The buildings and natural landscape of the University of Puerto Rico–Río Piedras, embody Hispanic tradition, the principle root of Puerto Rican culture. They are symbolic of the permanent presence of that tradition and of the constant struggle to preserve and extend it. The campus has been the cradle of ideas, initiatives, and plans of Puerto Rico’s coming of age politically, socially and economically. Its architecture heralded the fusion of modernism with the tropical climate of the Island. With the general loss of many significant structures from the recent past, conserving the architecture and open spaces of the campus is of great importance.

Although founded in 1903, the first 20 years after the second World War saw the greatest physical growth of the campus, when the Hispanic Revival style was discarded in favor of a modern vision of Puerto Rico. The new architecture of this period was the product of an innovative architect, Henry Klumb, who worked on the master plan and many buildings between 1945-1965. Klumb arrived in Puerto Rico after emigrating to the United States and working with Frank Lloyd Wright. His campus master plan aligned new buildings orthogonally to the original quadrangle. Beyond this quadrangle Klumb generated a new rotated organizational grid more in keeping with the dictates of the hot, humid tropics. The 26 buildings that Klumb designed, 19 of which were built, were radically distinct from the original campus buildings. He created a tropical modernism for Puerto Rico using horizontality, spaciousness, and a fluidity of space, promoting natural ventilation and illumination. Klumb’s buildings were the first to bring international attention to the campus, appearing in Progressive Architecture, Architectural Forum, Interiors, AIA Journal, and Fortune Magazine, among others.

The Student Center is his most significant work on campus. Designed in 1948, it is one of the ten best modern buildings in Puerto Rico. It embodies his design fundamentals: liberty of movement, continuity between interior and exterior, and inter-relatedness of the various functions. The Student Center is a true expression of Klumb’s vision of a modern Puerto Rico, one that is both rooted in its Hispanic heritage and looking towards the future with fresh, innovative ideas.
MODERN MINNEAPOLIS: ALWAYS NEW, NOW AT RISK

Throughout the twentieth century, Minneapolis took pride in always looking to the future, and always wanting what was newest. One unfortunate result was that early preservationists were regarded as Luddites, and met with little success. This mindset, however, produced some great modern buildings. Today, preserving ornamental buildings from the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is seen as progressive, while some Streamline Moderne designs are still scorned by the old guard and more recent structures are viewed with apathy.

The preservation battle over Ralph Rapson’s 1963 Guthrie Theatre is an exception. The energetic group of musicians, architects, and other activists behind the Save the Guthrie organization have generated a stimulating debate about the merits of preserving the structure. Its listing on the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s “Eleven Most Endangered List” put a national spotlight on the controversy. Theater advocates have hiredAMS Planning and Research to conduct a reuse study to counter the reuse study produced by the Walker Art Center, which plans to demolish the Guthrie. Ultimately, the current economic downturn might prove to be the most potent preservation tool. The Guthrie Theater organization has been planning a move to a new location, but is having difficulty raising needed funds—especially critical state bonds. With Minnesota’s deficit pegged at well over $4 billion, bonds to help the theater are not a high priority for many legislators. Fundraising for the Walker’s expansion is also rumored to be slow. The status quo might be the only option. For the latest updates, visit www.savetheguthrie.org.

While the Guthrie has elicited passionate support, the demolition of another mid-century landmark received nearly universal approval. Only a few brave preservationists dared suggest that the Minneapolis Public Library (McEnary and Krafft, 1958-1961) deserved a second look. The library and its plaza occupied a city block fronting a pedestrian and bus corridor in the heart of downtown Minneapolis. The library complex featured a straightforward form-follows-function arrangement: a multistory cube for books, reading rooms and offices; a lower section with an auditorium and bookstore, and beneath a jewel-box dome, a planetarium. The wrecking crew was hard at work all winter. Photographs can be viewed at www.mplib.org/ncl_demo.asp.

