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Profile

**Transparently Traditional**, by Nancy A. Ruhling
John Milner Architects’ portfolio of new and restored residences combines craftsmanship, clarity and context.

Recent Projects

**Country Manor Overhaul**, by Nancy E. Berry
A 1930s home in Holmby Hills, CA, is updated and revitalized by Richard Manion Architecture.

**Resurrected Quarters**, by Annabel Han
William Bates Design re-imagines a derelict 19th-century outbuilding as two historically-inspired apartments.

**Home at Last**, by Lynne Lavelle
New York City’s 31 East 38th Street, New York City, is made whole once more by Cooper, Robertson & Partners.

Product Report

**From Prosaic to Precious**
From appearance to longevity, salvaged building materials hold many advantages over their new counterparts.

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**Allan Greenberg: Classical Architect**, by Allan Greenberg, reviewed by Clem Labine

**Andrew Jackson Downing Essential Texts**, edited by Robert Twombly, reviewed by Martha McDonald

**Applying Mathematics to Construction, Carpentry Mathematics and Estimating**, by Kenneth Williams, Sr., reviewed by Judy Hayward

The Forum

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Preserving historic housing stock is a community-wide concern.

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On the cover: Cooper, Robertson & Partners restored 31 East 38th Street, New York City, to a single-family residence. Photo: Peter Murdock
Buying Guides

In this issue you will find 17 Buying Guides on our issue theme: Restoring the Period Home. The Guides contain information on suppliers, manufacturers, custom fabricators, artists and artisans, as well as many photographs of their work. The Guides range from Conservatories & Outbuildings to Roofing and Woodwork. They form a most comprehensive source for professionals working in restoration, renovation and traditionally styled new construction.

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John Milner Architects takes timelessness to the future. By Nancy Ruhling

Since the beginning, it has always been the hand of the craftsman that has caught architect John D. Milner’s eye. He has seen it in the details of every historic building he has restored, every new traditional-style house he has built and each addition he has designed to complement historic residences. Milner, FAIA, and principal of the Chadds Ford, PA, firm that bears his name, has always had an interest in architecture, but he came to the profession in a round-about way. Like the seamless additions he designs for traditional-style houses, his interest in the field grew organically in his heart—after he abandoned studies in engineering and tried his hand at sculpture.

While earning his architecture degree from the University of Pennsylvania, it was at a summer job working on the Historic American Buildings Survey that Milner began to focus on historic buildings and traditional design. “I saw buildings and how they were built,” he says. “The hand of the craftsman was evident, and I could relate to the artisans who built them. I continued to work with HABS for a couple of years, and that experience allowed me to see how craftsmen in the past faced challenges. That is what sets my firm apart—we have always done a lot of restoration work, and there is a very strong connection between our new design and what we have learned from our restoration work.”

The firm is grounded in Milner’s vision, which is informed not only by the Greek Revival tradition of William Strickland and the Neoclassicism
of Sir John Soane, but also by the contemporary designs of Philip Johnson. “As an architecture student, our class visited Johnson’s Glass House,” Milner says. “I was absolutely blown away. I was impressed by the proportions, the clarity and simplicity. I have found that these principles are translatable to traditional design. Because of my background in art, there also is a sculptural quality to my designs that gives them personality.”

The award-winning firm, which Milner established nearly a half century ago, has 20 employees, including four partners: Milner; Mary Werner DeNadai, FAIA; Christina Carter, AIA; and Christopher Miller, AIA. While tradition is the constant in the firm’s design vocabulary, Milner says that every project is driven principally by the location. “We respect the site,” he says. “We have no preconceived style unless the client requests it. We always visit the site first. It tells us what kind of house to design. For example, on a hillside, you can’t put a rigid, traditional house. You have to drape it around the landscape.”

Milner’s legacy is far larger than his projects. For the past 37 years, he has served as Adjunct Professor of Architecture in the Graduate Program for Historic Preservation at the University of Pennsylvania’s School of Design, his alma mater. He believes that his greatest responsibility is to extend that legacy into the future through his firm’s accomplished partners and talented design staff, as well as the many generations of his students.

**Milner’s Home Base**

All of Milner’s design ideas come together in his own home, a quaint 18th-century house that sits on a hill above the Brandywine Valley in West Chester, PA. The modest two-story red-brick house, which is a wonderful example of the English Quaker style, had been inhabited, for most of its long, storied life, by tenants on a large property. When the land was divided, Milner and his wife, Wynne, bought the 10-acre parcel that is hemmed in by hundreds of acres of conservation land. His intent was to restore it and add what he calls “a sympathetic addition” to make it amenable to his 21st-century lifestyle.

An addition was necessary because the house was small: Its 1,200 sq. ft. held only two rooms per floor. Although there had been a rear addition at one time, only the original 1724 structure remained. To

Above: Milner’s addition to his own home in West Chester, PA, features a verandah of wood clapboard, stained dark so the main house is the primary focus. The dark red window frames reference the original red iron oxide paint on the windows and cornices of the original house. Photo: Don Pearse

Right: The old and new, side by side, look as though they were built to live together. Photo: Don Pearse
Above: A terrace that runs across the back of the house looks over the pond. A bay window in the living room enhances the water view. Photo: Don Parrav

Right: In Villanova, PA, the style is announced at the front door, where a hand-carved limestone frontispiece is juxtaposed against the random pattern of the stone. Photo: Matt Wingo

honor the house’s history, Milner decided to put the new addition on the same spot but to position it in such a way that it did not distract or detract from the glory of the main house.

The two-story, 1,800-sq.ft. addition, which features a wood-shingle roof like the main house and a front and a back porch, "recedes visually even though it is larger than the old," Milner says.

Milner didn’t want the addition to match the house. By making it of wood clapboard that is stained dark to further blend it with the landscape, he placed the main house front and center. "The original house was made of bricks made from clay found on the land," he says. "I wanted to honor that."

Milner uses the addition as the main entrance to the house. "The original front door faces and is close to the road, and I didn’t want to clutter that area with a driveway," he says.

The addition and the original house fit together perfectly: The old home houses the living room and dining room, plus an upstairs guest room and sitting room. The addition, which is where the Milners spend most of their time, includes a first-floor new old-style kitchen/sitting room and second-floor master bedroom suite, both with corner fireplaces.

Site Specific
It was the softly sloping site that inspired Milner to design the Philadelphia Main Line residence that looks as though it is draped over the land like an elegant shawl. "The revival of the French Norman style was popular in this area in the 1920s," he says, "so it was a natural fit, especially for a surprisingly small house."

The two-story house, which rests on a five-acre site, is in a pretty private setting although it is surrounded by other homes. "It called for a very intimate composition," he says. Milner’s firm designed the low-profile house around a central tower and built it of red brick punctuated with black mortar. "I’ve never used black mortar in this way before," he says. "It is very striking. And we added a criss-cross pattern of glazed headers in the tower."

The wrought-iron front gate, which is illuminated by the soft light of a lantern, leads to a sunken garden that lies before the front door. A second door in the front brick wall, off to the side, is the entry to the loggia and the kitchen beyond. "This second door acts as sort of a back door," Milner says. "We wanted the owners to enjoy the garden regardless of where they entered."

The living spaces are on the first floor; guest rooms occupy the second. The central tower acts as a springboard for two wing-like additions, one of them the husband’s office, the other the master suite. "All the little details like the strap hinges on the doors and the molded plaster ceilings hark back to the Arts and Crafts movement of the 20th century," he says.

Casual Classicism
A formal house that is decidedly informal. That is what Milner’s clients, who have a penchant for the Irish Georgian architecture they had seen while living on the Emerald Isle, asked him to design for their 10-acre property amidst the farmland of Villanova, PA.

