



Soane Gala Salutes American Architect

By GARY SHAPIRO, New York Sun | April 25, 2008

An adaptation of Cole Porter's "You're the Top," with such highbrow lines as "You're never lazy / You're Piranesi," a reference to the 18th-century Italian artist known for his etchings of Rome, was part of a gala Wednesday at the Rainbow Room honoring architect Robert A. M. Stern and the architectural publisher Gianfranco Monacelli, whose Monacelli Press has published several books by Mr. Stern.

The Sir John Soane's Museum Foundation, which supports the Sir John Soane's Museum in London, organized the musical tribute as part of its annual fund-raiser in New York, which took in about \$400,000 for restoration work.

The museum, at no. 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields in London, is the home built and lived in by Soane, an architect of the Regency era who was a surveyor for the Bank of England and a professor of architecture at the Royal Academy.

Soane's stature was such that he saw to the creation of the museum through an Act of Parliament in 1833, four years before his death. An adjacent building he also designed houses a research center today.

A fun element of the modest-sized urban home's design is a hidden system of sliding panels to display paintings. Soane also collected drawings, rare books, architectural models, and antiquities, many of which now are on display to visitors — without labels, as Soane had them.

During the decades after Soane's death, the museum became such a gloomy and unvisited place that Henry James used it as a scene for a tryst in his novella "A London Life," published in 1888, the museum's director, Tim Knox, told guests. However, spurred on by subsequent admiration of Soane's stripped-down classicism by architects such as Philip Johnson and Robert Venturi, the museum has become a cult destination, Mr. Knox said.

Mr. Stern praised Soane's work for its quiet dignity, a trait that "does not seem to be on the minds of architects today," he said, referring to projects with "dazzling complex shapes" that lack Soane's decorum and appreciation of "what goes before and what comes after."

The museum maintains ties to America through patrons and visitors, and most recently, the arrival of a new exhibitions curator, Jerzy Kierkuc-Bielinski, a native of Bath, who wrote his doctoral thesis at the Courtauld Institute about Polish and American conceptual art.

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Please Note: the 2009 Gala Dinner Dance is scheduled for Tuesday, 21 April 2009