



## SAVE AS Podcast Series

Featuring the work of the USC Master of Heritage Conservation program

**Episode 1:** A Glimpse into the Future

**Date Published:** October 29, 2020

*Racial violence. Urban resilience. Acoustic heritage. Heritage conservation students at the University of Southern California are tackling some of the most important and innovative issues in the field, and we're bringing their groundbreaking work to you. In this inaugural episode of Save As, the dynamic duo of Trudi Sandmeier and Cindy Olnick discuss how the podcast came about and what you can look forward to over the coming months. You'll get a glimpse of a glimpse of the future of heritage conservation--new ways of thinking about what we save, why we save it, and for whom.*

### TRANSCRIPT

**Trudi Sandmeier [00:09]:** Welcome! This is Save As, a podcast that glimpses the future of Heritage Conservation through the work of graduate students at the University of Southern California. I'm Trudi Sandmeier, Director of Graduate Programs in Heritage Conservation and an Associate Professor of Practice at the USC School of Architecture.

**Cindy Olnick [00:27]:** And I'm Cindy Olnick, a communications pro with a passion for historic places and a mission to help people save them.

We are so excited to bring you this show and we want to take just a few minutes to let you know what's up and what you can expect. So, Trudi, I believe that students are our future. That we should teach them well and let them lead the way. And that's just what you're doing at USC.

**Trudi Sandmeier [00:56]:** I think there's a song, something that goes like that, isn't there? I think you're exactly right, Cindy, and that is what we're doing at the USC School of Architecture. In Heritage Conservation we're talking about the future of Heritage Conservation. Not only how we're doing it now, but how we're going to do it in the future and what are the things that we need to pay attention to, to tell the story of who we are as humans, as communities and all the places that are important to us over time. We are a relatively young graduate program in Heritage Conservation. We've been around since 2002 and we've been doing this work at the School of Architecture for longer than that through a summer program: an executive education program for folks and also a graduate certificate that was training for architects and professional planners who needed to know a little bit more about Historic Preservation as it's called here in the United States. And so

we have been gradually evolving our programs and growing them, and we now not only have a Master's in Heritage Conservation, but a dual degree with our planning school at USC so you can get a dual master's degree in Heritage Conservation and Urban Planning. Coming up on the books, is a dual degree with Heritage Conservation and a Master of Landscape Architecture, as well as a dual degree with Heritage Conservation and Building Science. So lots of different ways that you can learn about the field and all the different aspects of it.

**Cindy Olnick [02:47]:** Nice, I took that summer course.

**Trudi Sandmeier[02:49]:** I know it's part of what launched you.

**Cindy Olnick [02:52]:** And it was amazing. And I still rave about it to this day. I'm like, Oh, it's the perfect bootcamp. It's the perfect immersion, you know, and I came out of it saying, I definitely want to be in this field and I definitely want to do what I've already been doing, which was communications. So it really helped me clarify that. It got me on track to really build a strong working knowledge of preservation. I'm certainly not an expert, but I know enough to help people talk about it.

**Trudi Sandmeier [03:21]:** Absolutely. We like to think that it helps people sort of kick the tires to decide, is this a field I'm interested in? Is this something I want to get a graduate degree in? Is this something I want to know more about? It gives everybody a chance to sort of stick their toe in the water and really learn the basics just as a brief immersion and then decide if it's something that they really want to dive deeper into.

**Cindy Olnick [03:51]:** So, Trudi, you talk about Heritage Conservation. How does that differ from what we generally think of as Historic Preservation?

**Trudi Sandmeier [04:00]:** Well, it's actually two sides of the same coin. Historic Preservation is a term that's really only used in the United States. Internationally, the term is Conservation and so we wanted to make our degree title really internationally, globally relevant to the field. And so that was one reason we changed it, but we also changed it because in our field the term 'preservation' has a very specific meaning and that is to preserve a place at a specific moment in time. To basically freeze time. What we do in our discipline is really 98% of the time - not that. We are working on rehabilitating buildings to put them back into use, to give them life for the next 100 years and make them usable in today's society. We are talking about intangible cultural heritage, we are talking about all of these different aspects of the field that really have nothing to do with freezing a building at a particular moment in time. So, 'preservation' is a really great term but it doesn't actually reflect what we do most of the time. So we really wanted our degree title to more clearly indicate what we are focusing on in our program.

**Cindy Olnick [05:27]:** Right. Well at the L.A. Conservancy I spent 14 years talking about how preservation is not about freezing places in time. That's one of these misperceptions people have about what preservation actually is.