While the library finishes fundraising for its new building on the same site and awaits completion of plans by Cesar Pelli, limited library operations have moved to the “old” Federal Reserve Building. Ironically, this modern landmark designed by Gunnar Birkerts and built between 1968 and 1972 has recently received questionable modifications. The unique structure has a suspended central section supported by a giant catenary arch draped between two towers. A developer recently bought the building, and added a forty-foot-deep addition to the back. The addition adopted materials and massing that complement the original building, and its understated design keep it clearly subservient.

Threats to other Modern buildings appear on a regular basis. Even with the depressed economy, the rate of change in Minneapolis remains swift, and mid-twentieth-century buildings are usually swept aside with little thought. As the twenty-first century progresses, it will be interesting to see when citizens wake up to the importance of this period.

~Charlene Roise
DOCOMOMO/US CHAPTER UPDATES

NEW ENGLAND

The New England Chapter is monitoring the status of a number of “invisible modernist” houses that have recently come on the market. This term describes pre-1938 works that were rendered “invisible” by Sigfried Giedion’s claim that Gropius’ design was the first realized modern house in New England. In October, DOCOMOMO/NE and the Cambridge Historical Society sponsored a very popular lecture and tour of modern houses in Cambridge. It included a number of little-known early modern houses in New England. A sequel is planned for next fall.

In December, the monthly chapter meeting took in a show at the Wentworth Institute of Technology in Boston, where architecture students constructed models of a number of the “invisible modernist” houses. There are plans to find another venue for an expanded version of the show in the near future. At the February meeting, Gina Coyle, a Wellesley resident, spoke about modernism on the Outer Cape. It has come to the chapter’s attention that a number of summer houses from the early modern period are still extant, hardly documented and in deteriorating condition.

In cooperation with SPNEA and Gropius House Site Manager Marianne Zephir, a number of tours of regional Modern houses and neighborhoods are planned for this spring. These will include a trip to Western Massachusetts, as well as neighborhoods in Lexington, Belmont, and Lincoln. Members will also be given a tour of a Paul Rudolph House in Chestnut Hill in the spring, and a lecture on Rudolph’s work at Wellesley is being cosponsored with the College.

DOCOMOMO/NE participated in the conference on 20th-century architectural metals, at MIT in April. Chapter member David Fixler was featured on NPR’s “The Connection” in November 2002. While the discussion was not only about modern movement preservation, the appearance prompted many positive responses, and hopefully promoted new awareness of DOCOMOMO. Work on behalf of modernist houses continues and has been noted in local press: members Gary Wolf and Hélène Lipstadt were written up in the Boston Herald and the entire group’s efforts on behalf of the Field House was highlighted in MIT’s Technology Review, October 2001.

—Brendan Moran

NEW YORK TRI-STATE

Winter 2002 began with a book party in November to celebrate publication of Hubert-Jan Henket and Hilde Heyne’s Back from Utopia: The Challenge of the Modern Movement. The event, organized by board member Nina Rappaport and Rudolph Foundation administrator, Christopher Northrup, was held at the Paul Rudolph-designed house on E. 58th St. in Manhattan. The townhouse, a white composition of varying planes echoing the Beekman Place residence, was built in the mid-1980s. It now houses the Paul Rudolph Foundation, launched last year by Ernest Wagner.

Also with the Rudolph Foundation, New York/Tri-State members visited the Goshen New York County Government Center (1963-1970) to meet county executives and show support for the preservation of the building. County officials say out-dated court rooms and offices, and HVAC problems make the building unusable.

On January 23 the chapter co-sponsored a lecture by Mardges Bacon, professor of architectural history at Northeastern University, on “Le Corbusier in America” (the title of her 2002 book). The lecture was held in conjunction with the “Le Corbusier Before Le Corbusier” exhibition held this winter at the Bard Graduate Center.

The APT NE chapter held its 2003 Symposium and annual meeting in February at the Yale School of Architecture. Organized by DOCOMOMO member Kyle Norman and the APT Northeast Chapter, the conference featured case studies by prominent preservation consultants on restoration work at Yale, from the Sterling Library to Modern monuments such as Gordon Bunshaft’s Beinecke Library, Louis Kahn’s British Art Center, and Eero Saarinen’s Ingalls Hockey Rink. Yale Architecture Dean Robert A.M. Stern welcomed the crowd of 144 participants to the event, which brought attention to Modern preservation issues through illustrated talks and tours of campus restoration projects.

