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Conservation's curatorial conundrum

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Wright Terms Doomed Robie House Sound, Hits Plan to Raze Structure

Only Kitchen is Out of Date, He Finds

Architect Frank Lloyd Wright took another look at the doomed Robie house, 5747 Woodlawn av., yesterday and pronounced it as beautiful as the day it was built.

Wright, 87, designed the house more than 50 years ago and had not seen it for many years. The house, built for the late Frederick S. Robie, bicycle manufacturer, is owned now by the Chicago Theological seminary, which plans to demolish it to make way for an apartment house for married students and dining room facilities.



Robie house at 5747 Woodlawn av. designed more than 50 years ago by Frank Lloyd Wright, which the owner, Chicago Theological seminary, wants to replace with an apartment building for married students.

Not Sullied to Needs

In explaining its plans for the site, the seminary has said it would cost between \$50,000 and \$100,000 to put the house into first class condition, and, in any event, the house is not sullied to the seminary's needs.

Wright's visit yesterday was suggested by a committee established to preserve it. The committee wanted his opinion of its condition and his suggestions as to its future use.

"It is in excellent condition structurally, really in marvelous shape, considering the abuse it has suffered," Wright said. "All that is wrong with it is the result of bad jointure, that is, lack of maintenance."

Cost Was \$20,000

He said the house had cost \$20,000 to build and exclaimed, "Can you imagine what it would cost today?"

As he walked thru the house he pointed with his walking stick to the indirect



Architect Wright pictured yesterday during visit to the house, which he called in excellent condition.

features he termed striking innovations in 1909, when the house was completed. He frowned only at the kitchen.

"It is out of date," he said. "It shows what progress we have made in designing kitchens in the last 50 years!"

Mention of the plans to raze the house aroused Wright's anger. "This is a cornerstone of American architecture," he said. "To wreck it would be like destroying a fine piece of sculpture or a beautiful painting."

Would Exchange Property

The house was described in Architectural Record magazine as "one of the seven most notable residences ever built in America." Carroll L. V. Meeks, professor of architectural history at Yale university, has called it one of the

great monuments of American architectural history.

Members of Phi Delta Theta fraternity, to which Wright belongs, accompanied him on the tour. Joseph J. Wagoner, president of the corporation which owns the University of Chicago chapter's house, said the chapter was prepared to exchange its property two doors to the north for the Robie house.

He pointed out that if the seminary successfully completes negotiations for the Zeta Beta Tau house, 5747 Woodlawn av., and makes the exchange with his fraternity, it will then be able to build the apartment house only one lot north of the site now contemplated.

Phi Delta Theta issued a pledge yesterday that it would keep the Robie house open to the public.

'NOT A KILLER,' DOCTOR PLEADS IN OLD BAILEY

BY ARTHUR VESSEY

LONDON, March 18—John Rodkin Adams, 58, an Irish born society doctor who presents the benign appearance of a kindly uncle or a whiter shirt than his colleagues, went on trial for his life in Old Bailey court today.

He is accused of turning a rich widow, Edith Morrell, a patient 81 years old, into a drug addict, getting her to will him her Rolls Royce car, an oak chest of silver, and an antique cupboard. Then, the prosecution charges, he killed her with a vast overdose of morphine and heroin more than six years ago.

Scotland Yard detectives investigated almost 500 potential violent deaths over the last 30 years at Eastbourne, a favorite resort for retired wealthy Britons, but Dr. Adams today was charged only with the death of Mrs. Morrell. At a preliminary hearing he was accused of only with the death of Mrs. Morrell. At a preliminary

Accused of Other Killings

"I am not guilty, my lord," cried the portly physician, standing in the big oak and glass walled dock at London's famed criminal court.

Told by a dour judge in scarlet and ermine robe and dark grey wig he could sit down, the doctor watched thru his round gold rimmed glasses with almost a twinkle in his eyes, as 19 men and two women were seated quickly in the jury box and sworn in, unquestioned.

Shakes Off Charges

Then the doctor's interest apparently lagged. His eyes closed, his head sagged and, from all appearances, he was fast asleep as the attorney general, Reginald Manningham-Buller, droned out for almost two hours the queen's case against the doctor.

"This is a most unusual case," said the prosecutor. "Not very often is a murder charge brought against a doctor."

But, he added later, doctors have no right to kill people, even those whose death they would like to hasten out of sheer pity.

The prosecutor said the doctor prescribed 164 grains of morphine and 139 grains of heroin for the widow in her last 19 and a half months as well as 1,629 grains of barbiturates and 1,928 grains of sleeping pills. During the last five days he stepped the dosage up to 38 grains of heroin and 40½ grains of morphine.

HOLD STUDENT IN ABDUCTION

NIXON HAILED LIKE A SULTAN

He Tours Tunisian Native Quarter

TUNIS, Tunisia, March 18 (AP)—Vice President Nixon landed here today for his last call on a visit of three weeks to the new nations of Africa.

This nation arranged for him a welcome such as it had accorded only to two Arab chiefs of state, Sultan Mohammed V of Morocco and King Saud of Saudi Arabia.

Nixon was greeted at the airport by President Habib Bourguiba.

Nixons at Legendary Fountain



Vice President and Mrs. Nixon testing coins over shoulder into Trevi fountain in Rome before flying to Tunisia yesterday. Legend says coin tossing insures return of visitors to Rome.

DENIES BANNING AIR FORCE AT REDSTONE BASE

PHOENIX, Ariz., March 18 (AP)—Maj. Gen. John B. Medaris, chief of the army ballistic missiles agency, said today the air force has never been refused admission to visit the army's missile testing grounds at Redstone arsenal at Huntsville, Ala.

