2021 MODERNISM PRIZE

WORLD MONUMENTS FUND/KNOLL

AWARDED TO JOHN PUTTICK ASSOCIATES FOR THE CONSERVATION OF PRESTON BUS STATION IN PRESTON, UNITED KINGDOM
The 2021 World Monuments Fund/Knoll Modernism Prize is awarded to John Puttick Associates for the restoration of Preston Bus Station in Preston, UK.

Designed in 1968 by Keith Ingham and Charles Wilson of the Building Design Partnership, with the engineering firm Ove Arup and Partners, the Preston Bus Station is one of the most impressive expressive engineering achievements of a heroic moment in British modernist architecture. Drawing on the then current “Brutalist” ethos, which was at once a reaction to modernism of the 1920s and 30s and a continuation of the fundamental commitment to an architecture expressive of modernist technique and life, Preston Bus Station is one of the great under sung achievements of that movement. Its assertion of a sculptural expression for reinforced concrete, while creating richness for a fundamental public space, provide an efficient functional facility all the while elevating a quotidian aspect of community life. When the building opened in October 1969, it was Europe’s largest bus station. Now with over 10,000 departures every week, Preston Bus Station is an extremely busy public building and one of the centers of life in the city.

However, by the 1990s the station suffered from neglect and inappropriate alterations. The building also suffered from considerable structural damage over time—most dramatically when a section of the facade collapsed during high winds. Advertising, signage, retailers and artificial lighting had also all contributed to a dreary, disconnected experience for passengers, who often felt unsafe in the space.

The firm’s approach reorients the building by prioritizing pedestrians over vehicles. The complex’s respectful restoration exemplifies not only an appreciation of the modernist commitment to creating dignified monuments for basic civic functions, but the twenty-first century’s need to adopt sustainable rehabilitation of inherited structures. It is at once an achievement for Lancashire and an exemplar for other cities.

Preston Bus Station is the largest project honored by the World Monuments Fund/Knoll Prize and the first at the scale of regional infrastructure. The prize jury valued the detailed and extensive efforts of this project to preserve the full spectrum of historic significance of the station: from its original materials and aesthetic to the building’s essential role as a civic center of transit and urban connectivity. The restoration of Preston Bus Station has enhanced both the social and public benefit of the station, and we are thrilled to recognize the outstanding achievements of John Puttick Associates.

Barry Bergdoll,
Jury Chairman
Knoll's commitment to modern design as a means to connect people to their work, their lives, and their world is stronger than ever. We are especially proud of our continuous support of the World Monuments Fund’s Modernism at Risk Initiative, and we congratulate John Puttick Associates for their thoughtful and detailed conservation of the modernist Preston Bus Station. The World Monuments Fund/Knoll Modernism Prize reflects Knoll's dedication to modern, sustainable design, and to workplace and residential furnishings that inspire, evolve, and endure. While many modern sites are being demolished, neglected, or abandoned, the sensitivity with which the restoration team at John Puttick Associates approached sustainable and community-centered approaches to this project can serve as a model for the role that architects and designers can play in the preservation of our architectural legacy. I would like to thank all those who submitted nominations for the 2021 prize and salute everyone associated with Preston Bus Station for their exemplary work.

Alana Stevens
President, Knoll

More than a decade ago, WMF launched the biennial World Monuments Fund/Knoll Modernism Prize, with founding sponsor Knoll, to raise awareness about the urgent threats to modern architecture. Since its inception, the prize has sought to recognize and support the individuals and organizations that preserve this period's built heritage. Previously honored projects include the Vyborg Library in Leningrad, Russia; Hizuchi Elementary School in Yawatahama City, Japan; and the Karl Marx School in the Paris suburb of Villejuif.

This year's award focuses on sustainable and community-centered approaches to rehabilitating modern buildings. By doing so, we celebrate the power of preservation as a positive force in society. The restoration of Preston Bus Station has enhanced both the social and public benefit of the station, which counts over 10,000 bus departures every week and contributes to minimizing the significant carbon footprint of commuting. We are thrilled to recognize the outstanding achievements of John Puttick Associates with this year’s prize.

Bénédicte de Montlaur
President and CEO, WMF
THE WINNING TEAM

John Puttick Associates

John Puttick Associates was founded in 2014. The following year the practice was appointed to refurbish the iconic Grade-II Listed Preston Bus Station through a competition-winning design. The Brutalist landmark re-opened to the public in 2018 with the wider masterplan completed in 2019. It was selected by both the BBC and The Observer as one of the architectural highlights of the year. The project has also won National and Regional RIBA awards.

