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Introduction: The Power of Light

JASON LLOYD CLEMENT

You name it, and it has happened. The boarded-up church is reborn as a community center. The dilapidated warehouse is transformed into a charter school. The barn becomes a bar. More often than not, successful activation of historic spaces depends on convincing people to look at old places in a new light.

However, sometimes all the history and beauty and significance in the world isn’t enough to overcome the fact that—for many—perception is reality. In those moments, we have to actually flip a switch to ignite the public’s imagination, empathy, and hope.

From our day-to-day lives, we know that the lights being on means that someone is home (or at least pretending to be). It means something is happening, and people are watching. Though perhaps more figuratively, the same logic applies when, all of a sudden, a beaten-up old building comes beaming out of the dark. And that’s what this issue of Forum Journal is all about—the awe-inducing ability of lighting and other creative interventions to breathe new life into historic places.

Before you dive in, I’d like to share two examples that have proved this concept to me—one from my professional life at the National Trust and one that’s much more personal. Let’s start in Miami.

Built in 1963, Miami Marine Stadium once drew thousands to Biscayne Bay for everything from powerboat races to religious services to concerts under the stars. On any given evening, hundreds of boats would surround the floating stage vying for the perfect “seat” and waiting for the festivities to begin. The experience was authentic Miami, and there was nothing else like it in the world.

Fast forward to today. Shuttered after Hurricane Andrew, this National Treasure—a beloved place identified as endangered and selected for preservation by the National Trust—had been shut off from the South Florida entertainment scene for over 20 years. It remained intriguingly off limits by day and utterly out of sight by night until the Miami International Boat Show came along. After
years of hosting one of the largest trade shows in the world in a cramped convention center, the Boat Show decided to bring its 2016 event to a park created on vacant land surrounding Miami Marine Stadium. Suddenly a derelict structure purpose-built for boating events was about to draw a crowd of more than 100,000 people, many of whom had experienced the stadium at its peak. The situation was ripe for an intervention.

Working with a local visual artist, we decided to tug at those heartstrings by re-creating the stadium’s heyday: the sunny days and crazy nights when hydroplanes roared and Jimmy Buffett sang. Our showcase included an 18-foot LED video screen, hours of remixed vintage video footage, a Miami-themed Spotify station, and six dazzling spotlights.

As crowds watched and cheered from temporary docks installed in the stadium’s basin, it became abundantly clear that this South Florida icon had never actually left its fans’ hearts. That same weekend, thousands of people signed our petition urging city leaders to make its restoration a priority, one of them remarking with a smile, “I forgot how much fun I had here until I saw this.”

Now for a personal example. Three summers ago, my partner created a heart-shaped sculpture made of 25 interconnected bicycle wheels, two metal seats, and one shared pedal. When two people climb onboard and figure out the awkward and oftentimes hilarious dynamics of single-pedal riding (hint: one person has to go backwards), an intricate system of well-oiled bike chains starts to churn and all of the sculpture’s bright red wheels spin in tandem.
By design, the piece was meant to be an interactive tribute to the city Casey and I both love and call home—Buffalo, New York. In practice, it is a mesmerizing statement about love, relationships, and the give-and-take that’s required between two people to make both of those things work. Quite fittingly, he called it CityHEART. While the sculpture is a sight to behold in its own right, I will always remember its debut as one of the more visceral moments in my life.

It happened during CITY of NIGHT, an innovative event in Buffalo during which art collides with placemaking in rare and rewarding ways. (You can read more about it on page 37.) In 2013 the festival once again took over the grounds of Silo City, a beloved site that is home to the most outstanding collection of grain elevators in the country. Although rusted and unused, they still rise powerfully over the Buffalo River like our city’s version of the Parthenon. Until, of course, they blend into the night.

CityHEART was positioned next to one of Silo City’s true gems, Marine A. A monolithic, poured-in-place masterpiece, this concrete structure has long been a canvas for artists who don’t care about “no trespassing” signs. By day, its echo-filled silos serve as grassroots galleries where a vast majority of the installations are dedicated to Buffalo’s resurgence. By night, however, this monument to both a bygone era and a city’s renewed sense of hope falls away—unlit and undetectable.

That evening was different, though. For the cost of a $20 flood light and a single extension cord, Casey created a dramatic backdrop for his sculpture by illuminating one of our city’s most imposing structures. As the sun went down and the light’s intensity grew, I remember thinking that this was a preservationist’s version of the Bat signal—a sudden beacon in the night sky demanding recognition. In that moment, I was proud not only of Casey but also of my city—its past and its undeniably bright future.

At the end of each day, our world’s iconic landmarks are bathed in light because they are places that matter. Places that say something about our values and our identities. Places we can’t live without. Imagine stealing a glance down a midtown street and not
seeing the Empire State Building pierce through the night sky. Or floating down the Seine and not seeing the Eiffel Tower twinkling like a galaxy full of stars.

But buildings don’t need to be architectural masterworks to be elevated and celebrated in this way. No matter how small or how modest or how forgotten, the places we love light up our lives. Let’s return the favor. Sometimes all it takes is 20 bucks. Just ask Casey. FJ

JASON LLOYD CLEMENT, the National Trust’s director of community outreach, creates campaigns that engage local communities across the country in saving places that matter.

VIDEO
Watch a time-lapse video of the lighting of the Miami Marine Stadium.

VIDEO
Watch a video depicting the activation of the Miami Marine Stadium.

TAKEAWAY
Read Jason Lloyd Clement’s “9 Tips for Lighting a Building.”
Jorge Otero-Pailos is a preservation artist, an architect, and the incoming director of Columbia University’s historic preservation program. We start to define the term “preservation art” in the interview that follows, but the concept is certainly informed by Otero-Pailos’ own career, through which he has carved out a space at the nexus of the artistic, theoretical, and material lives of old places. Otero-Pailos is perhaps best known for his leading-edge installations. *The Ethics of Dust*, for example, uses latex to capture impressions and pollution on architectural elements like Trajan’s Column at the Victoria and Albert Museum and the walls of the Doge’s Palace, which was exhibited at the 53rd Venice Art Biennale.

Otero-Pailos’ next installation will involve making luminous architectural volumes from latex sheets that have captured the layers of dust and pollution on the industrial chimneys of the Old San Francisco Mint. His work will bring this landmark building into contemporary culture in a new way with an exhibition at the nearby Yerba Buena Center for the Arts that will invite viewers to consider not only the building’s history through this aspect of its materiality but also the forces that shaped its historical and current social context. In addition to his work as an artist, Otero-Pailos also maintains an active architectural practice working on monuments, historic buildings, and master planning, often in collaboration with other international architects.

**Katherine Malone-France:** The theme of this issue of our Journal is “activating historic spaces,” and we know that the arts are key to doing that. You are both an artist and a preservationist, so I want to start by asking how you see the relationship between those two disciplines. Is it an important relationship? Do the arts and preservation benefit from working together?
Jorge Otero-Pailos: I think that, at a certain level, there are no boundaries between disciplines. Obviously, there is some need to compartmentalize knowledge for the purposes of education, but as you develop within a field of knowledge, you begin to realize that you can only continue to grow intellectually by making certain connections to other disciplines. My formal training as an architect and historian informed my approach to art and preservation, so the idea that preservation and art are totally different disciplines strikes me as very odd. Because preservation was born out of the work of many people who were also artists—think of John Ruskin’s watercolors. When preservation education was formalized in the last century, they left out art for some reason, focusing on history, architecture, chemistry, and planning as well as a little engineering and law.

I find it really interesting that a lot of artists today are turning to cultural objects as the enabling elements for their creative endeavors. And a lot of preservationists and preservation institutions are looking to the arts with a new seriousness—not as simply something that is external to preservation that you bring in as you would a caterer, to facilitate an event for the day—but as something really intrinsic to the work we do as preservationists. I find it really exciting that preservation has matured sufficiently to consider art as part of what we do.

What do you think is going on from the artists’ perspective? Why is it that they are, as you say, seeking out cultural artifacts?

On the one hand, artists are concerned with culture. They’re concerned with trying to understand what culture is because, as cultural producers, they need to figure that out as a sort of starting point. And there is no better place to start that process of inquiry than with places, things, and objects that are over-determined as cultural. Beginning to test what culture is requires having something that everyone agrees is culture, and those things are actually not easy to find. There are things that some people view as culture and other people don’t—fashion, for example. But certain objects are undeniably held to be culture across the social spectrum, and I think that’s what draws artists to them. And I think that old historic buildings and sites are undeniably culture.
It’s where they derive their power in large part, isn’t it?

Right. Now, culture is a very strange thing because it is no one and everyone. No one can say, “I am culture.” And yet it is something that we all share in some way. It’s both inside us and outside us, and we inhabit, use, and perform it. How we experience our participation in culture and how culture is part of us affects how we engage with objects. This is not news to anyone, but what is amazing about the turn to art in preservation and the turn to preservation in art is that it underscores the fact that how we relate to objects collectively, as a culture, is changing.

