

European
Historic
Houses
NextGen

European Young Heritage Entrepreneur of the Year Award 2026

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Introduction

Welcome to the 2026 edition of the European Young Heritage Entrepreneur of the Year Award. This year, European Historic Houses is proud to honor the exceptional young leaders who are redefining the future of our continent's legacy. The awards ceremony will take place in 2026 at Scone Palace in Perth, Scotland.

By blending innovation with sustainability, our finalists have proven that privately-owned historic houses, gardens, and parks remain vibrant centers of cultural life.

We are delighted to dedicate this booklet to the three visionaries under 45 who are driving this change. As we award this year's €5,000 prize, we also celebrate the growing network of NextGen members.

While we are here to celebrate our winner, we would also like to extend our deepest gratitude to everyone who submitted an application this year. Each submission served as a powerful testament to the passion and dedication of a generation committed to safeguarding Europe's rich cultural heritage. We thank you for your hard work and for being an essential part of our vibrant community.

The Jury

Karin Zumtobel President, Chairperson of the Board, Zumtobel Group AG
Harry Rosebery Sotheby's, Honorary Chairman, Sotheby's UK and Ireland
Ménélik Plojoux Patrice Besse, Directeur régional Rhône provençal & Languedoc
Justin Green Owner of Ballyvolane House, Ireland, Chair of Historic Houses of Ireland
Nicoline Schaub EHH Vice President and EHH NextGen President

The Finalists

This year, the jury selected three projects.
One finalist (EUR 5,000), one second place and a third place.

Winner:

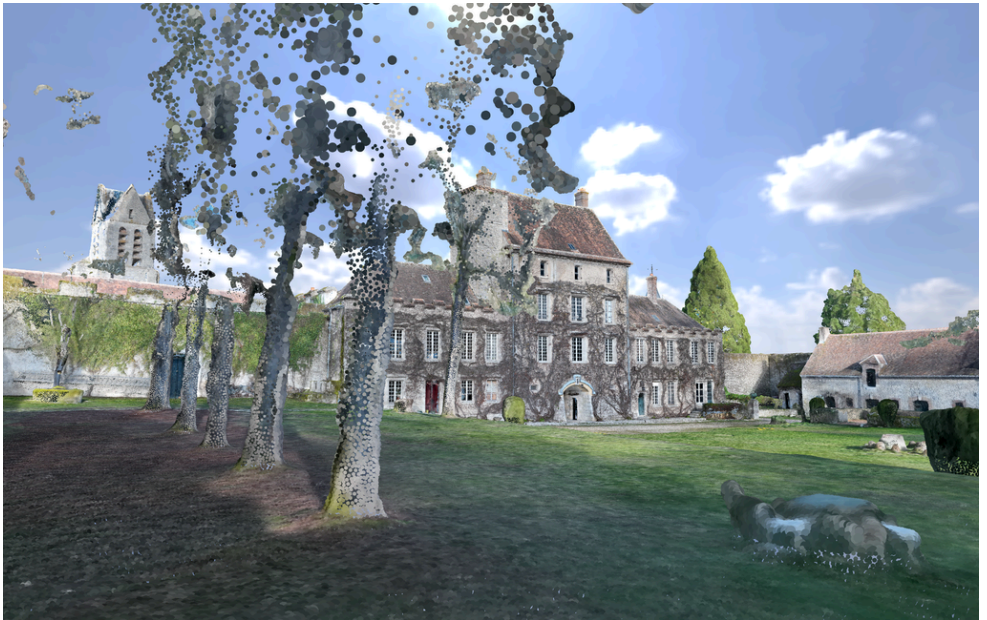
Ismaël Murat el Hakim & Laurie Mortreuil
Château de Paley (France)

2nd Place:

Otto van Bouwdijk Bastiaanse
Buitenplaats Zwanenburg (The Netherlands)

3rd Place

Federico Gallo Perozzi
Palazzo Gallo (Italy)





Winner: Ismaël Murat el Hakim and Laurie Mortreuil

Château de Paley, La Demeure Historique (France)
www.chateaudepaley.com

Tell us a bit about yourself and your story

I am the recent owner (5 years) of Château de Paley in Seine-et-Marne, France. My background is in video games, immersive creation and creative entrepreneurship, and today I bring that same energy to the preservation of heritage. What drives me is the idea that a historic monument should not be frozen in the past, but reactivated with intelligence, care and imagination. At Paley, I am working to restore a fragile site while also giving it a contemporary future rooted in culture, transmission and innovation. My story is really about building a bridge between old stones and new tools, and proving that heritage can still inspire, educate and create opportunity for future generations.

