Classical Classwork

A decade after its birth, the Institute of Classical Architecture still provides the country's only comprehensive training in antiquity's essential architectural methods and now The Institute is spreading its sought-after word nationwide.

by Eve M. Kahn

Consider these testimonial about the impact to date of the Institute of Classical Architecture, which turns ten years old this summer, Joseph Domonkos, graduate of the Institute's six-week Summer Program (a kind of classical boot camp), now attending the University of Notre Dame's classically oriented architectural program. "I'd put myself through college and to the University and have since been given to me. And I've been able to play around with fantastic buildings," he says. "I've been totally immersed in the language of classical architecture. It's changed the way I look at everything. It's changed the proportion and the embellishments of our products. It's been a basis for creating designs with purity to them."

David Pearson, interior-design-firm principal, alumna of an Institute rendering course, two Rome drawing jaunts, and a Naples tour. "All my work is influenced by what I learned there, whether my clients realize it or not. I've designed a garden pavilion directly based on a casino I've seen in the Vatican park. I've had epiphanies going up to the antique and historic buildings, touching them, measuring them, breathing them in." William Breedschmidt, boot-camp alumna, turned board member, co-owner of a design firm with Institute Fellow Courtney Coleman. "I became more serious student at the Institute than I'd ever been before in my life. It was an invigorating, reinvigorating experience; although when I first told people I'd be going they said, 'Gosh, why?'

More and more now, I'm saddened and angered that the classical proportions and the orders still aren't part of the architectural education system anywhere else."

Jeffrey L. Davis, founder and principal designer of Charlesworth's New Columns, Inc., a USA-based member, and survivor of its first boot camp: "I didn't know how to draw at all when I got there. I was going to learn the language that I could apply to my ideas to make a perfect column. Instead, the Institute expanded my horizons to the intellectual possibilities of classical architecture. Architects should know the basics of classical architecture, but they don't."

So at Charlesworth, we must work to educate our clients every day. As a member of the Institute's Board of Directors, I'd like to see it open chapters throughout the country.

And Davis's dreams may not be that far from realization. Already, in just one decade of existence, the Institute has transformed itself from a few

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The Institute sponsors a series of "salons" during the year, which are open to precociousness as well as the general public. In November of 2001, an illustrated talk entitled, "The New Caribbean Village: Windor, Florida," was given by Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk (left) and Scott Merrill (right), both of whom are well known for their contributions to the Institute's work. The talk was accompanied by a panel discussion on the role of the architect in contemporary architectural practice. The panelists included Frances Gomes, a partner in Plater-Zyberk & Company, and architect James Moore. The panel was moderated by Peter Cavallaro, a senior architect at the Institute, and moderated by the Institute's executive director, Peter Cavallaro. The Institute also offers a wide range of educational programs and resources for architects and students interested in classical architecture.

The Continuing Education Program at the Institute offers practical training in a range of courses in classical architecture, including "Elements of Classical Architecture," "Elevation Design," "Drawing and Perspective," "Traditional Woodworking," and "Special Topics." These courses are taught by experienced architects and provide an in-depth understanding of classical architecture, including its history, principles, and techniques.

The Institute also offers a variety of publications, including the quarterly journal, "The Classical Architect," which features articles and interviews with leading architects and designers, as well as news and updates on the Institute's activities and events. The Institute's website provides information about its programs and resources, as well as a searchable database of classical architectural resources.

The Institute's commitment to classical architecture is evident in its ongoing efforts to promote the use of classical principles and techniques in contemporary architectural practice. By providing education and resources to architects and students, the Institute aims to ensure that classical architecture remains a viable and relevant part of contemporary architectural practice.
coursework offerings in a borrowed classroom to a reclamation force, with an annual budget over $80,000 (up from $200,000 a year as recently as 1998). Three full-time staffers in a three-room permanent office now oversee not only the summer immersion program but also ten continually-ed courses per semester, in everything from urbanistic
theories to the nitty-gritties of collaborating with metalworkers — plus an annual publication on contemporary classicism called The Classical and lectures, tours, and seminars roaming as far afield as Los Angeles, Coba, Nashville, and Venice. "We're proof that if you just keep at a cause like this, you can eventually have a huge impact," says Richard Wilson Cameron, the Institute's vice-president and cofounder. "These days we're growing exponentially — although it will be nice someday to be the only ones doing what we do."

Engines of Change
Cameron established the Institute with fellow classicist Donald Rattner when both were working at the firm now called Ferguson Shamamian & Rattner. The first Summer Program was held at the New York Academy of Art, amid an enormous collection of plaster statues cast from classical originals. When the students were brought outdoors to measure buildings, only the faculty members were allowed to climb the ladders. "Back then," Cameron recalls with a laugh, "we didn't even have liability insurance."

After some peripatetic years bouncing among downtown and midtown temporary spaces, the Institute has settled into sunny high-climbing quarters at the corner of a circa-1927 tower in Soho. Along with Cameron, the group's front-line soldiers now include President Gil Schafer III, board member Christine G.H. Frank, and Executive Director Aida della Longa. Italian-born della Longa is a veteran of stints with non-profits, such as New York City's branch of the Soane Museum. ("My major pleasure occasionally is a far-flung applicant turned away — for instance, one federal peripatetic inmate who was hoping to occupy his leisure time learning classicism by correspondence.") And one major group of alumni will soon be residential designers in Florida, because the Institute is now arranging a seven-session version of its courses in collaboration with that state's branch of the American Institute of Building Design. So these Florida-based builders, who are already satisfying popular cravings for classically-inspired architecture, will soon have a chance to render more learned versions of the designs. In other words, as Frank points out, there's no basis left whatsoever for classicism's reputation as an elitist bastion.

