

BEDFORD & NEW CANAAN

M A G A Z I N E



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Classic Greenwich Houses

REVIEW OF CLASSIC GREENWICH HOUSES:
CHARLES HILTON ARCHITECTS
BY JAMES MCCOWN



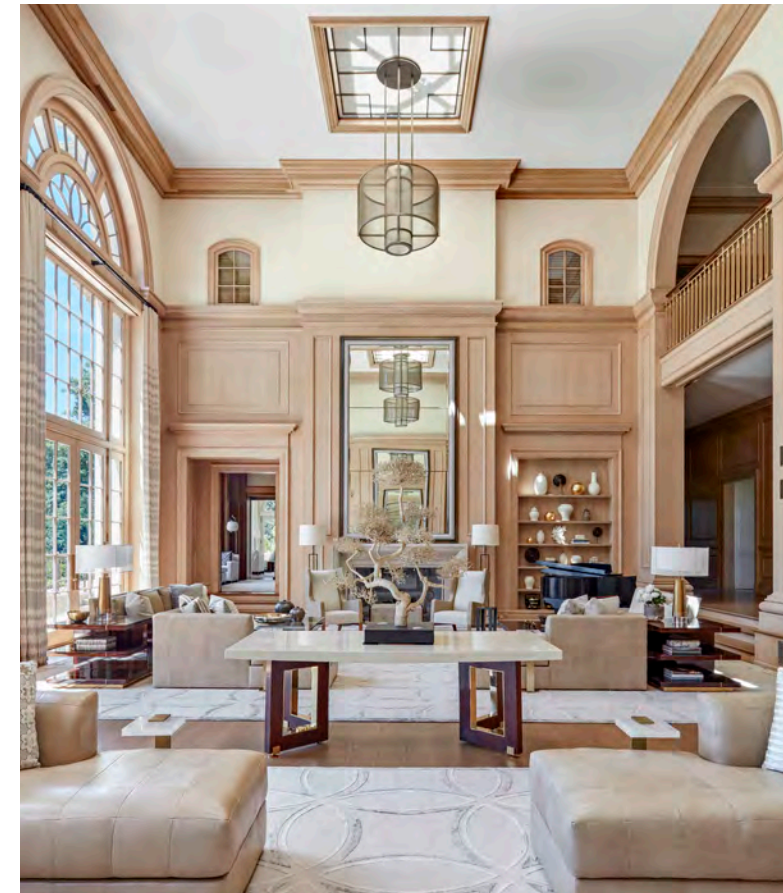
Hilton's oeuvre includes both from-the-ground-up new houses and additions and renovations to existing ones. So deft is Hilton's work that it's hard to tell which is which—indeed the additions are seamless while adding their own hints of the clever and whimsical. He is not interested in copying verbatim famous houses, explaining in his introduction:

Even in our most classical designs we respect the past without replicating the archetypes of historic houses. Our clients deserve more. They live in the present, and they rely on our creativity and ingenuity to design houses that honor tradition but are fully equipped for the present and the future.



The book features houses in three distinct styles: Georgian, New England Shingle and French Norman. It opens with an aerial view of a Greenwich waterfront estate that's straight out of *The Great Gatsby*. Hilton acknowledges that the site "was both its greatest asset and its greatest challenge, as coastal construction also comes with a staggering number of regulations and requirements that are not for the faint of heart." He freely acknowledges borrowing from McKim, Mead & White's nineteenth century shingle house work, considered the apex of the style.

In the chapter titled "Lakeside Georgian Estate," a gargantuan house is given a sense of human scale, as described by the architect: "We engaged in sleights of hand, with the utmost attention to proportion in order to unify and modulate the generous size of the home." He also points to architect David Adler's 1928 Crane estate in Ipswich, Massachusetts, as inspiration. (The Crane estate is now part of The Trustees, a Bay State organization that preserve's the Commonwealth's architectural patrimony.)

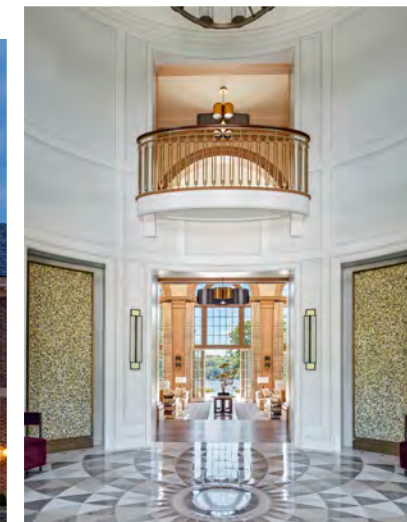


One of the refreshing things about the tone of the book is that Hilton makes no apology for the fact that his clients are rich. In fact he revels not just in their money but their cosmopolitan tastes, to wit: "They are extremely well travelled and regularly bring us fresh ideas from around the globe . . . [they] typically have the resources to pursue the very highest level of architectural design and construction."