That is what happens when you turn a historic site into a historic property. It goes from being used as a farm to, now, a historic farm. That is a total change in how we use it, how we relate to it. So how it remains part of culture becomes a question mark, which is where we get into questions of authenticity—are we making this farm into something inauthentic by preserving it? There’s this sense that preservation participates in estranging us from historic places, and that rift is where artists come in—not necessarily to heal it, but to interrogate it and cast it in a new light. I love the idea of “enlivening” places, because that word seems central to me.

That’s a nice segue into your own most well-known work on that front—The Ethics of Dust series. First of all, what has The Ethics of Dust demonstrated to you about how new art can enliven old places?

The artistic process is such that you often don’t have everything figured out before you start—it’s not the same as master planning. You might start making something and then figure out what it was that you did.
As I’ve worked on *The Ethics of Dust* over the years, I discovered that one can tell new stories with old buildings—that a building’s narrative is never complete. Art can be a way to recover objects that are historic but have lost their connection to what we think of as culture—they represent old cultures but not our culture. That’s what starts to kill historic places: they become somebody else’s culture. *The Ethics of Dust* has allowed me to begin to understand how one can bring objects that we don’t necessarily think of as part of our culture into our everyday concerns.

**We talk about that a lot at our historic sites: How do you make these places part of our culture, part of the fabric of everyday life for people?**

They have to address people’s concerns and interests. It really has to come from within—it cannot be imposed upon visitors, constituencies, or communities. The preservationist artist, if we could call it that—we have preservation architects and preservation planners so we can have preservation artists!—would have to enter into a relationship with those that care about a place as the first step in the creative process.

Artists are used to being the ones that put something out there, that make their stuff whether others like it or not. As a preservation artist, the work comes first, and you come second. And the goal is for the work to continue not to be yours. The sign of success in preservation art is for the work to continue belonging to culture, not to the artist. Of course, if that object is a historic site, presumably it’s already part of culture; except, of course, it often isn’t—many sites are forgotten, uninteresting, cultural residue. The preservation artist tries to bring them back into living culture.

Preservation art is mistakenly associated with appropriation art. This is not the same as Duchamp, who was taking everyday objects and appropriating them into high art by “over-coding” them with marks of the artist’s intention, like a signature. Here it’s different. The preservation artist doesn’t impose intention on the object but supplements the object to help it do what it cannot do by itself, like outlast its normal decay or continue to be culturally relevant. Hopefully, you end up with the recognition that the artist’s work is not theirs.
And that’s where we need to establish criteria for what is good and bad preservation art. In the worst cases, contemporary artists whose work is not fundamentally about historic sites are nonetheless brought to those sites—like Jeff Koons at Versailles. This is like bringing in a catering service: the caterer offers a set menu that doesn’t change in response to the venue.

**One of the things I love about The Ethics of Dust is how close it is to the building itself. It’s all about proximity in some ways, how close you get to the architectural fabric to create these new works.**

I think the issue of proximity is a very important one. If there is such a thing as preservation art, it should help preserve the thing that it is being installed in. That art shouldn’t just be external, it should help make the place endure in some way.

Of course, there is the materials-conservation side of that when you physically make the object more durable, but the social dimension is that an object doesn’t survive unless people take care of it. The social dimension of preservation art is engaging a community in caring for objects. It’s not just creating a nice artistic experience that bears no relation to the place or the community that cares about it. Preservation art is about sustaining people’s relationship to a place in ways that are meaningful and long-lasting.
Broadly speaking, if preservation art is going to enliven a place, it needs to be resonant with this place—to have an intellectual proximity. And resonance can be something that appears in the middle or end of a project, as it begins to enliven the place.

Absolutely. And resonance is a form of proximity because things resonate when they’re in the same harmony—their harmonic range. That can happen in many different ways. The National Trust, for example, has residencies for artists, where they come, spend time, and attune themselves to a place and discover it. Nothing beats spending time with an object or site to be able to learn and understand it.

But there are other ways, too. Part of enlivening objects is bringing our concerns to them and seeing how they help us deal with our own concerns. The Ethics of Dust is that, too—I bring my concerns about the environment, pollution, dust, and history to buildings that resonate with those concerns. Not every building would work for that particular series. We cannot pretend that we completely surrender ourselves to objects. We bring certain concerns, and what brings the objects to life is that they matter for us today.

And the challenge is to really figure out what concerns resonate with culture today. What are the issues and problems? And what are the objects that we’ve inherited that help us provide new answers, think anew about these problems, and develop ideas that would not otherwise be available to us? The short of it is learning from the past.

Besides your own work, are there any other specific projects in preservation art that you think our leader audience should pay attention to? That have been particularly successful?

A ton of artists out there are doing amazing preservation art, although they might not call it that. One better-known example is Ai Weiwei, who has been doing some remarkable exercises in saving objects. He has been buying traditional ancestral halls that are being demolished to clear land and finding ways to save them by bringing them into the art market. He is, of course, totally conscious of the history of antiquities trade, which has done so
much damage to preservation. He did an exhibition in Beijing recently wherein he convinced the owners of two contiguous, adjacent galleries to allow him to pierce through their dividing wall and put the ancestral hall across it—so that you can never really perceive the entire hall in one glance or really inhabit it. But they also cannot sell it, because who’s going to sell it between these two galleries? He was able to use this building to question the gallery system, to undermine building codes about fire safety, to say that the ancestral hall is more important than all that other stuff, that it should be the central focus, and all other decisions should be subservient to preserving it and finding a new life for it as part of contemporary culture. That’s one extraordinary, very thoughtful project that doesn’t shy away from all the problems and complexities of the difficult place of traditional Chinese architecture in today’s real estate–driven Chinese marketplace.

I would also cite Olafur Eliasson’s recent project for COP21, which involved one of the most ancient objects one can find—a glacier, which is an incredible piece of world heritage that we have no technique for saving. He brought a piece of one to Paris and allowed it to melt in the middle of the square during the COP21 talks. This extraordinary project brings preservation art as performance into the political arena in a very powerful way—as a call to action from political leaders.

Works that have to do with the divestment of states from culture are also very interesting. For example, Azra Akšamija, an
artist and a professor at MIT who is originally from Bosnia, has been working with the objects of the former Yugoslavian state that now have no state to take care of them. The new state doesn’t want to take care of Yugoslavian stuff, they want to build a new Bosnia-Herzegovina. She’s using art and the art world to figure out other instruments to fill that void for taking care of that heritage for the next generation. She invites people to bring her objects, documents them, puts them in what she calls a “future heritage collection,” and acts as a registrar to account for all this heritage in some way.

This Journal issue is going to touch on enlivening broader historic landscapes and neighborhoods as well as sites. Could you talk about your collaboration with Work Architecture Company on the master plan for New Holland Island in St. Petersburg? What do you think the approach to enlivening these larger historic areas should be?

New Holland Island was a military site for 300 years and was closed to the public. That mysteriousness was what made it so enticing for people. So the difficulty there was maintaining what was interesting and important about the site, which was its “closedness” and its mysteriousness, while also providing access.

One of the things I did there was design smells for the site—so that the whole neighborhood, the whole area, would smell differently than the rest of the city. The smells were those of the island 300 years ago when it was the site of ship manufacturing, and they used oak, tar, and fish oils in an 18th-century industrialization of the building process.

Of course, smell can’t be closed off—it has a plume to it. It was a way to reveal the site without necessarily having you see, access, or enter into it. The site, in a way, entered into you. We have this idea that public access means being able to put your foot inside and look inside—it’s all visual and territorial. By working with smell, I was trying to suggest the possibility of experiencing and having access to things without having to enter into them—or of entering into them mentally and imaginatively, not physically. When we talk about enlivening something, we are talking about entering into it mentally, experiencing it as part of us and our lives, making it ours.
Smell brings that in a very tangible way: rather than us entering into the object, the object literally enters into us.

**If we are defining preservation art, I like the idea that it has to have a preservation impact. I can’t think of a better way to preserve something than to have it become a part of you.**

Exactly. The more successful heritage is the one that invites people to take it home somehow. Obviously, you can take a photograph and take it home, but you can also take a memory home. You can take a way of life or a different attitude about the world home. These are now really important challenges or objectives for heritage.

As people that work in heritage, our job is to be able to gather people’s attention and organize it toward the potential for certain objects to help us answer certain questions. Not every object can do that for every concern, but we can go to certain objects to understand certain things in contemporary culture. As heritage managers and curators, we can telegraph what the potential of objects is, so that when people are searching for that, they find it. People go to Yosemite in search of something that’s very particular—somewhat intangible but real. People go to the Tower of Pisa expecting to take a picture of themselves propping it up. Historic sites and monuments set up expectations in us, and it is key for preservationists to articulate those expectations. That’s where art comes in—helping render those expectations in clear and compelling ways. The object itself is 90 percent, but that last 10 percent requires art.

**I’d like to revisit the topic of international examples. You were born in Spain, you were educated in the United States, and you work all over the world. Is there a different understanding of enlivening heritage outside of the United States? Is there greater tolerance for it? Less of a tolerance for it?**

It really is not something that one can answer in nationalistic terms. I don’t think that certain nations are more or less attuned to this. I do think that certain people are. And those people are leading the rethinking of heritage in contemporary society in certain places, but they also move. The way we communicate today has
really broadened the opportunities for dialogue, but nothing can replace going to the historic building or site. Those things are immovable, so when people who have a certain understanding of heritage are in the right place and have the right opportunity, the stars align for preservation art.

