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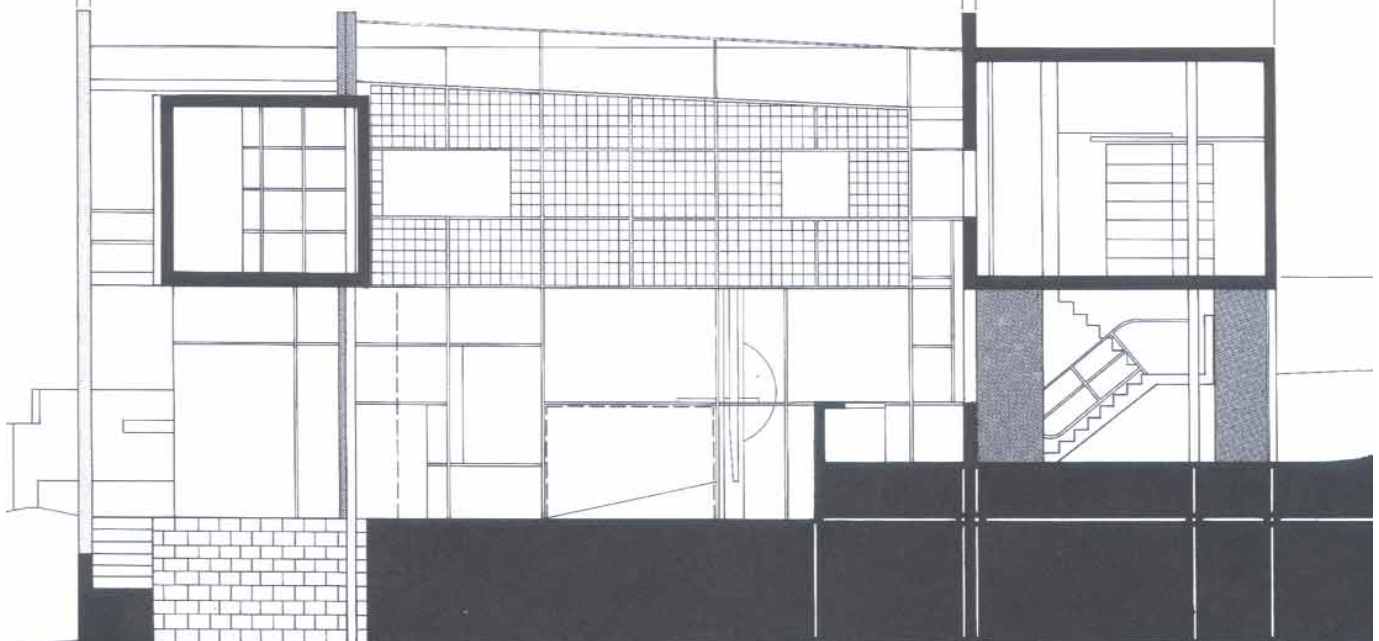
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Testing at the Extremes:

HOUSES

The Duplicate House, Hanrahan + Meyers

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tion in Dallas “employs a nineteenth-century English vocabulary of classically detailed brick walls with limestone trim and gently sloping slate roofs” — not exactly old home on the range. But the tradition allows the architects to organize the program around “a series of courtyards that extend into the landscape” and artfully accommodate late-twentieth-century requirements such as “a motor court” and “extensive exercise facilities.”

Much more indigenous are the new houses off Ocean Parkway in Brooklyn, where Stern, **Anthony Cohn**, and other veterans of the Stern office have done a number of buildings for members of the Syrian Jewish community, including Stern’s own impressive, striped-brick Kol Israel synagogue of 1988, which combines influences from historic synagogues, Near Eastern religious buildings, and nearby residential ones. The exquisitely-crafted, 10,000-square-foot house Cohn recently completed relates both to the vaguely neoclassical houses in the neighborhood from the 1920s and ’30s and to later renovations and insertions by the “École de Stern,” as the master impishly describes the offshoots, such as **William Georgis** and **Ike and Kligerman**. Like the majority of its neighbors, it fills most of its lot, but has a formal French parterre in the rug-sized front yard. It has the typical brick-and-stucco facade and tile roof, but here the very finest materials have been used — forest green French clay tile fired in matte and glossy finishes, Euville limestone from Nancy (like that on the Paris Opera House) for the curved window surrounds and solid classical porch columns, and bronze and art glass for the laylight over the circular stair-



