

*Remarks by Peter Kenny on the Occasion of the Presentation of the*

*Eric E. Wunsch Award for Excellence in the American Arts*

*To Richard Hampton Jenrette*

*January 22, 2014*

First, let me offer my thanks to Peter Wunsch and to John Hays for providing the opportunity and the venue to celebrate and remember our good friend Martin Wunsch and his abiding respect for those special individuals and institutions who have worked so tirelessly to advance the field of American Arts. I'm especially delighted to be asked today to say a few words in honor of today's second recipient of the Wunsch Award, one of the most talented, cordial, and refined gentleman I know, Dick Jenrette. Dick's accomplishments in the worlds of American finance, arts and culture, and historic preservation are extraordinary and legend. And it is hard to imagine a more worthy recipient of an award dedicated to encouraging the highest standards of excellence in the study and preservation of America's cultural heritage in architecture, furniture, and the decorative arts.

Over the past 45 years Dick has owned and meticulously restored a dozen historic and architecturally significant homes, six outstanding examples of which

now comprise his Classical American Homes Preservation Trust, whose mission is to preserve, protect, and open to the public examples of some of America's finest surviving classical homes from the first half of the nineteenth century along with their surrounding landscapes. But don't mistake any of these beautiful classical homes for your typical historic house museums run by bureaucrats and collection managers. (Don't those places just give you the creeps?) In the Classical American Homes Preservation Trust, the operative word is home. And while historic preservation is at the heart of Dick's enterprise an unstated but equally important part of the Trust's mission, in Dick's own words, "is to make the experience of visiting, learning about, and appreciating our houses fun. As Dick likes to say, "too often house museums cannot be enjoyed in their natural state, as places used for entertaining and gathering friends." In Dick's houses, the past is always present and the present melds seamlessly with the timeless beauty of the past. Dick wants you to feel at home in these houses, to enjoy the company of friends, to revel in the beauty of their interiors with music, lively receptions, talks by historians of all stripes, and best of all, to make you feel as if you really belong there. Why, he even lets you sit on his Duncan Phyfe chairs! This, I think, is Dick's secret formula, how he inspires and how he leads. There are few among us this evening who has not savored the fruits of Dick's hospitality and vision at

Edgewater in New York's magnificent Hudson Valley, at the Roper House on the Battery in historic Charleston, or right here in Manhattan at 93<sup>rd</sup> Street in the George Baker Houses, headquarters of the Classical American Homes Preservation Trust.

The preservation of America's historic homes and landscapes as vehicles for the teaching of American cultural, architectural, and economic history, as places that can and should be filled with as much life today as in their storied pasts, this is Dick's great accomplishment and his clarion call for others to follow in his path. Never a zealot or evangelist for the cause of preservation, he leads in this field through excellence and solid, quiet example. Everything about Dick's classical American homes from their graceful entablatures to their interior decoration bespeaks a sense of permanence, balance, symmetry, repose, all hallmarks of classical taste. And you'll pardon me if I stretch the religious metaphor just a little bit farther, here, by describing Dick as an apostle of beauty, that ineffable quality that often can only be appreciated when one finds him or herself in its presence. In 1841, Andrew Jackson Downing's published his book, *Cottage Residences*. The dedication of the book reads: to "Robert Donaldson, Esq. of Blithewood, on the Hudson, *Arbiter elegantiarum*," or, ultimate judge in matters of taste. In 1852, Robert Donaldson became the occupant of Edgewater, in Barrytown New York,

the crown jewel of the Classical American Homes Preservation Trust. It strikes me that when Dick purchased that great house on the Hudson in 1969, he inherited the title that Downing so graciously bestowed upon Robert Donaldson. And he has been living up to it ever since. I salute Dick on being the recipient of this prestigious award as well as all of his team at the Classical American Homes Preservation Trust, including its Executive Director, Margize Howell who is here with us today to accept it on Dick's behalf. Congratulations!