

Title:

Modern Wonders

Word Count:

923

Summary:

Modern times call for modern upgrades, and a Swiss entrepreneur has decided it's now time for a new Seven Wonders of the World to be compiled by populist decree. He's made a list, checked it more than twice, and if you cast your vote, he'll think you're more than nice.

Keywords:

Seven Wonders of the World, New Seven Wonders Foundation, New 7 Wonders Foundation, Bernard Weber, Great Wall of China, Petra, Stonehenge, Easter Island, Neuschwanstein Castle, Taj Mahal, Hagia Sophia, Colossus Rhodes, Statue Zeus, Alexandria Lighthouse, Mausoleum Halicarnassus, Temple Diana, Hanging Gardens Babylon, Cyberiter

Article Body:

Apparently, it's time to turn the page on the original Seven Wonders of the World ...

Since only one of them is left standing, and since most people can't remember what the rest of them are, anyway, this is a good idea for someone who has too much time on their hands and the ability to raise money.

In this instance, that would narrow the candidates down to one Bernard Weber. He's a Swiss idealist who is behind the New 7 Wonders Foundation, which he founded in 2000.

Weber's motivation is simply to call attention to the marvels made possible when mankind applies positive energy. In fact, should his foundation actually generate profits, he intends to use at least a portion of them to rebuild lost marvels. Specifically, he cites the Bamiyan Buddha statue, a cultural masterpiece which dated to the Fifth Century AD and was senselessly destroyed as a blasphemous icon by the Taliban when their stilted act tyrannized Afghanistan.

The original Seven Wonders were so anointed by an ancient geek, Philon of Byzantium, and an ancient Greek, Antipater of Sidon. Those were the days before travel agents and tour guides, so perhaps each felt a need to fill the void.

Whatever their inspiration, they were not the first to get the idea.

The concept of such a list was first mentioned by Herodotus in his seminal 'The History' in the Fifth Century BC. Later, around the Third Century BC, Callimachus of Cyrene, the top logster at the legendary Museum of Alexandria in ancient Egypt, wrote "A Collection of Wonders around the World." These lists varied in content, but Philon's prevailed, due in part to its mention in engravings by the Dutch artist Maerten van Heemskerck (1498-1574) and Johann Fischer von Erlach's 'History of Architecture.'

Here are Philon's seven wonders:

1. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon, although some historians believe they were an ancient urban legend and never really existed;
2. The Statue of Zeus, which honored the first Olympic games, was later moved to Constantinople and ultimately destroyed by fire;
3. The Temple of Diana at Ephesus, the largest known building in ancient times which took a century to build and was subsequently senselessly destroyed as a blasphemous icon by Christians when their intolerance tyrannized southern Turkey;
4. The Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, which stood for 1500 years until the Maltese Knights of St John used its stones to build their own mega-castle nearby;
5. The Colossus of Rhodes, which towered 120 feet high at the city's harbor entrance until it was destroyed in an earthquake, and which later served as the inspiration for French sculptor Auguste Bartholdi when he created the Statue of Liberty as a gift to the USA;
6. The Lighthouse of Alexandria in Egypt, whose beacon had a range of 100 miles and which stood for 1500 years before falling victim to an earthquake in the 1300s; and
7. The Pyramids of Egypt, the lone wonder still standing.

Once Weber confirmed there was no official Seven Wonders of the World being sanctioned by any recognized bodies, he established a website, gathered an impressive list of professionals --- architects, engineers and the like --- and began the process of nominating structures worldwide as potential Wonders. During the subsequent years, visitors to his site answered his call to vote and the nominees were pared to 77.

Recently, these were winnowed to 21 --- another multiple of seven, if you hadn't noticed --- with the voting set to continue throughout 2006. The new Seven Wonders will then be announced on New Year's Day, 2007.

I've gone to Weber's site, perused the finalists and did my cyber-duty by voting. All are truly worthy choices, but I didn't find it difficult at all to quickly make my decisions:

- The Great Wall of China, where the term 'breathtaking' is an understatement;
- The Easter Island Statues, also known as Stone Clones Gone Wild;
- Petra in Jordan, for its mixture of intricacy and magnitude in its status as the world's most spectacular city carved out of sandstone;
- Stonehenge, a Druidic version of the ultimate perpetual calendar with a timeless design;
- Neuschwanstein Castle in Füssen, Germany, because that's the way castles are supposed to look;
- The Taj Mahal at Agra, India, because Richard Halliburton said so in one of my favorite childhood tomes, 'The Book of Marvels,' and his vivid description therein sold me on it forever; and
- The Hagia Sophia cathedral at Istanbul, because I think at least one Wonder should contain Viking graffiti, and Halfdan did the honors --- which are still prominently visible --- during his stint with Byzantium's Varangian Guard.

One interesting twist to Weber's foundation is that its home is cited as the Heidi Weber Museum in Zurich, which also happens to be a landmark structure designed by the Swiss architect and visual artist Charles Edouard Jeanneret, who became famous under his nom-d'art of Le Corbusier. This building was commissioned by Mrs Weber, to be named after its designer and to house various artworks created by him. It was completed and opened to the public in 1962. However, disputes arose between the two parties, and when Le Corbusier died, the entity which survived him took up the case against the Webers. Among other things, this resulted in a re-christening of the building to its current title and legal squabbling over everything from exclusivity for artwork sales rights to website domain names.

The Heidi Weber Museum is rarely open these days. The irony of its creative

legacy and legal history compared to the mission statement of Bernard Weber's New 7 Foundation is rich. Clearly, universal harmony in the recognition and preservation of famous structures is easier said than done.