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6  REPURPOSING THE PAST
Architectural salvage adds patina to myriad design projects.
By Gordon Bock

12  BOOTHDEN A HOUSE IN PARADISE
In 1883, actor Edwin Booth built an estate in Rhode Island. Today, architect David Andreozzi restores the house to its former grandeur.
By John R. Tischler

22  BACK FROM THE BRINK
A nearly abandoned Virginia estate is given a new life—one defined by tradition.
By Kitty Jacobs

32  ART AS PROGENITOR OF ARCHITECTURE
Michael G. Imber: Ranches, Villas, and Houses
By Elizabeth Meredith Dowling; Foreword by Marc Appleton. Published by Rizzoli International Publications, New York, 2013; Reviewed by Clem Labine

64  EARLY INFLUENCE
A significant childhood influence on Michael Imber’s artistic development involved his introduction to watercolor with his aunt, Margaret Hynes.

52  ADVERTISER INDEX

BUYING GUIDES

Artwork, Art Glass & Furnishings .............. 36
Columns & Capitals .......................... 37
Conservatories, Greenhouses & Outbuildings ... 39
Doors, Windows, Hardware & Shutters .......... 40
Flooring ...................................... 45
Interior Elements, Ornament & Finishes ....... 46
Lighting & Electrical .......................... 48
Mantels, Fireplaces & Chimneys ............... 53
Metalwork ..................................... 55
Roofing & Roof Specialties .................... 57
Plumbing, Bath & Heating ....................... 58
Salvaged Materials & Antiques ................ 59
Stone, Brick & Masonry ........................ 61
Timber Framing & Barns ....................... 61
Woodwork .................................... 62
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Repurposing the Past

Architectural salvage adds patina to design projects.

BY GORDON BOCK | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIC ROTH
Far from new, and by no means an American idea, architectural salvage has been practiced for centuries as a way to cut material costs by recycling parts from one building into another. In modern times, it's also been a business where one man's cast-off can become another's crown jewel. Architect Stanford White made it a specialty in the 1890s by selling antique European columns and stone carvings to his Gilded Age clients at a stylish mark-up. Today, the architectural salvage industry continues to change and thrive among shifting tastes and swinging building cycles—including an epic housing crash—as some longtime experts in the field explain.

WHO BUYS SALVAGE?
Salvage seekers are as varied as people themselves, according to Noreene Parker at Pinch of the Past in Greensboro and Savannah, Georgia. "I have builders, interior designers, and DIYers that buy, and I also sell a lot to restaurant, hotel, and similar commercial developers." She adds that her company sells to, and does restoration work for, many art and cultural museums and historic house museums. "Some people use our pieces for restoration, and others just want to add character to these new, rather plain or ersatz construction projects," she says, "so it's a pretty varied business."

In the Midwest, Norm Kanis of Architectural Antiques of Indianapolis in Indiana reports an average balance between new construction and historic restoration. "We get people doing total restorations; we get flippers that want to keep the period character of a foreclosure they're getting, so they buy basic parts like a front door; and we get people seeking features that match their original house to make a new addition look like it was always there." He says salvage also appeals to clients building a totally new, but not necessarily period, house. "Any architectural feature that will make your property unique is what we're all about," he says. "We sell a lot of lighting, doors, and interior items that you can't buy at big-box stores."

Charles Nevinson of Architectural Accents in Atlanta, Georgia, points out that buyers change with the times. "During the recession, we saw mainly restorers of older houses because a lot of people opted not to sell and move. "Owners of these houses from the 1950s back to the 1890s would repair and restore, buying a new mortise lockset here, a match for a pair of hinges there. Up until 2000, and again after 2009 or so, there was also a "middle market" of new construction, adding a bathroom to an existing older house or making it modestly larger. "Today, I'd say that middle market is a little depressed, but we still get a lot of restorers. Plus, we're also getting the high-end buyer, who seem to be building new period houses as large as they did before the recession."

In fact, for many salvage businesses, the customers can be other businesses. "Restoration Hardware comes to us occasionally for items to insert into their retail shops," says Nevinson, "and with the film business huge now in Atlanta, they're always after old things for their sets."

For his own Washington, D.C., townhouse, Ankie Barnes of Barnes Van ze Architects incorporated several salvage pieces into his renovation project, including mantels and columns.

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Based on California's coastal beach cottages from the 1930s, architect Stephen Giannetti designed his home in Santa Monica—and his wife, Brooke, an interior designer, added patina through salvaged architectural elements. Columns stand as sentries to the living room, blue corbels add a flourish to the stairwell passageway, an old clock decorates a wall, and a large historical window becomes a mirror for the dining room.
SALVAGE CYCLES

No one was immune to the housing crash, but in the salvage market the impact was both bad and good. "Certainly a lot of the big sales for restaurants, small businesses, and hotels just fell off the cliff," recalls Parker. However, what didn’t slow down was supply. "I was getting eight, ten, twelve calls a day from people tearing down a building or selling their salvage, so it was a good time to buy and stockpile quality merchandise, within the limits of your cash reserves." What determines quality though can be relative to supply and demand. In times past, Parker says she’s had to turn away plentiful items like fireplace surrounds or bathroom and kitchen sinks "because we just couldn’t handle, say, 500 sinks." Even so, she says really good quality salvage in good shape has grown practically impossible to find over the years, and even items once overabundant are becoming scarce.

