

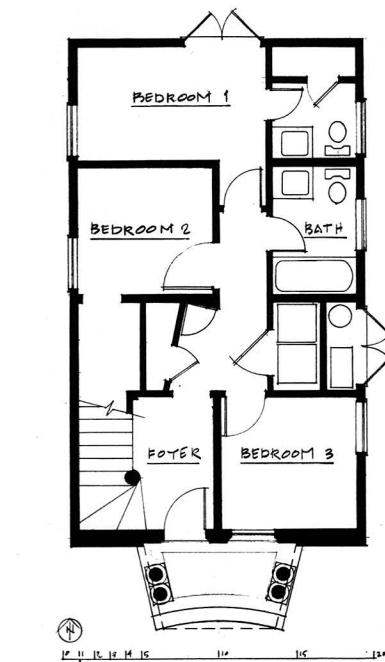
Richmond Hill House

Thomas Gordon Smith

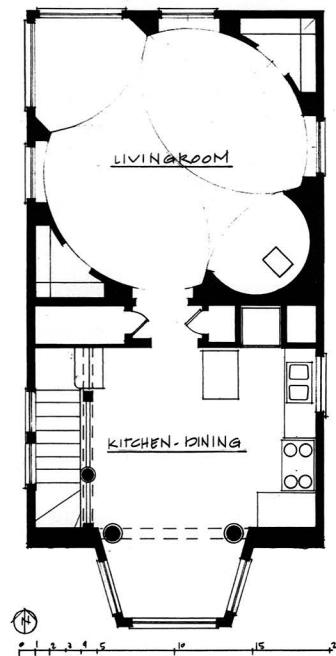
*On the Brow of Richmond Hill
Which Europe scarce can parallel
Every eye such wonders fill
To view the prospect round
Where the silver Thames does
glide
And stately courts are edified*

The house is built on a low hill near San Francisco Bay in Richmond, California. Thomas D'Urfey's verse, which Henry Purcell put to song in 1962, is used as an inscription for the living room frieze. It links the ambitions of seventeenth-century Richmond, England, with those of my own place in both an ironic and serious way.

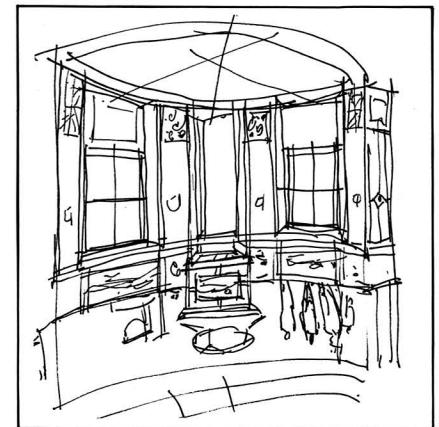
Richmond Hill House is the only "stately court" in a modest residential neighborhood. The living room is located on the second level to gain the maximum view beyond the immediate landscape. The house includes three bedrooms, a kitchen, a grand *Salone* in two and one half storeys within a nineteen-foot by thirty-two-foot perimeter (Figure 1-2). The rooms are arranged in a hierarchical progression which begins at the foyer and culminates with the *Salone*. This sequence is expressed through manipulating space, the classical orders, and pictorial imagery. These factors combine to imbue each room with a different character. The foyer is Doric and is decorated in first style painting—a two-dimensional representation of marble revetment. Sim-



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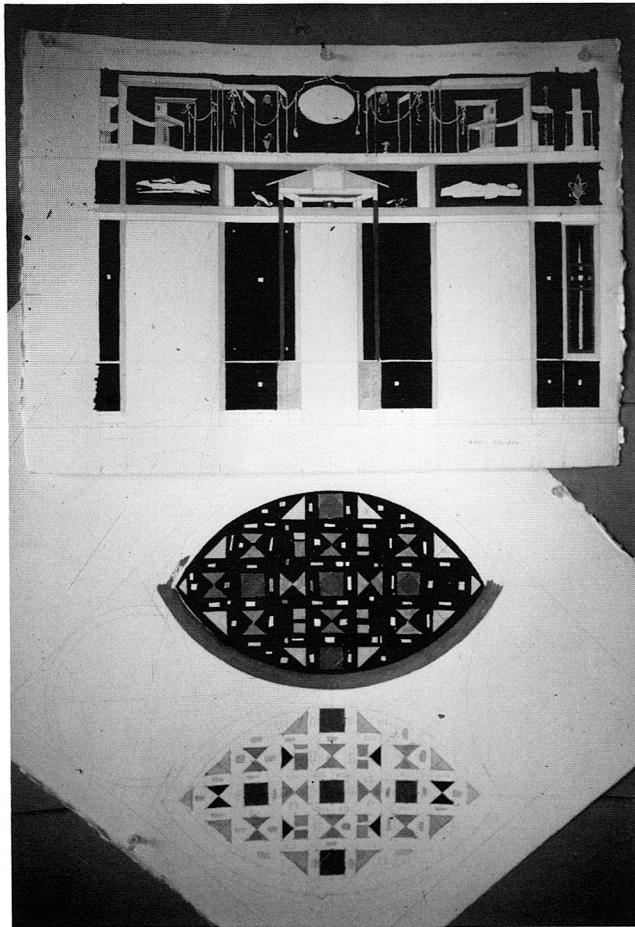
ple treatment at the point of entry enhances the sense of delight when one sees the more refined *Salone* upstairs. The *Salone* is an elongated architectural armature enfolding a complex iconography set against a black background painted in third style fresco (Figure 3-4). The opposite characters of these rooms, "base" and "elevated," serve as mutual points of reference and they are interdependent.

