

Diplomatic reception rooms
U. S. Department of State
Washington, D. C.
Allan Greenberg, Architect



Design for diplomacy



Dean Acheson once said that the Secretary of State's suite "looks like the second-class dining saloon on the *Europa*." He was speaking of the reception, dining, meeting, and executive offices in which the Department of State was then conducting diplomacy. Today, business goes on as usual in the building whose rooms Acheson once deplored—an undistinguished Late-Modern structure completed in 1961. Most of its interiors, including the main reception area on the ground floor, have not been renovated, and are unpleasant reminders of how badly "mediocre modern" holds up over time. Almost all of the spaces to which Acheson was referring, however, are now elegantly designed and detailed Federal-style rooms built within a Modernist shell. George Shultz has met with Anatoly Dobrynin in rooms that Thomas Jefferson would have considered suitable.

It all began in 1961 when Mrs. Christian Herter, the wife of President Eisenhower's Secretary of State, burst into tears when shown the room in which she was expected to hold a dinner party for the Queen of Greece. Encouraged by succeeding presidents, the State Department's protocol officer, Clement E. Conger, began to improve the more ceremonial interiors by launching a bold program to assemble the best furniture, paintings, china, and silver he could find circa 1740-1825, the period coinciding with the early years of our Republic. Today the collection, created entirely by citizens seeking tax deductions who have donated works of art or the money to buy them, is said to rival Winterthur and comparable accumulations in the American Wing of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art.

As the collecting went on, under the auspices of Conger and the Fine Arts Committee of the Department of State, so did the remodeling of the major spaces, also paid for by wealthy citizens seeking tax deductions. There were not many classical architects of the first rank to choose from to do these rooms, such skills and training having become virtually obsolete, but Clement Conger knew the men who were still doing it well, usually for private house clients. Walter M. Macomber, John Blatteau, and the late Edward Vason Jones have completed distinguished public rooms, and now Allan Greenberg has recreated the Secretary's inner sanctum, shown on these pages. His work includes two reception rooms for dignitaries visiting the Secretary or the Deputy Secretary named, respectively, for former Secretary of State George C. Marshall and John Jay, second minister of foreign affairs under the Continental Congress. He has also transformed a large conference room, the Secretary's office and study, a gallery and foyers.

The view of the office of the Secretary of State (overleaf) reveals the magnificence of the collection in Greenberg's masterful setting. In the foreground are American Chippendale wing chairs, Pembroke tables, a three-shell block-front chest of drawers from Newport, Rhode Island (circa 1765), an antique Heriz-Serapi rug, a fine 18th-century chandelier in the style of Robert Adam, and important paintings and china. In the background is Greenberg's architecture, based on the theme of paired Corinthian pilasters. The mantel carving (opposite page) is derived from 18th-century Philadelphia interiors and furniture. Fluted Corinthian pilasters in the Great Seal Order (which Greenberg invented) frame the mantel and overmantel. The firebox opening is framed with King of Prussia marble and has a double keystone in the center. The consoles that support the mantel have a traditional acanthus leaf decoration on their faces.

Greenberg, like Classical masters before him, re-invents the Classical tradition to serve the purposes of his own time, both functional and symbolic. For him, expanding the boundaries of Classicism, as he has done in these rooms, has a significance beyond meeting the Department of State's present eclectic criteria. He believes that the Classic legacy of our past not only "challenges us to create a fitting architecture for our times," but can teach us how. Many would agree with him, including art historian George L. Hersey, whose essay "Allan Greenberg and the classical game" begins on page 160. *Mildred F. Schmertz*

