sprinkled throughout the site. I counted sixteen clips, all accessible from the text screens below the QTVR panoramas—perhaps the least happy design solution. The clips add detailed views of magnificent architectural elements, such as the upper portions of the Hall of the Abencerrajes, but in general, they feel more like an earnest workaround to give greater visual access to the breathtaking decorative elements. This particular clip clocks in at 19.5 megabytes and requires a few seconds to download on an Ethernet connection. The site might benefit from adding an option to view higher resolution QTVR in the size range of 20 megabytes, which would also take a few seconds to download on a high-speed connection but would offer a higher level of zooming and eliminate the need for still images.

A few minor quibbles and a suggestion: an index or list is a useful way of organizing QTVR for quick access and would be helpful in this site. In addition, a PDF of the entire text would be appreciated by those who prefer to read by turning pages rather than flipping through screens where narrative flow is difficult to maintain.

Like so many historic sites, the Alhambra has been polished for an ever-burgeoning tourism industry, and the website reflects this glamorizing approach. The entire structure suffered much during the post-Muslim period, and in the following centuries, large parts of the complex fell into varying states of disrepair. We remain uncertain about the precise function of each room, most of which were modified after the Christian conquest, as well as the pictorial and textual iconography throughout the palace. The website does not capture this history, and if a second edition is produced, it would be worthwhile to describe restoration and conservation efforts and include historic photos such as those available from the websites of the George Eastman House (www.geh.org) or the Conway Collection at the Courtauld Institute (www.artandarchitecture.org.uk). For example, early photos of the Court of the Lions show the fountain with an upper basin now removed, enough information to raise issues of historic preservation for undergraduates.

This complaint conceals a more serious issue, namely the absence of a trained architectural historian acting as an advisor or, better still, coauthor of the website. Richard Doughty approached several scholars who declined to work on the site, which is understandable. Composing a text for such a website is closer to writing a documentary film script than a conventional article, and a website is generally not a forum for original research. This situation also reflects the still-limited penetration of advanced digital media in the art history classroom. While A Virtual Walking Tour: The Alhambra is absorbing for a solitary viewer driving the mouse, the complexity of the site might overwhelm even the most experienced of lecturers confident in their knowledge of the real place but apprehensive of getting lost in the digital replica.

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Notes
1. This option is exemplified by The History of Architecture website (www.learn.columbia.edu/ha) developed by the Visual Media Center in the Department of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University, with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The site features more than 1,000 QTVR panoramas divided into traditional art historical periods arranged in a basic alphabetical listing by geographical location and with links to ground plans. The site’s fundamental value is providing basic access for teachers and students to one of the largest collections of QTVR currently available. Columbia is planning to donate a selection of their QTVR panoramas to ARStor (www.arstor.org), which will provide an important new venue for QTVR material and enhance accessibility options.
2. Other examples of work by the Gross brothers may be seen at www.williams.edu/art/architectureVR, which shows how much can be accomplished within the financial limitations of an academic setting when talented students team up with engaged faculty.

Murray Grigor, director
Edgar B. Howard, producer
Sir John Soane: An English Architect, An American Legacy

Like Sir John Soane’s house in London, the recently released DVD Sir John Soane: An English Architect, An American Legacy is a curious and divided thing, as its title and multiple narrators confirm. The Checkerboard Film Foundation was established in 1979 with the goal of documenting contributions to the arts in America. Its first two films on architecture treat Gwathmey Siegel and Philip Johnson, and Sir John Soane may seem an odd choice for the third. Not only is he a quintessentially English architect, but he died in 1837. Yet, Soane is less the odd man out than he might at first appear. Gwathmey and Johnson spearheaded the rejection of modernist dogma that led to the postmodern movement in the late 1960s and 1970s. Together with Michael Graves, Robert A. M. Stern, Harry Cobb, Richard Meier, Denise Scott Brown, and Robert Venturi—all of whom, with the surprising exception of Gwathmey, appear in this film—they claimed Soane as a key inspiration for the American postmodernist legacy alluded to in its subtitle. Charles Jencks, present at the inception of the postmodern movement, narrates the film and points the viewer towards the richness of Soane’s house at Lincoln Inn’s Fields, an early nineteenth-century building that was profoundly influential in the 1970s and 1980s.