"When the market is good, you don’t have enough merchandise, and when the market is bad, you have more calls to buy than you can sell. It’s cyclical and goes up and down with the economics of the building environment."

Nevinson speaks for many when he says, "Just when you need new merchandise like a hole in the head, and you don’t even know where you’d put it, you have to be ready to commit to buying a good piece because it never comes on the market when it’s convenient."

In fact, Kanis says his most exciting finds were salvaged decades ago, when there was a big supply and not as much demand. He describes acquiring a pair of double-entry doors from folks who probably grabbed them in the 1970s when a house was razed, and saved them for some future project that never happened. "These doors are in pristine condition because they escaped some 40 years of wear and tear and likely came from a single-owner house in the first place. Finds like that are what we like best; they’re similar to a second chance."

Architectural salvage then turns on supply and demand, and a growing population combined with an aging building stock does not appear to hem it in. "We try to cater to the needs of all periods," says Kanis, "so we’re market-driven in that sense." He reports that in Indianapolis many Victorians have already been restored, but smaller towns offer opportunities so he still sells a lot of them. "I’d say that 1920s and ’30s houses are probably the majority of what people restore now; Mid-century Modern is really starting to come on strong—maybe not as strong for us as other areas, but that’s a big difference." He adds that doors and light fixtures are his dominant categories, with lighting being the biggest.

Parker says she carries merchandise from the 16th century through the 1960s. "If the salvage is good quality, I don’t turn it down just because it’s from the mid-20th century," she explains. "All of a sudden, half of my clients were born after 1960." She estimates she sells the bulk of her stock to clients within a 600-mile radius of her two Georgia stores. "Big items like stained glass, monumental sculptures, planters, and
large barn doors, we’ll sell all that we can get." The rest—perhaps 30 percent—find a home outside the Southern region, often though tourists, or is shipped as far afield as Oak Park, Illinois, and Modesto, California. "We have a big online presence with an extensive website and Facebook site."

Nevinson, too, casts his salvage net widely—and internationally. "The depth of our inventory does cover American," he explains, "but we're known as a source for the 18th-century European look, even if the items themselves are from the 19th, 17th, or 14th century." He adds though that these are not simply objects d'art. "We're on the more traditional, practical side," he stresses "so if we sell balconies, chimney pieces, doors, or whatever, we like to see them used for their original purpose. But that doesn't mean you can't come here and buy sconces, mirrors, and chandeliers."

Surprisingly, product supply and demand is not the only driver in the salvage business. "We used to move a lot of high-tank toilets and large 'sunflower' shower heads," Parker says, "but with water restrictions now in many communities we don't sell as many." The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements have had a similar impact. "I used to take 30 or 40 doorknobs out of an old hotel or apartment building and pretty much sell them right back to a hotel developer as soon as we cleaned them up, but not anymore. A commercial space has to have lever door handles."

She points out that a client building a new home to look old, or a substantial addition indistinguishable from an older home, can encounter similar issues. Suppose the building code requires all doors to be 36 in. wide, and the client wants them all to look the same? "I've got over 500 doors in inventory, but if somebody walks in hoping to drive away with 24 four-panel doors, 36 in. wide by 7 ft, tall, that all match, it just isn't going to happen." Without coming out of a hotel, such a quantity of identical doors could take months to assemble, she says. Nonetheless she does sell new old house builders a lot of millwork like trim, beadboard, and flooring, as well as accent pieces such as stained glass and chandeliers.

**THE SERVICE SIDE**

Depending upon its market, a salvage business does not necessarily stop with purveying building parts and architectural antiques as they come out of a building. "We do extensive restoration on just about anything," Parker says, adding that they polish brass, silver, and iron hardware, weld and sandblast, and restore stained glass. "We've got thousands of light fixtures and we restore all of those in-house."

Though Kanis sells most of his merchandise "as is," he also refurbishes a lot of lighting—but within limits. "We try to keep the finish as close to original as possible," he says. "It used to be everybody wanted to polish everything, but now we find people like older patinas." He adds that there's a market for anything, but generally his clients like items that are in good, original condition, as clean and pristine as possible. "The small inconsistencies of an old patina really attracts people and sets an item apart from one that is newly manufactured."

Nevinson takes the full-service approach. "It's a one-stop shop here," he explains. "If someone buys a door, for instance, we can completely prepare it—straighten it, if necessary, refinish it, install period hardware, adapt new hardware, and pre-hang it." He describes 12 or more artisans in various workshops that include slumped and stained glass, joinery, wood carving, Ul. rewiring and restoration of light fixtures, and locksmithing. "We also occasionally do a whole
Architect Gil Shafer is a master when it comes to incorporating architectural salvage into his design projects. For a house in New York, he incorporates historic mantels and wood flooring.

project a year for a client."