The site was relatively flat but with expansive vistas, inviting any number of traditional styles. "It was an interesting challenge," Milner says. "We took the formal arrangement of the façade and massing from that Classical style and dialed it down by using random rubble dry-laid stone. We brought back a bit of formality and definition by outlining the windows in brick."

Prime examples of this rare mix appear at the front door, which features a Neoclassical hand-carved limestone frontispiece that
contrasts with the country-style stone, and at the back, where a still-upper-lipped colonnaded verandah is a commanding presence looking over the country garden that was designed by landscape architect Jonathan Alderson of Wayne, PA. “We situated the swimming pool so it wouldn’t scream ‘pool,’ and we worked with Alderson to obscure it with hedges,” Milner says.

The formal/informality continues on the interiors of the two-story, five-bedroom house, where the Boston, MA-based design firm of Gauthier-Stacy complied with the owners’ wish for an “edgy” style that infuses the spaces with contemporary details.

The Country Life
For a 40-acre property in bucolic Chester County, PA, the Milner firm designed an expanded Pennsylvania farmhouse and 12-stall barn. The two-story fieldstone house, which is encased by a five-ft. high stone wall, opens to a large, casual garden that gives it the feeling of a contained estate. Its view is of preserve land. A charming blue gate leads to the stables.

The attached library, which is clad in clapboard, was designed to look as though it were added later. “We used an interesting composition of rooflines and massing to convey this feeling,” Milner says.

Milner brought history inside by pairing custom woodwork with antique architectural elements, including a chimney breast in the living room and paneling from an old house that was demolished. The central staircase, angled to create interest, evokes an earlier time. “It is less formal than a straight run,” he says.

Interior designer Barbara Gisel of Haverford, PA, continued the casual, traditional theme with furnishings and color schemes.

Building on Time
Old houses are built over time, and Milner got the chance to repeat history in a Chester County, PA, weekend home that his clients decided to make their full-time residence. Originally, the couple commissioned Milner to design a small stone house with an expansive porch, where they could sit and watch nature as it unfolded on their 40-acre property, which is surrounded by preserve land.

As it turned out, they liked the house so much that they decided to sell their Delaware home and settle there. So it was that two bedrooms, a kitchen and an informal great room, complete with a fireplace and living room and dining room, were no longer enough.

The clients asked Milner to add a large living room to the house. “We deliberately made it look like an addition,” he says. “We built it of wood instead of stone. By doing this, we adopted a somewhat more refined vocabulary.”

In response to the clients’ request for a “light, bright and airy space,” Milner made the ceiling higher than those in the main house, created woodwork that follows the height line of the built-in shelves and added a plaster cove ceiling. “It is very different in character from the rest of the house,” he says. “It has a very sculptural feel.”

WEB EXTRAS: For additional photos and other content, see the web version of this article by visiting “The Magazine” on Period Homes’ home page – www.period-homes.com.
When Los Angeles architect Richard Manion met with his new client to discuss renovating a 1930s English country manor once owned by Louis B. Mayer's granddaughter, he saw great potential. "The original scope of work was to create a modest addition and remove an ill-conceived porte cochère that had been added mid-century," he says. But once Manion began looking at the old house, he realized that it needed much more. "My client, who is an arts patron, has a wonderful eye — she understood the house could become more stylistically cohesive," he adds. "Other additions that had been tacked on over the years did not enhance the house." Manion wanted to bring back the home's graceful 1930s style while updating the interiors for 21st-century living.

Manion has made his career out of coaxing old genteel houses back to life. About 40 percent of his work today is focused on renovations. A Columbia University graduate, Manion studied American and European architectural history under noted historians Howard Hibbard and Joseph Connors. He started his career in New York in the offices of two of the country's most prominent architectural firms — Robert A.M. Stern and Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown. He is a member of the American Institute of Architects, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Los Angeles Conservancy and the Institute of Classical Architecture & Classical America.

Richard Manion realised the full potential of a 1930s English country manor in Los Angeles, CA, with a renovation that blends old and new spaces and accommodates the client's modern lifestyle. All photos: Erhard Pfieffer
Manion begins his projects by researching what aesthetic might have existed regionally. "In the 1930s, many of the houses emulated designs from the East Coast as more people moved West," he notes. "We wanted to keep the feeling in the house as intimate as possible — to keep the 1930s scale of the rooms." Since there was no record of the original architect or original architectural drawings, Manion focused on a loose, modern interpretation of the work of C. F. A. Voysey, Wilson Eyre and other contemporaries adapted to Los Angeles.

"The design really evolved out of necessity," notes Manion. The homeowner wanted to remodel to accommodate family members and guests. "We wanted the old and new spaces to blend together," he continues. "The house was well kept over the years but did have some structural problems — we ultimately took the house down to the studs."

To create new living areas and master suite baths, Manion enlarged the house considerably — 6,400 to 10,300 sq.ft. The end of the main axis of the house turned on an awkward angle so he took off a whole wing to configure a straight axis through the house. "In an older house, there are problems with the original design of the dining room, kitchen and service wings," says Manion, who always creates opportunities out of problems. "These spaces are not suited for modern-day living. There were problematic step-ups in the kitchen and service areas — we were able to raise ceilings and lower floors in the remodeling process. We rebuilt entire wings and updated electrical and plumbing for today's standards. The house also has all new windows and doors, which helped tremendously with climate control. You never know what surprises you might find in an old house once you open up the walls."

To create a focal point for the front entrance, Manion removed the porte cochère and designed a new gabled façade that announces the entry. This is where the house gets its name — The Gables. Manion had no evidence of the original façade so he created a look in keeping with the 1930s period.

Upon entering the foyer, the house begins to unfold. "We didn’t enlarge the foyer — we wanted to keep it intimate," says Manion. The original stair detailing was too heavy for the small reception area, so the architect designed a new stair in the same location. The original floors were uninspired 2-in. strip oak, so Manion designed a decorative inlay floor for the space to add interest. The window on the stair landing received interior paneling to help articulate the space and create more of a focal point. Manion also designed all the moldings and cabinetry in the house. For instance, the dining room panels conceal secret storage compartments, in keeping with original precedents. "We did replace all the hardware as well, which was too
"diminutive," he says. Manion chose a more substantial design from Baldwin Hardware of Reading, PA.

The new wing overlooks the existing pool and includes the family room on the first floor and his and hers bathrooms, walk-in closets and a study for the master suite on the second floor. "We raised the ceiling in the existing master bedroom and created a new fireplace mantel," says Manion. "We also added a small balcony off the master bedroom, an exercise alcove and office. The space is very private and the homeowner can come here and work in the study or use the elliptical."

For kitchen access, Manion created a service entrance and hall. He expanded the kitchen to add a large conservatory/bay window for a breakfast area, which overlooks the pool. The windows flood the space with light and create a welcoming place for morning coffee. In the 1930s, this kitchen would only have been used by servants.
Handsomen cabinetry that resembles furniture updates the space for modern use and it is now bright and cheery.

California living is very much based on the outdoors, and Manion worked to blend the interiors and exteriors whenever he could. French doors from the new family wing lead to the pool. A substantial pergola in poor condition was rebuilt to offer a shady terrace along the original main structure. Off the living room, sets of French doors lead to a terrace. Manion created a fountain and curved stair off the terrace that leads down to a gently sloped lawn. The chimneys were white washed to give them a soft patina. "Upon approach to the house, this is the first view you see," Manion notes.

When asked about his client, the architect says, "She is a wonderful client and really embraced the evolution of the old house. She understood the value of expanding the program — and the challenge of how to make the design fantastic." In the case of this remodel, Manion meets his design challenge by creating a graceful and inviting English country abode. — Nancy E. Berry

The new wing overlooks the existing pool and includes the family room on the first floor and his and hers bathrooms, walk-in closets and a study for the master suite on the second floor.
Resurrected Quarters

A dilapidated ca. 1820s outbuilding, once a kitchen house and slave quarters, is restored and renovated into two luxury apartments.