Richard Cheek photos



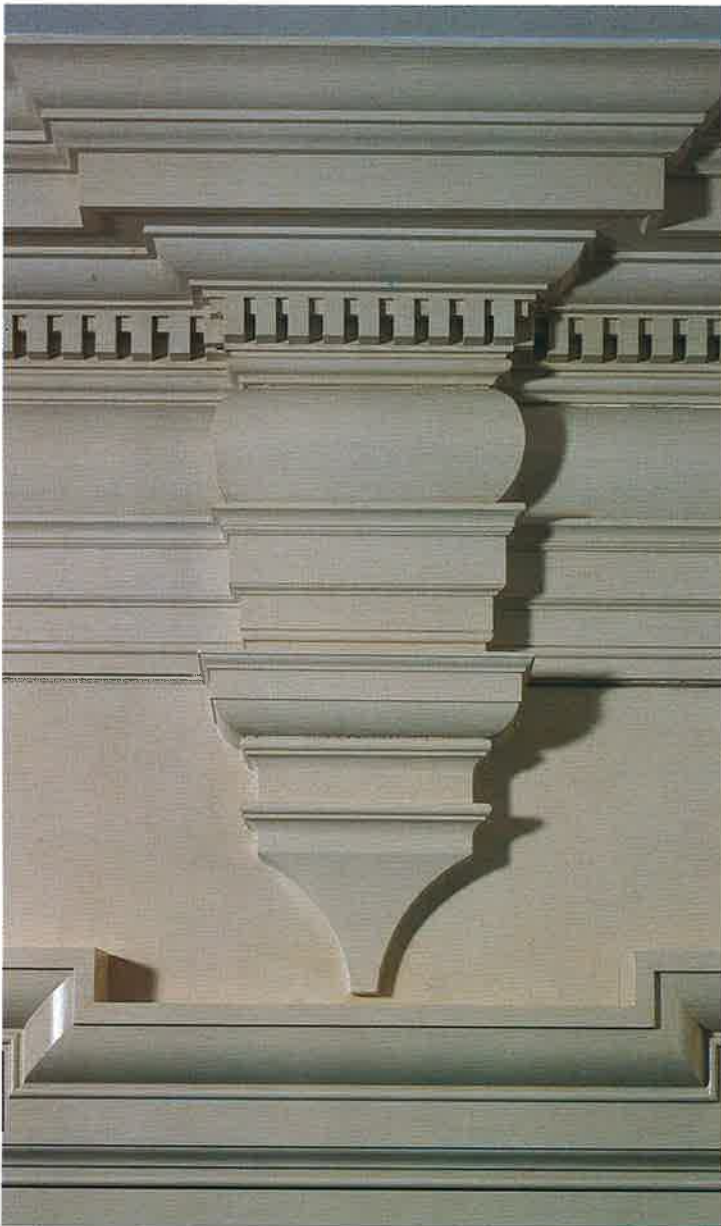
The door architrave and jamb detail (top) has as its principal feature a carved American Beauty Rose, the flower of Washington, D. C. The casing is a Romanesque motif, also used in England during the 18th-century. The carving on the inner edge is a traditional Greek water leaf motif. Corinthian capitals (above) incorporate the Great Seal of the United States. This follows both ancient and modern precedents, in using symbols to enhance architectural order. Benjamin Latrobe's beautiful corn and tobacco leaf capitals at the U. S. Capitol, are examples of this approach. The corner modillion above the corner pilaster projects at a 45-degree angle from the chimney breast. Setting corner modillions on the diagonal is a device for articulating a change in the direction of the entablature which architect Greenberg has added to the Classical idiom.