For some, this service end of the business flows naturally into making new reproductions of salvage-type items. "We cast some cabinet hardware, shutter hardware, and hinges because when you’re restoring a house, or building a new old house, your kitchen cabinets or shutters need hardware that looks old. But what you have is either mismatched or you don’t have enough pieces," Parker says. Barn door tracks are a case in point. "The big, sliding barn door thing is the biggest fad right now, and, of course, people come in practically daily looking for barn door tracks. So we’ve found some places where we can source repro track that people can use and we can still sell our doors." She adds that among many new people that call themselves contractors, if a building part doesn’t come out of a box with all its components, they don’t necessarily know what to do with it. "We have to help our market," she explains.

Nevinson has a similar tale. During the recession, he says he noticed that items like good blacksmith ironwork and period mantels were getting very hard and expensive to find. "Not everybody could afford a $30,000 mantel or even a $9,000 mantel, so my solution was to offer the same period look, but at a less expensive rate." In response, he created several dozen molds of old mantels and began reproducing them in cast stone, a material used for this purpose since the mid-19th century. "The thing is, it’s very hard to find matching pairs of period building parts, and when you do, they tend to command triple the price of a single item. So for a lot of people, it made sense to buy maybe one old mantel and get two reproductions." He offers the same approach with wrought ironwork, so clients can buy a chandelier for their dining room, and then have matching sconces in the great room. "Starting with people like Urban Archeology in New York, there’s quite a lot of reproduction salvage popping up in the industry," he observes. No doubt a source of future merchandise for the next salvage cycle. *

Boothden
a House in Paradise

In 1883, actor Edwin Booth built an estate in Rhode Island. Today, architect David Andreozzi restores the house to its former grandeur.

BY JOHN R. TSCHIRCH I PHOTOGRAPHY BY AARON Uasher
Who would not choose to live in Paradise? In 1883, Edwin Booth found his little piece of Eden on the shores of the Sakonnet River in Middletown, Rhode Island, among gently sloping meadowlands with distant views of Third Beach and the Atlantic Ocean. Prominent writers, poets, and painters made nearby Paradise Valley a frequent haunt. Thus, Booth was in good company with fellow artists. Set on the eastern side of Aquidneck Island, his secluded estate, named Boothden, offered more privacy than nearby Newport, where the fashionable set built villas on Bellevue Avenue where, according to Harper’s Magazine (1876), “society was always on dress parade.”

As the nation’s leading Shakespearean actor and brother of the infamous John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of President Abraham Lincoln, Edwin Booth (1833-1893) had more than enough public notoriety. Born into a theatrical family in Maryland, Booth was the illegitimate son of the Junius Brutus Booth. The young man began his career acting in plays with his father and brother. Edwin then rose to international prominence on his own, considered by many critics to be one of the greatest Hamlets of his day. In 1888, he founded The Player’s Club in his house at 16 Gramercy Park South in New York City. The club still operates on the premises, a testament to Booth’s camaraderie with his theatrical colleagues.

When not on stage, Booth was drawn to the coast of Rhode Island for its fine sailing and mild summer climate. He commissioned the supremely talented Calvert Vaux to create his retreat in Middletown. It was the perfect choice—Vaux had been discovered by the noted landscape writer and designer, Andrew Jackson Downing, who invited him to join his firm in 1850. The two men planned the grounds of the White House and the Smithsonian Institution before Downing’s untimely death in 1852. Celebrated as the “Father of American Landscape,” Downing developed the principles of the picturesque in architecture and landscape. Respecting and working with local topography, a love of the sinuous lines found in nature, and an appreciation of rustic forms was the basis of this picturesque ideal, of which Vaux became a devoted and skilful practitioner. Following Downing’s example of writing to promote his aesthetic theories on nature and design, Vaux published the influential book Villas and Cottages (1857). He then went on to greater celebrity in 1858 when he began work on Central Park in New York City with Frederick Law Olmsted. Vaux also had a passion for fine arts and a keen eye for all things visual, joining the National Academy of Design, the Century Club, and serving as a founding member of the American Institute of Architects. His affinity for picturesque environments, wooden structures, and his dedication for creating visually pleasing sight lines in the landscape all came to fruition in his scheme for Boothden.

The approach to Boothden reveals much about its owner and its designer. Passing through the lush landscape of Paradise Valley and down long country lanes, the visitor enters a tree-shaded lawn. Before one is a wooden house in the Queen Anne Revival manner with Stick Style motifs. The main façade is a combination of three Queen Anne gables with both plain and wave patterned shingled walls divided into square and rectangular compartments by wooden frames. The shingles give the structure a soft and textured organic feeling, while the Stick Style wooden frames impose an orderly quality on the composition. Windows are comprised of large expanses of plate glass with borders of smaller panes, typical of Queen Anne houses. Inspired by the sweeping roofs and half-timbering of English Medieval buildings and the rustic textures of Japanese architecture, the Queen Anne Revival-style was an amalgam of many sources. Its emphasis was always on the variety of ornament, natural finishes, and integration of the structure into...
FAR RIGHT: The stairs' baluster and newel post design celebrates regional craftsmanship—both residential and nautical—and is built by today's artisans.

