stones in the courtyards have destroyed the patina of age that these Ming Dynasty buildings have acquired over time. North of Beijing, at the most popular viewing site of the Great Wall, a bobsled ride reached by a chairlift mars the most sinuous view of the walls.

Still some traces of the past are being saved in a few Chinese cities. The scale of the French Concession in Shanghai—the tree-shaded neighborhood where Europeans lived in the 19th and early 20th century—remains remarkably the same. A small sampling of wonderful early 20th-century buildings marks the famous Bund district where European commerce provided the financial backbone for the glamorous lifestyles of old Shanghai. In contrast, across from the Bund on the new walkway along the river, one could sense the energy of young China in the fantastic shapes of new skyscrapers across the Huangpu on the Pudong skyline, sitting on what was swamp land only 15 years ago.

Some of our ICOMOS delegation reflected about the jarring juxtapositions of the authentic and the artificial. One noticed the plastic flow- ers in the vases on the shrines of the oldest Tibetan temple complex in Beijing side by side with the ancient statues of Buddha. To the keepers of such places, the idea of preserving an authentic setting often associated with smells and grime may be hard to understand, reflecting the fact
that their cultural aesthetic isn’t the same as our preservation aesthetic. The Chinese planners find it much easier to sweep it all away and put a few generic bits of architecture back with modern facilities. But in the end, will it satisfy tourists from abroad?

Dr. Roberta Wong Leung, dean of Shunde Polytechnic, a tourism management school in southern China, said, over dinner at the old Imperial Restaurant in Benhai Park, that her efforts to visit all 21 World Heritage sites in China were unsuccessful. There was no cultural tourism agenda among the 15 Chinese travel agencies that she contacted. This reflects the experience of our group of ICOMOS conference delegates, who found ourselves on the post-conference tour without a knowledgeable guide who could explain what was happening to the old cities. In our case, our protest led to the addition of a teacher, Mr. Mu, who took us around the old city and told us the stories of the re-creation of that Suzhou-style bridge. He appeared pleased that we wanted to know the real story. But “real stories” will disappear as those who know them die off and the new ersatz fabric tells no tales but makes attractive postcards.

While this trip involved many new experiences, I think one of the most important lessons learned was how quickly an authentic place can be tarted up, how history can be lost, and how mass tourism creates new perils. And most critically, how the cultural landscape of China, which somehow escaped the Cultural Revolution, is now being so transformed as to be only a simulacrum of the real.

Ronald Lee Fleming, A.I.C.P., pioneered Main Street revitalization projects for 25 years and has authored several books on place making here in the United States.