As was the case in the Victorian and Edwardian eras, Hilton's houses are peppered with exotic flourishes that keep them from feeling stale and academic. The ceiling of a pool pavilion utilizes Japanese joinery; a weathervane atop a cupola looks like a Chinese dragon; a round foyer's floor is an exercise in precise curvilinear geometry inspired by Michelangelo's Campidoglio in Rome.

Some cities have residential architects whose work becomes legend—Addison Mizner in Palm Beach, Philip Trammell Shutze in Atlanta and Rosario Candela in Manhattan are just three who come to mind. Once this iconic status is established, residential real estate brokers are able to brag "This is a Shutze house" or "This building was designed by Candela." Not only does the association with a famous architect provide a hint of glamour, it usually adds monetary value to the real estate as well.

Maybe it's time to start talking about "Charles Hilton Houses" in the Greenwich area. A sumptuous new monograph, entitled *Classic Greenwich Houses: Charles Hilton Architects*, published by The Monacelli Press, chronicles this designer's body of work in and around Fairfield County. It firmly establishes Hilton as a prominent practitioner of the New Classicism, an architectural movement begun in the late 1960s as a foil to the then-ubiquitous modernism. The book is also a good read and is richly illustrated.



As much as I admire the Georgian work that predominates in the book, I have two personal favorites. One is the French Norman Residence that could be the setting of a fairy tale. In fact the architect states that he and his clients took a “research trip to France” (quelle vie!) and “found that Marie Antoinette’s hamlet at Versailles could serve as a touchstone for our plans.” Hilton’s medieval French post-and-beam façades are accurately and impressively rendered.

The other project that caught my fancy is the most modest abode in the book—a townhouse in downtown Greenwich described as “steps from the train station, movie theater, shopping district and fine restaurants.” Here too, Hilton uses his skill by making a rather large house appear much smaller than it actually is. This results in a

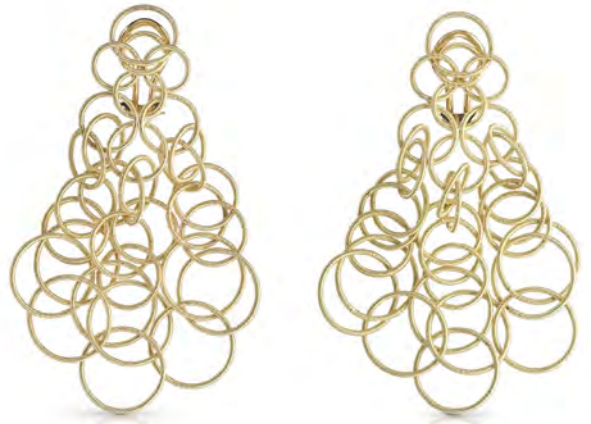


“four-story home that is cozy enough for two and also accommodates grown children and grandchildren who often visit from out of town.”

It may be decades before Hilton’s houses in and around Greenwich achieve the iconic fame of Mizner, Shutze and Candela. But in the mean time we have a book that is not only filled with compelling ideas about traditional design, but is pure eye candy as well. It makes for a nice addition to any design library.



Holiday Gift Guide



1. BUCCELLATI HAWAII PENDANT EARRINGS

\$4,500 from Manfredi Jewels

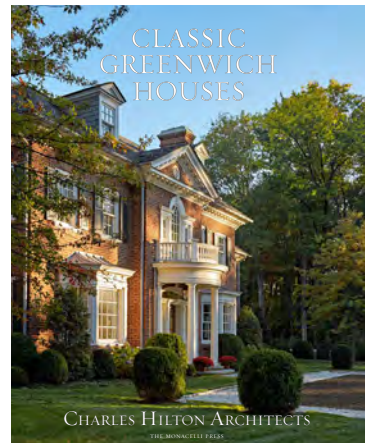
These gorgeous pendant earrings (7cm) make the perfect gift. Put a smile on your special—someone's face with this festive yet elegant accessory. Style: JAUEAROO3993



2. THE GLASS HOUSE X HERMÈS SCARF

\$395 - available only from The Glass House Design Store

This limited-edition 90x90cm silk twill scarf is a collaboration between Hermès and The Glass House. The scarf features a design by the late American artist Elaine Lustig Cohen (1927–2016) for Hermès of Paris, Inc, based on a large-scale 1967 painting by the artist. In 1955, Cohen began her design work in New York by extending the idiom of European modernism into an American context for her diverse clientele of publishers, corporations, cultural institutions, and architects. Her first client was the renowned architect Philip Johnson (1906–2005) – creator of the celebrated Glass House (1949) in New Canaan, Connecticut. Only a limited number remain, and all proceeds benefit preservation of The Glass House.



3. CLASSIC GREENWICH HOUSES

\$55 from Elm Street Books in New Canaan

Published by the Monacelli Press, featuring 200 stunning images from homes designed by Charles Hilton. This book showcases detailed interiors, elegant exteriors, and expansive landscapes. Classic Greenwich Houses is an ideal resource for design professionals, admirers of traditional residential design and anyone planning to build their dream home. This thick and attractive book transports its reader into a world of luxury making it a great conversation piece and a fantastic book to complete your coffee table.