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# BOOK REVIEWS

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Donald W. Insall. *Living Buildings: Architectural Conservation: Philosophy, Principles and Practice*. Mulgrave, Australia: The Images Publishing Group, 2008; 272 pp., 500 color photographs and 120 drawings, clothbound. ISBN: 978-186470-192-0. \$75.00.

Donald Insall's *Living Buildings: Architectural Conservation: Philosophy, Principles and Practice* is 272 pages long and lavishly illustrated with more than 500 color photographs and 120 plans, sections, and exploded isometric drawings, including many Royal Academy prize-winning renditions by the late Ailwyn Best. *Living Buildings* is full of interesting historical insights into the development of English conservation practice over the last 50 years and contains useful didactic material explained in a matter-of-fact style. However, at its heart, this inch-thick, 8"-by-11" volume is more a record of Insall's amazing legacy of work celebrating his firm's fiftieth anniversary.

Insall is an eminent British architect-planner who established an architectural firm specializing in historic preservation in 1958. His firm, Donald Insall Associates, has grown from a two-man practice in a London attic to a distinguished, 40-plus employee architectural firm with seven offices in the United Kingdom and a portfolio of work from around the world. A Founder-Commissioner of English Heritage, Insall was appointed Commander of the British Empire by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in 1995 for his services to building conservation after his work on the fire-damaged Windsor castle. Insall is well known to APT members, as he was the College of Fellows Lecturer in 1999 and received the Harley J. McKee Award that year. His earlier book, *The Care of Old Buildings Today: A Practical Guide*, was

reviewed in the *APT Bulletin*, vol. 5, no. 2, in 1973.

*Living Buildings* is based on the premise that the historic environment changes with time and that it is the conservation architect's role to help owners manage change in a benign and cost-effective way. After a general introduction, the book divides into four parts dealing with teamwork, why buildings are alive, the organization of projects, and Insall's "ten degrees of intervention" (day-to-day care, programmed maintenance, conservation, major repairs, radical improvement, restoration and rebuilding, rehabilitation, re-incorporation of existing buildings, new buildings in context, and conservation in a changing historic area).

The first chapter extols the virtues of teamwork in architectural practice, and Insall sees the role of the architect as a "broker" who must understand the needs of both the building and the owner. One can see how he has made convincing cases for his recommendations through the forcefulness and clarity of his conceptual sketches and other graphic tools to explain technical issues to lay committees and clients.

The "Organizing the Project" chapter is thorough, and the section on the methodology for analysis and reporting is particularly useful. The longest chapter in *Living Buildings* contains case studies of projects from Insall's 50 years of practice. His ten degrees of intervention have no formal relationship to UK practice, though British practitioners would recognize all the concepts expounded, including several from the Venice Charter. The ten degrees have more similarities to the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards than the English Heritage Conservation Principles (2008). APT members may be confused, however,

by this sentence on page 11: "it became our personal mission to press for 'conservation' rather than 'preservation' as a driving principle in environmental care. For we saw the latter as negative, obstructing all change, while the former encapsulates life." Here, "preservation" means preserve-as-found without any change or adaptation (often a Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings prerequisite), whereas "conservation" means a more generic approach.

Insall's commentary on how historic preservation has changed during his working lifetime in the "Trends and Issues" section is surprisingly understated given his 50 years of practice. Considering how many illustrations are included from other parts of the world (confusingly not all are Insall and Associates projects), an appreciation of international trends could have been more thorough and forceful. Also, given the current international focus on preservation and sustainability, *Living Buildings* does not discuss this important topic and instead pays lip service by reference to a completely new building in Cambridge that employs the technology.

Although *Living Buildings* is not intended to serve as a textbook, there are many lessons for good practice and preservation contained within the lavishly illustrated pages. *Living Buildings* is a glorious celebration of the vision and achievements of a senior British practitioner in the field and that of his associates, and it makes for fascinating reading for anyone interested in the subject.

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