He said that a civilian contracting agency was denied permission last December to visit the Alabama proving grounds "for good reason."

Medaris was commenting on a report in Aviation Week magazine that a special air force evaluation team had

CONSERVATION'S CURATORIAL CONUNDRUM

DANIEL BLUESTONE

Boston University

Figure 1. Frank Lloyd Wright campaigns to preserve the Robie House, *Chicago Tribune*, March 19, 1957. (Chicago Tribune Company)

Preservation's tangible qualities are the source of its greatest strength and responsibility. At the same time, the essential materialism of preserved places has led preservationists to steward these objects of preservation desire as if they are ends in themselves, often sapping preservation's vitality, relevance, and civic promise. Preservationists believe in the power of buildings and yet they regulate these very buildings in ways that short circuit the essential links between historic places, heritage, politics, and the future. This essay explores the curatorial conundrum through a series of case studies and proposes an alternative approach to Design + Heritage.

A curatorial conundrum stands at the heart of preservation practice. Preserving historic buildings and landscapes provides a powerful means of connecting people to the past. Their palpable three-dimensional character engages and envelops, often drawing upon all of our human senses in ways that written narratives, historic images, and told stories do not. Preserved places and material things bear authentic witness to history, a quality not as fully present in other forms of historical narration. Familiar landmarks help people feel situated in place, locality, and history. Preservation's tangible qualities are the source of its greatest strength and responsibility. At the same time, the essential materialism of preserved places has led preservationists to steward these objects of preservation desire as if they are ends in themselves, often sapping preservation's vitality, relevance, and civic promise. Preservationists believe in the power of buildings and yet they regulate these very buildings in ways that short circuit the essential links among historic places, heritage, politics, and the future.¹

This conservation conundrum has flowed in part from a simple historical coincidence. In the United States, the regulatory framework for attributing significance and controlling changes to historic buildings, landmark districts, and their contexts was largely codified in the third quarter of the twentieth century, at a time when architects and architectural historians, and their priorities, dominated preservation practice. Here, the 1955 establishment of Boston's Beacon Hill historic district provides a revealing illustration. The Massachusetts legislature enabled the creation of the district to "promote the education, cultural, economic and general welfare of the public through the preservation of the . . . district as a landmark in the history of architecture and a tangible reminder of old Boston." In a district with designs by noted architects such as Charles Bulfinch, Alexander Parris, and

Asher Benjamin, the history of architecture dominated Beacon Hill preservation. The district legislation required owners to receive a “certificate of appropriateness” from a local architectural commission before making any changes to the visible exteriors of buildings in the district. The commission was required to determine whether “proposed construction, reconstruction or alteration of the exterior architectural feature” would be “appropriate” to the preservation of the district. In weighing such changes the commission had to consider “the historical and architectural value and significance, architectural style, general design, arrangement, texture, material and color of the exterior architectural feature involved and the relationship thereof to the exterior architectural features of other structures in the immediate neighborhood.”² If the Beacon Hill district had been established at an earlier time when other preservation priorities dominated (for example, during the nineteenth century when national historic narratives and associations were more important in recognizing and protecting historic places), preservation regulations and notions of “appropriateness” would likely have been quite different than those established in the 1950s, which continue to shape preservation work in the United States.

The privileging of architectural style, form, and material on Beacon Hill similarly dominated the precedent-setting 1957 campaign to prevent the Chicago Theological Seminary from demolishing Frank Lloyd Wright’s 1909 Frederick C. Robie House to provide a site for a new married student dormitory. Josep Lluís Sert, dean of Harvard’s Graduate School of Design, joined two of his faculty, architect Walter Gropius and visiting historian Sigfried Giedion, to protest the proposed demolition. They argued that the house was designed at “a crucial moment in the development of contemporary thought and of contemporary architecture. . . . No other building in America or Europe could, at that time, compare with the purity of its lines and surfaces and its development of a totally new conception of the dwelling house. . . . The Robie House is without doubt a shrine of architecture.”³ These writers concluded that demolition could only be “regarded as artistic vandalism.”⁴ Sculptor Alfonso Iannelli, who collaborated with Wright, insisted that the house be preserved as an “outstanding example of Frank Lloyd Wright’s work . . . a performance that initiated the modern movement in architecture.”⁵ Allen P. Golden with the American Artists Group, asserted that it was obvious that the Robie House was “a great and important art monument.”⁶ Writing from her apartment in the recently completed Mies van der Rohe-designed building at 880 Lake Shore Drive, Anna Johnson, a 1943 graduate of the University of Chicago, pleaded with University of Chicago officials to intervene to protect the Robie House, describing it as a “masterpiece, . . . one of the beautiful structures of our American culture.”⁷ Nearly three hundred students at Vassar College sent a petition to preserve the Robie House, “the cornerstone of modern architecture.”⁸ When Wright himself joined the preservation campaign he declared that “to wreck it would be like destroying a fine piece of sculpture or a beautiful painting.” He also insisted, “it is particularly sad that professional religionists should be the executioners. It all goes to show the danger of entrusting anything spiritual to the clergy”⁹ (fig. 1).

