



WEBSITE REVIEW: The Greene and Greene Virtual Archives

<http://www.usc.edu/dept/architecture/greeneandgreene/aboutgreenes.html>

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Charles Sumner Greene and Henry Mather Greene, names sadly still found only in the footnotes of many studies, created a remarkable contribution to the renaissance of domestic architecture and interior design at the turn of the twentieth century. The relative

neglect of their lavish and multivalent production may, in some part, be attributed to the concentration of their output principally within California, a region which, beyond a handful of good local and monographic studies, has yet to be explored fully in critical



Figure 1 David Berry Gamble House, Pasadena, California 1907–09



Figure 2 Side chair, detail of back (view without background), 1908, maple, figured maple, oak, ebony, and silver, David Berry Gamble House, Pasadena, California (GGUSC-Gamble-DA-028A)

scholarship.¹ The newly launched Greene and Greene Virtual Archives will hopefully encourage a wider awareness and ensuing examination of their distinctive engagement with the main tropes of the design revival movement: natural materials, the aesthetic and formal influence of Japan, domestic architecture and design as a visualisation of the principles of the *gesamtkunstwerk*.

This archive is a vital resource for the academic researcher, student and collector alike. Offering more than four thousand images of drawings, sketches, photographs, correspondence and other historical documents, the virtual visitor gains a comprehensive grasp of the work of Greene and

Greene's southern California design firm (active 1894-1922). These resources have been presented as a consequence of the collaboration between the four core collections of Greene and Greene archival material: the Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library at Columbia University in the City of New York; the Environmental Design Archives at the University of California, Berkeley; The Gamble House, University of Southern California, Pasadena, California; and the Greene and Greene Archives, USC at The Huntington Library in San Marino, California.

This site documents the extraordinary diversity of forms in which the brothers experimented as never before. In addition to



an encyclopaedic collection of original photographs and primary documents, the real highlights of the site are the high-resolution images of architectural drawings, furniture and designed objects. The facility to zoom in and around in the detail images to a marvellous proximity is breath-taking, one can see the tiniest minutiae of graining and joinery in the furniture images, the delicate chalk and

pencil marks of the drawings and blueprints. The dichotomy within art publishing of recent years, between the beautifully illustrated but largely descriptive colour coffee-table book and the frustratingly grainy scanned illustrations within nonetheless exorbitantly costly scholarly texts, can be bridged by the opulent profusion of images available on archive sites such as this one. Before this shift, only

