

2024 WORLD MONUMENTS FUND / KNOLL

MODERNISM PRIZE

CASA SOBRE EL ARROYO

Awarded to the Ministerios de Cultura y de Obras Públicas de Argentina and the Municipalidad de Mar del Plata for the preservation of Casa sobre el Arroyo, Mar del Plata, Argentina.

JURY CITATION

The Casa sobre el Arroyo in the Argentine city of Mar del Plata is one of the great residential icons of modern architecture, the embodiment of the movement's ambitions to create new forms that would support the new lifestyles of the age. The young architect Amancio Williams took cues from advanced engineering in bridge design to build an unprecedented house of exposed reinforced concrete with tall plate-glass windows set in a great band that dissolves the solidity of the building. Materials and techniques more commonly associated with factories and infrastructure were turned into one of the most experimental and elegant houses of the twentieth century.

Once a beacon of Argentina's innovative contributions to modern architecture, the Casa sobre el Arroyo had by the turn of the twenty-first century become a virtual ruin, seemingly a lost cause for architectural historians and preservationists alike. The abandoned structure was severely vandalized and damaged by exposure to the elements. The acquisition of the house and its site by the municipality led finally to a plan to save a work by one of modernism's most adventurous architects.

Restoration projects included the conservation of the authentic features still present in the house and the reconstruction of missing elements using archival research. Whenever possible, the same materials and methods of craftsmanship used in the original were employed. New insulation, waterproofing, attention to pathologies of the concrete, and a thorough cleaning of the facade has restored the building's appearance. No less important in this comprehensive restoration of the house was attention to bringing back the natural setting, an integral part of Williams' design. This once-private home and its surrounding park have been turned into a publicly owned and managed site with a regular flow of visitors and events enhancing the site's historical and social significance. Discrete adaptations underscore this transition from an abandoned private to a thriving public site: new signage, accessible bathrooms, and office space.

For the quality of their work bringing back a lost milestone in the history of global modernism, as well as for the thoughtful creation of a new public site, the 2024 World Monuments Fund/Knoll Modernism Prize is bestowed on Argentina's Ministries of Culture and Public Works and the Municipality of Mar del Plata for the restoration of the Casa sobre el Arroyo.

Barry Bergdoll
Jury Chairman



Facade of the Casa sobre el Arroyo after restoration.



Damaged interiors of the Casa sobre el Arroyo before restoration.



Facade of the Casa sobre el Arroyo after restoration





There is something musical about the design of the Casa sobre el Arroyo: the building, originally created for the composer Alberto Williams, exemplifies a sense of contrapuntal balance between the built environment and the grove of trees that surrounds it. With its elegant geometries, the house is considered a touchstone of modernist architecture—and yet, until restoration works were completed in 2023, it was largely closed to the public, rendered unfit to visit after decades of abandonment.

At World Monuments Fund (WMF), we are proud that the 2012 selection of the Casa sobre el Arroyo for our World Monuments Watch helped bring international awareness to the building and its plight, supporting calls for its rehabilitation. The selection of the conservation project at this historic structure for the 2024 WMF/Knoll Modernism Prize marks the first time a building and conservation project from the Global South has been so honored. As such, it is a major moment for the recognition of the truly international character of architectural modernism.

It is our great honor to recognize the outstanding work of Argentina's Ministries of Culture and Public Works and the Municipality of Mar del Plata in restoring the elegant harmonies of this building once more.

[Bénédicte de Montlaur](#)
President and CEO, WMF

Knoll

Less than a century after their construction, Modernist masterpieces—critical documents in the history of architecture—are being routinely demolished, disfigured or abandoned. As part of Knoll's effort to contribute to the communities where we do business and preserve fixtures of modern design, we are proud to be a founding sponsor of the World Monuments Fund Modernism at Risk program. We are pleased to congratulate the Ministries of Culture and Public Works of Argentina and the Municipality of Mar del Plata for their outstanding restoration of la Casa sobre el Arroyo in Mar del Plata, Argentina. The thoughtful and community driven restoration of this historic structure successfully reharmonized the building design and its surrounding landscape, thus reflecting Knoll's likeminded belief of modern design as a means to connect people to their work, lives, and world. We would like to thank all those who submitted nominations for the 2024 prize and salute everyone associated with la Casa sobre el Arroyo for their exemplary work.

