

Allan Greenberg

Architect



Allan is honored at the Soane Foundation's 20th Birthday Gala.

•April 7, 2011 • [Leave a Comment](#)

The [Sir John Soane's Museum Foundation](#) will honor Allan as they celebrate their 20th birthday at the Foundation's annual Gala, on April 26th, in New York City. Event details can be viewed on their [website](#) and on [New York Social Diary](#). Allan sat down for interview that was published in the Soane's Spring newsletter. The interview reads as follows:

Soane Foundation: You design with both the classical idiom and modernism as starting points. Isn't that unusual?

Allan Greenberg: Well, why should it be? We don't read James Joyce and say, "I'm not going to read anything else except prose structured in the same way as *Ulysses*." No, we read Henry James, Faulkner, Hemingway, or the latest novel by an emerging writer.

There have always been a variety of styles with which architects choose to express themselves. I'm thinking of Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, Alvar Aalto, Gunnar Asplund and a number of others, particularly Italians, who've long been trained in modernism and classicism.

The great exemplars are Le Corbusier and Mies, who were able to take classical principles and turn them through 180 degrees, so that the resulting architecture is in exact and precise opposition to classicism—which means it is still tied to the tradition they are reacting to.

Of course, one group of architects, now remembered as the Harvard Bauhaus, completely rejected history. And their work, which pervades the world, is largely mediocre because of its lack of ability to relate to culture, climate, or geography. But the great modernists knew what they were doing and relate to the same tradition I do. They just chose different ways to express it.

SF: What was your first love in architecture?

AG: Or who? I'd say Le Corbusier. The first building I ever had to sketch in school was Edwin Lutyens's Art Gallery in Johannesburg. And I was stunned to discover, in the second post-war volume of Le Corbusier's *Oeuvre Complete*, a section where he praises Lutyens. Twelve years later, I published a paper about why Lutyens and Le Corbusier and Lutyens and Frank Lloyd Wright were so close.

In trying to resolve these interconnections, I realized that the modern dichotomy is just totally wrong. It's a view of the world held by people who are scared of the past and who have so demonized it, they've fouled history. After all, steel frame buildings are a classical, not a modernist, invention. The American skyscrapers of the 1880s and 1890s were steel framed, and most of the classical houses you see from 1900 to 1920 are actually steel framed as well. Most of the technology we think of as modernist is actually quite old. Classicists have tended to be like all good architects, always on the lookout for a better way to do things.

SF: There seems to be inevitability about the use of the classical architecture.

AG: Yes and no. I do understand how a people can find their history clouded, as have the Germans, and thus want to sweep the slate clean. Of course, in choosing to ignore their rich and marvelous architectural heritage, until recently the Germans have even neglected a genius like Karl Friedrich Schinkel.

SF: I suppose there can never be an unfreighted architecture. Even the most minimal architecture must, in the end, carry the weight of meaning of its time. So even for those wanting to start anew, their architecture will begin to accrue memories.

AG: Right. But it takes millennia to accumulate significance.

SF: Everybody talks about the amazing interiors you created for the Department of State in the 1970s. How long did the project take you?

AG: We started in 1984. George Shultz, then Secretary of State, said, "I'm going on a Latin American tour in about a month. If you can give me a set of drawings in about three weeks, I'll look at them on the airplane—and when I get back we can talk about them." We managed to get the drawings done and, while he was gone, kept polishing. When he came back and I showed him the catch-up work, he said, "Just do it."

We had about four months for the first 19 rooms (there were 48 in all), not only to finish the construction drawings but also to begin fabrication. Looking back, I think that having to work under that intense pressure allowed me to be more creative than if I had had a long time to get it all right.