Just a couple of houses down from the historic Aiken-Rhett House in the Garden District of Charleston, SC, a derelict ca. 1820s outbuilding is restored and renovated into two luxury apartment suites by designer William Bates. The outbuilding, along with the two-and-a-half story masonry main house fronting Judith Street, was built for wealthy sea merchant John Robinson as a speculative venture. It had once housed the kitchen for the main house on the lower level while the upper level served as slave quarters. When five of Robinson’s ships were captured and burned by the French in 1825, he sold this and other properties, including what is now known as the Aiken-Rhett House, to raise capital to meet his financial obligations.

In the fall of 2010, the current owners of the outbuilding approached Bates to reprogram the interior; the structure had been abandoned since Hurricane Hugo in 1989. “When I was commissioned to restore the outbuilding, it was in ruin,” he says. “The four solid 18-in.-thick masonry walls had weathered earthquakes, hurricanes and typical time ravages fairly well but the timber portions were essentially gone. The clients asked us to reinvent the interior spaces to accommodate two rentable suites and to give it a sense of history where there had once been but was no longer.”

It was decided that the outbuilding was to be restored to its 1820s appearance, so the first order of business was to clear out and sort through the debris that had collected in the interior throughout the years. Bates noted hearth fragments, a piece of a board-and-batten wall, four shutter dogs and portions of two windows
from the original structure. These artifacts were used to replicate original details and to guide the design team through the restoration and final phases of the project.

"The excavation revealed two aspects about slave life in 1820s Charleston," says Bates. "The first was that the ground floor showed no signs of ever having had anything but a dirt floor. The second was that the lower part of the windows had no glazed sash, as evident in our one extant window and those on the outbuildings at Aiken-Rhett House, which were both constructed by John Robinson. The shutters closed over an open sash. The only glass was in the fixed transom window above the shutter. Slaves were in close contact with the elements even when the shutters were closed."

On the exterior, deteriorated stucco was removed and the exposed brick shell was cleaned, repointed and finished with lime stucco painted in coral. Beneath the foundation, a concrete beam was poured at grade level for structural support. New wood windows were replicated based on the excavated window portions and modern casement windows were designed to fit in the openings without altering the profile and general appearance. The shutters and one-piece Dutch doors were fabricated using examples from the Aiken-Rhett House outbuild-

Above right: The massive kitchen fireplace in the first floor apartment suite was restored to working order and detailed with lime plaster.

Right: Modern casements were designed to fit seamlessly in the lower portion of the windows where no glazed sashes had existed before.
The second floor apartment features a smaller version of the first floor kitchen fireplace, hardwood floors and simple kitchen cabinetry; the table in the breakfast nook was built from salvaged attic beams.

The four recovered shutter dogs were restored and installed, and new ones were made to match originals. A standing-seam metal roof completes the exterior restoration.

The 1,600-sq.ft. two-story interior is subdivided into two apartment suites, each containing a kitchen and seating area, a bathroom and a bedroom. On the lower level, the apartment features a newly paved antique-brick floor and an original cooking fireplace, which was restored to working order and detailed with lime plaster. Using the piece of board-and-batten wall sample as guidance, the interior walls were covered with planks of horizontal pine. The kitchen cabinets and bathroom vanities have simple wood-paneled doors, understated black granite countertops, chrome faucets and wrought-iron hardware — the latter was fabricated by Exton, PA-based Ball and Ball Hardware. The shower is tiled with Carrera marble.

Using the excavated piece of board-and-batten wall as guidance, interior walls were paneled with planks of horizontal pine.
The color palette was based on paint samples Bates had collected from old Charleston houses as research when he was restoring his own home. Salvaged wood from the attic beams was used to construct end tables placed throughout the two apartments and a table in the breakfast nook in the upper level apartment.

“Originally, there had been an internal staircase for a single unit and no bathrooms,” says Bates. “At some point, a door was added in the upper level to connect the kitchen to the main house. We used that opening to gain access to the second floor unit and re-appropriated the area where the internal stairs had been for modern bathrooms.”

Compatible exterior stairs were built to the second-level entry, which opens to the kitchen and breakfast nook. A smaller version of the first floor fireplace was restored and the floors are hardwood throughout. Off the kitchen, a library leads to the bedroom and bath. The rest of the apartment is styled similarly as the lower level.

In addition to orchestrating the interior layout, Bates also decorated the interior and designed custom furniture pieces. “The furniture is a mix of antiques and updated styles reminiscent of ones that may have been moved out of the main house, as well as rustic pieces purpose-built for a cookhouse, all blended to create a fresh look,” he says.

The color palette was based on paint samples Bates had collected from old Charleston houses as research when he was restoring his own home. Salvaged wood from the attic beams was used to construct end tables placed throughout the two apartments and a table in the breakfast nook in the upper level apartment; the tables were fabricated by Charleston, SC-based Landrum Tables.

Additional key materials and manufacturers include Louisiana, MO-based Van Dyke’s Restorers (hardware restoration); and Chicago, IL-based USG Corporation Headquarters (plaster). Local Charleston, SC-based manufacturers include Innercoastal Millworks (custom windows and doors); Michael Lauer (interior lime plaster); Four Corners Woodworking (antique woods); and Circa Lighting.

After standing empty for more than two decades, the outbuilding on Judith Street has been successfully renovated into two apartment suites with its historic integrity restored. “It was nice to be involved in returning this property to a slightly more accurate historical density,” says Bates. “Today, many of the grand houses in Charleston are programmed for a couple that might have a few children. With the reprogramming of this building to include two suites, the main house and the cookhouse may have as many as 10 to 12 people occupying it at any one time, a bit closer to the density numbers it was built for originally.” — Annabel Hsin

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Home at Last

A divided 19th-century townhouse becomes a single-family residence once more.

In 1880, William R. Grace, Irish-born founder of shipping conglomerate W.R. Grace and Co., took up residence at a William Estabrook-designed townhouse in midtown Manhattan. Grace was not the first to occupy 31 East 38th Street, which was built in 1869 for Charles E. Butler, an attorney, but his time there proved oddly prescient; he was the city’s first Catholic mayor, from 1881-1882 and 1885-1886. Today, 31 East 38th Street falls within the Murray Hill Historic District, and is the residence of staff members of Highland Study Center, a faith-based, non-profit organization whose programs are inspired by the social teachings of the Catholic Church. Its transformation is the result of an intensive restoration and renovation by Cooper, Robertson & Partners, the results of which belie the client’s judicious budget.

Like many townhouses in the city, 31 East 38th Street underwent ill-advised renovations that altered or obscured much of the original building fabric. In 1937, all of the upper floors were severely compromised when the townhouse was converted to nine apartments. Beyond the permit for this subdivision, very little documentation about the building remained. Restoring it to a single-family residence was therefore a matter of careful editing and thorough investigation. “We examined the building very carefully,” says Manuel Mergal, partner at Cooper, Robertson & Partners.

Cooper, Robertson & Partners restored 31 East 38th Street, New York, NY, to a single-family residence for use by members of the non-profit organization, Highland. Among the townhouse’s new features is a private chapel. All photos: Peter Murdock
The selective demolition phase officially lasted four months, but was in reality an on-going process. Initially using 50 probes, the firm was able to determine what was behind the walls and what was and was not structurally sound. "We found a litany of construction issues," says Christian Bolliger, senior associate, "that had not previously revealed themselves." Among these were cut joists and brick removed from load-bearing walls – a result of squeezing plumbing for nine apartments into the building.

From a functional point of view, the interior was often incoherent. "This was an Italianate house," says Mergal. "At the time, the Classical language of architecture was freely interpreted. It was hard to tell sometimes which of the moldings were original and which had been added during the course of renovations."

