THE ART OF CLASSICAL DETAILS

THEORY, DESIGN, AND CRAFTSMANSHIP

PHILLIP JAMES DODD

Foreword by DAVID EASTON

CALIFORNIA GEORGIAN (see page 217): The dining room is decorated with Gracie hand-painted wallpaper that complements the highly detailed door casings and ceiling crown. *Eric J. Smith Architect*

California Georgian

ATHERTON, CALIFORNIA

Eric J. Smith Architect

THIS CALIFORNIA RESIDENCE recreates the historic feeling of a symmetrical Georgian-style home, while maximizing the allowable building area, and also preserving several large and beautiful oak trees that anchor the property. By designing around the existing woodland gardens that enclose the site, the house appears to have been built decades earlier. Yet despite its classical detailing and sense of permanence, the house includes all the amenities of a modern-day home, and is highly engineered in order to comply with California's rigorous seismic requirements.

The weathered patina of the home is further enhanced by the selection of stone for the exterior. Sourcing aged-faced granite cut from the abandoned fissures of a Connecticut stone quarry, the clients selected only pieces that had been exposed to the elements for many years.

The "H"-shaped plan allows most rooms to have windows on two or three façades, maximizing the views out on to the planted gardens and lawns, while also allowing natural light to flood the house. The symmetrical plan provides clarity, with enfilades providing axial views from one room to another, and out towards the swimming pool and pool pavilion beyond. Collaborating with a team of highly-skilled craftsmen and artisans, Eric Smith custom-designed all of the millwork, cabinetry, and plaster moldings in the house. It is this careful attention to detail, combined with material selection, that creates the feeling of a much older home.

Further images from this project can be found on pages 12–13, 43 and 44.

ORGANIZATION:
SYMMETRY AND AXIS

The most distinctive characteristic in classical architecture is the use of symmetry and axis—both in organizing the plan and detailing the façade. Typically, as per this Georgian design by Eric J. Smith, the plan and exterior elevations are symmetrical either side of an axis, or centerline, starting at the front door and running through the building. Secondary axes within the house follow the circulation routes, as in this case where upon entering the entrance hall the primary axis, which leads to the living room, intersects with a secondary axis aligned with the stair hall. Either side of the living room on their own secondary axes are the library and dining room (each with bay windows centered in the room), which in turn creates a symmetrical garden façade.

"Using symmetry and balance, the embrace of natural light and the honest use of durable materials united by the craftsmen's hand—these are the ingredients for good Classical Architecture."
Eric J. Smith

Select details, in a variety of materials, from an American country house
Wadia Associates

G. P. SCHAFER ARCHITECT · NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK

G. P. Schafer Architect is a small New York City-based firm specializing in classical and traditional residential architecture. In each of its projects the firm emphasizes a commitment to quality, craftsmanship, rigorous detail based on an understanding of historic precedent, and most importantly, comfort and livability. Led by principal Gil Schafer III, the firm has been widely published in books and periodicals on both sides of the Atlantic and has been the recipient of numerous awards including three Palladio Awards for outstanding traditional residential design.

ANDREW SKURMAN ARCHITECTS · SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

Andrew Skurman founded his firm in San Francisco in 1992. As principal and owner of Andrew Skurman Architects, he focuses on superbly-crafted custom houses that are perfectly and logically planned to the specific requirements and wishes of his clients. His expertise lies in the elegant and refined expression of Classical architecture and the interpretation of French, Georgian, and Mediterranean styles. Andrew has received the honor of being named a Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres by the Minister of Culture of France.

ERIC J. SMITH ARCHITECT · NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK

The office of Eric J. Smith Architect reflects Eric's personal values, those of tradition, timelessness, grace, and a commitment to quality. For over 20 years, Eric and his staff have been designing high-end, custom residences for clients in the United States and overseas, working in a variety of settings, styles, and architectural vocabularies. The firm is well known for its collaboration with some the America's finest interior designers, landscape designers, and craftspeople—and in particular the work it has done over the years with David Easton.

SMITH ARCHITECTURAL GROUP · PALM BEACH, FLORIDA

Since opening his office in 1989, Jeffrey Smith has established a practice that is committed to the pursuit of classical architecture. Following in the tradition of Palm Beach's celebrated architects of the past, Jeff's work displays a refined elegance coupled with exquisite detailing and superb craftsmanship. He subscribes to the idiom that the rebirth of tradition yields architecture with meaning. Much respected in Palm Beach, he has served as Chairman of the Town's Architectural Commission and Landmark Preservation Commission.

