

A MASTER REFLECTS: A CONVERSATION WITH ALLAN GREENBERG

Recently, the Soane Foundation newsletter sat down and chatted with Allan Greenberg, who the Soane Foundation honors on Tuesday, April 26, at the Foundation's 20th Birthday Gala.

The South African-born architect is the founder and principal of the eponymously named firm based in Washington, D.C., New York, and Greenwich, Connecticut; author of *Architecture of Democracy* (Rizzoli, 2006), among other titles; and recipient of The Richard H. Driehaus Prize for Architecture (2006). Many readers will know Allan from his years of service as a member of the board of Sir John Soane's Museum Foundation.

Soane Foundation: You design with both the classical idiom and modernism as starting points. Isn't that unusual?

Allan Greenberg: Well, why should it be? We don't read James Joyce and say, "I'm not going to read anything else except prose structured in the same way as *Ulysses*." No, we read Henry James, Faulkner, Hemingway, or the latest novel by an emerging writer.

There have always been a variety of styles with which architects choose to express themselves. I'm thinking of Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, Alvar Aalto, Gunnar Asplund and a number of others, particularly Italians, who've long been trained in modernism and classicism.

The great exemplars are Le Corbusier and Mies, who were able to take classical principles and turn them through 180 degrees, so that the resulting architecture is in exact and precise opposition to classicism—which means it is still tied to the tradition they are reacting to.

Of course, one group of architects, now remembered as the Harvard Bauhaus, completely rejected history. And their work, which pervades the world, is largely mediocre because of its lack of ability to relate to culture, climate, or geography. But the great modernists knew what they were doing and relate to the same tradition I do. They just chose different ways to express it.



Above: Allan Greenberg, Photo © Lise Metzger. Below: Office of Secretary of State, Photo © Tim Buchman



SF: What was your first love in architecture?

AG: Or who? I'd say Le Corbusier. The first building I ever had to sketch in school was Edwin Lutyens's Art Gallery in Johannesburg. And I was stunned to discover, in the second post-war volume of Le Corbusier's *Oeuvre Complete*, a section where he praises Lutyens. Twelve years later, I published a paper about why Lutyens and Le Corbusier and Lutyens and Frank Lloyd Wright were so close.

continued inside...