The firm documented every single molding in the house, many of which were obscured by layers of paint, to determine the original hierarchy of its rooms, from 9-in. casings on the garden floor to 6-in. casings on the upper floors and 4-in. casings at the top, which denoted servants' quarters. After some deliberation, the firm decided to re-create the 9-in. casings used on the garden and parlor floors and custom-designed 6-in. casings for the upper floors, with the exception of bathrooms and service areas, where 4-in. casings were used.

That the garden and parlor floors were in a state of renovation when Cooper, Robertson & Partners came on board proved useful in determining the timeline of the building. A portion of an existing stair had been cut and concealed, and evidence of relieving arches on several floors suggested that an addition had been constructed at the rear early on. "There were areas where either walls or ceilings were removed," says Bolliger. "We found pieces of the original single-family house."

To accommodate the client's extensive new program, the firm carried out a gut renovation of the upper floors, reconfigured them entirely, added an elevator, and changed the location of the dining room from the parlor to the garden floor. "We had to pack a lot into this building," says Mergal. "We had to accommodate 12 bedrooms, 12 bathrooms, a library, some office space, a private chapel, sitting rooms, a laundry room, kitchen, dining room, family room etc."

Despite space constraints, the firm found imaginative ways to retain beloved elements of the house. In the entry hall, for example, the memory of a mirror at the top of the entry hall stairs is a window that looks into a second-floor corridor beyond. Here, a new skylight was added and the entire corridor was moved to the west in order to accommodate bigger rooms.

"It is perhaps due to our urban design background that in this firm we have a sense of being stewards," says Mergal. "Stewards of the environment and stewards of what we inherit. So we have to take what is there very seriously, look at it, and think, 'What are we going to do about this?' so that there is a sense of continuity with what previously existed."
The private chapel – once the parlor room – is off the entry hall.

Perhaps the most unusual program requirement for a single-family home was the inclusion of a private chapel, in what was once the parlor room. After trying to incorporate the original pocketing door into the design, the firm designed a new three-door expression at the rear of the parlor, made to look as if they had always been there, added a platform for the altar and removed the fireplace. The firm re-created new ceiling moldings in plaster, which were finished to disguise differences in materials. In other areas such as where wainscoting is used, “the initial stripping led us to believe that curly maple was used throughout,” says Mergal, “but after finishing stripping, we discovered maple and pine, used randomly. It was more cost effective to paint this area instead of staining it, as we had originally intended.”

The new kitchen is a hybrid between residential and commercial; warm and welcoming, it has the capacity to serve a large party with no outside catering. Off the kitchen is the dining room, where new moldings, casings – which were integrated with the cornice and wainscoting – complement the restored original fireplace. “None of the fireplaces were working and all but two were removed,” says Mergal, “but the clients were very proactive with trying to sell the mantles.”

Though Cooper, Robertson & Partners was initially retained to work on the building interior only, the clients decided to bring the
Relocated from the parlor to the garden floor, the dining room features new moldings, casings and a restored original fireplace.

One of the upstairs bedrooms accommodates three and opens to two bathroom suites.

The exterior was cleaned using micro-abrasion and chemical peeling, and excess cement was removed to reveal the articulation of the stone column capitals and pediments.

eterior up to historic district standards. The building had been painted, from the base and stairs to the roof slate. To make matters worse, the column recesses and entry pediment had been filled with concrete as a cheap method of pigeon control. "I have worked in stone buildings for most of my professional life," says Mergal, "of course I had a visceral reaction against painting stone. It was hard to tell what was stone, slate or wood."

As the building is Nova Scotia sandstone with a brownstone base, the firm looked at other historic two-tone townhouses for guidance in cost-effective cleaning methods. The lower half was worst affected by carbon staining, so required micro-abrasion, while chemical peeling sufficed for above. Excess cement was removed, revealing the articulation of the stone column capitals and pediments while the metal gates were sandblasted and refinished.

The exterior stone conservation and restoration was carried out by A. Ottavino Corporation of Jamaica, NY. Other suppliers for 31 East 38th Street included Elite Woodworking of Brooklyn, NY; Rejuvenation Lighting of Portland, OR; and Ball & Ball of Exton, PA, (lighting).

Since the completion of the project in 2012, 31 East 38th Street has been proposed for National Historic Landmark status. "Our design kept as much of the original structure as was possible," says Mergal. "The clients bought the house because of its character. Today, it is impossible to determine what was existing and what is new; thereby, the architectural integrity that originally attracted the owners to the house is preserved." — Lynne Lavelle

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From Prosaic to Precious

In appearance and performance, certain building materials lend themselves to recycling.

By Gordon Bock

The practice of harvesting materials and parts from one building for new life in another is hardly new. Before the cost of labor eclipsed that of materials sometime in the mid-19th century, the usable lumber, stone, brick and metal in unwanted houses was recycled into other structures almost as a matter of course. In the 1890s, architect Stanford White was famous — some say infamous — for combing Europe for antique mantels, columns, and carved-wood paneling that he would incorporate into his superiors for America's Gilded-Age nouveau riche — and at eye-popping mark-ups. Whether you call it salvaged, recycled or simply used, the market for "experienced" building components continues today for period houses, and in ever-changing ways, as this look at four popular materials shows.

Tile Roofing

From asphalt shingles to metal sheets, most roofing materials are destined for periodic replacement — frequently after service lives as short as 15 years. However, one of the most recyclable of building materials is actually a traditional roofing component: ceramic tile. What makes tile roofing practical to recycle under the right conditions is its legendary longevity.

"Tile roofs in Europe have lasted centuries," says Michael Lukis of Tile Roofs Inc. in Frankfort, IL. "Years ago, architects didn't realize that typically, it is not the tiles that cause roof problems, it is the wearing out of other components — fasteners, underlayments and flashings."

One of the advantages of salvaged tile is for repairs. "The roof is a highly visible part of a house," adds Lukis, "but with salvaged tile you can exactly match old material in look, age and color so that a repair to a 1920s or '30s roof doesn't look like a repair — and you may also save a bit of money."

Lukis explains how even a spot leak produced by, say, wind-driven rain can, over time, work its way through 16 oz. copper flashing. "If a tile roof is leaking," he says, "it is the underlayment that is failing. Therefore, a leaking tile roof does not have to be abandoned; it can be repaired and restored by removing the tiles, renewing the underlayments, underlayment and flashings and then re-installing the tiles." Lukis says, "so when someone asks if I'm interested in the old tile roof they plan to rip off, I wind up explaining how it can be repaired — even though I'm happy to sell all the tile to another customer."

It is not hard to envision where the restoration of a period house may entail an entire re-roofing in salvaged tile, but Lukis says that he also sells large quantities of recycled tile for roofing brand new houses. He describes one client who bought 35,000 sq.ft. of tile freshly salvaged from an 80-year-old sanatorium. The rustic style tile (no longer in production) was exactly what the client sought for his new hunting lodge, and he easily expects to enjoy another 80 years of service from it.

When asked why someone would choose to roof a brand new house with salvaged tile — especially if they are not limited by budget — Lukis has a surprising answer. "Many people prefer the older clay color. Though manufacturers of new tile sometimes attempt to simulate this color with glaze, it is not the same."

Above: Gavin Historical Bricks supplied these antique Portington bricks for a driveway in Hillsdale, IL. Photo: courtesy of Gavin Historical Bricks.

Right: Salvaged clay tile supplied by Tile Roofs was used to create an instant patina on this roof. Photo: courtesy of Tile Roofs Inc.
match historic American tiles and patterns; they have also been successful in re-creating the green glaze popular decades ago.