The chapter trying to raise awareness of Edward Durell Stone’s 2 Columbus Circle and help build support for the building’s survival at various city levels. Stone’s former museum will likely become the Museum of Arts and Design. A redesign scheme that totally erases Stone’s classic façade has just been presented by Allied Works Architecture of Portland, OR. Landmark West! is leading the efforts, watch for updates at www.preserve.org/lmwest/2ccpanel.htm

DOCOMOMO New York/Tri-State is involved in advocacy for other Tri-State region endangered sites such as the 1939 Maxwell House coffee factory in Hoboken, N.J. designed by the architect/engineer H. K. Ferguson; Marcel Breuer’s Pirelli building in New Haven, CT, (see p. 6); TWA Terminal (p. 7), and the Alvar Aalto Rooms at IIE. We are also continuing work on a comprehensive survey of Modernism in Midtown Manhattan.

—Nina Rappaport

WESTERN WASHINGTON

In the Fall of 2002, DOCOMOMO.WeWa was awarded a King County Special Projects Grant to organize and present a lecture and self-guided tour of Modernism in Bellevue. Celebrating its 50th anniversary, this Seattle suburb presents a good example of the development of Northwest Modernism as well as the incorporation of car culture in the urban environment. DOCOMOMO members will continue with research and documentation through the summer and the tour will occur on Saturday, September 13th.

WeWa members are actively engaged in promoting the appropriate stewardship of Western Washington structures. The Washington State Library was relocated in 2002 and its original building, located on the State capitol campus in Olympia, is acting as a temporary facility while other buildings damaged in the recent earthquake are renovated. WeWa members are focusing attention on the future reuse designs of this important Paul Thiry designed building. The 1962 Seattle Monorail could still be threatened by a new ballot initiative. The chapter is focusing attention on the future reuse designs of this important Paul Thiry designed building. The 1962 Seattle Monorail could still be threatened by a new ballot initiative. The chapter is focusing attention on the future reuse designs of this important Paul Thiry designed building.

DOCOMOMO.WeWa is co-sponsoring with the Washington State Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation the “Nifty from the Last Fifty” initiative. This state supported survey will identify and document the most important modern structures in Washington State of the last 50 years.

—Andrew Phillips

Chapter News continued next page
NoCa continues to provide public programs on modern topics. Last fall the chapter hosted a screening of the independent documentary entitled “Eames in Hollywood.” The film, by Steve Cabella and Ruth Freeman, documents the Eames’s role in the film industry.

One of NoCa’s goals for 2003 is to form better partnerships and alliances with existing state and local preservation organizations, in order to share resources and increase effectiveness. In February, the chapter sponsored a lecture with the San Francisco AIA by DOCOMOMO US Board member Paul Adamson. The lecture, entitled “Eichler: Modernism Builds the American Dream” was based on Paul’s recently published book about Joseph Eichler, a California developer of modern, middle-class houses.

Another important alliance is with the California State Historic Preservation Commission. Last fall, the commission decided to establish a committee on Modern Movement resources, and asked the Northern California Chapter to join. Chandler McCoy and Paul Adamson are representing DOCOMOMO. The committee’s most pressing objective is to help the Office of Historic Preservation assess the state’s modern resources, and to provide educational programs for the state.

NoCa continues research leading to a book on modernism in San Francisco. This research has resulted in the completion of 20 new fiches to add to NoCa’s existing register.

“In the completion of 20 new fiches to add to NoCa’s existing register, Chandler McCoy

DALLAS HOTEL AND LIBRARY FACE UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Currently two significant landmarks of mid-century modern, both located in the city of Dallas Harwood Street Historic District, are under threat of demolition if new plans for a park in the area are realized.