What we’re talking about here is something that remains quite rare. It’s an emergent field. And preservation artists require training, but there are currently very few artists with training in preservation—just as there are very few preservationists with training in art. It’s still a rarity, but one worth continuing to nurture because there’s so much potential there.

_Sometimes when projects bring artists, commercial partners, or others to enliven historic sites or neighborhoods, we run into resistance. Have you encountered any resistance to the enlivening of historic places in your work? And, if so, how do you handle it?_  

The word “art” comes with baggage. There are a lot of presuppositions about what artists do and a lot of suspicion that artists are not going to respect the object—they’re going to transgress certain taboos and demote the object in some way. Overcoming that fear requires trust, which is built over time. It’s an important process that takes years. For example, I’m opening a project in London this summer, and it’s taken me six years to get to this point.

It’s also really key that things evolve over time, because preservation art is not an event. If the art comes in and goes away overnight, it’s not really preservation art we’re talking about, because it doesn’t help to preserve the object.
Trust is essentially an understanding that everyone is taking responsibility for this work, including the artist, instead of the museum or the heritage manager giving the artist this set of rules: “You can’t drill into this wall, and you can’t do this, and you can’t do that. As long as you don’t touch my object, you can do your art.” Preservation art requires allowing the artist to touch the object, but the artist has to demonstrate their commitment to preserving it. It takes a long time to build trust, especially because preservation art is not mature as a practice. We have protocols in place for demonstrating that a conservator has that intention when they start removing plaster, but we don’t have those protocols in place for artists. That’s why I think that training is really important: preservation artists need to be trained, just like preservation architects.

As the new director of Columbia University’s preservation program, how do you think we should approach training preservationists to think broadly and creatively about enlivening places and making them a part of culture?

We have to allow for time in people’s training for them to make their own discoveries and ask their own questions about the objects they’re engaging, not the same old questions. We need to guide students, but trust their intuitions a bit more. We need to let students experiment more and learn from what works and what doesn’t.

We need to engage in collective pondering, testing, and examining of preservation with students through technological, intellectual, political, and legal exercises. At Columbia we are working to make creativity the center of preservation education, but that means really conceptualizing what creativity is in preservation, which is very different than in other fields. Preservation art is responding to something existing that is culturally charged: a response, not a projection; an attunement, not an imposition. That’s a very different idea than the one taught in art and architecture schools, because it places the thing before the person. I think of what preservationists produce as “not me” creations.

This is particularly important at this juncture when we are facing massive environmental and political challenges. We have to find a way forward that depends not on charismatic personalities
but on our ability to work together from the bottom up. You need a model of creativity that is not centered on the romantic notion of the genius, but is inclusive, collaborative, and centered on shared objects. Our environment is a shared object. Our air, our cities, and our monuments are shared objects. We are trying to find ways to come together around these objects. In the 19th century, we figured out how we come together around a building. In the 20th century—around a city: we need landmarks commissions, we need certain preservation bureaucracies. We even figured out how we come together around big pieces of land with national institutions like the National Parks Service.

But the objects have gotten bigger. Preserving the oceans, preserving the forests, preserving the atmosphere—those escape our current institutional forms of coming together, so we need to find new ways. That’s one of the things that we’re trying to help students invent creatively. We need to be daring and experimental because things have changed, and we don’t have the tools and the necessary institutions in place yet. We can’t saddle new generations with the thinking of the 19th and 20th centuries. We have to stay nimble and experimental, with our ear to the ground, to enable them to do the work they need to do.

FJ

KATHERINE MALONE-FRANCE is vice president for historic sites at the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

VIDEO

Watch a lecture about experimental preservation by Jorge Otero-Pailos.
Activating Iconic Spaces: 
Art Intervention as a Force for Preservation

PETRA BACHMAIER AND SEAN GALLERO

Luftwerk creates immersive art installations using light, color, sculpture, and sound to augment the experiences of space and site, blending history with contemporary media to open new aesthetic conversations. In recent years, we have had the opportunity to interpret and illuminate several historically and culturally significant places. We view these art installations as interventions, forming a creative link between architectural masterpieces, their natural settings, and the audiences of today.

“WORKING WITH” GREAT ARCHITECTS

Given that we are site-specific installation artists, the concept of space has always fascinated us. In recent years, we have had the honor of “working with” great architects of modern history, which has enabled us to develop an increased awareness of space. With each project, we aim to discover and accentuate the unique relationships between architecture and environment, transforming the experience of space and site through light and color. We view our interventions with architecturally significant buildings as direct conversations with their architects and the environments they created. By researching the architectural theories and musings of modern masters such as Ludwig Mies van de Rohe, Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, and others, we have become keenly aware of the architects’ relationships to site and the mechanisms that informed their designs.

We believe that their buildings are important to learn from, engage with, and preserve because of the enduring nature of their iconic designs: from their bold, unconventional shapes and relationships with environment to their use of building materials.

We continue to be inspired by their philosophies and, with each new project, are excited to engage in dialogues by activating spaces that attract new and reinvigorated audiences.
PROJECTING MODERN AT THE ROBIE HOUSE

Our first opportunity to work directly with iconic architecture was in 2010 with Frank Lloyd Wright’s Frederick C. Robie House in Hyde Park, Illinois. We began our research by mining Wright’s aesthetics to gain a holistic understanding of the building itself. Inspired by his philosophies and the building as a forerunner of Modernism in architecture, we investigated the symbiotic relationship between architectural space and contemporary art. Throughout the house’s private rooms, we used walls, ceilings, and floors as canvases and frames for light interventions that literally and figuratively projected the idea of “modern” and what it means to us as artists today.

Titled Projecting Modern, the exhibition invited visitors to explore seemingly disparate video installations that, taken as a whole, spoke with—rather than for or about—Wright’s aesthetic. The exhibit became a milestone for our art practice, allowing us to tangibly engage with significant principles found within the built environment. Invigorated by the challenge of “working with” a master architect, we have since sought to work with structures that hold similar architectural significance.

FALLINGWATER: ART IN NATURE

In 2011 we were commissioned by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy to create an immersive light installation—Fallingwater: Art in Nature—celebrating the 75th anniversary of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Fallingwater residence in Mill Run, Pennsylvania. Our
intervention was informed by the structural dynamism of the house and its striking integration with its natural surroundings. Inspired by Wright’s principles of “organic architecture,” we mounted a seven-channel video installation throughout the surrounding forest and, at nightfall, projected imagery directly onto the front facade of Fallingwater. The multiplaned, tiered architecture inspired the projected graphic content of geometric motion, while the waterfall on which the home sits was filmed and integrated into the video content. The projections created a performance of patterns and abstracted imagery while deconstructing the house’s architecture into multiple planar canvases. The dialogue emphasized the relationship of the building to its site, magnifying the harmonious coexistence of natural and manmade forms.

LYRICAL GEOMETRY AT THE FORD HOUSE
In 2014 Sidney Robinson, owner of the Bruce Goff–designed Ford House in Aurora, Illinois, invited us to participate in a performance with critically acclaimed music group Third Coast Percussion, activating the unique Midcentury Modern house through a projection on its distinctive dome-shaped ceiling. Through research, we learned that Goff was not only a largely self-taught architect but also a composer of music for the player-piano, and his music became the catalyst for both the audio and visuals of the performance. While Third Coast Percussion used original recordings of the music as
inspiration, we looked to the visual traits of the paper piano rolls. Each roll is marked with a multitude of perforations that act as physical “data,” controlling the output of the instrument. Informed by the spacing and fluidity of the perforations in the paper, we created *Lyrical Geometry*. The light composition spoke directly to the music featured that evening and to the vast creativity of the architect, as the Ford House’s interior dome was imbued with variations of light and motion. Since the event, the owner has moved forward with having the residence landmarked to ensure that it will be enjoyed by generations to come.

**INSITE AT THE FARNSWORTH HOUSE**

“What do you do with a revered masterwork of the 20th century?” was the question posed by Steve Dietz, who wrote the curatorial text accompanying *Insite*, presented in 2014 at Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s [Farnsworth House](http://example.com) in Plano, Illinois. Here we were inspired by the minimalist structure of the building with its eight iconic vertical columns, horizontal floor and roof planes, and intimate relationship to the nearby Fox River and the black sugar maple tree that had so shaped Mies van der Rohe’s siting choice. Consequently, the video projections used were influenced by the geometry and natural setting of the house. The projected patterns deconstructed and reconstructed the building’s geometry,
celebrating its Modernist architectural gestures. As the building, which sits in a flood-plain, is elevated by columns, the projections further emphasized its ethereal quality of floating. The exhibition aimed to offer new perspectives on the Modernist building that has been discussed and analyzed since its creation and invited viewers to participate in a dynamic journey of visual and sonic elements specific to the house. Dietz described the artwork as:

*a looping composition divided into three sections roughly corresponding to the structure of the house, the fluidity of its transparent glass walls, and the organic, where nature meets geometry. Luftwerk uses projection mapping, especially in the first movement, to highlight the horizontal structural steel beams that enable the glass walls to enclose the volume of the space with such an ethereal mass. Subsequent projections of abstracted patterns are like an artist’s MRI of the interior volume of Farnsworth, flooding it with images of fluidity created in their studio in a playful but systematic topographic investigation. In the last movement, color enters in and nature is projected within the volume of the house. Dappled sense memories from the daytime meld with the structural outline of the house, transforming it.*

**SOLARISE: A SEA OF ALL COLORS AT GARFIELD PARK CONSERVATORY**

Our most recent project is *solarise: a sea of all colors*, currently on view at Chicago’s [Garfield Park Conservatory](#) through September 2016. The conservatory is considered a civic gem in the “emerald
“necklace” that is the city’s unique boulevard and parks system—a place for the public to rest, wander, explore, and connect to nature. With this exhibition, we were inspired by the innovative vision of Jens Jensen, the conservatory’s designer and the godfather of naturalistic landscape and conservatory design, aiming to create a series of art installations that would echo his call for public interaction with nature.