LEFT: The dining room was re-created to have an individual sense of Victorian soul—however, it opens to the formal hallway and stair in a gesture of open modern juxtaposition.
The original living room, which had been renovated over the last century, has been redesigned with more ocean views to recapture the spirit of the original design.

Below: The new traditionally inspired library, crafted in crotch mahogany, is intended to be reminiscent of an antique New England chart room.

its surroundings. Vaux devised a restrained façade for the entrance, but an open and dynamic treatment reigns on the waterside façade. The architect understood the power of sequence in buildings, moving from contained entrances to expansive views. He employed this in both his parks and his houses to great effect. The plan of Boothden is a long rectangle with a service wing projecting at an angle from the main block. On the waterside façade, the house is all windows and porches. The sequence of the glassed sunroom, open verandah and an octagonal porch with a peaked roof create a zone of spaces for every type of weather and temperature, and always provide sweeping views of the grounds, the Sakonnet River, and the sea beyond. Large jerkin head gables, appearing at either end of the façade, feature a distinctive small downward slant at the top and were inspired by Medieval rural buildings in Britain and Northern Europe. The wood shingles, the green toned framing, and the red colored window mullions all blend effortlessly with the surrounding landscape.

Edwin Booth enjoyed his summer villa for ten years. Upon his death in 1893, Edwina, his only child, inherited the estate. She had been engaged to Calvert Vaux’s son, Downing, but he died prematurely by being asphyxiated by gas flames. Edwina later married and summered in Narragansett, Rhode Island. In 1903, she sold the Boothden, which passed through a series of proprietors from the very grand to the somewhat shady. At one time, a syndicate of bookies rented the house and operated a gambling scam which inspired the 1973 Oscar winning movie, The Sting. T. S. Matthews, the owner of Time Magazine, inherited the estate in 1954 when he was married to his first wife, Julianna Cayler Matthews. (When Julianna died, he married Martha Gelhorn, the former spouse of Ernest Hemingway.) Accomplished yachtsman and organizer of the 1976 Bicentennial Tall Ships pageant, Avery Seamen, lived in the house with some style until his widow, Eleanor (Jean) Seamen, sold it in 2007.

Several decades of owners and their renovations produced many alterations to Boothden. The windmill, with its lower portion containing a henhouse, and the original boathouse, featuring a Japanese style gate, had been demolished, but the main house still
retained its air of romance. In 2008, Kim and Larry Ingeneri were inspired to revive the original spirit of the place, remarking, “we fell in love with the setting and the history of the place.” That sense of time and place would be among the guiding principles of their work on the property. Andreozzi Architects and Le Blanc Jones Landscape Architects were engaged in developing a plan to rehabilitate the old estate while updating it for modern living. The house was moved slightly to stabilize the structure with an entirely new foundation and to take advantage of better views of the shoreline. A subtle arrangement of grass terraces, supported by stone retaining walls, were created in front of the waterside façade. The terraces now contain a hot tub, swimming pool, an arbor, and a pool house in the same style as the main house. Following the wave and diamond pane patterns of the original house, the façades were re-sheathed in wood shingles.

The high level of detail on the exterior is followed through on the interiors. As a house celebrating the beauty of natural materials, the architect utilized fine carving and millwork throughout every room. Among the finest features is the main staircase, which is a major sculptural element at the heart of the house. Three different spirals turned balusters are used on each step. These are revivals of 17th-century-style balusters, appropriate to the Queen Anne Revival style. In fact, David Andreozzi modeled the balusters after originals at a historic house in Stepney Green, London, which were illustrated in Three Centuries of Craftsmanship by Colin Amery. The stained newel posts and railings contrast nicely with the turned balusters, creating a dynamic interplay of dark and light. These newels are a design architect David Andreozzi has been experimenting with in variations over the years and are intended to capture the spirit of old wooden yacht design and craftsmanship.

White predominates as the primary color of the interiors, with contrasting tones used sparingly but effectively. Large white painted beams mark the dining room ceiling, while boldly scaled beams also define the ceiling arrangement of the wood stained
The room is formal in order and geometry, but in a very informal and welcoming vocabulary.
LEFT TOP & BOTTOM: The master bedroom, inspired by a Stick-style aesthetic, is designed with a “chandelier ceiling,” panels of hand-blown glass rondels.

TOP: A semi-private kitchen office and workstation provide the control center for the entire home.

ABOVE: The informal powder room is respective of its history.

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LEFT: “Her” bathroom in the master suite is intended to be private and intimate.

BELOW: The entry hallway to “her” bathroom and custom shower uses feminine curves, solid glass block, and glittering iridescent Italian tiles to create a feminine respite.

study. These elements are produced with the generous proportions and fine detail found in a period Queen Anne Revival house. The kitchen is composed of white glass cabinets and cupboards with hardware typical of late 19th-century service rooms. A series of smaller interconnected storage and office spaces extend from the kitchen. These are beautifully developed with an eye towards proper lighting and with fine millwork for windows, doors, and cupboards. The kitchen work area flows into an adjacent dining and sitting room that has a magnificent ribbed wooden ceiling in keeping with the brackets that appear throughout the building.