[Knoll](#)



Historic photograph of the Casa sobre el Arroyo by Manuel Gómez.





Historic photograph of the Casa sobre el Arroyo.

THE WINNING TEAM

The Casa sobre el Arroyo Conservation Project was the result of teamwork between the National Ministries of Culture and of Public Works of Argentina and the Municipal Government of Mar del Plata. The first state organization includes the Comisión Nacional de Monumentos, created in 1940 to identify, establish, and protect national landmarks across the country. Within the Ministry of Public Works, the agency historically in charge of national landmarks preservation is the Dirección Nacional de Arquitectura (DNA), assisted by the Dirección Nacional de Gestión de Obras (DNGO).

At the municipal level, the Museo Casa Sobre el Arroyo and its Friends Association have been the custodians and supporters of the site for several years.

In recent years, the work of these public organizations has been enhanced by the participation of experts from different conservation fields, such as architectural researchers and historians; preservation architects and engineers; conservators and restorers; and museologists and cultural managers. Another important achievement was the intense international exchanges and collaboration, as well as the inclusion of other Argentine landmarks in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

The Casa sobre el Arroyo Conservation Project specialists and professionals include: Lic. Teresa de Anchorena, Arq. Fabio Grementieri, Lic. Magalí Marazzo, Dr. Martin Gill, Arq. José Ferrero, Arq. Guillermo Frontera, Arq. Fermín Labaqui, Ing. Carlos Ramírez, Arq. Mariana Quiroga, Arq. Graciela Di Iorio.



Facade of the Casa sobre el Arroyo today.

Historic image of the Casa sobre el Arroyo's interior.





THE JURY

BARRY BERGDOLL, CHAIRMAN

Meyer Schapiro Professor of Art History and Archaeology Columbia University; New York, NY

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Yale University, New Haven, CT

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Professor of the History of Modern Architecture and Director, Urban Studies Department of the History of Art and Architecture Brown University;
Providence, RI

KAREN STEIN

Critic, Architectural Advisor, and Executive Director of the George Nelson Foundation; New York, NY

MABEL O. WILSON

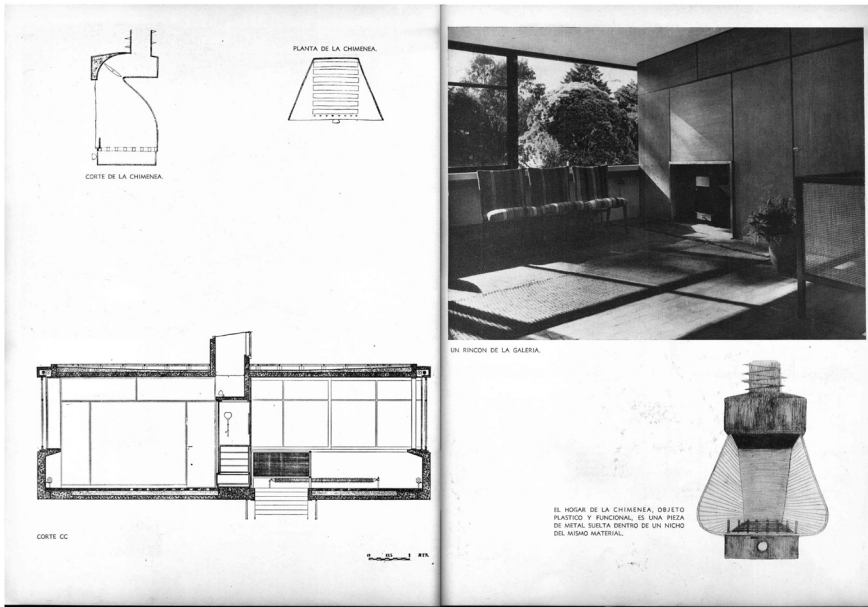
Nancy and George Rupp Professor of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, a Professor in African American and African Diasporic Studies, and the Director of the Institute for Research in African American Studies (IRAAS) at Columbia University;
New York, NY