Please, describe your project

My project was to create a digital twin version of Château de Paley, not as a simple visualization, but as a foundation for a much broader heritage and video game ecosystem. The digital twin precisely documents the castle and supports restoration, but it also allows the site to become playable, explorable and creatively reusable. We will be using it as the basis for World of Heritage: Château de Paley, a simulation game built from the real castle. It also feeds our game jam, creative residencies, workshops and future access to assets for video game creators. Even the dovecote can become an interactive, immersive space through this digital work.

Why are you passionate about this project?

I and my wife are passionate about this project because it connects preservation with creation. Too often, heritage is presented as something admired from a distance. I want Château de Paley to be experienced, understood and reimagined. The 3D version helps us do exactly that: it protects memory, supports future restoration and opens the castle to communities who may connect first through games, immersive media or workshops rather than through traditional heritage channels. For me, video games are not a distraction from heritage; they are a powerful language for transmitting it. By turning Paley into a place for residencies, game jams, creator workshops and interactive installations, we can make the monument relevant to younger audiences while staying deeply respectful of its history and identity.

What lasting impact has the project had?

The project has already created lasting impact on several levels. First, it gives us a durable digital record of a vulnerable monument, useful for understanding the site and guiding future restoration. Second, it has transformed the castle into a platform for new forms of cultural transmission. The digital twin now supports our video game vision, public workshops, creative residencies and game jam activity, helping heritage become something participatory rather than passive. Third, it strengthens the long-term future of the property by opening educational, cultural and economic opportunities that can support continued management. The scan is therefore not just an archive; it is an active tool for heritage, community engagement and creation. It allows the château to exist both as a real place and as a shared imaginative world.

What challenges did you have to overcome?

One of the main challenges was making sure the project was useful in more than one way. It was not enough to create a 3D scan; it had to serve restoration, mediation and future creative production at the same time. Working on a fragile, layered historic site also meant dealing with access, technical constraints and the complexity of faithfully capturing irregular spaces, interiors and key features such as the dovecote, often resulting in having to merge technologies like LIDAR, laser, and photogrammetry and various software solutions and rendering engines. Another challenge was building a bridge between two worlds: heritage conservation and video game culture.

How was the project funded?

The project was developed through private commitment and targeted collaboration with specialist partners, making the most of about 20 K€ as initial funds .

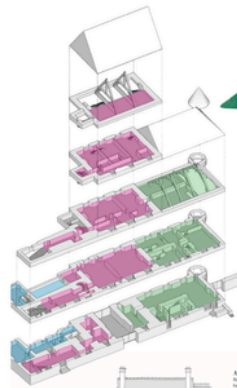
What lessons have you learned from the project that you could pass on to others?

The biggest lesson I learned is to trust intuition when a historic place seems to be calling for a new form of life. At first, 3D scanning can look like a technical tool for documentation. But if you follow the idea with enough rigor and enough imagination, it can become much more. In our case, the digital twin of Château de Paley did not stay a static record: it opened the way toward a video game world, creative residencies, workshops, shared assets for creators, and even immersive experiences such as the future interactive dovecote. We discovered that the most interesting uses do not always appear at the beginning. They emerge as you build, test, and let the technology meet the spirit of the place. My advice is to begin seriously, but not narrowly. Create a strong digital foundation, then allow experimentation to reveal new possibilities. Heritage does not lose its soul when it enters new media; sometimes it finds a new voice there.



