



Portal TO THE Past

Restoring Argentina's seventeenth-century Misión de San Ignacio Mini

Embraced by the dense Argentine rainforest near the Paraguay border, the remains of the seventeenth-century Misión San Ignacio Mini bear silent witness to Jesuit efforts to indoctrinate the region's indigenous Guaraní, as well as manage Spanish economic interests in South America. Abandoned in the wake of the Guaranítica War of the 1750s and the subsequent expulsion of the Jesuits from Spanish lands in 1767, many of the 30 missions built at the junction of what are now Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil, were destroyed. Others were harvested for building materials or left to decay. San Ignacio Mini is one of perhaps a dozen to have survived to the present day, albeit as a sublime ruin. Vestiges of its baroque grandeur, however, are evident in its magnificent east portal, which has only recently been restored.



The missions, which exhibit a unique blend of Spanish architectural forms and indigenous symbolism, served as a catalyst in the preservation of Guaraní culture and language, which was recorded in an extensive series of documents printed on mission presses.

Since its inclusion on WMF's 1996 list of 100 *Most Endangered Sites*, San Ignacio Mini—along with the sites of São Nicolau in Brazil and La Santísima Trinidad de Parana in Paraguay—has served as a proving ground for the development of a comprehensive conservation, management, and sustainable development program for all of the surviving missions, seven of which have been inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

RESTORATION OF THE PORTAL

A full restoration was carried out on the East Gate of what remained of the Church of San Ignacio Miní.



STONE MASONRY

Mortar joints in the masonry had deteriorated as a result of water infiltration.



DECORATIVE LINTEL

Extraordinary carvings on the lintel had been obscured by biological growth.



JAMB

The masonry of the door jamb had deteriorated over the centuries while wooden beams had begun to sag.

LINTEL

The four wooden beams, installed in the 1940s to support the decorative lintel, had deteriorated to the point of collapse.

THE RESTORATION

1. During the restoration, the ornamental stone lintel was left in place, temporarily supported, while wooden beams were replaced.

2. Prior to disassembly, each stone in the upper section of the wall was cataloged.

3. Beams were replaced with new ones hewn of the same type of wood as the originals. Metal flashing was inserted to protect the beams from water infiltration.

4. The portal was reconstructed with each stone having been cleaned and conserved, and returned to its original location.