The Statler Hilton, designed by New York architect William Tabler and completed in 1956, is a 18-story, 1001-room structure. Featuring a Y-shaped hotel tower that engages the street with a gently inflected facade. The tower, clad in a curtain wall of blue-green porcelain panels and clear glass in aluminum frames, floats above an assemblage of masonry and stone clad forms housing public functions of the hotel-lobby, retail, ballrooms, and restaurants. The hotel’s structural system was engineered by Seeley, Stevenson, Valt & Knecht, was the first use of an innovative cantilevered flat-slab design. Tower floors extend eight feet beyond interior columns, providing a clean, crisp look behind the curtain wall. Reviews were published in 1954 in both Architectural Record and Architectural Forum.

The adjacent 1953 Dallas Public Library, designed by Dallas architect George Dahl, operated until the mid-80s, when a larger facility opened a few blocks away. The modest granite, marble and aluminum building, a handsome counterpart to the adjacent hotel, contains airy, mezzanined interiors gently and effectively illuminated from above by screened clerestories.

The library is a fascinating milestone in both the long career of George Dahl and the architectural development of Dallas. Less than two decades earlier Dahl was the chief architect for the 1936 Texas Centennial Exposition at Fair Park, and oversaw the design of a number of fine Moderne structures organized along City Beautiful principals. Today this collection remains the largest collection of Moderne exposition architecture in the world. That this leading architect, and the city in which he practiced, could make the leap from Moderne to Modern in only 17 years (in spite of intervening war and depression) is testimony to the power modern architecture held in Dallas’s postwar years.

In spite of their significance, both buildings are now threatened by recent events. The Statler Hilton, sold in the mid-90s to Hong Kong investors, was operated for several years as the Dallas Grand Hotel. Property taxes are now in arrears and there is a possibility the building will be auctioned for back taxes. Various studies, some disputed, indicate that renovation costs could run as high as $80 million to return it to productive use as a hotel.

In addition, a privately funded planning effort for the revitalization of downtown has recently recommended construction of Commerce Gardens, a new two-block park, one block of which would occupy the current site of both buildings. While there is wide agreement in Dallas that additional green space is needed downtown, many architects, planners, civic leaders and preservationists would prefer to see some of the vast extents of surface parking (26% of the Downtown area) converted to green space instead of demolishing modern landmarks.

Fortunately, other studies are under way, including a Downtown Parks Master Plan, a Downtown Transportation Plan, and a DART study for a second downtown light rail line. It appears that any action towards implementing Commerce Gardens is on hold until the completion of those studies in 2004, and thus the immediate threat to the Statler Hilton and Dallas Library appears to have lessened. Preservation viewpoints will be well-represented during these planning processes (including members of the design teams), and it is hoped that more balanced alternatives to Commerce Gardens will be identified.

In the meantime, concerned professionals and citizens will be working hard to find a new champion for the hotel and the library with the vision and financial wherewithal to integrate them into the revitalization of downtown Dallas.

—Robert Meckfessel
DOCUMENTING THE MODERN MOVEMENT IN MARYLAND

In 2001 a team of professors and graduate students from the University of Maryland began a research project to understand, document and help preserve the Modern Movement in Maryland. Supported by Maryland Historical Trust and based in the University’s Historic Preservation Program, the project is now in the second of three years. The project’s goal is identifying the salient trends, resources, and places characterizing the Modern Movement’s impact on the state—with an eye to how they could be preserved in the future.

In the first year of the project, data collection and research identified over a thousand Modern buildings and sites, as well as architects and planners associated with them. This was accomplished through archival and bibliographic research, windshield surveys, and interviews with some of the living pioneers of the Modern Movement in Maryland. Research focused on resources designed or built between 1930 and 1970, in all parts of the state. Of particular interest is the rich variety of modernist buildings in suburban Maryland, because suburbia is not generally considered a promising setting for architectural innovation. While there are many fine examples of architect-designed buildings in the state, the project is documenting vernacular resources as well.

A major result of this research is the statewide context study. Authored by the project’s primary researchers, Prof. Isabelle Gournay and Mary Corbin Sies, the context essay characterizes the many manifestations of the Modern Movement in Maryland and details its arrival and evolution.