"We're part of an absolutely vital tradition, producing an enormous, high-level body of work that's completely missed by the mainstream media and architectural press," she says. Every summer, her charges develop proposals for an underutilized New York site, such as the Brooklyn Bridge Park (at the bridge's Brooklyn base), after they've had some chance to master the orders, elements of ornament, rendering, and proportion. "We like to pick sites in neighborhoods that could benefit from a classical point of view, in neighborhoods you might not expect," she says. "Then the students get to present their ideas to the community, for some real experience engaging with people. It helps take away that ego-driven design-out-of-your-own-head attitude which is typically taught in architectural schools." Cameron adds, "And there's been a lot of extremely positive community reaction. When we hung up the students' proposals for a meatpacking district site in a storefront office window there, literally hundreds of people stopped by for an informational flyer about what we're up to."

Dynamics
Demand for the Institute's wares has grown so intense that lectures sometimes draw hundreds of guests, leaving scores more cooling their heels on the waiting lists and then reluctantly being turned away. Other architecture schools do offer some classical training, of course: in addition to Notre Dame's full-blown program, the University of Miami teaches...
New Urbanism under the leadership of Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk (both of whom serve on the Institute's advisory council, along with other household names such as Michael Graves, Robert A.M. Stern, and Tom Wolfe). Classes also turn up at outposts including the University of Maryland, Georgia Tech, Syracuse University, Yale, and the University of Washington. But in general, says Cameron, the pickings remain slim. "And can you imagine the outcry there'd be if the music schools were like architecture schools, and stopped teaching classical music altogether? I don't think the parents of the kids at these places realize what their term bills are paying for." For post-university would-be classicalists, meanwhile, at nowhere but the Institute can they delve into sessions with inspiring titles like "The Grammar of Moldings and Proportions: A Perennial Pathway of Beauty" (all while accruing AIA continuing-education credits).

"Long-term," Schafer says, "we want to be less and less New York-centric. And someday we'd love to have our own building — I can picture the major donor's name engraved over the doorway in Trajan typeface, like a Renaissance kingsize. There would be exhibition spaces and much bigger classrooms inside" — so that there'd never again have to be waiting lists for anyone seeking the Institute's brand of enlightenment.

This drawing by Rome student Michael Ryn is a study done while at the Tempio. Mr. Ryn is an architect in Washington, D.C., who was the recipient of the ICA's 2000 Edward Vason Jones Prize Scholarship. The need-based prize, established by architect and ICA Summer Program instructor William H. Bates, III, is awarded each year to a student participating in the Rome program who may not be able to attend otherwise. Edward Vason Jones was an accomplished but little known classical architect in practice during the 1950's, 60's and 70's – a period when classicism was definitely not fashionable or much appreciated. Mr. Bates honors Vason Jones with his prize and is delighted that each year brings exceptional applicants from which to choose.

Rome Drawing Tour student Roselh Vinhandt Coelho from Brazil is shown here sketching at the Castra of Faia IV. This trip was her first to Rome and has profoundly affected everything she has done as an architect since. Program participant Liis Coelho benefits from the daily surveys in the ruins of Rome, much the way architects and artists through the centuries have sought inspiration from the monuments of antiquity and the rich cultures of Italy. This 10-day tour with ICA faculty and guest lecturers is a signature program of the Institute, which inspires a lifelong project of learning from Rome. This year, as part of the 10th Anniversary celebration, a new educational travel program has been added to the schedule of events. In March 2000, a 7-day visit to Havana, Cuba, will be sponsored by the Notre Dame School of Architecture and led by Notre Dame faculty member and ICA Fellow Emeritus, Victor Drioli.

INSTITUTE OF CLASSICAL ARCHITECTURE

The Institute of Classical Architecture (ICA) is a not-for-profit-educational organization created to fill a significant gap in contemporary architectural education. Over the last 10 years, the ICA has emerged as the nation's leading comprehensive educational resource for the study of classical architecture. Students, professionals, and the general public come from all over the world to benefit from any of the following programs:

- **Continuing Education Courses**
- **6-week Summer Program in NYC**
- **Rome Architectural Drawing Tour**
- **Travel Programs (Upcoming: Havana, Cuba; Nashville, TN; Georgia Country House of Ireland)**
- **Summer Lecture Series with Sotheby's Institute of Art**
- **Seasonal Salons in NYC and Around the Country**
- **Annual Conference**
- **Book Series**
- **The Forum, 8th Annual Newsletter**
- **The Classicist: Award-Winning Annual Publication**

For more information please visit: www.classicist.org or contact the Institute of Classical Architecture 225 Lafayette Street, Suite 1009 New York, NY 10012 Call: (917) 237-1208 Fax: (917) 237-1230

One of the Continuing Education classes early in the Institute's existence was a course in traditional rendering techniques taught by Richard Cameron. The class, "Traditional Architectural Rendering in Wax," has become a mainstay of the program and is a required course toward completing the ICA Certificate in Classical Architecture. In the class, students learn how to use India ink and toned ink to create watercolor wash drawings of architectural subjects. Topics covered include casting of shades and shadows, atmospheric perspective, light composition, and the production of the Benvenuto Tintoretto drawing type known as the "atupraf." The example shown here, "The Disputes of the Tabernacle," was created in 1993 by Andy Taylor, a student who subsequently became an ICA instructor.