To better understand the DNA of the space, we connected with conservatory staff to learn the history of the building and its plant collection. To further inform our designs for each of the installations within the conservatory, we researched the ways in which different plants grow, adapt, and flourish in certain environments. This helped ensure that our installations are in conversation with the environment and enhance the feeling of wonder as viewers experience the plants and artwork. Being one of the largest greenhouse conservatories in the United States, Garfield Park Conservatory hosts multiple “houses” for collections, which presented us with the opportunity for multiple points of intervention. As we developed the exhibition, each artwork began to reflect the different qualities of its specific site, resulting in five large-scale installations in direct dialogue with their surrounding natural environments. Specific examples of our work integrating with the architecture of the conservatory include *The Beacon* and *Florescence*.

When Jens Jensen conceived the design for Garfield Park Conservatory, he was inspired by the tall prairie grass landscape of the Midwest. With the shape of the prairie haystack in mind, he developed the long, horizontal front facade. In response to Jensen’s design approach, we created *The Beacon*—a dynamic, moving light installation featuring 526 computer-programmed LED light nodes that run vertically along the interior of the Palm House dome.
The content of the programmed LEDs is a recording of prairie grass blowing in the wind, and the piece is activated by anemometers that gauge the course and speed of wind passing across Chicago, affecting the vibrancy, speed, and dynamics of the installation. *The Beacon* is designed to create a fluid gesture of light that aims to mimic tall prairie grasses swaying in the breeze.

With *Florescence*, we were inspired by how plants perceive light. Specifically, we learned that the red and blue spectrums found within light are most vital to the growth process, with red prompting flowering and blue determining the direction of growth. This led us to create a sculptural intervention of red and blue petals hung canopy-like in an optical pattern. As sunlight passes through the translucent petals, colorful shadows are cast throughout the entirety of the Show House, creating an immersive experience that changes visitors’ perceptions of the colors of the plants, heightening their awareness of the processes by which nature unfolds. By flooding the space with red and blue, we aimed to create an atmosphere referencing growth and blossoming, placing the viewer in a “charged” environment and accentuating the ways in which people, plants, and color interact with light energy.

A site-specific response to the conservatory, *solarise* invites new perspectives on light and nature while heightening visitors’ awareness of the natural surroundings, the relevance of Jensen’s visionary landscape, and the significance of the building and its grounds.
ART INTERVENTION DRIVING PRESERVATION

Through these projects, we have seen firsthand how art can be a transformative tool providing a unique point of access to engage and invigorate viewers with new ideas, aesthetics, and perspectives. We have also found that the value of integrating art as site-specific programming includes, but is not limited to, finding creative ways to educate the public about historical importance and contemporary relevance, developing new audiences and driving increased traffic, generating publicity through exhibition reviews, aiding in fundraising efforts, and more. For example, INsite was made possible by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Northern Lights.mn, and the National Endowment for the Arts, but we also used a Kickstarter campaign to raise awareness both for financing the project and for the site itself. Doing so provided necessary seed funding as well as a platform to speak about the relevance of landmarks such as the Farnsworth House, develop audiences for the project, and spur subsequent press coverage. Further, through online video documentation and social media, we have been able to reach people worldwide, creating new audiences not only for our practice but also for the sites we work with. We are excited to continue having these conversations with architects—as well as with the people who steward these iconic places today—and presenting refreshed dialogues and new perspectives by way of contemporary art. FJ

PETRA BACHMAIER and SEAN GALLERO met during Performance Art studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1999 and have collaborated since 2000. The artist duo formed Luftwerk, based in Chicago, in 2007.
Liberating Lyndhurst from the Tyranny of the Period of Significance

HOWARD ZAR

Somehow in the development of the professional practice of historic preservation, someone came up with the idea of the period of significance. The concept was that, to be properly understood and interpreted, a building needed to be restored and furnished to a specific period of time—its most important period—and all other architectural accretion needed to be stripped away, essentially sanitizing messy history.

For the houses of the founding fathers or for sites associated with a distinct era, like Colonial Williamsburg, this might have made sense. The institutions that first stewarded these places were founded to tell a very specific history—almost a glorified myth—about our shared origins as a country. However, the problem with using period of significance broadly for interpretation is that it ignores the way most buildings and neighborhoods of any age metamorphose and how ownership and usage change over time. Rare is the building that never undergoes any renovation.

Even worse, by emphasizing one time period, one architect, or one owner, period of significance interpretation relegates collections, landscapes, and whole histories as adjuncts and often tosses them into the dustbin. Rather than allowing a building and its surroundings to tell a multigenerational story of social change, we get stuck with a very neat and often very inaccurate interpretation of a site. Even among some of the best-documented historic properties, period of significance has created an ersatz history that is more myth than true chronicle. As the stewards of Colonial Williamsburg themselves admit, guides at the property’s opening were outfitted by Broadway costume shops to provide the proper “ye olden times” feeling.

Above all, period of significance tends to elevate concern for historic structures and their purportedly most important owner or
architect above their collections or landscapes. This has been particularly true at Lyndhurst, a National Trust Historic Site in Tarrytown, New York. The landscape itself and many of the structures added to it over the site’s 178 years have been discounted—at times, even disassembled—in efforts to honor the narrow period of significance defined by its architect and most prominent owner. The result not only distorted history but also limited opportunities for public interaction with the space. Today we are working to activate Lyndhurst and engage a broader community by recognizing the complex significance of its landscape and the diversity of its stories.

WHAT’S FIT TO PRESERVE

Lyndhurst is widely considered the most important and most seminal 19th-century house in the United States, and the masterpiece of Alexander Jackson Davis, one of the most influential American designers of the 19th century. Because of Lyndhurst’s architectural significance and the fact that it has retained many of the 50 pieces of furniture originally designed for the house by its architect, many other aspects of the estate have often been overlooked. The two most significant rich white men associated with the mansion have been the key focus of interpretation. Davis, who constructed the house between 1838 and 1842 and returned to double its size between 1864 and 1868, has received the most attention. Jay Gould, the railroad baron who was the third owner of the estate and one of the most famous characters of the Gilded
Age, has been given secondary billing, in part because it was his family that donated the estate to the nation. However, the extremely fine collections—including the many pieces of Davis furniture, the Tiffany and La Farge stained glass, the extensive suites of Herter Brothers furniture, and the excellent French academic paintings—were never given their due as artworks. The last two owners—philanthropist Helen Gould and Duchess of Talleyrand Anna Gould—have only been remembered as Jay Gould’s daughters, even though both were important in their own right, made significant additions to the estate, and were responsible for preserving it for posterity.

The 67-acre landscape has been the biggest victim of period of significance interpretation. It was almost completely forgotten and never given due attention in the site’s interpretation. When the house was first opened to the public in 1965, much of the landscape was still an overgrown mess. Many of the most important outbuildings were in great disrepair, including the 1894 bowling alley; the large swimming pool building; Jay Gould’s yacht bridge over the railroad lines of his competitors, the Vanderbilts; and the breathtaking 1882 greenhouse by manufacturer Lord & Burnham. Most egregious was the unceremonious removal of key landscape features that were erroneously seen as additions of the late 19th and 20th centuries—primarily the work of Gould’s two daughters and, as such, not considered worthy of serious preservation. At one point in the early 1970s, the extensive collection of marble garden sculpture was ripped out of the landscape and thrown into a pile next to the greenhouse. Paths were removed because the restorers at the time believed cement to be a modern material, even though the paths appear in period photographs from the 1860s. (Cement proliferated in New York after its introduction as the chief material used to construct the Erie Canal in the 1820s.) Wood and glass elements of the iron-framed greenhouse—not an A.J. Davis structure—were simply removed to the greenhouse basement. Period of significance interpretation allowed for the destruction of major elements of the landscape—those that track the stories of the women who were so important to the property—simply because they were not perceived to fit with an interpretation of the mansion.
as a masterwork of one of America’s most important architects or the prized possession of one of its economic titans.

While, in hindsight, this might seem shocking and wanton, this would have been totally appropriate in the Colonial Williamsburg school of restoring everything back to a specific period. Removal of later accretion was intended to create purity and clarity and to get rid of chaos.

TELLING A BROADER STORY THROUGH LANDSCAPE

Times change, and our ideas of importance change. At Lyndhurst, this means telling a far richer and broader story of how the estate tracks almost two centuries of a developing and evolving American cultural heritage. In particular, this has meant reintegrating Lyndhurst’s important landscape into the interpretation and overall use of the historic property. Consideration of Lyndhurst’s landscape is critical to an understanding of the function of the mansion, including changing uses over time, and to the developing ideas about our interaction with the landscape in the United States.