Obviously, there are moments, as in the Robie House campaign, when historic preservation focuses on sites that are primarily significant for their architectural design. In the



Figure 2. Charlottesville Coca-Cola Bottling Works, 1939, Doran S. Platt, architect, view ca. 1940. (The Coca-Cola Company)

twentieth century, architectural design and connoisseurship came to constitute something of the gold standard for preservation practice. That development drastically narrowed the historic preservation movement. Moreover, because of the timing of the creation of historic preservation regulations, preservation increasingly came to subject all preserved properties to levels of scrutiny and stewardship that might only be appropriate for buildings comparable to the Robie House. Preservation by its very nature is about the material realities embodied in buildings, landscapes, and objects. But at the same time, preservation needs to be about something greater; it needs to be about the role of heritage in cultivating a capacity for critical thinking about society and politics, about seeing the past in ways that can inform acts of citizenship devoted to shaping the future.¹⁰ Despite frequent appearances to the contrary, preservation is not about curating the objects of desire for the architectural cognoscenti. Design + Heritage relies on buildings, but it also needs to move beyond buildings to realize its fullest potential. This essay will explore a handful of examples in which regulating buildings as if they were the Robie House, or as if they were standing with Bulfinch on Beacon Hill, has truncated their preservation possibilities.

Historically, Doran S. Platt's 1939 Coca-Cola bottling plant in Charlottesville, Virginia, loomed large in the local landscape (fig. 2). In a region dominated architecturally by versions of Jeffersonian classicism, the plant's Art Deco design stood out. It seemed fresh and modern and pointed optimistically to a forward-moving economy and society, beyond the Depression. The building incorporated display windows measuring fifteen feet in length and over seven feet in height. With a building sited close to the lot line, the windows invited public scrutiny of the bottling operation, conducted in a sanitary interior flooded with natural light. Indeed, unlike the second-floor windows, which were divided

into a grid of smaller panes, the first-floor windows had only a single vertical muntin, dividing each window into two parts, with transom openings above to provide ventilation.

Coca-Cola's invitation to public scrutiny was partly rooted in its own legal history. The company had endorsed the federal Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, hoping the law would help drive marginal soda companies out of business. But then Coca-Cola became one of the early targets of prosecution under the act for false labeling, as the beverage no longer had coca as an ingredient. Moreover, public health concerns abounded over the introduction of caffeine into the drink. Federal prosecution went all the way to the Supreme Court and resulted in Coca-Cola having to substantially reduce the amount of caffeine in its product. The company also was the defendant in numerous lawsuits by customers who asserted that they had found "foreign ingredients" in their Coke, ranging from bugs to worms to other substances. These legal challenges over the purity of its product threatened to undermine Coca-Cola's massive investments in national advertising. Construction of bottling plants with their large display windows aimed to reassure consumers by inviting them to oversee the production of the beverage. Doran S. Platt's design was part of a hugely successful distributorship controlled by Walter L. Sams. Indeed, the profits from just the first full year of operation at the Charlottesville plant paid for the land, the building, and the equipment.¹¹

In the 1970s, the introduction of expensive new high-speed bottling equipment, the rise in popularity of soda cans, and improvements in the interstate and regional highways network led to consolidation of Coca-Cola bottling operations. Smaller plants, including the one in Charlottesville, ceased operation. In 1973, the Charlottesville building became a local distribution warehouse for Coca-Cola. In 1982, the plant's display windows were bricked in, reflecting this transition to warehouse operation. In 2010, the warehouse operation ended, and the building stood vacant.

On the local level, Platt's bottling plant carried both architectural and historical significance. Architecturally, it joined a handful of other buildings that broke with the historicist forms of Jeffersonian design in the region of Jefferson's Monticello and the University of Virginia. The building also represented and had the potential to encourage critical thinking about changing consumption patterns, including the rise of national brands and national advertising, and about the role of government in regulating these corporate interests. The conversion of the bottling plant and the bricking up of the building's windows revealed further technological innovations and competitive consolidation in the industry.

In 2010, Martin Chapman and Madeleine Watkins purchased the bottling plant with plans to expand their biotechnology business, focused on allergens, and to establish a biotechnology research campus for similar businesses. This vision seemed promising to nearly everyone who encountered it.¹² A twentieth-century production building would be sustainably reused for a twenty-first-century biotech medical operation, a use that was being assiduously cultivated by state and local economic development officials. Located within walking distance of Charlottesville's downtown, rather than in an outlying business park, the idea captured observers' imaginations. Chapman and Watkins were inspired by the building's history, particularly as it related to the display of production. They planned

to put their laboratory operation on the first floor for passersby to be able to see biotechnology work firsthand.

To do this, they committed to reintroducing the fenestration pattern of Platt's original design, for which extensive documentation existed. Charlottesville's Board of Architectural Review had previously designated the Coca-Cola plant as a locally protected historic landmark. The adaptive reuse of the plant would rely in part on the use of federal tax credits for buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Virginia's Department of Historic Resources staff and board members, however, expressed concern that the lack of the original windows deprived the building of its architectural and historic "integrity." Such a finding would likely frustrate the efforts to list the building on the National Register of Historic Places, despite the owners' commitment to restore the original window configuration. In the end, the fetish over the original windows and the building's integrity slowed, but did not prevent, the listing of the building on the National Register.

