A PALLADIAN SPRING BREEZES INTO NEW YORK

by Danielle S. Willkens

Andera di Pietro della Gondola Romana was born in Padua in 1508; he was reborn three decades later as ‘Andera Palladio,’ but he was not called ‘architect’ until he was nearly forty. Rising from the ranks of stonecutters, Palladio shared little with his architectural contemporaries; he was not famous prior to his architectural commissions, he was not part of an artistic guild, and he was not a product of Florentine or Roman apprenticeship. Nonetheless, Palladio became one of the most influential architects in history. He was self-educated, had a voracious appetite for reading, and, unlike many Renaissance architects, spoke the language of construction. As a student of Rome, his surveys of ruins were instrumental to his adoption of classical proportions and forms. Palladio bridged the gap between theoretician and builder. His treatise I Quattro Libri dell’Architettura was approachable to non-academics since it was written in Italian—rather than erudite Latin, and contained clear line drawings with dimensions. Palladio’s unprecedented focus on domestic architecture redefined the Veneto and translations of the Quattro Libri ultimately inspired global experiments in Palladian principles.

At the age of forty, cloth maker-turned-joiner-turned painter Inigo Jones added architecture to his list of creative explorations when he discovered Palladio’s works while in Italy. Jones was immediately smitten. He introduced Palladio to England, albeit in a more restrained, solid manner characterized by the use of stone; a material often foreign to Palladio’s budget. Jones translated the vivid frescoes that enlivened Palladio’s interiors into physical architecture; the temple front was traded for the tectonic. Jones even collected Palladio’s rich drawings. At the end of his life, Soane worked on the restoration of the Banqueting House. This Jones design, to be the Sir John Soane’s Museum’s conservation effort, is on view at The Morgan, 225 Madison Avenue at 36th Street, from April 2 to August 1, 2010.

The Foundation’s annual benefit honors A. Eugene Kohl, Susan Weber, and Yale University Press, with John Donatich, director, accepting (Please see inside) for further details please visit www.SirJohnSoaneFoundation.com or call 212-225-2012.

RARE MODELS BY FOUQUET RIPE FOR CONSERVATION

by Helen Dorey

Please note: This article is part of a series devoted to the Sir John Soane’s Museum’s conservation efforts, which the Soane Foundation has adopted as its own focus for fundraising.

The magnificent model room, which Sir John Soane created on the second floor of 13 Lincoln’s Inn Fields at the end of his life, was dominated by a great central model stand, made especially for a cork model of Pompeii. An 1833 view of the room shows the Pompeii model on the lower level, whilst on the upper level a shelf surrounding a large central aperture (to allow light to fall on the Pompeii model from above) supported an array of other cork models of the ruins of Rome and the great temples at Paestum in southern Italy.

Interpersed among the cork models of the great ruins of antiquity Soane, displayed 20 plaster models by François Fouquet of Paris, which he bought from the architect Edward Grevy in 1834 for £400. These exquisite models depict antique buildings reconstructed, as if pristine and newly built—the whiteness of the plaster-of-Paris emphasizing this quality. The fineness of the material enables the depiction of every minute detail of capitals and columns—either carved free-hand with almost surgical precision or made using very small moulds.

Nor were the Fouquet models limited to the buildings of Rome, but included celebrated Greek buildings and ancient tombs at Palmyra, in Syria, probably based on drawings made there by the artist Louis-François Cassas.

From a family of model-makers, Fouquet made models as well for Cassas, who built up a collection of 76 architectural models with the aim of creating an encyclopaedic museum of architecture (now dismantled...).
THE NAPOLEON RING COMES HOME
by Helen Dorey

After 170 years, Sir John Soane’s mourning ring for Napoleon is back at Lincoln Inn Fields, where it will remain on view in the North Drawing Room until the end of March 2010.

The ornate gold ring, encasing a lock of hair in glass, almost slipped through the fingers of Sir John Soane’s Museum when an unknown collector (outbid the Museum at an auction last year at Christie’s). But when the Soane wrote to the new owner to enquire whether he or she might consider letting the Museum know where it was—well, the result exceeded expectations.

An English Napoleonic who has been collecting Napoleonica since childhood, the new owner responded quickly, visited the Museum (for the first time), and generously decided that he was willing to sell the ring back to the Soane, so that it could return to Soane’s collection.

