



Architecture: Quinlan Terry

A Palladian Country House in Kentucky

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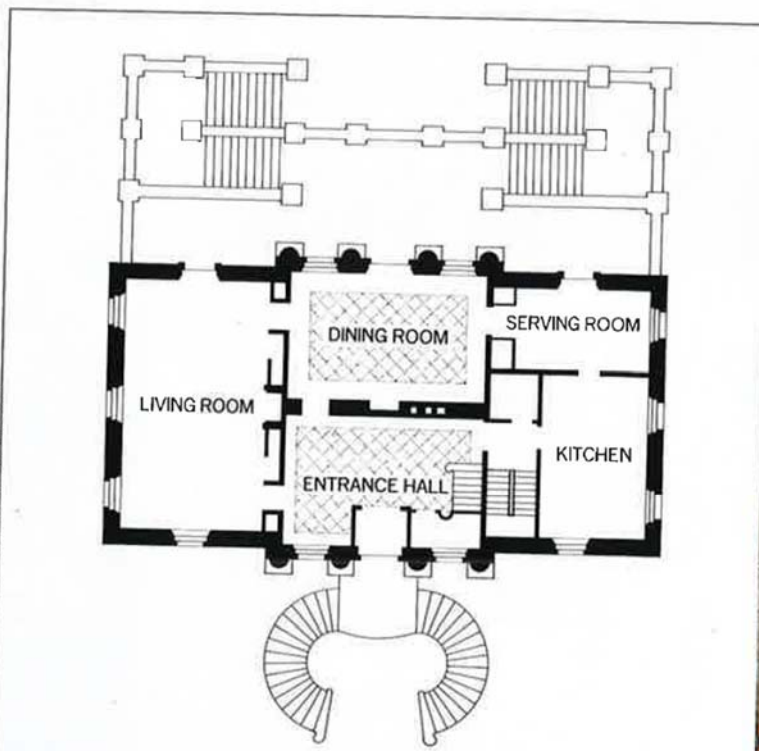


"Mrs. Abercrombie asked for a small, imposing house to form the center of a large horse farm. She also preferred simple stone classical buildings," says British architect Quinlan Terry of his design for Josephine Abercrombie's Pin Oak Farm in Kentucky. ABOVE: A long drive leads to the house, which is on a raised basement with a façade of Corinthian columns supporting a pediment with finials. OPPOSITE: "This is the less formal, rear façade of the house, where Mrs. Abercrombie, her family and friends can sit out in the open when the weather is pleasant," says the architect. BELOW: The first-floor plan shows that the house is small in scale yet formal and symmetrical in its arrangement of rooms and its use of double split stairs at both the front and rear entrances.

A LARGE HORSE BARN with broad overhanging eaves is the first thing you see when visiting Josephine Abercrombie's new house, Pin Oak Farm, in Kentucky. From there the drive leading to the house runs as straight as a Roman road: down to a stream and up the hill. Approached this way, the house is nothing short of spectacular.

On its rise of ground, the house is superbly placed, and the fact that it has a full basement gives it an even greater effect of height. The architectural idea has a grand simplicity: giant Corinthian columns, pediment, walls of sparkling stone, sweeping steps. It is so simple and well proportioned, in fact, that it could be any size. It looks enormous; but when you get up to it, you realize that it is really quite small. That is why it is so important for the first impression to be head-on.

In achieving this masterly illusion, the architect, Quinlan Terry, has created many people's ideal of a late-twentieth-century country house. It is a house that has all the grandeur and presence of one of the great mansions of



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the past but is not overburdened with guest bedrooms or service wings. Most of his clients, Terry finds, do not want to have more than one or two couples staying on the weekend, and modern technology has reduced the need for large numbers of staff.

In England, Terry has had more experience building country houses than any other practicing architect. Pin Oak is his first house in the United States, and it is arguably the most successful of his career so far.

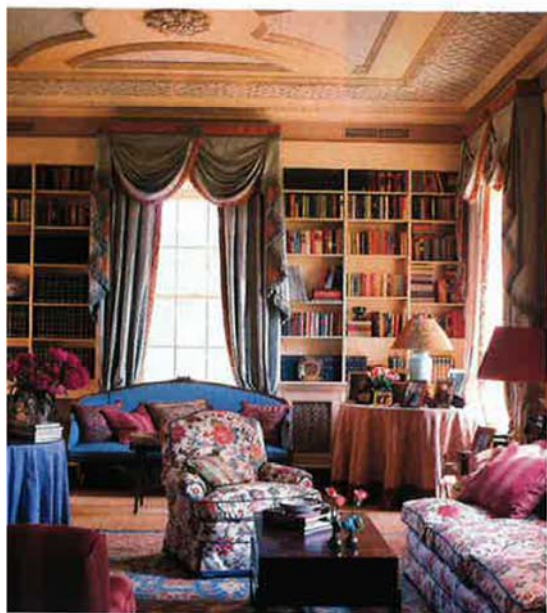
Much of the credit for this must go to his client, Josephine Abercrombie, who had worked out her requirements and stuck to them. They were, simply, for two big rooms downstairs—a living room and a dining room—and three bedrooms. She was not tempted by the idea of a big double-flight staircase, which has been the central feature of some English Palladian houses. Such a stair is impressive for entertaining but seems a luxurious use of space at other times; it also causes the whole scale of the house to expand. Though Mrs. Abercrombie knew her own mind, she also fell in love with the first drawings that Terry produced. The house differs little from those early sketches.