The next step in the adaptive reuse of the Coca-Cola plant proved even more difficult. Suzanne Tripp, an architect with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, objected to a key aspect of the adaptive reuse plan. Tripp insisted that the adaptive reuse of the building would require the "Retention of Exposed Structure and Historic Finishes—Features that were historically exposed such as ceilings, floors, paint[ed] and unpainted masonry walls, joists, beams, and columns should remain exposed. All intact historic finishes including plaster walls and ceiling, terrazzo floors, wall and floor tile should be retained and repaired and remain visible."¹³

The Coca-Cola plant historically had a perfectly banal and ordinary industrial interior without any unusual design or structural elements. That interior might well have expressed the attitudes of the managerial class toward production workers. But the reuse plan only anticipated changing the surfaces in the area of the first-floor biotech labs. There were plenty of places in the complex where the original, utilitarian, and unembellished form of the original building would remain visible. The insistence on retaining these features everywhere meant that the creation of a hygienic biotech laboratory space would be difficult, if not impossible. The Department of Historic Resources offered a solution, suggesting that the laboratory be moved to the "non-contributing portion of the building as these areas provide a greater degree of design flexibility."¹⁴ This suggestion would scuttle the owners' effort to permit passersby the opportunity to watch a biotech laboratory in operation, visible through the very windows that had previously permitted people to watch the production and bottling of Coca-Cola. A reuse that engaged in a deeper understanding of the historical function of the building, one explored fully in the National Register form, would be set aside in favor of viewing architectural preservation as an end in itself, exposed surfaces floating in an incomprehensible and unthinking soup of authenticity and architectural materialism.

Is this where historic preservation should really be taking its stand and digging in its regulatory heels? We now treat ordinary industrial interiors as if they were conceived and shaped and constructed in the same way that Frank Lloyd Wright designed the Robie House. This approach to the Coca-Cola plant contributed to derailing the overall project.

The building has now found another adaptive reuse as a bar and beer garden—complete with historically exposed surfaces. The biotech proposal had included a historical exhibition on the history of building and its operation. The beer garden proprietors did not provide any exhibition. There is some continuity between a beer garden and the bottling plant of an iconic national beverage maker. Still, it is hard not to feel that the proposed adaptive reuse as a biotech research center had a magic and purpose that is missing in the beer garden. Although those original exposed surfaces remain, the building’s story and history have been flattened by a set of preservation principles that treat the architecture as an end in itself, divorced from its history. What was needed from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources was more flexibility to accommodate reasonable reuse of the building and less of the rather inappropriate cult-like devotion to original fabric that frustrated a deeper historical engagement with the building and its invitation to public surveillance and spectatorship. The cult of the original also seemingly assumes that designers are incapable of designing in a way that lets the public see and distinguish historical layers, including our own interventions in adapting historic buildings to serve humane uses in the present and for the future.

Another more recent project in Boston offers a similar insight. Political and economic leaders in the city have greeted twenty-first-century population growth and building development in Boston with enthusiasm. Between 1950 and 1980 the city lost nearly 30 percent of its population as a large portion of its manufacturing and commercial base disappeared in a wave of suburbanization, manufacturing regional decentralization, and economic globalization. The city was in a steep downward spiral. A turnaround came as university-inspired developments in biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, computer technology, and financial services began to revitalize the local economy. The city made substantial population and economic gains in the first decade and a half of the twenty-first century. The workers in these industries have shown a new interest in urban living. Boston’s storied historic landscape and cultural resources offered a certain allure.¹⁵

For many observers, the 2016 decision of General Electric to move its international headquarters, with eight hundred employees, from Fairfield, Connecticut, to Boston captured something of the excitement of recent developments.¹⁶ General Electric thought that locating in Boston would help the company recruit the very best talent and employees, people likely interested in both living and working in Boston. General Electric settled on a plan for its headquarters that simultaneously reflected the history and aspirations of the company. The adaptive reuse of two brick mill buildings constructed in 1907 for the candy manufacturing operation of the New England Confectionary Company underscored General Electric’s origin in heavy industrial manufacturing.¹⁷ A high-tech modern building, with a prominent veil of photovoltaic cells, impressively cantilevered spaces, and crisp modern lines designed by Gensler architects reflects the company’s aspirations in the field of computer software and digital controls for business and industry (fig. 3). In presenting its building plans to the Boston community, the company included captions declaring “HERITAGE MEETS INNOVATION: DIGITAL + INDUSTRIAL” (fig. 4). Attending one of



Figure 3. General Electric Innovation Point (architect: Gensler), 2016, adjacent to adaptively reused building of the New England Confectionery Company, 1907. (Gensler and General Electric)

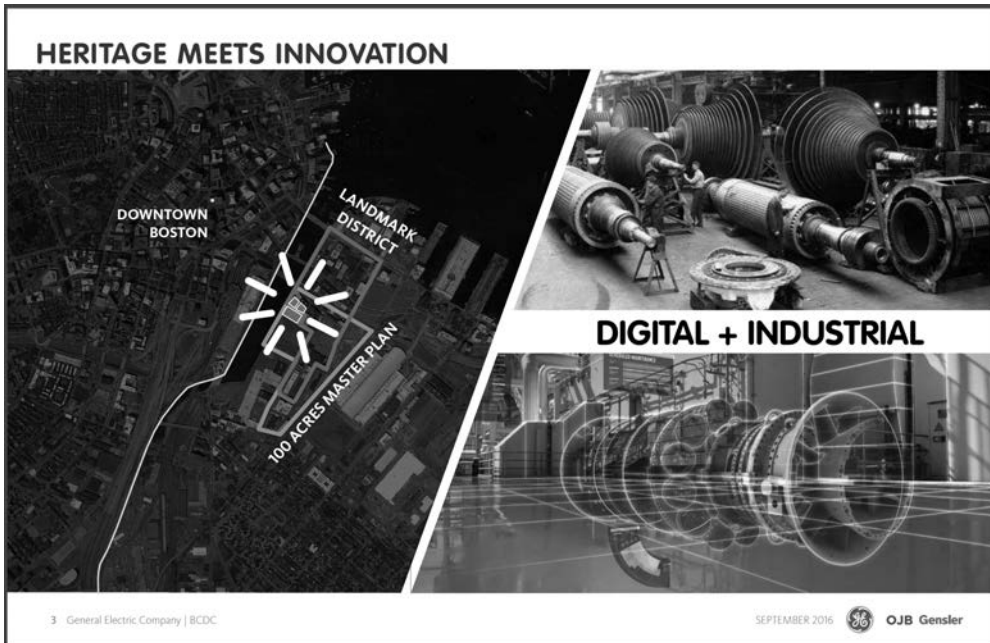


Figure 4. Slide from General Electric public presentation, "Heritage Meets Innovation/Digital + Industrial," Gensler, 2016. (Gensler and General Electric)

