

*An Explosion of Beauty*  
An Online Course on the Art, Architecture  
& Collections of British Country Houses



**Session 4: February 7, 2023**  
Palladian (1715—60)  
Rococo (1730—70)  
Chinoiserie (1750—65)

**American Ancestors**  
The New England Historic Genealogical Society

**Art & Architecture**  
with Curt DiCamillo

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**Curt DiCamillo**  
*Curator of Special Collections*



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**PROGRAM**

- **Presentation (60 mins.)**
  - What is a country house
  - Overview houses
  - Study houses
- **Q&A (30 mins.)**

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*What is a Country House?*

A country house is a centuries-old institution virtually unique to Britain and Ireland. I define a country house as being a house of a minimum of five bays that, at some point in its history, was the country seat of a landed family.

These houses had an estate (agricultural land) that served as the center for local community life and may have included farmland, villages, or other supporting acreage. Their estates ranged in size from 1,000 to 1 million acres and employed hundreds, sometimes thousands, of people.



9 Bays →

Houghton Hall  
Norfolk

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*What is a Country House?*

A wonderful snapshot of the British country house comes from Brian Masters, writing in his 1975 book, *The Dukes*:

"The large country estate, with the house as its pivot, was (and is) a peculiarly British affair. In many ways it was a perfect example in miniature of the welfare state, self-sufficient and self-protecting, with every member of the 'family,' from shepherds to carpenters to kitchen-maids, provided for from cradle to grave."

Over 350 estates in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland are owned by the National Trust. In Scotland, the National Trust for Scotland owns over 128 properties.



Blenheim Palace  
Oxfordshire

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The arrangement of houses by dates/stylistic periods is a moving target. Many houses began in one period, but were significantly added to in later centuries, so, in the interest of sanity, I've tried to rationalize these along lines that make sense to me, which means that no one rule defines these categories.



Holkham Hall  
Norfolk

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One of the most important books for this class is the exhibition catalog from *The Treasures Houses of Britain* held at National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1985-86.



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## PALLADIAN



**Andrea Palladio**  
1508—80

In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century there was a growing reaction against the extravagance of the Baroque style. A desire to return to the basic principals of classicism, with its emphasis on restraint, proportion, balance, and the systematic use of the classical orders of architecture, led to the development of Palladianism.

This unique British style was based on the form and ornament of ancient Roman buildings transmitted through the work of the Italian Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio and the 17<sup>th</sup> century British architect Inigo Jones.

Palladian interiors were richly decorated, in contrast to the exteriors, which were plain and austere. The British loved associating the designs of ancient Rome with the growing British Empire.

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**Andrea Palladio**  
**Villa Rotonda**  
Vicenza  
1567—92

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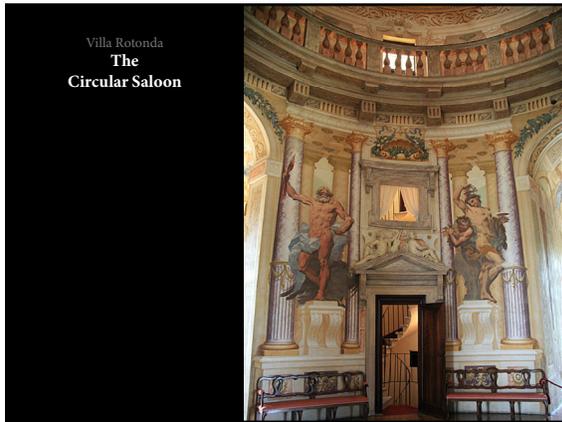
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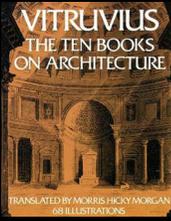
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Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, commonly known as Vitruvius, was a 1<sup>st</sup> century BC Roman author, architect, and civil engineer.

He is famous for his multi-volume work, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, which was dedicated to his patron, the Emperor Augustus.

In the books, which were written as a guide for building projects, Vitruvius invented the concept that all buildings should have three attributes: strength, utility, and beauty.

His work was widely copied and survives in dozens of manuscripts from the Middle Ages. The books remain in print today.



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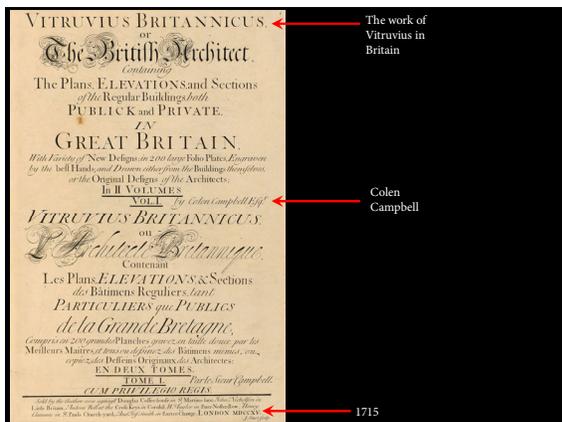
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VITRUVIUS BRITANNICUS  
or  
The British Architect  
Containing  
The Plans, ELEVATIONS and Sections  
of the Regular Buildings both  
PUBLIC and PRIVATE.  
BY  
COLEN CAMPBELL  
Architect.  
LONDON, Printed by W. Johnston, at the Golden-Shop, in St. Dunstons Church-yard, 1715.

VITRUVIUS BRITANNICUS  
ou  
L'Architecture Britannique.  
Contenant  
Les Plans, ELEVATIONS, & Sections  
des Bâtimens Regulars, tant  
PARTICULIERS que PUBLICS  
de la Grande-Bretagne.  
Compris en 202 grandes Planches gravées en taille douce, par les  
Meilleurs Maîtres d'Architecture de France & des Bâtimens mêmes, ornés  
de plusieurs Ordres d'Architecture.  
EN DEUX TOME.  
TOME I.  
Par Colen Campbell  
CUM PRIVILEGIO REGIS.

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Rococo emerged as a distinct style in France in the 1720s. By the following decade it was blossoming in Britain, where immigrant artists and craftsmen played a key role in its dissemination.

While classicism was bound by the rules of the architectural orders, Rococo was free of such restrictions. It was a style of extravagant forms and asymmetry that used fruit, flowers, rocks, and shells as design elements.

In Britain the chief promoters of Rococo were artists, craftspeople, and entrepreneurs from the middle class, rather than architects and their noble patrons. Thus, the style was rarely taken up in architecture, though it played an important part in the design of interiors and luxury goods.

Often criticized for its immoderation, the style never took a firm hold in Britain, where it was seen as a product of the French, who were viewed as frivolous, extravagant, and effete.

## ROCOCO



Jean-Honoré Fragonard  
*The Swing*  
1767  
The Wallace Collection

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Balthasar Neumann  
**The Würzburg Residenz**  
Lower Franconia, Bavaria  
1749—51

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## CHINOISERIE



Blue & White Pagoda Porcelain

In 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe porcelain, silk, wallpaper, and lacquer from China and Japan were very fashionable. This inspired many British designers and craftsmen to imitate Asian designs and to create their own fanciful versions of the east. The style derived its name from chinois, the French word for Chinese, and featured what, to Europeans, were representations of exotic and mysterious foreign cultures. The designs, which appeared on a wide variety of products, were inspired by influences as diverse as the roofs of Chinese pagodas, Asian landscapes, magnificent birds, and fierce dragons.

For interiors Chinoiserie was particularly used for bedrooms and dressings rooms, which often featured genuine Asian objects such as Chinese wallpaper and porcelain. In architecture, the style most commonly appeared in the form of colorful, richly ornamented garden buildings.

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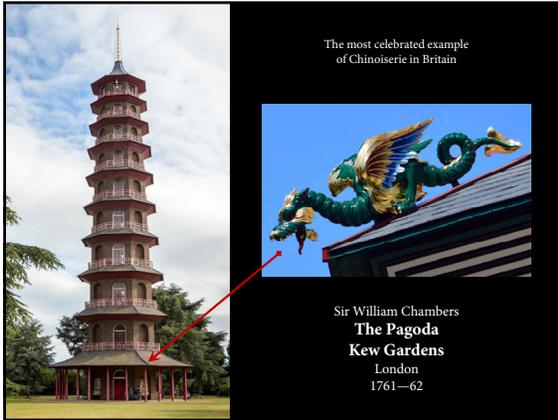
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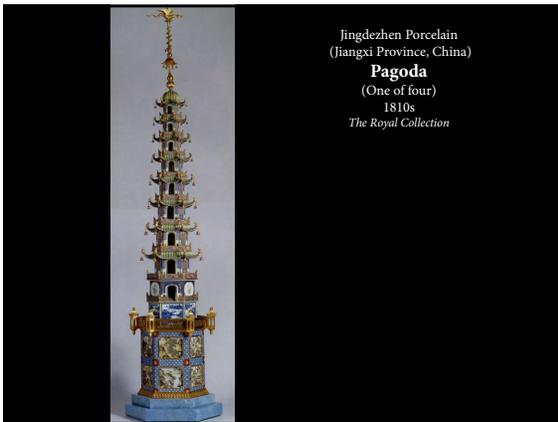
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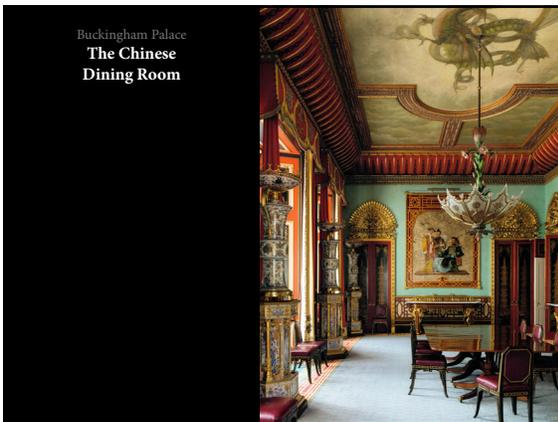
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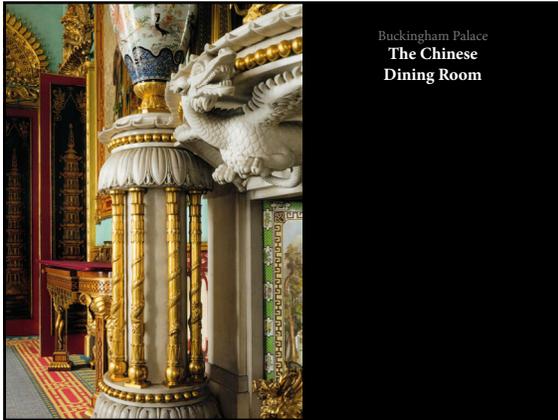
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*Overview Houses*