Ismaël Murat el Hakim and Laurie Mortheuil

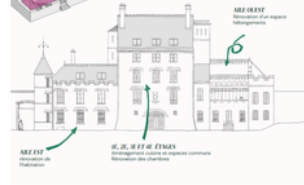




**ÉCURIES :
ATELIERS DE CRÉATION
NUMÉRIQUE**



**DÉPENDANCE ET
CORPS DE LOGIS :
HÉBERGEMENTS HAUT
DE GAMME**



**ATELIERS DE
CRÉATION
MANUELLE**



**Collaborer, expériménte
et s'inspirer.**





2nd Place: Otto van Bouwdijk Bastiaanse

Buitenplaats Zwanenburg / De Strepen, Vereniging Particuliere Historische Buitenplaatsen (The Netherlands)
www.huiszwanenburg.nl

Tell us a bit about yourself and your story

We are Otto(28), Florentine(27) and Marius(24). We all grew up on Buitenplaats Zwanenburg. The estate entered our family in 1835 and has been passed down through every generation since. It remains fully privately owned and covers around 15 hectares. With our father's recent health developments, our responsibility of running the estate may come sooner than expected, making our involvement even more meaningful. Outside our study and jobs, we are at the estate very often, supporting maintenance, long-term planning, and several development projects. One of these is the De Strepen project, which forms the basis of this submission. Otto also serves on the board of VPHB (Vereniging Particuliere Historische Buitenplaatsen) NextGen.

Please, describe your project

Buitenplaats Zwanenburg is committed to restoring and sustainably developing the cultural-historical landscape surrounding the monument. Together with dairy farm De Waaistap, the municipality of Bernheze, the water authority, and the province of North Brabant, work has been done on creating a future-proof form of nature-inclusive agriculture within a varied and small-scale landscape. The project De Strepen provides space for recreational visitors, who naturally find their way to this special location. On 7 March 2025, Alderman Rien Wijdeven (Sustainability) planted the first shrub. Fifty volunteers then put their shovels into the ground to plant one thousand metres of hedgerows on the De Strepen plot. At the end of 2025, a second planting round took place, marking the successful completion of the project.

Why are you passionate about this project?

As the children of the current owner and the seventh generation to live on our family estate since 1835, our connection to this land runs deep. This long family legacy gives us not only pride, but also a profound sense of responsibility. We feel a duty to preserve and strengthen what previous generations entrusted to us, ensuring we can one day pass the estate on in better condition than we inherited it. This sense of stewardship shapes how we look at our land, our heritage, and the choices we make for its future. That is why we are passionate about this project. It reflects everything we believe in: sustainable development, respect for history, and long-term protection of our cultural landscape. By restoring and enhancing the estate in a thoughtful and future-proof way, we honour our past while investing in a stronger legacy for the generations to come.

What lasting impact has the project had?

One of the most important outcomes is that a local nature-inclusive farmer, who previously had very limited opportunities to expand, can now continue farming on the estate in a fully nature-inclusive way. This approach has already led to a visible increase in biodiversity, including a rise in pollinating insects such as bees and the development of richer fungal cultures within the soil. The project has also played a strong role in strengthening local tourism. It received significant attention in regional and even provincial media, which has increased public awareness of the estate and attracted more visitors. This growth supports the local economy and directly benefits activities on the estate, such as the rental of buildings and the holiday cottage. In addition, the project has enabled the development of a new long-term revenue model. In partnership with a well-known organisation in the field of CO₂ compensation, we now measure the amount of carbon stored annually in the soil. This data forms the basis of a certified compensation scheme, creating a sustainable financial stream that supports the continued management of the estate by the family.

What challenges did you have to overcome?