these presentations, *Boston Magazine* reporter Kyle Scott Clauss sent out a tweet observing: “Doug Gensler now waxing philosophical about the ‘kissing of the new and the old’ at the GE HQ site.”¹⁸ The General Electric design had at its core an aesthetic of eclipse; the adaptively reused early twentieth-century industrial buildings provided a somewhat dowdy backdrop for the modern structural and technological heroics of the Gensler design. The new glass-and-steel building looked far more impressive for having warehouse buildings and an older brick industrial loft close at hand. For General Electric, the juxtaposition of new building and old captured something of the changing character of its own business but it also pointed more dramatically to the future than to the past.

To their credit, the designers of General Electric’s Boston headquarters did approach the project with a salutary awareness of what the future portends in relation to climate change and global warming. This was necessary because the General Electric site on Fort Point Channel and adjacent to Boston Harbor stands on land reclaimed during the nineteenth century, nearly at sea level, and thus extremely vulnerable to storm surges and the rise in ocean levels that are accompanying global warming. The threat is real, and in adapting the old New England Confectionary Company buildings to office uses, the designers merged the first and second floors, raising the level of the first floor above that of anticipated storm surges. In other words, there was an element of climate preparedness that framed the reuse. Since the buildings stand in a locally protected historic district and might use historic tax credits, the Massachusetts Historical Commission reviewed the plans. The Commission determined that the proposed plans presented no “adverse effect” on historic properties; however, the approval was conditional; Brona Simon, the state historic preservation officer and the executive director of the Historical Commission wrote: “the first floor windows of 5 & 6 Necco Court that will be intersected by the ‘new ground level floor’ shall have opaque glass and the interior of the glass shall be backpainted or have a backing, of a dark color, so that the new ground floor or difference in the floor level spaces cannot be seen/perceived from the exterior of the building.”¹⁹

The difficulty with the Commission’s requirement is that in its vigilance about these historic buildings’ architectural significance, it loses sight of a broader and more significant set of issues. We live in a political culture in which the settled science of global warming and climate change is regularly dismissed and denied by politicians, justifying their inaction in confronting the issue. The fact that General Electric needs to raise the level of the ground story of its historic buildings is something that should be broadcast rather than hidden behind opaque glass. Nobody should be able to walk past these buildings without confronting the relationship between human beings and the climate and the looming challenges of environmental catastrophe. Indeed, these lessons are likely to be much more significant than any historical understanding of how these industrial loft buildings tapped into the global networks of sugar and human immigration that made the Boston site ideal for manufacturing 32 million pounds of candy annually in the early twentieth century.²⁰ Stewardship of these buildings is not just about their architecture, and it should certainly not preclude thinking about the relationship between the past and the future. In this sense, General Electric seems more attuned to this nexus of meaning and the cultural

issues of connecting the past and the future than are the people charged with helping steward the buildings on behalf of future generations. This should not be the case.

The new building in the General Electric headquarters stands just outside of the local historic district and thus was not subject to design control by Boston's landmarks commission. Despite the vision of new and old kissing in the project, the high-rise, high-tech, Gensler design would not likely have cleared the regulatory hurdles that greet most new buildings constructed in historic districts. The design guidelines for the Fort Point Channel Landmark District do not bar modern design. However, they declare:

new construction shall strive to relate to the urban context and the particular streetscape of which it is a part in building height, massing, setback, rhythm, scale, proportions, and materials. . . . Proposals for new construction will be reviewed for compatibility with the existing architecture including review of such critical factors as land coverage, building materials, building form, scale, height, proportion, method of connection to existing buildings, visual association and urban context. . . . The height of new construction shall be compatible with the height of the adjacent building(s) having common property lines. Height above the height of adjacent building(s) may be allowable if a) additional stories are located so as to minimize visibility from existing or proposed streets and ways that are open to public travel, or b) if the design acknowledges the cornice height of the adjacent building, reinforces the existing street wall, and is compatible with its context.²¹

The scale, materials, and massing of the new Gensler building obviously do not correspond very well to the district's historic buildings, constructed a century or more earlier for a world of industry and warehousing, of wool and candy manufacturing. It juxtaposes new glass and transparency with older brick. The new building is more than twice the height of the old. The soaring solar veil dominates the new building's profile and is without precedent or referent in the district's older architecture. The cornice line and street wall of the old buildings is indeed acknowledged in the new design but only as a takeoff datum for the structural gymnastics of the cantilevered parts of the new building that jut far out from beyond the existing street wall. Like most historic district guidelines, those of Fort Point Channel favor compatibility and harmoniousness, encouraging the seamless introduction of the new into the context of the old, even when modern design is encouraged or tolerated.