Postmodernism espoused a return to history, which many interviewees in the film insist had been repressed by modernist pedagogy. Stern, dean of Yale’s School of Architecture, holds Walter Gropius responsible for the removal of history from the curriculum: modernism was to operate as a site for new invention, “an entirely new beginning.” To prove the point Graves recounts how, as a young student at Harvard, the dean stopped him from studying a neoclassical theater design: “You won’t need that
here,” he was told to his horror. Curiously, the “American Legacy” presented by the film slights history prior to the twentieth century. For example, no mention is made of Benjamin Henry Latrobe, who emigrated to America from England and imported Soanian neoclassicism well in advance of the modern movement and the counterreactions it generated.

Despite the film’s ostensible interest in historic architecture, the informative treatment of Soane’s work and travels through Europe provided by Margaret Richardson and Christopher Woodward is at odds with the postmodern counter-narrative that approaches history as a generative device untethered from representational or mimetic imperatives. As Venturi and Scott Brown insist, the project of Venturi’s Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture of 1966 was not to copy historical precedents but to analyze and abstract them into technique, form, geometry, organization, and effect. Given the branding and historical pastiche with which postmodernism is most commonly associated today and that still resonates in Graves’s product designs for Target or the work of many of these architects for Disney, Venturi’s original argument is startling. Indeed, his projects presented in the film in support of this agenda are restrained and elegant and owe as much to late modernism as they do to Soane.

This recent architectural legacy underscores that designing inventively remains Soane’s most memorable contribution. The postmodern critique of modernism—that design must not blindly obey rules—was one that modernism itself directed (perhaps ironically) against the superficial historicisms of the late nineteenth century. But it also echoes the choice that confronted Soane between inventing new styles and forms or copying classical examples thematized in the work of Giovanni Battista Piranesi and George Dance, both important influences on him. Soane’s peers regularly criticized his work for its radicalism, and they decry his Bank of England for its irreverent flouting of neoclassical precepts. Woodward points to Soane’s interests in the domestic project as a site of unrestrained experiment; like the funerary monument, it was a place where the free rein of the imagination was possible.

At its best, Soane’s style was sculptural: the carving out of form from space; heavy domes hanging, almost unsupported, like draped fabric; the layering and involution of spaces. Woodward presents the ruins of Rome and Sicily as sources for Soane. He discerns the lineaments of the architect’s formal vocabulary in the architecture stripped bare of ornaments and stuccos and reduced to the play of form and movement of light and shade across abstract surfaces that Soane associated with antique architecture. Cobb, describing his Portland Museum of Art (1978–82), explicitly invokes these Soanian effects. Despite the flatness of the façade, it abstracts Soane’s historical work—his Dulwich Gallery (1811–14) and Chelsea Stables (1814–17)—into a series of techniques: primitive geometries, a recession of layered planes. “You don’t just cut a hole,” Soane teaches Cobb, “you create a change of plane within which an opening takes place.” Similarly, Venturi and Scott Brown abstract classical vocabularies into rhythm and cadence. Noting that the existing National Gallery in London behaves like a gavotte because of its static symmetries, they liken their extension to a jazz tempo, a dissonance of pulsing compression that is entirely modern.

Although they used classical detailing on the Sainsbury Wing of the National Gallery, Venturi and Scott Brown insist it is not a classical building; if anything, they claim, it is mannerist. (It is, in fact, a classical face on a Miesian building.) Soane, they proclaim, was one of the great mannerists. Perhaps he would agree. After all, he had busts of Michelangelo and Raphael placed on a ledge just below his own, together surveying the concatenation of space, its vertical pulls and compressions, its labyrinthine layers that make up the museum section of his house in Lincoln’s Inn Fields. The dynamic spatial effects of Soane’s most inventive spaces are worthy of Michelangelo’s Laurentian Library foyer or the Gothic cathedrals admired in Soane’s time for their movement and complexity. But the atmospheric effects of his house, in which Soane took great pride, are equally baroque, if not a more modern combination of the sublime and picturesque. Ultimately Soane appears most contemporary through this project, thanks to which in this DVD postmodernism emerges from the dusty corners of history into the present. Jencks notes at one point that Soane is “the Shakespeare of architecture” (no doubt picking up on the Shakespeare recess in Soane’s house). In his buildings, “all conditions and all types of mood” are present.

Mood and atmosphere remain Soane’s quintessential legacy, a romantic interest in architectural effect that ran through the work and theory of the French Enlightenment, seeped into the British as they stood in awe of the moody spaces of their cathedrals or basked in the poetics of ruin-scapes, and tripped fully fledged from the special-effects machinery of the popular shows of Soane’s London.1 Soane was a master curator of special effects, and this is most evident where Sir John Soane: An English Architect, An American Legacy begins: in Soane’s house and in the work of Philip Johnson.