SUSAN MACDONALD

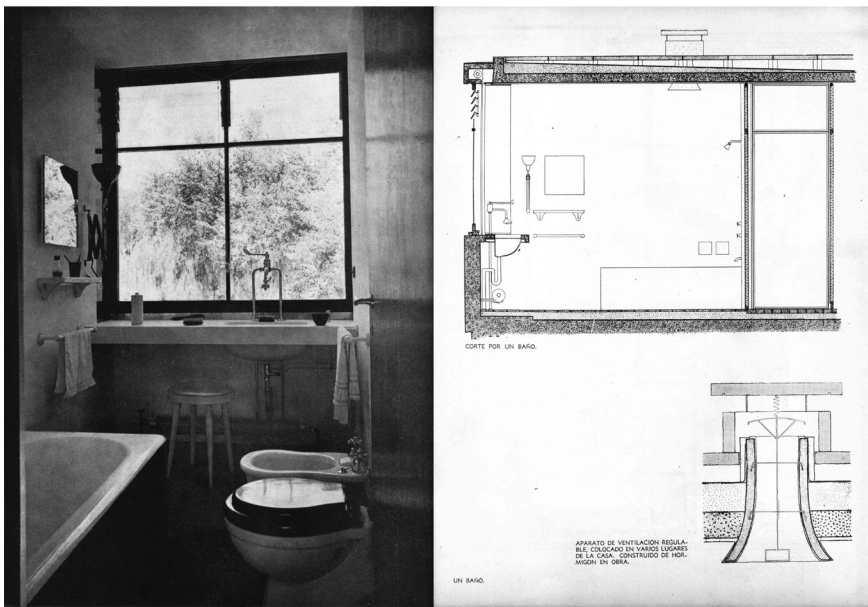
Head, Buildings and Sites The Getty Conservation Institute; Los Angeles, CA

THEO PRUDON

President, Docomomo US and Adjunct Professor of Historic Preservation Columbia University and Pratt Institute; New York, NY



Archival images of the fireplace of the Casa sobre el Arroyo.



Archival images of the bathroom of the Casa sobre el Arroyo.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SITE

Co-designed by husband-and-wife team Amancio Williams and Delfina Gálvez de Williams for the former's father, the Casa sobre el Arroyo (or "House above the Stream") sits at the heart of a verdant park in the Argentinian coastal city of Mar del Plata. The building is perched on an arch spanning a narrow brook, earning it the additional nickname "the Bridge House." As well as its eye-catching form, Williams and Gálvez also designed the structure's stylish wood-paneled interiors. With its sleek lines and ample windows giving onto the surrounding greenery, the house exemplified Williams's philosophy that buildings should complement, not dominate, their natural setting. The placement of the house allows occupants to hear birdsong and rustling leaves, a deliberate design choice on the part of the architects: Alberto Williams, who commissioned the building, was a musician and composer whose pieces often took inspiration from the landscapes and soundscapes of his native Argentina.

Williams and Gálvez's work would win recognition from the likes of Le Corbusier, and in 1997 the pair's design for the Casa sobre el Arroyo was honored with National Historical-Artistic Monument status. Though Amancio Williams is now viewed as one of Latin America's leading exponents of modernism, he saw few of his designs actually constructed during his lifetime, adding to the singularity of the building. The Casa sobre el Arroyo is thus a gem of modernist design by two of Argentina's most important twentieth-century architects.



Historic photograph of the exterior of the Casa sobre el Arroyo.



THREATS TO CONTINUED VIABILITY OF THE SITE BEFORE PRESERVATION

After Alberto Williams death, the building served as a local radio station before being shut down by Argentina's military junta in the 1970s. It was following this decision that the Casa sobre el Arroyo fell into disrepair as over decade of ownership disputes prevented necessary maintenance work from being carried out and left the building vulnerable to vandalism. Two fires caused major damage, including one in 2004 that destroyed much of the custom-designed interiors. The quality of material used in its construction forestalled but could not entirely prevent damage as years of neglect mounted up. In another blow to the architects' original vision, the stream that gave the Casa sobre el Arroyo its name dried up as urban development interrupted the flow of water.