Stone also has its moment at Boothden. The focal point of the octagonal porch is a fireplace in rough-hewn fieldstone supporting a large circular tablet engraved with the image of a windmill. David Andreozzi traced over a historic photograph of the windmill (once on the southwestern edge of this site) to provide the artwork for the design, which was then sandblasted into marble. Cloaked in local legend and lore, the windmill is a symbol of colonial Rhode Island, as these structures dotted the landscape of the region. The stone carving also conjures up the vision of Edwina Booth guiding her father home from a day’s sailing by illuminating the windmill. It is an appropriately romantic gesture for an estate inspired by a romantic approach to both buildings and their settings.

As a wooden structure set on a stone foundation, embedded in verdant grounds and overlooking the sea, the house is a combination of materials that are in harmony with nature. The revitalized Boothden now sits serenely in its environs, blending with the colors and contours of the landscape just as Calvert Vaux intended. Through the efforts of the current owners and their design team, both the fabric and spirit of a storied place has been re-created. At Boothden, the paradise envisioned by a renowned actor and made a reality by a talented architect has now been revisited and revitalized for the 21st century. Paradise never looked so tempting.

John R. Tischler is an award-winning architectural historian, writer, and photographer. His work may be seen at johnstories.com.

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Back from the Brink

A nearly abandoned Virginia estate is given a new life—one defined by tradition.  BY KILEY JACQUES

TOP: To obtain state tax-credits for the owner, the redesign of the spaces as well as restoration decisions had to have approval by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. Photos by Andrea Hubbell

LEFT: A historic photo of Tiverton. Photo from the Holsinger collection, University of Virginia Special Collections Library

FAR RIGHT: All of the existing 1930 interior embellishments were deemed historic and were required to be kept.
It's not hard to imagine . . . a stately house with once-manicured grounds slowly succumbing to what Adams Sutphin of H. Adams Sutphin Architecture calls the "jungle of Virginia." In fact, by the time he stepped on site in 2008, the Classical Revival-style Tiverton estate had been nearly swallowed by English ivy, lending the property an air of mystery.

"Tiverton has been a fascinating place for all of locals who have lived around Charlottesville," notes Sutphin. The property's visibility from the road meant many onlookers watched it suffer neglect for years. The absentee owner did very little to preserve the house and grounds, so when Sutphin's team took on the restoration project, they had their work cut out for them.

The date of the original construction is unknown but Sutphin had access to photos of the property's exterior taken in 1917. "They show the house as we believe it was originally constructed." (Some architects speculate it was designed by McKim, Mead, and White and patterned after The White House.) At the time of Sutphin's restoration, however, much of the house's character was shaped by a different era.

In 1935, a fire gutted the house and roof, though the major walls still stood. The owner at that time set about repairing the home and engaged landscape architect Charles Freeman Gillette of Richmond to redesign the gardens. It was the home and gardens of
1935 that Sutphin faced. "We inherited a house that, on the outside, looked very similar to the original structure," he explains. "The interior, though, looked like a 1935 revision of a home from that period. We had no photographs so we can only imagine what the interior of the [original] home looked like as compared to 1935." Oddly, when they arrived, some of the interiors were "Pepto-Bismol pink with sort of a Miami flair" and the entire house was weighted with French provincial furniture from the 1960s.

"In 1935, there were different ways to achieve what they wanted," notes Sutphin. "For instance, the plaster molding inside the home were pre-[fabricated] pieces." Because catalog ordering was an option at that time, many traditional elements came from nontraditional sources. The brick exterior, plaster interiors, and layout, however, remained true. "We think the plan of the home was very similar [to the original]," says Sutphin.

Upon purchase of the property, the Virginia Department of Historic Resources was contacted to see if the house would qualify for the state's historic tax credit for rehabilitation projects. It was. "Working with them, we were able to carve out portions of each floor where we could preserve the main areas . . . and reconfigure some of the minor elements."

The main floor comprises four large spaces: a library, a parlor, a dining room, and a large entrance hall. Minor spaces include a corridor, a small bedroom, a bar area, bathrooms, and a separate backstair.

The large new eat-in kitchen was rendered by combining smaller rooms. (The original kitchen was
HERE & BELOW: The sunroom was a decaying vintage 1960s relic. Using historic photographs, the fenestration pattern and exterior trim were reproduced to restore the intended design to be compatible with the house exterior.
in the basement, as was typical of estates in the early 1900s. In the 1960s, a galley kitchen was configured. The team took freedoms with the kitchen but worked within the original framework's openings, windows, and walls. They took the corridor-like galley space and opened it up to create what's referred to as the butler's hall, which connects the new kitchen to the dining room. "It really flows so the kitchen becomes part of the house," says Sutphin, noting that it is a kitchen "specific to that home." To maintain historic appeal, they preserved the fireplace and used two-inch thick white Carrara marble countertops. There is "a permanence and heaviness" to the materials. New inserts do not mimic period cabinetwork, but they did use traditional-style cabinets with beaded face frames. Sutphin notes the enormous island that fills nearly the entire space as the heart of the home, saying: "Life happens in the center of that kitchen."

