

## Olfaction and Preservation (Future Anterior)

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Olfaction and Preservation

Special issue co-edited by Adam Jasper and Jorge Otero-Pailos

Future Anterior invites essays that explore the relationship between olfaction and preservation from historical, theoretical and critical perspectives. We seek scholarly papers that take stock of the recent surge of interdisciplinary research on olfaction and speculate on its relevance and impact on the practice of preservation.

Whether deodorized or artificially scented, the olfactory signature of historic buildings is rarely haphazard. Yet the conscious practice of altering smells in order to influence how visitors experience heritage is rarely subjected to serious scholarly scrutiny. In part this might be due to the fact that most preservationists lack training in olfaction. This deficiency is arguably cultural and as old as preservation itself. In 1857 the English polymath George William Septimus Piesse wrote: "Of the five senses, that of smelling is the least valued, and, as a consequence, is the least tutored; but we must not conclude from this, our own act that it is of insignificant importance to our welfare and happiness." Piesse was writing during a period in which miasmatic theories of disease transmission held sway. He believed training the nose was useful for detecting disease-carrying airs. Whereas the 18th and 19th centuries had a horror of the effects of the stagnation of air, in contemporary hygiene aesthetics, the sterile separation of spaces via glass and ceramic tiles is privileged.

- To what extent can historical case studies of public beliefs (justified or not) regarding odor, hygiene and disease inform an understanding of interior space, and its concomitant implications for architectural preservation?
- Today, we think of the uses of olfaction more in terms of enhancing memory and recollection, as advances in neuroscience have taught us that the region of the brain that processes smell is the limbic system, which is directly linked to the hippocampus and the amygdala, where emotions are registered and memories stored. The powerful connection between smell, memory, and emotions encouraged preservationists to experiment with scenting historic sites in the 1980s. A pioneering example is the Jorvik Viking Center in York, England, designed by John Sunderland, who conceptualized smell as a central element of what he called "time warp experiences."
- Papers may examine the history, successes and failures of olfactory design in preservation projects. To what degree did the introduction of manufactured smells as part of historic buildings reinforce or challenge previous conceptions of preservation? For example, how could the focus on smell inflect debates about the authenticity of historic buildings?

- Papers might also consider whether the construction of smells can be thought of as part of the history of building technology, and the modern pursuit of the well tempered and attractively scented environment. Whether deceitful or not, the reality is that we are in the midst of an explosion in the use of unique fragrances in branded spaces, such as luxury hotels or retail spaces. How can we square off the experimental preservation uses of smell with the wider contemporary trend to scent commercial environments?

- Papers can examine why historically smell has been so easily employed or construed as a deceitful lure. If the low evidentiary value attributed to smell is due to the difficulty in objectifying or documenting it, this status should change. It is now possible to document the smells of contemporary buildings and to archive them along with more traditional records such as photographs and architectural drawings. A transformative moment in the history of smell technology was Roman Kaiser's invention of Headspace in the 1970s, which automated the field documentation of smells, and made it possible to artificially emulate practically any smell.

- What standards should this emerging documentary practice follow? What schemata are available for the categorization of historic smells? The language of smell is here a central concern. The description of smells proceeds entirely via euphemism. As Kant wrote in *Reflexionen zur Anthropologie*, "all the senses have their own descriptive vocabularies, e.g. for sight, there is red, green, and yellow, and for taste there is sweet and sour, etc. But the sense of smell can have no descriptive vocabulary of its own. Rather, we borrow our adjectives from the other senses, so that it smells sour, or has a smell like roses or cloves or musk. They are all, however, terms drawn from other senses. Consequently, we cannot describe our sense of smell." Would it be appropriate to categorize the smell of historic buildings according to their visual styles (eg. Gothic, Baroque, Neo-classical, Art Deco, Modernist, etc)?

