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Palladio and His Legacy: A Transatlantic Journey

April 2–August 1, 2010

The Morgan Library & Museum, New York City

By Suzanne Stephens and William Hanley

A small, elegant exhibition on view at the Morgan Library and Museum in New York, *Palladio and His Legacy: A Transatlantic Journey*, has been attracting numerous visitors since it opened April 2, 2010. Organized by the Royal Institute of British Architects (the RIBA) Trust, in London, in association with the Centro Internazionale di Studi di Architettura (CISA) Andrea Palladio in Vicenza, and the Morgan, the exhibition includes thirty-one infrequently seen drawings by Andrea Palladio (1508-1580) from the collections of the RIBA Trust. Supplementing the drawings are the RIBA's rare books by Palladio, Vitruvius (whose Roman treatise influenced Palladio), and 18th century followers of the architect.

A spectacular supplement to the show is sixteen models executed by Timothy Richards, which include Palladio's villas as well as buildings reflecting Palladio's influence in America. In addition, bas-reliefs were conceived by Guido Beltramini and Mauro Zocchetta of the Centro in Vicenza and fabricated by Ivan Simonato to accompany several drawings. After the show closes in New York, it will travel to the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C., the Milwaukee Art Museum, and the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh.

Architectural Record's deputy editor, Suzanne Stephens and Web editor, William Hanley, interviewed **Irena Murray**, director of the British Architectural Library at the RIBA, one of the curators for the show (She worked with Charles Hind, associate director and curator of drawings at the RIBA, Guido Beltramini, director of CISA in Vicenza, and Calder Loth, retired senior architectural historian at the Virginia Department of Historical Resources.) They also spoke with **Baroness (Tessa) Blackstone**, chair of the RIBA Trust and **Ruth Reed**, president of the RIBA, about the thinking behind the exhibition.

Suzanne Stephens and William Hanley: How did the RIBA, a professional institution for architects come to have this rare and important collection of drawings by Palladio?

Baroness Blackstone: Actually the RIBA Trust has four million items—books, drawings, photographs—in its British Architectural Library.

Ruth Reed: Since it was founded in 1837, the RIBA has been interested in advancing architecture, not just the practices of its member architects. We have this higher purpose. And this explains our extensive collections—the RIBA has a million and a half architectural photos, including for example, rare images of New York City's Central Park.

Irena Murray: Specifically in the case of the RIBA's collection of drawings by Palladio, it all started when Inigo Jones went to Italy in 1613. He came back with about 100 drawings that we suppose were given or sold to him by the oldest



Image courtesy RIBA British Architectural Library
Sebastiano Ricci (1659–1734), Conjectural portrait of Andrea Palladio, 1715

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SS/WH: Tell us about your decision to include specially commissioned plaster models by Timothy Richards. There are 12 models of American buildings whose designers (Thomas Jefferson, James Hoban, George Post, and Cass Gilbert, among others) were influenced by Palladio.

Jones invited other architects to see them, so already, in the 17th century, Palladio's drawings were well known to a small circle of artists, architects, and theater people in England. In 1719, Lord Burlington went to Italy and came back with a separate collection of Palladian drawings, about two-thirds of what we have now. Then he acquired the ones that had been in Jones's collection but had passed on to private hands.

Lord Burlington now had the major collection of surviving Palladio drawings. He proceeded to categorize them in the order you will find in the show: There are the free-hand sketches and drawings Palladio made of ancient monuments, presentation drawings he executed for own projects, and drawings for his 1570 treatise, *I Quattro Libri dell'Architettura*.

After Lord Burlington's death, the drawings entered the collections of the Dukes of Devonshire through marriage. There they stayed until the late 19th century when the 8th Duke of Devonshire offered them as a gift in trust to the RIBA to diminish his property taxes.

With 380 drawings, the RIBA has close to 90 percent of the drawings by Palladio that exist in the world. As custodians we want to make sure we would do justice to the collection.

SS/WH: What made you decide to do an exhibition on Palladio in the United States now?

RR: A large retrospective exhibition *Andrea Palladio: His Life and Legacy*, opened at the Royal Academy of Art in London in January 2009 to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the architect's birth.

BB: Given that Palladio had so much influence over here, it was a shame that the larger exhibition was not able to travel to the States.

IM: There were 300 objects in that previous exhibition, so editing was necessary with this smaller one [which, in addition to the 31 drawings, includes eight books, 16 models, and seven bas-reliefs]. We see this exhibition as a chamber music performance versus a symphonic work.