Many of the existing materials throughout the house were of good quality, as seen in the white Carrara marble stair hall with its oak flooring and decorative balustrade. "A lot of the public spaces were historic," notes Sutphin. "We didn't want to change them but we added new sconces and paint finishes—it was really more a restoration of existing materials."

In addition to the kitchen, the library is of special note. "It's a place where we did more than less," says Sutphin. It featured four small bookcases with highly decorative plaster wall panels and pilasters. Large custom-made bookcases were added "to create more of a library experience." Restrictions mandated
by the Department of Historic Resources meant the new bookcases had to be removable, and none of the existing plasterwork could be affected. The idea for the library was to make it warmer and more welcoming—it’s a very large space that had been overwhelmed by an ornate fireplace. “It was the only thing you noticed when you went in because it was almost the only thing in there,” says Sutphin. With the new cases and lighting treatment, the room became less formal and more functional.

During the 1935 renovation, mantels were added throughout the house. Because the Department of Historic Resources prizes mantels for their decorative character the team was required to “leave all mantels as they are.” All of them are from different periods and vary in style. “There’s no consistency from living to library to dining room,” explains Sutphin. The challenge was to “tame them and make them more integral to the room rather than the focal point.” Color played a big hand in accomplishing that objective, as did the making of other elements “as large as the mantels.”

Outside, the gardens are period appropriate for 1935 and are typical of Gillette’s style. He terraced the existing lawn using brick retaining walls. (There are photographs of the gardens from 1917, featuring sloping parterre gardens.) He divided the gardens into an upper terrace by the house and a large “sunk garden” hemmed in boxwood with a reflecting pool in the center.

In 2010, the owner had all of the invasive plants removed to uncover what was intentionally planted. Landscape architect Rachel Lilly was hired to bring the gardens back, not necessarily to historic perfection but to maintain the integrity of what was there and to insert elements in step with today’s gardens.
Interestingly, detailed landscape plans for 1935 were found in the house. They called for very high-maintenance plantings. Lilly took the plans and incorporated existing features, such as the walkways (they even added walkways that were in the drawings but never built) to create less labor intensive gardens. Particularly challenging were the retaining walls, as they were exceptionally tall and dangerously on the verge of collapse. They were dismantled and restructured to meet code without sacrificing the preservation requirements. Decorative ironwork throughout the grounds was also taken down, refurbished, and reinstalled.

In addition to the grounds and the main house, there was a period greenhouse that was “pretty highly developed for its time.” Completely renovated, it is again a working greenhouse. Abutting it was a collapsed head house, which they rebuilt from scratch. “It was basically archeology,” says Sutphin, noting that the whole structure had fallen apart and sunk into a hole in the ground. The roof form was a bit unusual and needed to meet with the greenhouse roof. “It is known to not look like what was there, but it is known to accommodate what was there,” he explains. They also managed to save a carriage barn from ruin, as well as three tenant homes—one serves as a gatekeeper’s house; the other two are farmers’ cottages.

Of all of their efforts to bring Tiverton back from the brink, Sutphin says: “We were trying to find a balance between the historic nature of the house and the desire for a house that wasn’t a historic monument but a livable home.” He is quick to compliment the owner’s own vision, too. “It was an endeavor of love. He didn’t have to do it, but he took it on and tried to do it right.”*
Gillette designed upper and sunken gardens that lie to the east of the house had become a tangle of overgrown box and ivy, and the decorative swimming pool had become a frog pond. Original blueprints of Gillette's design were found in the house, and became the basis of the garden restoration. The retaining walls on both ends that created the sunken garden had failed, and were rebuilt with proper foundations and structure. The original pierced brick balustrades that did not meet current code were required by DHR to be kept, so an intermediate turned steel spindle was inserted as the walls rebuilt to satisfy the code spacing while remaining visually secondary. Unbuilt walks shown on Gillette's plan were added and laid in a contrasting bond to differentiate from the original walks of 1935.
Art as Progenitor of Architecture

A unique outlook and design process produces some of the most sublime structures on the American architectural landscape.

Michael G. Imber: Ranches, Villas, and Houses

By Elizabeth Meredith Dowling; Foreword by Marc Appleton
Published by Rizzoli International Publications, New York, 2013.
240 pp; Hardcover; Over 175 Full-color images; $60;
ISBN 978-0-8478-3385-6

Reviewed by Clem Labine

For many years I've been aware of some superb designs by architect Michael G. Imber, FAIA, through his Palladio Award-winning projects (2010 and 2011) and his appearances in various publications. But I never fully understood the scope and transcendent qualities of his architecture until I picked up the Rizzoli monograph that showcases his firm's exceptional work. Imber's treatise rises above the usual monographs that are collections of "beauty shots" with the goal of attracting new clients and massaging the creator's ego. Such monographs have little to teach the design professional. By contrast, the Imber compendium, besides providing the expected abundance of gorgeous images, also rewards the reader with an understanding of how the architect produces such beautiful buildings.

Some might glibly describe Imber as a "regional architect." And it's true that most of his creations are rooted in the history and building traditions of the desert Southwest and Mexico, with an especially deep connection to the architectural heritage of his native Texas. But there is no particular "Imber style." Each project is a carefully worked-out synthesis of the client's program fused with the special character of the adjacent landscape, regional building traditions, and local materials. As an example of Imber's design versatility, alongside many of the monograph's projects that exhibit strong Southwestern influences, we are shown an elegant pair of adjacent Palladian villas he built for brother and sister Italian clients.

