

2019
ANNE SIEBERT
Academic Scholarship
SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION

by **Rafael F. Fontes**

As the son of two public school teachers, I firmly believe that education not only transforms individual lives, but is necessary to drive positive and meaningful societal change. During my undergraduate at Arizona State University, I majored in Architectural Studies and minored in Spanish Language. From its beginning as a childhood fascination, my interest in architecture grew the more I became familiar with the curriculum, while my minor allowed me to indulge a love of history and language inherited from parents who taught these subjects.

After five years of working and volunteering, I began to explore how I could continue my education. For me, the issue was not only where I could afford to go for graduate school, but how exactly I would combine my professional commitment to the built environment with my love of history. After much research and thought, I concluded that Historic Preservation, alternatively known as Heritage Conservation, was the only answer that made sense to me. After more than a year of graduate level study, I still find this to be true. This is not only because I think the work itself is engaging and fun, but also because conservation lies at a crucial nexus. Few other fields so directly engage the critical connections among making, meaning and memory. It is my continuing passion, and pursuit of these themes, that makes me ideally positioned to contribute to the ongoing preservation movement in Southern California.

My diverse experiences inspire me to view the study of heritage as not just critical but noble. Our drive to create, share, and remember is intrinsic to the human experience. The desire to build on my own experiences is what motivated me to apply to USC for a degree in Heritage Conservation. Few other programs are blessed by proximity to such a complex, vibrant and dynamic context as Southern California. It was this place, and the ability to pursue a dual degree in Heritage Conservation and Planning, that made for an irresistible set of interdisciplinary opportunities. As a current graduate student, I have done my best to take advantage of these resources. I do so not only by engaging within and beyond the USC campus, but also by pushing myself to continually learn, explore, and respect the histories of this region as a newcomer.

Thus far, my current education has allowed me to leverage my technical skills in order to gain research experience through advocacy and consulting work. This work has helped me to focus my interest in the recent past, specifically how connections between built and social heritage in Southern California can relate to preservation efforts globally.



In my view, Southern California gives us the opportunity to explore, discover, interpret, and preserve a rich diversity of nationally relevant stories more than any other urban region at present. While the inherent dynamism of this place is a continuous source of renewal and inspiration, the pressure for change also threatens to erase the built heritage that contributes to that very same vitality. Addressing this challenge, and saving places that matter, requires a sophisticated understanding of the intricate networks of design, development, and environmental regulations that help govern and determine the fate of historic resources.

My current educational path will help me approach this understanding, and guide me towards becoming a well-rounded practitioner. Beyond professional aspiration, I also believe that places can speak to us. They can tell us important things, about ourselves and each other, but they can only do so if they are allowed to continue existing, growing and adapting with sensitive and well-informed change. At the same time, I know that I still have so much to learn, and am eager to continue doing so.

Moreover, I see that nothing I have done up to this point has been done alone. My ability to arrive and flourish here is due to a network of family, friends, mentors, and benefactors who are not only curious about what I want to do, but have helped me understand how to conserve for the right reasons.

In short, I would be honored and humbled to receive the Old Towne Preservation Association's Anne Seibert Scholarship.

Thank you for considering me as an applicant.

Sincerely,

Rafael F. Fontes