**Trudi Sandmeier [05:40]:** Absolutely. And, you know, the other interesting thing is that a lot of people when they hear the word 'conservation' they think about environmental conservation. And, Heritage Conservation is on that same continuum. You sort of stretch -- environmental conservation is at one end, heritage conservation is at another -- but they're tied; they're very much linked in their ideas about conserving what's important and essential to the places and spaces that we believe are important.

**Cindy Olnick [06:12]:** Well, that's a whole other episode. I actually think that what we do is more about the environment than arts and culture, so when you have to tick that box it's like, why? They're great and they're beautiful and educational but it's the environment, it's just the built environment.

**Trudi Sandmeier [06:28]:** It's part of the same conversation, absolutely.

**Cindy Olnick [06:33]:** Right. Well the students we're going to be talking about on this show have done some deep dives and they've done some really groundbreaking work and that's not new to USC. It's pretty much the way the way you've been since you started the program. Right?

**Trudi Sandmeier [06:50]:** Our focus has always been on the things that are unique to the place in which we exist. Our grad program teaches everyone the basics of Heritage Conservation, all the basic skills that you need at any professional degree program in our field. But we are uniquely tied to Los Angeles and to the interesting things that we're talking about here in LA. We have sort of three main areas that we focus our program on. First, of course, is because we are in Los Angeles we talk a lot about modernism, about sites that are significant since the turn of the century, the 20th century, looking at in particular, Los Angeles' really amazing postwar legacy. We have just an incredible collection and that is a strength of the place in which our program is located. So that's a really exciting area to explore. So that's one thing that we look at. The second area we focus on is cultural conservation; sites that are significant for the people associated with them, the important events that happened there. As a field, we know how to save historic architectural icons. We're pretty good at that actually, but we're not as good at saving sites that are significant, that may not be beautiful buildings or even places that you would think of as Historic with a capital H, but that resonate, that are part of people's lives and are really important cultural icons. And so we are focusing on those kinds of places in this program. The third focus of our program is making underrepresented communities visible in the historic record and underrepresented communities can really mean a lot of different things. It can mean economically disadvantaged communities that don't necessarily show up in the historic record. It can be women, LGBTQ communities,

people of color, indigenous communities, any of these folks whose historic resources are not well represented in the official registers where these things are listed. So things like the National Register of Historic Places or the California Register of Historic Resources, places like that, where there's a huge gap between the things that are listed and the resources that are important to these various communities. So we're doing something to try and help fix that.

**Cindy Olnick [09:40]:** We've got some catching up to don't we?

**Trudi Sandmeier [09:42]:** Oh, we have a lot of work to do. That's exciting and a little bit sad at the same time.

**Cindy Olnick [9:51]:** But we know we have the problem and more and more people are out there trying to solve it. Including these students. They're doing this really cool work and, not just at USC, but all over the world, there's all this really great student research sitting on shelves. So what's up with that?

**Trudi Sandmeier [10:10]:** Yeah, I think that you go to grad school, you do an original research piece to get your Master's Degree, and it goes into the library at your school and you sort of move on with your life and you never look at it again. But all of this original research is this completely untapped source of information that people just don't even know about.

**Cindy Olnick [10:32]:** It's a gold mine, a gold mine!

**Trudi Sandmeier [10:35]:** It's unbelievable. Our students are doing this really, really amazing stuff and we want people to hear about it.

**Cindy Olnick [10:42]:** Yes. So hence this podcast! So we're getting it off the shelf. We're celebrating the students and we're gonna get a glimpse of what's ahead in this crazy cuckoo field. We're going to do a new episode every other week. Each one will be an interview with a graduate student in Heritage Conservation at USC about a specific project. So it could be their thesis. It could be an article. It could be any other kind of work they're doing.

**Trudi Sandmeier [11:09]:** We are also doing a lot of work in our coursework with the community and so we want to be sure and talk about some of the projects that the students are doing in real time with community members throughout the LA area about different aspects of Heritage Conservation. The cool thing is that the students will be interviewed by me, by you, and our amazing producer Willa Seidenberg. Willa teaches at the USC Annenberg Communications School and is right now getting her own Master in Heritage Conservation. So she is already becoming an expert and totally knows what she's doing.

**Cindy Olnick [11:47]:** She most certainly does. Yay Willa. We love Willa. We have some great interviews coming out really. Just a few examples, we've got Jackson Loop on sites of racial violence in Los Angeles.

**Trudi Sandmeier [12:02]:** Jackson was really motivated to take a look at places that are not your typical Landmark with a capital L, sites of important racial violence that happened in Los Angeles and that in some cases, erased history in that process. And so he takes a kind of deep dive on three different locations in L.A. that really help reveal the stories of these important events that happened and the places associated with them.