- Within flavors and fragrance companies, "fragrance wheels"—in which families of smells are arranged in an analog of the spectrum of visible colors—are often used as mnemonic and communicative devices. Other schemes array scents on musical scales, or in n-dimensional space. We also have taxonomies of scents from Carl Linnaeus (1756), Zwaardemaker (1895), Crocker and Henderson (1927), and Jellinek (1951), amongst many others. The enormous variety of such representations, which may be indispensable in the effective communication of olfactory experience, attests to their current insufficiency. What developments are to be expected on this front? Can the conventional language of smell be satisfactorily formalized for professional preservation use?

- In recent years, studies of the smells of decomposing materials point to a promising new form of non-destructive testing for historic architecture, and a new science of "material degradomics." Exemplary applications include the "Heritage Smells!" project led by Lorraine T. Gibson, which analyzes the gases emitted by heritage objects to establish their state of decay. The ambitious project involves scientists and conservators from the British Museum, the University of Strathclyde, University College London, the National Records of Scotland, English Heritage and the British Library. What are the current limits to, and the necessary preconditions for the technological study of olfaction for architectural preservation? What new possibilities are offered by corpus analysis, data mining and other research techniques in the digital humanities in determining historical perceptions and theories of smell? How can these techniques best be disseminated, applied and critiqued?

- Papers might examine the long history that precedes the current interest in measuring decomposition through smell. One interesting precedent is the Henning Odor Prism, or Henning Olfactory Prism (1915–1916). While scents may have much in common, according to the Henning prism

they differentiate themselves from each other in their odor profile during decomposition. The Henning Prism therefore suggests the possibility of charting “smell trajectories,” that is, the characteristic changes in smell as a perfume’s volatile top note lifts to reveal its middle and base note, as a fruit ripens, or as an organic product undergoes metabolic decomposition. What are the prospects for developing an understanding of how the smell of a building will naturally change over time?

- We also welcome papers that examine the relationship between olfaction and urban preservation. From the characteristic odors of the Renaissance city, through the great stench of London and Paris in the nineteenth century, to the rise in synthetic deodorants in the twentieth, the smell of the historical city undergoes change. As Rudolph el-Khoury writes in *Polish and Deodorize*, “Urban historians have indeed spoken of a Copernican revolution in the Enlightenment’s conception of a city. Beauty, once the governing principle of urbanism, is claimed to have been overthrown by health, hygiene and physiology”. In particular, the public fear of disease engendering miasmas, and more specifically the telluric emanations of interior walls, had a significant impact on both urban planning (Haussmann’s sewers) and interior architecture (in particular wallpaper) in 18th century France. To what extent is the sense of smell, our tolerance of certain odors, its thresholds and affective categories, also historically determined?

Future Anterior invites papers from scholars in preservation and its allied fields (architectural history, art history, anthropology, archeology, geography, chemistry, engineering, political science, juridical studies, urban studies, and planning) that explore these and related questions from a variety of disciplinary perspectives.

Future Anterior is a peer-reviewed journal that approaches the field of historic preservation from a position of critical inquiry. A comparatively recent field of professional study, preservation often escapes direct academic challenges of its motives, goals, forms of practice and results. Future Anterior invites contributions that ask these difficult questions from philosophical, theoretical, and practical perspectives.

Articles submitted for peer review should be no more than 4000 words, with up to seven illustrations. Text must be formatted in accordance with the Chicago Manual of Style, 15th Edition. All articles must be submitted in English, and spelling should follow American convention. All submissions must be submitted electronically. Text should be saved as Microsoft Word or RTF format, while accompanying images should be sent as TIFF files with a resolution of at least 300 dpi at 8” by 9” print size. Figures should be numbered and called out clearly between paragraphs in the text. Image captions and credits must be included with submissions. It is the responsibility of the author to secure permissions for image use and pay any reproduction fees. A brief author biography (around 100 words) must accompany the text.

For further manuscript guidelines, please visit:

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Acceptance or rejection of submissions is at the discretion of the editors.

Please do not send original materials, as submissions will not be returned.

Please email all submissions to:

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