

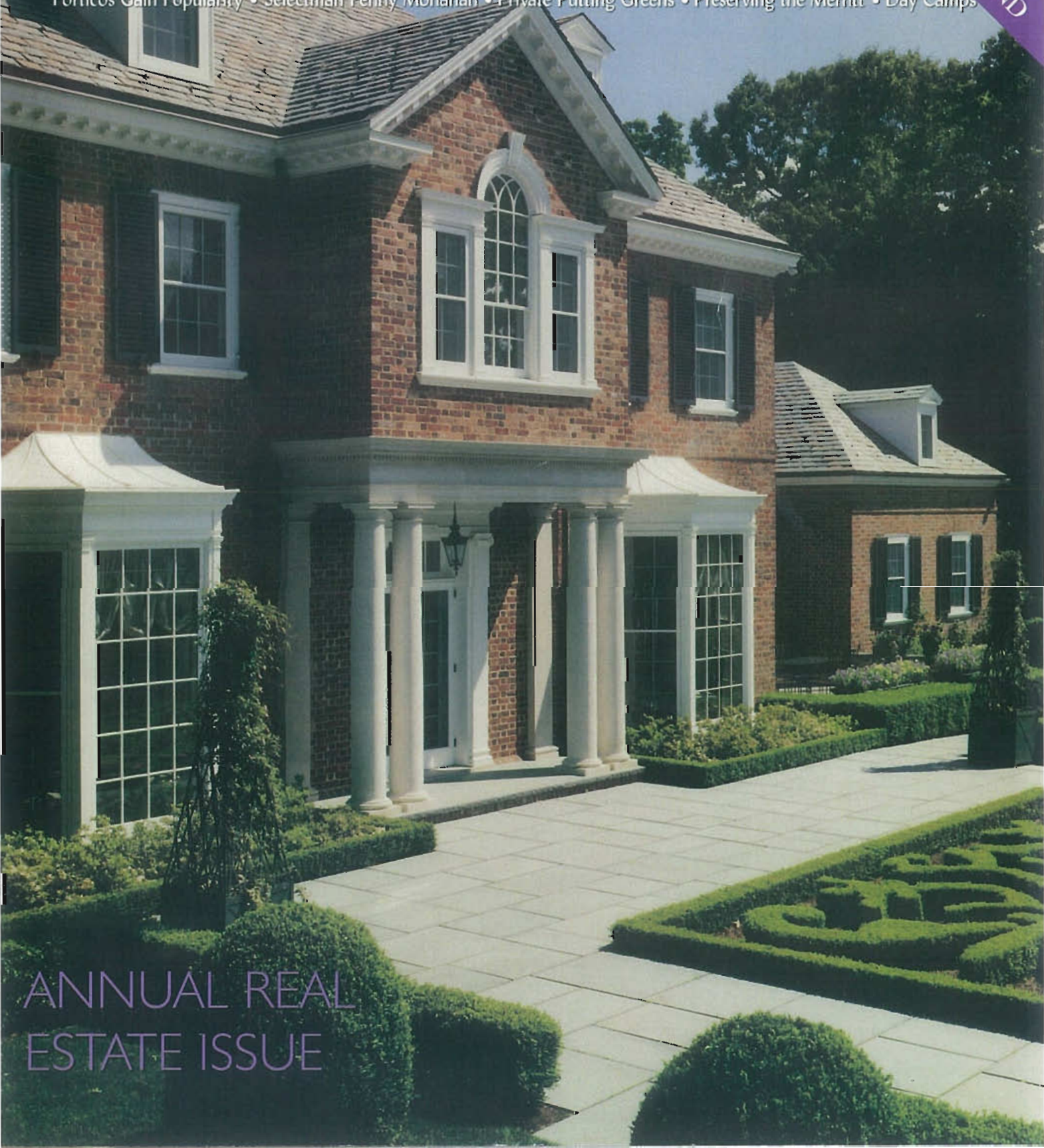
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GREENWICH

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AN AFGHAN
VIEWS HIS NATIVE LAND



ANNUAL REAL
ESTATE ISSUE



PORTICOS SEEM TO BE GOING UP ALL OVER TOWN.
SOME ARE GOOD, SOME ARE NOT.

FOLLOW THE RULES

BY JAIMIE SEATON



Built in 1942 and based on a Maryland plantation mansion, this Georgian was invigorated by Charles Hilton and Daniel Pardy of Hilton-VanderHorn Architects. To accommodate a 2nd-floor addition at the rear of the house, the architects added a portico. The sweeping lawn and formal parterre of boxwood on the piazza echo the simple elegance of the Doric columns made of Indiana limestone.



