



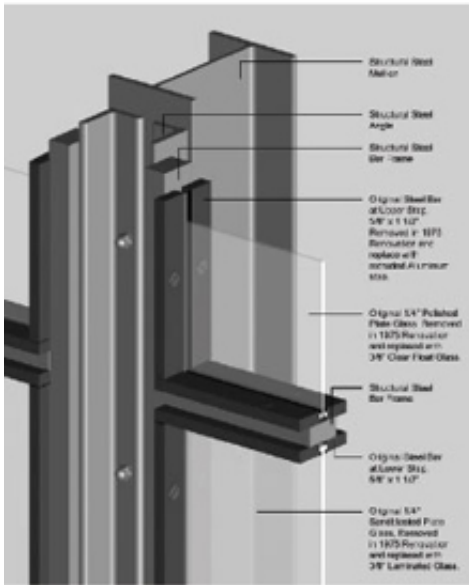
The Technical Challenges of Preserving Modern Buildings

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The very qualities that make the best Modern buildings and landscapes worth preserving are also those that make the process challenging and the outcome sometimes less than satisfactory. Tremendous transparency, a minimalist approach to detailing, experimental technologies, and program-driven design define some of the best modern architecture, but these concepts are often the ones most affected by changing

use, concerns about security and access, new technologies, code requirements, and social patterns. While the Modern period includes a very diverse body of work by those practicing in many regions and over a long span of time, an understanding of these identifiable themes must be integrated into the restoration, rehabilitation, or adaptive reuse of almost any Modern building. A closer look at the fate of two significant and innovative buildings from the mid-1950s highlights these specific challenges and illustrates varying approaches by architects and owners in dealing with the legacy of important Modern buildings.

Blurring the boundaries between inside and outside through transparency, the use of extensive glazing, and carrying similar materials and details from the inside to the outside were seen by architects such as Mies van der Rohe and Paul Rudolph as ways to design for a modern lifestyle that embraced informality, a greater connection to the outdoors, and a more democratic approach to institutional buildings. Solid and imposing masonry edifices no longer conveyed the appropriate message for civic buildings, which instead were designed to be open and transparent. Maintaining this transparency and openness in a society obsessed with security and worried about energy costs is not easily solved without a real commitment to a preservation ethic and an appreciation for the design intent.



Crown Hall

Mies van der Rohe's Crown Hall in Chicago, completed in 1956 to serve as the IIT School of Architecture, is one of the iconic buildings of the Modern Movement. A large, long-span, glazed pavilion hovering over the ground plane, its structural elements are its main defining features. Over the years, its appearance and condition have suffered due to poor maintenance, as well as Mies's use of many experimental technologies—he pushed the envelope of tolerances in order to achieve the greatest effect from the fewest, smallest, and thinnest members. When IIT, with preservation architects Gunny Harboe and architects Krueck and Sexton, undertook a comprehensive restoration of the building in 2005, the rehabilitation of many architectural elements, which in any other building would

great deal of creative thinking.

Unfortunately, the School Board has chosen to reject the Rudolph design and has not even attempted to solve these problems, many of which are of their own making. A more creative and sensitive approach would be to search for creative solutions to address each of the technical and program issues and figure out a way to rehabilitate the school and also restore the elements, which worked well in its original configuration, while designing new elements to solve the current programmatic problems.

The Challenge of the Integrated Whole

One of the most difficult aspects of rehabilitating a Modern building is that often the architect's original concept is a highly detailed composition that serves a very specific purpose. Each element contributes to the aesthetic whole and functions together. But as building programs and technologies change, adapting parts of this total unity can greatly affect the character of the design. Either the new program needs to compromise in order to accept the over-arching significance of the original design concept, or some change that may obscure or modify the original design intent is inevitable. Being respectful of the innovative and experimental quality of the original design will typically lead to the best and most creative solution.

The restoration of Crown Hall and the decision to demolish the Riverview School are opposite approaches to addressing the technical difficulties of preserving significant Modern buildings. At Crown Hall, IIT took an almost museum-like approach to the restoration, understanding that each individual element contributed to the complete design, and that no item was too small to warrant careful study and understanding of Mies's original thinking. At the Riverview School, the School Board decided that it would be easier to start from scratch with what will likely be a conventional and unmemorable replacement building than to try creatively to address the programmatic and technical challenges of rehabilitating a significant Modern building and updating it for today's needs.