

JetModern: An On-the-Ground Survey of Who is Doing What to Save American Modern Architecture

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Modernism + Recent Past Program

Travel, Research and Blogging
by Seth Tinkham
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Edited by Emily Koller

Modernism + Recent Past Program

Significant sites come in all shapes and sizes, and from all eras of American history. The architectural, historical, and cultural sites of the Modern movement and dating from the recent past are an important chapter in our national story, yet thousands of Modern and recent past resources are demolished every day with no consideration of their significance, while scores more stand threatened by a lack of public awareness and public policies that fail to provide adequate protections.

Since 1965, the National Trust for Historic Preservation has helped promote, protect, and preserve Modern and recent past sites along America's roadsides, in its metropolitan centers and suburbs, on its public lands, and fronting Main Street. At a time when development pressures, the vagaries of the economy, and aging infrastructure put more Modern and recent past resources at risk, the National Trust recommits itself to raising public awareness, improving public policy, and supporting grassroots advocacy in this important area of preservation with its Modernism + Recent Past Program, also known as TrustModern.

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

ABOUT JETMODERN

Using the 30-day “All You Can Jet” pass from JetBlue, Seth Tinkham, a self-employed grant writer and preservation planner from Alexandria, Virginia, used the airline’s sell-out promotion and its social media momentum to explore efforts to preserve American Modern architecture. Within 30 days, he visited New York City, New Canaan (CT), Boston, Portland (ME), Chicago, Houston, Salt Lake City, Seattle, San Francisco, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, and Orlando. He wandered neighborhoods with non-profit leaders, interviewed city officials and chatted with residents and homeowners. These interviews and conversations helped identify both immediate threats to Modern buildings and successful policies and programs being used to protect and restore well-known icons and everyday examples.

Tinkham blogged and “tweeted” his way through the 30-day adventure to record his discoveries in real-time. He fit right in with many others using the “All You Can Jet” promotion to raise awareness for their individual causes. JetBlue took notice of their passengers’ flurry of activity on Twitter, blogs and Facebook, reposting select updates on their own Twitter page, including those from [TrustModern’s](#) and JetModern’s Twitter feeds.

Tinkham may have been recording his observations in 145 characters each day, but the broader fieldwork he compiled confirms much of what TrustModern has identified as key challenges to preserving structures of the recent past: a general lack of public awareness and appreciation; and an absence of policy, design guidelines and materials information to support preservation at the local level. Tinkham’s report, especially the local needs he identified, is a valuable tool in shaping the agenda for Modern and recent past preservation in the United States.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Surveys

Although some communities do have architectural surveys that identify significant Modern buildings, most existing surveys are outdated. Local governments and preservation non-profits have little information on the breadth of Modern resources in their communities.

Materials

Property owners struggle to find appropriate replacement materials and fixtures for their Modern era properties. There is a need for professional guidance on material conservation and suitable replacement materials. Design guidelines for recent past resources are almost nonexistent.

Social Media Use

Many of the organizations visited found social media is a highly effective outreach tool for individuals interested in the preservation of Modern resources. Social media is also an effective way to reach interest groups and demographics not traditionally engaged with preservation groups.

Public Engagement

There is a need for programs that support public engagement with Modern era resources. Many organizations have a difficult time setting more recent resources within a historical narrative, particularly one that likely includes their membership’s own lifetimes. A number of organizations have developed educational programs to provide individuals with a better understanding of Modern architecture, but the need exists to draft national contexts for the Modern movement.

Defining “Historic”

Property owners are confused about what “historic” means. The requirements for a building in terms of the age at which it becomes eligible for historic designation differ at local, state and national levels. Many feel the National Register of Historic Places criteria that a structure be older than fifty years and that the architect most closely associated with its construction be no longer living unfairly limit the listing of newer resources.

Thinking About Preservation in New Ways

The vast number of Modern and recent past resources dictates the need for new, more creative ways of conducting preservation. A less curatorial approach – say, saving half a building in its original condition and renovating the other half – requires a diminished focus on the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties but strives toward the ultimate goal of allowing a larger number of buildings to remain in use and in the landscape.

IDENTIFIED NEEDS FOR MODERN RESOURCES

Property Owners NEED Technical Guidance

Documentation (what is historically significant and why) and materials (rehabilitation and replacement).

Non-Profits NEED a Comprehensive Toolkit

A resource book for organizations concerned with Modern architecture to provide solutions to common challenges.

Local Governments NEED Coordinated National Efforts

A leadership voice to provide best practices, funding and organizational support.

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

(WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO NOTED INDIVIDUALS)

National Trust for Historic Preservation Regional and Field Offices:

Leah Brown, Walter Gallas, John Hildreth, Christina Morris, Barb Pahl, Elaine Stiles

Philip Johnson Glass House

Christy MacLear, Gwen North Reiss

CUBEwork

Jason Hart, Chris Johns, Aaron Malnarick

Greater Portland Landmarks

Hilary Bassett

School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Vincent Michael

Landmarks Illinois

Eiliesh Tuffy

Gropius in Chicago Coalition: The Campaign to save Michael Reese Hospital

Grahm Balkany

Houston Mod

Malcolm Perry, Chelby King, Don Browne, Steve Curry, Jason and Vanessa Smith

Utah Heritage Foundation

Kirk Huffaker

Washington Trust for Historic Preservation

Chris Moore

DOCOMOMO WEWA & Historic Seattle

Eugenia Woo

California Preservation Foundation

Cindy Heitzmann, Corrine Ingrassia

Preserve Nevada

Andrew Kirk

Central Florida Modern

John Kaiser, Dawn Kaiser, Jacki Hale

World Monuments Fund

Holly Evarts

City of San Francisco

Andrew Wolfram

Los Angeles Conservancy

Constance Farrell, Alan Lieb

Los Angeles Modern Module Panel

Additional thanks and interviews:

Rachel Levin, Julia Rubin-Smith, Annie Tselikis, Meredith Johnson, Anne McPheeters, Sara Bernstein, Daniel Jarcho, Ruth Grossinger, Aighleann McKiernan, Josh Posner, Mary-Margaret Stratton, Stephen Fox, Christine Madrid French, Janet White, *AtomicIndy*, Margaret Gaertner, Nancy Barba, Kenneth Breisch, Ken Bernstein, Mary Fresques, Pete Ashdown, Mara Thiessen Jones, Courtney Mooney, Robert Searcy

The JetModern Schedule

September - October 2009

9	NEW CANAAN, CT
10	BOSTON, MA
11-13	PORTLAND, ME
14-16	CHICAGO, IL
16-18	HOUSTON, TX
19-22	SALT LAKE CITY, UT
22-24	SEATTLE, WA
25-27	SAN FRANCISCO, CA
27-29	LAS VEGAS, NV
30-Oct 2	LOS ANGELES, CA
3-6	ORLANDO, FL



Site Visit Reports

NEW CANAAN, CONNECTICUT

September 9, 2009

Philip Johnson Glass House, a National Trust for Historic Preservation Historic Site

The Philip Johnson Glass House (1949) in New Canaan, Connecticut, was the first property visited on the JetModern tour. Christy MacLear was interviewed as part of the project. The house and outbuildings – including a library, visitor center, guest house, and galleries – are separate from the space that is actually used as a visitor center. The Glass House is among several properties in and around New Canaan designed by a notable Modernist architect; others with work in the area include Marcel Breuer, Eliot Noyes and Charles Goodman.

While the house and certain outbuildings have been owned by the National Trust for Historic Preservation for some time, they have only recently been opened to the public. The number of visitors to the property is limited by an agreement with the town of New Canaan. As a tourist destination, the Glass House is positioned both as a structure of architectural merit and as significant part of the larger story of Modernism. The National Trust has conducted a survey of other New Canaan Modern homes, highlighting the Glass House as but one example among many, with the goal of raising interest in Modern properties before they are razed. The [survey results](#) are available via the web, as are a number of oral histories from prominent mid-century architects and artists. The National Trust has also expanded public engagement at the Glass House beyond Connecticut, using the property to host international conferences on Modernism. The Glass House uses its own branded social media outlets, including a very popular Facebook page and a blog. The combination of programming and interpretation has led staff to suggest that the project in Connecticut may be a national model for interpreting and using a Modern building and site.

While the Glass House is working to position itself as an international center for Modernism, the local community is equally embraced. The overall tone of engagement strategies, whether for tourists or conference attendees, is that the Glass House is not a typical house museum. Staff strive to create a place of action reaching out to area residents inspire programming. For example, a major exhibit in the visitor center features films and images of the Glass House done by local high school students. Other programs include public tours, a “conversations” series, retreats, continuing education classes for professionals, and an oral history project. The comprehensive outreach strategy of the Glass House, then, is broadly focused and aims to use the house as an educational tool. At a local level, the property is incorporated into arts education attempting to attract young visitors. On a broader national and international level, the house is used as a platform for the documentation of modern and modernist buildings, offering a template for neighborhood surveys, and as a center for discussions of modernism.

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Visit the site at www.philipjohnsonglasshouse.org.

JETMODERN DISCOVERY!

ONE PROPERTY CAN SPUR INTEREST
IN OTHERS IN THE AREA

If studied and programmed effectively, only a handful of
Modernist properties are needed to create the basis for local
engagement.