First steps were made towards the rehabilitation of the building in 2005, when the Municipality of Mar del Plata assumed custodianship of the site and undertook limited restoration work. Nevertheless, the building's condition continued to deteriorate, to the point that the site was closed to visitation. Public calls for the renewal and reopening of the building—including not only local activism in Mar del Plata but support from across Argentina and the world—culminated in the successful 2012 nomination of the Casa sobre el Arroyo to the World Monuments Watch, galvanizing support around these grassroots efforts after years of sustained advocacy.



Upper view of the Casa sobre el Arroyo's stairwell before restoration.



Lower view of the Casa sobre el Arroyo's stairwell before restoration.



Graffiti and other damage to the interiors of the Casa sobre el Arroyo before restoration.



Restoration of the Casa sobre el Arroyo

SPECIFIC INTERVENTIONS

Following extensive research—including interviews with the descendants of the house's former owners—Argentina's Ministries of Culture and Public Works and the Municipality of Mar del Plata began physical restoration work at the site in 2021. The project aimed to preserve as much of the original fabric as possible and encompassed major interventions to the roof, facades, masonry, plastering, ceilings, floors, and more. Those features which had been lost over the years were meticulously recreated based on archival documents. The project also encompassed the installation of key fire safety measures in order to prevent further losses. Last but certainly not least, the flow of water was restored to the park's stream, reviving the house's signature element and filling the space once more with the sound of birdcalls as the grove came back to life once more.

The Mar del Plata community was greatly involved in the revitalization of the site. An important component of the project included construction and restoration trainings, as well as tours and educational materials for the general public. These advocacy efforts alongside the physical restoration works exemplify a community-driven preservation story that owes its success to the many individuals who have devoted their time and energy to the cause of the house along the way. As a result of the meticulous restoration work, the Casa sobre el Arroyo can today function as a museum, welcoming visitors to learn more about this icon of Latin American modernism.



Casa sobre el Arroyo during restoration.



Bathroom of the Casa sobre el Arroyo after restoration.



Kitchen of the Casa sobre el Arroyo after restoration.



Kitchen of the Casa sobre el Arroyo after restoration.



Living room of the Casa sobre el Arroyo after restoration.



Living room of the Casa sobre el Arroyo after restoration.



Studio of the Casa sobre el Arroyo after restoration.



Patio of the Casa sobre el Arroyo after restoration.



Stairs of the Casa sobre el Arroyo after restoration.



Studio of the Casa sobre el Arroyo after restoration.

About World Monuments Fund

World Monuments Fund (WMF) is the leading independent organization devoted to safeguarding the world's most treasured places to enrich people's lives and build mutual understanding across cultures and communities. The organization is headquartered in New York City with offices and affiliates in Cambodia, France, India, Peru, Portugal, Spain and the UK. Since 1965, our global team of experts has preserved the world's diverse cultural heritage using the highest international standards at more than 700 sites in 112 countries. Partnering with local communities, funders, and governments, WMF draws on heritage to address some of today's most pressing challenges: climate adaptation, inclusive heritage, balanced tourism, and post-crisis recovery. With a commitment to the people who bring places to life, WMF embraces the potential of the past to create a more resilient and inclusive society.

About Knoll

Knoll is a globally recognized leader in modern design and the founding sponsor of the World Monuments Fund Modernism at Risk program. The company's constellation of design-driven people creates high-performance workplaces, work from home settings and luxury residential interiors. A recipient of the National Design Award for Corporate and Institutional Achievement from the Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Knoll is aligned with the U.S. Green Building Council and the Canadian Green Building Council and can help organizations achieve the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) workplace certification. Knoll also helps clients comply with the International Living Future Institute to achieve Living Building Challenge Certification, and with the International WELL Building Institute to attain WELL Building Certification.

About MillerKnoll

MillerKnoll is a collective of dynamic brands that comes together to design the world we live in. MillerKnoll includes Herman Miller and Knoll, plus Colebrook Bosson Saunders, DatesWeiser, Design Within Reach, Edelman Leather, Fully, Geiger, HAY, Holly Hunt, Maars Living Walls, Maharam, Muuto, naughtone, and Spinneybeck|FilzFelt. MillerKnoll is an unparalleled platform that redefines modern for the 21st century by building a more sustainable, equitable, and beautiful future for everyone.