A client or architect may naturally wonder if they can determine the quality of recycled roof tile. While Lukis describes one client who sent tiles to a lab for testing to ASTM standards (which they passed with flying colors), he says the better gauge is the track record right on the roof. “To stand up to the moisture and freeze-thaw conditions of northern climates,” he says, “roof tiles must have an absorption rate of 8% or less, otherwise in time they will exhibit flaking, breakage and other signs of failure. Therefore salvaged roof tile in good condition has actually been tested in the real world – a pretty sound indication that you have a good quality tile.” He notes that this kind of trial-by-usage has the advantage of testing every tile in a roof, while a new manufacturer only tests samples of a production run or lot.

Lukis says the salvaged roof tile business has been pretty steady even through the economic swings of the last few years – especially compared to new tile sales. While he does not see the appeal of recycled materials as a big driver in his business, he describes one client who, in building a large new house, made extensive use of used roof tile and was able to obtain a 30% tax credit. “The Internet has done a lot to educate people on salvaged tile,” he says “either to sell or to repair and use, and they are now far more aware of its value and possibilities.”

Slate Roofing
Another recycled building material at home on period houses – and in the same league as tile – is slate. Whether new or used, the life expectancy of roofing slate is determined by the source from which it was quarried. According to Jack Jenkins at the Durable Slate Co., based in Rockville, MD, “Most of the slate we see is from the slate belts in Vermont and New York State, which last about 125 years.” He explains that slates from Buckingham, VA, have a life of around 175 years, and Pennsylvania HardVein and Peach Bottom slates (which no longer quarried) stand up for 100 and 200 years respectively.

“When we reclaim slate from a building, we research the slate type, as well as when it was quarried and installed,” he says, “so we have a good idea of the kind of life that can be expected from a new installation.” As an example, he says they usually do not even reclaim Pennsylvania blue-black SoftVein slate because its life of 60 years or more is comparatively short. “In fact, some of the high-end slates are hard to find because, having such extraordinary lifespans and durability, they do not come onto the recycled market.”

According to Jenkins, the majority of the recycled slate market is for additions to existing slate roofs and major repairs, especially when a match in appearance and longevity is desired. “Slate is a rock, a very long-lived rock,” he says and, echoing tile, “what typically fails on a roof is not the rock but the underlayment.” However, he says that they also regularly sell recycled slate for entire new roofs. “What drives the choice of recycled slate over and above aesthetics? The opportunity to keep the roofing out of a landfill is a factor for some clients but the bigger appeal is usually the bottom line. Installation labor is the lion’s share of the cost of any slate roof, old or new, but Jenkins notes that using recycled slate can contribute a significant savings on materials – as much as 30% over new slate.

For all of the above reasons, Jenkins says, “There is a pretty strong market for recycled slate,” with his company keeping an inventory of some 800,000 to a million pieces in stock. Also, he says they are tapped into a national network that makes it possible to source pretty much any slate desired, from graduated slate to green, purple and mottled slates and the always hard-to-find red.

In another bit of roofing déjà-vu, Jenkins adds that the recycling process is actually an advantage. “Because recycled slate is being handled quite a bit during the course of recovery, sorting and shipping, you are getting a pretty solid material by the time it arrives at a new installation site.” As with any building material, when ordering new slate you have to factor in some overage for waste. “It’s the same for recycled slate,” he adds, “but maybe only by a couple of percentage points more.”

When it comes to installations, Jenkins says that in the hands of an experienced roofer, there are no significant differences between installing recycled slate versus new slate. “However, we
have been encouraging people to consider the hook system rather than using nails.” As he explains, hooks have been used for generations in Ireland and Wales. “Typically, under-nailing or over-nailing is one of the major sources of problems in slate roofs,” he says, either causing breakage of under-slates or punch-through on over-slates, “and the hook system eliminates that possibility.”

Brick and Stone
Perhaps no building materials have as long a history of being recycled as brick and stone, but for period houses the market is about as much more than used, run-of-the-mill masonry units. For example, John Gavin at Gavin Historical Bricks says that a large portion of his business is in paving — stones as well as bricks. Typically these come from urban streets to be repurposed by residential buyers for driveways and walkways, however, there is also the occasional call from a city that wants to repave a byway either with historical accuracy or for cobblestone ambiance.

Blocks crafted from granite or durable regional stones like quartzite and bluestone are hard to mistake for anything but paving — especially when they are worn smooth from generations of use — but when it comes to laying roadways you can’t use just any brick. “Paving bricks are heavy, dense, and can take exposure to moisture,” says Gavin, making them tough enough for traffic as well as weather. “Purington was once the largest maker of paving bricks in the world,” he says, “shipping all over the globe until the post-war era, when blacktop led to the demise of paving brick makers almost overnight.”

Used brick has a long history of being an economy building material, but that is not the end of the market in which Gavin’s typical client — or Gavin himself — operates. A big part of his business is supplying matching brick for building additions, both residential and non-residential.

“We just had a call from a client in New York, where the local historic review board said they have to use matching brick or they won’t be able to proceed with the addition.” He adds that he suspects this will be a growing trend as historic regulations increase in sensitivity and people invest more in existing buildings.

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www.tileroofs.com
888-708-TILE

The Durable State Co.
www.durablestate.com
240-650-9780

Gavin Historical Bricks
www.historicalbricks.com
319-354-5251

Wm. J. Rigby Co.
www.wmjrigby.com
607-547-1900

While the bricks Gavin deals in may be from the golden age of brick-making — that is, about 75-120 years old and machine-made — the units themselves are far from ordinary. “We are constantly on the look-out for specialty bricks — products such as iron-spot brick or scratch-block brick — because this is what our clients seek.” For example, he says that not only is garden-variety, common brick not hard to find — “There are scores of old mills and warehouses in the Southeast built with this red-orangey brick,” — this is not the brick that is challenging to match on, say, a house addition. The same applies to the yellow brick endemic to the Chicago area.

Someone building a new house might seek reclaimed flooring for its aged character, or to gain environmental peace of mind by saving it from a landfill, but with brick it is more about blending. “Some clients want to get LEED points for using recycled materials,” Gavin says, “but we do a lot of work with architects who need to get matching brick for an addition.”

For this reason, he concentrates on the distinctive. “We are a high-end brick business,” he says, with “millions upon millions of pounds of material in inventory.” Gavin deals in clinker bricks too — the misshapen culs that became popular as visual accents in house and garden walls, especially in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. They are something of a specialty item he notes, and he sources them in old walls as well as from new suppliers.

Whatever the brick, typically the shopping process is pretty straightforward. The client will send a photo and dimensions of the desired brick or stone, and if Gavin has a match — which is likely — he will send back a sample. Orders are then shipped out on flatbed truck. “I had a load of one brick type in the yard for five years, untouched,” he says, “then one day an architect called, asking ‘Do you have anything like this?’ and I sold the whole pile.”

Architectural Hardware
Though it too has a long history, architectural hardware is sort of an under-the-radar market in the recycled building parts world because the sources are so disparate — from general salvage dealers and architectural antiques purveyors to flea markets and now eBay. Nonetheless, with careful sourcing, recycled door locksets, knobs, window equipment and the like can be great assets for a period house project.

According to Bill Rigby at Wm. J. Rigby Co. in Cooperstown, NY, who specializes in unusual
original stock as well as antiques, they do a lot of business in relatively small items, such as sash lifts and other window hardware, but they see a significant call for many larger items that are otherwise unavailable as new products. Pocket door hardware is a prime example, including rabbed locksets for mating doors and sheaves and rollers for top- or bottom-rolling doors. Rigby adds that, “Industrial salvage has gone through the roof.” By that, he means heavy-duty door handles, lights with cages, and items with the maker’s name visibly cast into it, “anything that can be repurposed for a house,” he says.

Recycled architectural hardware, however, is not like buying new. “The problem today with salvage hardware is that people will buy something because it looks pretty,” says Rigby, “but then find it is not in working condition.” This is typically due not to a lack of ethics but more that the buyers—as well as the seller—are not experts in hardware. A generalist purveyor might be selling everything from millwork and doors to staircases and lights; the same is true of eBay, where much salvage commerce is now transacted, but by anyone.