Photo: Paul Warchol, Glass House

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

September 10, 2009

CUBE design + research LLC

CUBE design + research LLC, or CUBEwork, is a design practice in the Boston area exploring the challenges of preserving and reusing Modern architecture. Principals include Aaron Malnarick, Chris Johns and Jason Hart.

The discussion with CUBEwork focused on rethinking historic preservation. Their interest has evolved in part from statistical data on the sheer number of buildings that will face demolition over the next thirty years. Mid-century architecture uses construction materials in experimental ways; therefore, post-WWII architecture has not aged the same way as buildings built of more traditional material. While many of these structures aren't worthy of historic preservation in the traditional sense – as a curatorial practice that separates historic spaces for safekeeping – their presence is important to the history of the American built environment. From a simple sustainability perspective, we can't possibly afford to demolish that amount of material. The issue, then, becomes one of distancing historic preservation from the notion that it is necessary to preserve a structure in its entirety. Saving a building in its original condition isn't always the right answer and CUBEwork suggests there are many unexplored degrees of preservation between the old-fashioned all-or-nothing proposition. These varying degrees are more developer-friendly and will also be welcomed by groups who should be better partners in our work – sustainability consultants, green builders, etc. Rethinking preservation involves considering dissecting, moving and re-inhabiting buildings in useful and innovative ways.

Our conversation was framed mostly around the Cyclorama Building (Richard Neutra, 1961) at Gettysburg National Military Park in Pennsylvania that features a distinctive round room in which a 360-degree painting of the battlefield was displayed. In great detail, the CUBEwork team has outlined a plan for repositioning the preservation of mid-century structures as something that can be done to discrete pieces of a building. A distinctive exterior element, they suggest, could be separated from a building and reused as a sculpture, or the rotunda structure designed to display the painting at Gettysburg could be stripped of its exterior finishes and the interior support skeleton equally shown as sculpture. Their philosophy tends to be one of selective re-use as a way to allow for dynamic growth in urban spaces while preserving elements of the older built fabric. Given the experimental use of materials that are difficult to reproduce or repair today, CUBEwork suggests that saving the most representative and “save-able” part of the building should be the preservation goal. In this way, communities can keep what is most important to them—a reminder of the past without having to care for and maintain an entire building.

CUBEwork uses both their website and Twitter to publicize their projects. Study them and learn more about their preservation philosophy at www.modernpreservation.com.

JETMODERN DISCOVERY!

PRESERVATION DOESN'T HAVE TO
BE ALL-OR-NOTHING.

The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that 17% (52 billion square feet) of our current building stock will face the prospect of demolition over the next 30 years, and half will be renovated.

To continuously encapsulate our built environment through the act of preservation is counter-productive. *If we are to live with our history while embracing our future, we must rethink the very idea and standards of preservation.*

-CUBEwork, Modern Preservation

PORTLAND, MAINE

September 11 - 13, 2009

Greater Portland Landmarks

Greater Portland Landmarks (GPL) is the citywide non-profit historic preservation advocacy organization for the City of Portland. GPL has recently created the Center for Architecture and Preservation, which will be a regional study center encouraging preservation research. I spoke with Executive Director Hilary Bassett. As an organization, GPL operates the Portland Observatory Museum, provides curriculum materials for teachers, coordinates walking tours, and advocates for local and statewide preservation policy initiatives.

Greater Portland Landmarks has not done a great deal of outreach or programming related to Modern structures, mostly because the city does not have a large number of quality Modern buildings. However, there are a number of residences scattered in the suburbs designed by prominent 20th-century architects. In preserving and interpreting these private structures as well as newer commercial buildings downtown, Greater Portland Landmarks has had to confront the fact that tourists and visitors to the city (particularly those that come by cruise ship in the summer) do not think of the city as having a modern face, and much prefer to see the city's identity in its older buildings. The challenge for GPL has been to develop programming that captures the interest of visitors but doesn't lock the city into only one facet of its architectural past. The Center for Architecture and Preservation is designed to counter this by highlighting architecture and design as ongoing processes. With the influx of tourists generated by cruise ship dockings, the City of Portland has come to see architecture as part of its identity and appeal, suggesting that recognition of the city's Modernist heritage will come. Overall, Hilary Bassett agreed that the key is getting people inside Modern buildings and focusing on the buildings' historic context. To help provide this larger context, the State Historic Preservation Office has developed a supplement to their survey form that explicitly recognizes the distinctive features of Modern structures, like carports, and allows them to be catalogued.

Greater Portland Landmarks has not used social media in its outreach efforts. With a small staff, limited resources, and a full calendar of programs, there does not appear to be the time necessary to devote to an additional outreach stream. Despite support for Modernism-focused programs within the local preservation community, GPL's plate is mostly full meeting existing needs and tourism demands. The greatest help to increasing awareness for mid-century resources has come from the supplement to the statewide survey form. Many other preservation groups, particularly Houston Mod, were very interested in this supplement as something they could bring to their city and state preservation officials.

Visit GPL at www.portlandlandmarks.org.

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

September 14 - 16, 2009

School of the Art Institute of Chicago and Landmarks Illinois

I met with Vince Michael, chair of the Historic Preservation Program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC). I also spoke with Eilish Tuffy, a professor at SAIC and Director of Preservation Programs at Landmarks Illinois, a statewide preservation non-profit organization. The SAIC enrolls approximately 3,000 students in the preservation and conservation fields, as well as fine arts programs.

As an educational institution, SAIC engages with the community somewhat differently from a citywide nonprofit, a house museum or an architectural firm. Faculty and students are seen as a resource and the public often comes directly to the school with technical questions, requests for research assistance and the need for scholarly opinion. Chicago has an extensive Modernist presence; indeed, preservation in Chicago was, according to Michael, almost exclusively focused on Modernist structures until the 1970s. While the curriculum at SAIC reaches beyond a single school or architectural design, some classes do directly address the Modernist tradition in Chicago and Cook County, and students are involved in some survey work. Modernism is not as controversial in Chicago as it is in other cities. The meeting with Michael mostly set the stage for one with Landmarks Illinois, a statewide preservation organization.

Landmarks Illinois has a statewide reach that is both advocacy and education focused. For their advocacy efforts, Landmarks Illinois most frequently engages with local level planners. The organization is also involved in trying to update an earlier survey of buildings in and around Chicago, that currently only includes structures built through 1940. The survey is volunteer-led and the process has been steady but time consuming. Within the context of Chicago as an “architecture city,” Landmarks Illinois often finds the public supportive of the preservation of Modern structures, but faces challenges from the city leadership. A good example of this is the Michael Reese Hospital complex, where generating community support for the hospital building, which city leaders sought to raze completely, was not difficult. Landmarks Illinois has a Facebook and Twitter presence that they use to announce upcoming events related to preservation. Their social media content serves to highlight actions, while the website provides more in-depth treatment of topics.

The JetModern visit to Chicago also involved a “Modern Skyscrapers” tour offered by the Chicago Architecture Foundation featuring many of the city’s

JETMODERN DISCOVERY!

SOCIAL MEDIA CAN EXPRESS
CONTROVERSIAL MID-CENTURY
PRESERVATION BATTLES IN REAL-TIME,
REACHING WIDER AUDIENCES FASTER.

The Gropius in Chicago Coalition used social media almost exclusively to document the demolition of the Michael Reese Hospital Complex by the city in 2009. They received letters of support from across the county and the world.



East elevation of the Friend Convalescent Home, MRH campus, and below, demolition in October 2009.

Photos: Gram M. Balkany / Gropius in Chicago Coalition

iconic buildings. The tour was excellent but did not contextualize the Modernist structures within a historical continuum.

Gropius in Chicago Coalition: The Campaign to Save Michael Reese Hospital (Save MRH)

Michael Reese Hospital (MRH) is a complex including a hospital, research buildings, and a dormitory for nursing staff in Chicago. Large parts of the complex were designed by architect Walter Gropius and the entire complex – save one structure – and portions of the surrounding community are threatened with demolition. A few of the hospital complex buildings have already been razed. The Gropius in Chicago Coalition is a group of volunteers, led by Graham Balkany, who have fought the destruction of Walter Gropius' buildings in Chicago and have been focusing their recent efforts on the campus, its building, and landscapes. At the time of the interview, plans called for the removal of the campus, rearrangement of access roads, and construction of dormitory facilities for athletes competing in the 2016 Olympics, which Chicago had submitted a bid to host. Chicago has since lost the bid, but continues to tear down buildings on the MRH campus.

The coalition is almost entirely internet-based, using Save MRH as their web identity on Twitter, Facebook, and their web page. Twitter seems to provide an ideal platform for Save MRH, as the group receives letters of support from groups across the country and continues to speak out about the destruction of a facility suited to being a residential complex to be replaced with a residential complex. Save MRH is able to use Twitter to “push” content to interested individuals, rather than waiting for them to visit the organization's website. During and the city's bid to host the Olympics, Twitter provided a fast and efficient way to update the group's followers who first discovered the advocacy efforts through mediums like rallies, blogs, and the group's extensive website. The website packages and assembles the group's activities into a rolling newsfeed while also providing more formalized division of content into sections that provide a better description of the campus and proposed changes. Save MRH has been able to use its online presence to generate interest in its cause through separating the responsibility for maintaining the web page and other online resources from the activities of the Executive Director.