The DVD’s juxtaposition of Soane’s breakfast room, with its hovering pendulative dome, yellow glow, and mirrored dazzle, with Johnson’s guest room at New Canaan and his Kneses Tifereth Israel Synagogue, repeats a comparison Venturi made forty years ago in Complexity and Contradiction.2 Venturi focuses on the layering and formal juxtapositions that link Johnson and Soane, but the luminous color, hidden light washing from above the canopied ceilings, emphasis on atmospherics in the service of mood—these are all Soanian devices taken up by Johnson. Venturi’s book began a backlash against what he saw as the bland reductions of modernism, an extreme (and moralistic) minimalism exemplified by Johnson’s glass house at New Canaan and encapsulated in his “less is a bore” dictum.3 The guest house Johnson built beside it was part of this new movement: the “sexy” interior, in his
terms, to modernism’s poker face. If Sir John Soane: An English Architect, An American Legacy reminds the viewer of the value of the sexing-up of architecture and of Soane’s pursuit of mood as an endeavor worth taking seriously, it will have proved a success.

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Notes
3. Ibid., 25.

Jesper Wachtmeister, director

Kochuu: Japanese Architecture/Influence & Origin
www.frif.com

Jesper Wachtmeister’s Kochuu: Japanese Architecture/Influence & Origin boldly begins with seven different architects’ perspectives from inside and outside Japan. Viewers hear Tadao Andō explain, “I want visitors before they enter the building to be able to reflect on what kind of architecture it is,” while they watch footage of people walking through his minimal concrete Benesse House art village (1992–2006) set within the dramatic landscape of Naoshima Island in Japan’s Inland Sea. Toyo Itô describes his interest in the ambiguity between outdoors and indoors in traditional Japanese architecture as the camera captures the ride up a glazed elevator within the open structural cores of his glass and steel Sendai Mediatheque (2001). In stark contrast, architect/theorist Juhani Pallasmaa is pictured in front of Alvar Aalto’s Villa Mairea (1937–39) citing the power of Japanese influence on Finnish architects, and Sverre Fehn affirms that, for him, “the flexibility of Japanese buildings was exciting.” Finnish architect Kristian Gullichsen discusses his long interest in “the Japanese tradition of building in wood,” while architect Kazuo Shinohara, set within his stainless steel Tokyo Institute of Technology Centennial Hall (1987), proclaims that “chaos is not necessarily bad.” Further mystifying this picture, Kishō Kurokawa asserts, “Even using modern high-tech, we want the ‘invisible’ Japanese traditions to be present.”

Despite the seemingly contradictory and separate nature of these themes—modern versus traditional Japanese architecture from domestic and international perspectives—the Scandinavian filmmaker Wachtmeister attempts to bring them together through the notion of “kochuu 蓋中,” which literally translates as “in the jar.” This is a reference to the tradition of constructing microcosmic spaces in Japan such as tiny tea houses that Kurokawa describes as “small space[s] filled with big thoughts.” Kurokawa argues that this notion is pervasive in contemporary Japanese architecture, and it thus becomes the theme of Wachtmeister’s relatively short film filled with big thoughts.

The strength of Kochuu is its vivid depiction of the dynamics of “Japanese Architecture” conveyed as a virtual visit from the perspective of both the observer and architect. Like the format of Nathaniel Kahn’s film My Architect (2003) and Sydney Pollack’s Sketches of Frank Gehry (2005), both of which include footage of buildings and interviews, Kochuu goes beyond the still architectural photograph to include the promenade to and through buildings. These moving images are brilliantly shaped by subtle background noises such as cicadas chirping or sounds of geta (wooden clogs) on a stone path to a tea-house. In contrast to typical still photographs of Andō’s architecture, almost always shot with a blue-sky background so that gray exposed concrete walls do not disappear against a gray sky, the film footage captures the character of his absolutely smooth concrete surfaces in the rain or the effect of gentle waves in the concrete lotus pond of his Water Temple (Awajishima Island, 1991). Moreover, rather than hearing Andō’s dubbed voice, the viewer listens to the particular character of his Osaka-dialect while reading subtitles.

Wachtmeister’s film footage of architects describing their design ideas within their realized buildings is a veritable historical document. The viewer understands the bodily experience of the