

Architectural Gems of Montclair

By Helen Fallon

Board of Trustees, Montclair History Center (formerly the Montclair Historical Society)

Montclair is known for its notable architecture. Many of the town's homes and commercial buildings were constructed in the late 1800s and early 1900s, after the railroads had come through and made Montclair a bucolic home base for people who worked in Hoboken, Jersey City, and New York.

Recently, the Montclair History Center invited local architects to participate in an informal survey in which we asked, "What is your favorite historic Montclair building?" We are delighted to share the responses!



Photo credit: Wright & Robinson Architects

A House with Twists and Turns

Mark Wright, AIA
Wright & Robinson Architects
Working so closely within historic buildings often creates a deep appreciation and affection for them. Mark Wright notes why his favorite building is 208 North Mountain Avenue, a home in which he worked closely with the current owners on an award-winning renovation:

"One hundred and thirty years ago, artist Harry Fenn built an exceptionally exotic Queen Anne house on Upper Mountain Avenue, with long views over the open valley. It was later rotated 90° and

moved downhill. It was widely published upon its completion in 1886, and archival research its owners' efforts (and ours) to gradually recover its missing elements. We admire the original house for its fearless idiosyncrasy, and its owners for their spirit of stewardship."

A Building for the Arts Professions

Paul Sionas, AIA
Sionas Architecture, PC
ARCHITECTURE+LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE+PLANNING

Paul Sionas reports that his Montclair favorite is one that he has grown to admire while his firm has been working on its interior and exterior renovation: the "Madison Building."



Photo Credit: Sionas Architecture

"Constructed in 1912, the 'Madison Building' at 427-429 Bloomfield Avenue is a four-story Beaux Arts Revival style building designed for Edward Madison by the architects Van Vleck and Goldsmith. These architects also worked on the Montclair YMCA, the First Methodist Church on North Fullerton Avenue, the Grove Street School, and, after Mr. Goldsmith left the firm in 1913, Joseph Van Vleck Jr. worked on the Georgian Inn and the current Van Vleck house.

Mr. Madison's idea was to create a building with offices and studios for arts-related professions all under one roof, including architects, painters and printers. The brick building is decorated with sculptural stone elements including carved stone spandrels separating the floors with images of Mr. Madison holding paint brushes.

There is a four-story central atrium topped with an oversized copper and glass pyramidal skylight. The concrete floor balconies surrounding the atrium are inset with glass and protected by beautiful metal railings."

It's a must see!

Clinker Brick and Rock Face Concrete

Debra David, RA
Architecture/Historic, Restoration/Adaptive Reuse & New Construction
Debra is also Vice Chair of the Montclair Township Historic Preservation Commission.

Debra David's response focused on building materials, rather than a specific building. She wrote:

"I find my favorite buildings in Montclair aren't the ones that



Photo credit: Debra David RA

you might think are important. I fall in love with structures because of their materials. For example, those that incorporate clinker bricks.

Although primarily used in limited areas on residential houses throughout Montclair, this garage on Pine Street is especially interesting because of the way that the mason laid the brick. Prior to the 1920s bricks that were misshapen, discolored or otherwise not the standard, were called "clinkers" and were discarded. However, during the Arts and Crafts movement, it became popular to use these clinker bricks for exterior front facades as more of a decorative finish. I find this building facade so very charming."

Debra also noted another interesting building material – Rock Face concrete block, found in a home designed circa 1908 by architect A.F. Norris for Mrs. Elijah Pearce. Norris designed many homes in Montclair. According to Debra,

"On Norwood Avenue there is a small garage, reminiscent of a French village or barn, constructed completely of Rock Face concrete block. This economical material became popular at the turn of the last century, often used for foundation walls

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 Last month we shared several of the buildings that architects selected when we asked them to participate in the Montclair History Center's "What's Your Favorite Historic Building?" survey. Here are a few more of their responses, highlighting notable structures in our architecturally-rich town:



Photo credit: Wright and Robinson Architects

"St. Eric's Evangelical Lutheran Church, 205 Glenridge Ave., was dedicated by its Swedish congregation in 1896. It is a small structure in disrepair that could be repurposed into a great space. It was built in a time when the structures were primarily wooden and small in scale. Definitely a village type building. Fixed up, it would be a terrific location for many uses. A jewel mixed in the jewelry case."

The Gates mansion at 66 South Mountain Avenue also ranks highly with Steve. Constructed in 1902-1904, Prairie style architect George Washington Maher, who had worked for Frank Lloyd Wright, designed the building. Frederick Taylor Gates, a Baptist minister from Chicago and advisor to John D. Rockefeller and the Rockefeller Foundation, commissioned the building. One of the home's later occupants was a minister, Sweet



Photo credit: Montclair Public Library Local History Collection



Photo credit: Helen Fallon

Daddy Grace, founder and first bishop of "United House of Prayer for All People." Steve notes,

"[It's] definitely a distinctly modern house for the time it was constructed. Situated majestically on the hill with a deep and broad lawn, the view from coming up Hillside Avenue makes a statement: Blonde brick, heavy eaves, and extremely wide windows make it distinctive. It is the first stately mansion on South Mountain, beginning a string of them driving south to the estate section."