Visit Landmarks Illinois at www.landmarks.org; and the Gropius in Chicago Coalition at www.savemrh.com.

Read Vince Michael's blog, *Time Tells*, at <http://vincemichael.wordpress.com>.

HOUSTON, TEXAS

September 16 - 18, 2009

Houston Mod

Following a lecture by curator and critic Peter Buchanan, hosted by the Rice University Design Alliance, I met with members of Houston Mod. Houston Mod is a volunteer-led citywide nonprofit organization that focuses primarily on the mid 20th-century neighborhoods that surround downtown Houston. With Houston Mod members, I toured several neighborhoods around Houston, as well as specific homes.

Houston Mod has assembled an impressive amount of information on the 20th century history of the city and the members I met were very knowledgeable about the growth and development of Houston overall. Although there are no zoning laws, and owners are only bound by deed restrictions that expire after a period, most mid 20th-century neighborhoods in Houston are fairly intact. Houston Mod highlights properties within these neighborhoods through their "Mod of the Month" program, an informal gathering of members and prospective buyers held in recently listed Modern properties. Beyond these events, the group has put out an extensive range of publications that chronicle the city's growth and change and

have undertaken a Modern resource survey. Houston Mod members were very interested in using the survey form developed by the State of Maine as a basis for more formalized local efforts to chronicle mid-century properties in Houston. The group does have a Facebook site, but it is only sporadically updated.

Houston Mod as an organization seems to be the ideal type of group for whom a Modern preservation toolkit would be helpful, as this guidance could help the group as it works to enlarge its membership base, interact more with the local government, and use social media to get its message out. Having an established structure and some ready reference tools would help volunteer-led groups like Houston Mod's better manage a growing workload.

Glenbrook Valley

Glenbrook Valley is a neighborhood in Houston with a significant number of Modern homes. Real estate agent Robert Searcy has designed a website for the neighborhood and specializes in the sale of mid 20th-century homes. He is the first real estate agent the JetModern project encountered with such interest and specialization.

Searcy's website for the neighborhood is a rich source of documentation. His pitch to potential clients, though, is not based

JETMODERN DISCOVERY!

REAL ESTATE BROKERS ARE OUR FRIENDS.

Houston Mod works closely with real estate agents who are 'students' of mid 20th-century architecture. Their websites, like Robert Searcy's site for the Glenbrook Valley neighborhood in Houston, can be a wealth of information and are under-utilized tools that celebrate Modernism.

Ultra Swank Rambler with Guest House

Price: \$229,900

Spacious roman brick rambler over 3400 sq ft with separate guest house with full bath that adds over 400 more square feet. Both formals, den with flagstone fireplace and cove lighting, huge party room with long cocktail bar. 4 big bedrooms, 2.5 baths, kitchen with cross ribbon glass door panels on cabinet facing breakfast room.



Photo and Listing: Robert Searcy's Glenbrook Valley website.

necessarily on the history of the area. Instead he markets the idea that suburban neighborhoods of the 1950s and 1960s are now fully part of the urban landscape of Houston, yet maintain their characteristic spacious and private lot and home layouts. In short, Glenbrook is an urban alternative that offers residents a house and property of a distinct style and design. He notes that even less architecturally outstanding ranch houses can be outfitted with period or reproduction pieces or landscaping to be quite remarkable. This is most often due to the unique features of many properties— such as skylights and large sliding glass doors forming a wall of the house— that, are not typically found in newer homes. The often reported difficulty, though, is finding suitable replacement parts for fixtures whose standard sizes have changed over the years or finding materials no longer in mass production.

See the work of Houston Mod at www.houstonmod.org and visit Robert Searcy's website at www.glenbrookvalley.com.

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

September 19 - 22, 2009

Utah Heritage Foundation

The Utah Heritage Foundation is Utah's statewide, non-profit preservation organization. Their membership developed the Salt Lake City Modern Committee in 2008, by the National Trust's 2008 National Preservation Conference in Tulsa, OK. Similar to Houston, the majority of modern structures in Salt Lake City are residential.

In general, the Utah Heritage Foundation works to preserve a range of buildings. The Modern Committee and Utah Heritage Foundation have designed a number of educational efforts in order to raise awareness of local Modern architecture. Of particular note is the work underway to produce an architectural family tree, helping to tie architects to the buildings they built and the individuals who now live in them. The goal of this project is to personalize preservation while building a city-wide database of Modern properties. This is particularly important as Salt Lake City's mid 20th-century properties are geographically scattered. While many other organizations profiled for JetModern are doing some kind of survey work, the content tends to focus on the historic context of the buildings' completion dates, and does not take into account subsequent history, use, or significance. In terms of social media and outreach, the Utah Heritage Foundation has a Facebook page that is regularly updated, and including shorter stories that link to the foundation's web site.

The Utah Heritage Foundation raised an important issue about the use of social media. When they announced the date and times of their popular and established homes tour, they tried to publicize it through online channels only, including using Facebook to manage RSVPs. Unfortunately, the events reached capacity and it was difficult to communicate to those still wanting to attend that there was no space. Since then, for popular events, the Foundation has used its online presence to allow people to request to be added to a guest list - invitations and RSVPs are managed through traditional mail.

Visit the Utah Heritage Foundation at www.utahheritagefoundation.com.

The visit to Salt Lake City included the first "Tweet-up" of the project, held at the Twilite Lounge. The Tweet-up was an experiment to see whether Twitter could be used to generate a live response. Attendance was a bit low, but it was good practice for the San Francisco Tweet-Up.

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

September 22 - 24, 2009

Washington Trust for Historic Preservation

The Washington Trust for Historic Preservation is Washington's statewide non-profit preservation organization. The Washington Trust has recently been involved with supporting the nomination of a nuclear reactor in the middle of the University of Washington campus in Seattle to the National Register of Historic Places. The information uncovered on this visit is an excellent example of the challenges facing the listing of Modern resources on the National Register.

Within the professional preservation community, there is disagreement as to whether the National Register criterion that buildings be fifty years or older, as well as the unwritten policy that architects no longer be living, helps or hinders the preservation movement. JetModern discussions indicate that these criteria and policies result in iconic and monumental 20th-century structures being listed, but leave out lesser-known and equally threatened properties. National Register guidance states that the 50-year criterion and "living architect" policy help moderate between resources of passing, contemporary significance and resources of lasting significance, and stresses that exceptions are provided for each category. In Chicago, Vince Michael suggested a possible solution: the creation of a category to allow for the listing of a building because of its contributions to a contextual history of an area or group of people. This might be a way to recognize significance independent of time by allowing buildings to be assessed by their contribution to a larger category like "automobiles" or "International Style."

During the visit to Seattle, the nuclear reactor at the University of Washington was discussed as an example of just this type of structure, with some feeling that the building was not exceptional, while others argued that it was outstanding within a given context. The Nuclear Reactor Building (More Hall Annex), was not listed on the National Register at the time of the JetModern field visit, but has since been both nationally and locally listed. In making the case, the National Register nomination form stressed two main points under listing criteria pertaining to significance for association with important events (Criterion A) and design (Criterion C): first, its association with the movement towards the peaceful use of nuclear energy; and second, the form of the building. Completed in the Brutalist style in 1961, the reactor facility was built by a group of architects with ties to the University of Washington called The Architect Artist Group.¹ The building was listed on the National Register over the objections of the University of Washington, who felt that the reactor building was neither an important example of Brutalism, nor that it contained a significant design element to connect it to a larger historical

JETMODERN DISCOVERY!

MODERN RESOURCES NEED TO BE
CONTEXTUALIZED BEYOND THE LOCAL
LEVEL FOR NRHP NOMINATION.

Modern structures often have very different forms from surrounding buildings. Historic designation at the federal level may require evaluating the structure for its contribution to a larger historical category like "Automobiles" or "Nuclear Development" independent of local context as in the case of the More Annex Hall, the Nuclear Reactor building, at the University of Washington.



Photo: Abby Wilson, University of Washington

¹ Nuclear Reactor Building – King County, Washington NRHP Nomination Form, Section 8 Continuation Sheet, p. 1.

narrative.² The nomination paperwork, however, contends that construction of the reactor building and growth of a nuclear engineering program at the University of Washington “represented a significant (local) manifestation of a nationally important trend associated with the expansion of nuclear engineering technology during the post-World War II-era.”³ The reactor, then, becomes a local representation of a group of structures related to this theme. As a result, the significance of the reactor building grows beyond Seattle.

The University of Washington also objected to the National Register listing because the site did not play a role in any significant experimentation in nuclear science and was not connected with any nationally significant event. However, setting the structure within the larger, national conversation on the role and place of nuclear energy after World War II reveals that its significance is independent of its date of construction, being based in the role the building had as part of a number of facilities researching peaceable applications for nuclear science. Creating a national context for the reactor building seems, based on the argumentation of the National Register documentation, to be important in establishing the significance of recent past resources, which often have very different forms from surrounding buildings.