Many preservationists don't use Gensler's language that suggests we need to have the old and the new kissing, but his idea is not far from the regulatory aspiration. Preservationists usually want the new and the old to get along. They especially do not want the new distracting from the old. If there is an aesthetic of eclipse at play, many preservationists tend to favor the opposite of the General Electric case; they want to see the old eclipsing the new, with new buildings quietly playing a functional background role or standing beyond carefully demarcated buffer zones. In their advocacy of harmony, compatibility, and seamless integration, preservationists envision an urban world that never really

existed. Historically, spatial hierarchies and a diversity of buildings have punctuated cities. They are one of the things that make cities legible and exciting. They reveal both significant changes across time and society's relationships of power in social, economic, and cultural realms. Here the curatorial zeal in preservation operates at full force. It is as if the guidelines view the city as a museum, and they simply don't want to have different genres of painting in the same gallery for fear of confusing or overwhelming the visitor. The question is: why exactly is this the city we are now encouraged to build?

The vision of harmonious, preserved, historic buildings and districts is a vision where the modern world does not intrude on public engagements with history, or with historic buildings and landscapes. This aspiration is problematic at best and unfortunately stands at the core of many preservation ordinances and regulations. It effectively removes, or holds at bay, architectural and historical juxtapositions that have the power to provoke people to wonder or imagine how we got from there—*the past*—to here—*the present*. It mutes the possibilities for thinking critically about the relationship between the past, the present, and, even more importantly, the future. The reason thinking critically about the relationship between the past, the present, and the future is worth encouraging in heritage and design is this is the best way to activate citizenship by increasing the rigor with which people think about and engage their society, economy, and culture.

Sometimes local landmark commissions do seem to get the balance just about right. This was the case in New York City when the Landmarks Preservation Commission had to preside over the rebuilding of a Greenwich Village town house on West 11th Street that was heavily damaged in March 1970, when a bomb being made by members of the Weather Underground exploded, killing three members of the group and toppling the façade of the building they occupied. Architect Hugh Hardy designed the replacement for the town house (fig. 5). He precisely restored the cornice and the window openings on the third floor to correspond with the adjacent town houses in the row. On the first and second floors, he pivoted the façade, pushing the elevation out into a bay in the living room and stepping it back at the entrance and side hall.

The design, approved by the New York Landmarks Preservation Commission, was respectful but left in the landscape a provocation to residents, visitors, and passersby to ask, or to narrate, the unusual events that transpired on this site in the course of the building's history. What was it that led some people to build bombs in a Greenwich Village town house as part of their political resistance to the Vietnam War? Some preservationists have objected to Hardy's design. Architect Steven W. Semes insists that Hardy's "cubistic reconfiguration of a bombed-out Greek Revival town house on West 11th Street in New York's Greenwich Village is a dissonant interruption in the civility of the historic street, perpetuating the violence that destroyed the original façade."²² Semes's suggestion that the original design be seamlessly and harmoniously restored might make sense from a narrow curatorial or architectural point of view, but it is socially and politically vacuous, overlooking the broader civic possibilities of heritage. Preservation on West 11th Street can usefully aspire to more than stewarding the "civility of the historic street"; Hugh Hardy's design provided a step in the right direction and a challenge to the all-too-easy



Figure 5. 18 West 11th Street town house (architect: Hugh Hardy), 1978, New York City. (Photo by Daniel Bluestone, 2017)

assumption that harmoniousness and compatibility between historic buildings and the modern world is the best, or the only, worthy approach.

The question of how to build in the context of historic buildings and heritage, the question that confronted Hugh Hardy in Greenwich Village and Douglas Gensler in Boston, also arose when Rafael Viñoly Architects designed a new building for the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business, which was completed in 2004. The building occupies the southeast corner of Woodlawn Avenue and 58th Street; it overlooks Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House to the north and Bertram Goodhue's Rockefeller Chapel to the west. It is not clear whether the Viñoly design would have been able to pass the "compatibility" and "harmoniousness" tests if these buildings were grouped in a landmark historic district. The building conjured up the dominant lines and elements found in both the Robie House and in Rockefeller Chapel (fig. 6).²³ The part of the new building closest to Robie House



Figure 6. University of Chicago, Booth School of Business, Rafael Viñoly, 2004, presentation sketch with: *far left*, Robie House (architect: Frank Lloyd Wright), 1909; and *far right*, Rockefeller Chapel (architect: Bertram Goodhue), 1928. (Rafael Viñoly)

was given a crisp, low, modern cantilevered mass that echoed the strong horizontal lines of the Robie House, with its cantilevered roof. The school's winter garden atrium court was supported by a system of pointed arched-steel trusses reflecting the pointed arches of the Gothic revival forms of Rockefeller Chapel and other key buildings on the University of Chicago campus. The staccato rhythm of the fenestration and massing reflects that of the original university quadrangle. It is attuned to its context; like the Robie House and Rockefeller Chapel, it sits back from its lot line, with lawns and landscape; it engages the architectural heritage of the area; it manages to merge, in a single building, references to the disparate forms of Wright's Prairie School residential design and the University of Chicago's Gothic revivalism. This building obviously burrows into its place and site; the playful cross-street architectural conversations might actually help visitors look anew at the buildings and the context. While connected to the place, Viñoly's formal elements are unmistakably different and modern as they incorporate new materials, colors, and massing.