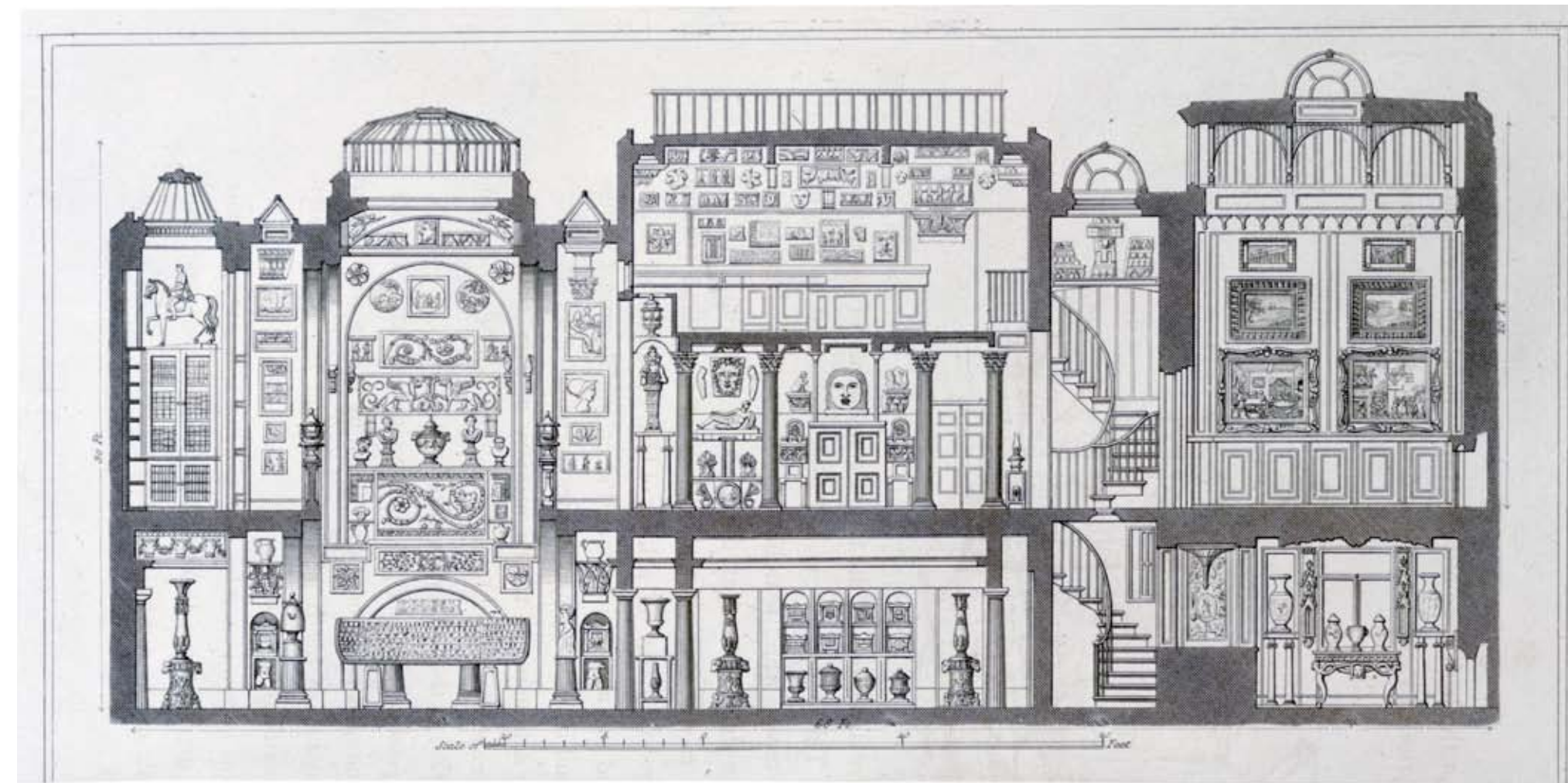


Image from the *Description of the House and Museum on the North Side of Lincoln's Inn Fields, The Residence of Sir John Soane*, London, 1836. This is the last of the series of four Descriptions that Soane had printed (a bibliophile would say that strictly they were 'Not Published' – as Soane paid for them and sent them to friends, important people, libraries and institutions). Plate XXV - the title of the plate is *Longitudinal Section through the Museum and Crypt*. Not seen is the lower part of the plate which shows a plan of that part of the Museum. The image is taken from Soane Museum vol.85c. What the image actually shows is that Soane was re-using old plates from his earlier Descriptions. The skylight over the Dome area is his first one. It leaked and so was replaced by Soane with the one that we currently see (and which was present in 1836), the truncated conical light with plaster rosette under the lead cap.

SIR JOHN SOANE'S MUSEUM FOUNDATION

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SOANE TRAVELS



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SOANE MUSEUM LAUNCHES PUBLIC APPEAL

On a Monday morning in mid-February, 25 journalists assembled in London's most atmospheric museum to hear Director Tim Knox and the British architect and TV personality George Clarke launch the Sir John Soane's Museum's public appeal for its three-year restoration with the *Opening Up The Soane* program.

Tim explained: "We are delighted to be taking the final steps towards the start of our ambitious program of restoration and renewal by asking all those who love architecture and the Soane to help us raise the final £500,000 (\$804,000)."



George Clarke and Tim Knox in spotlight at press conference

The work will open up an entire new floor to the public for the first time since Soane's death in 1837, revealing eight idiosyncratically designed spaces, richly furnished and decorated, including Soane's bedroom and bathroom.

"The Museum has kept everything that Soane collected. The project will involve the cleaning, restoration and redisplay of hundreds of objects left to the nation and recreate the rooms and spaces that Soane carefully designed."