DOCOMOMO WeWA and Historic Seattle

The western Washington chapter of the international organization DOCOMOMO (Documenting and Conserving the Modern Movement), DOCOMOMO WeWa is primarily an educational membership group that functions parallel to several statewide and citywide historic preservation organizations. Eugenia Woo from the regional chapter was interviewed. She also is the Director of Preservation Services for Historic Seattle, Seattle’s citywide, non-profit preservation organization.

Much like the Utah Heritage Foundation, DOCOMOMO WeWa is working on an oral history project that will highlight the work of Modern architects in western Washington. The work of these architects is particularly threatened due to development pressure, a lack of public appreciation, and, according to Woo, the “assumption that because [some] don’t understand the aesthetic [a building] can be demolished.” To counter this, DOCOMOMO WeWa and Historic Seattle, like the other organizations interviewed, concentrate on providing technical assistance to homeowners along with tours, lectures, and events allow the public to interact directly with Modernist structures. These last three efforts focus on education; the organization strives to provide context and information to humanize the buildings. DOCOMOMO WeWa is an organization that exists exclusively online and is completely reliant on email for communication. They do not have a Twitter or Facebook page, nor do they have a blog; they do, however sell tickets to events online and accept online donations. On the other hand, Historic Seattle is a bit more dynamic in its use of the internet; they have a Facebook presence and Woo has started blogging at MAIn2.

Visit DOCOMOMO WeWa at www.docomomo-wewa.org and Historic Seattle at www.historicseattle.org.

Read the MAIn2 blog at <http://main2seattle.wordpress.com>.

² Ibid., Letter of Objection, Univ. of Wash to the WA State Advisory Council on Historic Preservation 14 Oct. 2008, pp. 2-3, 5-7.

³ Ibid., Reviewer’s Comments (Paul R. Lusignan)

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

September 25 - 27, 2009

California Preservation Foundation

The California Preservation Foundation is California's statewide nonprofit preservation organization. Its small staff size prevents a Modern-focused program, although the organization's conferences have focused on the subject in the past.

The California Preservation Foundation's outreach activities include conferences, workshops, and training sessions. All architectural periods receive equal amounts of programming in efforts to serve all segments of the organization's membership base. Given the large size of California, the California Preservation Foundation is primarily reactive to Modern preservation issues, allowing and empowering local preservation organizations to be the primary voice in their communities. On a statewide level, they have just begun to address an underserved community - young people - by developing curricular materials for the state's youth, most recently through art classes in preparation for their 2010 conference in Nevada County. In this county, CPF has developed an innovative short film competition that will highlight conference tracks. The competition (hosted on YouTube) engages youth in material they might otherwise not be exposed to while giving the Foundation new voices to tell the story of preservation. In addition, the project has enriched the art curriculum with local history; art teachers in the county have even decided to add a poster competition and possibly a photography one, too.

Visit the California Preservation Foundation at www.californiapreservation.org.

The visit to San Francisco also included the project's second Tweet-up, held at the Tonga Room, a high-style Tiki bar at the Fairmont Hotel. Approximately 15 to 20 people responded to the event as advertised on local preservation mailing lists, Twitter, and the JetModern blog.

LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

September 27 - 29, 2009

Preserve Nevada

Preserve Nevada is Nevada's statewide, non-profit preservation organization and is housed in the History Department at the University of Nevada - Las Vegas, working closely with its public history program. It is focused primarily on training a new generation of preservation professionals using the university as a bridge to connect academia to the community. Advocacy is done in concert with professional development.

In regard to Modern resources, Preserve Nevada works to alter the general perception of Nevadans that Modern architecture is not historic. Unique to their region is a public affinity for post-war neon signs. Young Electric Sign Company, YESCO, owned many of these signs and simply leased them to the casinos and hotels around the city. As a result, they have been well-maintained over the years. The appeal of these signs has given Preserve Nevada an unusual angle—they are able to link the “value” of the sign with the “value” of the structure to which it is attached. But, as Janet White (a professor at UNLV not associated with Preserve Nevada) notes, the best of mid 20th-century Las Vegas is already gone, and the key to saving what is left is to “make people aware of what they’ve got.” Preserve Nevada does not utilize blogging, Twitter, or Facebook.

Visit Preserve Nevada at <http://preservenevada.unlv.edu>.

JETMODERN DISCOVERY!

USE ICONIC PARTS OF A BUILDING TO GENERATE INTEREST IN THE REST.

Preserve Nevada uses a unique regional affinity for neon signs to cultivate interest in the less-loved Modern buildings to which they are attached.



Photo: Emily Koller

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

September 30 - October 2, 2009

Los Angeles Conservancy

Arguably the United States' foremost Modernism preservation organization, the Los Angeles Conservancy (LAC) and its Modern Committee (ModCom) have long been active in preserving mid 20th-century structures.

The LAC uses social media extensively, especially for its "Sixties turn Fifty" program, an initiative to highlight Modern properties in Los Angeles. In using Twitter and Facebook to build interest in and to promote events related to this program, the LAC has found that their social media outreach efforts have been just as effective as direct mailings. However, there are no plans to abandon traditional outreach tools; rather, online outreach will continue to serve as an additional channel within a comprehensive outreach strategy. The biggest advantage, according to Constance Farrell of the LAC, is that social media quickly reaches a younger and wider audience. Despite the appeal of social media, the LAC stresses that their primary goal is to drive visitors to their website. The "participatory atmosphere" of Twitter and Facebook is a bonus that allows member engagement; it is not, however, a replacement for quality web hosted content.

For smaller organizations, Constance Farrell recommended that a way to lessen the staff burden might be to use Twitter and Facebook to concentrate on fresh content even if it is not produced by the organization. Rather than always turning followers to the organization's home page, Tweets might link to an article that references the organization or is of interest to members. The need for constant Tweeting and Facebook activity would then be greatly reduced. Both Farrell and Holly Evarts of the World Monuments Fund recommended the use of Google Alerts as an online clipping service that allows organizations of all sizes to maintain an awareness of articles about a group or to highlight the content of others that might be relevant to a group's members. Further, the Conservancy has used YouTube as an advocacy tool to, quite literally, show why preservation is important. This is an added outreach stream that could provide content both directly for an organization or as a citation in a Facebook post or Tweet.

In addition to speaking with the LA Conservancy, the JetModern project in Los Angeles also included attending TrustModern's first Modern Module, a two-day lecture and invited panel series funded by the National Endowment for the Arts. The Module began with a public overview session that emphasized the context of mid-century Los Angeles, particularly in reference to the ambitious survey program the City of Los Angeles has just begun, known as SurveyLA. The next day, at a closed panel, experts gathered to discuss solutions to bridging the gap between the public and historians. Some suggestions included the proactive nomination of "easy" buildings and allowing the civic conversation on the preservation of mid 20th-century resources to develop in a less hostile environment than with highly controversial structures. In addition, it was suggested that there is a need to revise the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and to develop collaborative partnerships to help with this. Beyond the technical focus, Module attendees emphasized the importance of education, especially reaching populations not otherwise engaged by preservation groups.

Visit the LAC at www.laconservancy.org.

ORLANDO, FLORIDA

October 3 - 6, 2009

Central Florida Modern

Central Florida Modern (CFM) is part of the Nils M. Schweizer Fellows, a non-profit corporation named after the prominent Central Florida architect, with a goal to promote awareness and seek the preservation of Central Florida's exceptional Modern architecture. Central Florida Modern is a small, non-profit membership organization staffed by volunteers.

One of the largest initiatives of CFM has been to hold an international design competition for the reuse of the precast concrete *brise soleil* surrounding the American Federal Building (Bob Murphy, 1963), popularly called the Round Building. The City of Orlando is razing the Round Building to make room for an office building and performing arts center. CFM has fought to save parts of the Round Building's distinctively patterned concrete curtain wall through a reuse design competition, RBR360. The competition is a good example of the 'selective preservation' philosophy advocated for by the architectural firm CUBEwork. RBR360 was developed independently by CFM and has helped raise awareness for both the building and the organization, constituting one of their largest outreach efforts to date, and providing a stellar model for the reuse of Modern resources facing development pressure.

Another important part of CFM is supporting owners of buildings by Neils Schweitzer, a student of Frank Lloyd Wright who oversaw the construction of a number of Wright-designed buildings in central Florida. To date, CFM has focused on organized discussions of preservation strategies for Schweitzer buildings. They are also working to support the only house in Florida fully executed - both designed and built - by Wright. The current owners would like to turn it into an art center or retreat, but are struggling with maintenance issues. The group is not yet developed a comprehensive educational program; however, they have created a catalogue of Modern structures throughout the region on their website and maintain a Facebook page. Most outreach is done through email. CFM is small, but committed, and is exactly the type of organization that could benefit from the support of a national preservation organization and network of peers throughout the country.

Visit CFM at www.centralfloridamodern.com and the Round Building Reuse competition www.rbr360.com.

JETMODERN DISCOVERY!

SELECTIVE PRESERVATION CAN HELP
SAVE SIGNIFICANT PARTS OF
MODERN COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS
FACING URBAN REDEVELOPMENT
PRESSURE.

The RBR 360 Design Competition in Orlando generated interest in the 1963 American Federal Building's concrete *brise soleil* - the winning entry is an urban sundial situated in a nearby park.