Rigby also notes that other pitfalls are investing in hardware that is not equipped to do the job the buyer expects—say, an office door lock that is attractive but not up to modern security needs—as well as buying items that are worn out or not complete. “Even door knobs,” he says, “should be a matched set of knob, rose and escutcheon and thimble, otherwise they won’t work or will wear out prematurely.”

Another common expectation issue is when buyers want to make hardware do something it was not designed to do. He notes how lever handles are increasingly popular—in part for ADA reasons. However, he explains that, “Ninety percent of old hardware is designed for knobs, and you cannot simply switch over to levers; the locksets are typically not built with sufficient springs and the shafts may not be correct.” He adds that while springs may be easy to fix or replace when broken, just shipping the lockset back and forth adds to the cost of the item. With this in mind, Rigby’s prime advice is to ask the seller about their return policy. “In a lot or order of several items, you are almost guaranteed to have one item that is not up to snuff.”

Gordon Bock is co-author of The Vintage House (www.vintagehousebook.com) and available for keynote speeches, seminars, and workshops through www.gordonbock.com.
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Haddonstone produces a wide variety of architectural elements, including porticos and columns.

Heather & Little fabricated this copper capital.

Chadsworth Columns manufacturers the IMP (Injection Molded Plastic) Tuscan capital and base/plinth sets for 8-, 10- and 12-in. round PolyStone column shafts; they can be secured with finishing nails or construction adhesive.

This wooden Corinthian capital was hand carved by the artisans at Agrid.

This plaster capital from Felber Ormamental Plastering Corp. measures 6½ in. tall x 6½ in. wide and projects ½ in.
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Exterior Spaces: Gardens & Landscapes
Multi-Unit

Corresponding awards, sponsored by Traditional Building magazine, will also be made for commercial, institutional and public projects.

JUDGING CRITERIA
The Palladio Awards are named in honor of Andrea Palladio, the Renaissance architect who created modern architecture for his time while using models from the past for inspiration and guidance. The judges will be applying the same criteria that Palladio used in his own work: the projects should meet all the functional needs of contemporary usage while applying lessons learned from previous generations to create beauty in the built environment.

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If you are one of the winners of a Palladio Award for 2014, you will receive a Palladium – the cast-bronze trophy emblematic of the program, designed, sculpted and cast by the artisans at Historical Arts & Casting, Inc., West Jordan, UT – at the Traditional Building Conference. You will also have the opportunity to give an illustrated presentation of the project at the conference and the project will be published in the July 2014 issue of Period Homes.

Winning projects will also be highlighted for 12 months on the Palladio Awards website.

DEADLINES & ENTRY REQUIREMENTS
The deadline for receipt of the completed entry package is November 22, 2013.

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Fifthroom.com supplied this 14x18-ft. treated-pine rectangular double-roof gazebo with two custom 12x12-ft. treated-pine pergolas attached.

Haddonstone's orangeries are ideal for traditional homes or commercial projects, whether freestanding or connected to an existing property.

The Victorian Lodge glasshouse is custom handmade by Hartley Botanic and features a central portico entrance.

This forged iron canopy is part of a large geodesic fabricated by Wiemann Metalcraft installed in Sugarland, TX.

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The International Network for Traditional Building, Architecture & Urbanism is a worldwide organization dedicated to the support of traditional building, the maintenance of local character and the creation of better places to live. www.intbau.org

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Manufacturer of classic architectural elements: plaster crowns, ceiling medallions, ceilings, niches & swags; 13,000 appliques for woodwork/furniture; 900 sizes of column capitals, pilaster capitals, corbels & columns; 15 styles of traditional wood mantels; classically inspired grilles; since 1883.
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NIKO fabricated and installed these pressed-metal ceiling panels.

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This ceiling lantern, model H173 from Herwig Lighting, is made of cast-aluminum alloy and crystal moss glass sealed in silicone.

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GREENBUILD 2013, November 20-22, 2013. Greenbuild’s international conference and expo will be held in Philadelphia, PA. It is dedicated to green building products and services and will feature three days of educational sessions, green building tours and seminars. For more information, visit www.greenbuildexpo.org.

2014 PALLADIO AWARDS DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS, November 22, 2013. The annual Palladio Awards, honoring excellence in traditional architecture, are sponsored by Traditional Building and Period Homes magazines and the Traditional Building Conference Series. For more information, go to www.palladioawards.com.

FLOWERING CHINOISERIE MURAL WORKSHOP, December 5-7, 2013. Lynne Rutter Studio in San Francisco, CA, will conduct a three-day workshop lead by the decorative artist herself on painting flowering chinoiserie murals. Participants will learn traditional and innovative techniques to paint classic chinoiserie murals focusing on flowers and plants. For more information, visit www.lynerutter.com.

FIRE & LIGHT: A TOUR OF THE ART GLASS OF GREENE & GREENE, December 7, 2013. This two-hour in-depth tour of the Gamble House in Pasadena, CA, will examine the stained-glass work of Greene & Greene. Contemporary glass artist and Gamble House docent John Hamm will show participants the Greene’s evolution of style. For more information, visit www.gamblehouse.org.

ICAA’S NEW ORLEANS GUIDED TOUR, December 11-15, 2013. The ICAA will lead a guided tour of New Orleans, LA. The excursion, titled, “The Louisiana Classicism of New Orleans, A. Hays Town and More,” will combine the city’s traditional architecture and gardens, both public and private, with the vernacular work of architect A. Hays Town (1903-2005). For more information, visit www.classicist.org.

RALPH ADAMS CRAM’S 150TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY, December 13-14, 2013. A two-day celebration will be held in Boston, MA, in honor of the 150th anniversary of Ralph Adams Cram’s birth. Event highlights include tours around the Boston area, organized bus tours to two churches and evensong at the All Saints’ Ashmont. For more information, email cramcelebration@allsaints.net.

INTERNATIONAL BUILDERS’ SHOW, January 22-24, 2014. Next year, the Association of Home Builders (NAHB) will co-host its annual show with the Kitchen and Bath Industry Show at the Las Vegas Convention Center in Las Vegas, NV. For more information, go to www.buildersshow.com.

CLASSICAL TRADITION CONFERENCE, February 6-8, 2014. The Classical Tradition Conference will be held at the Grand America Hotel in Salt Lake City, UT. The event is a forum designed to bring together passionate individuals with a common interest in Classical and traditional architecture, art and the allied building arts. Participants arriving on the first day will have a chance to mingle at an evening gathering followed by two days of presentations. For more information, go to www.ctcslc.com.

NOMMA’S 2014 METALFAB EDUCATION EXPO & EXCHANGE, March 12-15, 2014. The National Ornamental & Miscellaneous Metals Association (NOMMA) will host its annual convention at the Embassy Suites in St. Charles, MO. The three-day event features seminars and workshops on the metalwork industry; topics include LED illuminated handrails and best practices for metalworking as well as a tour of historic St. Charles. For more information, visit www.nomma.org.

NATIONAL BUILDING MUSEUM PROGRAMS & EXHIBITS. The National Building Museum in Washington, DC, offers a series of exhibits and programs throughout the year on topics dealing with architectural design and building. Many of the programs qualify for AIA continuing-education units. Exhibitions include “Palaces for the People: Guastavino and America’s Great Public Spaces,” which feature large-scale color photography of tile constructions created by the Guastavino family, original drawings, patents and advertisements of the Guastavino Company, as well as a full-scale tile vault and construction demonstrations. The building itself is worth the visit, and 45-minute walk-in tours are offered daily. For details on current programs and a tour schedule, go to www.nbm.org.
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This Chinese Chippendale mantel was hand-carved by the artisans at Agrell.

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This chimney piece from Haddonstone incorporates legs in the form of Ionic columns supporting a mantel with swags, medallions and a dentiled cornice.

