THE AMERICAN STYLE

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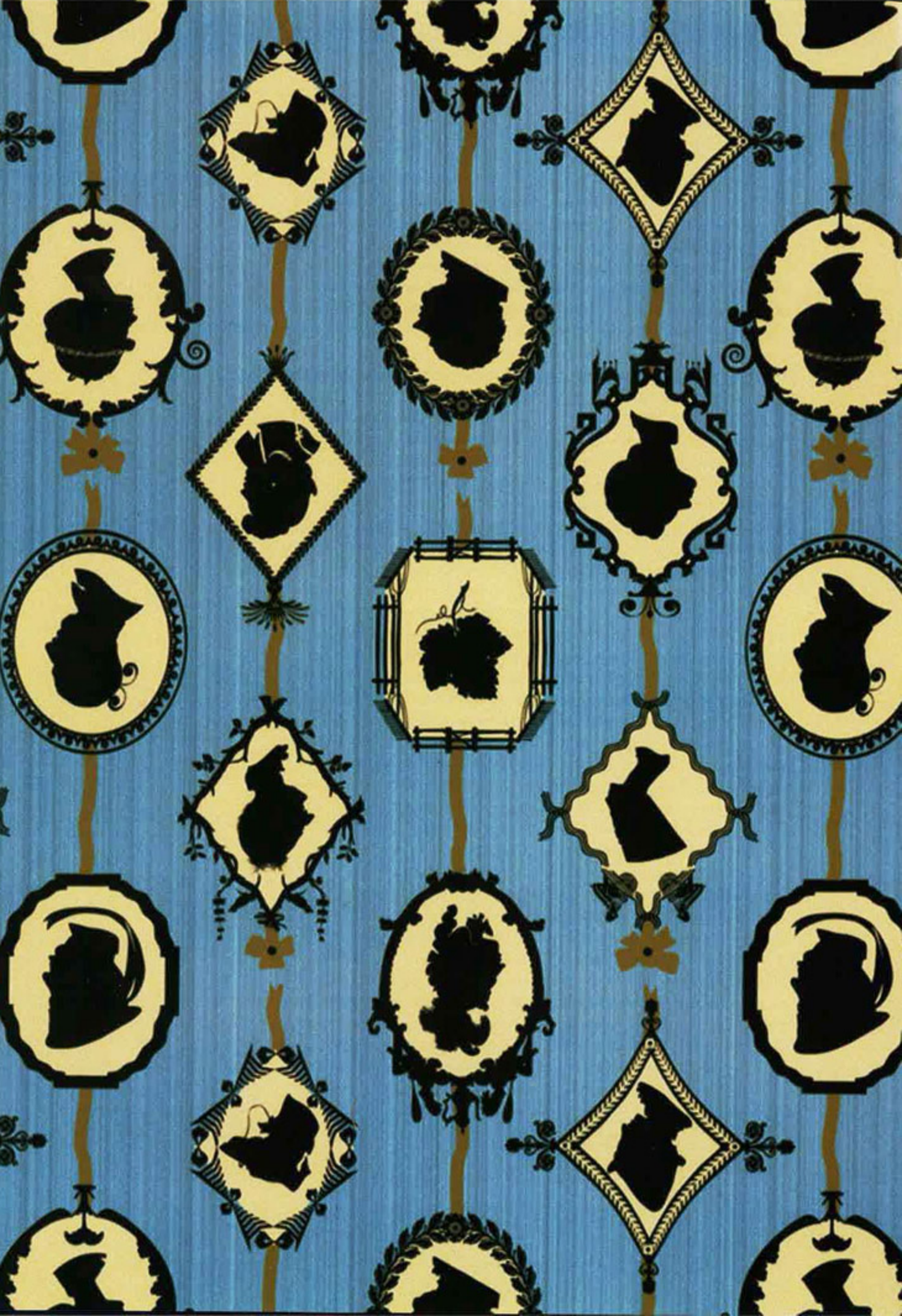
Epilogue

AN ENDURING STYLE



COLONIAL REVIVAL TODAY

THE COLONIAL REVIVAL PRODUCED PARTICULARLY ROBUST architecture and design between the nation's centennial and the advent of World War II, but it began before 1876 and continues to this day. Indeed, the movement is perhaps best understood as a series of revivals, each of which has responded to specific events and main currents—for example, the centennial, various local and national anniversaries, immigration, and the Great Depression. Shifting tastes and ideologies within the architectural and design communities have also played a role.

