

National Trust for Historic Preservation

Richard H. Driehaus

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

June 3, 2008

I would like to thank the National Trust for Historic Preservation for honoring me tonight. It is a privilege to be here.

To give you some early background: Over 30 years ago I moved from the Southwest Side of Chicago to downtown. It was then that I began to notice the early architectural works of Henry Ives Cobb; Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge; and Burling & Whitehouse. Their buildings' unique character, representational form and human-scale design resonated with me.

The architect Leon Alberti defined beauty as "the adjustment of all parts proportionately, so that one cannot add, or subtract, or change, without impairing the harmony of the whole."

Captivated by what I had seen, I later purchased a number of historic buildings, including:

- the Richardsonian-style Ransom Cable House in 1987,
- a turn-of-the-century Georgian estate in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin in 1998, and
- the Nickerson Mansion in 2003, a mix of Renaissance Revival, Neo-Classicism and Aesthetic Movement design.

The architects of these buildings clearly understood writer and social critic John Ruskin when he wrote:

"When we build, let us think that we build forever. Let it be not for present delight, nor for present use alone; let it be such work as our descendants will thank us for."

These are timeless buildings with soul, spirit and individuality.

As Winston Churchill said: "We shape our buildings, thereafter, they shape us."

Through the Driehaus Foundation and my interest, we have focused many of our efforts on preserving the built environment. We also have provided competitions for new public schools, education in landscape architecture, and recognition and renovation of the Chicago bungalow.

This evening presents all of us with an important opportunity. Many of the brightest architects, editors, preservationists, and other civic leaders are here. Let us make a commitment to further the cause that has brought us together.

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It is only by uniting our common passion for the cause, that we can raise visibility and awareness of the many important projects that have yet to be undertaken.

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge my esteemed colleague and friend, Dr. Kirby Talley, who is here tonight. We have spent the past five years renovating and restoring the magnificent Nickerson Mansion in Chicago. It has been a life changing experience.

Kirby was my indispensable right hand, masterminding all of the work on the historic building. The results exceeded my greatest expectations, and strikingly demonstrate William Blake's insightful quote that "Execution is the chariot of genius."

Thank you, Kirby, for all you have done.

Preserving the built environment in a human scale design creates an opportunity for all of humanity to understand what influenced our past. It gives us context for our future. I hope that recognition like this will inspire others, thus furthering our cause.

It was British writer, designer and socialist William Morris who wisely recognized: "...these old buildings do not belong to us only; they have belonged to our forefathers, and they will belong to our descendants... They are not in any sense our property to do as we like with. We are only trustees for those that come after us."

I thank the National Trust for Historic Preservation for its influential and essential work in preserving our historic built environment and heritage. And everyone here tonight for their support of the National Trust.

French priest, writer and lecturer Ernest Dimnet said it best: "Architecture, of all the arts, is the one which acts the most slowly, but the most surely, on the soul."

Thank you for this important award. It means a great deal to me.