



NEW CLASSICISTS
RICHARD MANION
ARCHITECTURE

Text by Stacie Stukin
Foreword by Sam Watters
Principal Photography by Erhard Pfeiffer

images
Publishing

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The creation of personal private residences could not be accomplished without the collaboration of a host of individuals, from trusting clients and dedicated employees, conscientious contractors and talented craftsmen, to great interior and landscape designers and myriad specialty consultants. This book is dedicated to all of you who were essential to the realization of these fine residences and with whom I have had the great honor of working together.

Of the many influences that have had an impact on my work over the past 25-plus years, none has been as significant as the lessons taught to me by Robert A. M. Stern during my days at Columbia University in the early 1980s. I will always be indebted to Bob for his serious and witty instruction about so many facets of architectural work, from design and the study of historical precedents to the preparation of client presentations and having an organized approach to life.

Richard Manion

Los Angeles

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F O R E W O R D

Richard Manion and his clients have conviction. They build lavish traditional houses in the challenging terrain but forgiving climate of California and, notably, in Los Angeles.

For more than a century the city has democratically embraced diverse architectural traditions. In the post-Civil War years, the region flourished as a promised land beckoning all classes to come west, prosper and build homes of their own. An outcome of this open society in an undeveloped land of orange groves and wheat fields was determination, invention through incorporation, and a rugged, uncompromising, tenacious individualism.

Unencumbered by the conformity demanded of life in older cities, Angelenos adopted established and new architecture for personal expression. On palm-lined streets, in the shade of gray eucalyptus and violet jacaranda, on grassy hillsides dotted with ancient oaks and along coastal beaches, houses and gardens in all styles, in all sizes, in a range of quality and permanence, came to exist comfortably next to one another. The Tudor manor, the French-Regency cottage, the Spanish/Swiss hacienda and Indian/Chinese bungalow, one right next to the other in a single block, manifested L.A.'s bold spirit of acceptance and experimentation. The city, sprawling over 400 square miles, was, and still is, the Wild West of urban design.

Traditional building in Los Angeles has followed the fall and rise of American house design, declining in the Depression and ascending in the 1980s when wealth expansion, the return of craft and a rigorous reassessment of modernism made possible the postmodern practices of Robert A.M. Stern and the architects, including Richard Manion, who trained in his New York office.

Richard Manion has succeeded in L.A. because he embraces the region's legendary eclecticism, meeting the challenge that his predecessors faced a century earlier: adapting ideas that originated on a continent an ocean away to create an American house for Californian living. Like Myron Hunt, Gordon B. Kaufmann, Robert D. Farquhar, Roland E. Coate and Paul L. Williams, Manion synthesizes the past for life in the present.

Regional identity and social conditions set the stage for house building but they do not explain why, given the myriad possibilities, Manion's clients turn to historic

traditions, some millennia old, to build in the 21st century. Their shared response: The traditional house is a home. And what is home? For some, home looks like their childhood house. For others, it suggests, but does not replicate, a famous chateau or villa.

Clients concur that the house planned and decorated according to established ideals embodies the “good values” they intend to teach their children. The modern house is informal and egalitarian, appropriate for beach life and mountain retreats. The traditional house is formal and hierarchal, honoring long-accepted conventions of relationship: parent to child, family to friends, owners to servants. Learning and living according to values distilled over generations is imperative for success, open to all, but achieved by few. “America is a land of opportunity, not equality,” explains one client; the traditional house, in plan and decoration, reflects this understanding of the American way.

Manion’s clients approach the design of their homes with the same determination they bring to business. Many start building only after years of clipping magazines, reading books and touring America and Europe. They want houses that not only reference the past with abstracted, established form, but also evoke it through historic finish and detail. For this they come to Richard Manion. Committed to the Western architectural canon and knowledgeable of complex building techniques, Manion’s firm designs with classic proportions and materials to build new houses that feel traditional. Construction codes and living standards intervene, requiring the skilled architect to reconcile the architecture of distant centuries with present needs without sacrificing what clients describe as the alluring elegance of old houses. How Manion achieves this reconciliation is complex, and is well illustrated by a house he designed in 2004.

Sycamores (see page 64) sits on a landscaped plateau in Holmby Hills, a 1921 subdivision west of Beverly Hills. Its owners grew up in New York and Boston suburbs known for traditional buildings and gardens. Not surprisingly, their inspiration was Anglo-American country house architecture and the work of East Coast architect Harrie T. Lindeberg. The influence of his 1930 R. Boyer Miller house in Wenham, Massachusetts, is apparent in the manor’s profile and picturesque details associated with the Arts and Crafts movement, itself synonymous with hominess. In contrast to the Miller residence, Sycamores is long and low, conforming to height limits protecting hillside views and a traditional profile along residential streets.

Double doors and windows bring Southern California’s warmth into the house’s spacious rooms. Architects before 1930 applied, as was possible, the height-over-width proportion of early precedents. Today, that proportion is necessarily