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CONNECTICUT CLASSIC

WHAT, IN 21ST-CENTURY AMERICA, IS "CLASSICAL" ARCHITECTURE?



THIS PAGE, ABOVE: Dinyar Wadia's architectural studio in New Canaan.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Detail showing the half-timbering, decorative brackets, and carved roof fascia of "Gitanjali," Wadia's restored and updated English country house in New Canaan, built as a guest cottage in 1870.

Fourteen Greek Doric columns, hand-crafted of wood, march around the perimeter of the second-floor gallery of Dinyar S. Wadia's architectural offices in New Canaan, Connecticut. The design—suggestive of the peristyle of a Greek temple—signals to all who enter that the style this firm embraces is *Classical*.

Wadia's handsome new book, *New Classicists* (The Images Publishing Group Pty Ltd, 2007), traces this renowned designer's passion for classical architecture back to his childhood in Bombay, India, a city rife with magnificent public buildings. For the past 30 years, since he founded his firm, Wadia Associates, in New Canaan, he has made that passion manifest in the elegant residences, both small and large (from potting shed to Gatsbyesque Tudor mansion), that he has designed—principally in Fairfield County.

Connecticut is ideal territory for a lover of traditional architecture. From the late 19th century to World War II, the era of the Great Estates, tycoons built huge, opulent residences in Fairfield County—castles, chateaux, manor houses—notes Suzanne Knutson in the book's essay on Wadia's journey to classicism. "Although the Great Estates era is now but a faint memory, its legacy remains in the diversity of architectural styles to be found in this region." >>

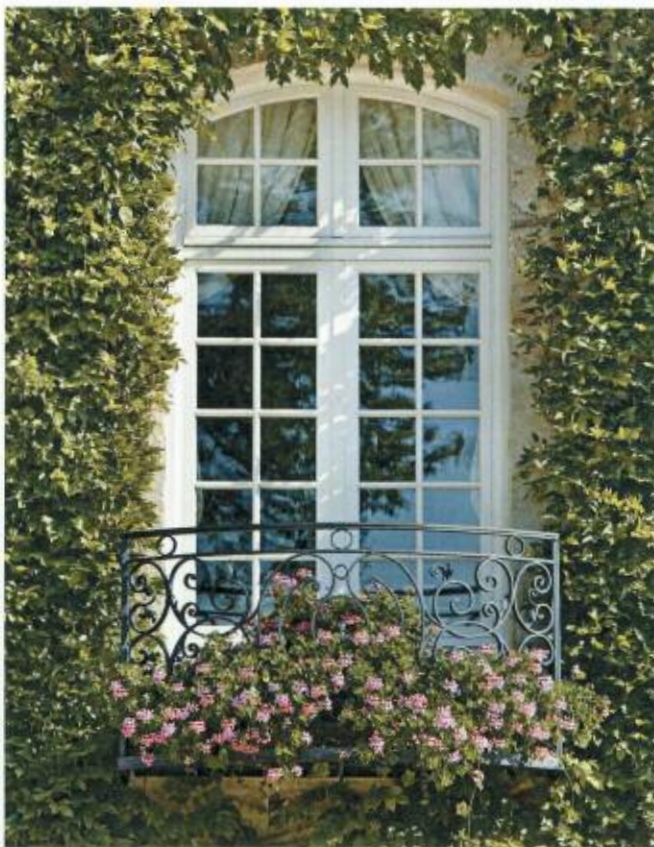


Wadia designs in all classical and traditional architectural styles, as the many full-page photographs in his 256-page, coffee-table-size book make clear. HRH The Prince of Wales, Prince Charles—an outspoken advocate of traditional architecture—notes, in the book's introduction, "I was immediately struck by the way that this practice commands such a broad range of architectural language, creating buildings for the 21st Century that draw unabashed from the living traditions of architecture, be they classical, gothic or vernacular."

What is "classical" design? "Classical does not mean simply *traditional*," points out Phillip Dodd, a design associate at Wadia Associates and the editor of *New Classicists*. "In America, 'classical' architecture has its roots in Western European architecture—and that, in turn, has its roots in classical antiquity. American classicism is based on those buildings, primarily in England and France, that, hundreds of years ago, reflected the architectural ideas brought back by wealthy travelers who had taken 'classical tours' to view the ruins of ancient Greece and Rome—as well as the new buildings of the Italian Renaissance. In America, many buildings are hybrids of these Western European architectural styles."

In the 21st century, building "classically" requires the architect to find a way to incorporate modern amenities into a residence of classically influenced design. "One of [Wadia's] greatest challenges has been to accommodate new room types within a classical framework," Knutson writes. "While his residences feature the classic proportions of traditional architecture, Wadia is creative when it comes to room usage, often reinventing interior spaces to include family-breakfast-kitchen combinations, exercise rooms and spas, and extensive master bath areas."

The gracious manor houses spotlighted in *New Classicists* are striking indeed; a few examples are reproduced on these pages. What is particularly helpful to laymen who read this book, and who would like to acquire a sharper eye for architectural styles as they drive Connecticut's byways, is the section called "Pattern Book." There, watercolor paintings and floor plans of homes of various styles are presented, along with clearly written captions that describe the elements (variously,



THIS PAGE, FAR LEFT AND LEFT: A brick Georgian with an Ionic-columned portico, in New Canaan, sports playful elements like scrolled brackets at the dormer windows and a cartouche window surround in the pediment. ABOVE: A window overlooking the formal gardens of a French country manor in Greenwich. OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: A classic American Shingle in New Canaan; the Roman Doric-columned breakfast porch of a residence in New Canaan; Dinyar Wadia's new book; another view of the breakfast porch.



columned porticos; six-over-six windows; hipped roofs; asymmetrical massing) that identify a residence as being of a certain style—an Elizabethan manor house, a French country house, Early American eclectic, Colonial Revival, a French Provincial chateau, an American Palladian house, a Shingle Style house, a mid-Georgian farmhouse. Scanning these photographs and watercolor renderings is sure to add to your pleasure, by making your eye keener, as you make your way over what the book so rightly calls the “alluring topography” of the Constitution State. ♦

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Wadia Associates, based in New Canaan, Connecticut, describes its design philosophy as “a pluralistic approach to traditional design... based upon reinterpreting the past and updating it for the present.” 203.966.0048; www.wadiaassociates.com; info@wadiaassociates.com.





“The gracious manor houses spotlighted in *New Classicists: Wadia Associates* are striking indeed.”