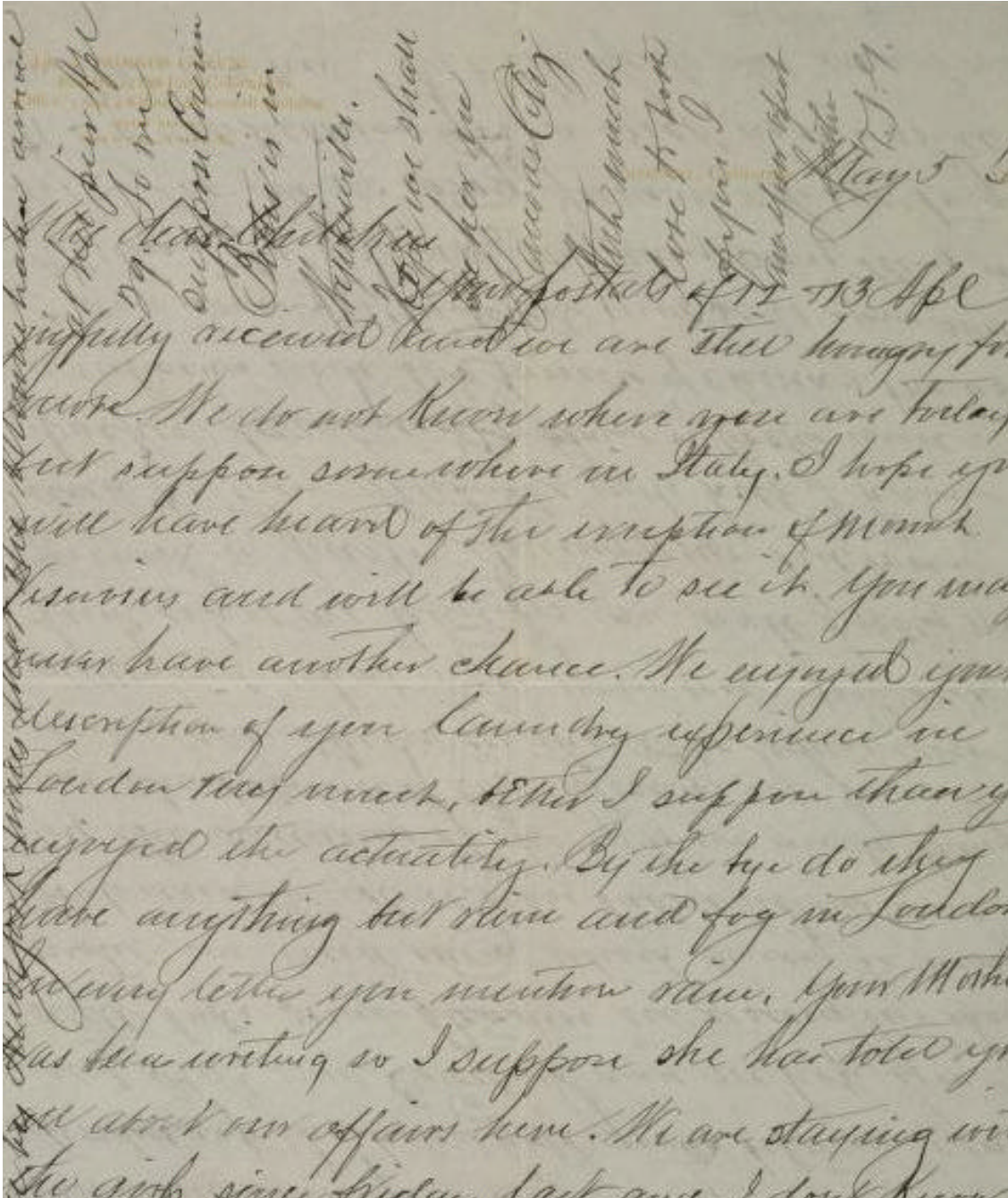


Figure 3 Letter from Thomas Sumner Greene to Charles Sumner Greene and Alice Gordon Greene, ink on paper (GGUSC-Greene family-2814b-2)

the *catalogue raisonné* allowed one to consult a full set of architectural drawings for each project. However, this archival site will permit a satisfying immediacy of consultation allowing the evaluation of unillustrated scholarly arguments and facilitating online learning for undergraduates. The often-rushed process of acquiring and accrediting illustrations will be rendered infinitely easier by the efficient links to the relevant institution provided in each entry, whether for a scholarly or press publication.

The inclusion of such revealing ancillary images, such as the cover of the photograph album kept by Mrs C A Whitridge of her house in Pasadena, California (with precise measurements), allows the virtual scholar to gain a remarkable simulation of the hands on process of research and discovery which lies at the heart of our profession. The illustration of letters is particularly admirable in this respect; when the trials and tribulations of palaeography are at stake how wonderful to be able to consult the document instantly. Despite a certain nostalgia for the solitary if

tortuous delights of trawling through card catalogues, old guide books, journals and correspondence in search of forgotten sites and works, it must be avowed such a centralised source will facilitate the tentative early stages of research marvellously. The analyses of each object are informative and lucidly written, providing useful groundwork for the development of more elaborate analysis.

The Greene and Greene Virtual Archives are a wonderful collaborative achievement; the participating institutions and their supporters are to be applauded. The possibilities such sites open up for encouraging general interest, student and scholarly access and as such new enquiry, is one of the greatest assets of the internet age and one which we at *Art on the Line* hope to emulate and to further.

All illustrations are courtesy of The Greene & Greene Archives, University of Southern California, Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens.

- 1 The core sources remain Andersen, T J, Moore, E M and Winter, R W, *California Design 1910*, Los Angeles: California Design Publications, 1974; Trapp, K R (ed), *The Arts and Crafts Movement in California: Living the Good Life*, New York: Abbeville Press, 1993; Winter, R (ed), *Toward a Simpler Way of Life: The Arts and Crafts Architects of California*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997 and the relevant entries in Kaplan, W, *The Art that Is Life: The Arts and Crafts Movement in America, 1875–1920*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1987. More recent interventions have added to the study of Greene and Greene's oeuvre, particularly Bosley, E R, *Gamble House*, London: Phaidon Press Ltd, 1992 and *Greene and Greene* London: Phaidon Press Ltd. 2000. A number of recent broad overviews of American Arts and Crafts architecture and design are helpful survey texts and source-books for designers and amateurs, but less relevant to researchers owing to the brevity of their focus and analysis based on specific projects and practitioners.