- Badminton House, Gloucestershire, 1660—90** (Palladian, Rococo & Chinoiserie)
- Honington Hall, Warwickshire, 1685** (Rococo)
- Mereworth Castle, Kent, 1720—25** (Palladian)
- Houghton Hall, Norfolk, 1722—35** (Palladian)
- Chiswick House, London, 1725—29** (Palladian)
- Holkham Hall, Norfolk, 1734—62** (Palladian)
- Kirtlington Park, Oxfordshire, 1742—46** (Palladian & Rococo)
- Powderham Castle, Devon, circa 1755 staircase** (Rococo)

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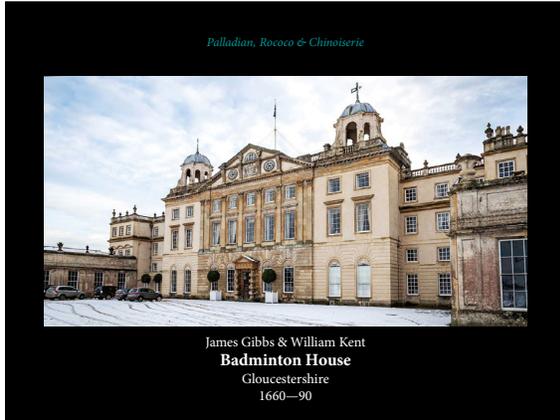
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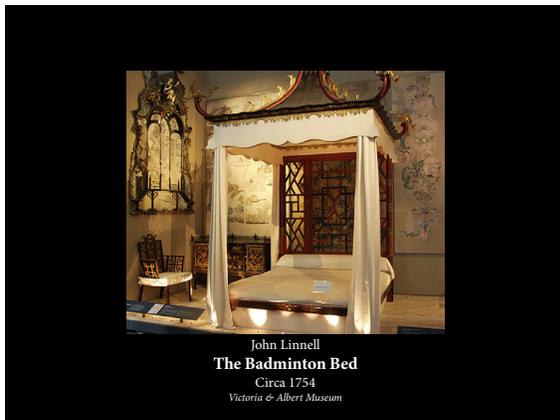
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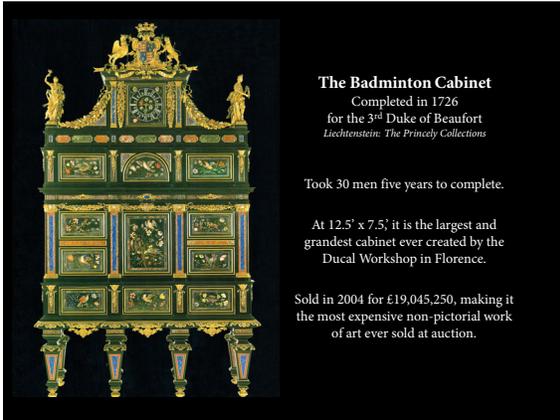
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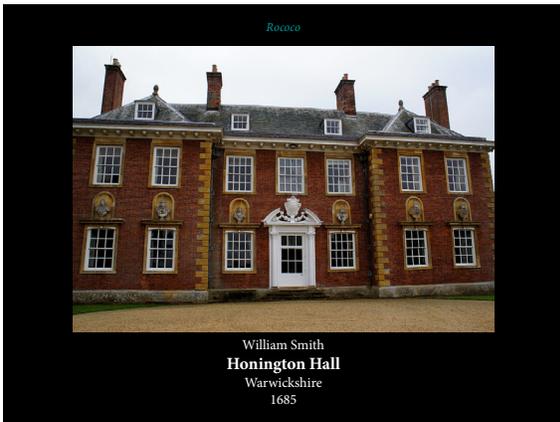
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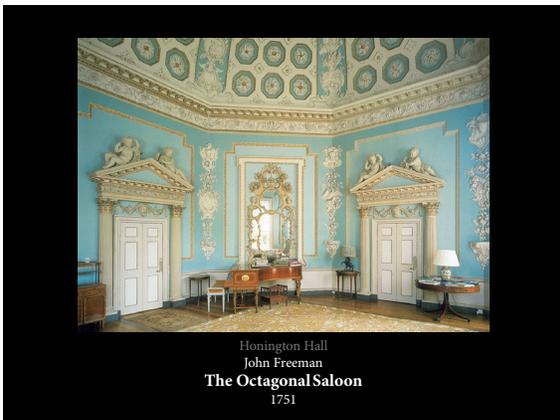
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*Palladian*

Samuel Ware  
**Foots Cray Place**  
Kent  
1752—55  
*Demolished 1950*



In the 18<sup>th</sup> century  
there were four  
houses built in  
Britain based on  
Palladio's famous  
Villa Rotonda:

Thomas Wright  
**Nuthall Temple**  
Nottinghamshire  
1754—57  
*Demolished 1929*



~ Merworth Castle  
~ Chiswick House  
~ Foots Cray Place  
~ Nuthall Temple

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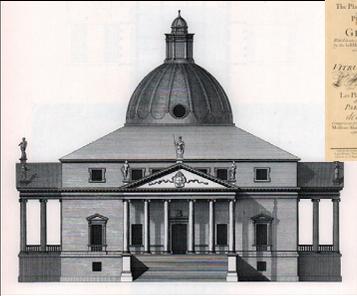
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*Palladian*



VITRUVIUS BRITANNICUS  
*Or the British Architect*  
The PLAIN, ELEVATION and SECTION  
of the Temple of Palladio  
as it is in the Original  
PALLADIO'S ARCHITECTURE  
IN GREAT BRITAIN  
By the Author of the  
PALLADIO'S ARCHITECTURE  
IN GREAT BRITAIN  
LONDON Printed by J. BARNES, in Strand, 1751.

Colen Campbell  
**Merworth Castle**  
Kent  
1720—25

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Antonio Visentini  
**Landscape With a View of Merworth Castle**  
1746  
*The Royal Collection*