Exuberance expressed through texture

Karen Robinson, AIA
 Wright & Robinson Architects

Karin Robinson selected 52 Lloyd Road as her favorite building. It was designed by noted architect A.F. Norris and was built in 1905 for Charles F. Droste of Montclair. Notes Karen,

"Montclair has many breathtaking shingle style, Tudor and colonial revival houses, but I selected the unique 52 Lloyd Road as my favorite. Its picturesque grouping of dramatic elements express great exuberance. The rough plaster tower—slightly tapered with a shallow conical roof—first caught my eye, reminding me of the work of the English Arts & Crafts architect CFA Voysey, one of my idols. The facade is dominated by two Flemish-style gables of red brick with red mortar. The uniformity of color allowed the architect to emphasize texture: standard Flemish bond bricks here are laid with headers projecting 1/2" in front of stretchers. I just wish I could have seen the cheery round-topped dormers sitting on the original red-stained cedar shingle roof, along with the long-lost copper finial on the original moss green-stained cedar shingle roof of the turret."

An eclectic mix of favorites

Stephen P. Rooney, AIA
 Chair, Montclair Township Historic Preservation Commission
 Steve Rooney, Chair of Montclair Township's Historic Preservation Commission was bursting with ideas for this survey and submitted several responses – with adaptive re-use or potential for adaptive re-use being high on his list!

Switching centuries, Steve points to more contemporary architecture in town, not often highlighted.

"Any of the modern houses on Highland Avenue south of Bradford are excellent examples of contemporary architecture of the 1960s and 70s. They have broad expanse of roofs, lots of



Photo credit: Helen Fallon



Photo credit: Ira Smith

wood and glass. When you take detailing away from ornament, these houses are pure form. They reveal a change in orientation from public ostentation to discreet and private. They were definitely built to take in the New York City views."

A Commanding Corner

Ira Smith
 smithmaran architecture+interiors llc
 Ira Smith highlights 475 Bloomfield Avenue at the corner of Bloomfield Avenue and North Fullerton Avenue, currently housing a Chase Bank, as one of his favorite Montclair buildings.

"There are so many truly great buildings in Montclair that it isn't possible for me to single one out as my favorite, but this one is a favorite. An agglomeration of three existing buildings that were given a new, coherent facade in the earliest decades of the 20th-century, the structure fulfills classical commercial design principles with purpose and invention. A minimal granite base negotiates the sloping site and provides a spare platform for the 'temple of commerce' above. A tall bay of glass and cast metal, a harbinger of glass curtain walls to come, is centered on the main facade and reappears on the side facade. These gestures address the scale and importance of the Six Corners intersection, and also hint at the grand skylit atrium within. The dropped cornice, running like a zipper along both facades, incorporates the traditional entry pediment and ties the scale of the building to its neighbors. The melding of ancient and new here, the classical order and the integration of modern craft, is a constant inspiration."

What's your favorite historic Montclair building -- and why?? Let the Montclair History Center know (in 75 words or less) at mail@montclairhistorical.org!

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above-grade. The blocks could be made on site using a 'machine' from Sears!"

We'll share more architects' responses in part two of "Architectural Gems" in next month's issue of Montclair Neighbors.

What's your favorite historic Montclair building -- and why?? Let the Montclair History Center know (in 75 words or less) at mail@montclairhistorical.org! ■



Photo Credit: Sionas Architecture



Photo credit: Debra David RA

Do You Know What an Elder Law Attorney Does?

ELDER LAW

Contributed by Shana Siegel, Esq.

When I was in college I worked as an intern on the documentary, "Can't Afford to Grow Old." Little did I know that I would eventually see poignant stories like those portrayed in the film every day of my career. Today, as an elder law attorney I handle a variety of legal issues affecting older and disabled people.

Initially it was my interest in health policy led me to Washington where I went to work for AARP, and then to law school where I had amazing mentors who solidified my decision to pursue elder law as a career.

Policy has not been a big part of my every day practice. Typically my days are spent dealing with practical life issues such as advising clients on asset preservation strategies, submitting a client's Medicaid application, drafting a special needs trust or preparing a guardianship accounting. My favorite time is spent talking to clients: supporting a child who is agonizing over whether to place their mother into assisted living or reassuring a spouse that she will not lose her home because her husband has early-onset dementia. I am often overwhelmed by the great love and dedication I witness -- in parents who give everything to keep their children out of institutions and spouses who shoulder the burden of full-time caregiving for years.

I can't help but worry about my clients and neighbors as we face an uncertain future for Obamacare, Medicare and Medicaid. It is times like this when I realize how crucial policy is to the everyday lives of my clients. For example, if we moved to a Medicaid block grant system, New Jersey would likely have to scale back long term care benefits currently offered under a Medicaid program called the Managed Long Term Services and Support program (MLTSS).

We might revert to the days when individuals with more than \$2,000 a month income in Social Security could not receive Medicaid home care coverage. I recall one such client who had Social Security income of \$2,100 a month, which disqualified her but wasn't enough to pay for home health care. Her children had promised her that she would remain in her home, so one son moved in with her. He could not afford to quit his job so he woke up early to dress her and feed her before work. He drove home every day at lunch to check on her. Her other son stopped by in the late afternoon when he got off work and stayed until his brother got home in the evening. The rest of the day this woman with moderate

dementia remained alone. Her family lived with the fear that their mother would wander into the street, or have an accident, but to them, it was worth the risk to avoid nursing home placement. These are choices no family should face.

Creative, advanced planning and advocacy will become even more important for families should there be additional restrictions in Medicaid eligibility and cuts in benefits. I will be there to help my clients understand how new laws impact their lives. I will also be reserving a little bit of time in my practice to return to my policy roots to advocate for policies that benefit seniors and individuals with disabilities. ■

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