Viñoly's design raises an important question: is it sufficient for architects to connect their designs to heritage by only using their eyes? Viñoly obviously did that very well—he used his eyes and considerable design imagination to connect his design to the architectural icons of the local context. But there are elements of local heritage that could very fruitfully be cultivated that were not as readily apparent. The site had been used immediately after World War II to house veterans who attended the University of Chicago with the support of the G.I. Bill. Viewed by many historians as the last of the major New Deal programs, the G.I. Bill paid for the education of 2.3 million veterans. The massive influx of veterans overwhelmed college and university student housing, a situation made even

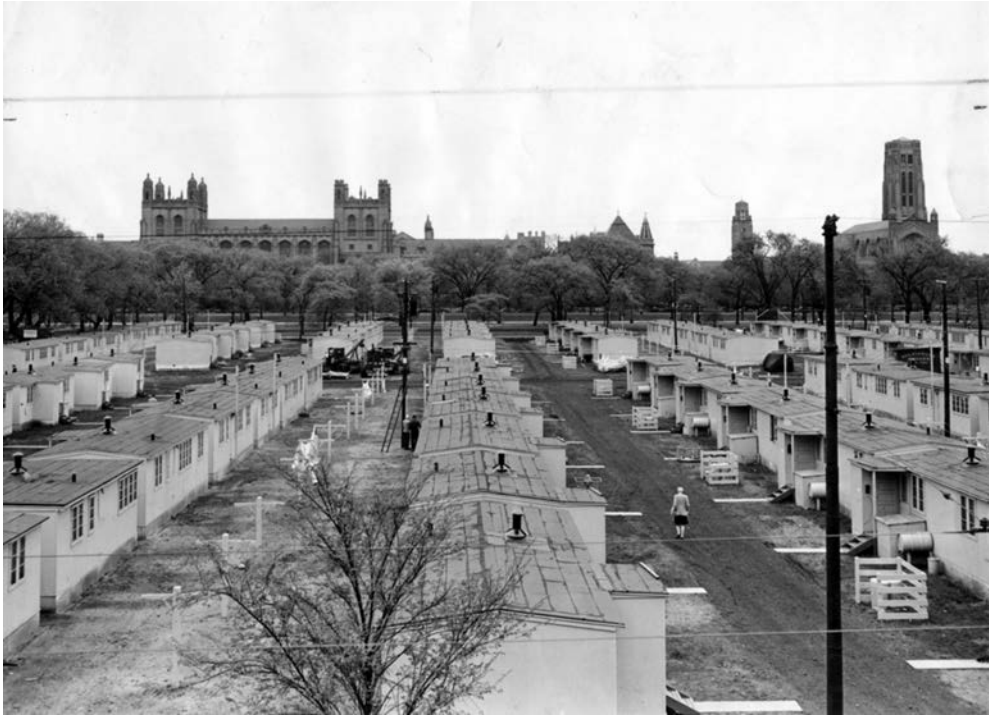


Figure 7. University of Chicago veterans' temporary housing, on south side of the Midway, photograph, c. 1947. (University of Chicago Special Collections)

more difficult by the fact that many of the veterans were married and had children. The Federal Public Housing Authority found an inventive way to address the veterans housing crisis. It moved over two hundred and fifty thousand units of housing that had been constructed for war workers near military and industrial installations to 720 college and university campuses and to major cities throughout the United States. Trailers, prefabricated cabins, and wood-frame barracks were simply picked up and moved to sites where they took on a new life, solving a very different sort of housing shortage (fig. 7). This aspect of local architectural heritage captured something profound about a society initially mobilized for war and then mobilized to fulfill the social contract with its veterans. Thousands of units of “temporary” housing on university campuses stood for a decade or more on sites from Camp Randall at the University of Wisconsin, to Copeley Hill at the University of Virginia, to Stadium Terrace at the University of Illinois, to blocks along the Midway at the University of Chicago.²⁴ This temporary and mobile architecture created a series of vibrant, intense communities of veterans and their families focused on the future and on the possibilities for the world beyond war. The repurposing of these units constituted the housing version of beating swords into plowshares. The three hundred and eighty-eight units of temporary housing for veterans relocated to the University of Chicago campus had all disappeared by the time Rafael Viñoly studied the site for the Booth School of Business building. Viñoly did not do anything to recognize this aspect of local architectural and cultural heritage.

The omission shows the limitation of approaching heritage in new design simply through the prism of what is visible to the architects working there today. To work engagingly or profoundly with both design and heritage may require architects to collaborate with historians, geographers, and local communities to more systematically and rigorously take measure of the heritage of their building sites. In their new buildings, architects can render visible significant aspects of heritage that may have disappeared from the local landscape. The repurposed units of veterans' housing that stood on the site of the University of Chicago business school, with their connection to both World War II production and the G.I Bill, could have been referenced in some aspect of the Viñoly design. Architecture, even in its newest buildings, has the ability, even the responsibility, to look both backward and forward. The integration of new design within historic environments might very well require architects to use more than their eyes and to not collapse the question into simple architectural analysis. Heritage at its best can use architecture as a medium but it needs to aspire to get at issues well beyond architecture; this can start with the materiality of design but then needs to move onto the fabric of human community.

Just as in Boston, where preservation could have been enriched by revealing the challenge of climate change rather than by prescribing the false imperatives of original fabric and architectural appearances, in Chicago Viñoly's design could have been richer if it had been more ambitious, moving beyond Wright and Goodhue to engage the heritage of the social contract between veterans and the state, or resource recycling, or the vexed questions of war and peace. It is wonderful to think of Viñoly's project inspiring business school students to see architecture better and to even become patrons of sensitive and rigorous design. But it would also be worth seizing the opportunity to prompt these same business students through architecture to think more deeply about the social, political, cultural, and economic forces giving shape to human society. Engaging the post-World War II veterans' housing history on the site could have done that. It would have harnessed the power of architecture and design to get at issues of heritage that stand beyond architecture. Here, architecture could provide the beginning but not the end of an engagement with heritage.