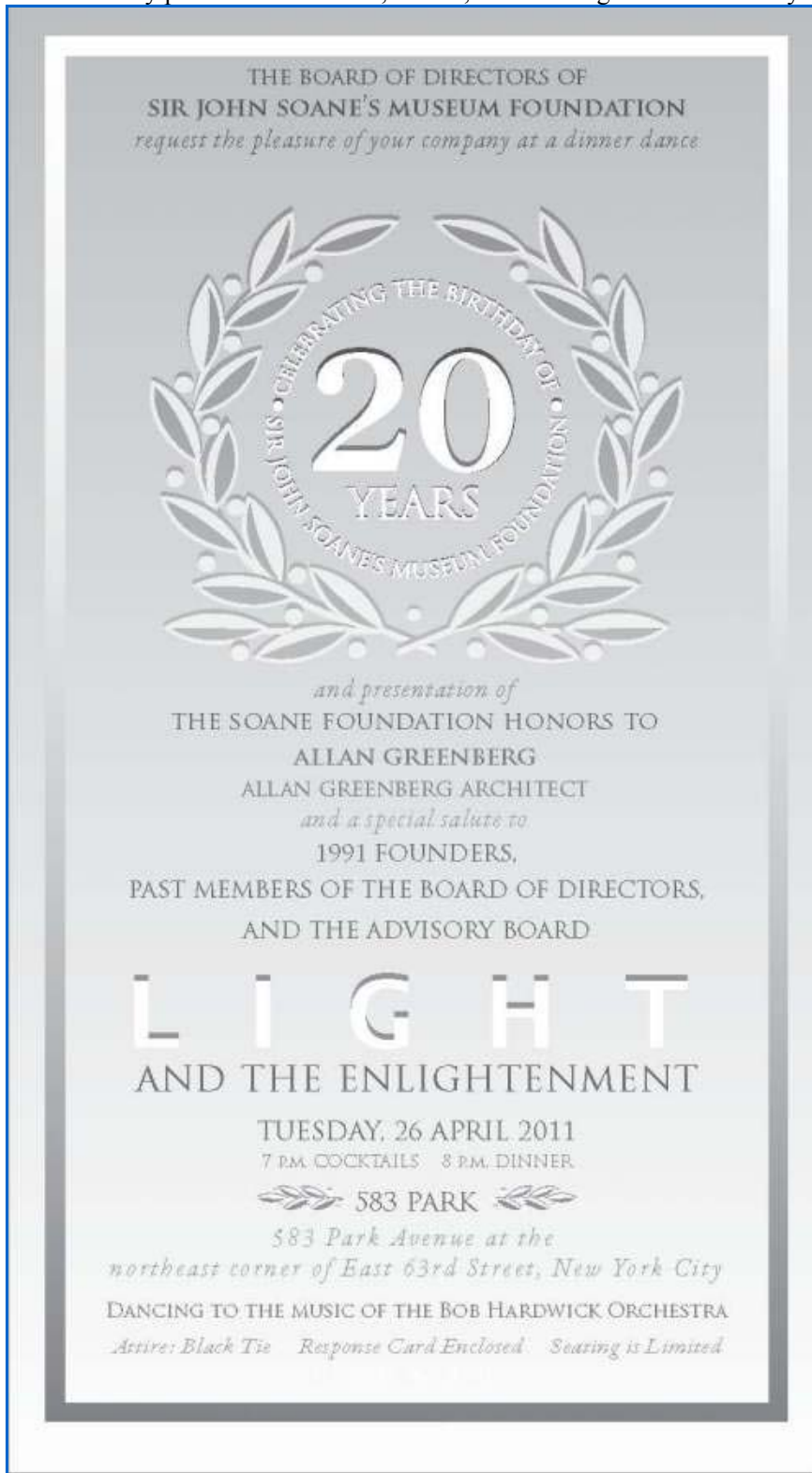
SF: Can you tell us about your collaboration with Arthur Drexler at MoMA in the early 80s?

Arthur ran a very open house during the 1970s and 1980s. I remember *The Architecture of the École des Beaux-Arts* in 1977, which I think was one of the most popular architectural exhibitions the museum has ever held. Just imagine these gigantic drawings, all watercolors created by teenagers or students in their early 20s for the various historic competitions, taking over a large part of the museum. A few years later, Arthur did a Lutyens exhibition that I co-curated with him.

You know, given my fascination with Schinkel and Mies, and speaking of MoMA, here's hoping that Barry Bergdoll has a big Schinkel/Mies exhibition in the back of his mind. That would be something to look forward to.

SF: Speaking of looking forward, we are very excited that you are receiving Soane Honors at our Gala dinner on Tuesday, April 26.

AG: I am very pleased as well. And, indeed, I am looking forward to it very much.



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[Can Modern Architecture Be Classical?](#)

•February 7, 2011 • [Leave a Comment](#)

Allan's next lecture, *Can Modern Architecture Be Classical?*, will be held by the Institute of Classical Architecture in [Los Angeles on April 13th](#). It will come to the Boston chapter at a later date.

This lecture deals with the classical structure that drives the work of some modernists like Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier. It also explores how certain works by Schinkel and Lutyens stretch the idea of what is classical.