SS/WH: How did you decide what to emphasize in the work of such a famous figure?

IM: We wanted to show something of the process in Palladio's work, his observational ability, and his close reading of Classical ruins, such as the Baths of Caracalla in Rome.

Besides the pen and ink freehand sketches, he used an ivory stylus, then filled the drawing out in black ink—which now has faded to brown—and black chalk. These drawings allow you to follow the thinking. When Palladio apprenticed as a stone cutter, his native intelligence attracted scholarly patrons such as Giangiorgio Trissino (who gave him the name of Andrea Palladio to replace his original one, Andrea di Pietro della Gondola).

in way that people could easily read. We wanted to make the exhibition more accessible—when you look at Richards' plaster model of the 1792 competition entry by Jefferson for the President's House in Washington, you can see the influence of Palladio's treatise on Jefferson.

Because of Palladio's training, perspective came later to him. His drawings often look flat. But a model naturally provides that extra dimension. We have two types of models: Besides the ones by Richards, there are others contributed by our colleagues in Vicenza, which are 1:1 scale bas-reliefs of some of the drawings.

SS/WH: [Could you explain the reason for your inclusion of 18th-century British books by architects and builders influenced by Palladio?](#)

IM: American architects and builders depended on pattern books in the 18th and 19th centuries. In them you can find Palladio mixed with Sebastiano Serlio and Vincenzo Scamozzi, with a dash of James Gibbs, and grains of Abraham Swan. These strains were all fused in this country's architecture. For example, Swan cannibalized Palladio and Scamozzi, yet early on Swan was a source for American builders.

SS/WH: [At the current moment why would Palladio have a strong appeal?](#)

RR: Palladio's interpretation of antiquity resulted in architecture that was so well-proportioned and balanced it could be translated into modern buildings—the [Villa Rotonda](#), for example, shows why Palladio was so good.

BB: This is a show every architectural student could learn from. Although I am a lay person—a social scientist—I am involved in the RIBA because I believe people need to be more discerning and demanding about architecture.

SS/WH: [Here \(as in England\) there is a rift between modernist or avant-garde architects and classically oriented ones. Historical figures such as Palladio are not talked about today as much as they were in the 1970s and 1980s, during the postmodern period. Now there is a perceived schism between modernists and traditionalists in the religion of architecture.](#)

RR: We are an incredibly broad church in the RIBA—we are about to mount an exhibition of the drawings of Ben Pentreath, George Saumarez Smith, and Francis Terry, who are classically oriented young architects. Palladio is a way of bridging modernists and classicists.

IM: In my earlier studies I specialized in European modern architecture between the wars, and I find Palladio's simplicity of form and sense of unity very modern. He has a very democratic sense of design. He was acutely aware of the needs of a working villa. For a farm he would design an appropriate form for storage shed as well as the master's house. He gave as much attention to the utilitarian structures as to the palazzo. You can see in the show the utilitarian drawing for the Port of Trajan in Ostia, and when you compare it with his Basilica in Vicenza, you see he was trying to figure out the structure—he wanted to make sure he had the right dimensions. The old Vicentine Basilica had fallen down because the corners were weak. Palladio trying to make sure all strategic points would be doubly supported. He was interested in engineering, which people don't often mention. And he had a modern sense that what is beautiful has to be functional.

A catalog accompanies the exhibition, edited by Charles Hind and Irena Murray, in which these drawings and photographs are presented, along with essays by James Ackerman, Howard Burns, and Warren Cox, among others.



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It should be noted that the RIBA and CISA would like to acknowledge the support of the following organizations and persons for their efforts in bringing the Palladio exhibition to the United States: Regione del Veneto; Richard H. Driehaus Charitable Lead Trust; Dainese; British Architectural Library Trust; Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation; Samuel H. Kress Foundation; Center for Palladian Studies in America, Inc.; Richard Wernham and Julia West; Andrew D. Stone; William T. Kemper Foundation; Sir John Soane's Museum Foundation, and Anne Kriken Mann.—S.S.