Modernists use words like "nostalgic" and "romantic" as derogatory labels to dismiss historically imbued architecture, but Imber welcomes such terms. As he says: "Our homes are meant to be the most comforting physical realization of our lives . . . they should embody both our personal and cultural memories. This cultural memory is at the root of our architectural practice." Where contemporary starchitects revel in ever-more-complex exercises in geometry, Imber strives to create buildings that embrace their landscape and historical context.

The secret sauce of the firm's practice is Imber's emphasis on the art of drawing: pencil sketches, watercolors, and ink wash renderings. "Rendering expresses design," he declares. Long before he was an architect, Imber was an inveterate sketcher in pencil, pen, and watercolor. He asserts that the elimination of hand drawing from basic architectural
LEFT: Snake walls at Rancho Dos Vidas provide architectural richness, while fulfilling their traditional function: keeping rattlesnakes out of the property. Iron-rich sands from a nearby river give reddish tones to the stucco.

BELOW: Rancho Del Cielo in Jeff Davis County, Texas, required architects to design a new larger infill building to replace an earlier structure lost to fire, while still keeping the scale and character of original adobe construction in the rest of the compound.

BOTTOM: Live oaks frame a pavilion on the pool terrace of the large and complex Turnberry House in San Antonio, Texas. The design uses local limestone and flat clay tile roofs to echo Arts & Crafts massing found in nearby 1930s buildings.

RIGHT: Arrival approach at Independence Horse Farm, Independence, Texas, showcases the expressed mass of the two-story living room. Walls are built of local stone that reference historic structures in the area.
education directly correlates with the current profession's lack of ability to create beautiful buildings.

Imber's artistic skills come into play at the start of the design process through watercolor studies of the site and surrounding landscape. The physical process of passing salient elements of local character from eye to brain to hand imparts a visceral understanding of the space he's been assigned—a level of comprehension that's far deeper than what can be obtained from mere looking. Ink wash renderings, in particular, allow study of composition, light, and form that greatly assist in building massing and details. Imber finds special inspiration in watercolor and rendering from the prior work of architect Bertram Goodhue and the landscape firm of Shepherd and Jellicoe.

Imber's life-long examination of Southwest building traditions has also made him keenly aware of the role that skilled craftsmen played in evolving the unique look of buildings created in harsh climate. Undulating curves of stucco and adobe surfaces . . . hammering texture of hand-forged ironwork . . . structural timbers made from bark-striped tree trunks . . . walls of uncut stones . . . colorful hand-painted tiles . . . all these elements show up in Imber architecture. But the details are not handled as pasted-on afterthoughts, but rather as elements integral to the underlying structure.

Images in the monograph include not only stunning photographs of projects ranging from bungalows to sprawling ranches, but also incorporate beautiful reproductions of Imber's renderings and watercolors that are essential to his design development. As a bonus, plans that show basic building layout accompany most of the projects. These plans are especially helpful in understanding Imber's larger projects in which their size is camouflaged by clever massing, making it seem like the structures have grown organically over time.

The text, authored by Elizabeth Meredith Dowling, retired professor of architectural history at Georgia Institute of Technology, provides not only lucid descriptions of each project but also adds insights into Imber's design process. And she includes delightful personal details, such as the watercolor kit Imber uses today was a gift from his artist-aunt who presented it to him while he was still in high school. The foreword by architect Marc Appleton gives us additional personal background that only a long-time friend can provide.

With its graphic proof of design benefits that accrue from the skills of hand drawing and rendering, this book should be required reading in every school of architecture. *
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800-486-2118 www.chadsworth.com
4020 Haddonstone (USA), Ltd ..................................37
719-948-4554 www.haddonstone.com
1516 Worthington Millwork ....................................38
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Doors, Windows, Hardware & Shutters
690 Allied Window, Inc ...........................................40
800-445-5411 www.alliedwindow.com
8410 American Historic Hardware .........................43
607-547-1900 www.ahhardware.com
1202 Architectural Accents .....................................46
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9600 Coppa Woodworking .....................................42
310-548-4142 www.coppawoodworking.com
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717-252-4442 www.jwright.com
1611 Marvin Windows and Doors ..........................3, 43
888-537-7828 www.marvin.com
3003 Parrett Windows & Doors ...............................5
800-541-9527 www.parrettwindows.com
6001 Phelps Company ............................................44
603-336-6213 www.pelhscmpny.com
1727 Vintage Doors ..............................................42
800-787-2001 www.vintagedoors.com
1448 Weather Shield Windows & Doors ..................41
800-538-8836 www.weathershield.com

Interior Elements, Ornaments & Finishes
190 Chelsea Decorative Metal Co .............................47
713-721-9200 www.thetchelsea.com