KEN TATE ARCHITECT · NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

Ken Tate started his own firm in 1984 and has since become one of the most sought-after designers in his native South. Ken's understanding of classical architecture is enhanced by his love of vernacular styles, and while some of his designs offer a faithful representation of historic styles, others marry elements from several periods to give the impression that they grew and changed over time. By employing this design technique, as well as the use of traditional craftsmanship, all of his homes have a romantic feel that makes them appear to have been lived in for generations.

WADIA ASSOCIATES · NEW CANAAN, CONNECTICUT

For over 30 years, Dinyar Wadia has earned a reputation for designing classically-inspired homes, gardens, and interiors. His finely detailed residences display a remarkable versatility and adaptability within the classical language, and are characterized by a passion for excellent detailing, use of fine materials and exceptional workmanship. Dinyar's core design philosophy is to emphasize the integral relationship between a home and its gardens—an approach that has seen him garner numerous architectural and landscape design awards.

Schnelling, in his *Philosophie der Kunst* (1802–03), while Goethe himself studied musical theory between 1810 and 1815 in the hope of writing a book on music as a parallel to his *Theory of Colours* (1810). Though the idea of music being frozen is hardly an attractive one, the notion that there is some kind of parallel between music and architecture has much to be said for it. This is partly because architecture is appreciated through its form rather than through any expression of a human narrative, and this largely true of classical music, notably chamber music though not opera.

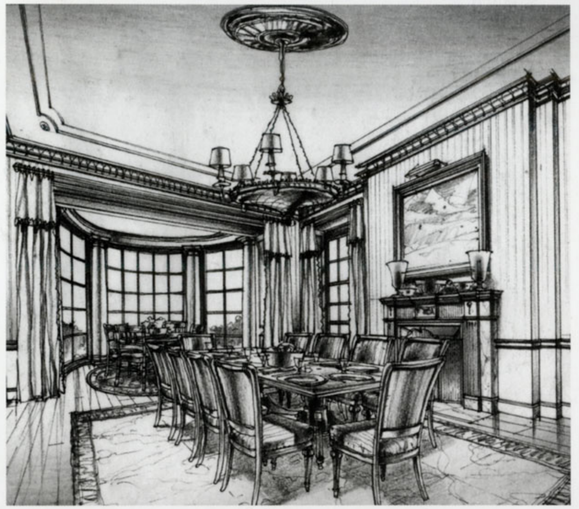
Durand, Professor of Architecture at the Ecole Polytechnique in Paris from 1790–1830, noted that architectural elements "exist within architecture like words in a discourse or notes in music."[13] Indeed, the grammar of the language of the orders is quite as complex as that of musical notation, so that in classical architecture the relation of every element to every other is based on a module that is the diameter of the column at its foot. We can analyse this proportional relationship in the same way that we can analyse a Bach fugue in which the initial exposition or theme—a variant of the module in classical architecture—is heard successively in all the voices.

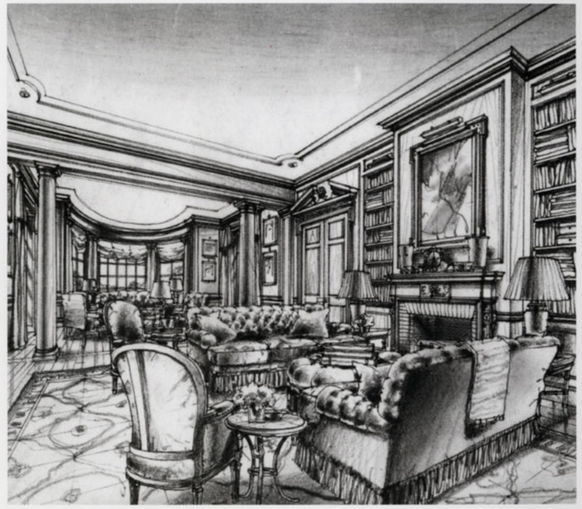
The parallel is closest in the relation between music and the grammar of the classical orders in architecture. All classical architecture is based on the orders in a system of trabeation in which columns support a horizontal entablature. These elements are divided into three units: thus, the column has a base, shaft, and capital—the base itself consists of three parts—while the entablature comprises architrave, frieze, and cornice. In temples, the roof which this structure supports has a pediment at each end, its three sides forming a triangle. We see exactly this at a Palladian building such as Houghton Hall, Norfolk, by Colin Campbell and James Gibbs, where in the west garden front of 1722–27 the central three bays are fronted with an Ionic portico of four giant Ionic columns supporting a pediment.

