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Homes & Gardens



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Left and bottom: Estate Cane Garden, Richard H. Jenrette's Palladian-style villa on St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands. Below: Jenrette in front of his beloved Edgewater in upstate New York.

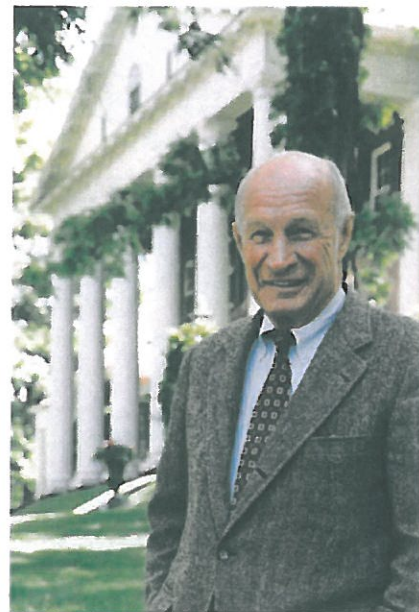
## A gentleman's LEGACY

*Richard Jenrette collects great American homes, restores them, then opens the doors to the public*

Growing up in Raleigh, North Carolina, on the eve of World War II, Richard Hampton Jenrette was love struck — with grand Southern homes.

"I guess I had seen *Gone With The Wind* several times by then, and it made an indelible impression on me," says Jenrette. Even before seeing the saga of great columned mansions set against the rich verdure of the southern landscape, he had taken to drawing homes and going on long walks with his mother and sister around their Raleigh neighborhood, critiquing various buildings and asking questions about the city's architectural patrimony. "But there was one home under construction that was the grandest thing I or anyone in Raleigh had ever seen, called Tatton Hall," Jenrette continues. "It must have fostered in me a desire to have something grand myself one day."

He has succeeded in that quest. A legendary financier, described by *The New York Times* as "the last gentleman on Wall Street," Jenrette has used his wealth to accumulate an exceptional portfolio of classical homes, from the imposing grandeur of Edgewater along the Hudson River in New York to the elegant



BY JAMES MCCOWN



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simplicity of the Roper House in Charleston, South Carolina. Six residences form his nonprofit Classical American Homes Preservation Trust, charged with maintaining and operating the collection. The other properties include the Millford Plantation in Pinewood, South Carolina, noted for its six imposing Corinthian columns and a central foyer so wide that it is said two mounted horsemen could ride down it abreast; Ayr Mount, a comparatively simple Federal-style house in Hillsborough, North Carolina; Estate Cane Garden, a former sugar plantation in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands; and the George F. Baker Houses, a townhouse complex on the Upper East Side of Manhattan.

Jenrette continues to live in four of the homes — Edgewater, the Baker Houses, the Roper House, and Cane Garden — but his will specifies that all of the properties will belong to the trust upon his death.

And even when he is in residence, all are open to the public. The trust's mission is simple: "To preserve, protect, and open to the public examples of classical American residential architecture, surrounding landscapes, and trails, as well as fine and decorative arts of the first half of the nineteenth century."

Jenrette considers the trust to be a greater legacy than his time on Wall Street. A co-founder of the investment banking firm Donaldson, Lufkin and Jenrette in the late 1950s, he served as its chairman from 1974 to 1996 and was the chief mastermind of the firm's sale in the mid 1980s to The Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States, an event that gave Jenrette a large net worth and a seat on Equitable's board.

"We shape our buildings, and thereafter they shape us," Winston Churchill famously said, and anglophile



Top to bottom: A massive entablature and six imposing Corinthian columns announce Millford Plantation, a National Historic Landmark in Pinewood, South Carolina. The interior features original Duncan Phyfe furniture, while the gardens are formal in arrangement.





Two-story Ionic columns define the main façade of the Greek Revival Roper House in Charleston, South Carolina, whose main piazza affords views of the city's harbor.

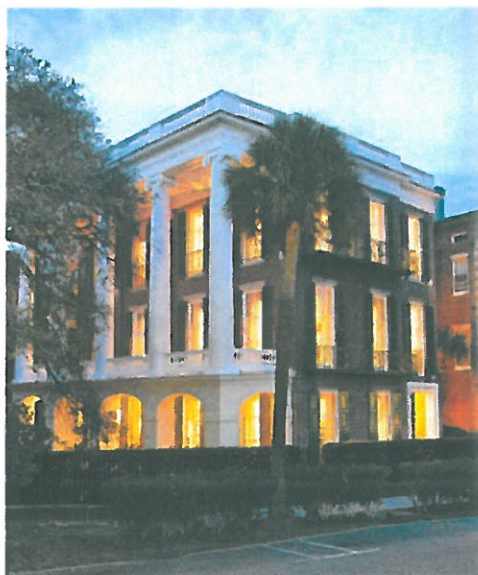
Jenrette concurs.

"Classicism keeps coming back," he says, reinventing itself afresh with each passing generation. "I definitely agree with the idea that these buildings can shape our character."

He has a passion for things uniquely American. Furniture by the great New York cabinetmaker Duncan Phyfe is a particular favorite, and he lucked upon paintings of the Donaldson family, builders of Edgewater, going as far as Spain to track them down and repatriate them to their original home.

Jenrette also subscribes to the Jeffersonian idea that classical architecture played a large role in helping a young nation define itself. How democratic or monarchical. How urban or agrarian. How individualistic or collectivist.

"Dick has spent the better part of his life trying to understand these buildings," says Carter L. Hudgins, director of the Graduate Program in Historic Preservation co-sponsored by Clemson University and the College of Charleston. "He knows that architecture is an expression of certain meanings of time and place. Greek and



Roman classical styles were part of a search for national aspirations, and the South had a particular affinity for the Greek Revival style." But preserving these houses is anything but frivolous, Hudgins says. "Preserving them allows us to hold onto materials and crafts that simply cannot be replaced." Patrons like Jenrette provide resources that the government cannot match.

"Some will say that the genius of historic preservation in this country has been that it was private from the very beginning," Hudgins says, adding that Charleston had the nation's first historic preservation district.

"Good preservation is contagious," Jenrette says. "People see what you're doing and then they do likewise." ■