One of the biggest challenges was making the land financially viable for this project. Agricultural land in the Netherlands is extremely expensive, and converting it to nature-inclusive land represents a significant decrease in market value. Once converted, this change cannot be reversed, which made the decision both financially and strategically complex. After years of discussions we finally developed a model in which the water authority compensated the devaluation of the land. They agreed to this because the project would significantly improve the water quality of the nearby river, the Aa, which was also in their interest. This cooperation ultimately resulted in a fiscally feasible project that benefits the entire area. Another major challenge was developing the new CO₂ compensation revenue model. CO₂ projects are usually implemented on a much larger scale. On our smaller scale, extensive research was needed to explore the possibilities and ensure accurate, measurable carbon storage in the soil. With combined efforts and expert support, this eventually succeeded and has now become an important long-term income stream for the estate.

What lessons have you learned from the project that you could pass on to others?

One of the most important lessons we have learned from this project is the value of involving all stakeholders from the very beginning. The key takeaway is simple: involve people early, communicate openly, and address concerns immediately. When stakeholders feel included and informed, they are far more willing to collaborate—and this makes even complex projects move forward much more smoothly.





3rd Place: Federico Gallo Perozzi

Palazzo Gallo, ADSI (Italy)

www.instagram.com/palazzogallo.osimo

Tell us a bit about yourself and your story

My name is Federico Gallo Perozzi, I am 31 years old. After living in Milan for almost ten years, I decided to return to Osimo, the town where I grew up, a small historic town in the Marche region of Italy. My family has lived here since the fifteenth century and still owns Palazzo Gallo, a historic residence in the center of the city. In recent decades Osimo has experienced a gradual decline in economic and cultural activities, particularly in the historic center. Our palace, once prosperous, had also fallen into a state of near abandonment: the piano nobile had been closed for more than ten years. When I returned home, I felt a responsibility to bring life back to this place and to reconnect it with the city.

Please, describe your project

My project aims to reactivate the piano nobile of Palazzo Gallo as a cultural space open to the public. After more than ten years of closure, I decided to return these historic rooms to the city through a series of contemporary art exhibitions and experimental installations. The goal is to create a dialogue between historical heritage and contemporary creativity, transforming a private residence into a living place of encounter for artists, citizens and visitors. In this way the palace becomes a cultural laboratory where history, art and new technologies can coexist. This approach allows the building to be enhanced without altering its identity, making it once again an active part of the cultural life of the city.

Why are you passionate about this project?

I grew up surrounded by this place and by the history of my family. For me, heritage is not only something to preserve, but also a responsibility towards the future. Seeing the main floor of the palace closed for many years made me realize that historic places risk losing meaning if they are not lived in and experienced. Reopening it was a way to bring life and purpose back to a space that has witnessed centuries of history. I believe that younger generations must find new ways to keep heritage relevant today, preserving memory while opening it to creativity and innovation.

What lasting impact has the project had?

The project has brought renewed cultural attention to Palazzo Gallo and reopened a historic place to the local community. I reopened the space in 2022, and since then the initiative has grown significantly. The exhibitions have attracted more than 15,000 visitors in total, with over 5,000 attending in the last three months alone. The palace has become a meeting place for artists, residents and visitors, strengthening the connection between historic heritage and the contemporary life of the city. The initiative demonstrates how a privately owned historic residence can become a cultural resource for the territory while preserving its identity, and it has created the foundations for future cultural activities that can continue to develop over time.

How was the project funded and what was the approximate scale of funding required?

The project was financed through a combination of private resources and collaboration with the local municipality. The initiative would not have been possible without the support and approval of the city council, which helped enable the first exhibitions and supported the reopening of the space. Today the project has grown into a small cultural operation: six people actively work at Palazzo Gallo, managing ticketing, visitor reception and the safety of the exhibitions. Rather than relying on large initial investments, the project developed gradually through partnerships, shared efforts and the reinvestment of resources generated by the activities themselves.

What lessons have you learned from the project that you could pass on to others?

The most important lesson I have learned is that historic places must be lived in to remain meaningful. Even small projects can reactivate spaces that might otherwise remain closed or forgotten. I have learned that opening a private residence to the city can create new relationships between heritage and the community. Another lesson is that collaboration with artists, institutions and citizens is essential to bring new energy to these places. I believe the future of historic houses depends on the ability of new generations to find a balance between preservation, openness and innovation.

