

Transformation and Conservation

The transformations through which our world is passing have been especially vivid in the last several years, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the eastern bloc, the shifting balance of German and Japanese economic power, the rise of ethnicity as a compelling political force and the increasingly repellent duality of homelessness and excess in our own cities.

The tensions between global change and local identity are a persistent theme in current affairs. On the one hand are the ostensibly inexorable forces of economic development, compounded by the increasingly rapid diffusion of ideas, technology and culture. On the other hand is the wish to hold steady the traces of a known and familiar order, the persona of a given place and culture.

To hear some of the protagonists tell it, the choices are stark; the battle, once joined, is consuming and apocalyptic. Preservation advocates are often characterized as narrowly focused and intolerant of difference; the forces of development are taken to be thoroughly opportunistic and heedless of the geography into which they insert new patterns or of the consequences for those who live and work there.

To set these conflicts in an international perspective, *Places* circulated a call for papers inviting authors to address issues of conservation and transformation in countries outside the United States. We received a

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large number of abstracts, invited the authors included in this issue to submit papers and encouraged others to develop material for subsequent issues.

The stories told here reveal the scope and pervasiveness of the dilemmas that accompany the wish to conserve cultural properties: To whom do they belong? What sociopolitical forces do they serve, and what purpose is served by conserving them? How can places persist without the life forces that created them? How can we conceive a landscape that encompasses purposeful, modulated change?

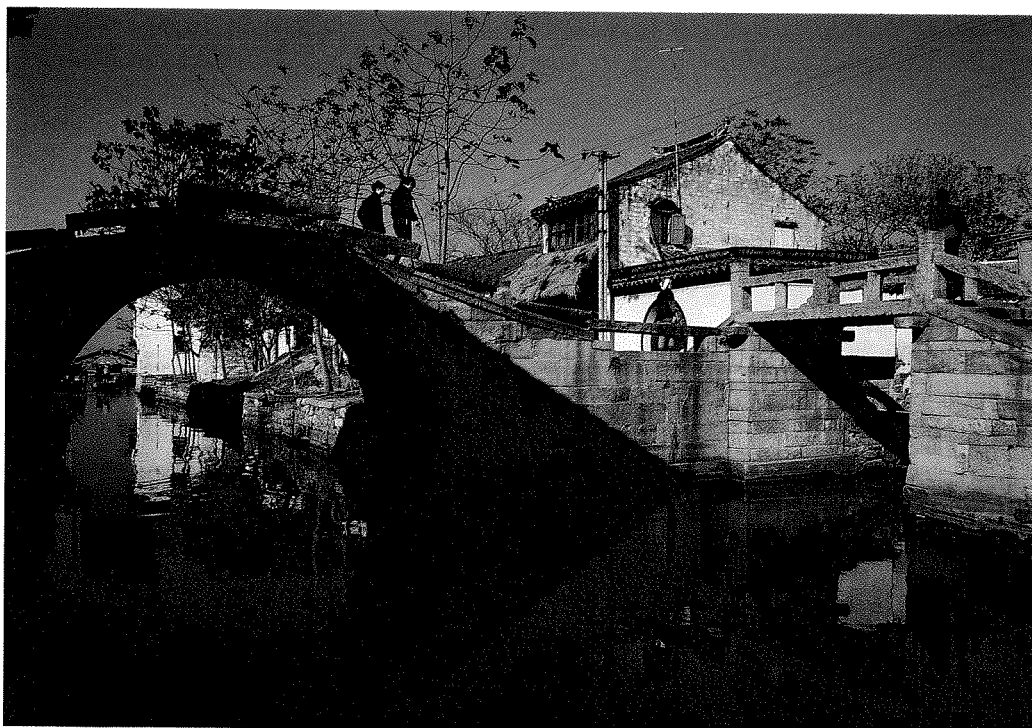
One story we could not present told of a sensitive plan for conserving the historic center of Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina, which fell under siege during the production of this issue. While this omission reminds us of the senseless change that often is wrought by military and political turmoil, other articles chronicle the hopeful determination people show in regenerating

devastated places, respecting their memories but also using them as frameworks for moving forward.

The places these articles describe are on several continents, in cultures of varying complexity and with differing economic and political conditions. Together, they remind us of the tremendous fertility of human imagination and the scope of the cultural transformations in which we are taking part. They also show the numbing power of generalizations and the incessant need for careful design — for discerning the quite particular qualities of a place and bringing them to the fore as a guide for conservation and a stimulus for the imaginative accommodation of change.

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— *Donlyn Lyndon*



Twin Bridges, Zhouzhuang, China.

Photo by Joseph C. Wang.