Residence in Preston Hollow, Dallas, Texas, Robert A. M. Stern Architects

case. Cohn worked on the house, his fifth in the neighborhood, for more than five years, designing marble floors, carpeting, French doors, and bronze railings with an Art Nouveau feeling. The house also has a cove-ceilinged living room, a rich wood paneled library, a very formal dining room, chandeliers and sconces, marquetry furniture, an onyx bathroom and inlaid-wood dressing room, a gold mosaic niche, a home theater, and a state-of-the-art exercise room above the living room between the second floor and the attic.

“One of the reasons I’m an architect is to have somebody pay me to learn about things that I couldn’t normally learn, like the supposedly disappearing (but actually thriving) crafts of mosaic and marquetry,” Cohn said, adding, “I try to do something that has a little bit of a sly take on traditionalism.” But it comes off as authentic. The architect’s ego doesn’t show. The invention in the detail is in the service of the overall architectural statement, which makes connections with nearby buildings and the cultural values of the large traditional family that built it. Their dining room is not just for par-

ties. Their preference for rich materials, deep colors, florid decoration, something vaguely Near Eastern, is echoed throughout the neighborhood. It may be why the architect has had difficulty getting the house published. It isn’t familiar enough. It doesn’t look quite like the Anglo-traditionalism shelter magazines prefer, nor is it classically Italianate.

Most laymen prefer traditional architecture to modern because it is familiar, and therefore react negatively to innovation. Also, since classicism does carry meanings, an architect working with it has to be sensitive to the shades of meaning the language conveys. His or her role is closer to that of a translator than a playwright. What works for one client, if it really works, may not work for another with even a slightly different script.

The collaboration between architect and client in modern and traditional design is of a different order. Commissioning a modern house is usually more like commissioning a work of art.

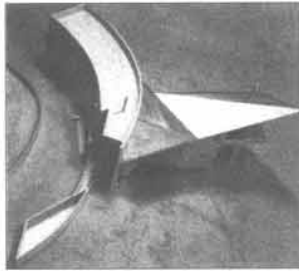
The partners at **Ferguson Murray & Shamamian**, who came out of the decorating firm Parish-Hadley, retained their mentors’ “awareness of



A classical estate, Bridgewater, Connecticut, Ferguson Murray & Shamamian

their obligation to...assist the owners in articulating their objectives...determining the feasibility of...the established financial and schedule parameters, and then helping them make the appropriate decisions...to realize their goals” — rather than trying to lead them in directions they may not have considered, as architects usually do. Like most architects, they believe “all aspects of design, including exterior, interior, and landscape elements, should be...integrated to form a consistent whole.” But unlike modernists, they value “the authenticity of the architectural vocabulary” and reject “ersatz historical styling and experimental forms...in favor of work informed by a thorough knowledge of precedent and its adaptation to a modern context.”

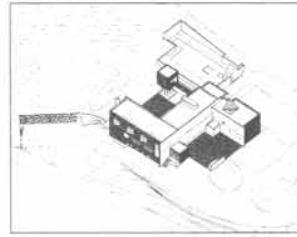
A house they recently completed in Bridgewater, Connecticut, did not derive from a postmodern desire to reflect nearby dwellings or the owners’ cultural roots. It recalls English country houses and Virginia plantations, which are based on Palladio and ancient sources before him. The new old-looking estate replaced a house for which they designed a



*The Riverbend House,
Great Falls, Virginia,
Hariri + Hariri*



*Family retreat,
Montauk, Long Island,
Deamer + Phillips*



*House for a family of six,
Short Hills, New Jersey,
Agrest and Gandelonas Architects*