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Custom fabricator of all types of spiral stairs: steel, steel/wood or all-wood; custom railing & wood stair parts.
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NIKO fabricated this custom zinc spandrel panel.

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Manufacturer of metal & wood staircases: straight, curved & spiral; metal stair parts & treads, balusters/railings & newel posts; brass, steel, bronze & aluminum; custom fabricated or kits; any size; ships worldwide.
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Susan Benjamin, architectural historian and principal, Benjamin Historic Certifications, Highland Park, Ill.
Bill Latoza, founding principal, RA, LEED AP, BauerLatoza Studio, Chicago
Dan Smith, CSI, CCPR, LEED AP, commercial sales representative, Marvin Windows and Doors, Chicago

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How does an acolyte of Le Corbusier become America’s first modern Classicist? This intellectual journey, told by Allan Greenberg in a preface he titled “Fragments of an Autobiography,” is just one of many fascinating elements contained in this handsome new monograph from Rizzoli. As one would expect, the bulk of the pages in this beautifully produced collection are devoted to presenting the elegant projects—houses, apartments, retail venues, university and civic buildings—that Greenberg’s office has produced in recent decades.

Allan Greenberg, the first American to be awarded the Drirschau Prize for excellence in traditional and Classical architecture, has devoted his career to establishing Classicism as a valid language for contemporary design. This was quite a lonely mission initially because Greenberg emerged on the scene just as it seemed that the last vestiges of canonical Classicism were about to disappear with the passing of master practitioners such as John Russell Pope (1874-1937), Mott B. Schmidt (1889-1977) and Philip Trammell Schutze (1890-1982).

As he relates in the preface, the young Allan Greenberg moved to the U.S. in 1963 after studying architecture in Europe and in his native South Africa. The allure of Modernist theory had captured his imagination; the iconoclastic writings of Le Corbusier held a special appeal. But while at the architectural school at Yale, Greenberg began to have doubts about Modernism’s impact on America’s cities. After viewing the havoc caused by New Haven’s urban renewal program, Greenberg writes, “I concluded that, for me at least, Modernist architecture lacked an alternative urban vision. I decided to pursue a career as a classical architect.” In the mid-1970s, with Modernism in full control of the entire architectural profession, that was a daring decision.

In the ensuing five decades, Greenberg’s firm, which now has offices in New York City, Washington, DC, and Greenwich, CT, has not only produced a steady output of exceptional traditional architecture, but also has been a training ground for many young Classical architects who have gone on to their own productive careers. All the while, Greenberg has shown impressive command of the Classical language, demonstrating his ability to generate not only canonically correct compositions but also brilliantly creative variations on Greco-Roman and other traditional forms.

This inspiring Rizzoli monograph displays 14 of Greenberg’s most recent residential projects and seven institutional and commercial undertakings for blue-chip clients including Harrison Ford, Martha Stewart and Bergdorf Goodman. There is also a brief section reprinted some of his earlier work, including the renowned Treaty Room Suite at the U.S. State Department. The oversized format (12 in. x 12 in.) provides a satisfyingly large canvas for the sumptuous photographs that document each commission. The generous number of photos (around 10 per project) is sufficient to convey both the overall character of each work, as well as providing informative close-ups of key details. Showing both interiors and exteriors, the photos also demonstrate how the architecture is artfully harmonized with adjoining gardens and landscapes.

Exquisite Details

Beyond a refined sense of proportion and composition, Greenberg’s works are characterized by painstaking attention to architectural details, both in design and construction. Greenberg collaborates with leading artisans—cabinetmakers, wood carvers, plasterers, sculptors and mosaic artists—to create sophisticated details at the highest levels of craftsmanship. One example that intrigued this reader: Greenberg treats chimneys as architec-
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The Father of American Landscape Architecture

Andrew Jackson Downing Essential Texts
edited by Robert Twombly
W.W. Norton & Co., New York, NY; 2012
400 pp; soft cover; a number of b&w illustrations; $35
ISBN 978-0-393-73359-4
Reviewed by Martha McDonald

“Architect and Gardener to the Republic,” the introduction to Twombly’s book, highlights Downing’s short life (1815-1852) in Newburgh, NY, and points to his reputation as “the father of American landscape architecture, as his profession is now called, and a father of the urban park movement in the United States, as well as the foremost advocate of village, indeed national, beautification.”

Downing began writing about horticulture when he was 16. He wrote more than 140 essays, many of them editorials in the journal he founded, The Horticulturist and Journal of Rural Art and Rural Taste. He also wrote four books on landscape gardening, fruit trees and residential design. Downing followed his father into the nursery business but eventually devoted all of his time to The Horticulturist and offered his services as a professional landscape gardening expert.

He collaborated with Alexander Jackson Davis from 1942 until 1850 on at least five residential commissions, with Downing as the consultant and Davis as the architect. In 1850, Downing went to England to study landscapes to study landscapes, and returned with a young architect who worked as his assistant for two years, Calvert Vaux.

Downing was working on what would have been his largest project, the “Public Grounds” in Washington, DC, when he died in 1852. He and his family were on board the Henry Clay headed for Washington, DC, when the vessel caught fire and Downing was among 70 people who drowned.

Twombly has selected a number of Downing’s writings and presented them in six sections: “Architecture and Building,” “Landscape Gardening,” “Parks and Other Public Places,” “Village Beautification,” “Horticulture,” and “Agricultural Education.” Each section contains a number of Downing’s essays, and each one of these is prefaced by an introduction by Twombly. Most of the illustrations (all are black-and-white photos or drawings) are located in a section of the center of the book.

The writings reveal a person devoted to the wellbeing of the general public. He quite often mentions the value of public parks and institutions.

His interests ranged from simple country homes to grand public sites. For example, a chapter in the first section entitled “On Country Houses,” written in 1846, states that rural homes should be simple with “neat and quiet grounds,” and “within the reach of almost every landholder in America.” He then proceeds to provide guidelines, including drawings, for a simple country cottage.

The second section on “Landscape Gardening” starts with a letter to the editor of The New-York Farmer and Horticultural Repository, published in 1832 when Downing was only 17, signed “X.Y.Z. Newburgh.” He noted, “That branch of horticulture called landscape gardening is, as yet, completely in its infancy among us,” and warned against “straight line planting,” and the common fault of “placing the residence too near the public road.” Other chapters include “A Chapter on Lawns,” “Hints on Flower-Gardens,” “The Management of Large Country Places,” and “A Chapter on School Houses.”

The third section, “Parks and Other Public Places,” reveals Downing’s belief in the need for public parks “open to all classes of people, provided at public cost, maintained at public expense and enjoyed daily and hourly by all classes of persons.”

In The New York Park, published in 1851, Downing praises Mayor Kingsland’s proposal for “a green oasis for the refreshment of the city’s soul and body.” He only complained that Kingsland’s proposal, at 160 acres, was too small, noting that “five hundred acres is the smallest area that should be reserved for the future wants of such a city.” In his notes for this section, Twombly points out that the state legislature authorized the purchase of 778 acres in 1853, and another 65 acres in 1863, bringing New York City’s Central Park to 843 acres.

The book concludes with a section on agricultural education in which Downing bemoans the fact that irresponsible farming is depleting the nation’s soil and calls for the creation of agricultural schools. A useful detailed index and suggestions for further reading are found in the final pages.

Twombly, a retired professor of architectural history at City College in New York, and author of other books and anthologies, became interested in Downing during visits to the two remaining Jackson-designed landscapes. One is the 1851 Headley property just south of Newburgh, NY, Downing’s home town. The other is the 1951-52 Matthew Vassar estate in Poughkeepsie, NY. Twombly was disheartened to see that very little of Downing’s original work remained, and that even Downing’s home and its 11-plus acres no longer existed. This led him to study more about Downing and his influence on others such as Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, and to develop this most informative book. It is a book that could be read straight through, and revisited often by anyone with and anyone with even a passing interest in landscapes and the public environment.