The other major result of the context research is a list of high-priority buildings and sites representing the most influential aspects of the Modern Movement in Maryland and retaining a high degree of integrity. The team is now in the midst of documenting particular buildings and places around the state, including:

- Washington County Public Schools, as leading examples of the Modernist public schools found on the outskirts
- Goucher College campus, Towson, result of a national competition in 1938 and built out by a number of Modernist designers;
- Charles Center in Baltimore;
- Gibson Island, a private enclave of pioneering architect-built houses;
- architect-built houses (including their own) displaying the great inventive-ness of the pioneering Modernists;
- a rich typology of residential subdivisions.

THE MODERN MOVEMENT SHAPED EVERYDAY LIFE IN MARYLAND...

of most towns in the state, marking the enormous postwar baby boom;
- Greenbelt’s post-New Deal heritage legacy;
- Goucher College campus, Towson, result of a national competition in 1938 and built out by a number of Modernist designers;
- Charles Center in Baltimore;
- Gibson Island, a private enclave of pioneering architect-built houses;
- architect-built houses (including their own) displaying the great inventive-ness of the pioneering Modernists;
- a rich typology of residential subdivisions.

Finally, the Faculty Center has been the subject of a proposal to restore it to its original function. This proposal by the School of Architecture and Social Sciences in harmony with Klumb’s original proposal.

For more information about the project, contact the research team at: rmason@umd.edu

—Randall Mason

PUERTO RICO, CONTINUED

exterior, integration with the natural landscape, and the use of the structure as ornament. John Whelan, quoted in La Arquitectura de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, says at the building’s inauguration, “This is a place for free minds. Nowhere is there confinement; nowhere is there the imposition of pedantic order. There are no public rooms with four walls, connected by corridors, entered through doors. These are simply not rooms in the ordinary sense. Areas are defined by levels and relative position and their use...The building is free space and free form.”

Contemporary in design with, and situated on a site adjacent to the Student Center, the Faculty Center is quite distinct in program and character, and evolved in an independent manner. This project is notable for its liberal use of an irregular geometry that follows a Wrightian logic of centrifugal organization. In contrast with the Student Center it is introverted in its relation to the site.

An effort to document and preserve the works of Klumb is being led by the School of Architecture at the University of Puerto Rico. A National Endowment for the Arts Preservation Grant was utilized to create a model preservation plan to recognize and conserve the built environment of the recent past, focusing on Klumb’s work.

The School has proposed the nomination of three Klumb buildings for the National Register of Historic Places. With the State Historic Preservation Office, it is working to increase the boundaries of the quadrangle’s existing historic district to include all Klumb’s work. The School’s Archivo de Arquitectura y Construcción de la UPR (Architecture and Construction Archives) will produce a book and exhibition on the work of Klumb for 2004. A restoration project will repait the Colleges of Business Administration and Social Sciences in harmony with Klumb’s original proposal.

Finally, the Faculty Center has been the subject of a proposal to restore it to its original function. This proposal by the School won a Certificate of Honor from the AIA-Puerto Rico Chapter and an Honor Award from the VII Bienal de Arquitectura de Puerto Rico.

—John Hertz
MONORAIL ON TRACK

Built for the 1962 Seattle World’s Fair, the Monorail, along with the Space Needle, have come to symbolize the city of Seattle, and represent a time when future innovation appeared limitless. Fair organizers felt that a monorail fit the Fair’s focus on modern technology and could also serve the region’s transportation future. Seeking to promote the monorail as the ideal form of urban rapid transit, Alweg International of Germany constructed it as a speculative venture.

Since its construction, a number of proposals have been made for extending the Monorail. In 1997, a citizens’ initiative passed directing the city to find the means to extend the Monorail as a citywide transportation system. In November 2002, after two additional ballot initiatives, Seattle residents approved the construction of the first new line in the system. The final legislation, however, calls for the original Monorail to be demolished, not extended.

The original rail route line extends a mile from the Fairgrounds to the downtown retail district. It consists of parallel, reinforced concrete beams that are elevated 25 feet above grade and are supported by T- and U-shaped, reinforced concrete pylons. The streamlined cars were promoted in 1962 as having “interior comfort and eye-catching design” with wide windows and contoured glass ceiling.