**Cindy Olnick [12:39]:** And, we've got Kasey Conley on recording studios, so cool.

**Trudi Sandmeier [12:44]:** This was a really fun project, both for her and for me as someone who was helping her with her work. She is a musician in her background and she really wanted to do something that linked her past life with her interest in Heritage Conservation. Her husband's a musician and she herself used to be a lead singer in a band. The recording studio aspect was something she was really passionate about. She did some research on some of the local recording studios, which are not fancy buildings. They are in no way architecturally significant icons, but have these really interesting features about them. And each of these places has a signature sound, an acoustic signature that is specific to those places. The sound that you get when you record at Capitol Records in Los Angeles is very different than the sound that you get when you record at East West Studios or some of these other really amazing historic places around L.A. and so she wanted to explore that issue and it's really fascinating.

**Cindy Olnick [14:00]:** And her husband, Stephen did the music for the podcast, thank you Stephen! Alright, we have Rafael Fontes on the city's LGBTQ heritage.

**Trudi Sandmeier [14:13]:** Rafael's thesis was really an interesting one. He took a look at three different sites that were proposed for landmark designation that were significant for their history of the LGBTQ community and some of the nominations were successful and some of them weren't. He wanted to really explore why they were unsuccessful, why they were successful, what were the reasons behind the nominations, the challenges and the issues that came up that were very specific to nominating sites from that particular community. He looked at three different case studies in a particular part of Los Angeles and it was really an interesting look and hopefully will provide some lessons for folks going forward as the next raft of nominations come forward. Some universal truths that came out of this would apply not only to the sites that he looked at, but other sites to come. It was a really interesting take on a particular aspect of conservation and sites that were significant not for their architectural value but certainly for their cultural value and the challenges that go along with that.

- Cindy Olnick [15:41]:** You know what I love? I love how this work not only documents the heritage itself but it explores the field. It really highlights ways we need to change how we do Heritage Conservation. So, we also have Kelsey Kaline on Heritage Conservation's role in Urban Resilience. Such an interesting idea.
- Trudi Sandmeier [16:13]:** Well, Heritage Conservation talks about a lot of issues having to do with sustainability and resilience and Kelsey's thesis really examines the role of heritage in that process. What kinds of things are important to save in a crisis? We all have attachments to places and they are icons for us. We know that when places are destroyed in a crisis or a calamity that we feel bereft by that loss, we feel grief. In the same way that we want to protect the infrastructure of our communities in the case of a disaster or crisis, we also need to be protecting our heritage resources to provide those sort of cultural rallying points that are so important for us in our recovery about who we are as a community and as people. And that is a really, really interesting idea to explore.
- Cindy Olnick [17:16]:** Super, super great. And then I'm so psyched to talk to my good friend, Jerome Robinson, on the great yet much overlooked architect, Robert Kennard, who did so much amazing work in Los Angeles and was very much a reflection of the Black experience in Los Angeles in the second half of the 20th century. And there's just so much to his story, it's so rich and so interesting. He did so much beyond architecture. He's left such a great legacy.
- Trudi Sandmeier [17:48]:** Well, and one of the great things about Jerome's work is that he is creating a scholarly approach to Kennard's legacy that we can continue to build on. There's so much interesting information. He had an incredible career and a huge impact and Jerome's work is the beginning of the story. And it's exciting.
- Cindy Olnick [18:09]:** And so much more! This is just the beginning! We've only just begun. We're also going to do some, where are they now interviews with earlier graduates to see where their USC research has taken them. It's really having an impact out there. I'm excited.
- Trudi Sandmeier [18:27]:** Me too. I am really excited to be working on this with two people who I respect and admire greatly -- Willa and Cindy -- whose expertise and enthusiasm for this project have really helped crystallize this from a crazy idea into a reality. And it's been really exciting to see this come to fruition. I'm so proud of our students and of the work that they've done, that it's really a privilege to be able to share it with people who have that same passion and to bring new folks into this conversation in a way that amplifies the voice of these next generation conservation professionals.
- Cindy Olnick [19:16]:** We've been talking about this for a while now, it's so exciting to see it come together. So we hope you like this little glimpse of the glimpse of

the future we're going to take during this show, we hope you'll come back and listen to some of these great interviews with these great students, and let us know what you think. Be sure to subscribe to the podcast so you won't miss anything, and every couple of weeks or so you'll hear from us.

**Trudi Sandmeier** [19:43]:

We look forward to chatting with you all down the road and telling some really great stories about amazing places and amazing people and communities that have made a difference in the world. So we'll talk to you soon.