The language of the orders has a grammar that is quite as complex as that of musical notation so that the relation of every element to every other is based on a module that is the diameter of the column at its foot. We can analyse this proportional relationship throughout all parts of the west front at Houghton in the same way that we can analyse a fugal composition by Bach in which the initial exposition or theme is heard successively in all the voices.

Each column on the west portico at Houghton is 30 feet high, nine times the width of its diameter at its foot, a proportion customary in the Ionic order where the columns are more slender than in the Doric order. This module also governs the height of the base of the columns at Houghton which is half the diameter of the column. The intercolumniation at Houghton, that is the width between the columns, is three times the diameter of the column. All this makes the length of the portico equivalent to 13 modules. The entablature which surmounts the columns is one fifth of their height, while the 10-foot-high crowning pediment is three times their height. Though these proportions are always interrelated in classical buildings, they are not fixed, for the great Renaissance theorists like Palladio, Scamozzi, and Vignola, all came up with their own personal variations.

In the most magnificent reception room at Houghton, the Saloon, created by William Kent in 1725–31,





CALIFORNIA GEORGIAN (see page 217): Design renderings for the dining room, living room, library, and stair hall show furniture in the rooms which immediately provides a sense of scale.

CALIFORNIA GEORGIAN (see page 217): Typical of Georgian design, the staircase is located at the end of the principal cross-axis in the house, which in turn is centered on large Palladian window at the landing. *Eric J. Smith Architect*

the pedimented Ionic chimneypiece is a brilliant variation on the theme of the west portico, showing the startling effect of the variety allowed by classical discipline. Here, the Ionic columns are coupled, one behind the other; the pediment is broken in the centre to allow for an antique bust; the frieze is interrupted by a marble panel carved with Walpole's star and garter; while a striking polychromy is introduced by the use of white Carrara marble contrasting with black marble flecked with gold which Kent also used for the tops of his side tables in this room. All of this variety against a common classical base, including the echoing rhythms of the columns which flank the chimneypiece, breaking forwards and backwards, can surely be paralleled in the music of Bach, born in 1685, the same year as William Kent. Works like his Double Violin Concerto in D Minor were created while Kent was at work at Houghton.

Just as the basic elements of classical architecture—the column, entablature, and pediment—are divided into three units, so in music, the sonata form that appears in symphonies as well as sonatas, is divided into three: an ABA rhythm of theme, development, and return, including recapitulations and codas. The disciplines of architecture and music also have numerous flexible elements which bring variety to the basic core; for example, the Greek Doric column lacks a base just as a sonata does not invariably have only three movements.

Each of the orders which form the core of classical architecture, Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian, incorporate moldings appropriate to them, which not only serve a decorative purpose but can themselves also be decorated. There are essentially five mouldings, cyma recta, cyma reversa, ovolo, cavetto, and dentil, each of which can be ornamented with decoration such as egg and tongue, bead and reel, and waterleaf. This decoration can be compared to the ornaments which feature so strongly in classical music and were described and explained by C. P. E. Bach in a chapter in Part I of his influential and authoritative treatise, *An Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*.[14] Referring to the principal embellishments, appoggiaturas, trills, slides, turns, and mordents, which he regarded as "indispensable," he stressed that "All ornaments bear a proportionate relationship to the length of the main note, to the speed and to the expression of the music," thus making a parallel with the architectural language of the orders He went on to explain that the ornaments "join notes and enliven them" as well as "give emphasis and accentuation."[15]

The composer Jean-Philippe Rameau, the founder of tonal harmonic theory in works such as his *Theory of Harmony* (1722), was inspired by the claims of the architect Charles-Etienne Briseux in his *Traité du Beau essential dans les arts* (1752) that the simple numerical ratios and proportions of the classical orders in architecture were based on the harmonic and geometric proportions found in music.[16] Even if that is debatable, the complex moldings and their ornaments certainly have to be mastered by the classical architect, just as the composer of music has to operate within a parallel but flexible grammar.

The unfolding structure of a fugue can remind us of a complex building articulated with a giant order rising through two stories, as pioneered by Michelangelo in the Capitoline palaces, threaded through with a minor order echoing the theme of the major order