"Despite the recession, we've had a wonderful response to our fundraising efforts so far and we're delighted with the support that our friends in the USA have demonstrated; the project really seems to have caught people's imagination and shows just how much the Soane Museum is loved – not just in the UK, but internationally."

An architect and TV presenter widely known in England as the "restoration man," Clarke added: "Sir John Soane is one of my great heroes. He was one of Britain's greatest and most original architects and he wanted to bring good architecture and

continued inside...

A VISIT TO CENTRAL PARK WEST BY WAY OF 19TH-CENTURY PARIS

Six years ago Checkerboard Film Foundation in New York released *Sir John Soane: An English Architect, An American Legacy*, an engrossing hour-long film in which a number of leading American architects discuss how Soane's genius was reflected in their own work. Since then, the non-profit film company has gone on to produce an unparalleled oeuvre capturing the current moment in architecture. Its latest film is to premier in the spring to benefit the Soane Foundation: *Robert A. M. Stern: 15 Central Park West, The History of the New York Apartment House* (producer: Edgar Howard; director/editor/cinematographer: Tom Piper; additional photography: David W. Leitner).

Edgar Howard, Founder and President of Checkerboard Films and former Soane Foundation Board member, recently spoke with Suzanne Stephens, Checkerboard's architectural advisor, Deputy Editor of *Architectural Record* and Soane Foundation Board member, about his latest project.

Ed Howard: It was enormously satisfying to produce a film on the impact of Sir John Soane and his museum on seven leading contemporary architects. Afterwards, I thought it an opportune time to capture some of the dramatic new architectural projects being developed during the first decade of the new millennium in the U.S.

So in 2006 Checkerboard embarked on a new series, *Landmarks in 21st Century American Architecture*, which focused on recently completed projects of Peter Eisenman, Tom Mayne, Steven Holl, Daniel Libeskind, Jean Nouvel, and Yoshio Taniguchi, including three museums, a theater, an office building, and a football stadium.

The Peter Jay Sharpe Foundation not only made that series possible, but supported us when we decided to undertake another, more open-ended series, *Explorations in 21st Century American Architecture*. Here we examine a number of topics, including architectural history and sustainability issues, through the work of Jeanne Gang, Rick Joy, Ray Kappe, Kieran Timberlake, Vincent Scully, Robert A. M. Stern and Diller Scofidio + Renfro

Coincident with our interest in documenting some of the more important structures by the preeminent designers of our day, we came to 15 Central Park West. Suzanne and I both regard the building as a capstone of a certain building type, the New York apartment house.

(PUBLIC APPEAL, continued from first page)

design to as many people as possible. As well as displaying a fascinating and enormous collection of objects, his extraordinary house demonstrates countless, ingenious but simple ways to bring light into buildings and maximize the use of space.

The public appeal yielded feature stories in *The Telegraph* and *The Times* and a piece on Radio 4's *Today* program. Given earlier coverage in *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *Country Life* and the *Evening Standard*, it is clear that the Soane Museum is successfully reaching a wide swath of the British public to help it finish the job of *Opening Up The Soane*.



The Dakota, Photo by: J.S. Johnston, Collection of The New-York Historical Society

Suzanne Stephens: The apartment house came to New York in the 19th century, borrowed from Paris. As in Paris, the idea here was to encourage people to live under the same roof. At the outset, there was enormous resistance. Some Americans felt that the apartments must be immoral. (They were French, weren't they?)

Developers were finally only able to persuade New Yorkers to leave their brownstones by offering all the amenities of home: libraries, dining rooms, maid service, and laundry rooms. Early apartment dwellers in the city didn't have to go out. The Dakota, by Henry Hardenbergh is a prime example of this city-within-a-city living.

Elizabeth Hawes, author of *New York, New York: How the Apartment House Transformed the Life of the City, 1869-1930* (1992), is fascinating on this subject and we're fortunate that she appears in the film.

Bob Stern also uncovered a rich history on the architects of the early 20th-century apartment house. The hero here is Rosario Candela, who worked during the same period as Mies and Saarinen, but who, in dealing with traditional forms of apartment living, never became particularly well-known outside of New York. Candela devised amazing principles of interlocking plans and solved all kinds of problems produced by the lack of space along Park Avenue. This was an architect who knew how to get light around airshafts.

