

# Time Honored

A Global View of  
Architectural Conservation



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## A Global View of Architectural Conservation

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PARAMETERS, THEORY, & EVOLUTION  
OF AN ETHOS

**John H. Stubbs**

**Foreword by Sir Bernard M. Feilden**

*With a contribution of images from the photo archive  
of the World Monuments Fund*



John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

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Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey

Published simultaneously in Canada

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***Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:***

Stubbs, John H.

Time honored : a global view of architectural conservation : parameters, theory & evolution of an ethos / John H. Stubbs.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-470-26049-4 (cloth)

1. Architecture—Conservation and restoration. 2. Historic preservation—Philosophy. I. Title.

NA105.S79 2009

363.6'9—dc22

2008021419

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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# Preface

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People's awareness of the importance of protecting the world's cultural patrimony—in particular its architectural heritage—is at a record level, and it is growing. *Time Honored: A Global View of Architectural Conservation* explores the reasons for this phenomenon, explains how international architectural heritage practice operates, and considers where this firmly rooted global interest may lead.

Protecting historic buildings and sites as a way of making the best use of the built environment is an important consideration for architects, landscape architects, urban planners, and others in disciplines that depend on heritage protection, such as archaeologists and museologists. Indeed, protecting at least representative examples of human-made heritage and the countless actions exerted each day toward its accomplishment are a worldwide concern that characterizes life and societal values in our time.

Restoring and preserving historic architecture throughout the world is a very broad topic. A balanced portrayal of it seemed possible when research for this book began in 1998 for two main reasons: the cumulative experience and amount of information on the subject that had been amassed and a vastly improved means for accessing it. Equally important was the coincidental development of participating government organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and members of the general public. Their combined successes in the field demonstrated how powerful they could be when working in concert. The resulting cultural heritage protection system, which includes topics beyond matters of historic sites and architecture, is the universe in which we work and live today.

As the first of a multipart series that profiles architectural conservation practices in different regions of the world, the present volume offers a gateway to this large and diverse topic. Its overall aim is to provide a convenient means for learning about contemporary international conservation practice—whether the reader is a student, a professional in the field, or an interested layperson seeking to know more about the subject—and to highlight architectural conservation solutions that have been developed in different parts of the world. This volume seeks to define the physical and conceptual parameters of the field of architectural conservation, its background, and its position today as a major influence on the world's built environment. In the near term, four more volumes will be published to focus on architectural conservation practice from the mid-twentieth century onward: in contemporary Europe, the Americas, the Middle East and Africa, and in Asia, Oceania, and the Polar Regions.

In *Time Honored*, the subject is addressed via an introduction to aims, characteristics, context, and language of the profession, an outline of humankind's long experience in protecting its built heritage, and a discussion of the evolution of its principal theories and their applications. These are followed by examples of representative problems, solutions, and promising new directions from around the world.

*Time Honored* is written from the perspective of both a participant and an observer of a wide range of architectural conservation projects in more than one hundred countries, experience I have gained through my work both as director of field projects at the New York-based World Monuments Fund since 1990 and through teaching for more

than two decades at Columbia University's Graduate Program in Historic Preservation. Because the field is synoptic, in this instance demanding the attention of a variety of special interests and talents, I hasten to add here that I was one participant among many. Indeed, the more I traveled to view progress at established field projects, to see prospects, to participate in conferences, to advocate, or simply to observe, the more I became aware that my interests and actions were but a fraction of the countless efforts exerted over the centuries that have resulted in the historic built environment we know and enjoy today. If *Time Honored* helps in any way to achieve the conservation of more of the world's amazing artistic, architectural, and cultural patrimony, it will have served its purpose.

JOHN H. STUBBS

October 2008

# Foreword

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The main appeal of architectural conservation for me has been its physicality. One need only look around to see the need for it; it's real, site-specific, and relevant. Today's demands on heritage conservation practitioners are at an all-time high. Examples of its successes—and, it must be said, its shortcomings as well—can be seen practically everywhere on earth.

*Time Honored: A Global View of Architectural Conservation* is a rich and ambitious offering steeped in the author's experiences in architectural conservation practice at both the local and international levels over a period of nearly forty years. John Stubbs, a native of Louisiana, was trained in both architectural technology and historic preservation. He has taught the subject at the graduate level at three institutions, including Columbia University. He worked for the US National Park Service's Technical Preservation Services Division in Washington, DC, and later practiced for a decade as a restoration specialist at the firm of Beyer Blinder Belle Architects & Planners in New York. And for nearly two decades Stubbs has been in charge of the field projects for the renowned World Monuments Fund (WMF).

I know of no one other individual who could have produced such a book. His post-graduate training at the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), and later, his close work with the eminent educator and historic preservation practitioner James Marston Fitch in New York, certainly exposed him to the leading thinking in the field. (I first met Stubbs when he attended ICCROM in 1977. I worked with him most recently, at WMF's invitation, at Angkor Wat in 2004.)