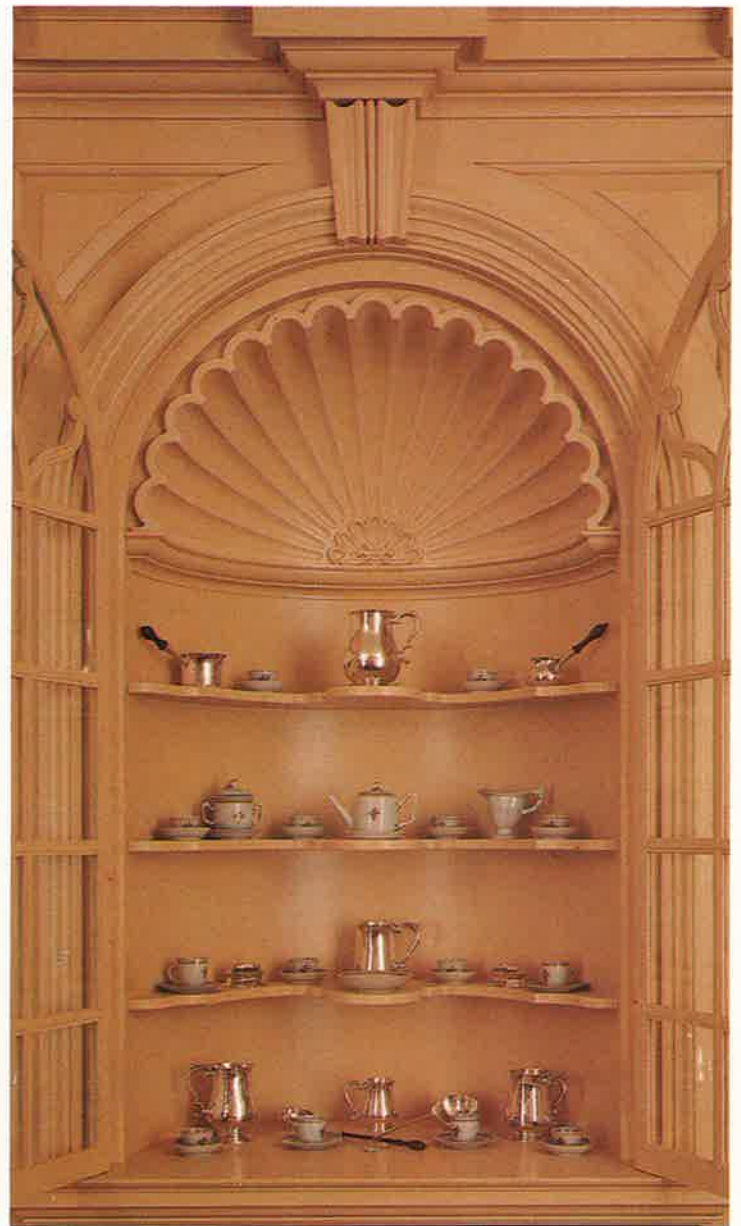
The John Jay reception room (above) was inspired by the great hall of Stratford Hall in Virginia. Fluted Doric pilasters on pedestals frame raised paneling and carry a cornice which breaks forward over each pilaster. The furniture is of the Federal period in Hepplewhite and Sheraton styles dating from 1790 to 1815. A set of six Hepplewhite shield-back side chairs, said to have belonged to George

Washington, are placed around the room. Above the New York Sheraton sofa is a 19th-century girandole looking glass. Colored engravings, dated 1816, hang on either side of a portrait of John Jay. The rug is an Isfahan, the chandelier a reproduction. Especially noteworthy are the Hepplewhite eagle-inlaid mahogany secretary and a pair of inlaid card tables.



The pendant molding or console (top left and cover) is placed above a door lintel in the George C. Marshall reception room. The walls of this room are divided into bays by regularly spaced pilasters on pedestals, and the door occupies a space that would otherwise be the location of a pilaster. The pendant maintains the rhythm of the cornice which breaks forward over each of the pilasters. The corner cupboard

detail (above right) has a keystone and a shell carving as the dominant components. The simple curved geometry of the shell-shaped niche contrasts with the intricacy of the central shell, the shaped shelves, and the curving muntins of the arched glass doors. A miniature Chinese export porcelain tea service (circa 1800) is displayed in the cupboard along with examples of 18th-century American and English silver.



The archway (top right) has a heavy keystone and an architrave which relate in form to other archways in the Secretary of State's suite. Inspired by the ideas of Thomas Jefferson, architect Greenberg has used stone ratios rather than those of wood for baseboard, wainscot and arch designs in the suite. The sides and underside of the archway are canted in so as to reduce the height of the arched opening on the corridor side where the ceiling is lower. Blind doors in the archway paneling open to provide storage and a coat closet. The main foyer (bottom right) connects the two major reception areas and the executive secretariat. A Roman Doric colonnade frames the entrance to the secretariat. The approach on axis to the George C. Marshall reception room from the reception room opposite (facing page) reveals through the archway and vaulted vestibule the hand carved architrave framing double doors. The cornice breaks forward over the pilasters creating a rich interplay of light and shadow. Coffers in the vaulted ceiling of the vestibule are painted blue to suggest the sky. Throughout the suite of offices random-width pegged mahogany boards have been used for the flooring. A late-18th-century 12-light cut-glass chandelier hangs above the modern Indo-Joshaghan rug in the foyer. The Chippendale side chair was made in Philadelphia circa 1770.