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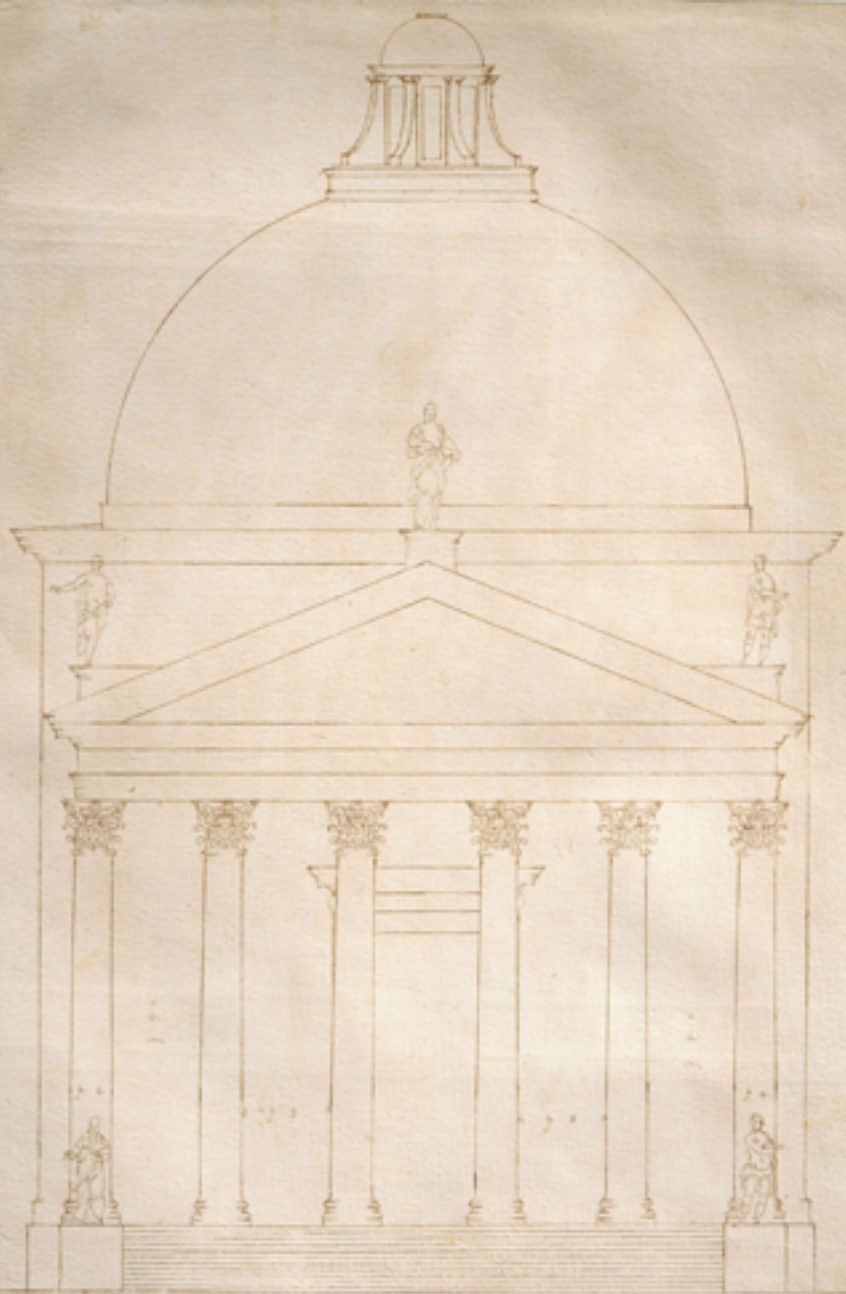
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