Photos: Central Florida Modern

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

World Monuments Fund⁴

An international advocacy organization with offices in the United Kingdom, France, and the United States, the World Monuments Fund is broadly concerned with the preservation of the built environment. While it has an established Modern program, the organization focuses primarily on prehistoric resources.

Outreach for Modernism is one part of a larger engagement strategy for World Monuments Fund (WMF). WMF has a blog, Twitter account, and Facebook page. With an international reach, Evarts noted that blogging from the field has not been easy for the staff. The constant need for content is difficult to meet, and the staff struggles to do remote blogging, which leads to a significant lag time between when a site visit is made and returning to the home office. Tweeting has, so far, only been in English. Evarts mentioned that WMF uses Google Alerts to monitor its presence online and has also used a grant from Google to purchase Google Adwords, a paid search ranking feature. An advertisement placed on Facebook was extremely successful in increasing the number of online friends of the WMF page. A new primary goal for press announcements is to get on wire services (particularly internationally), as the wire distribution reach is very large, and can be a way to receive coverage in languages other than English and in publications not previously targeted.

Visit the World Monuments Fund at <http://www.wmf.org>.

⁴ Interview conducted after the September 2009 traveling portion of JetModern.

Blog Entries

Jet Modern: Columbus Circle + Pennsylvania Station

by **Seth Tinkham** on September 15th, 2009



2 Columbus Circle, c. 1964
Photo: NTHP

Why wasn't [2 Columbus Circle](#) the next Penn Station? It's not the first time a building in New York has attracted the widespread attention of preservationists.

In 1963 when Pennsylvania Station (NY) was razed, the outcry helped to shift federal cultural heritage laws toward explicitly and systematically including structures. The destruction of Penn Station also helped bring preservation from a local/localized effort to a nationally coordinated one.

When plans to alter 2 Columbus Circle (Edward Durell Stone, 1964) were drawn up, though many rallied around the structure, there was no widespread groundswell of support resulting in either a major shift in preservation policy nor general attitudes towards the preservation of mid-century buildings. To be clear, a number of individuals and groups (including the National Trust for Historic Preservation) advocated on behalf of preserving the building, or, at the very least, having the New York Landmarks Commission have a hearing on the matter. I do not know the full history of the Commission's decision not to hear the case for preserving 2 Columbus Circle.

The point, though, is that while the loss of Penn Station engendered broad support for preservation protections, the major loss of the façade of 2 Columbus Circle and the renovations to the interior did not. At the time Penn Station was destroyed, it was about 50 years old. When Columbus Circle was altered, it was also about 50. With two buildings of approximately the same age, how is it that one became a touchstone for the creation of a protected status for buildings and the other was heavily altered?

The removal of the original Penn Station building from the landscape of Manhattan was driven in large part by shifting modes of transportation, a corresponding declining use of rail, and increasing property values (air rights) which put a premium on space, making generous waiting areas and separate arrival and departure areas ripe for re-purposing for revenue generation. This very shift shows a social progression documented in a structure - from train to jet to car. The station took on a symbolic role as a constructed space with meaning within a community as the building became a historical marker of the rail age. Its form (appearance), shaped by grand rail travel, documented a moment in history.

Are there some ways that 2 Columbus Circle could have been re-



2 Columbus Circle in 2009
Photo: Seth Tinkham

set as a similar marker of history, a history this time not of the early 1900s, but of the mid-1900s?

To help understand some of the obstacles faced by those in favor of preserving 2 Columbus Circle, and some successful strategies for community engagement in and with modern structures, I headed to New Canaan, CT to visit [Philip Johnson's Glass House](#), a modernist residence set among colonial Connecticut farmhouses.

Next stop: New Canaan.

[JetModern: George Washington Didn't Sleep Here...](#)

by **Seth Tinkham** on September 17th, 2009

But maybe he would have wanted to...

You wouldn't think that New Canaan, a former farming town now a commute away from New York City, would house one of the largest collections of mid-century modern buildings in the country.

Beginning in the late 1940s, many of America's most famous modernist architects settled in New Canaan, Connecticut. According Gwen North Reiss, my tour guide for one of the most famous houses here, [Philip Johnson's Glass House](#), the architects were drawn to the area by [Eliot Noyes](#) who had moved with his family to then-rural Connecticut because it was affordable and had good schools. Soon after, though, others followed, inspired by Noyes' leadership to build show houses, buildings that would be "calling cards" and help to generate new commissions. Many of the architects came from Harvard's architecture school; Philip Johnson was one of the Harvard group. Selecting a site overlooking a hollow, he built the Glass House in 1949, placing it among the colonial cottages and houses already in New Canaan.



**Philip Johnson's Glass House in
New Canaan, Connecticut**

Photo: Seth Tinkham



**Philip Johnson's Glass House: Exterior
view of the gatehouse known as "The
Monsta." Photo: Carol Highsmith**

In the 1980s when Johnson gave the Glass House, outbuildings, and land to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, he did so because he felt that, absent some protection, the structure would be torn down by a community that objected to modernist building forms.

I was curious to see what Christy MacLear, executive director of the Glass House, has done to help increase the visibility of the house and the way the property participates in life in New Canaan. The Glass House certainly is an active player in both the local community and beyond. To do this, the staff used traditional methods to increase the visibility of the property,

share the context in which the house developed, and provide information to visitor.

[Using a survey of surrounding structures](#), the staff turned what could have otherwise been a common tack into an interactive resource, posting the results online and in print and widening the scope to include communities beyond Connecticut. Building awareness of the property and modernism off this survey was a key in the plan to make Philip Johnson's Glass House less about the house itself and more about the creating a center for modernism in a larger context.

So, how did they do this and what worked? The key was positioning the property not in isolation, as a reactionary preservation response to a threat, but to setting the house, grounds, and outbuildings as a dynamic place within the modernist conversation. This had three parts:

1. appropriately harnessing new technology (to make the survey collaborative through online participation and, in another project, the posting of YouTube videos of oral interviews of influential mid-century architects – both older interviews and more contemporary);
2. designing programming which gets the public and specialists into the structure(s) to learn about modernism in general;
3. and by maintaining the property as a good example of the modernist form.

Again, the end result is a better understanding of context.

While the survey may be a slightly more academic exercise, the ease of accessibility to the study data, its attractive and well planned presentation, and open platform all easily allow it to function well at a local and national level. Smartly planned publicity that does not alienate potential visitors based on how they may receive information (online or in person, as it were), can help to place the property not within a separate narrative of newness, but one which is incorporated within the whole of the historical built narrative. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, getting visitors in and through the property. Positive interaction appears to be key. Positive does not mean that visitors will leave liking the structure more than they did when they arrived; rather, it means having an informed opinion.

My sense has been that once people know some of the *why* behind the form of a newer building, they will understand (again, this doesn't mean like) the appearance. I would be curious to know if anyone has any demonstration of this. At any rate, there is a good deal of theory to mid-century modern, which is not unique. The Arts & Crafts movement was equally about improving life through built structures. Mid-century modern, though, has less obvious expressions of craft and human craftsmanship and (usually) much more apparent theoretical aspects. Understanding the theory at work is helpful to understanding the building. Most importantly, though, because George Washington didn't sleep in newer properties, one doesn't have the advantage of presenting visitors with a narrative that ties into (positive) preconceived notions. Building an informed narrative around a newer property is what, I believe, Christy MacLear and staff at the Glass House are trying to do. Getting people in structure and looking at it is the opportunity to get the informed message across and provide an additional layer to popular opinion and critics.

Next stop: Boston.

[JetModern: Coming Up Next Week](#)

by **Sarah Heffern** on September 18th, 2009

As Seth makes his way from Houston to Salt Lake City via JFK (because it's on the way?), I thought I'd share a couple of photos he took of Boston's City Hall — one of the sites he'll be writing about next week. Enjoy the eye candy as you head into the weekend!

(By the way... It might not be proper to mention it here, since this is a blog and not Twitter, but modern fans in Salt Lake City can meet Seth at his "tweetup" on Monday night. [Visit his Twitter page to get details on the time and location.](#))



Boston's City Hall
Photo: Seth Tinkham

[JetModern: Partial Preservation Pressure?](#)

by **Seth Tinkham** on September 21st, 2009

The staff of the [Glass House](#) have made the choice to position the property as both a house museum and a center for modernism. In doing this, they have made the decision to set the property as a space that is both part of the past and actively involved in the present. For example, local high school students were invited to tour the property and make videos of certain elements as a part of their coursework. In this way, the property is captured as part of the historical record, but used as the backdrop for new projects.

Coming out of my visit to the Glass House in New Canaan, Connecticut, I headed to Boston to speak with an architecture firm looking creatively at what preservation and adaptive reuse might mean for newer structures. Together, Jason Hart, Chris Johns, and Aaron Malnarick are the architectural firm [Cube](#). Our conversation raised a number of interesting points about how [preservation of newer structures](#) might differ from the presentation and preservation of older buildings.

Many mid-century modern buildings used experimental materials to a much higher degree than is common today. As a result, it is worth considering what the intended lifespan of some structures is and what preservation of these structures might mean. While a question not unique to mid-century buildings, if major components are regularly replaced because of material failure, how authentic is the structure as a whole?