Renovation of offices of the Secretary of State, U. S. Department of State, Washington, D. C.

Owner:

The Fine Arts Committee, U. S. Department of State;

Clement E. Conger, chairman

Architect:

Allan Greenberg—
project staff: Allan Greenberg,
Richard N. Wies, Robert Orr,
Marisol Ramon, Daniel Pardy,
Thomas Noble

Consultants:

Karl Hansen (structural);
Smith & Faass (mechanical/
electrical)

General contractor:

William R. Lipscomb Inc.





Allan Greenberg and the classical game

By George L. Hersey

Some critics see Allan Greenberg's classical architecture as the latest thing to come along in the wake of post-Modernism. This, however, makes it one more new wave in the sequence of styles following the death of Eclecticism sometime in the 1920s. After Bauhaus Modernism followed by a Late Corbusier/New Brutalism phase, and finally post-Modernism, Greenberg, according to this scenario, represents a renewed Classicism. His buildings, like those of other contemporary Classicists such as the late Philip Trammell-Schutze, Edward Vason Jones and Leon Krier, can thus be linked to the return of the human figure in painting and of tonalism in music. They are the latest fashion.

But convinced Classicists do not look at their work thus. This is the key fact about their architecture as opposed to other kinds. And the 19th and 20th centuries have been hotbeds of these "other kinds," almost all of which have consisted of one-time 20- or 30-year movements ranging from Puginian Gothic to High Victorian Gothic to Arts and Crafts to Art Nouveau, *Neue Sachlichkeit*, Art Deco and on to the Bauhaus. Each episode is stylistically distinct from what came before and after it, though there are of course overlaps in timing. But when one of these episodes is over and done with, we never see it again, or if we do it is utterly transformed, as Robert Stern transforms the Shingle Style.

Classicists, in contrast, see their movement as a continuous tradition going back at least to 600 BC. And in fact, that tradition exists. A sufficiently tenacious historian could probably find Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian of one sort or another being erected uninterrupted, somewhere in the world, from antiquity to the present.

Certainly the "Gothic" Middle Ages are full of it—there are Corinthian capitals at Reims, though Vitruvius would not have approved of them. Classicism is therefore not important because of its newness, like Modernism or post-Modernism, but because of its age. A Classical architect does not try to be different from his artistic predecessors, as Wright tried to be different from Sullivan or even as Stern tries to be different from, say, W. R. Emerson. Classicism is not reactive or confrontational. It does not make fun of, or ironize on, its paternity, again like post-Modernism, but edits and develops what has gone before. Allan Greenberg is therefore not a revivalist but a survivalist.

Being so ancient, so perennial and even possibly eternal, Classicism eschews not only the short life spans but also the timebound

philosophies of architectural revivals and revolutions. Some of these philosophies now seem quaint. The Gothic Revivalists, for instance, had claimed that their architecture would improve the character and community life of the people who built and used it. Ruskin and Morris constructed whole careers around this notion. Classicists do not make such claims. Nor do they, like Modernists, wish to express the character of their age. Their architecture is not about something other than architecture—about society, personality, or a moment in history; like music, mathematics, chess, or a good deal of ballet, Classical architecture is about itself.