The success of the Bus Station has led to work on a number of other civic and community buildings, including a museum remodelling in Hertfordshire, the refurbishment and extension of a Grade II* Listed Charles Barry-designed church in Brighton, and a series of new build youth centres across the UK for a charity specialising in providing young people with inspiring places to gather. The first of these opened in South London in 2019.

In addition to working on projects in the UK, John Puttick Associates has designed buildings overseas. The firm’s first completed project was a gallery for emerging artists in Beijing and they have since designed a series of residential and interiors projects in the United States.

As well as RIBA awards, the firm’s work has won awards from the Royal Town Planning Institute and the Institute for Historic Building Conservation. John Puttick Associates is a RIBA Chartered Practice.

THE JURY

BARRY BERGDOLL, CHAIRMAN
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KAREN STEIN
Critic, Architectural Advisor, and Executive Director of the George Nelson Foundation

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Nancy and George Rupp Professor at Columbia University GSAPP and a professor in the African American and African Diasporic Studies Department

SUSAN MACDONALD
Head, Buildings and Sites The Getty Conservation Institute

THEO PRUDON
President, Docomomo US and Adjunct Professor of Historic Preservation, Columbia University and Pratt Institute
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SITE

Preston Bus Station is a site of significance due to its architectural interest. The building represents an important moment in the development of Modernist architecture in Britain and established a public space that is enjoyed by its community. Designed by the newly formed BDP and opened in 1969, the Bus Station is a fine example of Brutalist architecture and transport planning of the period.

The Bus Station represents the forward-looking thinking of the 1960s. The original design intended to bring some of the glamour of air travel to a Bus Station. The original brief was to provide a single bus station to replace the four separate buildings operating in Preston in the early 1960’s. Additional elements were added including a car park for 1,100 vehicles. The building opened in October 1969 and was, at that time, Europe’s largest bus station. The station plays an important role in the lives of those who use it, with the generosity of spaces creating an important destination that is used by many different sectors of the community.

Central to the value of the Bus Station to Preston’s cityscape is its striking monumental presence when viewed across the western apron. Gently curving concrete parapets give a powerful horizontal image to the building. Around the main Bus Station there are a number of related structures including the taxi rank to the south and the curving car park ramps. These structures have their own massing and tectonic characteristics that relate to the main building.
The building used a number of construction techniques which were innovative for their time. The contractor created a site factory for casting concrete, made feasible due to the amount of open land on the site of the future bus parking. Glass Reinforced Polyester (GRP) was used as a material for the molds as its versatility and flexibility was able to cope with the compound curves of the shapes required and provided a smooth surface finish. Using this technique approximately 2,800 concrete elements were cast in just under 12 months.
Despite the threat of demolition hanging over the Preston Bus Station for many years, community interest and sustained advocacy eventually triumphed, reaffirming this monumental civic building to its place of pride at the core of the Lancashire town of Preston.

Susan Macdonald, Jury member

THREATS TO CONTINUED VIABILITY OF THE SITE BEFORE PRESERVATION

Prior to the decision to hold an international competition to choose an architect to refurbish Preston Bus Station, there had been a 15-year campaign to prevent the building from being demolished. The building was threatened with demolition on a number of occasions, beginning with the 'Tithebarn Street Regeneration Scheme'. A number of actors— including local people and organisations such as the Twentieth Century Society— took part in the campaign to have the building 'Listed' (UK designation for a protected building of special interest). This included English Heritage recommending the building for Listing on a number of occasions but being refused by government ministers.

In 2011 the regeneration project for the site collapsed due to unfavourable economic conditions and the withdrawal of the anchor retail tenant. Attention was also drawn to the building by the announcement of its inclusion on the 2012 World Monuments Watch. In December 2012 a new application was made which finally achieved the Listing of the building in 2013, removing the threat of demolition.

A design competition was held in 2015 by Lancashire County Council to select an architect for the site, leading to the appointment of John Puttick Associates. At the time, while the building remained operational it had been neglected and was in a poor state of repair. At an urban level the use of below-ground subways to access the building had failed and the site was surrounded by fencing that attempted to separate the public from moving buses.
The building’s facade had suffered considerable damage over time. The aluminium brackets had degraded leading to failure in some cases—most dramatically when a section of the facade collapsed in high winds in late-2015. Little of the glazing was safety-glass, causing a danger to the public. The sliding doors which made up the lower section of the facade were too heavy to use, leading them to being either permanently open or closed—again presenting a hazard in failing to separate pedestrians from manoeuvring buses. Visually, many of the original materials and colours had been over-painted and much or the original signage had deteriorated.