Georgian-inspired, nearly-octagonal library ten years ago. The new 10,000-square-foot, three-bedroom residence has a sun room that echoes the library's shape. A central volume of fieldstone, rather closed on the entrance facade with brick veneer, quoins, and jack arches, opens in the back to gardens, low-walled terraces, and the rolling hills beyond with a series of French doors framed by wood pilasters and punctuated by porticos. "The theme of architectural stone is carried into the interior...especially in the entry hall stair, where walls are treated in a plaster simulation of ashlar blocks," the architects explained unabashedly. They do not share the modernist proscription against simulation, since simulated materials have a long tradition. In their work an "imaginative use of inherited architectural conventions...supplant[s] the quest for novelty."

A Matter of Values

The crux of the difference between traditional and modern architecture lies in the value placed on originality, but it extends to the interpretation of "authenticity," which means "sanctioned by

precedent" to a classicist and "truth to materials, time, and program" to a modernist. The difference accounts for why one New York firm known for innovative modern design told us that it had done a "Federal" house and "it really came out well," but did not want to publish it in *Oculus*. They believed they were obliged to honor their clients' request but felt somewhat compromised by doing so.

An invitation to deal with real historic material, however, rarely creates a conflict. **Denise A. Hall's** clients purchased a 10,000-square-foot, ten-year-old Shingle Style house in Westchester, which they were told was built with the remnants of a demolished mansion by McKim, Mead & White. The pieces were there all right, especially on the facade, but inside Hall found awkward proportions, fiberglass molding, eight-foot ceilings in the bedrooms — very little that could be attributed to the turn-of-the-century firm. "And it was really badly built," she said. But the case proved an interesting challenge to someone who believes that "the process and the exploration is the heart of design." Luckily, her clients said, "Let's make it what it

wants to be." But that was not so easy. "There's a tremendous amount of bad stock detail out there, because for the most part there's not attention to detail. People are not willing to do what they have to do to get it. We've scoured the salvage places like Urban Archaeology, but even these people are going into reproduction."

Hall is also designing a guest house for a "youngish" couple (around 45) who inherited a house on the way out of town in Nantucket. It was a summer cottage — a long, rambling ranch house with a series of additions — but they want to live in it year-round, so she is designing a new little building "where four people can be doing different things at the same time." It can also be rented out or used to accommodate guests or in-laws. She will make it two stories tall to fit in with the old shingle houses nearby and do "some extensions to the existing house to tie it all together."

Detective work can make a house commission rewarding. So can clients' desires to create a niche for themselves, as **Deamer + Phillips's** clients in Montauk, a graphic designer, his wife, and child, are doing.

The 3,000-square-foot house occupies an extraordinary site — two lots on a bluff overlooking the ocean — but it is "seen as a private retreat for the family, not a place to show for parties." The husband, who is from Basque, showed the architects a lot of the images of stone vernacular buildings with wood details and very small windows to shelter from the weather. "Our house is shingle on two sides, wrapped with a stone wall that kind of disengages from the house and creates an entry and a skylighted space. You approach frontally, then turn and are in an outdoor garden," Peggy Deamer said. "The house feels somewhat indigenous but clearly isn't." There is also a guest house on the property, which they have renovated, and a pool between the guest house and the main house that comes up against the stone wall.

The private residence can also provide an opportunity "for formal and symbolic investigation," as a house for a couple with four children in Short Hills, New Jersey, is doing for **Agrest and Gandelonas**. "The contemporary American house stands as a field where overlapping demands intersect," Diana Agrest explained. These clients "expressed first the desire for a courtyard that would convey a sense of enclosure, and second the need to facilitate three different sets of activities...for the family, for entertaining, and as a sanctuary for individual study." So "the project entwines three elements. Two L-shaped structures, the family house and the more public house for entertaining, are overlapped in plan and dovetailed in section to form an inverted Z in two axes. Each L implies a courtyard, the [public] entrance courtyard and the family courtyard at the rear of