Mrs. Abercrombie first met her architect at his office—

not as straightforward as it sounds, since Terry works from the little East Anglian town of Dedham. It didn't take him long to formulate the basic idea of the plan, which is almost completely symmetrical. Unlike most English houses, oriented to take advantage of the sun, Pin Oak would be entered from the south, so that the cooler garden side could be used for sitting outdoors. In the center is the entrance hall, with a staircase tucked off to the side; behind the entrance hall is the dining room. The whole of the west side is taken up by the big living room, with a table in one corner for Mrs. Abercrombie to work on her bloodstock pedigrees. Balancing this on the east side are the kitchen and serving room. The other staff rooms and the garage have been placed in the basement (this does away with the need for an ungainly service wing). But perfect symmetry might be tedious, so one of the ground-floor windows of the façade is blank. Mrs. Abercrombie claims that the idea for the trompe-l'oeil picture of a dog with which it has been painted is her own contribution to the design. For the interiors throughout, she called upon Anthony P. Browne, a Washington, D.C., designer.

A house of this size, though quite large by modern stan-

BELOW LEFT: Terry enhanced the living room with a decorated ceiling and a wall of bookshelves. Explaining the interiors, designer Anthony Browne says: "I tried to create what takes generations to achieve—the appearance of comfort and that 'inherited look.'"



RIGHT: A wide cornice sets off the tortoiseshell-painted ceiling of the entrance hall. Blending American and English antiques, Browne placed a 19th-century American child's bed used as a log basket, far right, near the winged English mahogany armchair. The late-19th-century to early-20th-century equestrian prints are by Sir Alfred Munnings. Quinlan Terry's drawings for the house are hung along the stair. OPPOSITE: A classical-style marble fireplace and decorated ceiling accent the formal dining room. The mahogany dining table and wheel-back chairs are Hepplewhite.







dards, would have been called a villa in the eighteenth century. For an architectural solution, Terry therefore turned to Marble Hill in Twickenham, one of England's most influential early-Palladian villas, built in 1724-9. It has a three-bay centerpiece and pediment, flanked by single bays to either side. Marble Hill formed the inspiration for one of Terry's first country houses, Newfield in Yorkshire, but this has service wings instead of a basement. At Pin Oak he was able to follow the precedent more closely, though in detail there are many differences.

One is the materials that it is made of. Finding the right stone was a turning point of the whole project. Josephine Abercrombie chose Terry after having seen Waverton, the house he built for Jocelyn Hambro in Gloucestershire. Waverton is constructed of the honey-colored stone seen everywhere in the Cotswolds, and Mrs. Abercrombie wanted this effect in Kentucky. To find an equivalent to the English Clipsham stone used for the architectural

LEFT: Josephine Abercrombie with one of her mares, No Skid, and a young foal. "For Palladian-style architecture, Quinlan Terry is without peer," she says.



dressings was not easy. However, Indiana limestone proved to have an equally attractive color. But Terry had to fly around the United States in search of a suitable stone for the walls. At last he found one in Minnesota, pale yellow with an orange blush and a rough texture. Terry has laid it in irregular courses to form a contrast with the silver smoothness of the limestone centerpiece. As for the craftsmanship, Terry feels that the carving by the Bybee Stone Company is "as good as anything in England."

A terrace runs across the back of the house. It would seem that in the South one might expect a portico, but this would have made the rooms inside too dark. The portico columns are attached, as they are on the entrance front, and to strengthen the sense of architecture, Terry designed a double balustraded staircase of two straight flights that turn 180 degrees halfway up.

The staircase, he says, was one of the most difficult aspects of the commission. To get it right he went to Chis-

wick House, fountainhead of English Palladianism, and measured the one there. By means of the staircase it is possible to walk down to the lawn and out into the paddocks that come up to it. However grand the house, Josephine Abercrombie insisted from the start that she have the easiest possible access to her horses. There are fine eighteenth-century horse paintings inside the house, but it is even more enjoyable to look at the real thing outside.

The horses are almost as well housed as their owner, at least to judge from the five barns placed in a circle, or *rond-point*, around the house. Terry suggested that each of the barns might be linked to the house by an allee of trees, but the idea has not matured, partly because the horses need larger fields than it would have allowed. Nevertheless, planting is under way along some of the other roads. When these trees have grown up and the house settles down comfortably into its surroundings, the triumph of this grand house in miniature will be complete. □

BELOW AND OPPOSITE BELOW: The stallion barn displays a classical pedimented entrance porch, deep overhanging roof and clerestory windows. Caring for one of Mrs. Abercrombie's horses is Irish groom Clifford Barry. The interior of the barn features a large central space of white-painted concrete block with a lofty exposed timber roof and clerestory windows to provide good air circulation.