If more historic preservationists would stop viewing buildings as ends in themselves, they could begin to explore a very different approach to regulating and preserving historic buildings and districts. This would involve crafting a performance-based approach to design and heritage. Such an approach would require that preservation advocates be much more articulate about precisely why they value a particular building or district. Architects making additions to existing buildings or designing new buildings in a district could then proceed with that awareness in mind. Landmark commissions, city councils, other reviewing bodies, and the public could assess whether the changes are acceptable given what is viewed as important about a particular building or district. This would help shift preservation from a questionable regulatory regimen that focuses too narrowly on often-misguided efforts to protect the authenticity and integrity of original building fabric, completely detached from a more rigorous and expansive engagement with heritage. It would also be

refreshing for guidelines to demand excellence in design. Rather than calling for harmoniousness and compatibility between historic structures and later design, why not simply say, “Look, we spend considerable time and resources to steward key historic buildings and landscapes on behalf of future generations. If you want to make additions to these buildings or construct new buildings in the area we need to hold you to a higher standard—we expect your buildings to be of a quality and seriousness that future generations would be willing to protect them, on behalf of the generations beyond.” Such a proposal would likely open preservationists to charges of subjectivity on issues of design. This difficulty does not mean it is not worth aspiring toward excellence. One could do worse than to have landmark commissions democratically debate and settle upon shared views of design excellence and heritage within their own communities. A storied environment that percolates with narratives about human experience and society would help lay the groundwork for these debates about the intersection of new design and heritage.

The curatorial approach to preservation has another pitfall with which preservationists need to grapple. Opponents of historic preservation wield curatorship as a cudgel against heritage conservation. They are all too happy to try and shove preservation ideals back into the 1950s and to suggest that buildings that are not of an architectural value comparable to the Robie House, or buildings that have lost some elements of their original form or integrity, do not merit preservation attention. George Thomas, an architectural historian and lecturer affiliated with Harvard University’s Critical Conservation Program, has done work that exemplifies such an approach. Under the auspices of his CivicVisions LLC, Thomas has repeatedly represented developers and other interests in Philadelphia who wish to oppose the designation of historic buildings or to demolish city landmarks. Thomas often builds his anti-preservation advocacy around an argument that particular buildings either never possessed architectural merit, or more importantly, have lost any merit they once had due to changes made over time. In 2016, Thomas authored a report titled “Inappropriateness of 81–95 Fairmount Avenue for Historic Designation” emphasizing the extent to which changes had been made to a terrace row of eight 1820s row houses.* One of the fascinating things about the history of the row is that in the 1920s, Thomas D. Sullivan, son of Irish immigrants and president of the Philadelphia’s Terminal Warehouse Company, which owned and operated about three million square feet of storage space in some of the largest warehouses in the city, had converted the 81–95 Fairmount Avenue row into the company’s headquarters.²⁵ The company’s intriguing adaptation of an iconic block of historic Philadelphia, even as it was eclipsing those forms with technologically and economically innovative buildings, offers another vivid example of what Doug Gensler presented as the “kissing of the new and the old” at the General Electric site.

*I had hoped to illustrate this section with an image from Thomas’s report. Thomas did not grant permission to use the image, explaining that he was not sure “whether it is appropriate—or even legal given that the material is technically owned by my client” (email George Thomas to Daniel Bluestone, August 20, 2017). This is a curious position to take. I do not know of any preservation *advocates* who so easily cede or lose ownership of their own scholarly and intellectual production. The image can be found on page 2 of <http://www.phila.gov/historical/Documents/81-95-Fairmount-Ave-consultant-report.pdf>.

Thomas's report dismisses this culturally significant development as it hangs its anti-designation argument on changes in the original design, which, in his view, provide sufficient grounds for scuttling any designation effort. Could it be that the changes themselves constitute part of the significance of the building?

In the early twenty-first century, preservation efforts diversified to include a much broader set of historical experiences and perspectives. The field seems to have recovered from the near-death experience of assuming that preservation turned on an axis of architectural discernment and connoisseurship. Despite significant changes and progress in the field, anti-preservation advocates seek to justify the rejection of landmark designations for or demolition of historic buildings by tenaciously clinging to preservation's past and attempting to trivialize all other arguments or claims of significance. Anti-preservationists seemingly value the legacy of the field's past more highly than they value the rich complexity of a building's evolving change and use through time. The field needs to quickly resolve the curatorial conundrum or be crushed by it.

The integration of new design into historic environments needs preservation standards and guidelines that are more flexible and open to buildings and places that change through time; it is precisely by observing and understanding the dynamics of architectural and historical change that we can begin to surface historical agency in ways that can help people focus on their own actions as citizens with the ability, the imperative, to help shape their own world. Treating buildings as ends in themselves and getting caught up by the cult of original material and the demands for harmoniousness and compatibility defines the responsibility and meaning of both design and heritage much too narrowly. Approaching the question as one of connoisseurship and fastidious curatorial architectural formalism shortchanges both design and heritage. We should aim to understand the world we have inherited and the world we are making by aspiring to explore architecture as it is bound up with, and as it can reveal, the most profound questions of heritage and humanity. Sitting around the table at the landmarks commission and participating in the debates and deliberations about how to best steward heritage while building the future is not a bad place to start. Those discussions are likely to be productive in direct proportion to our ability to dislodge the narrow curatorial concerns from the heart of preservation practice.

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