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.


**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 have 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 Baurhaus, 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.

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 the UK, but internationally.

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).”
Six years ago Checkerboard Film Foundation in New York released Sir John Soane: An English Architect, the American Legacy, an engrossing hour-long film in which a number of leading architects reflected on the career of Sir John Soane, his museum on seven leading contemporary architects. Afterwards, I thought it an opportune time to capture some of the dynamism and new architectural projects being developed during the first decade of the new millennium in the US.

So in 2006 Checkerboard embarked on a new series, Landmarks of the 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 Sharp Foundation not only made that series possible, but supported us as we decided to undertake another, more open-ended series, Explorations in 21st Century American Architecture. Here we examine a number of architects, including architectural history and sustainability issues, through the work of Jeanne Gang, Rick Joy, Koning Eizenberg, Venturi, Scott Brown, Robert A. M. Stern and Diller Scofidio + Renfro.

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

We welcome our friends and colleagues from the Soane Foundation, their American colleagues, and guests of our host, Checkerboard Films.

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 was a small enterprise officially became the Sir John Soane’s Museum Foundation with the incorporation and acceptance of an IRS filing.

The Soane Foundation’s first office space was piked high with index cards, slips of paper, envelopes, and a bulky, ancient copy machine, not to mention the cold coffee cup, half-eaten sandwiches, and well worn coat. Cyndy recalls that it was the fledgling enterprise nationwide Sir John Soane’s Museum Foundation with the incorporation and acceptance of an IRS filing.

The Soane Foundation. The first floor of the Soane Museum is dedicated to an expanded programme for an expanding audience a lively educational forum in the fields of art, architecture, and the decorative arts. The Soane is supported and assisted financially Sir John Soane’s Museum in London. For more details, please refer to our website: www.soanefoundation.org.

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The Soane Foundation is a registered 501(c)3 organization.


General entry ticket price is $30, $20 for students, $10 for under 18. For general admission, the museum is open Tuesday through Sunday, 10am to 5:45pm, 1st floor. The upper floors are open on Saturdays only. Free entry is offered on Saturday from 5pm to 8pm.

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