After World War II, with leading architects' near-exclusive focus on Modernism, a split developed: Colonial Revival largely disappeared from the urban scene, while it remained popular, although often watered down, in the surrounding suburbs. A few individuals and organizations, however, spoke in alternative voices. Beginning in 1956, Henry Hope Reed Jr. gave walking tours of New York's classical architecture in an effort to build a preservationist constituency. In 1959 he wrote the book *The Golden City*, in which he unfavorably compared Modernist buildings to their traditionalist counterparts, and he founded the important advocacy group Classical America nine years later. (In 2002 this group joined forces with the Institute of Classical Architecture.) Also in the 1950s, John Barrington Bayley's monumental visionary schemes for New York City further stimulated interest in classicism, particularly among practitioners. At the same time, architectural preservation was being transformed from a specialized interest to a popular one. In 1963 the destruction of McKim, Mead & White's Pennsylvania Station sparked the creation of New York City's Landmarks Preservation Commission. The same year also brought the publication of Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (published by the Museum of Modern Art), which pointed a young generation toward an inclusive architecture once again embracing historical reference. While none of these efforts focused exclusively on Colonial Revival, collectively they fostered an environment that opened the eyes of architects and designers to the style as a living tradition.

Allan Greenberg and Robert A. M. Stern were among the first high-profile architects to reconnect with the rich traditions of the Colonial Revival. Greenberg's grandly evocative, Mount Vernon–inspired farmhouse in Connecticut of 1983 garnered broad attention. Three years later, Stern, who had already been pursuing a variety of classically rooted architectural styles, hosted a documentary television series, *Pride of Place: Building the American Dream*, that explored the nation's architectural heritage and its continued relevance. Recently, Stern's designs for Villanova Heights, a residential development adjacent to Fieldston in the Bronx, echo Dwight James Baum's early-twentieth-century Colonial Revival work in the area.

A younger generation of architects has followed in the footsteps of Greenberg and Stern. Peter Pennoyer worked at Robert A. M. Stern Architects before opening his own firm. Pennoyer has also coauthored a series of books on important American architects working in classical styles such as Delano & Aldrich. Anne Fairfax and Richard Sammons established their architectural practice in 1992. Gil P. Schafer III started his architectural firm, G. P. Schafer Architect, in 2002, having previously worked for Peter Pennoyer.

While decorative artists and interior designers have consistently embraced the Colonial Revival, since the 1980s the style has been mined in particularly inventive—and sometimes humorous and ironic—ways. Launched with a collection of architect-designed dinnerware in 1984, New York–based Swid Powell was the brainchild of two alumnae of the ardently Modernist firm Knoll International, Nan Swid and Addie Powell. Swid Powell's products reflected the era's diverse architectural trends, including a historicism that updated, sometimes in a straightforward manner, sometimes with an ironic twist, the style practiced by prominent Colonial Revivalists earlier in the century. James Boyd and Anne Reath have picked up on the wit of these designs in wallpaper by representing unexpected figures, from Nefertiti to Charles de Gaulle, in silhouette. Jewelry designer Ted Muehling creates decorative art objects, collaborating with such manufacturers as Steuben and Nymphenburg. In 2009 Muehling and seven other fine and decorative artists took part in a program sponsored by *The Magazine Antiques* and the Shelburne Museum in Vermont. During a weekend at the museum, the artists surveyed its vast collections, and each selected one artifact that inspired them to create a contemporary design. Muehling's chandelier was sparked by a Colonial-era one in the museum's Stencil House.

Among interior designers now looking to Colonial Revival for inspiration, three firms stand out for their particularly inventive approaches. The Dickstein Residence (1999) by William Diamond and Anthony Baratta is a psychedelic update of Colonial Revival with braided rugs reminiscent of Wallace Nutting, but here rendered 60 feet long and colored acid green and shocking pink. Manhattan decorator Jeffrey Bilhuber's recent renovation of a seventeenth-century Long Island house, which he uses as a weekend residence and christened Hay Fever, artfully mixes furnishing and decorative effects from numerous periods, including the Colonial, while the interiors of Jamie Drake for the late-eighteenth-century Gracie Mansion constitute a bold essay in the Colonial Revival for the twenty-first century.

GIL P. SCHAFER III

HUDSON VALLEY FARM, 2007.
PHOTOGRAPH BY JONATHAN WALLEN.