Lyndhurst sits on 67 acres on the Tappan Zee, the widest part of the lower Hudson River in what is now essentially New York City’s urban sprawl into Westchester. With other neighboring properties, Lyndhurst is part of a 125-acre waterfront oasis in an otherwise congested urban area. The history of Lyndhurst’s landscape is both long and well documented. Architect A.J. Davis began work on Lyndhurst in 1838, one year before he would make the acquaintance of Andrew Jackson Downing. While Downing is recognized as the father of American landscape architecture—his practice employed Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmstead, who would go on to build Central Park—it is not often remembered that both Davis and Downing considered themselves to be equally architects and landscapers. In true Romantic tradition, the placement of homes within a landscape was essentially seen as the creation of the picturesque, and both the architecture and landscape held equal weight.

In Lyndhurst, Davis created the first fully realized Gothic Revival mansion and marked the transition from classical architecture to Romanticism in the United States. Davis’ choice of Gothic
for Lyndhurst is a direct reflection of the craggy landscape. The house sits on a rocky outcropping overlooking the Hudson, and the Gothic style was seen as appropriate and organic to the site. As Frank Lloyd Wright would do 75 years later, Davis designed the exterior and interior of the building, as well as all its furniture and fittings; placed the building in the landscape; and probably redesigned the landscape around the mansion.

While there are no specific records of his landscape design, parts of the existing estate may be Davis’ only landscape project remaining in the country. The clues lie in a map created for the sale of Lyndhurst after its second owner, George Merritt, died unexpectedly after only a short residence in the mansion. The watercolor topographical map reveals which plants had been added in the landscape expansion of the 1860s and which had been in place for some time. Since only 30 years had passed between the occupancy of the original owners and the death of the second owner, the areas of the landscape shown as mature on the 1873 map are likely Davis’ work for Lyndhurst’s first owners or at least an 1840s landscape by a now-unknown designer. Recent inspections by knowledgeable landscape historians suggest that this work may even be an extremely early Davis/Downing collaboration, although further research is necessary.
Key among the elements of the early landscape are a series of three rock viewing platforms, made from gneiss rock sourced on the property, that were connected by a cement walkway starting at the front porch of the mansion. The walkway descended in a circle from the mansion and led through the summer shade of older trees on the lower lawn while providing structured views of both the building up the hill and the Hudson River down below. The first of the rockeries, a simple oval of rocks on a level spot surrounded by cedars, presented a dramatic view of the prominent Gothic features of the mansion. Shortly after came a large, three-tiered rockery surrounded by cedars and chestnuts and extensively planted with lily of the valley. At the center was a long pathway bordered by decorative gneiss boulders; at the top was an elaborate raised wooden bench sporting Davis’ Gothic decoration; and at the bottom level was a latticed, low bench affording panoramic views of the river. The third rockery, behind the northern end of the mansion, was terraced up a hill and also provided views of both the house and the river.

Surprisingly, the third rockery survives virtually unscathed, still surrounded by its trees and with its pebble sidewalks and border rocks still in place. The large rockery has sustained some damage, caused primarily by the uprooting of trees during major storms, but after years of being overgrown, it is remarkably intact. The first simple rockery lacks its trees but also remains in place. In addition to being depicted in the 1873 map, the large rockery was extensively
photographed in the late 1860s after the Merritts took possession of the house. Thus, we have early visual documentation of the placement of the trees and flora as well as the style and placement of the now-missing benches. Luckily, although the cement sidewalk was removed in the 1970s, its gravel underlayer still exists in the grass lawn, and modern technology will allow us to accurately plot the exact location of the original walkways throughout the property.

Because Lyndhurst’s landscape was developed and documented throughout the length of its occupancy, from the 1840s through the 1960s, presenting this history also allows us to tell a far more inclusive story about the various owners, particularly the last two women, who owned the property from the 1880s through the 1960s and made extensive additions to the landscape.

In particular, Helen Gould, Jay Gould’s eldest daughter and one of the longest-term owners of the property, became one of the leading philanthropists in the country and a major proponent of women’s economic empowerment. Gould had a number of recreational buildings constructed on the estate, including the riverside bowling pavilion built in 1894—a 7,000-square-foot building with two regulation bowling lanes, two parlors, and a large veranda overlooking the river. Interpretation of the newly restored building will provide the opportunity to explore layers of social history. At the time of the bowling alley’s construction, for example, private bowling lanes were a status symbol of the upper classes. Bowling

A 1942 photo of a croquet game outside the bowling pavilion that Helen Gould added to the Lyndhurst landscape in 1894.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE LYNDHURST ARCHIVES
was of particular interest to Helen Gould as it was a sport that could be played equally and together by both men and women. However, it is believed that Gould had to use a male intermediary to purchase the lanes because the installer would not sell directly to a woman.

Gould later converted the bowling alley to provide venues for public enjoyment and vocational education. She used the northern parlor of the building as the headquarters for the sewing school she founded. Gould realized that the many immigrant women she employed as servants had no other training or way to make a living. Having learned to sew, they could get jobs in the New York garment industry, find their own apartments, and start families. Gould educated as many as 500 community women at a time, and the school welcomed women of different races and religions—an idea well ahead of its time in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The sewing classes were often conducted outside to simultaneously teach women a trade and give them time away from their interior housework in the daylight and fresh air.

RESTORATION AND REVIVAL
Lyndhurst recently received a grant from New York state to begin a $1 million project to restore the early landscape between the mansion and the Hudson River. When work is completed, visitors to Lyndhurst will be able to step off the front veranda and take a guided walk through the series of 1840s rockeries, exploring gardens and shady specimen trees while enjoying picturesque views of the mansion and the river. The ultimate destination will be the riverside bowling alley, which will open for the first time after 30 years of ongoing work—a centerpiece of the landscape restoration project.

Restoring the landscape will bring many benefits to the estate. It will re-establish the balance between the architecture and its setting that was so important to Davis and that gives a much better sense of how the property was originally designed, sited, and used. Even more important, the improvement in the lower landscape—the first to be refurbished—will open the property to new audiences and allow us to tell a broader story about the history of ownership.
Lyndhurst is not alone among historic properties that are looking for ways to attract new audiences. Those who might come to Lyndhurst to view the interior of the mansion will probably come only once in a lifetime. Landscape and garden aficionados, however, tend to be repeat visitors to a historic property. They like to see the gardens throughout the seasons and will often come in the spring, summer, and fall to experience the changes. By emphasizing Lyndhurst’s early and important landscape, we will provide a whole new experience to a completely new set of visitors.

On an even larger scale, Lyndhurst’s landscape restoration seeks to attract an audience that is not interested in historic houses or historic landscapes—specifically, those interested in nature, the Hudson River, and new opportunities for recreation. Lyndhurst is bisected by two major regional trails, the Old Croton Aqueduct State Historic Park Trail and the Westchester County RiverWalk. Both extend for more than 20 miles—leading from New York City, along the Hudson River, deep into Westchester County—and bring recreationalists through the Lyndhurst estate. In 2018 a major bridge on the New York State Thruway just north of Lyndhurst will open, connecting the west and east banks of the river and providing a pedestrian and bicycle pathway across the bridge. This will link to the RiverWalk and Aqueduct paths, bringing multiple new visitors through the Lyndhurst landscape. The restored lower landscape will provide one of the best places to enjoy views of the river as well as shelter and—just as important—public restrooms and refreshments.
Other historic properties in the Hudson Valley that offer opportunities for both tours and recreation report that four to five times the number of visitors come for the landscape as for the historic house tours.

Restoration and reintegration of the landscape is just one example of how we’re re-examining and reinterpreting Lyndhurst. We’re in the process of restoring the observation tower and laundry building as well as reopening the various servants’ rooms and kitchens. In past years, we’ve rehung the picture gallery to emphasize the best artworks rather than the historically exact hanging scheme. We’ve redone bedrooms—some to 1860, others in the same house and on the same floor to 1940.

Ultimately, we’re trying to give visitors much broader opportunities to interact with the whole property. If visitors only want to walk their dogs, enjoy the shade, and have a snack, we view that as a totally appropriate experience. Quite frankly, that’s closer to the way the original inhabitants of the estate enjoyed the property than a museum visit. For those who want a formal tour of the mansion, its collections, and its landscape, we’re able to tell the full 175 years of its history, including that of its many owners and workers—men and women who made it a unique place.

Very few of our visitors care whether we have interpreted Lyndhurst mansion and its furnishings to a very specific date. They only know whether it engaged them in the way they wanted to be engaged. FJ

HOWARD ZAR is the executive director of Lyndhurst. He also serves on the board of the Museum at Eldridge Street, which conducted a 20-year restoration of the historic Eldridge Street Synagogue, as well as the board of the Greater Hudson Heritage Network.

