

Restoration Authenticity or Reality - A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The Venice Charter of 1964 [1] has provided the guiding principles for the conservation and restoration of ancient monuments. However, many interpret these principles as applying to historic structures in general, and not just monuments.

The articles in the Restoration section of the Charter have several interesting statements (underlines are for emphasis) that are open to interpretation. In many cases, these statements cause a conflict of priorities, especially with funding being the overriding issue. In addition, local and national heritage agencies sometimes take a more liberal approach to restoration, particularly regarding authenticity.

The statements under discussion are:

“ARTICLE 9. The process of restoration is a highly specialized operation. Its aim is to preserve and reveal the aesthetic and historic value of the monument and is based on respect for original material and authentic documents. It must stop at the point where conjecture begins, and in this case moreover any extra work which is indispensable must be distinct from the architectural composition and must bear a contemporary stamp.”

“ARTICLE 10. Where traditional techniques prove inadequate, the consolidation of a monument can be achieved by the use of any modern technique for conservation and construction, the efficacy of which has been shown by scientific data and proved by experience.”

“ARTICLE 12. Replacements of missing parts must integrate harmoniously with the whole, but at the same time must be distinguishable from the original so that restoration does not falsify the artistic or historic evidence.”

Each of these statements affects the authenticity of the restoration. But, maintaining authenticity of the restoration has to be balanced with the reality of maintaining our heritage buildings on limited resources. Can it be done?

This paper discusses these challenges in the context of the 1996 restoration of a three-story, 19th century brownstone. The paper will include the conflicts with recommendations for an authentic restoration in accordance with the Charter principles. The work was performed on a limited budget and attempted to address the owner’s desire for an aesthetic solution. Finally, an assessment of the restoration after 23 years will be included.

REFERENCES

- [1] The International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (Venice Charter), Association for Preservation Technology International Bulletin: The Journal of Preservation Technology, Vol. 37, No. 4, p. 51, (2006).