Residence in Connecticut,
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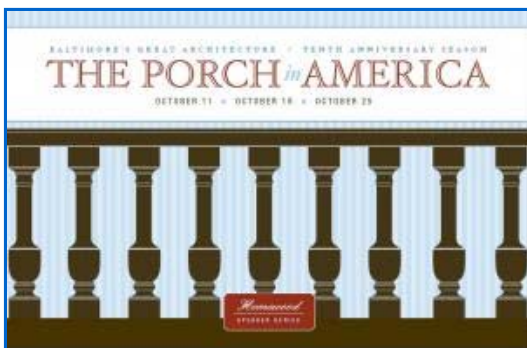
•November 3, 2010 • [Leave a Comment](#)

Allan discusses prefab and sustainability in the [November issue](#) of Architectural Digest. p. 68 – full article not available online.

Posted in [Articles](#)

[Baltimore's Great Architecture: The Porch in America](#)

•October 20, 2010 • [Leave a Comment](#)



Come hear Allan lecture this Monday at the Homewood Museum at Johns Hopkins University, as part of the tenth anniversary season of the *Baltimore's Great Architecture* lecture series. For this year's series, [The Porch in America](#), Allan will be the keynote speaker, lecturing on *Porches, Porticoes, and the Architecture of Democracy*.

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[Early Mies](#)

•July 2, 2010 • [Leave a Comment](#)

Mies Van der Rohe's early career, from 1908 until 1925, was devoted to designing understudied and underappreciated traditional houses. Influenced by both Schinkel and Behrens, these houses in the suburbs of Berlin, already display a mastery of form and the razor sharp clarity that is so characteristic of all his great works. You will not be surprised to learn that these buildings have been written out of most histories of 20th century architecture.



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[Design Dialogue](#)

•June 11, 2010 • [Leave a Comment](#)



Our latest project in Greenwich, inspired by Mies van der Rohe's work at IIT in the 1940s, is illustrated in the July 2010 issue of *Architectural Digest*. The existing house, which dates back to 1901, is a marvelously bold composition of columns, entablatures, curved porches with balustrades, and widow's walks. Our original task was to renovate and restore the house and to design an addition with large areas of glass that would nevertheless adhere to the same language of form. From this starting point, the addition evolved through several stages to its final form that is airy, relaxed and flooded with light.

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[The Last Full Measure of Devotion](#)

•May 3, 2010 • [Leave a Comment](#)

Allan recently wrote a piece on Boston's Robert Gould Shaw Memorial, featured in The Claremont Review of Books

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Shaw Memorial

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[University of Notre Dame – Design Studio](#)

•April 26, 2010 • [Leave a Comment](#)

The Mies/Schinkel Design Studio at Notre Dame

In March 2009, twelve architectural students—all undergraduates at the University of Notre Dame—spent a week in Berlin with Dean Michael Lykoudis and myself, studying the work of two great classical masters, Karl Friedrich Schinkel and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Mies often referred to Schinkel as his teacher and one of the goals of the studio was to find actual connections between their works.

We visited the early houses of Mies—from the Riehl House of 1907, through the First World War, and up until some of his last houses, still bearing the imprint of his time with Behrens, but now leavened by the increasing significance of Schinkel in his designs. Lack of time denied us the opportunity to see the great International Style works of the 1920s, like the Tugendhat House in Brno,



Tugendhat House

or his brick houses in Krefeld built during the 30s.

Berlin is a treasure trove of Schinkel's architecture as well. We visited the Altes Museum,



Altes Museum

with its subtly graded transition from plaza to interior, the Neue Opera House, the Neue Wacht, and Friedrich Church. Outside the city we visited the charming Casino at Charlottenburg, the early church at Neue Hardenburg, the Schloss Neuhardenberg, with its additions by Persues, and the extraordinary Schloss and Gardener's House at Charlottenhof,



Schloss Charlottenhof

which takes classical architecture to a place it has never been before—or since. The Gardener's House, with its daring asymmetry and profound interaction between architecture and gardens, may be the most radical classical structure ever built. Of particular importance, and the subject of more than one discussion at dinner, was the brilliant relationship Schinkel created between his buildings at Charlottenhof and the surrounding garden.

The culmination of the trip was a one-day stop-over in Barcelona to visit Mies's masterwork, the Barcelona Pavilion, a work that shows the profound influence of the Gardener's house.



Barcelona Pavilion

Returning to South Bend, the class's six week-long studio project involved designing two buildings on the marvelous Mies-designed campus of the Illinois Institute of Technology, where he also served as head of the school of architecture. This campus is Mies's most profound work in the United States and the place where one may best study how he moved away from the preoccupations of his last decade in Europe, especially the Barcelona Pavilion, and synthesized a new approach to architecture. At this time one can only guess at the influence the early steel framed buildings of late 19th and early 20th century Chicago had on his work.

