

Date: Thu, 29 Jun 2006 12:09:03 -0400
From: frederic schwartz <fschwartz@schwartzarch.com>
To: undisclosed-recipients: ;
Subject: Aalto's Woodberry Poetry Room at Harvard is being destroyed and we need your immediate help to call for "a stay of execution."

Alvar Aalto's Woodberry Poetry Room at Harvard is currently being dismantled and we request your immediate help.

Toshiko Mori and I are organizing a letter and e-mail campaign to restore Alvar Aalto's little-known Woodberry Poetry Room in the Lamont Library at Harvard University (1949).

I have included a letter explaining the situation by Cara McCarty (Loeb Fellow 2004-2005) and a letter of support from John Stubbs (World Monuments Fund).

Please email Toshiko Mori [Toshiko@tmarch.com] or call her (212-337-9644) if you have any questions.

Thank you in advance.

Frederic Schwartz, FAIA

Please send via email or mail letters to the following people and/or Toshiko@tmarch.com:

Nancy M. Cline
Harvard, HCL Widener
Library
Office of the Librarian,
Room 110
Harvard Yard
Cambridge MA 02138
ncline@fas.harvard.edu

Professor Sidney Verba
Director, Harvard
University Library
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Cambridge, MA 02138
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Dean Jeremy Knowles
Interim Dean of the
Faculty of Arts and
Sciences
University Hall
Harvard University
Cambridge, MA 02138
jeremy_knowles@harvard.edu

Dear Toshiko:

I was aghast to learn of Harvard's recent decision to dismantle the Woodberry Poetry Room designed by the Finnish architect, Alvar Aalto, for Lamont Library. The Poetry Room is one of only four existing projects in the United States by one of the greatest architects of the twentieth century. And it is a gem of a space. It is a masterpiece of interior design that has many of the signature elements for which Aalto is famous - sculpted, organically-shaped light fixtures, natural materials, original Aalto furniture made in Finland, free-standing perforated wooden partitions, bookshelves and listening stations. In short, it is a cohesive, intimate work of art that is best understood if left in its entirety.

Cambridge figured prominently in Aalto's American career. In addition to the Woodberry Poetry Room and the Baker Dormitory he designed at MIT, the pioneering retail store, Design Research, was among the first to introduce Aalto's furniture to the American public. Because his humanistic modern designs were more readily accepted by Americans than the work of most of his contemporaries, he played a pivotal role in the way modern architecture and design developed in this country.

Harvard boasts one of the best architecture schools in the world. As a leader in the field it should set examples. To have an architectural treasure by a renowned architect is both a gift and a privilege. And with that comes the responsibility of stewardship, which means preserving it for future generations. Falling short of that would be a shameful embarrassment for Harvard. This is a situation where one must think in retrospect about the impact and repercussions from the potential loss of an architectural legacy.

Please let me know what I can do to help protect the Woodberry Poetry Room from destruction.

Sincerely,
Cara McCarty (Loeb Fellow 2004-2005)
The Grace L. Brumbaugh and Richard E. Brumbaugh
Curator of Decorative Arts and Design
Saint Louis Art Museum
1 Fine Arts Drive
St. Louis, Missouri 63110
Tel.: 314-655-5214

Dear Toshiko:

Thank you for bringing to the World Monuments Fund's attention the plight of the Woodberry Poetry Reading Room at Harvard College Library which is slated for radical renovation later this summer. By the description you provided in your two letters to WMF and what we could glean from Harvard's web-published article entitled "Woodward Poetry Room Renovation Underway" (June 12, 2006), it appears that this interior not only represents a very rare work in America by master modernist architect Alvar Aalto, but that its proposed renovation is being handled in a very insensitive way.

Interiors such as these which represent "total design" by such famous architects are quite hard to find now outside of museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. It would certainly be an added distinction to Harvard University to instead commission a scrupulously accurate period restoration of the Woodberry Poetry Reading Room and instead celebrate it as one of the many jewels in the crown of America's oldest and most famous university.

Is it not possible to place the needed computer equipment and other such amenities in an adjacent location so that the Reading Room can continue use simply as reading room? I think of the great library interiors of the world that I have seen which retain their historic character

due to careful restoration. (Avery Library at Columbia University, the Library at the American Academy in Rome, etc. and ones WMF has restored in Mexico and France.)

As you may know WMF has been involved in supporting a long and careful restoration of a complete library building by Alvar Aalto known as the Vipuri Library in Karelia, Russia. One of WMF's efforts to promote Aalto's library restoration in Karelia entailed an event three years ago at one of his other great interiors in this country that is located across from the United Nations here in New York. All in attendance were in awe of not only the fineness of its design but were appreciative of the recent efforts to preserve it.

You are on the right track at this time in calling for a "stay of execution" for Aalto's Woodberry Poetry Reading Room until every reasonable alternative has been explored. Please know that the World Monuments Fund would be pleased to advise on strategies for preserving and presenting this special example in the history of design if it is already not too late.

Cordially,
John H Stubbs
Vice President, Field Projects
World Monuments Fund