

What a Difference a Decade has Made

The cause of preserving the world's great monuments has several components, all of which the World Monuments Fund addresses. Primary energy must be given to actual physical preservation of edifices that are becoming decrepit. They must be made structurally strong; and they must be made legible. But WMF cannot work on all the monuments in the world. Part of our mission is to educate people about preservation and awaken popular interest in making the grandest artifacts of the past permanent. The project of raising consciousness is served by our educational programs, by this magazine, and most of all by the World Monuments Watch list. The sites that appear on the list tend to get a great deal of attention in their own countries, to be newly and well appraised by the people who live in proximity to them. Governments lend their support to the conservation of monuments to which they had paid little attention. Things that might have been knocked down are saved from the wrecking ball. The Watch list is a call to arms, and over the last ten years, it has proved an exceptionally effective one. Seventy-five percent of the more than 400 sites that have been on the Watch list are on their way to being out of danger, with more than \$160 million spent to ensure their salvage.

The word "watch" is not a matter of happenstance. The Watch list focuses on the efforts of a vast body of observers, people from within and outside the conservation community. They keep their eyes peeled, vigilant at signs of rot or abrasion in the world's most beautiful and important sites and structures. The Watch list is about seeing what is happening in such places before it is too late, about analyzing the dangers that afflict any particular location, about recognizing what makes something great and what makes it fragile. We need the eyes of thousands of educated witnesses to the process of decay; the fine quality of their attention ensures that such decay is arrested or reversed. The Watch list has created a forum to organize and prioritize the world's multitude of worthy sites and projects, seen by a galaxy of bystanders.

It is the nature of man-made structures to crumble, so as some sites come out of danger, others settle into it. Preservation is not a finite project; it is a permanent commitment to keeping for the future the legacy of the past. The Watch List is effective at drawing attention to the individual structures it lists. Moreover, it wakes in a broad swath of people an interest in the idea of conservation. Nominations to the list pour in, put together by those with personal and professional commitments to sites around the globe. In communities that have not traditionally been preoccupied with preservation, people fix up a particular temple; they are likely to look at the next sacred site they stumble on with new eyes, and to endorse further conservation efforts. Almost three hundred sites have been helped as a direct consequence of being on the Watch list, but there are without doubt hundreds more that are the indirect beneficiaries of the heightened awareness of conservation that the very existence of the Watch list brings. These direct projects will find echoes wherever great buildings are frail. ■

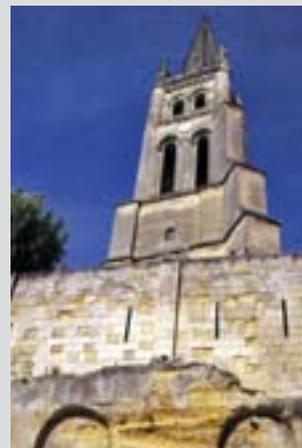
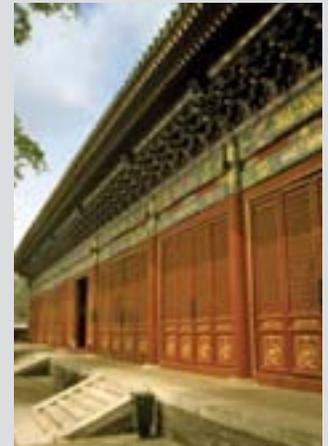


ADVOCACY

Controversy over the proposed demolition of Brussels' transportation hub, Tour and Taxis, erupted with the 1996 Watch listing. The proposal to destroy this rich district of nineteenth-century cast-iron architecture was described by experts as "the scandal of Europe." The complex has since been saved, finding new life as a cultural and recreational hub for the city.

LEVERAGE

The fifteenth-century Temple of Agriculture in Beijing, used by Chinese emperors for springtime rites in honor of the "father of agriculture," had long since lost its original function by the time of its first Watch listing in 1996. WMF funding for the restoration of Jufu Hall (pictured), leveraged substantial support from the Chinese government. Today, the complex is being fully restored as a tourism destination with two museums.



TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

The rock-hewn church of St. Emilion in France was filled with a forest of concrete pillars to prevent its collapse when it was Watch listed in 1996. WMF supported a technical study to address structural issues. Church piers were later reinforced with tensile bands to increase their strength. Funds from state and local governments have sponsored the restoration of the former hermitage, which is now open to the public.



RECOGNITION

Shortly after the National Schools of Art in Havana were Watch listed in 2000, the Cuban government vowed to restore the buildings—a process now underway and led by the original team of architects who designed the schools. While the U.S. embargo on economic support to Cuba has prevented WMF from providing funds for the project, recognition resulting from Watch listing was enough to start the process.