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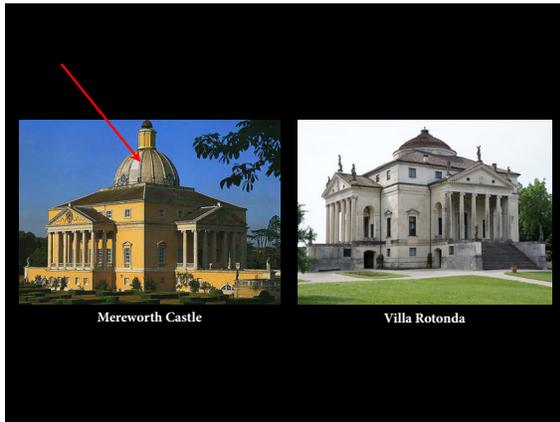
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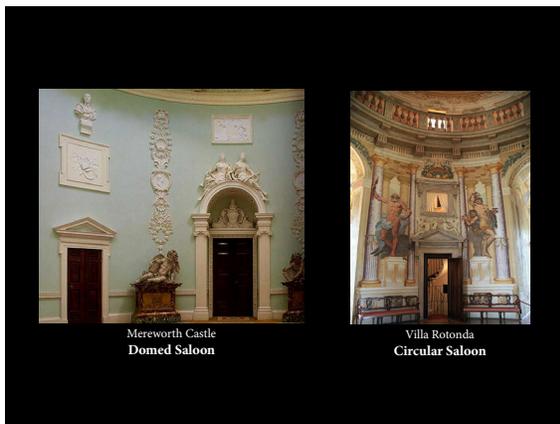
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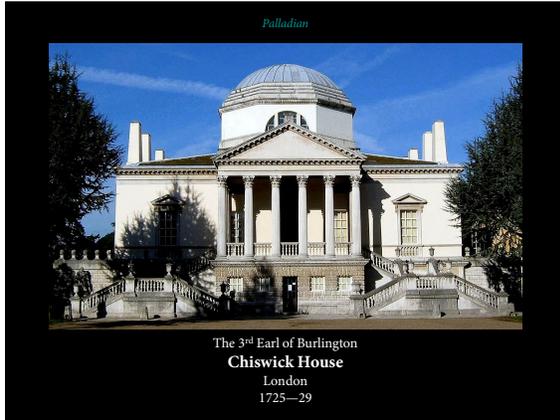
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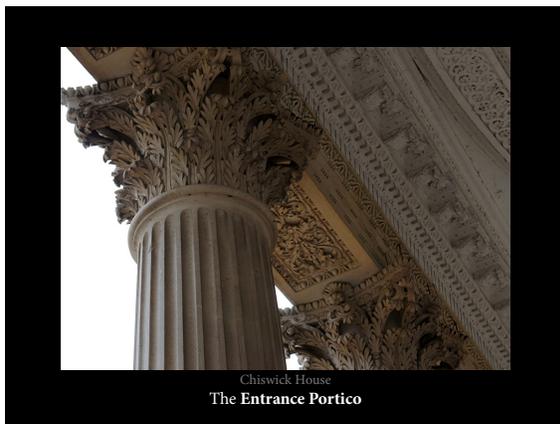
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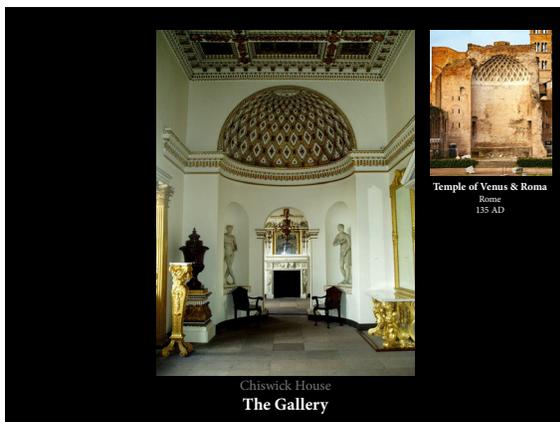
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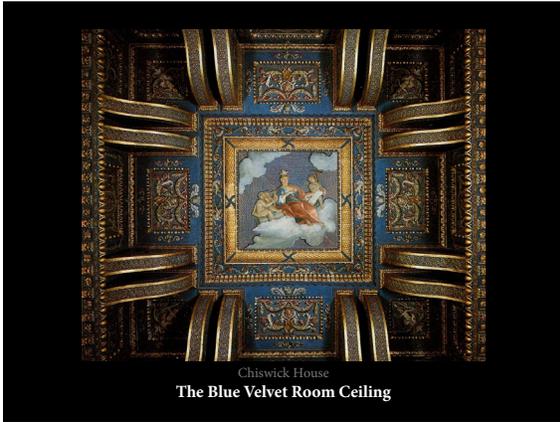
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Chiswick House  
The Blue Velvet Room Ceiling

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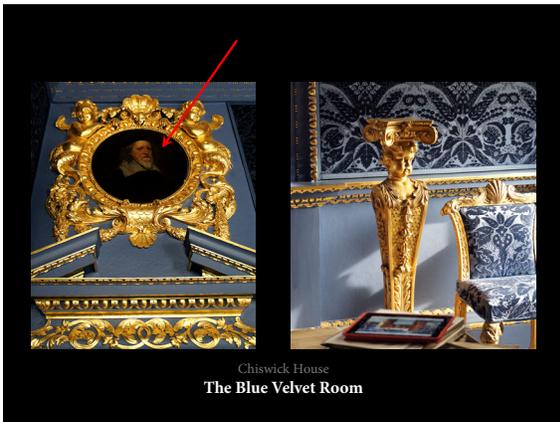
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Chiswick House  
The Blue Velvet Room

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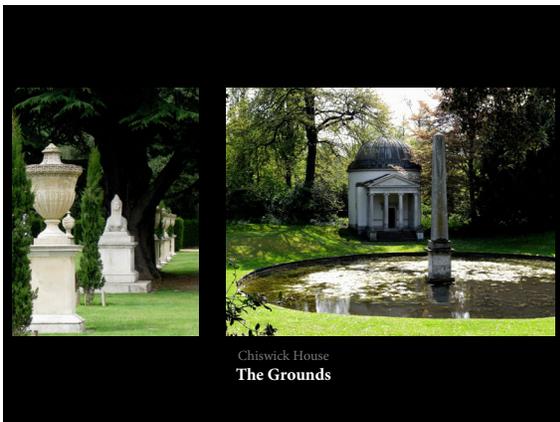
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Chiswick House  
The Grounds

