



WRITTEN BY BROOKE PERRY

SUBURBAN CLASSIC

PHOTO: JONAS

SUCCESSFUL ARCHITECTURE IS NOT SIMPLY A BUILDING BUT A  
**E L E V A T I O N**  
DESIGN PROCESS THAT GIVES FORM TO A CLIENT'S DREAMS AND IDEALS



**I**n Allan Greenberg's recent book, *Architecture of Democracy*, the influential architect and scholar writes "great architecture makes great ideas visible," noting that "American architecture embodies the ideals of democracy for which our revolution was fought and our Constitution created." Moving through history, the book explores the connection between America's architectural tradition and political ideals.

Not surprisingly, Greenberg has a passionate interest in the history of his adopted homeland. "One of my great pleasures is to sit in the library at my office and page through the correspondence of George Washington or Thomas Jefferson; to open a biography of James Madison or John Marshall; or to read the speeches of Abraham Lincoln. This probably explains why I have one of my offices in Washington, D.C."

THE LIME WASH ON THE BRICK WALL OF THIS CONNECTICUT HOME WEARS UNEVENLY, ADDING CHARACTER (OPPOSITE). INSPIRED BY ANDREA PALLADIO AND THOMAS JEFFERSON'S MONTICELLO (LEFT), THE SHINGLE-COVERED WALLS, RHYTHMIC DEPENDENCIES AND LARGE WINDOWS ARE ALL VERY AMERICAN.

So passionate was his interest in history that Greenberg saved for two years to travel to Charlottesville, Virginia to “see the buildings of the extraordinary man who drafted the Declaration of Independence, served as third president, and also excelled as an architect...I felt as if I was walking through Jefferson’s mind.”



PHOTO: TIM BUCHMAN

SET ON KIAWAH ISLAND IN SOUTH CAROLINA, THIS FACADE WITH ITS TERRACES, SHADED BALCONIES, LARGE GLASS WINDOWS AND FRENCH DOORS TAKES ADVANTAGE OF VIEWS ACROSS THE ATLANTIC OCEAN ALL THE WAY TO PORTUGAL. ALL OF THE MAJOR ENTERTAINMENT ROOMS OPEN OUT ONTO THE TERRACE, ALLOWING BREEZES TO VENTILATE THE HOUSE AND BLUR THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR (OPPOSITE), THE COMPACT AND VISUALLY DYNAMIC STAIR IS A MAJOR FEATURE OF BOTH THE ENTERTAINMENT AND BEDROOM FLOORS OF THE HOUSE (ABOVE).

Though born in Johannesburg, South Africa, Greenberg considers his arrival in the U.S.—in 1964 in the International Terminal at JFK Airport—a life-altering moment. “An electric energy seemed to pulsate through the ground on which I was standing. At that moment, I fell in love with America. It felt as if I had come home.”

His journey to the United States started half a world away. Greenberg was educated in classical and gothic architecture at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg where the five-and-a-half year program included a two-year study of European modernism and five years of architectural history, fully immersing him in scale, construction, technology, symbolism and the language of architectural form.

At the time, the modernist movement was in full swing and the pursuit of classicism was routinely dismissed. “I was often mystified by the destruction of old buildings in Europe and their replacement with undistinguished new ones,” he has written. His passion for history and architectural relevance revealed an intellectual conflict about the role of architectural history in contemporary architecture and the relationship of new buildings to cities and the landscape.

Following graduation, Greenberg escaped South Africa’s racial turmoil and spent the next several years working in Denmark (for Jørn Utzon on the Sydney Opera House), Helsinki and Stockholm. His scholarly curiosity led him to the Master’s Degree program at Yale University, where he studied under Paul Rudolph and nurtured an emerging passion for American history.

So passionate was his interest in history that Greenberg saved for two years to travel to Charlottesville, Virginia to “see the buildings of the extraordinary man who drafted the Declaration of Independence, served as third president, and also excelled as an architect.” On his visit to Monticello, he recalls “I felt as if I was walking through Jefferson’s mind. Experiencing that great house changed my life.”

Indeed, commissioning Greenberg to design a home is not unlike signing up for a course in architectural history. He expects his clients to become active participants in the process, and engages them with his enthusiasm for classical architecture, directing them to the best examples of it and guiding their understanding and appreciation of it. *Departures Magazine* once noted that Greenberg’s “forte is harmonizing a centuries-old building tradition with modern life.”

Following his graduation from Yale, Greenberg worked in the city of New Haven’s Rede-

velopment Agency, served as a visiting professor at Yale (where modernism predominated) and eventually focused on developing his own office. One of his first design commissions was an addition to a 17th-century house in Connecticut, a project he says reinforced his growing belief in the adaptability and richness of classical architecture. Increasingly, he found the process of adding to an existing structure more exciting because it required research into the architectural background of the existing house and its adjacent buildings.

A great many commissions followed, in realms ranging from universities and government institutions to retail and commercial spaces. Among the dozens of projects: Aaron Burr Hall at Princeton, Gore and Dupont Halls at the University of Delaware, the Humanities Building at Rice University, the headquarters of the Supreme Court Historical Society, the Luxembourg Embassy in Washington, D.C., and the offices of the Secre-

tary and Deputy Secretary of State and the Treaty Room Suite at the U.S. Department of State.

Among his big breaks, Greenberg counts a 1979 commission by Peter Brant, who was interested in building a "Mt. Vernon/George Washington" style house. The Brants were referred to Greenberg by the famed architect Phillip Johnson. Their White Birch Farm in backcountry Greenwich took nearly a year to design and three years to build and helped establish Greenberg as one of the area's premier residential architects.

In 1983, another highly visible project came his way. He was asked to design a new set of monumental display windows, as well as "the city's most beautiful revolving door" for Bergdorf Goodman in New York. Later, he designed the Simon & Shuster offices in Rockefeller Center and the D&D Annex on Third Avenue at 58th Street.

Greenberg is renowned as a rigorous perfectionist. While building a store for Tommy Hilfiger in Beverly Hills, for example, he experimented



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with 22 shades of white before selecting one that would complement the adjacent Museum of Television and Radio. Another Greenberg trademark is moldings—lots and lots of deep, dramatic moldings. He relies on the computer to generate complicated combinations of moldings to “catch the eye” and taps master craftsmen to create focal point pieces such as mantles and medallions.

“The classical architect’s approach to design is very different from that of the modernist,” says Greenberg. “For a classical architect, the past is not dead, rather it is part of a continuum that includes the present and the unknown future.”

At the age of 70, Greenberg shows no signs of slowing down. He has offices in Washington, D.C., New York and Greenwich, and is considering opening an office in Los Angeles in the near future. Through his books, articles, teaching, public lectures and architectural commissions, Greenberg has been extremely influential in furthering the study and practice of architectural tradition. Among his many awards and accolades is the 2006 Richard H. Driehaus Prize for Classical Architecture.

[To learn more about the architecture of Allan Greenberg, log on at [www.allangreenberg.com](http://www.allangreenberg.com).]