One Saturday last year, as Greenwich architect Jon Halper was entering the Saugatuck Rowing Club in Westport, he noticed a woman meticulously measuring the building's portico.

"She was clearly measuring the width and depth," Halper says with slight amusement, "so I said, 'May I help you?' She looked up from her tape measure and said, 'I really like this portico and I'm thinking of putting it on my house.' I told her, 'I'm the architect and I'm flattered, but this is a 15,000-square-foot building. You might want to consider the size before putting this portico on your house.'"

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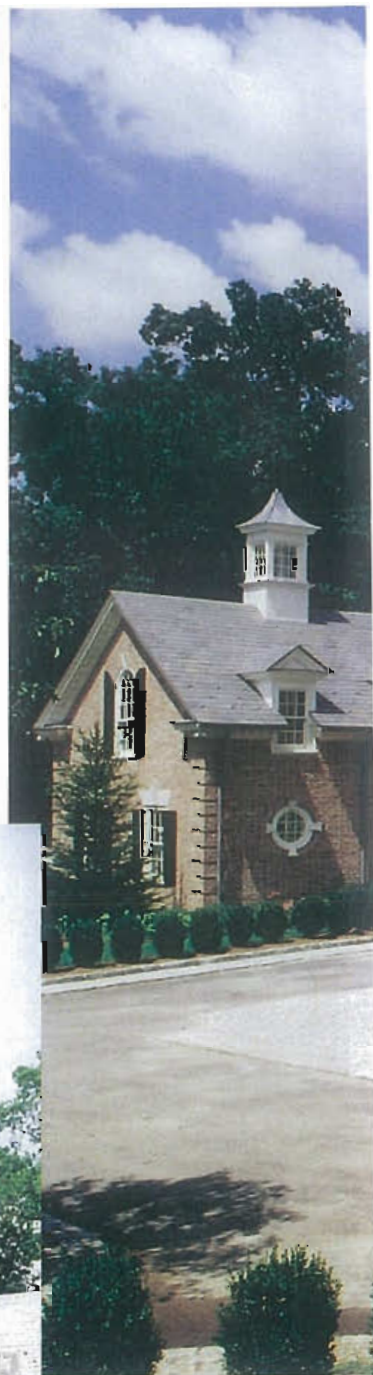
Copyright infringement aside, the woman's architectural innocence embodies some of the pitfalls associated with bad portico design and execution.

"She looked at the portico, thought it was nicely designed and thought she only needed to know the measurements to reproduce it, but there is so much more to good design than that," says Halper, whose firm, Halper Owens Architects, has offices in both Greenwich and Washington Depot.

Not that the woman should be criticized too harshly for her ignorance. Each of the architects interviewed for this article said that lack of knowledge about portico design runs rampant.

Of course, this may come as no surprise to residents who have witnessed porticos — some, extraordinarily beautiful and others, painful eyesores — going up all over town. Whether part of new homes or additions to existing structures, the portico just may be Greenwich's newest status symbol. One resident reports that on her street of eighteen homes, three new porticos have gone up in the last year alone.

"That's two too many," says Richard Cameron, half in jest. "Not every house needs a portico, nor does every street need five porticos, which isn't to say I'm anti-portico." To the contrary, Cameron, of Cameron, Cameron and Taylor and a founder of the Institute of Classical Architecture, both of which are in New York, waxed poetic about the simple yet elegant portico as he explained its evolution from ancient outdoor gathering place to modern entryway.



A new Georgian in all its perfect symmetry came from the drawing board of Doug VanderHorn. The house sports porticos with wooden Doric columns front and back (both pages).



The closest historical prototype to what we know as a portico is the Greek stoa, which was a long colonnaded space, typically near the marketplace or agora. Traditionally, the stoa was either freestanding or connected to a theater building. (George Washington's Mount Vernon has a wonderful example of a Greek stoa.)

The Romans took the stoa and adapted the idea, actually attaching the columns to their basilicas. One of the earliest Roman examples of a portico being used on a structure is the Porticus Aemilia, which was built in 193 B.C.

"These days, when people think of a portico, they are most likely thinking of a temple front, which normally is a line of columns with a gable roof, most often triangular," explains Cameron.

The two most common types of porticos have either a pediment or balustrade on top of columns.

The modern portico dates to the Renaissance and Andrea Palladio (1518–1580), who was the first designer to take a temple front and apply it to a house. The Villa Rotunda (1567–1570), a private residence built in Vincenza,