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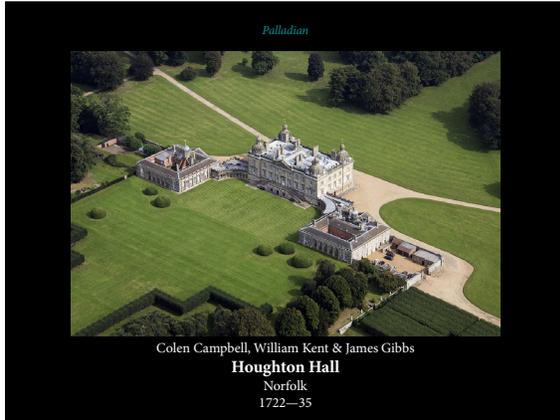
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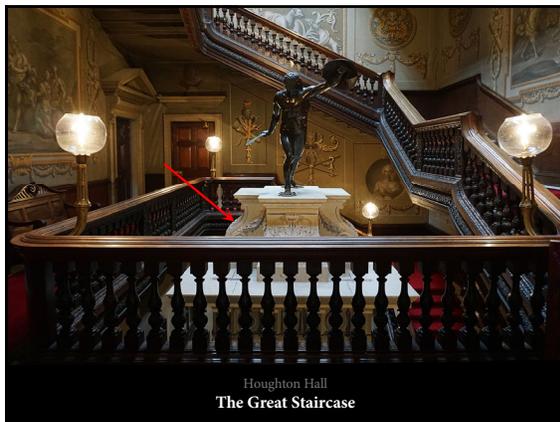
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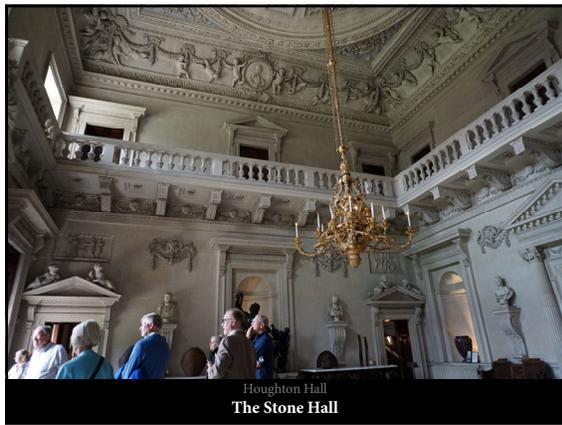
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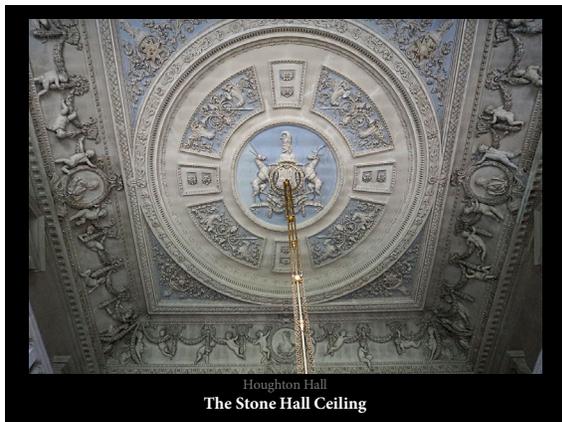
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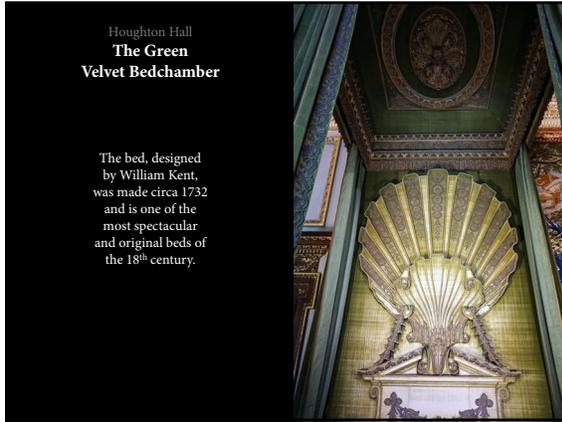
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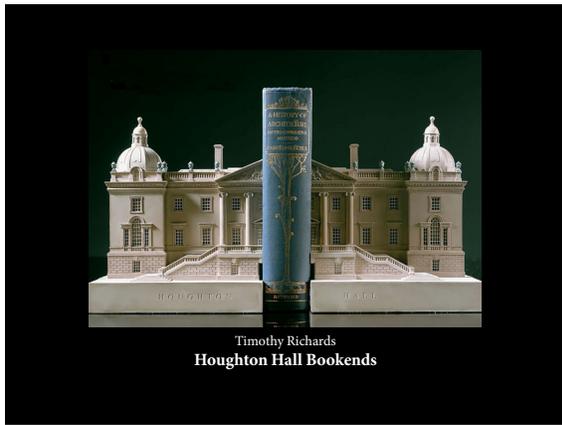
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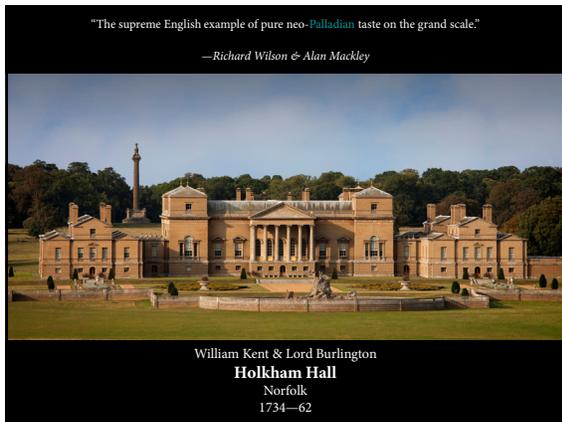
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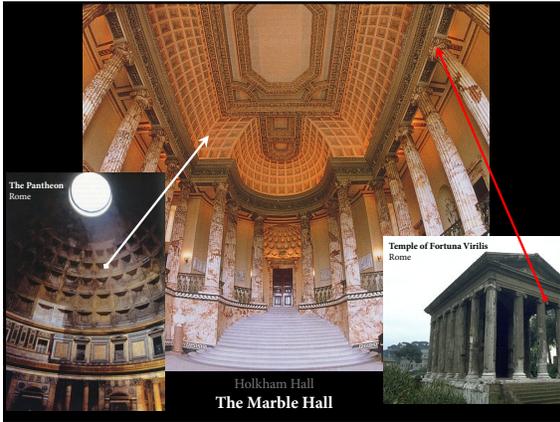
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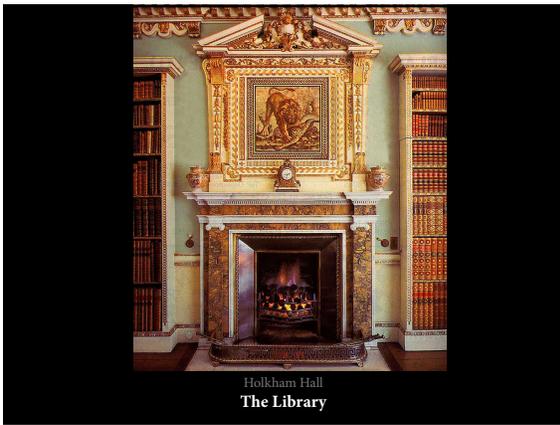
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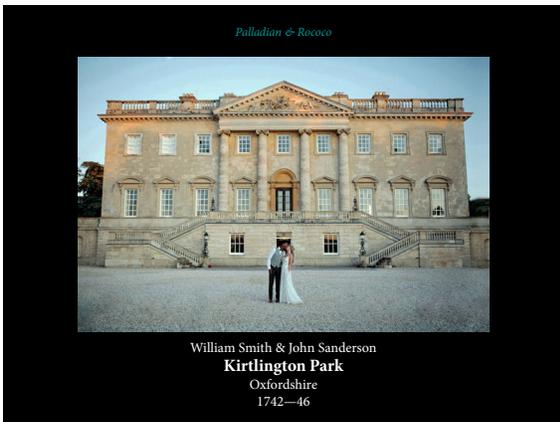
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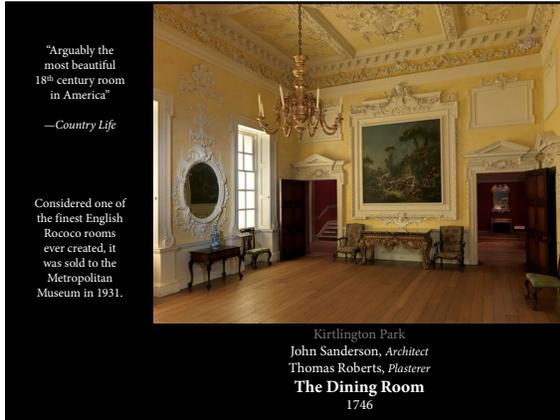
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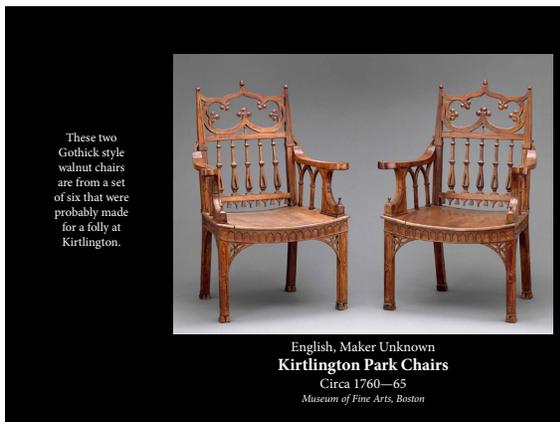
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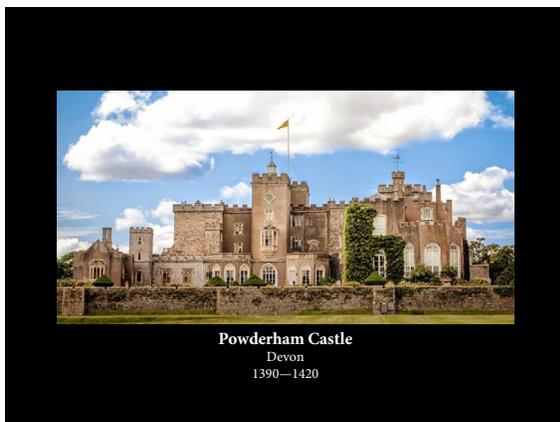
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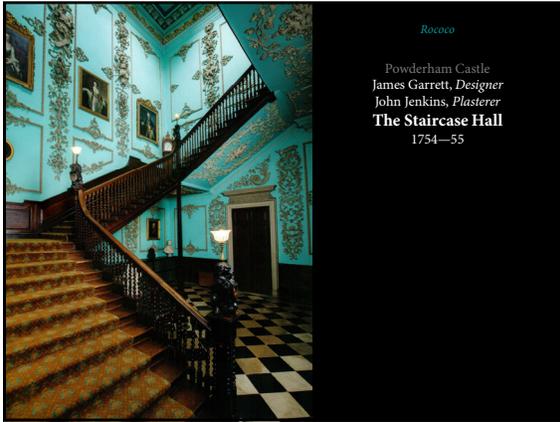
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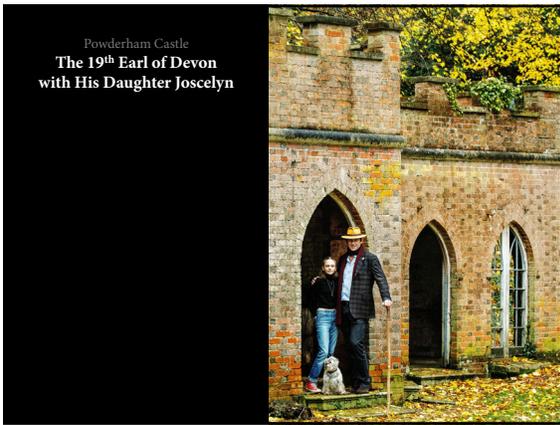
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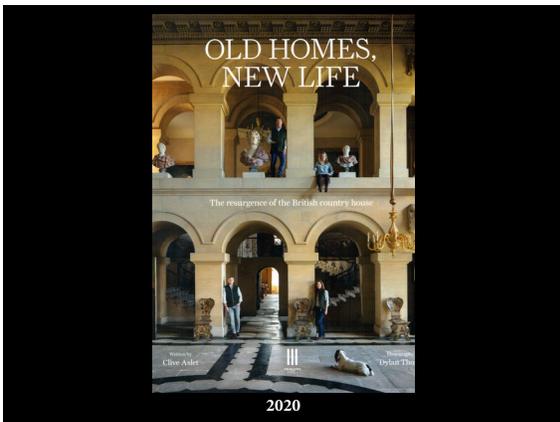