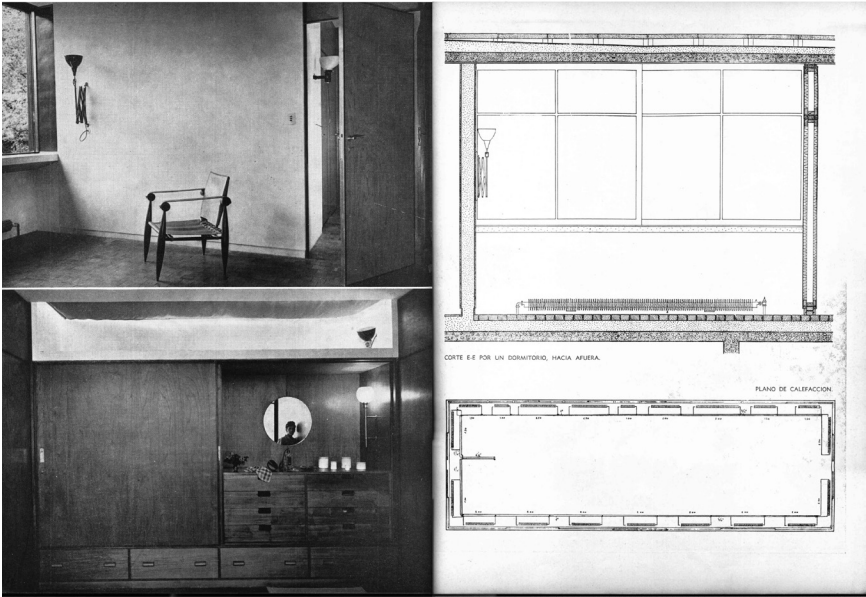


Historic photograph of the Casa sobre el Arroyo's staircase.

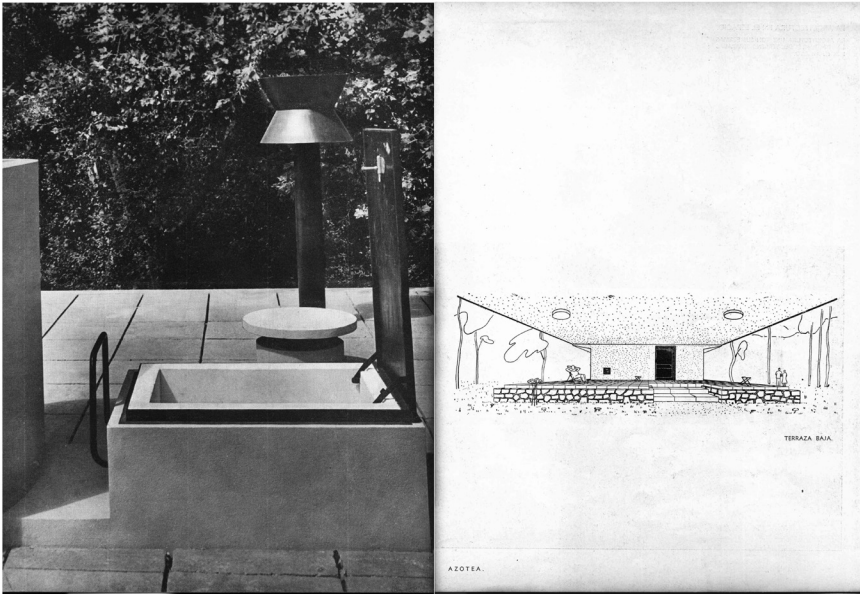




Historic photograph of the Casa sobre el Arroyo's interior.



Archival images of one of the bedrooms in the Casa sobre el Arroyo.



Archival images of the patio and rooftop terrace of the Casa sobre el Arroyo.



Historic photograph of the Casa sobre el Arroyo's interior.





Casa sobre el Arroyo and surrounding park circa 1970. Image courtesy of the Ministerio de Obras Públicas.





Casa sobre el Arroyo and surrounding park after restoration.



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Historic photograph of the
Casa sobre el Arroyo by Manuel Gómez.