IKEA TAKES ON MARCEL BREUER’S PIRELLI BUILDING

New Haven, CT may not be on every architect’s list of travel destinations, but as a result of patronage by Yale University and the 1960s administration of Mayor Richard Lee, the city possesses a substantial number of important works of Modern Architecture. Now its modernist heritage is under threat. While Louis Kahn’s Yale Art Gallery is about to embark on its first major renovation, other buildings—Roche Dinkeloo’s New Haven Coliseum and Paul Rudolph’s Manor House—are threatened with demolition.

One endangered structure is Marcel Breuer’s Armstrong-Pirelli Building. IKEA has just received City and State approval for a new 300,000 sq. ft. retail facility at the site of the Breuer building. The plan calls for a partial demolition of the building and the conversion of the 19-acre landscaped site into an on-grade parking lot. Barring any last-minute change of heart by the City or by IKEA, the project is to break ground this spring.

The Armstrong-Pirelli building, completed in 1969, is important for its architectural quality and for its siting. The tower is “hung” from a truss and the facade is highly articulated pre-cast concrete. Situated at the junction of I-91 and I-95, it signals one’s arrival in New Haven and provides access to New Haven’s Long Wharf—an industrial waterfront area that the city is starting to convert to recreational use.

Due to public pressure, IKEA backed away from its initial plan for complete demolition of the building. It has agreed to retain the tower portion, demolishing its two-story plinth and double-height warehouse facility. The company has no plans to re-use the tower building—its store will be housed in a separate metal-clad structure to the south.

RENOVATION OF MIES ICONS AT IIT CAMPUS

The Illinois Institute of Technology announced in November 2002 the formation of a task force to raise funds for the restoration of several buildings on the IIT campus designed by Mies van der Rohe. This task force, known as the Mies van der Rohe Society, will raise $20 million for technological and physical improvements of several buildings located on the architecturally significant Chicago campus.

Two of the buildings slated for renovation are Wishnick Hall and S.R. Crown Hall. Wishnick Hall (1945-46), with its expressed steel structure, yellow brick infill and aluminum windows, is typical of most of the buildings that Mies designed for the campus in the 1940s and 1950s. A revitalized Wishnick Hall will house the Digital Media Center. Crown Hall, designed by Mies in 1954-56 to house the School of Architecture and Institute of Design, is synonymous with his ideas for universal space and a structural philosophy that he referred to as beinahe nichts, almost nothing. Although Mies envisioned the universal space to be flexible for many uses and generations, he could not have foreseen the technological revolution in architectural education that has made the single, open space somewhat inflexible for today’s learning environment. The funding will adapt the space for technology, while preserving and restoring both the deteriorated exterior and the great hall.

Leading the Mies Society will be former Illinois Governor, James R. Thompson. During his administration in the 1980s, Governor Thompson was responsible for the state’s acquisition and restoration of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Dana-Thomas House in Springfield. Thompson also led recent efforts by the state to acquire the Mies designed Farnsworth House in Plano, Illinois.

In his address announcing the formation of the Mies Society, Thompson praised the architectural significance of the IIT campus and its Mies designed buildings and vowed to, “restore, where necessary, the buildings and landscape to the level Mies and his colleagues originally envisioned for their students.” The campus, which had fallen on hard times since the mid-1970s, has recently seen a renaissance. A new Campus Center designed by Rem Koolhaas and student housing designed by Helmut Jahn are slated for completion this fall. Several other Mies designed campus buildings are in the process of renovation.

—Doug Gilbert
CUBA TURNS A CORNER AND PRESERVES ITS MODERN PAST

Cuba represents a unique example of a country in which architectural preservation constitutes a major component of the national economic development plan. Visitors to the island in the past decade have noted the steadily accelerating pace of renovation and reconstruction work that is transforming the face of Havana and spreading now to the secondary cities. Tourism has provided both the impetus and means for this remarkable preservation activity.

In Cuba, architectural preservation...
The Alcoa Building in San Francisco, designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill in 1967 and completed in 1971, was one of the finest modern buildings in California when built. Considered by some to be a prototype for SOM’s John Hancock Tower in Chicago, its structural exoskeleton is made up of diagonal steel crossbracing, giving the building its aesthetic identity and taking the place of any other compositional treatment.