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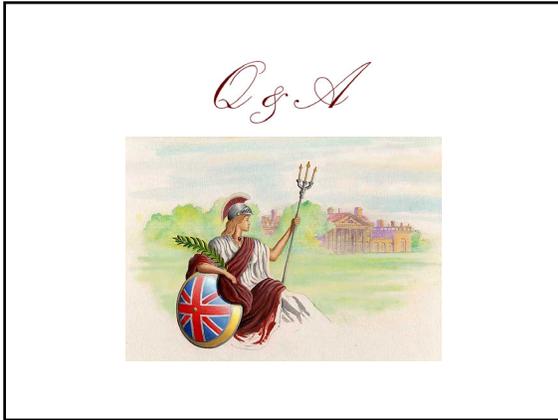
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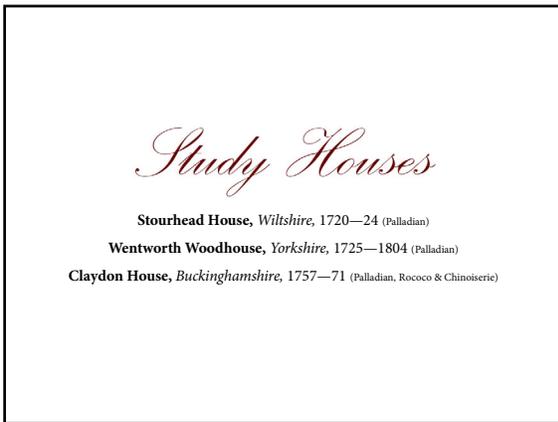
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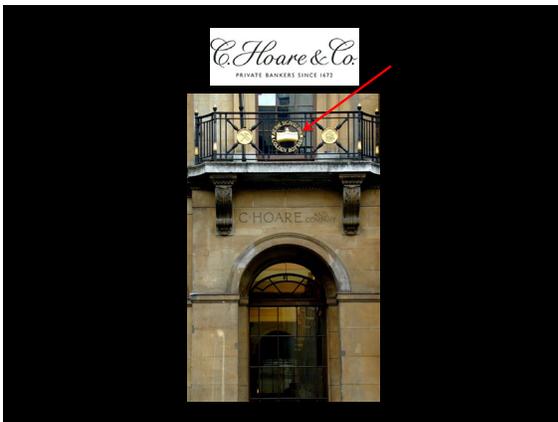
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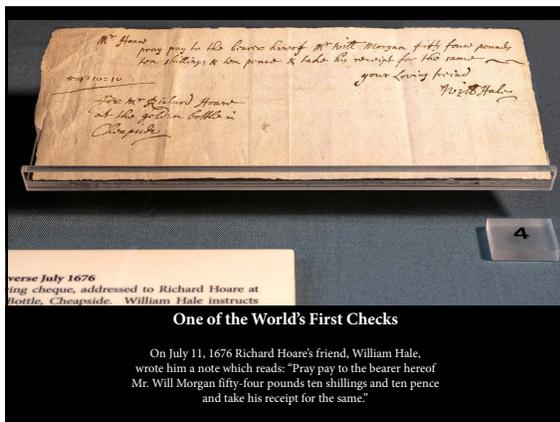
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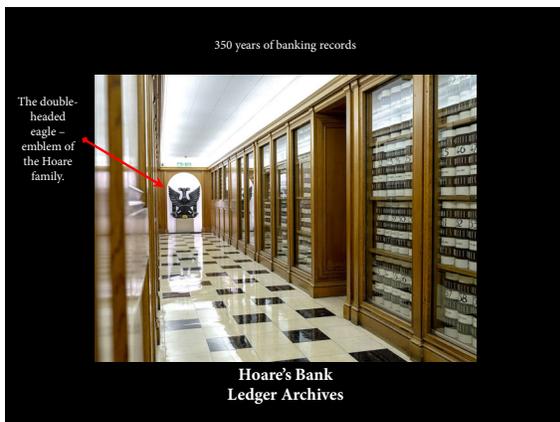
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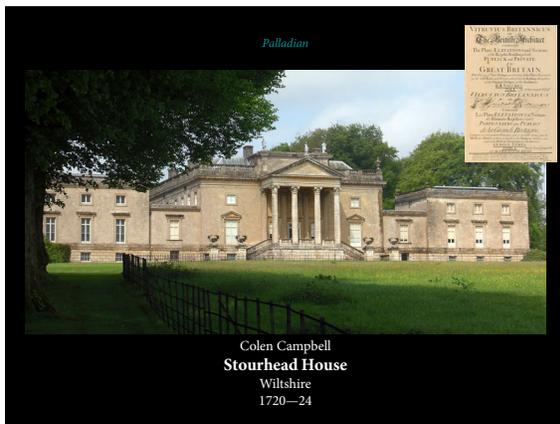
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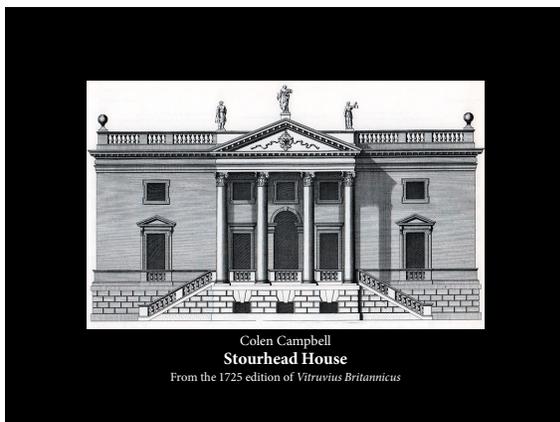
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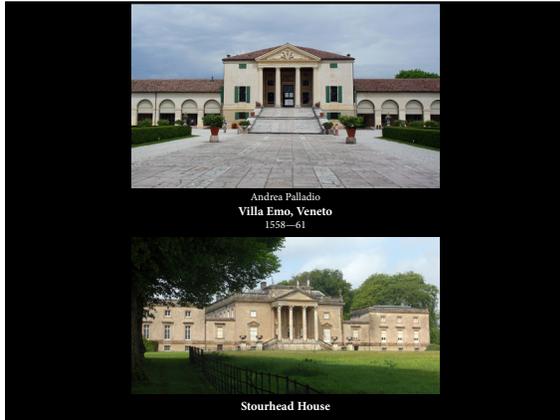
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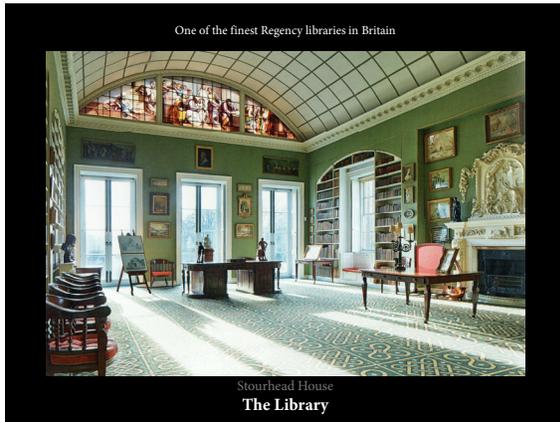
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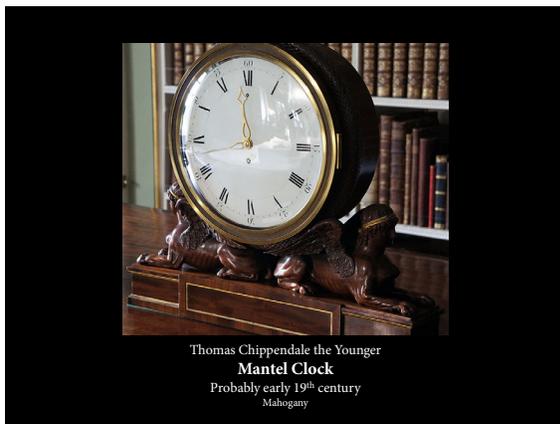
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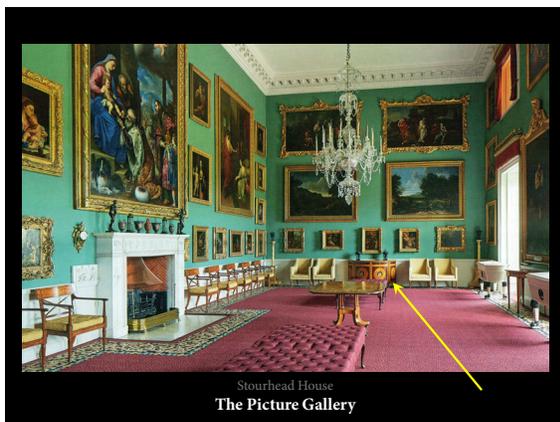
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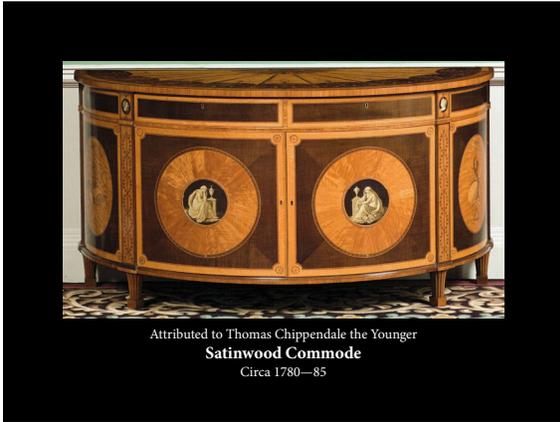
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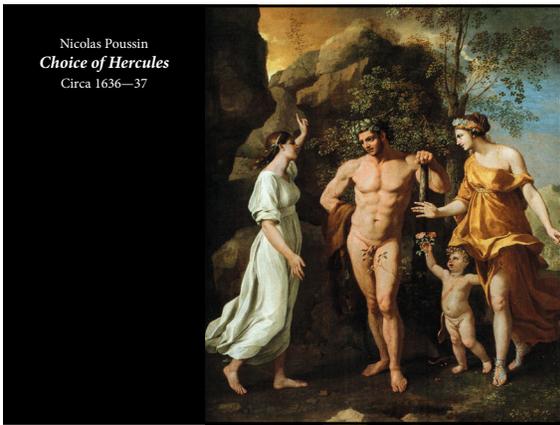
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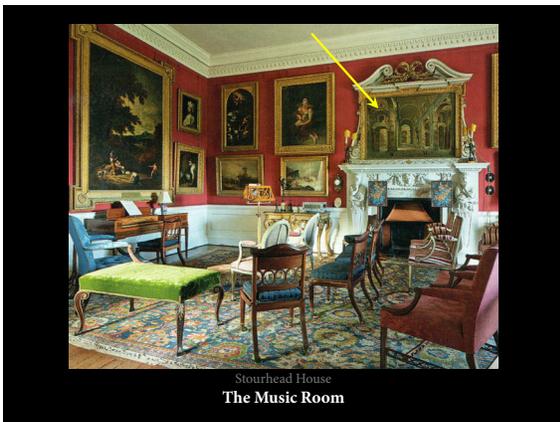
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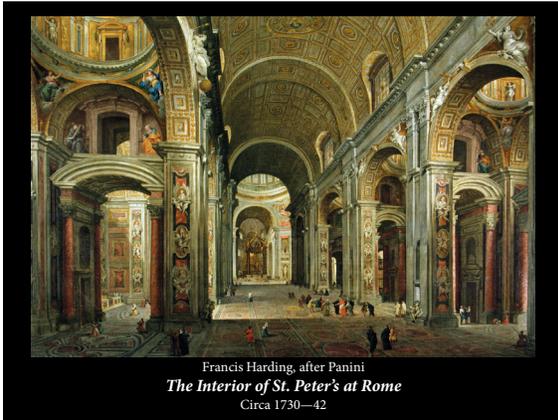
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Francis Harding, after Panini  
*The Interior of St. Peter's at Rome*  
Circa 1730—42