Although the basic form of the exterior has remained constant, the ideas for organizing its facade have developed throughout the

process of construction. All schemes have relied on a progression of material from the periphery toward the central point of entry. Lime stucco (mud) at the sides becomes rusticated limestone (sedimentary) at the facade, which is transformed to marble (metamorphic) pilasters around the door. The initial schemes were more elaborate than the one that was executed. They involved subtly modulated carving of limestone pilaster bases, a development of the Roman Baroque method of articulating the orders. The elevation shows the facade at an early

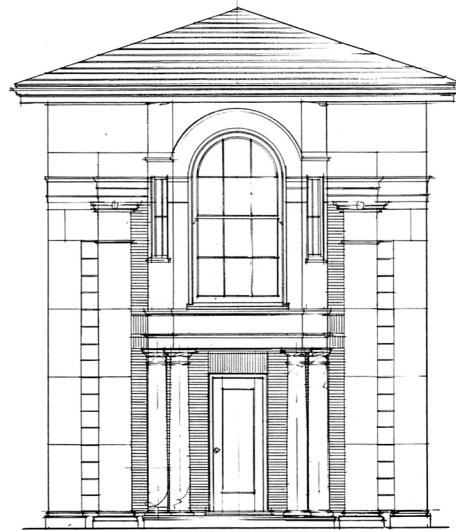
stage, before the plan was fully resolved (Figure 5). The concern for articulating the status of various orders through mouldings and materials is suggested in another preliminary sketch (Figure 6). My hesitation just before hanging the limestone veneer prompted consideration of less ambitious solutions (Figure 7). In the end, however, the stone was taken to full height and will soon be complemented with a massive doric pergola (Figures 8-9).

The elements of Richmond Hill House express the importance of the *Salone* in the life of my family and the importance of the point of entry to the outside world. I have employed materials, elements and pictorial imagery in a hierarchical arrangement to achieve this effect and to develop a broader objective—a rationale and a method for employing the classical system today.



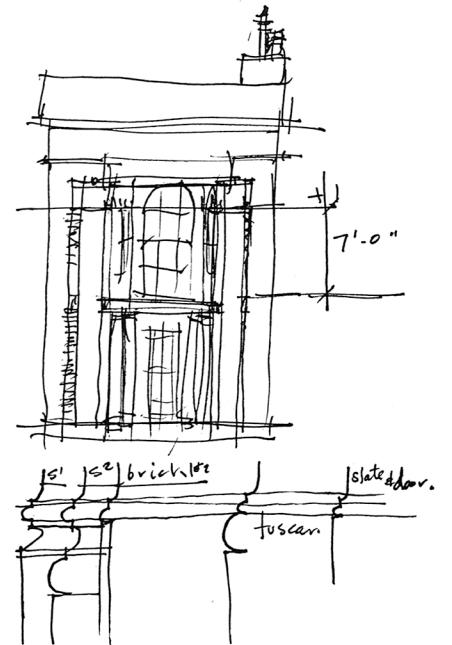
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1. First floor plan
2. Second floor plan
3. Living room, study sketch
4. Living room, cartoons for wall and floor decorations
5. Street elevation, preliminary scheme



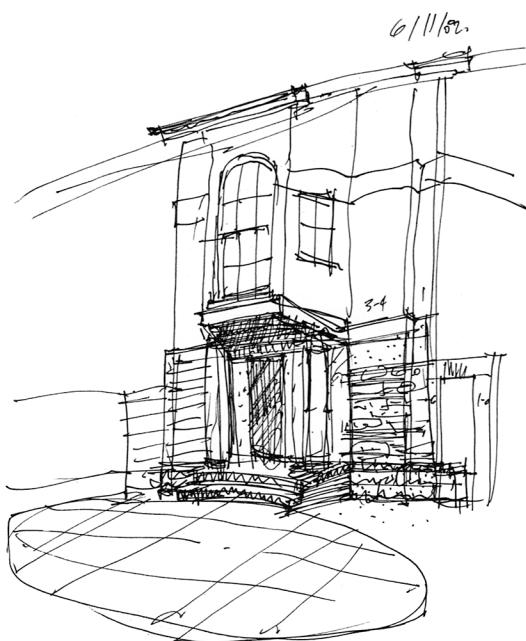
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6. Street elevation, preliminary scheme
7. Street elevation, sketch prior to modifications during construction
8. Street elevation, sketch
9. Street and side elevations prior to construction of pergola



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