The ring was a gift from Napoleon to his wife Josephine, Caïmite, on the occasion of their wedding in 1807. It does not go unnoticed that the date 25.III Napoleon Bonaparte 1807 is etched on the inside of the ring in法语: Cette boucle de cheveux de Napoleon Bonaparte a été offerte à Josephine, Caïmite, en l’occasion de leur mariage le 25 III 1807.

The ring was designed by the famous Italian goldsmith and jeweler, Prier Pieri (1751–1817). The ring is inscribed with the words: “Priez pour moi” (Pray for me). The ring was once owned by Miss Elizabeth Balcombe, a member of the family of John Soane’s ancestor, Henry Gutch, who had inherited a small collection of souvenirs associated with Napoleon from Phyllis Avory, the great-granddaughter of Sir Thomas Lawrence, the portraitist of Napoleon. As the press picked up the news, Rosemary Gutch, the original vendor of the ring, stepped forward, and added more detail to the object’s history. It seems the ring belonged to her mother, who had inherited a small collection of souvenirs associated with Napoleon from Phyllis Avory, the daughter of the noted judge Sir Honore Avory. Having tragically lost her fiancé in World War I, Phyllis had never married, but had converted to Catholicism and become fascinated by Napoleon. Gutch, the original vendor of the ring, heard the news and, as the head of Soane’s department of Scientific and Curatorial Studies, immediately contacted the Soane Museum.

We do know that six months ago, Napoleon’s mourning ring was collected from Christie’s South Kensington, thanks to The Art Fund, which, having offered to support the Museum’s bid at auction, generously agreed to fund a new purchase to the same level. Letters to a small group of patrons and friends of the Museum quickly bridged the remaining gap.

Sir John Soane’s Museum is most grateful to these donors—The Art Fund, Sir Christopher and Lady Oxlade, Tomasso Brothers Ltd, Niall Hobhouse, The Marsupio and Marchinos of Douro, Philippe Sorellet and Gilrs Ebouvel, Stephen Soaneville, and Regis Cocheet—and to Diana Scarbrough and Nicholas Norton for their advice.

A MEMBER’S PLANNED GIFT

Following in the Footsteps of Sir John Soane

Susan Soane’s Circle Member 103, Curt DiCamillo of Boston, recently let the Foundation’s office know of his plans to leave a legacy to the Soane Foundation in his will.

The Soane Foundation is the bequest of Sir John Soane, the British architect whose legacy goes beyond the architectural. His Museum is not only an example of careful design, but also a museum of the world. In this building, architecture becomes, within a residential setting, the qualifying mediator between human experience, nature, fact, and fiction.

Multiple cultures and histories inhabit Sir John Soane’s house every object has a specific location related to its immediate context as well as to its original geographic location. This dynamic interaction becomes the source of multiple associations between local situations and global process. As a result, the ideal architectural space is turned into a detailed place in which the aesthetic and perceptual suggest the conceptual. Different from other institutions, the envelope and its contents, paintings, furniture and architectural commodities are joined in becoming an art object. It successfully effects with the intention to provoke the emergence of the new.

The Soane has very special meaning for me. I share many of the same interests of Sir John Soane, most particularly his deep love for architecture and respect for the architects of his time. In fact, the Soane is a treasure trove for those of us fascinated by the architecture of 18th and early 19th century England and is a major source of information concerning many of these.

For me in particular, the Soane has been invaluable for too exhibitions in which I have been deeply involved. First was my work for Turner “Sublime” Stuart: The Royal Society’s Antiquaries, which originated at the Bard Graduate Center and then went on to the Victoria & Albert. Soane was a lifelong admirer of Stuart, and his earliest corpus work included quotations from the first volume of Stuart’s Antiquaries of Athens./ Much more recently the Soane Museum once again for extensive research, this time on William Kent, the subject of a new exhibition I am developing for the Bard Graduate Center (also to be shown at the Victoria & Albert in the spring of 2013). It gives me pleasure to have given credit to the Soane staff for their acumen, hard work and kindness to me over the years.

The Soane, then, has played an important role in my life. I can’t imagine London without it. In fact, I can’t imagine me without it, and I am deeply grateful for all that it has given me over the years.

ABOUT US

Mission Statement of the Foundation

Sir John Soane’s Museum Foundation’s mission is to provide for an expanding audience a lively educational forum in the fields of art, architecture and the decorative arts within the Soanean tradition and to assist financially Sir John Soane’s Museum in London.

For details on Sir John Soane’s Museum Foundation, including opportunities for support, a list of our Board of Directors, events, trips and other details, please refer to our website: www.SoaneFoundation.com.