

REPORT ON THE
14TH US/ICOMOS INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM



RESPECTING THE VALUE OF CONTEXT

**THE RELATIONSHIP OF OLD AND NEW DESIGN AS A
PRELUDE TO THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF THE
WORLD HERITAGE CONVENTION [2012]**

**WASHINGTON, DC AND RICHMOND, VA
JUNE 2-4, 2011**

Over the next five years, the international world of heritage conservation and the US community of historic preservation will be celebrating major anniversaries of the World Heritage Convention (2012), the Venice Charter (2014), US / ICOMOS (2015), and the National Historic Preservation Act and the US National Park Service (2016). As the US re-engages itself in the international scene and has begun nominating new sites to the World Heritage Sites List, this symposium is the first in a series designed to critically examine the impact of international Charters, Declarations and Doctrines, starting with the Venice Charter, and the effect they have had on the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and US preservation laws.

THEME OF THE 2011 SYMPOSIUM

The central focus of the symposium can be summarized by the following passage from "The Power of Adaptive Reuse" by Michael W. Mehaffy, Traditional Building Forum, October 2010 (<http://www.traditional-building.com/Previous-Issues-10/OctoberForum10.html>)

"Some preservationists believe it's wrong to make the modifications required to adapt an historic building to new uses, which might thereby 'falsify history.' They often cite the Venice Charter, the international conservation doctrine that guides redevelopment (and serves as the basis of the US Secretary of the Interior's preservation standards). The Charter's Article 5 states that such modifications 'must not change the lay-out or decoration.' That may prevent planning approval for a viable reuse, and actually make it more likely that an historic building will be torn down.

The logical fallacy in the Venice Charter – or perhaps more accurately, in its recent interpretation – is the simplistic (and actually not very modern) belief that the past is wholly different from modernity, and 'that was then, this is now.' There's an especially problematic phrase in Article 9 of the Venice Charter, which states that "any extra work which is indispensable must be distinct from the architectural composition and must bear a contemporary stamp." Some architects take that as a mandate to do deliberately jarring

new additions to historic structures.”

The symposium to address this issue was organized in four cycles, exploring the relationship between old and new at the urban level and at the cultural landscape level, leading to the design of buildings in historic contexts and culminating with a roundtable discussion at the recently restored and expanded Virginia Capitol. The Virginia Capitol, originally designed by Thomas Jefferson, is now on the US Tentative World Heritage Sites List.

PRESENTATIONS, DISCUSSIONS, AND TOURS

The first day of presentations opened with welcoming remarks by George Skarneas, Chair, US/ICOMOS and a keynote address presenting an international perspective on the symposium theme by Gustavo Araoz, President, ICOMOS. Subsequent presentations dealt with the impact of the World Heritage Convention on American cities by Paul Farmer, Executive Director and CEO of the American Planning Association, and Ellen Moyer, former mayor of Annapolis, Maryland, who talked about her administration’s efforts to obtain World Heritage designation for that historic city.

The afternoon session consisted of presentations on design issues of new architecture around historic squares in Poland by Boguslaw Szmygin, President, ICOMOS Poland, contrasted with examples from Charleston, South Carolina, presented by Winslow Hastie, Historic Charleston Foundation, and Charles Chase, Architectural Resources Group. The final presentation by Patricia O’Donnell, Heritage Landscapes, and Laurie Olin, Olin Studio, focused on heritage standards and design interventions for cultural landscapes. The day concluded with a walking tour, led by David Schwartz, David M. Schwarz Architects, of design review issues along Washington’s Connecticut Avenue corridor, concluding with a welcome reception and speakers’ dinner at the Cosmos Club.

The second day of the symposium opened with a presentation by Ronald Lee Fleming, President, The Townscape Institute, highlighting examples of the juxtaposition of old and new designs, primarily through the addition of modern architecture to historic buildings. This presentation included illustrations by Jon-Paul Couture on alternative designs that incorporated historic rather than modern aesthetics. The presentation was followed with a panel discussion on design issues by Clem Labine, Traditional Building Magazine, Warren Cox, Hartman Cox Architects, and Alan Chimacoff, Ikon 5 Architects.

The afternoon session focused specifically on the Secretary of Interior’s Standards. David Schwarz spoke about the impact of the standards on architectural practice; Susan Mead, Jackson & Walter, LLP, spoke about the impact of the standards on Tax Act projects; and Anne Fairfax, Fairfax & Sammons Architects, focused on the impact of the standards on civic design.

Following these presentations, a panel discussion, or dialogue, on the issue of potential modifications to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards was provided by Steven Semes, Director, Rome Studies Program at the University of Notre Dame, and John Sandor, Architectural Historian with the National Park Service.

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The Saturday (final) session was held at the Virginia State Capitol, opening with welcoming remarks by Susan Schaar, Clerk of the Senate, Richard Silwoski, Director, Department of General Services, and Kathleen Kilpatrick, Director, Virginia Department of Historic Resources. The group then was led on a tour of the recent interior restoration work and the new underground visitors center by George Skarmeas, lead architect of the project, and Calder Loth, Senior Architectural Historian, Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

During lunch provided by the Virginia Capitol Foundation, Ron Van Oers, Program Director, UNESCO Heritage Conservation Center, made a presentation on UNESCO's Historic Urban Landscape initiative. The afternoon concluded with a summary panel discussion by Gustavo Araoz, Alan Chimacoff, Kathleen Kilpatrick, Calder Loth, Ron Van Oers, and Boguslaw Szmygin.

The symposium concluded with an invitation by William Dupont, University of Texas – San Antonio, to attend the 15th US/ICOMOS Symposium May 31 – June 2, 2012 in San Antonio.

SUMMARY

The overriding theme of this symposium concerned the influence of the Venice Charter and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards on the design of new additions to historic buildings and new buildings in historic districts. Numerous examples of what many would alternately consider "good" or "bad" design were presented, however much of the resulting discussion focused on the degree to which the wording of the Charter and Standards influenced the actual construction design. For example, while the Secretary of Interior's Standards do call for "differentiation" between new construction and historic buildings/districts, the same standards also call for "compatibility."

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation (36 CFR 67) was the most relevant to the symposium discussion. Point 9 in these Standards reads:

New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.

Guidance published by the National Park Service in 1986 (*Preservation Brief 14*) included illustrations that apparently emphasized examples of "differentiation" over "compatibility," however an updated/revised version of *Preservation Brief 14* (NPS, August 2010) "features all new illustrations and contains expanded and updated design guidance on the subject of new additions." The brief notes both "widespread interest as well as divergence of opinion" (p.1) on this topic but reiterates that the focus of the NPS guidelines is distinctly "to ensure [new additions] preserve the character of historic buildings" (p.1).

Whether the revised Preservation Brief with its new illustrative examples will suffice to satisfy critics of the current state of design issues with respect to new additions remains to be seen. It is hoped, however, that this symposium helped elucidate the issues involved and expanded the dialogue regarding the value of context.

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ARTICLES ON HISTORIC CONTEXT STEMMING FROM THE 2011 US/ICOMOS SYMPOSIUM

Two recent articles were published stemming from the discussions at the US/ICOMOS symposium—one in the Wall Street Journal by Catesby Leigh and one in Traditional Building by Clem Labine. The articles can be found at the links below.

“The Bias Against Tradition” by Catesby Leigh
<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304569504576403841372798886.html>

“Preserving Historic Context” by Clem Labine
<http://www.traditional-building.com/Previous-Issues-11/OctoberForum11.html>