

Modernism + Recent Past

Why must we save places of the Modernist Movement and the Recent Past?

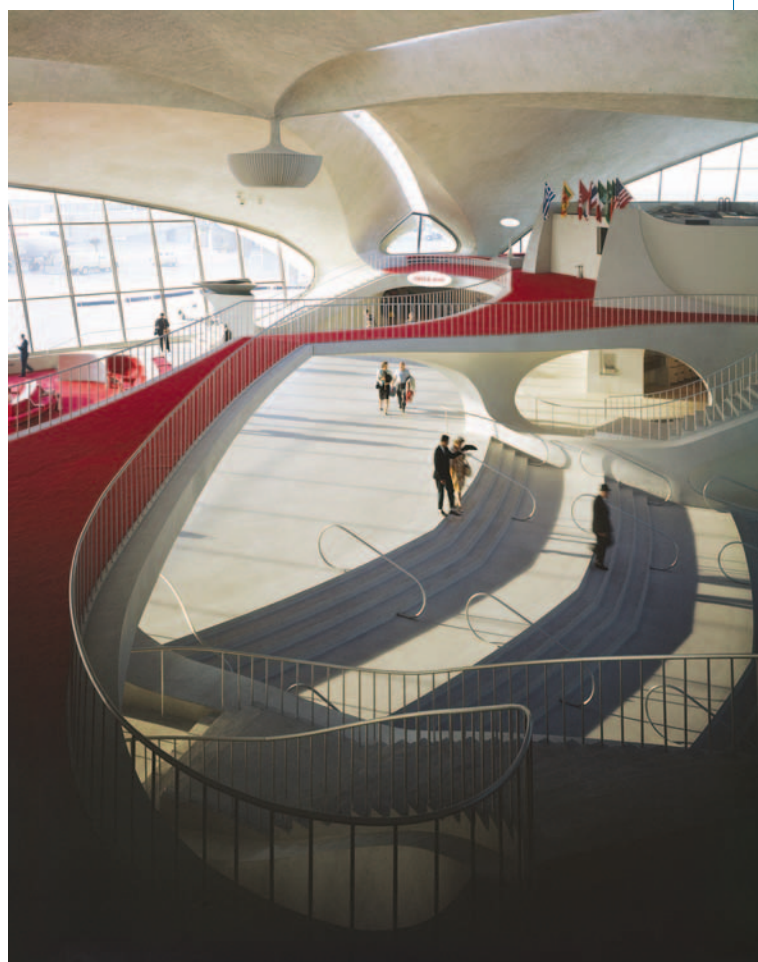
The answer is simple. If we do not preserve the significant places built since the mid-20th century, our nation stands to lose a vital aspect of its architectural and cultural heritage. At a time when many still question the importance of the modernist landscape, the urgent need to save the landmarks of our recent past remains clear. Day after day, the wrecking ball destroys places of the Modernist Movement as well as resources of all types built within the last 50 years, with little consideration of their historic merit, design importance, or role in creating a sustainable future. Although the National Trust for Historic Preservation has long championed their importance and safekeeping, more must be done.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation,

in response to threats of demolition and neglect and to calls for help from the field, vigorously renews its charge to protect our nation's heritage. The **Modernism + Recent Past Initiative** focuses on the significant architecture of the mid-20th century, as well as those places of social, economic, and cultural importance. This four-year initiative will link the National Trust's formidable expertise, technical resources, partnerships, and nationwide networks in an integrated approach.

The National Trust has long recognized the rich contributions of modernism in the architectural lexicon. Our acquisition of the Philip Johnson Glass House in 1986 and the multimillion-dollar purchase of Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House in 2003 testify to our commitment to preserving, protecting, and promoting works of the Modernist Movement. Pulitzer Prize-winning architecture critic Paul Goldberger noted that these two residences, in Connecticut and Illinois, respectively, "are arguably the most important modern houses in America."

The impact and resonance of modernist icons like Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater and Richard Neutra's Kaufmann Desert House are indisputable, but the National Trust will not overlook the many other treasures of Modernism and the Recent Past found along America's roadsides and in our civic and commercial centers. Development pressures, the vagaries of the economy, and aging infrastructure put hundreds of thousands of office buildings, schools, libraries, and airports in jeopardy. Although



Above: Built in 1962, Eero Saarinen's TWA Terminal at the John F. Kennedy Airport in New York. Its extraordinary curves and spacious halls were intended to convey the openness and exhilaration of flight.

the historic significance of these places may not yet be commonly recognized, many clearly contribute to community life and have enduring worth. While all these resources may not merit protection, none should be destroyed without careful review.

After more than a decade of preserving places of Modernism and the Recent Past, the National Trust and its partners have already raised public awareness, initiated a dialogue to reconsider site



National Trust's Western Office will manage and direct related preservation work across the country. This position will lead national policy efforts; provide strategic advocacy; manage statewide and local partnerships; and generate best practices and technical assistance materials.

With the essential support of donors, the National Trust will endow a **Modernism + Recent**

Past Preservation Fund—

a permanent source of funds for deserving places nationwide. Data show that Preservation Fund matching grants serve as powerful stimuli for community investment and action in local preservation projects. Grassroots activity forms the foundation for national preservation, and we must encourage greater efforts to preserve Modernism and Recent Past resources at the community level.

The National Trust and its partners, through the Modernism + Recent Past Initiative, will continue to provide visionary stewardship of this important aspect of America's rich heritage.



management practices, and spurred and supported grassroots advocacy. Today, the National Trust's commitment goes beyond these achievements, challenging the nation to carefully consider the places recently built and demanding attention before more landmarks are lost.

To achieve these goals, the National Trust is creating a new **Center for Modernism** at the Philip Johnson Glass House in New Canaan, Connecticut. Building on the National Trust's record for innovation, it will serve as a scholarly, technical, and advisory center for saving modern environments. Also, a **National Coordinator of the Modernism + Recent Past Initiative** in the

Neutra's Modern Icon Lifted from Decay

Not so long ago, an exceptional modern house in Texas designed by world-famous architect Richard Neutra came dangerously close to ruination.

Then, in 2004, the National Trust put the George Kraigher House on the list of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places. That recognition, along with efforts of the National Trust's Southwest Regional Office, helped to attract the attention and care this residence in Brownsville, Texas, so desperately deserved.

Built in 1937 for airline pilot George Kraigher, the stucco-and-wood home is considered a gem of the Modernist International Style. With its Corbusian roof terrace and wrap-around windows, it stands as one of only a few Neutra homes outside of California. But after Kraigher left Brownsville in the early 1940s, the house remained empty, overlooked for decades and scarred by vandalism and water damage.

The City of Brownsville purchased the house in 1999 but did not have the financial wherewithal for the extensive restoration needed. A federal grant several years later initiated the process. Today, the city leases the property to the University of Brownsville and Texas Southmost College, whose

students work on it as part of their studies. The National Trust's Southwest Regional Office worked long and hard with the city and the educational institutions to find a way to preserve this iconic modern place. Plans call for the Kraigher House to be open to the public in 2008.

Clockwise, starting from upper left: The Philip Johnson Glass House, New Canaan, CT; Lollipop Motel in the Doo Wop Motel District of Wildwood, NJ; the recently restored George Kraigher House, Brownsville, TX.