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Stourhead House  
**The Italian Room**

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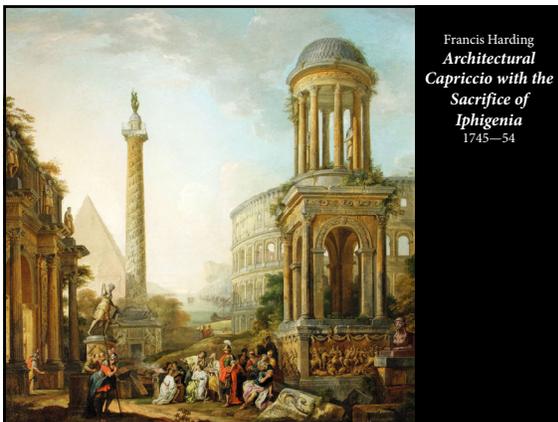
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Francis Harding  
*Architectural Capriccio with the Sacrifice of Iphigenia*  
1745—54

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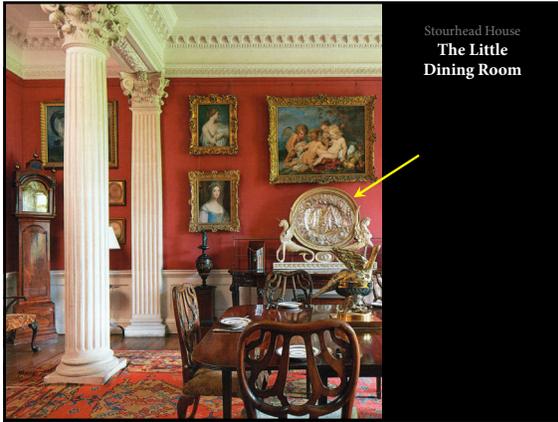
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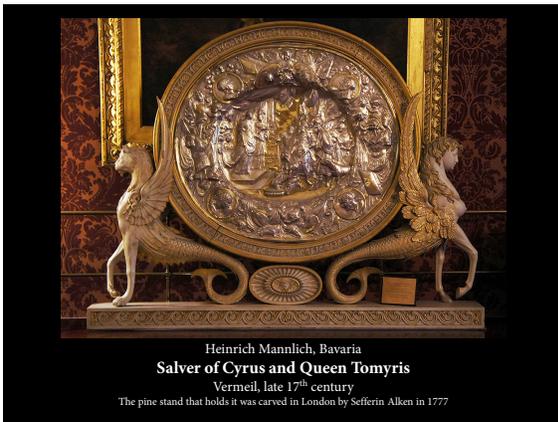
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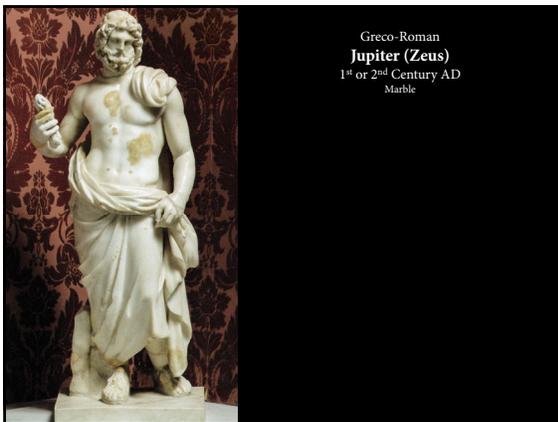
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Inspired by the ideal of the Renaissance city, Sixtus launched a far-sighted rebuilding of Rome.

He laid out new streets, installed 27 new fountains, completed the dome of St. Peter's, and planned to convert the Colosseum into a silk-spinning factory.

Sixtus had no appreciation of antiquities, which he destroyed to use as raw material to serve his Christianizing programs.

His foreign policy was regarded as over-ambitious. He was an enthusiastic enforcer of the Counter-Reformation, excommunicated Queen Elizabeth I, and funded the Spanish Armada.



**Sixtus V**  
Pope from 1585 until 1590

82

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## PIETRA DURA

Pietra dura is an Italian term for hardstone, specifically for the inlay of fitted and highly polished colored stones to create images. After being cut into different shapes, the stones were glued to a base. Stability was achieved by grooving the undersides of the stones so they interlocked, like a jigsaw puzzle. Many different colored stones, particularly marbles, were used, together with semiprecious and precious stones. The technique first appeared in Rome in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and reached its full maturity in Florence, where the Grand Ducal Workshop was founded for such work in 1588.



Martin Carlin & Dominique Daguerre  
**Pietra Dura Cabinet**  
Circa 1778  
*The Royal Collection*

83

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Maker Unknown, Rome  
**The Sixtus Cabinet**  
Circa 1585

Considered the greatest of all Roman pietra dura cabinets, this almost seven-foot-tall piece of furniture is studded with over 25 different varieties of stones, including emeralds, amethysts, citrines, lapis, and turquoise.

The cabinet, which contains over 125 secret drawers, was made for Pope Sixtus V, who installed it at the Villa Montalto, his magnificent estate on the Esquiline Hill that overlooked the Baths of Diocletian.

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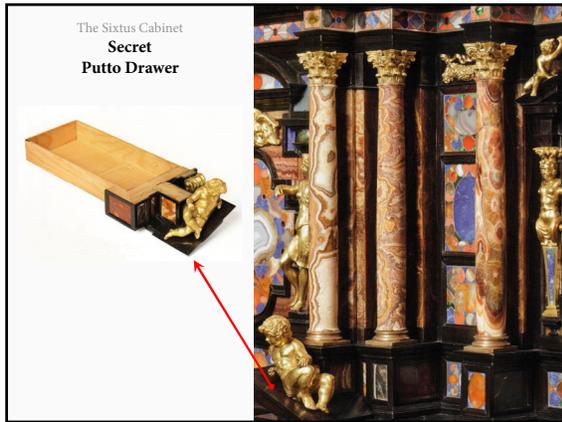
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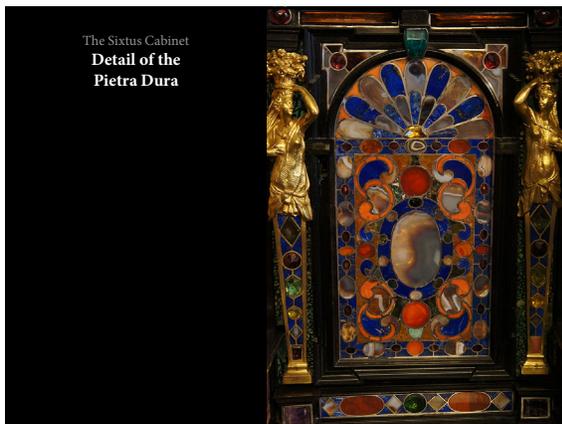
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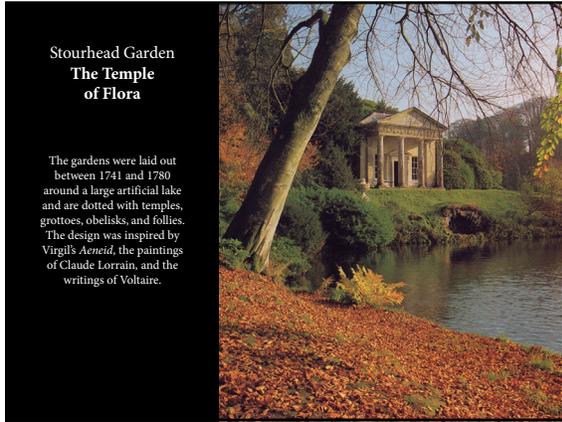
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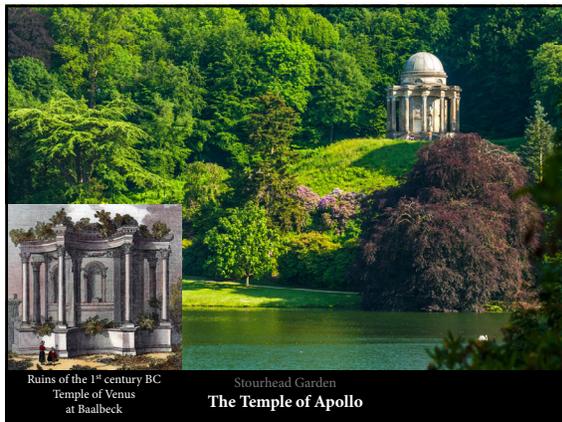
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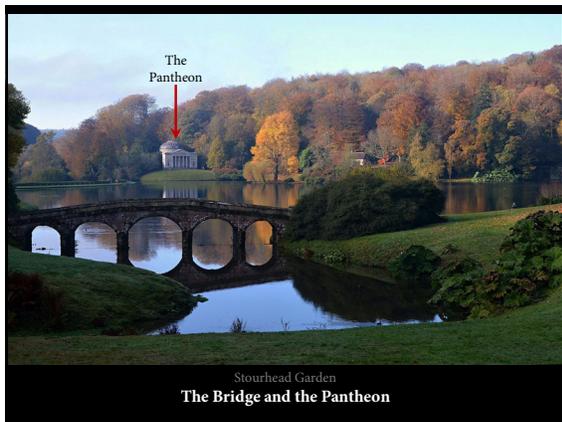
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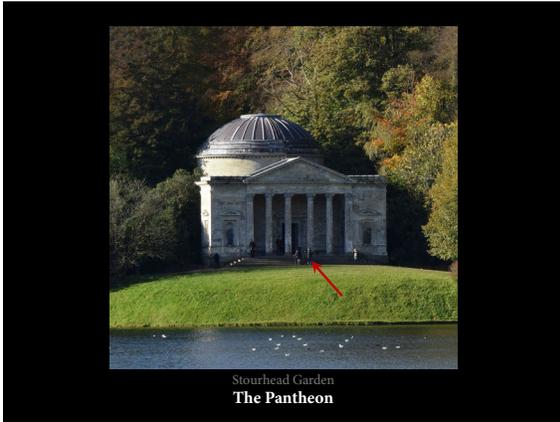
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Stourhead Garden  
**The Pantheon**