Above all, Classicist buildings, while they may and should be functional, do not exalt functionalism. They glory in their useless columns, cupolas, and cornices. Greenberg probably does not go so far as to agree with one of the great Classicist prophets, Sir A. E. Richardson (1880-1964), who used to say that William Wilkins had been given £150,000 to build University College in London, and spent it all on a magnificent dome and portico, with only some meager sheds for the professors and students. "And," Sir Albert would continue, "he did right." Greenberg has always built complete buildings, but part of their completeness is precisely in their use of an inward, nonexpressive system, or language—the Orders—whose only "function" is to bring into the observer's mind associations with earlier uses of that language, to play the Classical game of quoting, adapting, reusing, and challenging the educated observer to recognize what is going on. Lutyens, letting Palladio stand for all of Classicism, recognized the gamelike aspects of this architecture. "In architecture," he wrote, "Palladio is the game. It is so big—few appreciate it now and it requires considerable training to value and realize it. . . . It is a game that never deceives, dodges, never disguises. It means hard thought all through—it is labored if it fails." When the game is played brilliantly, as Greenberg plays it, the results have the power and memorability of great abstract art.

As with any great game the rules change only slightly across time. The major compendium of French Classicism illustrates this. Louis Hauteceur's *Histoire de l'Architecture Classique en France* (1943 ff., many volumes) proposes a continuous tradition reaching from the very earliest French Renaissance buildings of the 16th century to the dawn of the 20th. And this is itself only a 300-year episode in the 2,000-year line going back to Rome and thence to Greece. While there are incidental

variations and period flavors, there is only one style. A given architect may betray the fact that he is working in, say, 1740, but he is not trying to express 1740, though that date might occur to someone who looks at his buildings. He is quoting precedents established decades or centuries before. And he is providing precedents that will be used in later generations. By precedents I do not mean general ideas like Palladian windows or the Pazzi Chapel motif, which are used by all sorts of architects. I mean a specific language with specific words, e.g., an order or molding, borrowed, say, from Perrault, who borrowed it from Leveau, who borrowed it from the Temple of Fortuna Virilis in Rome.

It is this sense of a tradition that makes Classicism different. An architect who works within it can be as close to Vitruvius, or to Michelangelo, as to his contemporaries—closer, indeed. Other architects have a very different experience. They are tied almost entirely to their contemporaries. One might compare the situation to two families, one of which remembers only the history of its last two or three generations while the other has knowledge going back 70 generations.

Classicist literature points up the differences between Classical architects and the Modernist/Revivalist schools in other ways. Classicists tend to downplay photographs and sketches in favor of large-scale measured drawings. As noted, theirs is an architecture of details. Photographs do not show as well as drawings do how the guttae are arranged beneath the regulae of a Doric entablature, or exactly what kind of waterleaf design appears on a cyma. Classicist literature is also highly prescriptive. Being full of details it is full of formulas for those details, full of ratios and proportions. Another classic in the library of Classicism, Vignola's *Rules of the Five Orders* in most editions contains no text at all—only diagrams and formulas.

Classical architecture also has an individual view of planning. The great tradition is geometric. Beautifully drawn plans and elevations are part of the game, and are sometimes required if the finished building is to be completely understood. The French, in the tradition of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, have exalted both the geometric possibilities of architecture and the possibilities of architectural rendering, excelling beyond all previous achievement. As a planner, Greenberg assumes and develops this rigorous, fascinating French play with the plan. But he is English, too, for he is under the spell of one of the true

geniuses in British early-20th-century architecture, Lutyens. And Lutyens, in my opinion, was the only great Classical architect who could get away with Picturesque plans (he spent his early years as a Gothic Revivalist). Greenberg's sensitive and often witty spaces borrow both from Lutyens's informed picturesqueness and from the orderly rigor of the French.

From 1968 to 1973 Greenberg taught at Yale, offering among other courses one in which the students worked in different styles—Wright, Asplund, Alberti. He also served as a consultant on the building and remodeling of the Connecticut state courthouses. This led to some of his most important commissions.

The first of these was his West Wing Addition to the Connecticut State Library and Supreme Court Building in Hartford (1967-1975), designed in 1912 by the Beaux-Arts architect Donn Barber. This addition ranks as one of Greenberg's two major post-Modernist buildings. Another was his contemporaneous project for an addition to the Hartford County Courthouse of 1928 by Paul P. Cret.