Internally, a number of additions cluttered the spaces and lighting, signage and advertising had accumulated in piecemeal fashion detracting from the original design. The colour of the upper part of the central spine had been changed, and the recent artificial lighting scheme created both unwonted surface fixtures and a dreary atmosphere—leading the building to feel unsafe in the evening. In some locations freestanding retail units had been added, interrupting areas which would otherwise have more generous space and views between the east and west concourse. Minor items also contributed towards the sense of clutter. Netting had been installed to prevent birds from landing; original signage had been lost or clumsily adapted; roller shutters and wiring had been installed in an ad-hoc manner. New seating had been installed on the west concourse out of keeping with the original design and the WCs entirely renovated with no trace of the original interiors remaining.
SPECIFIC INTERVENTIONS

As well as being an important example of Brutalist architecture, Preston Bus Station is the UK’s largest building of its kind and the second biggest bus station in Europe. With over 10,000 bus departures every week, it is an extremely busy public building and one of the centres of life in the city. The key challenges of the project were how to connect the building to the city centre and reorganise it to be suitable to the demands of a 21st Century transport hub while restoring and celebrating its original architecture.

Previously isolated from the city centre by a sea of bus parking, our refurbishment reorients the building by prioritising pedestrians over vehicles. Bus arrivals are now consolidated to the east and a major new public square has been created to the west connected to the city centre. Members of the public can now approach the building safely at ground level and spend time in the new public space before embarking on their journey. The square also improves the setting of the building, allowing uninterrupted long-views of the impressive western facade.

Internally, we have rearranged the building so that generous new waiting areas face the square. New benches have been made by re-using the original Iroko barriers to provide places for people to sit. While the majority of the original fabric of the building has been retained, later interventions have been removed and the below-ground subways filled in to better connect the two sides of the building. The eastern side continues to house the bus gates and beyond restoration work and adjustments to improve fire escape it largely remains as the original 1960s design. An information hall has been established to provide a place for orientation and a 24-hour dedicated coach station created with its own support facilities.
The double-height concourse facade—which was previously failing—has been replaced with glazing and mullions matching the original profile. Care has been taken to match the original detailing and colours whilst addressing the technical issues that led to decay. The original three-dimensional signage scheme has been reinstated but now reflects the new organisation of the building. Inside, the facade is animated by a back-lit band and signage guiding visitors to their destination, restoring the original design. A package of concrete repairs has been carried out throughout the building.

Reinstating the powerful 1960s design, we pared down the interior and restored the original materials. The original black rubber flooring has been restored and the ‘spine’ of accommodation that runs through the middle of the building bought back to its original colours. A new lighting scheme has been introduced that carries out the original intent to predominantly use light reflecting off the concrete soffit, improving the feeling of safety. New interventions—such as the reception—have been carefully detailed to complement the original architecture while being clearly of the present. The project’s focus has been to rejuvenate this significant public building as a 21st Century transport hub for the benefit of the community.
Interior waiting area, after restoration.
Interior bus gates, after restoration.
Large-scale transport infrastructure can be challenging to conserve in ways that meet contemporary demands whilst retaining their material character and quality—this project achieves both.

Susan Macdonald,
Jury member
About World Monuments Fund

World Monuments Fund (WMF) is the leading independent organization devoted to safeguarding the world's most treasured places to enrich people's lives and build mutual understanding across cultures and communities. The organization is headquartered in New York City with offices and affiliates in Cambodia, India, Peru, Portugal, Spain, and the UK. Since 1965, our global team of experts has preserved the world's diverse cultural heritage using the highest international standards at more than 700 sites in 112 countries. Partnering with local communities, funders, and governments, WMF draws on heritage to address some of today's most pressing challenges: climate change, underrepresentation, imbalanced tourism, and post-crisis recovery. With a commitment to the people who bring places to life, WMF embraces the potential of the past to create a more resilient and inclusive society.

About Knoll

Knoll is a globally recognized leader in modern design and the founding sponsor of the World Monuments Fund Modernism at Risk program. The company's constellation of design-driven people creates high-performance workplaces, work from home settings and luxury residential interiors. A recipient of the National Design Award for Corporate and Institutional Achievement from the Smithsonian’s Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Knoll is aligned with the U.S. Green Building Council and the Canadian Green Building Council and can help organizations achieve the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) workplace certification. Knoll also helps clients comply with the International Living Future Institute to achieve Living Building Challenge Certification, and with the International WELL Building Institute to attain WELL Building Certification.

About MillerKnoll

MillerKnoll is a collective of dynamic brands that comes together to design the world we live in. MillerKnoll includes Herman Miller and Knoll, plus Colebrook Bosson Saunders, DatesWeiser, Design Within Reach, Edelman Leather, Fully, Geiger, HAY, Holly Hunt, Maars Living Walls, Maharam, Muuto, naughtone, and Spinneybeck|FilzFelt. MillerKnoll is an unparalleled platform that redefines modern for the 21st century by building a more sustainable, equitable, and beautiful future for everyone.