We spoke about the possibility of partially preserving some newer structures — keeping central features while razing other parts and replacing them with new additions. This brings up an interesting question: are there elements of a structure that are more "historic" than others? That is, are there parts which better represent a defining historical characteristic than others? Would less than 100% retention of original features still constitute preserving a mid-century building (or, I suppose, any building) so long as these defining parts are retained?

They took the point even further and suggested that preservation of our built heritage can be advanced by looking beyond the building itself and by setting its parts as representations of larger themes. In doing this, the whole of the building is reduced to an element of the story told through preservation, which suggests that it might be possible to consider saving some portions while adding on through new construction as the condition and “saveability” of structures warrants. Much of this conversation took place within considering possibilities for Neutra’s Cyclorama (1961) at [Gettysburg National Military Park](#) in Pennsylvania.

For my own part, I tend to think that most modern structures are carefully sited, and that it would be difficult to add on to extant structures without altering both the structure and the relationship to its surroundings. However, I am certainly willing to admit that there must be cases where, through saving some character-defining element that is later incorporated into more contemporary construction, it’s possible to have a solid suggestion of the past while allowing a structure to grow and adapt to a new context. As Jason, Aaron, and Chris put it, this second life would still allow people to interact with the structure, perhaps even more than if it were a hermetically-sealed, 100% intact preserved resource.

In light of this, I wonder what some possibilities might be for a very public and often disliked modern building, [Boston City Hall](#) (Kallmann, McKinnell and Knowles, 1968), which could carry a demolition cost so high that perhaps some conditional reuse might be interesting to think about.

Next stop: Portland, Maine.

[JetModern: Preservation + Community Identities](#)

by **Seth Tinkham** on September 21st, 2009



Although limited, Portland’s mid-century building stock is functionally diverse, featuring structures that range from commercial buildings, to public buildings, to private residences.

Despite its name, historic preservation is as much about the present as the past. That being said, there are a number of incentives to emphasize or deemphasize particular aspects of the past as recorded in the built landscape around us.

Since citywide preservation organizations typically help communities see their built heritage as part of their identities, they can also help communities negotiate an identity that broadly incorporates all of their built history. In Portland, Maine, I met with Hilary Bassett, executive director of [Greater Portland Landmarks](#). We talked about some of the ways that preservationists in Portland are helping to balance how the city presents itself to visitors and residents.

She explained that, although limited, Portland’s mid-century building stock is functionally diverse. During the 1970’s, the city was recovering from a break in new building construction that lasted from the 1920’s until the 1960’s. This long break in new building seems to have meant a lower volume of modern structures, but not a smaller variety. Portland’s mid-century modern structures



Portland Public Library

Photo: Seth Tinkham

Portland's public library, a modernist structure, is undergoing a sensitive renovation which covers formerly open areas with glass windows. [As originally posted, blog entry incorrectly used a picture of the South Portland Public Library in place of the above.]

range from commercial structures, to public buildings, to private residences. I was particularly interested in the challenges to preservation of modern buildings in Portland, as these buildings seem well integrated into older structures and streetscapes.

Bassett said that Greater Portland Landmarks has noted two economic changes that may challenge the protection of mid-century buildings. A less expensive alternative to Boston, she suggests that the growth of a “creative economy” in Portland is driving new construction. When coupled with the city’s desire to tap cruise visitors eager to see a port city from the

1800’s, these two forces are a challenge to the city’s modern heritage. While Greater Portland Landmarks supports sympathetic new construction in historic areas, the key issue, according to Bassett, continues to be getting residents and visitors into mid-century structures. This would seem to be an approach that would work well for both visitors and residents. She does report, though, that there has not been much progress, yet.

In addition to increasing contact with modern buildings and emphasizing the historic content of these structures over their aesthetics, there have been successful adaptive reuse projects downtown. While not a newer building in any sense, a good example of this is [Grace](#), a church turned restaurant. Further, Portland’s public library, a modernist structure, is undergoing a renovation which covers formerly open areas with glass windows. While not part of the building as built, these windows do provide shelter from the Maine winter while still allowing the original voids to be read. Openness to both reuse and sensible alterations seems to be a good start to me.

There are, however, some ways in which the state government also supports the protection of mid-century resources. To learn more about this, Hilary Bassett suggested I visit [Barba + Wheelock](#), an architecture and preservation practice in Portland.

On a late Friday afternoon, I stopped by Barba + Wheelock. Much to my surprise, it was explained to me that the State of Maine has developed (with assistance from Barba + Wheelock, I believe) a supplement to statewide historic structure survey forms. This supplement has been specially designed to allow for the unique structural and layout elements which characterize newer buildings. The additional questions document:

- a garage (attached to or below the structure, for example);
- a porch;
- a car port or driveway;
- mid-century architectural elements and outbuildings like, to quote directly from the form, planters, screens, patios, retaining walls, or an upper story overhang.

What a good tool with which to capture some of the defining characteristics of newer structures. Have other states, cities, or localities developed additional questions for survey forms? I would be very interested to know how state- or local-level surveying includes modified documentation based on the age of the structure.

An influx of new building fueled (formerly fueled?) by new businesses leaving Boston and a tourism industry built around an older image of the city are assuredly threats in Portland. However, a combination of programmatic outreach to increase contact with newer buildings and inclusive statewide documentation efforts will hopefully help save the city's threatened mid-century buildings.

Next stop: Chicago.

[JetModern: Mid-Century Meets 21st Century at Salt Lake City Tweetup](#)

by **Seth Tinkham** on September 22nd, 2009

Editor's note: This post jumps a little bit out of sequence for [JetModern](#), but we wanted to share Seth's impressions from the National Trust for Historic Preservation's first-ever Tweetup (an in-person meeting of [Twitter](#) users, organized via tweets).

In partnership with [Utah Heritage Foundation](#), JetModern and the National Trust organized a Tweetup in Salt Lake City.

We *tweetedup* (twetup?) at the [Twilite Lounge](#), a self-described dive bar which, I gather, has become significantly less dive-like now that Utah public law prohibits smoking in bars and restaurants. I say this because every [SL modder](#) who came was surprised at how different the bar looks now that you don't have to part clouds of smoke to move around. Added bonus to conversation about modernism: the period over-sized wooden chess pieces mounted on the wall are now visible.

Beyond wall art, we also talked about reusing mid-century commercial office space. Finding a new tenant requires their buy-in on not just the "look" of the building and whatever meaning that image might have for them, but also to the layout of mid-century office space. A large, open floor plan for a secretarial pool would not be too difficult to repurpose; in some structures I have seen, though, there have been actual typing rooms to muffle the whack of typewriters. What to do with a 4' by 6' room with carpet-lined walls?

Also, since the idea of a *Tweetup* is new to me, I wonder how preservation organizations can and should use new media as outreach tools.

And now, in a nod to modern life safety equipment, the fire alarm is going off in my hotel. Hopefully this doesn't mean that future JetModern postings will be fire-roasted.

JetModern: Chicago, Vol. I

by Seth Tinkham on September 22nd, 2009



Alexander Calder sculpture at Dirksen Federal Courthouse in Chicago

Photo: Seth Tinkham

Bertrand Goldberg, SOM, Harry Weese, among countless others), this city does have a solid modernist heritage and is largely defined by that legacy.



Prentice Women's Hospital

Photo: Seth Tinkham

you can help connect a structure to a person brings that element of cultural history as expressed through the built

environment to his or her attention. Fostering those connections through programming and interactions with a specific built space coupled with activities that bring sensible discussions about preservation to forefront are key to gaining acceptance. There are, of course, “good buildings” and “bad buildings.” Those that catch your eye and hold your interest, as Michael put it, are the good ones. But they are good not because they

Portland had the problem of trying to widen how it read its architectural history through newer buildings. Chicago is a city in which you can't read the history of the place but through such structures.

Such a commitment to architecture, and, in particular, modern architecture is not new in Chicago, according to Vince Michael, Director of the Historic Preservation Program at the [School of the Art Institute of Chicago](#). In fact, he said, preservation in Chicago was almost exclusively focused on modernist architecture until the 1970s. In 1989, even, the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois ([Landmarks Illinois](#)) had drawn up a proposed list of modernist structures to be preserved in Chicago. With so many great names of modernism having practiced in Chicago (Mies Van Der Rohe, Eero Saarinen,

Given this tradition, how is preservation of mid-century resources done differently in Chicago? It's not all that different, actually. Having this conversation with a professor, though, did suggest an interesting issue. Michael suggested that there is a generation gap and that, while today's architectural historians and preservationists “get” the *why* of preservation, the general public still hasn't. Keeping in mind, of course, that this is still Chicago, a city of modernism. According to Michael, even here, there are some “curvy” modern structures—like Goldberg's Prentice Women's Hospital—that people have a hard time swallowing.

In general, though, widening the acceptance of mid-century built heritage to more than a single form requires two steps I've heard before. “People need to have associations,” Michael said. Any way that



Carr Memorial Chapel, Illinois Institute of Technology (1952); this is Mies' only religious structure.

Photo: Seth Tinkham

are Brutalist, Georgian, or Gothic. Engaging communities with structures is not about getting acceptance of a style, but a building as an expression of that style.