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Stourhead Garden  
**Interior of the Pantheon**

92

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*Apollo in his Chariot with the Hours and Aurora*  
attributed to William Hoare of Bath

Stourhead Garden  
**Settee from the Temple of Apollo**  
Circa 1765

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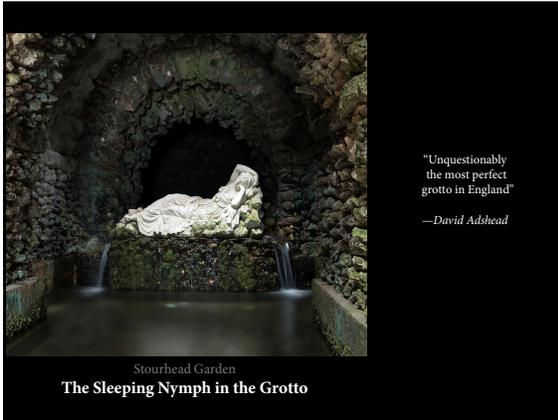
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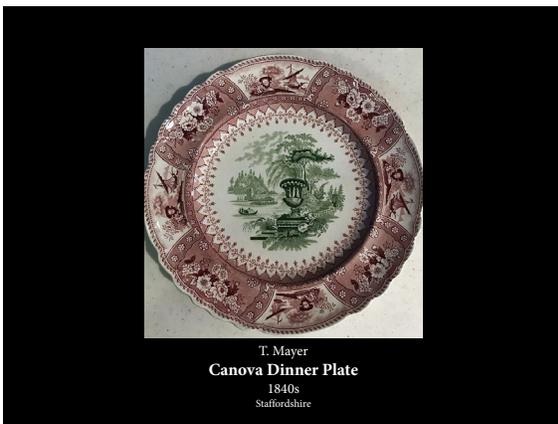
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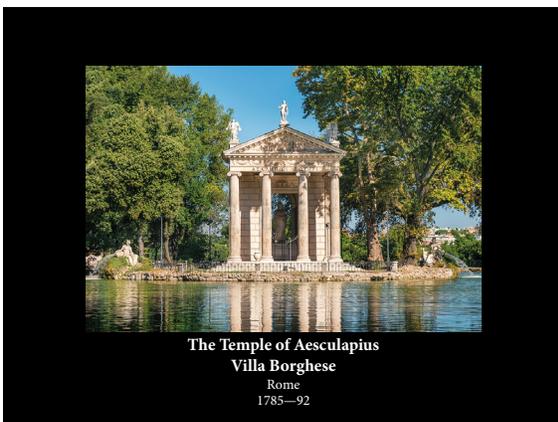
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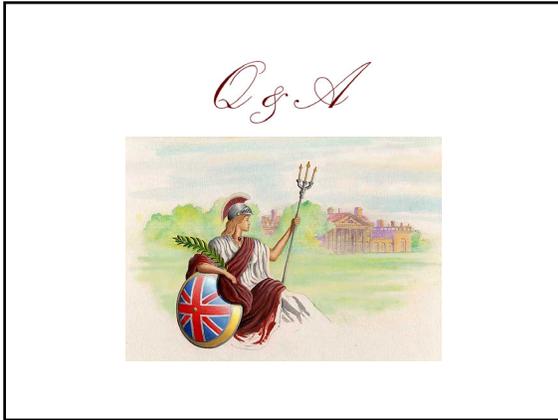
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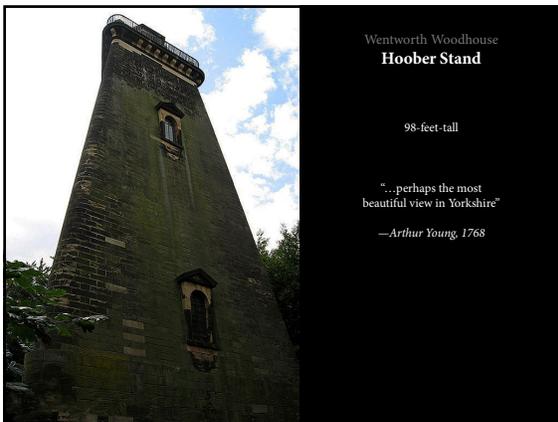
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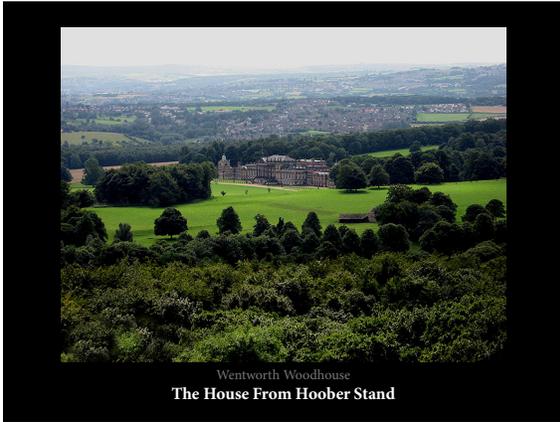
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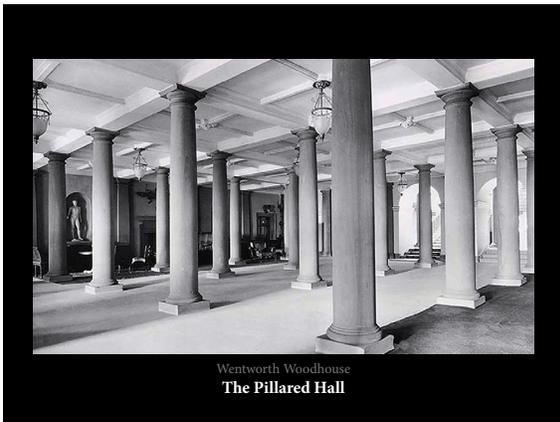
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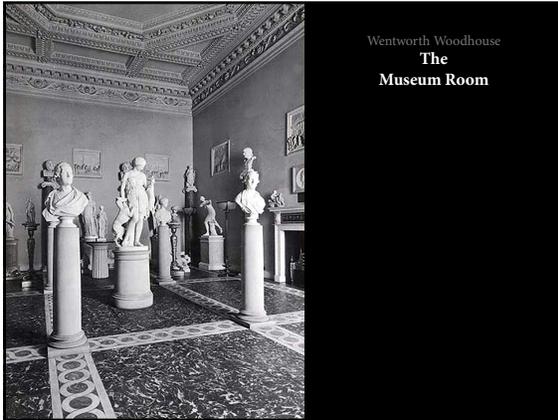
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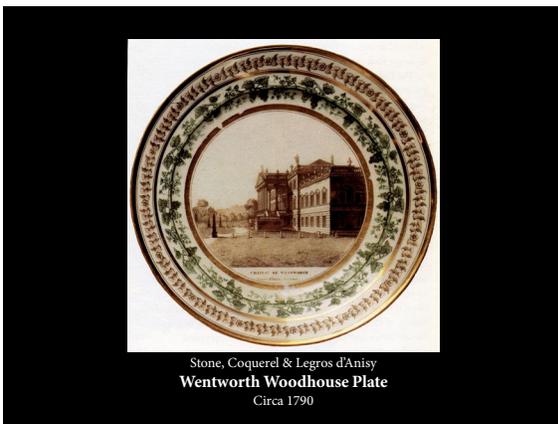
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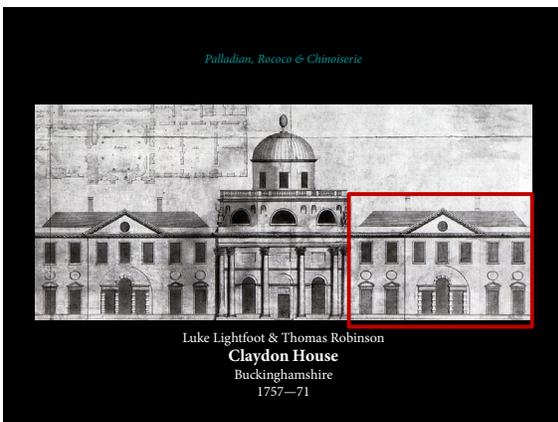
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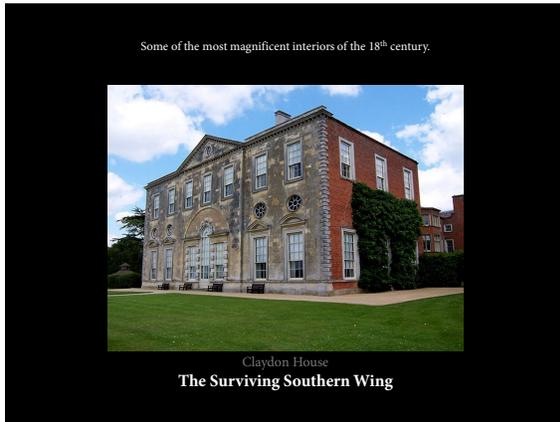
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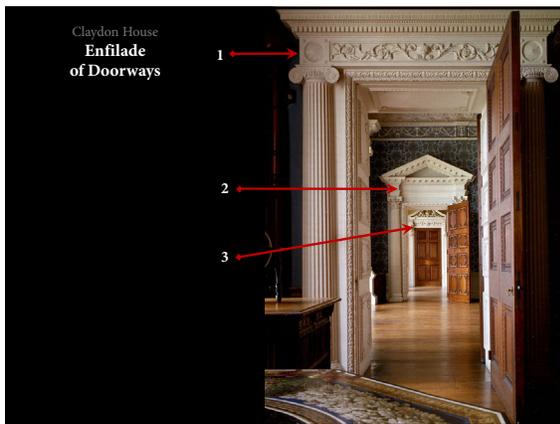
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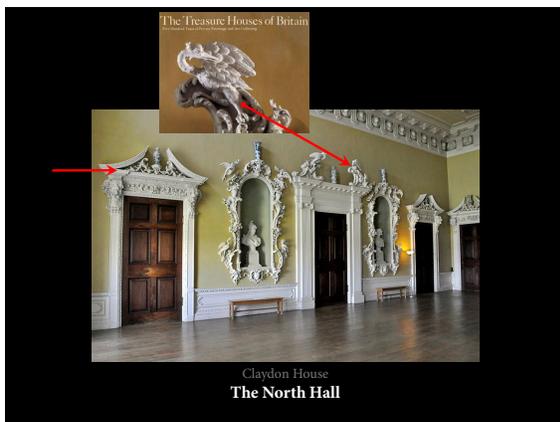
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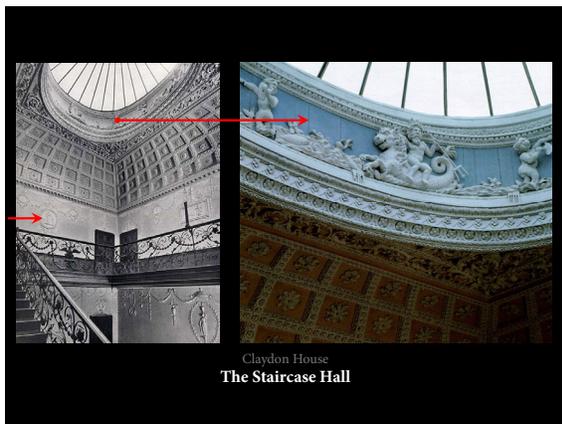
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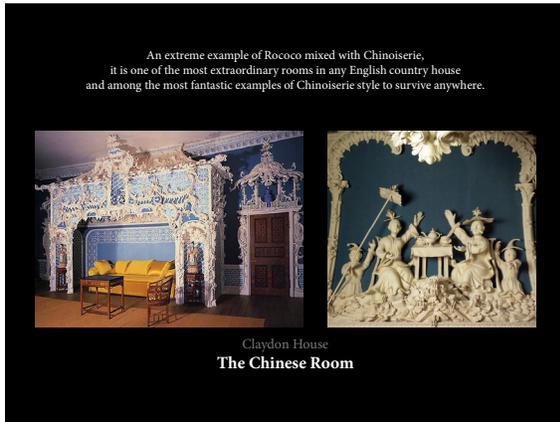
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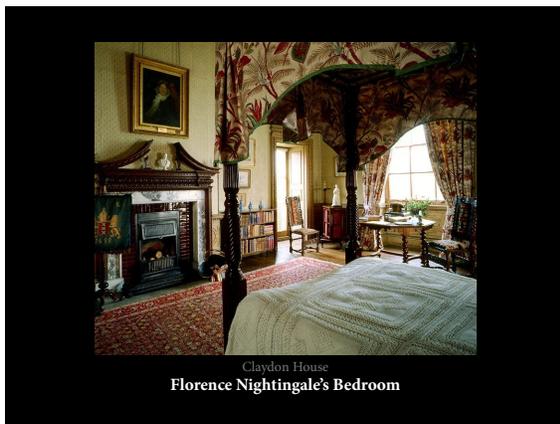
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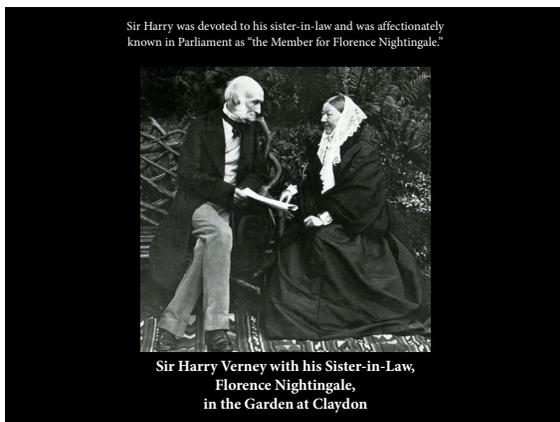
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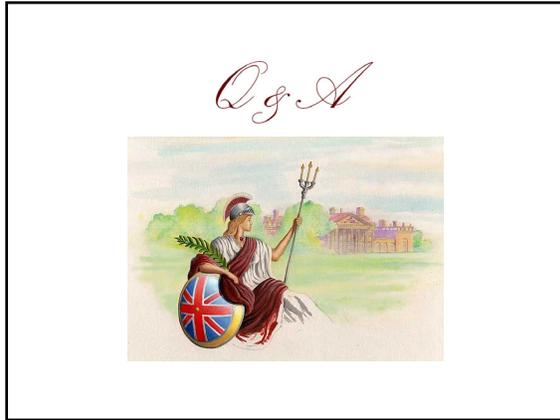
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**Art & Architecture**  
with Curt DiCamillo