Twombly has brought to light Andrew Jackson Downing’s remarkable contributions to the American landscape. As one who greatly appreciates our public parks, and who has, I will admit, often taken them for granted, I will never stroll through one again without thinking of Downing.”

The Father of American Landscape Architecture

A.J. Downing’s residence in Newburgh, NY, was demolished ca. 1920.

The plan for Downing’s estate, drawn by his assistant, Frederick C. Withers, published in The Horticulturist in 1851.
By the Numbers

Applying Mathematics to Construction, Carpenter Mathematics & Estimating
by Kenneth Williams, Sr.
Outskirts Press, Inc., Denver, CO; 2011
64 pp; soft cover; no photos; $42.95

Reviewed by Judy Hayward

During a recent conversation, my friend, who happens to be a carpenter, shared that he wished he had paid more attention to math in school. He went on to say that he understands the importance of math to his trade today but continues to worry that young people considering careers in the trades just aren’t hearing the message. This conversation would be music to the ears of Kenneth Williams, Sr., who has published Applying Mathematics to Construction, Carpenter Mathematics & Estimating. Williams is an instructor at Delgado Community College, Technical Division in New Orleans, LA.

Williams’ book distills years of construction experience as carpenter, contractor and vocational building trades instructor at the post-secondary level. It was during his years as a contractor that he developed a professional philosophy and practice of studying repeated problems to develop strategies and formulas to fix them. His philosophy is, “While making mistakes is common, fixing them is uncommon.” His book of formulas and practical processes is his gift to students and fellow faculty to shorten learning curves and avoid common mathematical errors that result in cost increases and lesser profits for those at work in the construction industry.

Williams divides the book into two parts: mathematics and residential estimating. He begins with the tape measure and moves through basic math, fractions, ratios, decimals, percentages, factors, calculating, ovals, octagons, triangles and the Pythagorean Theorem. He then applies this information to the practical aspects of measuring materials, ordering lumber and estimating a job. He strongly encourages tradespeople to school themselves in math because skillful application of mathematics is professional, workmanlike and honest. He stresses that lack of math skills leads to errors on the job and in ordering materials. Problems such as these diminish respect for the trades when math errors disrupt the delivery, installation and performance of materials. Problems such as these can result in legal confrontations, he warns.

He explains calculations effectively and includes detailed glossaries throughout the book. It is a practical manual for carpenters and other trade professionals to have on their bookshelves. It is a great book to give to a young person enrolled in either high school or college carpentry programs or to share with your local building trades instructor. Mathematics instructors would do well to give it a read too, because it may help them engage young people in their classrooms who are interested in construction. It is a good reference book to have in your office if you struggle with math and work in construction trades, the building supply industry or are a design professional.

The book could be improved with some photographs illustrating some of the math applications and I would encourage the author to think about adding some in subsequent printings of the book. I would also encourage Mr. Williams to add more text about the value of these calculations. We bet he has some great stories to share about how he and others learned the importance of some of the mathematical concepts. Having said this, I believe the first edition of this book is valuable to read, share and use and we applaud his efforts to help young people master construction math.

Judy L. Hayward is the education director of the Traditional Building Conference Series, Restore Media, LLC, and executive director of the Preservation Education Institute, Historic Windsor, Inc., Windsor, VT. She can be reached at jhayward@restoremedia.com.
Save Homes: Unite a Neighborhood

By Spiro Gouras

The Sunset Park neighborhood of Brooklyn, NY, is in many ways a microcosm of modern urban America. It consists of an industrial area, which is currently being groomed for new business, two burgeoning immigrant communities and a significant number of artists and young professionals who find themselves priced out of other neighborhoods. Pressure on Sunset Park’s historic housing stock is increasing from all sides, and visibly, additional levels being hastily added to the tops of brownstones, façades and cornices disappearing, and walls being torn down for extensions and ground-floor garages.

That these changes are allowed is shocking to the majority of residents and visitors, who routinely ask, “How is this allowed?” The fact is that the only obstacle to most developers in urban areas is zoning laws, which outside of historic districts are not concerned with aesthetics or history. There is nothing in standard zoning laws to stop a developer from acquiring a row of three-story 1890s townhouses and adding two or three levels to each one and/or removing the façade to make them easier to maintain.

The only defense is landmark designation, which can preserve the historic character of a neighborhood and encourage responsible development beyond its borders. Beyond that, the process itself can unite seemingly disparate groups behind a common goal.

Formed last year, the Sunset Park Landmarks Committee (SPLC) www.preservesunsetpark.org aims to halt the accelerating destruction of the architectural integrity of our neighborhood, whose story is far from unique across America, or even new. The movement has motivated residents to organize, make their concerns heard with developers, and challenge construction proposals through appeals to city agencies. We may not win them all, but this pressure has already made the rapid, easy development that has tarnished our neighborhood more difficult, dissuading developers and realtors who want a rapid return — at any cost.

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Many older Sunset Park residents remember the bulldozing of one of our commercial strips in the 1950s and ’60s, to widen Robert Moses’ Brooklyn Queens Expressway. They also watched as factories shut down and the neighborhood was taken over by the infamous crime spree of the 1970s and ’80s, which coincided with preservationists taking note of the affordable historic homes that Sunset Park had to offer.

The three key factors concerning SPLC are the sympathetic reconfiguration of this older housing stock to accommodate more families, the construction of new housing for immigrant groups, and managing gentrification, which puts long-time residents at an economic disadvantage. To begin, we propose a small landmarked district of roughly 600-800 homes that would cover the 6-8% of Sunset Park that contains the best preserved historic housing stock.

While this is a relatively modest footprint, historic districting remains a controversial issue at any scale. As urban living becomes more and more desirable, our overstretched cities must find new ways to accommodate new residents and businesses — that aren’t at the expense of historic character. Development is coming to Sunset Park from many angles, and basic zoning laws cannot stem the tide.

Early in the winter of 2013, SPLC asked the local community board for support in preparing our application to the New York City Historic District Council’s (HDC) “Six to Celebrate” for 2013. We learned in February of this year that we were successful, which means that we receive the group’s guidance and are invited to workshops to help us with our application.

As community support at public hearings is key to the Landmarks Preservation Council’s (LPC) ultimate decision, we formed a demographically and socioeconomically representative SPLC board, which could best communicate our ideas to every group within the neighborhood. Through monthly meetings, a street fair that garnered almost 1,000 signatures of support, walking tours and many other community events, the message has spread. And through this process, Sunset Park’s past and future has begun to overlap.

Residents share stories of the neighborhood’s past, their hopes for its future and the features that make them want to be here. Many are torn between sadness that our older homes are disappearing — or being altered beyond recognition — and support for a cause that they fear may price them out. We share with them studies that indicate price stabilization, rather than increases, when an area is landmarked. Simeon Bankoff, executive director of HDC, spoke at one of our meetings and took questions.

As with many sensitive issues, it is open dialog that is molding Sunset Park residents’ opinions of the historic districting movement. Before they will give support, long-time residents want confirmation that the committee does not aim to turn Sunset Park into our wealthy neighbor, Park Slope. Yet history repeats itself and with that, there is commonality. Many immigrants and senior citizens moved to Sunset Park when they were priced out of other neighborhoods — as young newcomers can relate.

Having raised awareness, SPLC will hold the first official public hearings on a proposed Sunset Park historic district at the end of this year. Though ultimately, the decision lies with the LPC, we have built a broad base of support. And in doing so, realized that we all have much more in common than we thought.

Spiro Gouras is an elementary school teacher in New York City. He is a member of the Sunset Park Landmarks Committee and is currently working on a project to establish ties between area schools and the committee.
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