Lighting & Electrical
1202 Architectural Accents .....................................51
404-266-8700 www.architecturalaccents.com
60 Authentic Designs ...........................................50
800-844-9416 www.authentidesigns.com
7660 Ball & Ball Lighting .......................................51
610-363-7330 www.ballandball.com
1128 Crenshaw Lighting ........................................49
540-745-3900 www.crenshawlighting.com
809 Deep Landing Workshop .................................50
877-778-4042 www.deeplandingworkshop.com
9130 Herwig Lighting ...........................................50
800-643-9523 www.herwig.com
339 House of Antique Hardware ...........................51
888-733-2545 www.ohiohand.com
1748 Lanternland ................................................50
855-454-5200 www.lanternland.com
301 Period Lighting Fixtures, Inc ...........................51
800-828-6990, 413-664-7141 www.periodlighting.com
316 Woolen Mill Fan Co .........................................50
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Mantels, Fireplaces & Chimneys
1202 Architectural Accents .....................................53
404-266-8700 www.architecturalaccents.com
377 Forshaw of St. Louis, Inc .................................53
314-874-4316 www.forshaws.com

Metalwork
2220 Architectural Grille .......................................55
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516-488-0628 www.aagrilles.com
270 King Architectural Metals ...............................55, CV4
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Plumbing, Bath & Heating
Bathroom Machinaries, DEA ................................59
209-728-2031 www.deabath.com
5810 Reggio Register Co., Inc, The .......................58
800-880-3090 www.reggioregister.com
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Roofing & Roofing Specialties
588 EM Copper Inc ...........................................57
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8300 NIKO Contracting Co., Inc. .........................57
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Salvaged Materials & Antiques
1202 Architectural Accents .....................................59
404-266-8700 www.architecturalaccents.com

Stone, Brick & Masonry
191 Gavin Historical Bricks, Inc ..........................61
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Timber Framing & Bams
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Crown Point Cabinetry manufactured this cabinet, finished in Bayberry Old Fashioned Milk Paint, for this period kitchen.

Crown Point Cabinetry
800-999-4994; Fax: 603-370-1218
www.crown-point.com
Claremont, NH 03743
Custom fabricator of handcrafted, period-style cabinetry for kitchens, baths & other rooms: Arts & Crafts, Shaker, Victorian, Early American & contemporary styles; available nationwide. Click on No. 477.

This woodwork ornament is the work of Decorators Supply.

Decorators Supply Corp.
800-792-2093; Fax: 773-847-6357
www.decoratorssupply.com
Chicago, IL 60609
Manufacturer of classic architectural elements: plaster crownings, 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. Click on No. 210.

The latest in woodwork is the work of Kuiken Brothers.

Kuiken Brothers offers traditional styles of wood molding, including this example of its Federal Casing profile # KB104 (1-13/16” x 4-1/2”) milled from poplar, double primed and buffed in 8- and 16-ft. lengths.

Osborne Wood Products offers this hand-carved molding with cattail leaf details.

Osborne Wood Products, Inc.
800-849-8876; Fax: 888-777-4304
www.osbornewood.com
Toccoa, GA 30577
Produces custom-turned balusters, newels, finials, and furniture parts in both pine and hardwoods.

Kuiken Brothers offers a selection of historically styled laser-cut wood covers and casings.

Kuiken Brothers Company, Inc.
201-795-5375; Fax: 201-475-2175
www.kuikenbrothers.com/classical
Midland Park, NJ 07432
Supplier of classical wood molding: KB Classical Moulding includes 70 classic American molding profiles; Early American, Georgian, Federal, Greek Revival, Colonial Revival & Traditional Revival; all in stock; milled from domestic Appalachian Poplar; double primed & buffed; decks & railings; window & door surrounds; CAD files available; online catalog; ships nationwide.

Cabinet and Panel work are among the many specialties of Drivwood.

Drivwood Moulding Company
888-245-9663; Fax: 843-669-4874
www.drivwood.com
Florence, SC 29503
Stock and custom room interiors for residential and commercial projects. Embossed moldings, raised-panel doors, mantels, bookcases, exterior and interior door surrounds, pre-fabricated raised-panel wall sections. Click on No. 1756.

Pacific Register offers a selection of historically styled laser-cut wood covers and casings.

Pacific Register Company
805-487-7500; Fax: No fax
www.pacificregisterco.com
Oxnard, CA 93033
Manufacturer of registers: metal, wood & stone; many historic styles; accessories. Click on No. 1743.

Wothington Millwork
800-872-1608; Fax: 850-640-0488
www.wothingtonmillwork.com
Panama City Beach, FL 32407
Supplier of architecturally correct columns in wood or PermaCast; round & square; clear columns in 7 species; cornice moldings, balaustres, niches, medallions, mantels, pedestals & more. Click on No. 1516.

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Early Influence

“A significant childhood influence on Michael Imber’s artistic development involved his introduction to watercolor. Imber’s aunt, Margaret Hynes, was a member of the American Watercolor Society. The two spent hours together exploring the possibilities of watercolor, drawing skyscrapers, sailing ships and imagined sea creatures. The watercolor kit Imber uses today was a gift given by his aunt for his high school graduation.” —from Michael G. Imber: Ranches, Villas, and Houses by Elizabeth Meredith Dowling.
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