Next came a courthouse and related offices for Alexandria, Virginia. Here Greenberg worked in a Colonial vein with architect Joseph Saunders of Saunders, Cheng and Appleton. The final structure is Saunders's. But Greenberg's 1975 model for the first time exhibits what was to become his hallmark: arched openings under mountainous encrustations of voussoirs, quoins, and string courses, a device that goes back to the great 16th-century Italian, Michele Sanmicheli.

And this brings up an important point about Allan Greenberg. He has moved steadily away from the American Colonial Revival movement. I believe this is because his increasing sense of the whole of the Classic tradition lets him see the Colonial architecture of this country for what it is—a bit provincial and a bit thin. Certainly our forebears never built such gateways as Greenberg designed for Alexandria. Yet of course American Classical architects have long been building in the most grandiose of Classical modes. One example, in the citadel of British Classicism, is the gorgeous golden colonnade by Daniel Burnham that fronts Selfridge's in London. It is to this aspect of American Classicism that Greenberg belongs.

In 1978-1980 Greenberg transformed a Manchester, Connecticut supermarket into a courthouse based on several of Sanmicheli's gates for Verona. Yet at the same time the building

preserves something of the local vernacular Classic style, reflected in its brick, and its delicate arched windows. The massively quoined central entrance, incorporating a frieze with large-scale inscription (another favorite Greenberg device), are like Sanmicheli, as is the low, long shape of the building as a whole. Yet Greenberg has reassembled the elements. Sanmicheli's rusticated Doric columns wrapped in deep channeled ashlar are gone, and so is the Doric entablature they support. By this omission Greenberg causes the pediment to float free of its underpinnings in a debonair way; and the sense of flotation is increased by the isolated keystone. The one facade is "about" the other. And as T. S. Eliot would say, not only do we see the later work differently, knowing about the earlier; we see the earlier differently knowing about the later.

After 1978 Greenberg worked on a number of unexecuted projects that develop the ideas of massive gates, arrays of quoins, columns *en ressaut*, triumphal-arch formulas, sequences of domes set into coved ceilings, and, as to detail, progressively more daggerlike keystones, more *mouvementé* skylines, more vivid Doric detailing. The most elaborate of the experiments in ashlar geometry is the completed Fifth Avenue facade for Bergdorf Goodman. Here a group of seven tall narrow facades, the two on each end being larger and non-matching, are tied together with a network of horizontal joints that erupts into a shower of quoins and voussoirs around the main door.

A more three-dimensional scheme is the Memorial to the Martyrs of the Holocaust, planned for Battery Park, New York (1). This will be a gigantic quadrigons topped with a faceted cone reminiscent of the obelisks on Neoclassical tombs. If Ledoux could redesign the Etoile, it would be like this. But the immediate source is Lutyens's Memorial for the Missing in the Battle of the Somme, at Thiepval, France (2). It is interesting to note that triumphal arches originated as frameworks on which to exhibit the weapons and armor a victorious army had captured from its foe. Here, in place of trophies, or *as* trophies, the numbers of the dead at each death camp and concentration camp will be carved on three sets of horizontal stringcourses all around the structure. Two of the keystones will be shaped like Torah scrolls. At the summit, each of the ten panels of the obelisk is to be inscribed with one of the Ten Commandments.