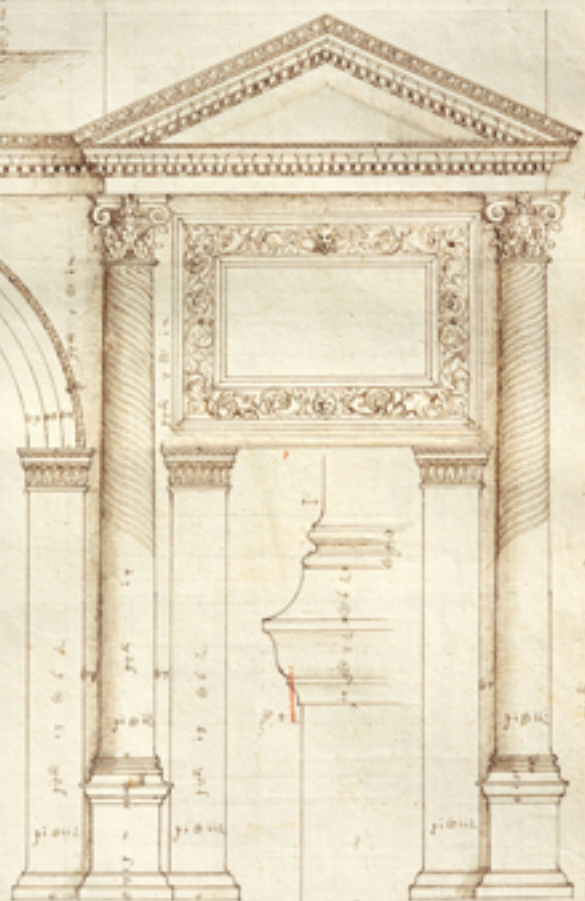
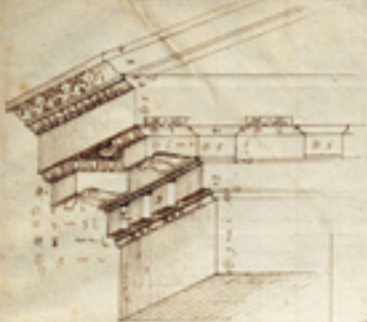
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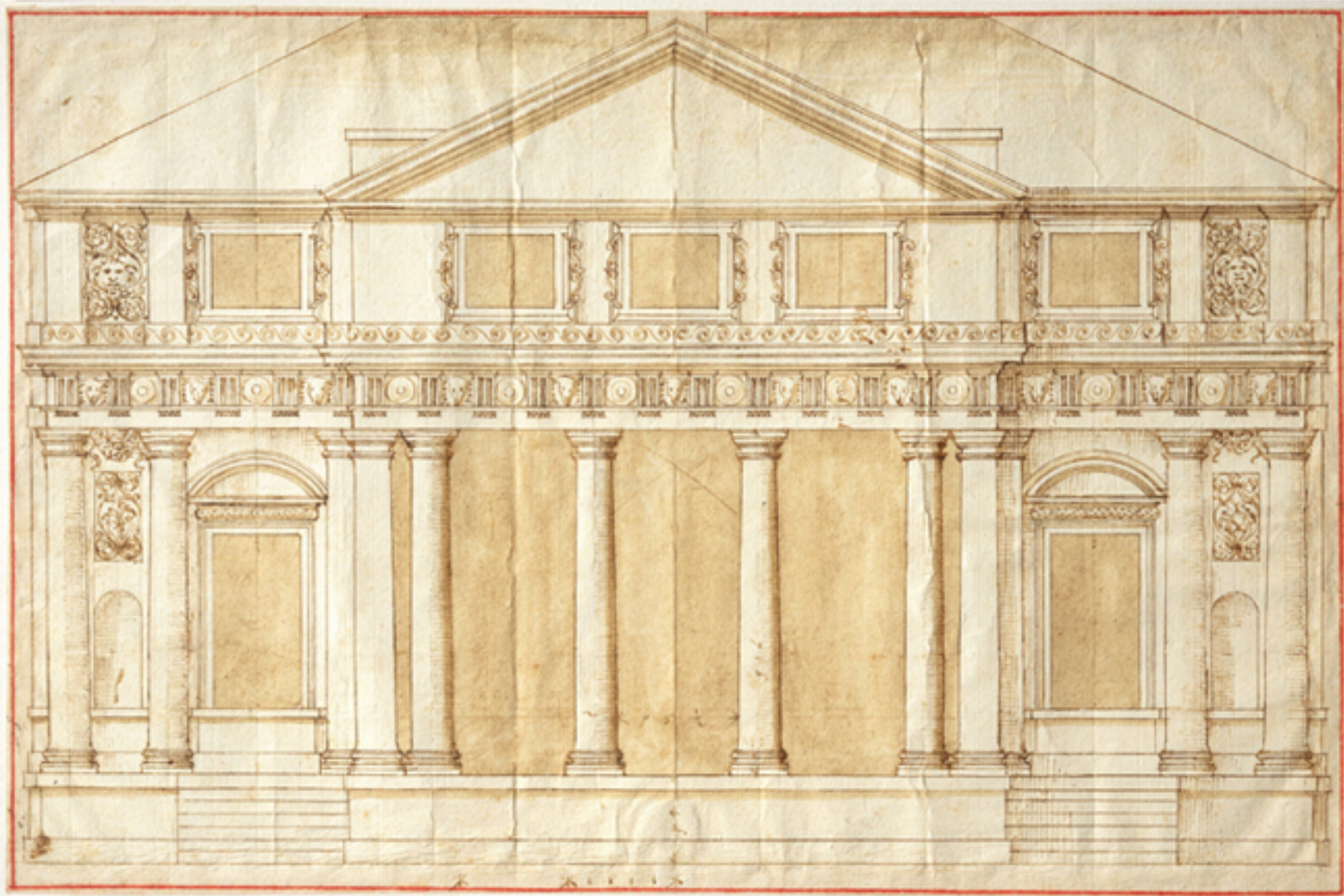