The building’s owner, Chicago-based Equity Office Properties, feels seismic upgrades to the building are necessary. They selected the Smith Group, a local firm, to design structural modifications. Like the rest of the design and preservation community, SOM was not consulted or alerted to the project, and discovered it only after the work had started. The modifications, currently underway, will significantly alter the building’s distinctive appearance by adding horizontal steel banding at regular intervals to the exoskeleton and by locating W-shaped steel legs around the base. Because the building’s design celebrated its structural system, changes of this nature are not insignificant. The new steel legs compromise the original design intent, in which the building is “floating” above the plaza level, supported by five massive vertical piers on each long elevation. Worse still, the new legs will be clad in the same material as the original, obscuring the distinction between the original and the new. The result is a clumsy, inelegant solution that dilutes the original design.

The San Francisco office of SOM played (and continues to play) an important role in shaping modern San Francisco. There are only a handful of SOM skyscrapers from the 50s and 60s, but these are defining works. The Northern California chapter of DOCOMOMO US included the Alcoa Building, along with the well-known Crown Zellerbach Building (1959) and the lesser-known Indemnity Insurance Building (also 1959) in its local modern register and in its 1998 guidebook. For several years, it has urged the local Landmark’s Preservation Advisory Board to landmark Alcoa, but the Board has never acted. Unable to effect the outcome of the project, the chapter was nonetheless able to generate publicity about it. Press coverage in both the mainstream media and a local preservation publication has been sympathetic to DOCOMOMO’s position, recognizing the importance of the building and the negative impact of the modifications.

—Chandler McCoy

**SEISMIC SHAKE-UP IN SAN FRANCISCO**

The Modern Committee of the Los Angeles Conservancy has been one of the pioneers in recognizing the importance of advocacy for the preservation of modern architecture in the LA area. Its most recent undertaking, the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Welton Becket’s birth, was a great success and an indication of how perceptions about modern architecture are beginning to change.

The event focused attention on an unresolved dilemma, which is how to recognize and assess the significance of large and prolific commercial firms that contributed so greatly to the spread of modern architecture in America and the rest of the world. The work of Welton Becket, Edward Durell Stone, Harrison and Abramowitz and other similar firms are examples. Their buildings are not all of equal merit in the same way that not all Victorian row houses are good. The GSA has also recently begun to identify and evaluate buildings from the Great Society era with the desire to protect the most important examples. Here, the ubiquity and significance of ‘middle of the road’ modernism are issues to be addressed.

The work of Welton Becket is synonymous with the development and face of modern Los Angeles. The Parker Center, or Police Administration Building, was completed in 1955. Named after the William Parker, the police chief, the building was intended to house an efficient and modern police department and also convey the new image of a facility that was open and accessible.

While the building survives largely intact and could be easily remodeled and upgraded, plans have been proposed for its replacement with an even more efficient and larger building. The proposal ignores the importance of Welton Becket, the ‘clean’ lines of the existing building, and the overall message that it represented. Buildings like the Parker Center deserve our attention and care. They can be retained and upgraded without losing the very qualities that made them important in their day; all it takes is courage and imagination.

—Theo Prudon

**LOS ANGELES REPORT: THE LEGACY OF WELTON BECKET**

**SEISMIC SHAKE-UP IN SAN FRANCISCO**

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—Chandler McCoy

**ADDENDUM**

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—Theo Prudon
IN OUR OWN TIME

STILMAN HOUSE NO. 1, MARCEL BREUER, 1950-1951

A surprising new exhibition exploring the hidden legacy of Modernism in Litchfield, Connecticut, opened at the Litchfield Historical Museum on April 11 and will run through November 30. “In Our Own Time: Modernism in Litchfield 1949-1970” focuses on a small but extraordinary movement of Modern design that involved some of the world’s foremost architects of the period. Among the leading Modernists to work in the area were Marcel Breuer, Richard Neutra, John Johansen, Eliot Noyes, Edward Durell Stone, and Edward Larrabee Barnes. All were drawn to Litchfield by a group of local patrons who embraced the Modern design philosophy that was emerging in America after World War II. “Litchfield’s Modern movement is notable in that it occurred at all, let alone in a town that so many people consider to be Connecticut’s quintessential Colonial village,” says Catherine Keene Fields, director of the Litchfield Historical Society. “It is also an exciting story to tell because all of the buildings still stand, and because so many of the original clients are still here to share their memories.”