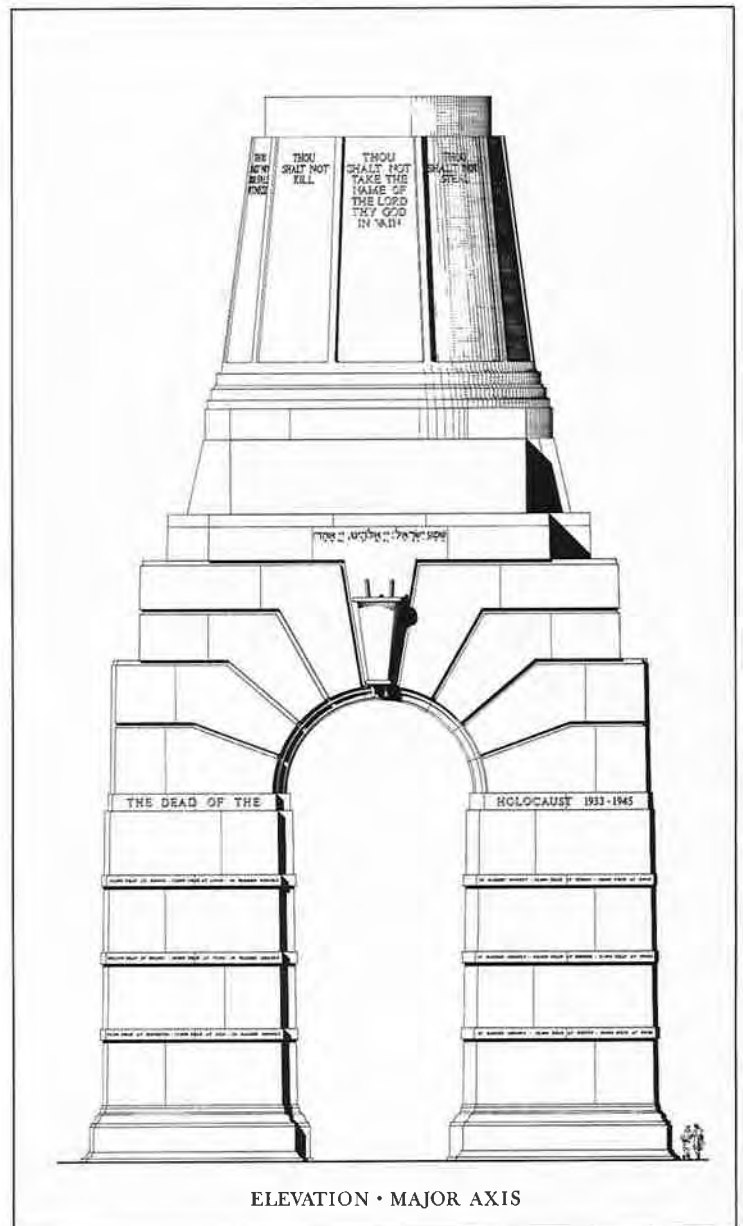
Greenberg's major breakthrough came in 1979 when he was asked to design a large farmhouse, based on George Washington's Mount

Vernon, in Connecticut. The house was completed in 1983 and makes a number of references as well to Hill-Stead Manor, Farmington, Connecticut, by McKim, Mead and White. Like Hill-Stead Manor the house in Greenwich is more symmetrical, more correct, and more luxurious than Mount Vernon. Greenberg plays interesting games with Mount Vernon's ad hoc fenestration, maintaining the alternate juxtaposition and distancing of the windows, but making the whole arrangement come out symmetrical. He also added dormers and strengthened the pediment that decorates the west front of Washington's house. Greenberg is now building an equally grand house whose garden facade will move into the realm of the Italian Baroque.

More important still is his work for the State Department Building in Washington, D. C. This has involved not only the executed projects, such as the offices of the Secretary shown on the preceding pages, but important unexecuted designs. Greenberg's relish for exquisite detail is evident in all his later work. On the other hand, the generously scaled moldings, thick reveals, and deep recessions of the arched entrance to the George C. Marshall Reception Room at the State Department (page 159), have a solidity and assurance that proclaim the presence of a master.

Greenberg is the most knowing, most serious practitioner of Classicism currently on the scene in this country. He has outgrown his early experiences with post-Modernism. His work is no longer tintured with the Colonial Revival, whose underscaled ornament and bald stretches of brick he now avoids. Nor does he any longer preserve that slight flavor of post-Modernism found in his very earliest work—though making a courthouse out of a supermarket is an inherently Venturi-esque enterprise—as, for that matter, is designing a corrected version of Mount Vernon. But essentially Greenberg belongs in the succession of Charles Follen McKim, Daniel Burnham, Henry Bacon, John Russell Pope, and Arthur Brown. And above all he belongs to the succession of Greece and Rome, of Vignola and Sanmicheli, of Vanvitelli, Ledoux, and Labrouste, to the visionary company of those who play the great game of Classicism.

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