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to be like this

to be like this







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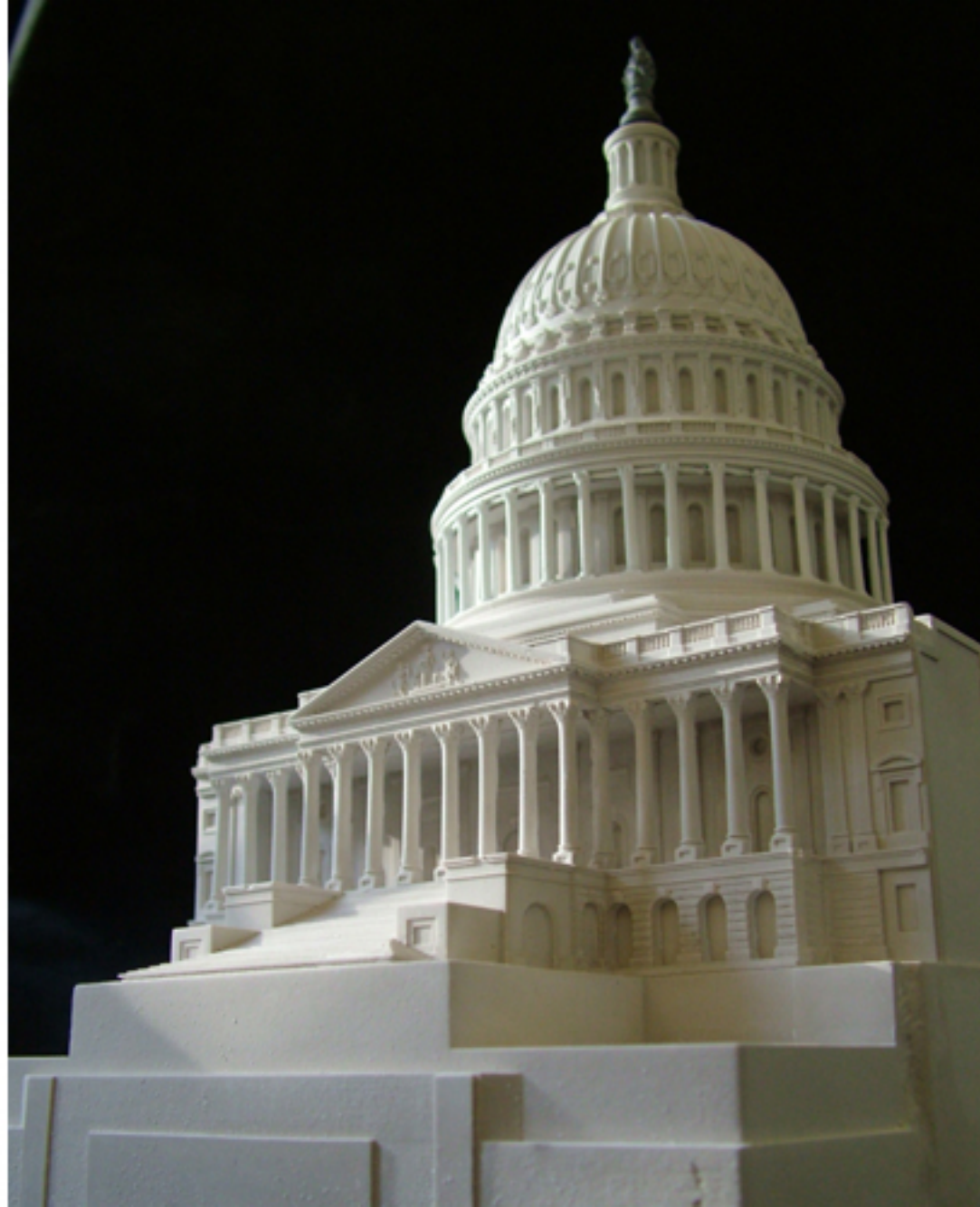
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Di Andrea Palladio.

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della Villa, de' Piazzi, de' Pioggi, de' Xelli, et de' Campi.
CON PRIVILEGI.

IN VENETIA,
Appresso Dominico de'
Franceschi.

1570.



Plan de la croisée de Nicaïus selon
le style de l'édifice



plan général de l'église selon l'édifice



plan général de l'église de l'édifice



Le plan général de l'église







Princeton Hall, Princeton, N. J., 1719





