



Theodore H.M. Prudon. *Preservation of Modern Architecture*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2008, 592 pp., color and black-and-white photographs, plans, drawings, hardcover, \$99.00, ISBN: 0-4716-6294-5.

Saving Modern architecture is the latest and perhaps one of the most contentious frontiers in the field of historic preservation. Long-standing prejudices and a persistent public lethargy often overcome objective analysis when Modern buildings—many over fifty years old—are faced with demolition or disfiguring renovations. Mainstream organizations are just beginning to recognize the importance of Modern buildings in our collective history, with an overall movement towards inclusion forming in the last few years. *Preservation of Modern Architecture* will undoubtedly become a handbook for preservationists concerned with issues specific to the restoration and renovation of these buildings.

Theodore Prudon, a prominent New York architect, is the first to tackle this controversial topic head-on. He approaches the subject both as an architect and a historian, a rare combination of skills that underlies his highly developed awareness of preservation advocacy and theory. A student of James Marston Fitch, Prudon echoes Fitch's strong opinions in his authoritative appraisal of the buildings and the state of historic preservation today. In addition to teaching at Columbia University and running the architectural firm Prudon & Partners, the author is currently serving as the President of DOCOMOMO/US.

The main idea of the book is summarized in a chapter entitled "Preserving Modern Architecture: What, Why, Where, and How." Here, Prudon analyzes problematic contextual issues, such as questions of authenticity and integrity. Motivated by a desire to uncover the initial design principles for Modern buildings, he reveals the original impetus behind design, construction, and use. Prudon hopes to demonstrate the continued relevance of each building in today's architectural environment and, therefore, argue successfully for its preservation.

This book is divided into two sections, each worthy of its own volume. Prudon first provides an overview in "Preservation of Modern Architecture," which includes discussions of preservation philosophies and standards, as well as an investigation and assessment of Modern buildings and structures. In "Building Typologies: Case Studies," Prudon analyzes thirty-one examples to illustrate the range of issues, problems, and solutions posed by structures covered under the wide umbrella of Modernism. He dedicates whole chapters to examinations of building types that are largely ignored in other texts, including residential architecture and prefabricated homes, such as the Lustron. Prudon also covers pavilions, schools, and hotels, as well as the more typical genres of performing arts centers, airport terminals, and industrial buildings.

Throughout the text, Prudon displays an uncanny prescience. He cites the cyclical nature of preservation and predicts that the preservation of Postmodern buildings will be the next challenge for the field. With this observation, Prudon gives form to a future movement that many organizations have so far failed to recognize. He can see that many major works and intact vernacular examples will reach the age necessary for historic status, if the buildings stand long enough, and he urges preservationists to identify and assess the significance of these structures before threats emerge. Also particularly telling is his statement that "it is only a matter of time" before most building materials need replacing. Using case studies, Prudon addresses the achievements of that replacement while retaining original design integrity and intent.

Prudon restricts his scope to the first seventy-five years of the twentieth century. The focus here is primarily on European, American, and Australian buildings, but

an astute reader should be able to translate the lessons to the preservation of Modern buildings in other parts of the world. Prudon's discussion of the sixteen-acre Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York City (built 1959-69), for instance, answers questions of material and scale that one might ask when studying Brasilia, Brazil, or Chandigarh, India. Although the text is heavily footnoted, it lacks a detailed bibliography, which would not only be helpful but could also inform further studies.

The book is well illustrated with black-and-white drawings, floor plans, and photographs. The most effective images convey the before-and-after conditions of Modern buildings that once stood out as unique but are now swallowed up by their current environments. Color plates at the center are crisply and beautifully rendered, complete with explanatory identifications and analyses. The lack of photography credits for the color plates is certainly an unintentional error that will be amended in future printings.

In the preface, Prudon cites the defeat of the prevailing "antimodern bias" as one of the "fundamental challenge[s]" facing historic preservationists today. Here, the architect dares to take the first major step in understanding the diverse and complicated topic of preserving historic Modern architecture. With this monumental achievement in the field, readers will be well equipped to win more victories for Modernism.

Prudon is an experienced writer with a number of books to his credit. His style here is concise and coherent, as legible to the professional as to the average reader. Historians, preservationists, and architects will benefit from a thorough review of this text, with multiple readings revealing more information and new perspectives. Members of the general public will also find important material here, whether pursuing a personal fascination with Modern architecture or researching particular buildings in their communities. Indeed, the book is a valuable addition to the increasing number of publications on this topic.

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