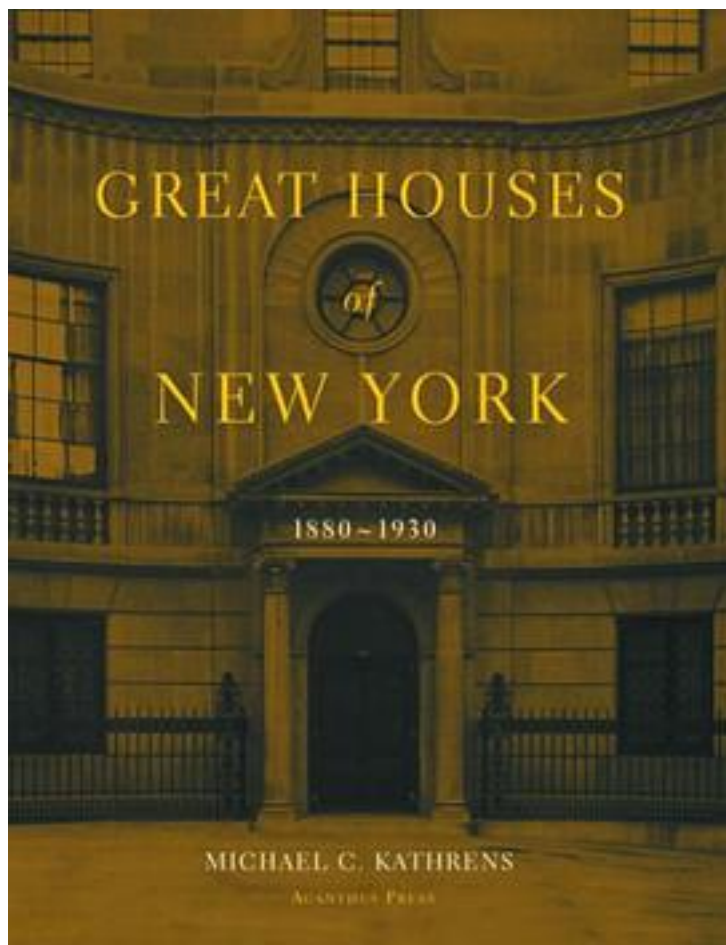


Great Houses of New York



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In 1869, when Edith Wharton's aunt Mary Mason Jones (immortalised as Mrs. Manson Mingot in "The Age of Innocence") finished her French classical house at the corner of 57th Street and Fifth Avenue - in a block for which her father paid \$1500 forty years

earlier - she was considered an adventuress for building so far uptown. By 1882, just down the avenue at 52nd Street, William K. Vanderbilt finished his limestone mansion, ushering in the era of the lavish New York Great House, modelled after the London houses of English aristocrats and their Parisian counterparts. At the behest of clients who formed the business and social elite of post-Civil War America, among them Otto Kahn of Kuhn Loeb, steel magnate Henry Frick, and George Baker, president of First National Bank (now Citibank), the leading architects and designers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries - Richard Morris Hunt, J. Armstrong Stenhouse, C.P. H. Gilbert, Walker and Gillette, Ogden Codman - were inundated with commissions to speedily construct lavish residences for America's wealthiest families. Private indoor swimming pools and ballrooms were only part of lavish architectural programs that were combined with unique American practicality, such as private baths, closets, kitchens, air conditioning, laundry rooms and pantries. Opulent English, French, and Italian-inspired detailing was combined with private galleries and exhibition halls created to house paintings, sculpture, and decorative arts collected on annual grand tours through Europe. "Great Houses of New York", 1880-1930 presents the stories of the most elegant houses built in New York. With over 300 archival photographs and floor plans and a decade of research, Michael Kathrens profiles New York houses known only for their magisterial presence on the city's most elegant boulevards, some of which still exist today, including the houses of Otto Kahn (Convent of the Sacred Heart), Andrew Carnegie (Cooper Hewitt Design Museum), James B. Duke (NYU Institute of Fine Art), and Morton F. Plant (Cartier), and Willard D. Straight (home of the banker Bruce Kovner). In "Great Houses of New York", lavish rooms are brought to life again-polished black and white columns reflect in the marble floor of a grand entryway, Dutch master paintings line damask walls in a second floor reception room, a crystal chandelier softly lights a dining room whose boiserie glows with paintings by Boucher-evoking the elegant private life that has become a trademark of the wealthy New Yorker.

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