**TAKEAWAY**
See a slideshow about determining your site’s period of significance.

**MAP**
Use an interactive map to compare Lyndhurst in 1873 with Lyndhurst today.
CITY of NIGHT and the Impact of Placemaking

DANA SAYLOR

When you find yourself standing in front of a floodgate and suddenly see a torrent rushing toward you, the smartest thing to do is crank open the gate and stand aside. You are but a facilitator, allowing the water to flow where it wants. It took me a few years to learn how to crank open the gate, frantically turning while the water rose around my ankles, then knees, then waist ... And then, as if in a dream, I was standing on a bridge, looking out over a powerful river. It seemed to come from nowhere, but the energy to activate a place like Silo City—the current that connects its past to its potential—had been building all along.

This was my experience creating CITY of NIGHT, a one-night site-specific art festival at Buffalo’s historic Silo City grain elevators. In September 2011 I toured the site with my arts group, Emerging Leaders in the Arts Buffalo (ELAB), and fell in love with the story it told. The silence of the massive industrial site was perhaps the most powerful aspect of it. Without words the grain elevators, malt house, and warehouses bore witness to experiences, people, industries.

Quieted by years of staggering loss, Silo City was much like the city of Buffalo—and the region. Our event came at a time when hope was just starting to spring up.

Crowds at Silo City in Buffalo, New York. CITY of NIGHT transformed Silo City, a stagnating industrial site, into a place for innovative artwork, live performances, and celebration. Making this isolated area accessible and alive with activity has permanently changed its public perception.

PHOTO BY LESLIE FINEBERG
THE WATERFRONT ENDURES

Industry has abutted the Buffalo River and Lake Erie waterfront for more than two centuries. The Seneca, who used the area as a hunting ground, rarely settled here—except for Farmer’s Brother. At the turn of the 19th century, he built his cabin on a spit of land that today looks out across the river at the hulking Lake and Rail grain elevator—a wall of concrete; steel marine legs; and docks where the oldest remaining steam vessel in America, the SS Columbia, is currently anchored. The Holland Land Company purchased most of the land in the region in 1800, extinguishing much of the Native American title to the area (save for a few reservations), and settlers from the East Coast began to move in. The period between 1837 and the Civil War was incredibly dynamic, with new industries and inventions coming to life here. Eventually German, Irish, Italian, and Polish immigrants found their way to Buffalo, where they either found work in the industries that earlier settlers had established or created their own.

One of the jobs from this era that has taken on mythic proportions for present-day Buffalonians is that of grain scooper. It was backbreaking toil, shoveling wheat or barley from the holds of lake steamers into the grain elevators for seasonal storage and eventual use in East Coast markets. The industry grew during the Civil War, when movement of goods throughout Union-controlled territory largely shifted to the Erie Canal. After the Welland Canal and
St. Lawrence Seaway opened, however, Buffalo lost its role as the hub of Great Lakes-to-East Coast trans-shipment. This caused many grain storage, milling, and malting operations to move elsewhere and a number of related industries to close.

Despite the business stagnation, though, Buffalo’s art scene persisted. Musicians, poets, painters, and new media creators were drawn to this place, in part because it had a reputation for a certain workaday creativity—as a place where innovation in a composition or painting were just as common as steam-powered elevators, lumber mills, or lead paint manufactories had once been. The 1960s and 70s were particularly fertile for creative collaborations that brought together the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra (BPO), University at Buffalo, and Albright-Knox Art Gallery for original events, while new organizations like Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center and Squeaky Wheel Media Arts Center launched the careers of now-iconic arts leaders, including artists Robert Longo and Cindy Sherman as well as renowned composer and BPO conductor Lukas Foss.

In spite of this vibrant culture, “desperate” best described the mindset of the local government and citizens by the early 1980s—not just in Western New York but in every legacy city facing similar job hemorrhages. The time of opportunity seemed to have passed and, with it, the moment to retain a generation of young people who wanted a chance at a good life. They left en masse, migrating to larger centers like New York, the West Coast, and some overseas destinations, believing that the situation was so dire they’d never return.

When the region began to experience a comeback in the early aughts, many were surprised. My own arrival in Buffalo coincided with the worst financial crisis the country has experienced since the Great Depression, and yet I was still able to find a network of creative people who had been working hard for decades to slowly rebuild the momentum. In a Buffalo that had lost access to many resources, our choices were collaborate or flounder.

The “Wild West” atmosphere in Buffalo (mirrored in other legacy cities) allowed for a kind of improvisation not seen before. This included cross-disciplinary work—artists and architects, for
example—and experimental events in abandoned places, like Artists & Models. A do-it-yourself scene that would influence a generation of Buffalo creatives was taking hold.

LEARNING A SPACE

I have lived in Buffalo since 2008, and I’ve learned from some brilliant urban planning, preservation, arts, business innovation, and sustainability thinkers. I have read everything I could get my hands on about Buffalo’s history and attended art events galore, meeting the leaders and staff of nearly all the creative organizations here. I made it my business to know people, quickly building my network and helping forge some cross-disciplinary connections of my own.

When I heard about the formation of a new arts group, I was curious and attended the first meeting. In a short time, I was secretary of ELAB, a chapter of Americans for the Arts. Shortly thereafter, I began to dip my toe into the waters of event planning.

We threw studio parties, hosted monthly ArtLab critique sessions, and then in February 2012 we planned Speakeasy—an Art Deco–themed event with live music, film projections, and food and drink in a vacant downtown Buffalo storefront. With fewer than 200 attendees and about $500 earned for ELAB, we considered it a huge success. Little did we imagine the flood that was to come.

When people ask me the secret to CITY of NIGHT’s success, a few thoughts come to mind. It was the right time and the right place. Silo City had been seen only by the most intrepid urban
explorers, photographers, and preservationists, after being opened up by the owner, Rick Smith, to occasional private tours (with plenty of trespassing too). Cross-disciplinary collaboration brought in enough partners and participants that we had a built-in audience. Through CITY of NIGHT we activate the history and future of such spaces, bringing site-specific sculpture, installations, light projections, dance, and music. The team of curators, promoters, and managers has launched places like Silo City into the popular consciousness of the region and now the country. There was a reason we chose the key themes of art, history, culture, and sustainability—we didn’t have the capital to redevelop property ourselves, but we could inspire thinking about the future of these buildings by sharing our group’s vision with the public. My contribution is often pointing out the obvious. My work could be billed as a complicated combination of creative placemaking, artistic practice, and event planning, but the truth is it’s very simple. I help people see. And what I see here are a wealth of historic assets just sitting there, waiting to be reimagined.

ACTIVATING A SPACE
We began with a basic concept—allow artists and others to tour the site, as we had done the previous year, to get inspiration and information. I shared the history of the grain elevators while the curator gave the artists ideas for what kind of art might work and where. We then stepped back and allowed their creativity to flourish, asking for proposals that outlined their general concepts with a few drawings and a description. The curator, Marissa Lehner, trusted that the ideas would flesh out once the artists got on-site to install the works, and she was right.

Regional artists, many of whom we knew personally, had been invited to submit proposals, and they gave it their Alma Jiminez’s Love video installation at CITY of NIGHT 2012.

PHOTO BY CATHALEEN CURTISS
Fotini Galanes worked inside one of the cavernous elevators, drawing her signature graphite swirls, organic and complex, while attendees drifted by her work table, dramatically lit in the darkness by a single lamp. Alma Jiminez installed a video-mapped projection piece that offered shifting images in four quadrants of the word “LOVE.” Kelly Tomasello installed a mossy tree emerging from the base of a rusted-out grain hopper that had once been used to deliver wheat to a ground-level conveyor belt.

That first-year event also included a curated, grain elevator-themed photography show organized by Christina Laing, as well as “Shutterbug Tours” for curious photographers led by local historian and urban planner Chris Hawley. A unique art fair in the malt house gave regional artists a marketplace and access to attendees. Food trucks gathered around the central courtyard where live bands and DJs played throughout the event. Roving dancers and performers delighted the audience.

And we found quite an audience. We were amazed at the scale of public response to CITY of NIGHT. Our first year, we expected around 1,000 people, but the event became a social media sensation with attendees calling and texting their friends, rousing them from bed at 11:30 p.m., saying, “You’ve got to get down here!” In the end, we estimate that there were 3,500 people on-site. The buzz led to a huge explosion of attendance in the following years: 12,000 in 2013 and a staggering 17,000 in 2014, our final year at Silo City.

We changed hearts and minds at these events, spreading the message of creative potential and civic pride to ever-broader circles. This was concurrent with a strong preservation activist movement throughout the region following the National Preservation Conference held in Buffalo in 2011. The conference was well attended and featured many field sessions, bringing focus to local projects, districts, and issues—including the fight to save the Bethlehem Steel administration building. The visibility of grassroots art and heritage were growing side by side, and our success in making Silo City accessible and alive with art, artist, and audience left it permanently transformed.
STEERING THE SHIP

An undertaking like CITY of NIGHT would hardly be possible without many passionate collaborators—executing such an event demands a broad range of dedicated individuals with diverse skills. Traditional experts in curating visual arts are as vital as one might imagine, but so too are specialists in other art forms, in marketing and communications, and in finance, to name just a few. Their strength lies in their many distinct skillsets collectively leveraged toward a common goal.

