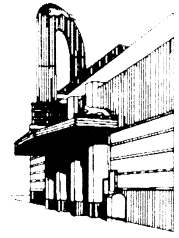


Preserving the Recent Past

An Introduction



Plastic laminates were used not only for countertops but for storefronts beginning in the late 1920s. This Formica advertisement promoted designs using colored and metal inlays.
Architectural Forum, January 1937.

Over the past several years, preservationists have finally begun to devote serious attention to the immense challenge of documenting, evaluating, and conserving cultural resources from the 20th century. This attention occurs not a moment too soon: it is clear that these are the issues that preservation professionals will be grappling with for the remainder of this century and well into the next millennia.

Our predecessors in the preservation movement fought battles to protect remnants from the Victorian age: buildings and neighborhoods that were not widely appreciated in the 1950s and 1960s by the general public—or by many architects and historians, for that matter. While these resources still continue to be at risk, at least today there is a broad body of information and knowledge about their history, significance, and care.

At the present time, we as preservationists are confronting perhaps the greatest challenge of all: how to deal with the 20th-century built environment.

It is hard to identify the defining moment when we recognized that it was time to face up to our recent past. Was it when Barbara Capitan pushed to have a good chunk of Miami Beach placed on the National Register? Was it when Philip Johnson decided to donate his Glass House to the National Trust for Historic Preservation? Was it when state and local preservationists fought to save Lockefield Gardens in Indianapolis, a public housing project from the 1930s? Was it

when the marble veneer of Amoco's highrise headquarters in Chicago began to fail? Or was it when Connecticut's State Historic Preservation officer requested a determination of National Register eligibility for the Merritt Parkway?

We are faced with defending, documenting, evaluating, and preserving resource types that did not even exist until the middle part of the 20th century: the shopping mall, the network of highways criss-crossing the country, the curtain wall skyscraper, the housing development, the edge city. What is the history of these new building types and by what criteria should their significance be evaluated? Which of the 2,800 nearly identical Lustron houses constructed around the country between 1948 and 1952 are worthy of preservation and why?

The strategies for protecting and reusing these resources, while owing much to past efforts with 18th- and 19th-century structures and neighborhoods, must deal with a scale that is unique to the 20th century: multi-building, high-rise housing projects, colossal airport hangars, and military bases that are measured in miles, not acres. Such strategies must also include a heavy—and particularly creative—dose of education and awareness-building: why should the public care about military structures built during the Cold War? What is so special about mass-produced, prefabrication houses? How can the general public be made aware of the importance of early gas stations, bus terminals, and other roadside architecture?

Enormous challenges also face architectural conservators, engineers, and architects who are beginning to rehabilitate and restore 20th-century resources; the materials in need of conservation are not only the traditional brick, stone, wood, and iron of yesterday but more complex materials such as plywood, fiberglass, stainless steel, and plastics. Building systems are no longer simple masonry bearing wall construction or wood balloon frame but curtain wall or post-tension concrete. How does one preserve 20th-century materials that may be identified with significant health problems?

COLORFUL STORE FRONTS
with Inlays

Formica store fronts are colorful, and with inlays in color or metal are capable of creating every double exterior effect. They are installed quickly and easily by carpenters. The finish remains clear even after a long period of use for the better of their store fronts, displays and other building accessories.

Aluminum storefront front in red inlay installed with metal entrance at Federal Building and 20th St. East, Pa.

Lighter Formica store fronts in a three-tone color with white inlay installed in bright white metal. This is one of many beautiful color combinations for this building store fronts.

Color Formica store fronts with inlay installed at 20th St. East, East Liberty, and other locations in the Pittsburgh area.

Formica for store fronts purposes is available in several thicknesses and in more than 35 colors. Quantities are available in varying order sizes, or by helping you order your samples. The colors are fast and set off by one light. In some states store fronts have decided a merchant's value for the same space.

THE FORMICA INSULATION CO.
4851 SPRING GROVE AVE., CINCINNATI, O.

FORMICA

FOR BUILDING PURPOSES

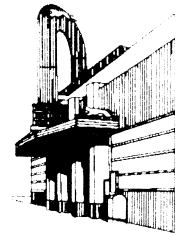
The serious study of the recent past is a relatively new phenomenon; there have been few scholarly books on the subject, and articles in professional journals are few and far between. The papers included in the handbook for the national conference, *Preserving the Recent Past*, Chicago, March 30 through April 1, 1995, have made an important contribution to understanding and addressing these issues. The conference was organized specifically to bring together preservation professionals from North America and Europe to consider the unique challenges of preserving 20th-century

historic resources. Together, the workbook and the conference will greatly expand the body of practical information available to preservation professionals on evaluating and protecting the recent past.

H. Ward Jandl, Deputy Chief, Preservation Assistance Division, National Park Service, Washington, DC, died suddenly of heart failure just two weeks prior to the conference, Preserving the Recent Past. The conference and workbook were his idea and stemmed from his interest and expertise in 20th-century building types and their preservation.

Bruce M. Kriviskey

Saving the Suburban Sixties Historic Preservation Planning in Fairfax County, Virginia



The notion of “historic preservation” in Northern Virginia’s Fairfax County—the most intensely developed jurisdiction in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area—often taxes one’s credulity. Those familiar with the county, but whose perceptions are of only gridlock and sprawl, strain to remember what is left that is old, much less historic. They recall waggish bumper stickers that use Fairfax as a verb describing an act that should not be done to other nearby counties or, for that matter, to the rest of Virginia. Those less familiar with the county may have read what some observers have written about our “Edge Cities,” “Beltway Bandits,” and “McMansions.”

The history of Fairfax County can be captured in three “snapshots.” The first shows a group of earnest Paleo-Indians ambushing a Woolly Mammoth at the crossing of two well-worn paths in the ice-age tundra. The second shows a graph of population change in the county since the first census in the 1790s. The population level was virtually flat until the 1930s; it doubled each decade from 1940 until 1980, and it doubled again over the past 14 years to over 820,000 today—an average increase of 88% per decade since World War II. The third is of Tysons Corner, a gas station and

a general store as late as the 1960s, now the commercial hub of the county and the seventh largest business district in the country, with over 20 million square feet of office and retail space. Archeologists might say that snapshots one and three depict the same spot and simply show the impact of the view shown in snapshot two on the past and present of a traditional crossroads trading center.

Of course, there are venerable sites of historic and architectural significance in the county—Mount Vernon, Woodlawn Plantation, and Gunston Hall, to name a few. There are also hundreds of lesser known 18th- and 19th-century historic sites scattered around the county, as well as more than 2,000 recorded archeological sites including one about 8,000 years old (properly excavated and recorded, of course) now under a parking structure in Tysons Corner. Collectively, these ably represent the heritage of the nation, state, and county.

Needless to say, these invaluable traces of the past—traditional history, if you will—have been the focus of the county’s preservation planning program since the early 1960s. But, this is history to read about, not recall; to look at, not to have lived. About 10 years ago, this dichotomy was recognized by those concerned with under-