



## Allowing the walls to 'talk' is part of historic preservation

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By **Staten Island Advance**

AIA, STATEN ISLAND CHAPTER

While a great deal of the practice of architecture entails creating new structures or adapting old ones to a new use, another vital role of the architect is the preservation of existing structures of historical or architectural significance.

Since man's beginnings, each civilization has created structures for use in living, working, and socializing that define who and what their members were as a people and as a society.

The expression "If walls could talk" carries special meaning to the preservation architect, for in his eyes, the walls do talk: They speak volumes with regard to how a people devised their homes, their economic and social situations.



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An example of Victorian Gothic Revival, the Kreischer Mansion in Charleston is a designated historical landmark. The preservation of structures like the mansion enables future generations to examine, evaluate and elaborate upon the materials and construction methods used.



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Drawing studies like the one above for the Kreischer Mansion, are required for historic

Architectural preservation seeks to maintain significant buildings and structures that embody who we are from a historical perspective — i.e., the White House or the Statue of Liberty.

It also aims to maintain structures that are authentic to a particular style of architecture or period of time, such as a Gothic church, Victorian mansion, or Arts and Crafts Bungalow, and preserve the works of masters of architecture like Christopher Wren, William Morris or Frank Lloyd Wright.

preservation projects for coordination of detailing, like period appropriate wood siding and porch railing, and the trades.

Many references to Staten Island's past may be found in neighborhoods from St. George to Tottenville. Walking along St. Paul's Avenue from Tompkinsville to Stapleton reveals a myriad of homes ranging in architectural styles from the Federal (1780-1820) to 20th-Century Romanticism (1940s to the present). □

## **KREISCHERVILLE** □

Charleston, known early in its history as Kreischerville, was established in the 1600s and still boasts houses of those who supported the factories that existed in the area. Balthasar Kreischer (1813-1886), a Bavarian immigrant, founded the Kreischer Brick Manufactory and the area took on his name until World War I, when anti-German sentiment flourished as the United States entered the war.

Kreischer had three mansions built on Kreischer Hill, one of which stands to this day. An example of Victorian Gothic Revival, it is a designated historical landmark.

The preservation of structures like the Kreischer Mansion enables future generations to examine, evaluate and elaborate upon the materials and construction methods used. Additionally, it allows an assessment to be made regarding how the people of a certain time and place lived their lives on a daily basis.

Today, we understand the significance of looking to structures of the past to improve upon those of our future, and we constantly seek to preserve those we feel identify us for future generations. □



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## **A VITAL ROLE**

The architect's role is vital to the preservation process. It is the architect who researches the building's origin and coordinates the many consultants who are required in a preservation project. He or she also files with the Landmarks Preservation Commission to ensure the concerns of various agencies have been addressed.

Consultants conduct archeological digs if a building is situated on a significant site, as well as analyses of paint and materials to determine the original colors and materials existing beneath layers and layers of paint and improvements.

While it is important to retain the architectural integrity of a structure, the architect also must attest to the structural stability of the building to ensure its safe use once the preservation project is complete.



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Drawing  
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Another exciting challenge for the architect is incorporating ever-changing technologies as they relate to heating, cooling, energy efficiency and “green” materials into a preservation project. He or she has a unique perspective and desire to honor the architecture of the past while supporting the technological innovations of the present.

In essence, the architect acts as a guide, assisting the property owner in uncovering the aspects of a historical building worth preserving and disclosing those that are not true to the original structure. It’s his or her job to ensure that the finished restoration project is historical in character, yet practical for the owner’s intended use. □

*Architect’s Corner, written by members of the Staten Island Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), appears twice a month in Home.*

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