The two buildings were centers for the study of Mies and Schinkel. The students' designs could be sited anywhere on the IIT campus and any of the post-Mies designed buildings could be demolished. The new work had to enhance the adjacent buildings and Mies's master plan for the campus, as well as satisfy the requirements of the program. The goal of the studio was not to encourage students to become shadows of Mies or Schinkel but to learn about their work. The students worked in teams of two, because the studio was more than a mere design exercise—it was an opportunity to learn about the work of these two great architects as if the students were literally successors to them—like Ludwig Perseus, who started in Schinkel's office, and Jacques Brownson (of C. F. Murphy) or Arthur Tagayuchi, both of whom studied at IIT and worked for Mies before going out on their own. (Brownson designed the Chicago Civic Center and Tagayuchi a school in South Chicago, both of which are unacknowledged masterworks of post 1950 architecture.) Using a studio for this purpose was an idea I explored when teaching at Yale in the late 60s and 70s. It is far more difficult to do this than to strive to express your own ideas, just like it is significantly more challenging to design a building that relates to its context than to ignore the surroundings—as illustrated by the very few recent buildings by “good architects” that do this.

At Notre Dame design studios meet three time per week. I came once-a-week, while Michael went the other two times. The jurors who reviewed the projects at the end of the studio included architects Barbara Littenburg and Steven Peterson, architectural historian Dennis Dordan, and architect Scott Wood. All agreed it was much more difficult for the students to understand and apply the design ideas of Schinkel, whose work is more intellectual, sometimes even obtuse. On the other hand, we were all surprised by the ease with which classically trained architects were able to appreciate Mies's varied details for buildings on the campus.





Patrick Devitt and Adam Edelbrock - Student Work

Posted in [Architects](#), [University of Notre Dame](#)

Tags: [Altes Museum](#), [Barcelona Pavilion](#), [Berlin](#), [Charlottenhof](#), [Mies van der Rohe](#), [Notre Dame](#), [Schinkel](#)

[Tribute to An Architect](#)

•April 25, 2010 • [Leave a Comment](#)

While researching the great Dutch architect Michel de Klerk, I came across two letters, written to the socialist workers' party newspaper upon his death. The letters were written by two women who lived in one of his housing complexes.

I know of no tribute to an architect as personal and moving.

One woman writes:

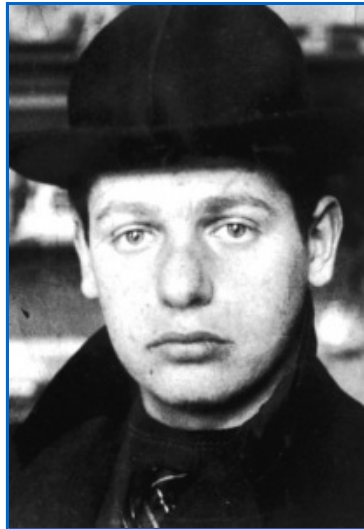
What a great loss, workers' wives, have you sustained in this somber November week, by the going from us of de Klerk and De Bazel... Who can know how much might still have been done even outside our city for workers' housing by these two, especially the younger... Good dwellings for the working class are still so scarce, the house that is a joy for its occupants to live in and look at, how rare in the workingman's quarters! And in these difficult and somber times, now that the whole world's misery presses down on us, what a privilege for those who derive consolation from beauty, to return to our home and see before us in the Spaarndammerbuurt or on the Ronnerplein the powerful arcading lines of de Klerk's creations. What a privilege to know that I may live in this dwelling, that my children will grow up in this inspired, harmonious environment, that has been created by this great artist with so much love and dedication. Because that is still the most beautiful part of de Klerk's work, the love, the purity, the animation, and the complete harmony between the grand lines and the smallest details...

He created beauty for the community, he was one of us in spirit, though he stood far from everything that inclined to partisanship or politics...

While another writes...

He is gone away, the man of our dwellings. Now how shall we workers' wives be able to thank this stalwart worker for what he has done for our husbands and children? Is it not wonderful after the fatigue of the day to come into a house built of pure joy and domestic happiness? Is it not as if each brick called to you – come all you workers, and rest in your house, it is for you? Is not the Spaarndammerplein the fairy tale that I dreamed of as a child, because it was something that did not exist for us children... Had de Klerk continued to live, this dream picture would have been a reality for our children. De Klerk, you have gone away in the bloom of your life...

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Michel de Klerk

Photo courtesy of Amsterdam Municipal Department for the Preservation of Historic Buildings and Sites (bMA)

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Thomas's Photo of the Week



Faaborg Museum, Denmark (Carl Petersen : 1915)

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