In normal architectural and engineering practice, the technical challenges of conserving historic architecture can range from addressing large, vexing engineering solutions to simply showing the way through problem solving and leadership. Architectural conservation, however, is distinct from the modern building industry in one main respect: It inevitably deals with history and changes to buildings over time. When compared to building anew, dealing with extant buildings can be a simple task—though, more often, it is considerably more complex. The problems of documentation, diagnosis, and the prescription of solutions—and dealing with endlessly changing variables—can be specialties in and of themselves. Implementing architectural conservation solutions at important historic buildings that are publicly owned, held in trust, or in possession of owners having differing affections for the task often brings with it added scrutiny that often requires informed answers.

At this stage in the evolution of architectural conservation practice throughout the world, questions of what to do and how to do it are remarkably clear. In addressing these matters in my own work, through nearly a half century of practice, teaching, and writing, I am amazed by the growing sophistication of the specialties comprising building conservation science and practice. Curiously, what has been lacking is a single published resource that offers explanations of how and why architectural conservation practice—now a recognized specialty profession—has come to be and outlines the extent of it. *Time Honored: A Global View of Architectural Conservation* offers the best and certainly the most convenient answers to these questions to date.

There has long been a need to delve into how architectural conservation has become such a pervasive subject, not only in the building professions but also in today's global society. *Time Honored* aims to do just that. The present inaugural volume addresses the fundamentals of the topic by defining the field and its structure, outlining its more remarkable examples and theories over time, and citing the key challenges faced and solutions being applied today. The book offers a plethora of examples and explanations with the help of hundreds of useful illustrations followed by four carefully considered appendices. There are further volumes planned, detailing the role and solutions for architectural conservation around the world. Singly or together, the books should prove to be a valuable resource to those wishing to learn the subject from the beginning or to supplement an existing knowledge of the field. The comprehensive nature of the book should prove useful for reference purposes as well. Stubbs stands beside the topics he presents here in a refreshingly objective way, more in the manner of an anthropologist or some other social scientist than a deeply involved advocate and stakeholder, as he thoughtfully says, "Conservation for the sake of conservation—a phenomenon of our time."

John Stubbs has witnessed and participated in more conservation projects in more places than probably anyone else. In *Time Honored: A Global View of Architectural Conservation*, Stubbs documents and explains what he has observed on his countless trips around the world and offers the first truly comprehensive review and balanced portrayal of today's field from a professional perspective. The results—often amazing—reassure us that concerted efforts at this kind of cultural heritage protection are a vital and essential aspect of life in the twenty-first century.

BERNARD M. FEILDEN  
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March 2008

# Acknowledgments

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*Time Honored; a Global View of Architectural Conservation* is in large measure based on the writings, teachings, and ideas of others. While I have endeavored to be thorough in giving credit throughout, not all sources—such as the people who created the buildings, places, and conservation schemes referred to herein—could be included. To those named and not, especially the pioneer researchers, thinkers, and those who *acted* to conserve the world's architectural heritage that we may enjoy today, I extend my sincere respect.

My first thanks for assistance in producing this book go to President Bonnie Burnham, the trustees, and my colleagues at the World Monuments Fund in New York for supporting my participation in numerous architectural conservation projects and programs throughout the world since 1990. Without this subvention, this attempt at portraying architectural conservation practice around the world would not have been possible. Of equal importance has been my teacher, mentor, and friend, James Marston Fitch, who put me to the task of writing this book in 1998. I also thank Martica Sawin Fitch, who offered encouragement and help of all kinds along the way.

The Graham Foundation in Chicago provided generous support during the final phase of writing and while choosing illustrations. The Samuel H. Kress Foundation in New York underwrote a research mission to Rome during the initial stages of research. The Bogliasco Foundation in Genoa, Italy, provided a haven for completing the first draft. I also received helpful financial and moral support from Joan K. Davidson through the Furthermore grants for publications program of the J. M. Kaplan Fund in New York.

Sincere appreciation is extended to colleagues and former students at Columbia University's Graduate Program in Architecture, Planning and Historic Preservation, in particular: Tenzing Lobsang Chadotsang, Brian Curran, Dorothy Dinsmoor, Tania Garth, Catherine Gavin, Jennifer Ko, Bruno Maldoner, and Professor George Wheeler. Special thanks go to Emily Gunzburger Makas and Rob Thomson, who helped greatly with research, content development, and shaping the text. Special thanks is also extended to Sharon Delezenski Genin, who helped prepare several drafts, including the final manuscript, and who served as general assistant for much of the project.

I am grateful to the numerous friends, hosts, and colleagues I have met in connection with the projects and programs of the World Monuments Fund who provided assistance, especially Amita Baig, Andrea Baldioli, Norma Barbacci, Nancy Berliner, William J. Chapman, Jonathan Foyle, Ian Morello, Gaetano Palumbo, Michelle Santoro, and Mark Weber. The World Monuments Fund also generously allowed the use of its photographic archives, from which over one-third of the images in this volume are derived. Heritage conservation consultant Arlene Fleming helpfully provided the compendium of conservation charters and declarations that forms one of the book's appendices.

I especially thank Sir Bernard Feilden, Professor Cevat Erder, Brian Fagan, and Lisa Ackerman for suggestions that improved the content of the book, and editor and writer Ann ffolliott, who did much to improve the text at various stages.

*Time Honored: A Global View of Architectural Conservation* is dedicated to my parents, King and Sue Stubbs, and my wife Linda Stubbs, whose support and encouragement above all else made it possible.

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