Candela's masterpiece is probably 740 Park Avenue at 71st Street, which directly inspired Stern when he started to design 15 CPW. But 720, 770 and 778 Park Avenue are also remarkable examples of Candela's apartment houses.

EH: In the film, Bob emphasizes the distinction between apartment houses and an apartment building. In an apartment house, one finds what one would find in a house in the sky.

Bob's themes were light, views, and space. Like so many of Candela's apartments, there are apartments in 15 CPW that run the length of the building, providing unbelievable views from two grand thoroughfares.

SS: Yes, and harking back to the 19th century, 15 CPW offers just about every conceivable amenity: library, dining room, swimming pool, spa, concierge, wine cellars, and screening room.

Of course, while Bob was busy crafting exquisite limestone for the façade of 15 CPW, a new crop of developers, a number of whom had begun by building hotels, were commissioning apartment buildings from such architects as Richard Meier, Neil Denari, Frank Gehry, Gwathmey Siegel, and Jean Nouvel for Chelsea, SoHo, TriBeCa, and Greenwich Village.

The "moderns" are doing extremely well, considering that for decades every affluent New Yorker aspired to a pre-war apartment. But 15 CPW has achieved a recession-proof reputation that few other apartments enjoy.

WELCOME TO NEW YORK, GEORGE!

As the Chairman of Sotheby's Europe brought down the gavel at The Soane Banquet in London in October, George Clarke, aka "restoration man," emerged as the winner of a fabulous trip to New York and invitation to attend the Gala Dinner Dance on Tuesday, April 26, as an honored guest of the Soane Foundation. The live and silent auctions helped the museum reach a grand total of £365,000 or \$592,000 for the evening, all to benefit the *Opening Up The Soane* program.



(A MASTER REFLECTS, continued from first page)

In trying to resolve these interconnections, I realized that the modern dichotomy is just totally wrong. It's a view of the world held by people who are scared of the past and who have so demonized it, they've fouled history. After all, steel frame buildings are a classical, not a modernist, invention. The American skyscrapers of the 1880s and 1890s were steel framed, and most of the classical houses you see from 1900 to 1920 are actually steel framed as well. Most of the technology we think of as modernist is actually quite old. Classicists have tended to be like all good architects, always on the lookout for a better way to do things.

SF: There seems to be inevitability about the use of the classical architecture.

AG: Yes and no. I do understand how a people can find their history clouded, as have the Germans, and thus want to sweep the slate clean. Of course, in choosing to ignore their rich and marvelous architectural heritage, until recently the Germans have even neglected a genius like Karl Friedrich Schinkel.

SF: I suppose there can never be an unfreighted architecture. Even the most minimal architecture must, in the end, carry the weight of meaning of its time. So even for those wanting to start anew, their architecture will begin to accrue memories.

AG: Right. But it takes millennia to accumulate significance.

SF: Everybody talks about the amazing interiors you created for the Department of State in the 1970s. How long did the project take you?

AG: We started in 1984. George Shultz, then Secretary of State, said, "I'm going on a Latin American tour in about a month. If you

can give me a set of drawings in about three weeks, I'll look at them on the airplane—and when I get back we can talk about them." We managed to get the drawings done and, while he was gone, kept polishing. When he came back and I showed him the catch-up work, he said, "Just do it."

We had about four months for the first 19 rooms (there were 48 in all), not only to finish the construction drawings but also to begin fabrication. Looking back, I think that having to work under that intense pressure allowed me to be more creative than if I had had a long time to get it all right.

SF: Can you tell us about your collaboration with Arthur Drexler at MoMA in the early 80s?

Arthur ran a very open house during the 1970s and 1980s. I remember *The Architecture of the École des Beaux-Arts* in 1977, which I think was one of the most popular architectural exhibitions the museum has ever held. Just imagine these gigantic drawings, all watercolors created by teenagers or students in their early 20s for the various historic competitions, taking over a large part of the museum. A few years later, Arthur did a Lutyens exhibition that I co-curated with him.