We in Buffalo are lucky to have a legacy of creativity so strong that all we need to do is spread the word of a new arts event and ask for participation. We are frequently overwhelmed by responses. One of the most important contributors to our event’s growth was Curator/Community Art Chair Marissa Lehner, thanks to her ability to shepherd the artists into a space that made sense for their work and to teach them to meet the technical needs of their pieces at the site. Her guidance was essential for building the artists’ confidence and ensuring the success of the artworks.

Tara Sasiadek, now the president (then vice president) of ELAB, has been our storyteller. She understands and interprets our group’s philosophy, recording our events and experiences, and sharing the meaning of our work with the public. She has engaged photographers and videographers, narrated videos, and even designed the group’s logo at one of the first meetings—a beaker, representing our experimental nature. On top of this, she has also created immersive art installations for CITY of NIGHT.

Our resident gallerist, Marcus Wise, who served as president during ELAB’S first few years, led the social media promotion and fine art fair aspect of the event. He recognized an opportunity to showcase local artists who either created work not suited to full-on installation in the grain elevators or couldn’t commit the necessary time and materials. The fair also gave attendees a place to purchase local art and walk away with a memento.

Leslie Fineberg joined us as the multidisciplinary chair, with a background in belly dance and a network of many artists whose work broke the two-dimensional boundaries. She brought us dancers, DJs, poets, and fire performers.
Of course, what is a huge event without a money manager? Candice Pack, an accomplished painter (and accountant), became ELAB’s treasurer shortly after moving to Buffalo. When a large foundation offered us a significant donation, she led ELAB through the process of becoming a 501(c)3 nonprofit. One year, while exhibiting in the art fair, she also had the unglamorous job of managing money drops from the various bars, merchandise booth, and other locations around the five-acre site.

Architect Kisha Patterson got involved with ELAB by first participating in CITY of NIGHT as an artist. Her installation was whimsical yet profound, moving blue and white balloons throughout the vast vertical space of a silo and inviting attendees to participate by tossing the balloons up into space that had once been occupied by tons of grain, now airy enough for a few fans to lift the balloons ever higher.

**ACTIVATING ACROSS THE RIVER**

After three years of growth, CITY of NIGHT was still run by an all-volunteer team that was happy with what we’d created but overextended and burned out. We loved the change we’d inspired but were seeking a shift. Silo City was becoming well known, hosting many events (including weddings). Drawing on our experience of activating place, we sought a new place to highlight and celebrate at a scale that was more realistic for our small organization to manage.

The Old First Ward, across the Buffalo River, was the neighborhood where grain scoopers, steelworkers, and lumbermen had once lived, their small worker cottages built in the shadow of great industry. The neighborhood welcomed us with open arms, and we began to work with the community center, the local tavern, the church,
and a few warehouses and factories still in the area. We planned a new variation on CITY of NIGHT that focused on the meaning of a city’s development over time—its architecture, heritage, and people. We also wanted to ensure safety and calm for current residents and so took pains to scale back on noisy music and discourage drunkenness. We significantly increased our security presence and fenced in the beer areas for the first time.

There were plenty of art installations: inside a five-car “train” made of rented shipping containers covered in murals; next door in a historic cooperage slated to become a distillery; and inside the church in the form of projections and performances. There were smaller stages around the neighborhood and roving performers throughout. The subtlety and relative tranquility of this event caught some attendees completely off guard, while others—our “true believers”—were willing to follow along and take a close look at what we were there to show them. We are proud of this iteration, which left the Old First Ward with a beautiful mural titled “The Worker,” celebrating the neighborhood’s blue-collar roots.

With many visions of what could come next, ELAB is taking this year to step back and work on strategic planning. Most of us are original founders of the group (now six years old) and very good friends. We’ve gained a great deal of knowledge and experience and have learned what it means to get our hands dirty and to mature together.

We stand together on the bridge, over the river that we—in part—made and look toward a future Buffalo that we’ve helped to shape. FJ

DANA SAYLOR is an artist, architectural historian, and event planner in Buffalo, New York. She is an innovative thinker and creative connector, focused on leveraging art and place.

VIDEO
Watch a video about CITY of NIGHT 2014.
Community Partnerships Activate Santa Barbara’s Presidio Neighborhood

ANNE PETERSEN

At the Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation (SBTHP), we prize our partnerships. In fact our operating model is dependent on them, and they provide a multidimensional standard for enlivening historic places while also allowing them to evolve. Ours is a large site with a rich, complex history comprising many stories. We, along with our partners, continue to honor, preserve, and tell those stories because our method of activating spaces is built on working with our community to weave history into contemporary use.

SBTHP was founded in 1963 by a group of committed community members who shared a dream of rebuilding the Royal Presidio of Santa Barbara, a Spanish fort established in 1782 and the origin of the modern-day city of Santa Barbara. The new organization began acquiring land within the Presidio footprint. El Cuartel was the first acquisition—made in 1964—and encompasses a 1788 adobe that is the oldest standing residence in California and the only completely original portion of the Presidio. These efforts coincided with California State Parks’ growing interest in adding the Presidio to its holdings, and in 1968 the site became a State Historic Monument.

It was named El Presidio de Santa Bárbara State Historic Park (El Presidio SHP) in 1970. The founders had dreamed of rebuilding the entire adobe fort, but a public planning process in 1988 resulted in the park’s current, less-ambitious general plan. Today the park comprises 5.5 acres of downtown Santa Barbara, with about one-third containing reconstructed and historic portions of the Presidio and with limited portions yet to be reconstructed. The rest of the park incorporates much of the original Presidio footprint and includes more than 20 additional structures dating from the 1840s through to the mid-20th century, each with its own rich history.
The Presidio is a centerpiece of El Pueblo Viejo Landmark District, the city of Santa Barbara’s major preservation and design control district.

In 1972 SBTHP signed a concession agreement with the State of California that later evolved into an operating agreement. This agreement is key to SBTHP’s business model and our commitment to successful partnerships. Under its terms, any funds raised within the park stay in the park to support its operation.

In 2011 SBTHP was proud to receive the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Trustees Emeritus Award for excellence in the stewardship of historic sites, and we consider our strong, mutually beneficial relationships with our tenants integral to that excellence. We work carefully to secure tenants that are well suited to the site, and those tenants assume a significant and layered role in promoting our shared value of preservation supporting a sustainable community.

Among the organization’s many resources for ensuring the stability of our tenant and partner relationships, as well as the integrity of our built resources, are a property management company contracted by SBTHP as well as the Restoration and Property Management committees. They are chaired by board members and include board members, staff, and community volunteers with professional skills in architecture, preservation, property development and management, engineering, finance, real estate law, nonprofit management, and historical archaeology, among others.

Many of the tenants continue historic uses of park properties, providing important connections between past and present. The rent they pay supports SBTHP’s mission of preserving, restoring, reconstructing, and interpreting historic sites in Santa Barbara County, but they also contribute to the vibrant neighborhood that surrounds the museum portion of the park.
CONTINUING EDUCATIONAL USE AT ANACAPA SCHOOL

More than just a tenant, Anacapa School, a private middle and high school, is an active participant in the life of El Presidio SHP. The school is housed in several historic buildings of the Presidio: the Rochin Adobe and the structures of the former Hoff Hospital.

The Rochin Adobe at 820 Santa Barbara Street was constructed in 1856, the first structure built within the Presidio quadrangle as the Presidio began to decline. It was made with adobe bricks cannibalized from the fort, and its transitional architecture—an adobe covered in wood siding with a shingle instead of a tile roof—marks its significance as an American-period building in the center of the older pueblo. The Rochin was acquired by the state in 1996 for inclusion in the park. Adjacent to the Rochin, at 816 Santa Barbara Street, sit two rectangular wood buildings conjoined to form an L-shape. Relocated to this site in 1947, the buildings originally formed part of the 1941 Hoff General Hospital, a World War II-era military hospital constructed a few miles northwest of their current siting.

Educational use of this site has a surprisingly long history. The Sloyd School, a Queen Anne Revival structure, was built here in 1893. The school included manual arts training and was a precursor to the University of California, Santa Barbara, but its building was lost in the 1925 earthquake. When the Hoff Hospital structures were moved to the site, they were used for an early incarnation of Santa Barbara City College. California State Parks acquired the property in 1982, and Anacapa School has occupied it since 1984, later adding the Rochin Adobe.
When the school moved in, SBTHP fenced the property and allowed the school to do some interior remodeling to accommodate its needs. Recent restoration work funded by SBTHP includes a new shingle roof for the Rochin—no small feat to undertake in Santa Barbara’s “high fire zone,” especially given that the building’s use as a school results in a higher-risk designation for the property. SBTHP successfully navigated the Santa Barbara Historic Landmarks Commission’s approval process to ensure that the new roof would include historically accurate cedar shingles. We are currently replacing and upgrading the more-than-100-year-old sewer main. Anacapa School itself funded exterior painting of the Hoff buildings and the Rochin as well as porch repairs to the Rochin.

