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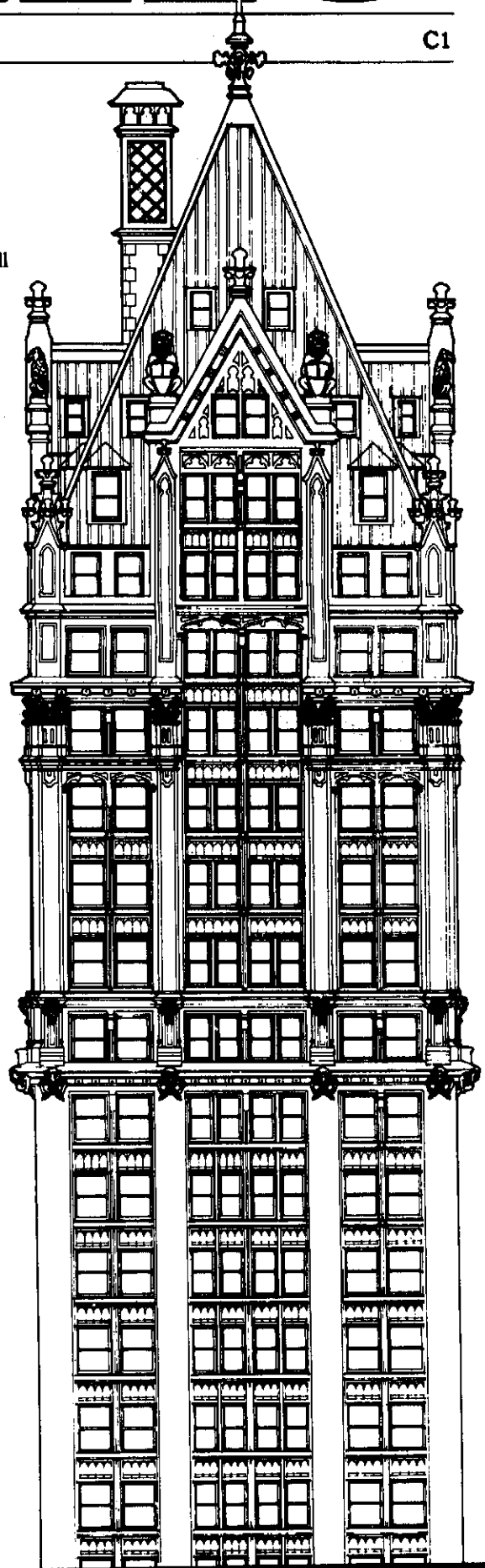
SECTION

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LEFT The Old Parsonage in Peru, Vt.

RIGHT Liberty Tower, near Wall Street.



One Man, Three Homes, One Mission: Preserving Architectural Treasures

By PATRICIA LEIGH BROWN

SOME people collect salt and pepper shakers. Joseph Pell Lombardi collects houses.

Like an architectural Sherlock Holmes, Mr. Lombardi patiently unravels their secrets, then fervidly restores them. To say that the 49-year-old New York architect and developer has a commitment to historic preservation is an understatement. The man is obsessed.

Mr. Lombardi divides his time among three houses he has been restoring for 11 years. During the week he may be found near Wall Street, in a 5,000-square-foot apartment on the 29th floor of Liberty Tower, a 1909 Gothic Revival skyscraper that was formerly the Sinclair Oil Building.

He spends winter weekends in Peru, Vt., at the Old Parsonage, an 1830's Greek Revival house surrounded by sugar maples. Summer and fall weekends are reserved for the Octagon House (1872) in Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y. It is a hallucinogenic eight-sided landmark that has the distinction of being the country's only residential interpretation of a Roman temple.

Unlike many architects, Mr. Lombardi has no desire to make a personal statement with his work, preferring to let history speak instead.

"If someone says, 'Gee, what did you do here?'" he said of the restoration of his houses, "to me, that's a terrific thing."

Liberty Tower, Manhattan

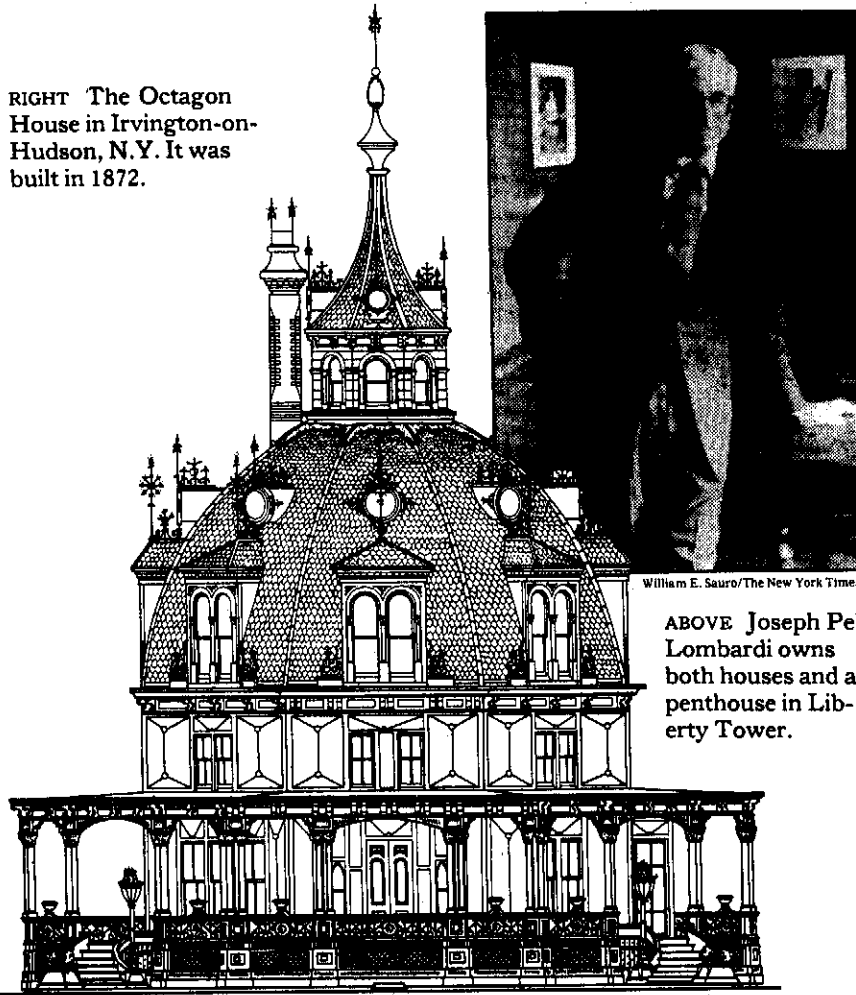
You can no longer see the Statue of Liberty from the living room, the former boardrooms of the Sinclair Oil Company. "All those upstairs have built here," Mr. Lombardi muttered, referring to the glass and steel towers of Wall Street.