ILLINOIS SAYS MIES DOES NOT MEASURE UP TO WRIGHT

For many, Mies Van der Rohe’s Farnsworth House, completed in 1951, is the quintessential modern house. The glass and steel house once again faces an uncertain future. In 2001, Lord Peter Palumbo, the house’s owner, announced plans to sell the famous house. Preservationists feared that it would be closed to the public, moved or demolished. Advocates organized the Friends of the Farnsworth House, and after a massive letter writing campaign, claimed victory when then Governor George Ryan persuaded lawmakers to set aside $7 million for the purchase of the house. In February, preservationists were stunned when Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan blocked the plan to buy the Farnsworth House, saying that “Mies’s biographer told me last week that ‘$7 million is a heck of a lot for that house,’ given its distant location, and Mies is not nearly as popular as Frank Lloyd Wright.” The house is now unprotected, as it is not listed on the National Register of Historic Places; nor protected by any local landmark designation program, as Plano, Illinois does not have a designation program.

Developers are attempting to buy and demolish an elegant set of International-style buildings designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill that house the city and county offices of Grand Rapids, Michigan. The buildings, constructed in 1969, are part of Vandenberg Center, which also includes a Miesian-inspired plaza, a massive steel sculpture “La Grande Vitesse” designed for the plaza by Alexander Calder, as well as a rooftop painting on the county building designed and donated to the city by Calder.

The developer, Gallium Group, LLC, in association with the Los Angeles firm of Keating/Khang Architecture, wish to convince the city and the county to sell the buildings and relocate their offices to make way for the construction of a new hotel complex. In the proposal, “La Grand Vitesse,” the Calder-designed outdoor sculpture and the symbol of the City of Grand Rapids, would become part of a private hotel complex, thereby losing its original context. The roof painting, “Calder on the Roof” (1974), would be destroyed.

The three-story county building and ten-story city hall are clad in brown Canadian granite over steel framing, and are sited on a plaza juxtaposed against the massive orange-red Calder stabile. Calder designed the stabile to be seen against the backdrop of the SOM buildings. “La Grande Vitesse” was the first federally funded public art sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts in their Work of Art in Public Places program. The roof painting atop the shorter building can be viewed from the taller buildings nearby. The interiors boast terrazzo flooring, spectacular views of the city, and the elegance of high quality International Style design. The buildings retain a high degree of original fabric and are representative of the work of SOM during the firm’s most influential period.

Ironically, these buildings replaced the former Grand Rapids City Hall (1888, Elijah Meyer), which was razed in 1969. The old city hall was demolished after an extended effort to save it, spawning the local historic preservation movement. This painful memory remains strong for those who witnessed that destruction and many local residents have mixed feelings about the SOM buildings. Despite their sad genesis, the SOM buildings and the Calder stabile truly represent the heart of the city. The Calder stabile image has appears on all city literature, vehicles, and signage. The plaza is the only large urban public space in the city and is utilized for numerous festivals in the spring, summer, and fall as well as for peaceful public protests.

The Grand Rapids City Commission approved a one-year option on the buildings and plaza presented by the developer in October 2002. The Modernism Committee of the non-profit Kent County Council for Historic Preservation has been formed to call attention to the negatives of this plan and work to educate the community about local modern design treasures and the crucial issue of preservation of the recent past.

―Jennifer Metz

While it is unlikely that the house will be demolished, it could be moved, or incompatible structures could be built on the site. Saving the Farnsworth House without state support will be a challenge, but the bigger challenge will be to save it and keep it open to the public. To that end, DOCOMOMO, the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois and the National Trust for Historic Preservation are all monitoring the situation closely and attempting to find a solution which will accomplish both goals.

―Jeanne Lambin
**DOCOMOMO US**

documentation and conservation of buildings, sites and neighborhoods of the modern movement

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