What are some successful strategies for community engagement that have worked here?

To answer this question, I spoke with Eilish Tuffy, Director of Preservation Programs at Landmarks Illinois. In general, she said that Landmarks Illinois has had some success in targeting city and urban planners as, from a regulatory standing, they make the local decisions. More than this, though, for mid-century modern programs and buildings, she echoed Vince Michael's observation that a generation gap exists. Landmarks Illinois is working to balance the interests of its members which are sometimes divided between the "traditional" modernism of Frank Lloyd Wright with other architects and more recent buildings. Further, advocacy and education programs for these newer buildings reach a younger and broader audience through the use of social media. Do different structures have different constituencies?

Next stop: Houston (almost).

[JetModern: Chicago, Vol. II](#)

by **Seth Tinkham** on September 23rd, 2009

On my second day in Chicago, in addition to taking a walking tour of the city and visiting the [cemetery](#) where Mies is buried, I spent a great deal of time going through the city with Grahm Balkany. While I took too many pictures to post from the road, I have tried to include some from major Chicago landmarks like the Illinois Institute of Technology campus and the Dirksen Federal Courthouse, among others. Aside from exploring the presence of Mies et al. in Chicago, some of the just great buildings in the city, and a disturbing trend in Chicago to raze mid-century public housing, we also met to discuss the Gropius-designed [Michael Reese Hospital](#).



Graceland Cemetery - view from the entrance looking towards Mies' grave (not visible)
Photo: Seth Tinkham

The hospital complex presents an unusual opportunity to save a campus-sized body of work by a renowned architect. More than the preservation opportunity, there is a clear potential for reuse, especially as the city of Chicago now owns the property and is attempting to raze the hospital and many surrounding buildings in preparation for its bid to host the 2016 Olympics. The replacement structures would displace a significant number of people, reroute roads, alter green space, and miss an important opportunity to harness the embodied energy in the hospital complex buildings. Shockingly, the proposed new construction would be athlete dormitories, facilities that could easily be retro fit into the hospital buildings (at least one of which was a dormitory). There are three sides to this



3550 Lakeshore Drive, exterior
Photo: Seth Tinkham

issue: the city, who would like to remove the complex; Landmark Illinois, who propose a [partial reuse](#) of the most significant structures; and Graham Balkany, [who suggests that keeping the campus whole is the best route](#).

Is this a case of overactive preservation or a chance to really be “green” and consider reusing a large campus for a similar purpose?

Next stop: Houston (for real).

[JetModern: Mod at Home in Houston](#)

by **Seth Tinkham** on September 24th, 2009

I had a unique opportunity while in Houston to visit with a number of members and supporters of [Houston Mod](#). While I saw mostly commercial and institutional buildings in Chicago, Houston was focused on residential architecture. While I will write more on the individual houses I saw, there are three larger issues here.

First, in my discussions with Houston Mod, I learned that Houston does not have zoning. That’s right, no zoning. Residential next to commercial? Sure! As long as the deed restrictions allow it. Are there other municipalities without zoning?

Second, in an unusual outreach effort, Houston Modders often hold happy hours (called “Mod of the Month”) in mid-century homes listed for sale. In addition to providing good exposure for the seller, these gatherings also provide a nice opportunity to see a variety of residential structures as well as to get together with like-minded folk.

Third, I spoke with [Robert Searcy](#), a real estate agent and one of a growing number of agents who are increasingly focusing on mid-century properties. I was curious to learn from him how he pitches a mid-century modern house to prospective buyers. We spoke mostly about a specific neighborhood in Houston, Glenbrook Valley, but the idea of a targeted pitch for mid-century structures goes beyond a neighborhood. Searcy said that he tries to market properties as having a distinct architectural style that is interesting and has unusual features. Not the repetitive cookie cutter newer tract housing, mid-century modern residential properties, he says, have the ability to be outstanding houses even if they do not have the finest architectural pedigree. Solid design provides a good base on which to build as the new homeowners customize their own Houston mod. An added bonus is that established neighborhoods tend to be in locations that are closer to Houston, while new developments are a bit further out of town.

Next stop: Salt Lake City



**A mid-century ranch in Houston with owner-designed front porch light in shape of Sputnik.
Photo: Seth Tinkham**

JetModern: Fifty Years

by **Seth Tinkham** on September 25th, 2009



The first building built in SLC after the Depression

Photo: Seth Tinkham

Like many of the cities I have visited, Salt Lake City saw a large break in new construction from the depression until the 1950s. Beginning then, though, construction restarted and mid-century modern buildings appeared scattered throughout town. Kirk Huffaker, of the [Utah Heritage Foundation](#) brought to my attention the first building built after the depression, which is pictured here. This building really helped bring Salt Lake City and Utah out of both an economic and emotional slump. Completed in 1955, it was a technological achievement for both Utah and the United States. It was also a stylistic gamble, as Huffaker suggested, with which to inaugurate new construction in Salt Lake, especially when viewed against structures from the 1920s.

Bound up in this newness, Salt Lake showed that it was willing to adopt a new aesthetic and to leave the depression behind. As a symbol of the break from the difficult years of the Great Depression, this building has become a powerful reminder of Salt Lake overcoming difficulty and beginning to participate in economic life on a national scale. Many consider this building to be as revolutionary as the United Nations Headquarters (1950) in Manhattan.

Is this building significant? Does, as the Trust often asks, this place matter?

Surprisingly, it seems that Salt Lake City does not allow for exceptions to its rule that buildings must be fifty years old before they can be considered eligible for protection/listing. This building meets the city's hard-and-fast fifty-year rule on buildings.

What about another structure that may not be that old yet? How long is appropriate to wait?

The structure pictured to the left and below — a first floor office from 1968 and a second floor residence from 1969/70 — is worth thinking about. In its completeness and form, it is certainly a fine example of modernism in Salt Lake. In addition, the degree to which its interior remains largely unchanged is striking. Most of the pictured pieces are original.



First floor office space in office/residence in Salt Lake City

Photo: Seth Tinkham

Could this slightly newer home also be significant? Is it as much a cultural marker as the first?

(As a side note, according to Kirk Huffaker, when the Olympics were held in Salt Lake City in 2002, there was no loss of buildings for the Olympic Village.)

Next stop: Seattle

[JetModern: Power and Preservation](#)

by **Seth Tinkham** on September 28th, 2009

In one brief day in Seattle, I met with three great preservation groups, DOCOMOMO WEWA, Historic Seattle, and the Washington Trust for Historic Preservation.

If, as Eugenia Woo of [DOCOMOMO WEWA](#) and [Historic Seattle](#) noted, the region's largest population boom came at the beginning of the 1900s with the gold rush, the second wave came after the Second World War. Both booms had an impact on the appearance of the region as significant building projects had to be undertaken to support these new populations. It is no coincidence that one refers to some of mid-century buildings as "atomic." Although the atomic age was driven to develop weaponry, nuclear research was also used to develop technologies to generate electricity. While weapon development programs were clouded in secrecy, the generation of "peaceful" electricity was, as Chris Moore of the [Washington Trust for Historic Preservation](#) suggested, a positive outcome of the Atomic Age that was significantly more transparent than the defense programs were.



Space Needle, Seattle
Photo: Seth Tinkham



Nuclear Reactor Building, University of Washington Campus (Seattle)
Photo: Seth Tinkham

As a major research university, the University of Washington in Seattle participated, I imagine, in both types of nuclear explorations. However, it is the Brutalist nuclear reactor (TAAG, 1961) that I toured as part of my trip that captured my attention. In addition to being one of the most unexpected Brutalist structures I've ever seen (next to our Brutalist fire station in Washington, Engine Company No. 2 in Chinatown, at 6th and F Streets, NW), this power plant is located in the heart of both the campus and a growing controversy over whether it should be razed. A [number of people](#) are fighting to save

the structure, maintaining that it is a very important cultural and historical marker and that its unusual design makes it a structure of incredible significance.

In discussing the significance of buildings, from reactors to carports, it is important to position the structure as more than just something to look at. It is the

cultural history of the reactor as much as its aesthetics that make it worth saving. The use of nuclear technology for power generation, and the incorporation of research into the possibilities for this power generation as a part of an engineering program at the University of Washington is part of the historical record of the structure, right? For this power plant, the atomic age was just as much about weapons as it was clean, cheap energy and a nation that looked to all things nuclear as a hallmark of the future. Wearing here her DOCOMOMO WEWA hat, Eugenia Woo made the good point that programming for buildings needs to be based on thorough research and context explanation so that, as I've previously suggested, the message isn't just about the visual appearance of the structure.

Preservation is more than skin deep. It's about more than the façade.

Next stop: San Francisco

[JetModern: Tweetup, Tiki Style](#)

by **Seth Tinkham** on September 29th, 2009



My stay in San Francisco included another Tweetup, this time held at the [Tonga Room](#). The Tonga Room is the Tiki bar and restaurant at the [Fairmont Hotel](#) (1906). Complete with floating bandstand and half-hourly rainfall with thunderstorm, the lounge appears relatively intact and true to its late 1960s update on an early 50s-adopted Tiki style.