Anacapa School has been a consistent and valued tenant for SBTHP. The school’s rigorous curriculum integrates opportunities for students to participate in programming at El Presidio SHP. Each semester three to five students serve as interns for the park’s heritage garden project. Students also participate as interpreters during living history programs, and the school devotes one day every year to volunteering at the park, with students often doing the whitewashing that is continually required for the adobe buildings of the Presidio. Headmaster Gordon Sichi and his students prize their school’s location. “This is the most historic part of Santa Barbara, and we’re actually a part of it,” Sichi says. “Both properties have … helped establish the character of the school.” Student Ray Johnson says that the adobe “has more of a welcoming feel than just a school … Looking at it, you don’t really see it as a school, you see it more as a house.” Student Lauren Sloan adds, “It’s been used by so many people that it really has that feel that people like to be here.”

KEEPING MAI TAIS FLOWING AT JIMMY’S ORIENTAL GARDENS

Santa Barbara’s Chinatown was originally centered one block to the west of the Presidio site, on East Canon Perdido Street, but after the 1925 earthquake provided an opportunity to redevelop the downtown in a uniform style, the buildings of Chinatown quickly came down. In the late 1920s, local real estate owner and contractor Elmer Whittaker built a series of structures on the south side of the 200 block of East Canon Perdido Street intended to
encourage a dwindling Chinese population to stay in downtown Santa Barbara. By 1930 the remaining residents of Santa Barbara’s Chinatown had moved to this “New Chinatown,” firmly situated within the Presidio quadrangle and adjacent to a small and active community of Japanese residents. Jimmy’s Oriental Gardens, built in 1947 by Whittaker for restaurant owner James Yee Chung, was the last piece of New Chinatown to be constructed.

The Chung family operated the bar and restaurant for two generations, until Jimmy’s son Tommy, who had taken over in 1970, sold the property, including the Chung family home, to SBTHP in 2006. The building that housed the last Chinese-operated business in Santa Barbara’s Chinatown is not only a major asset for the park but also a visual reminder within El Presidio SHP of the Chinese community.

In 2011 SBTHP signed a lease with Robert Lovejoy to operate a deli called Three Pickles in the restaurant portion of the Jimmy’s building, and in 2013 Lovejoy added a bar called the Pickle Room in the remaining portion. A labor of love, creating the Pickle Room involved a complete restoration of the Chung family’s bar. Lovejoy worked closely with SBTHP to re-cover the original bench seats in the booths, restore the length of the bar (which had been truncated under Tommy’s ownership), clean and repair the iconic pagoda roof over the bar, and update the restrooms. SBTHP’s curatorial department lent the business the original Chinese lanterns from
the bar, cleaned and rewired, as well as the historic business sign, which now hangs proudly under the pagoda.

With the Pickle Room, Lovejoy has not only restored a building, but also returned a beloved institution to the community, and he is very cognizant of his role as steward of this historic place. Lovejoy notes that he has a master’s degree in furniture design, his father ran an antiques shop, and his grandfather ran a bar and steakhouse in Los Angeles. “Red booths,” he says, “are my history.” Lovejoy was also a friend of Tommy Chung and a longtime patron of the Chungs’ business, and he feels a responsibility to carry on the character of the bar. “[Tommy Chung] was just a really sweet guy. He was a true gentleman, and welcomed everybody,” says Lovejoy. “On Thanksgiving, he would cook all this food for people who were alone and didn’t have a family. You always felt like you were welcome here. It was my charge to do this. I knew I would be the best man for this job.” Of El Presidio SHP, Lovejoy notes, “People ... come and visit you [the park], and one out of four of them drops into my door, so it’s a symbiotic relationship.” The Presidio is an anchor in the downtown that supports the surrounding businesses as much as they support us.

FROM WINE CELLAR TO TASTING ROOM AT CASA DE LA GUERRA

By repurposing a historic wine cellar for use as a wine tasting room, a local entrepreneur has found a uniquely suitable location for his business, and SBTHP has found an ideal partner to help share this historic resource with a wider audience.

Casa de la Guerra is the 1828 adobe home of the Presidio’s fifth commandant, José de la Guerra, and his family. The Casa and El Paseo, the shopping and office complex built onto the adobe beginning in the early 1920s, were donated to SBTHP in 1971, and both are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In 1989 SBTHP created a lot split and sold El Paseo while maintaining a conservation easement on the building’s facade. In 1990 we began restoring the Casa to its earliest configuration—the one dating to the lifetime of José de la Guerra. Today SBTHP operates the Casa
as a historic house museum that includes furnished period rooms as well as rotating art and historical exhibits.

In the last few years, a series of wine-tasting rooms have opened in El Paseo, capitalizing on Santa Barbara’s growing reputation as a wine region. José de la Guerra himself grew grapes on one of his five ranches, Rancho Simi, which were used in a chardonnay that won first prize at Philadelphia’s Centennial Exposition of 1876. The family’s bodega (wine cellar) stands in the northwest corner of the U-shaped adobe, along a zagüán (passage) that connects the building with El Paseo. In 2015 SBTHP leased the bodega to Standing Sun Wines, which now uses the space as a tasting room for its Santa Barbara County wines.

The bodega is rich with historic character. After SBTHP conducted above-ground archaeology in the room, the exposed adobe walls were left unplastered. Patches of original whitewash adorn the walls, and half of the room’s perimeter features an adobe platform originally used to store wine barrels. The building lease was developed to protect these features and to prevent the insertion of new elements, such as running water or glass window panes.

Fortunately, SBTHP found an ideal tenant in Standing Sun co-owner John Wright. Wright, a preservation architect by training,
started a second career in the wine business a few years ago. He takes pride in the location of his business, noting that “The joint effort of bringing this space back to life works well, because I do have an understanding of this building and the history of this courtyard and of this house. And I’m able to pour wine in this space that was the original wine cellar.”

Wright points out that his customers find their way into his tasting room for a variety of reasons, and many do not have a direct interest in history or museums. Wright is able to connect them to the history of the building through an experience in his tasting room that often inspires them to learn more. “A lot of people come in here for wine tasting,” he says, “and they almost feel like … they’ve taken a step back in time, and they are in a historic space. Instead of viewing it as a museum, which is one way to experience this history, they’re viewing it as a space that they’re occupying and just being a part of.” Wright plans to deepen the mutually beneficial ties with the historic house museum: “We can build the energy. We are going to put outdoor seating in the courtyard, and we can get people to start using this courtyard, and this room, and filtering out into the museum.”

Wright’s protective stewardship of the bodega is apparent in the way he shares the room with all of his customers. “I came at this project from an architectural standpoint,” he explains. “I walked into this space and I saw opportunity, not obstacles. I don’t mind being inconvenienced by character … To come into this space and to have to use it exactly the way it is, it gave limitations but it also drove the design and it drove the use of the space. Somebody else used it before, just the way it was, so you just have to figure out how you are going to use it in a modern-day application.” Wright added wine barrels to one section of the original platform, providing an interpretive opportunity to discuss how the room was originally used. He also displays and sells art in the tasting room but only uses existing nails to hang canvases. Where there is no nail, paintings lean against the wall—another opportunity to enliven the space.
WORKING WITH PARTNERS TO BRAND THE “PRESIDIO NEIGHBORHOOD”

SBTHP also works to cultivate the role preservation plays in the commercial area surrounding El Presidio SHP. We had long been developing an interpretive and programming approach using “Presidio Neighborhood” branding when, in 2015, local business owner Hugh Margerum began meeting with local businesses and organizations with a similar idea. While not a tenant of SBTHP, the Margerum family has a long-term stake in the success of the area, having operated an award-winning restaurant and tasting room there for decades. Margerum produced a Presidio Neighborhood map, website, and mobile app, which he developed with input from most of the organizations and businesses in the four-block area, including SBTHP. Funds contributed by each partner supported production of the map and the rack fees to ensure its placement in all major hotels and visitor centers in Santa Barbara.

Margerum feels that the area has “always had that historic aspect ... [The Presidio] was the first thing here ... The neighborhood ... is lively enough to have a coffee shop, a cool deli, a bar, world-class cheese shop, cafe, in addition to the wine tasting and restaurants like the Wine Cask ... So I was thinking, we need to get [the word out] to visitors and to locals [that this is] a destination to come to and have all these different types of experiences.”

The process has brought the neighbors closer together to focus on our shared interest in the success and sustainability of Santa Barbara’s historic core. Last year Margerum hosted a mixer for the neighborhood in his tasting room, fostering new connections. SBTHP was able to use the mixer as a forum to share the new direction of our traditional Founding Day event in April, which was expanded last year to serve as a celebration of the city’s birthday. All of the partners have begun to use the Presidio Neighborhood logo on their marketing materials to help promote the branding. The Presidio Neighborhood is now a destination on the rise, referred to by name in the media and sharing an increasing sense of camaraderie among partners.
THE KEY TO GOOD PARTNERSHIPS

SBTHP does not undertake partnerships and tenant relationships lightly. We spend time up front considering whether the potential relationship is good for the organization, good for the state park, and, most importantly, the right fit for the historic resource. Our collaborations not only bring much-needed income to support the preservation and educational work that we do, but our tenants and partners also act as stewards, sharing our work with the public in ways that reconnect the past to the daily lives of everyone who visits the park. FJ

ANNE PETERSEN is the executive director of the Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation. She has worked in various capacities of the organization for 16 years. She holds a master’s degree in museum studies and American civilization from Brown University and a Ph.D. in public history from the University of California, Santa Barbara. She would like to thank Michael H. Imwalle and Mary Louise Days for their assistance with this article.

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