You know, given my fascination with Schinkel and Mies, and speaking of MoMA, here's hoping that Barry Bergdoll has a big Schinkel/Mies exhibition in the back of his mind. That would be something to look forward to.

SF: Speaking of looking forward, we are very excited that you are receiving Soane Honors at our Gala dinner on Tuesday, April 26.

AG: I am very pleased as well. And, indeed, I am looking forward to it very much.

CELEBRATING A PAIR OF START UPS

The Soane in the United States was launched from a kitchen table on the Upper East Side in 1990 by two American women who had just returned to the city after living in London. It wasn't until June 1991 that the fledgling enterprise officially became the Sir John Soane's Museum Foundation with the incorporation and acceptance of an IRS filing.

Peter Thornton, curator of the Soane Museum, first brought Cyndy Spurdle and Susie Magee together in London on the off-chance they might establish an American friends group for the museum. Cyndy remembers that back then none of her American friends had the slightest idea of who John Soane was.

The Foundation's first office space was piled high with index cards, slips of paper, envelopes, and a balky, ancient copy machine, not to mention the odd coffee cup, half eaten sandwich, and well worn casserole. Cyndy recalls that the piles of paper in the kitchen could get so scary that she and Susie would do anything to escape, including hand-delivering mail to the glamorous design office of fellow board member Bunny Williams.

Fast-forward 20 years to the Soane Foundation of today, where Cyndy and Susie still play active roles as members of the Board. We will soon write more about the early days, but Cyndy couldn't help but remember a phone call that came late one afternoon during the early days, as she was

Dear Reader:

What did Ada Louise Huxtable have to say in 1978 about MoMA's architecture and design department under Arthur Drexler, which Allan Greenberg touches upon in the accompanying interview?



We at the Foundation delved deep into our extensive library—that is, we googled—to retrieve this excerpt from the essay *Sir Edwin Lutyens and the Cult of the Recent Past* (*The New York Times*, November 12, 1978), as collected in Huxtable's *On Architecture: Collected Reflections on a Century of Change* (2008):

Why, then, this sudden attention to his [Lutyens's] work? Actually, it is not all that unexpected. The guest director of the show, Allan Greenberg, is an architect who has been studying Lutyens for over a decade, and Lutyens's name has become one of the code words of the "postmodernists," who have been rediscovering a highly selective past...

But beyond all the turns and twists of revisionist theory and practice today—the agony and anguish of those who profess that modern architecture is dead and alternative must be sought, and the fruitful excitement of some of the more thoughtful explorations of those alternatives—one notable fact remains. Lutyens was a superb architect. If he had clothed his building in banana peels, he would have done it with urbanity and style. He was a high-wire practitioner; one need only look at run-of-the-mill classicism, or what passed for classicism in the twentieth century, to see the extraordinary art and skill with which he worked.

at the stove, cooking dinner for her family. As she went to grab a pencil and piece of paper, a soft voice politely inquired about membership in the Foundation (and, boy, did they need those!). But when Cyndy asked to get a mailing address, the young woman replied that she couldn't give out much information at the moment, because she was on her way to Texas to get married.

She did mention her name, Kristin McMahon, and her position as an architect with Peter Marino. Now we know that she married a fellow architect from Bob Stern's office by the name of Tom Kligerman. So here's wishing Kristin and Tom a happy 18th as we celebrate the Foundation's 20th anniversary.

THE 20TH BIRTHDAY GALA

Please join us on the evening of **Tuesday, April 26, for our 20th Birthday Gala**, honoring Allan Greenberg and the founders and past Board and Advisory Board members of the Soane Foundation.

To be held at 583 Park, 583 Park Avenue at East 63rd Street in New York City, the evening is black tie and seating is limited. For ticket reservations or for further information, contact Chas Miller at 212 223 2012 or info@soanefoundation.com

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 more details, please refer to our website: www.SoaneFoundation.com.

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