While I wouldn't first think of leisure and recreation spaces as part of threatened mid-century resources, they clearly are. Whether it's the external appearance of a structure or the interior, the use and form of built space does change over time. Recreation and leisure patterns certainly changed after the 1950s, and places like the Tonga Room do document that. Unfortunately, there was not enough light inside to take any good pictures.

The Tonga Room, though, is currently threatened. Despite an apparent uptick in business following the announcement of its contemplated closure, the hotel is considering turning the space occupied by the Tonga Room into parking spaces for the condominiums that are to be fashioned from the space currently with hotel rooms.

By way of highlighting the hodgepodge of preservation laws at the state, federal, and local level, I spoke with Andrew Wolfram, AIA who is the Commissioner of the [San Francisco Historic Preservation Commission](#). He indicated that city of SF has a 30 year period of significance, which I thought was interesting given the range of other cities' rules. He also wears hat of [DOCOMOMO NOCA](#) who have identified fifty significant buildings in San Francisco that are eligible to be listed. The local listing has only three!

I also spoke with Cindy Heitzman of the [California Preservation Foundation](#). As a statewide group, their advocacy is primarily accomplished through education, such as their annual conference. Their programs are targeted to both the general public but also for local governments since, as we discussed, the best policies are those which are well thought out at the time they are first

implemented, rather than altered piecemeal over time. The 2009 conference was held in Palm Springs and included a large amount of panels and programs on mid-century modernism. But it is important to remember, as Heitzman noted, that a statewide organization should not provide services better managed and coordinated on a local level.

Beyond a more formal conference environment, the California Preservation Foundation does other educational outreach. Corrine Ingrassia also joined our conversation to provide me with a sense of the youth-focused programs currently underway. While the foundation does not yet offer curriculum guides or educational tours like some other statewide preservation organizations do, they have begun a new program to build youth interest in their 2010 conference to be held in [Nevada County](#). As part of this program, students are asked to develop videos to be uploaded to YouTube, conceived of as a unit within art classes. These videos would be part of short film competition to cover the same topics as the conference will address. Art teachers have apparently liked the idea so much they are trying to have a poster competition, too, also to advertise the conference. All of which I thought was a really cool idea.

Next stop: Las Vegas

[JetModern: Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas](#)

by **Seth Tinkham** on October 2nd, 2009



Freemont East in Las Vegas
Photo: Seth Tinkham

Las Vegas, according to University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) professor [Janet White](#), is a “suburb with no ‘urb.’” It is a city with few urban areas and many suburban features crowded together. [Andy Kirk](#), another professor at UNLV and director of [Preserve Nevada](#), noted that Las Vegas grew from roughly 80,000 in the 1950s to approximately two million today. The growth of the city has deeply shaped its appearance. The Strip was formed, as Kirk noted, from a group of motels placed outside the city of Las Vegas designed to trap motorists before they got into the town to what is today a

surreal atmosphere of large hotels and resorts.

Many individuals and architects have been involved in the design and look of Las Vegas, whether that has been for large construction projects like the Venetian (1999, built on the site of the Sands) or the iconic “Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas” sign (1959). This sign, designed by Betty Willis (1924 -) has become one of the more recognized emblems of the city, yet most do not know that it was created by a woman. As Anthea Hartig (Director, NTHP Western Office) noted, modern architecture and the architects of mid-century exist in a very gendered space. The role and contribution of what some called then “lady architects” is often overlooked.



Las Vegas streetscape showing a hotel and diner
Photo: Seth Tinkham



Capitol Park apartment building, part of the New Southwest development in Washington, DC

Photo: Seth Tinkham

The projects taken on by these architects included some showpieces of mid-century architecture in important settings. Cloethiel Woodard Smith (1910 - 1992), for example, designed several of the apartment complexes built as part of urban renewal in Washington, DC. These buildings, part of what was called the New Southwest, were designed to replace “blighted” older buildings with planned communities, some of which were racially integrated and included a mix of subsidized and unsubsidized housing. Like Willis’s sign, though, Smith’s contribution to the New Southwest (among other Washington locations) is not common knowledge.

In looking both at Washington and Las Vegas, I think we still see a skyline dominated by men; part of the ways in which preservation captures the past is also through highlighting the people behind the building. In this case, it means telling the

story of a growing group of women who were also players in this literal field. Importantly, part of the mid-century was that this field began to have more players. Kirk Huffaker and the [Utah Heritage Foundation](#) are currently involved in forming an architectural family tree that will show the relationships between architects and their buildings. I think this is a great way to visually represent these relationships and to show the composition of the profession at mid-century.

I am curious to know what ways others have explored the social changes in the many professions behind the built environment (construction, planning, architecture, etc.).

Next stop: Los Angeles

[JetModern: Preservation in Los Angeles](#)

by **Seth Tinkham** on October 5th, 2009



Exterior view of the 1965 Department of Water & Power Building (John Ferraro Building) in Los Angeles.

Photo: Seth Tinkham

My visit to Los Angeles coincided with the first of a series of lectures and panel discussions sponsored by the National Trust and the [LA Conservancy](#). Called [Modern Modules](#), these programs will be taking place across the country over the next nine months. Each event consists of two parts: a public lecture and an invited panel discussion. In Los Angeles, the lecture also took place as the first event as part of the LA Conservancy’s “Sixties Turn 50” program. Held at the Department of Water and Power Building/John Ferraro Building (1965, A. C. Martin & Associates), the lecture was moderated by [Frances Anderton](#).

Anderton noted that in British English, what we here call the “recent past,” is referred to as the “familiar past.”

This familiarity has both advantages and disadvantages. As an advantage, a familiar aspect may be incorporated in with less-familiar parts of a building in order to build community interest in a structure. Andy Kirk explained to me that this is just what happened in my previous stop, Las Vegas, where public interest in the now-historic neon signs of the Strip and downtown Las Vegas was parlayed into an effort to save not just the sign, but the building to which it was attached. Chief among the disadvantages is the reluctance to see one’s

own life as historical; however, as Alan Hess, one of the lecturers, noted in his lightning quick overview of modern architecture in California in the 1960s, it was at mid-century that California was at the height of its cultural influence.

While I most often think of commercial structures (or even civic ones, like the Mark Taper Forum pictured here) as being important examples of an architectural style, there's no reason to forget about residential structures. In fact, Leo Marmol, FAIA, another of the evening's lecturers, suggested that there is a very real need to move beyond commercial spaces, especially in Los Angeles, a city very much of private spaces. Some of these private spaces were no less experimental than the largest commercial structure –



**The Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles was designed by Welton Becket, 1967.
Photo: Seth Tinkham**

the [Case Study](#) houses, for example, are a group of residential properties Alan Leib is working to protect. As difficult as it is to see a structure with which one is familiar with become a landmark, it must be all the more challenging to see one in which you have lived become “historic.”

Despite the fact that some remember buildings from mid-century being built, that memory does not guarantee that the firms that supplied the materials to build the structures will still be in business. Often using old materials in new ways or experimenting with new

composites, modern architecture raises some important questions about authenticity. As Marmol noted, there is a need to rethink some of the standards for preservation as they relate to the use of replacement materials. An experimental plastic used for five years in the 1960s may not be repairable or replaceable, so what can be done when it is worn or broken? Is a newly manufactured piece that mimics the old acceptable?

materials. An experimental plastic used for five years in the 1960s may not be repairable or replaceable, so what can be done when it is worn or broken? Is a newly manufactured piece that mimics the old acceptable?

In order to continue this conversation and to develop some concrete (no pun intended) answers, a more technical talk continued with an invited panel discussion. It was generally agreed that a tried and true survey is the best way to begin documenting the presence of mid-century resources within a community. As the City of Los Angeles begins a massive effort to survey their mid-century resources, they have also taken this a step further and have allowed direct community contributions to the survey process as part of a project called “My Historic LA” in which citizens contribute materials (videos, oral histories, etc.) on the sites in their neighborhoods they consider historic. This, then, helps a community to build an identity around a building or groups of building, engaging them with these structures and, hopefully, helping to translate this engagement into active advocacy for the preservation of historic spaces. To further encourage broad community engagement in LA and elsewhere, we discussed the following ideas:

- training of real estate agents in the basic idea of preservation
- creating tax incentives for purchasers or “re-users” of any existing historic property, much like the Mills Act does in California
- positioning of preservation as part of the green movement
- adding continuing education programs for architects on preservation
- proactively landmarking structures before they are threatened to be able to have preservation organizations shape tone of future discussions over preservation

Above all, I think it is important to remember that whatever we do now will help (or hurt) the ways in which the “window” of preservation will make the next jump forward. Hopefully when this happens, the significance of any given structure will outweigh any arbitrary age limitations. How will we handle it when discussions begin over buildings constructed in the 1980s? 90s? Maybe if the above strategies for engagement are started now, it will be easier to read history through “new” new buildings. If a landmarked structure like the otherwise drab headquarters for the former Superior Oil Company can be successfully transformed into a hotel (The Standard) while keeping its landmark status, it must be possible to recycle the built fabric of the past for a new purpose without sacrificing “history” to “progress.”



**A dramatic re-do of a landmark 1955
Claud Beelman building, the Standard
Hotel occupies the former Superior Oil
Company headquarters.
Photo: Seth Tinkham**