Next Session:  
**An Explosion of Beauty, Session 4**  
**Neoclassical (1760—90)**  
February 14, 2023  
4:00 - 5:30 PM EDT

[www.AmericanAncestors.org/events](http://www.AmericanAncestors.org/events)

More information about the houses discussed today can be found on Curt's website:  
[www.TheDiCamillo.com](http://www.TheDiCamillo.com)

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## An Explosion of Beauty, Part II, 2023

Thank you for registering for the online course, *An Explosion of Beauty: The Art, Architecture, and Collections of British Country Houses, Part II!*

*Nowhere in the world are there so many country houses as in England, matchless for the astonishing variety of their styles and the richness of their collections and furniture.*

This quote from the English architectural historian John Harris sums up what many scholars believe is Britain's greatest and most lasting contribution to world culture: the country house. For centuries the country house held a unique position in English life. Before World War I, the families in these power houses ruled Britain. Not only were their houses the center of productive agricultural estates, their breathtaking interiors were the repositories of jaw-dropping collections of art.

In this three-session online course, Curator of Special Collections and celebrated architectural historian Curt DiCamillo, FRSA will guide you through these stately homes, their interiors, and their world-class art collections. This seminar will span nearly two and a half centuries worth of British decorative arts and style, discussing **Palladian, Rococo, Chinoiserie, Neoclassical, Medieval Revival, Chinese and Indian**, and more.

This course includes three 90-minute classes, access to the slides, and a bibliography. You do not need to attend the live sessions to participate in the course. Each class will be recorded and made available to participants until the end of May 2023.

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To join the live sessions, click here: <https://zoom.us/j/9484107022>

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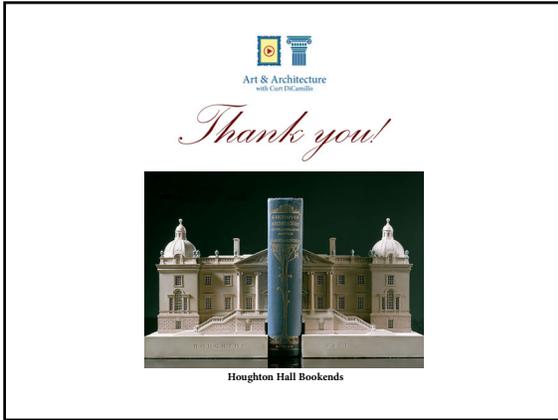
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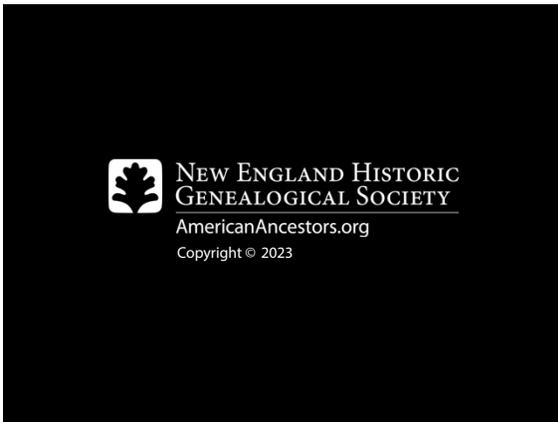
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