This may be the quintessential New York City apartment, redolent of the harbor's heyday. Mr. Lombardi bought the 33-story office building at 55 Liberty Street and converted it into cooperative apartments with partners in the late 1970's. He reserved the former boardrooms for himself.

"I've always wanted to restore, not build," he said, gazing out the living-room windows to the view of both the Hudson and East Rivers. "The more I learn, the greater respect I have for previous architects. The earlier the building, the better it was." Here and elsewhere, Mr. Lombardi

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RIGHT The Octagon House in Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y. It was built in 1872.



William E. Sauro/The New York Times

ABOVE Joseph Pell Lombardi owns both houses and a penthouse in Liberty Tower.

Illustrations by Joseph Pell Lombardi & Associates

One Man, 3 Historic Homes, One Mission

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is fastidious about historical verisimilitude. The living room interior, with its green-fringed velvet furniture, was based on photographs of English and American men's clubs, especially the University Club designed by the architect Stanford White. The wood paneling in the library, purchased from a demolition company, came from a building at 52 Wall Street ("1909: same patina," Mr. Lombardi said).

Room configurations are original, with the exception of a marble rotunda, which Mr. Lombardi added to unify the apartment. Throughout the apartment are miniature Statue of Liberty figures and miniature copies of historic New York buildings.

In the dining room, the walls are decorated with advertising posters from shipping companies. These are portraits of majestic, straight-prowed ships storming bravely through the waves and bearing names like the Berengaria, Lusitania and Aquitania. To be included in the gallery, ships had to be in New York Harbor in 1910, the year Liberty Tower was completed, Mr. Lombardi said.

Harry Sinclair's old study is now Mr. Lombardi's office. To call him on Mr. Sinclair's old telephone, friends dial "DI" — for Digby, the original exchange for the area, researched by Mr. Lombardi with the New York Telephone Company.

The Parsonage, Peru, Vt.

Built for \$400 in 1850 by J. J. Haggood for the Peru Congregational Church, the Parsonage sits on Main Street in a dreamlike Vermont village that consists of a post office, a general store, a church and 10 houses.

Mr. Lombardi bought the post-and-beam Greek Revival house in 1976. It was intact, but needed work: for example, uncovering the original paint colors hidden beneath layers of "each generation of parsons' wives' decorating," he said.

To bring the house back to its 1850 appearance, Mr.



Joseph Pell Lombardi & Associates

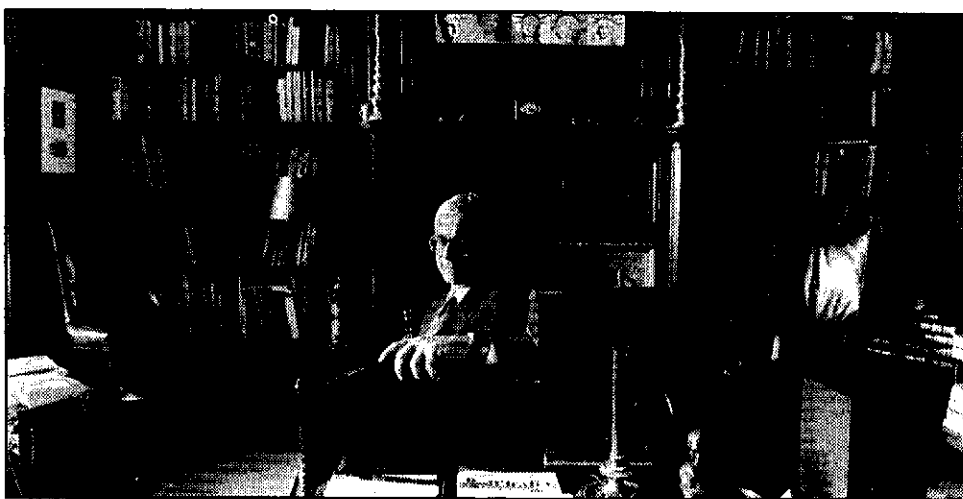
ABOVE Liberty Tower, a skyscraper built in 1909, now cooperative apartments. LEFT A former boardroom is now Mr. Lombardi's dining room and an ode to New York Harbor in its heyday.

'I've always wanted to restore, not build,' an architect says.



Photographs by William E. Sauro for The New York Times

ABOVE The new round foyer. RIGHT Joseph Pell Lombardi in his library; men's clubs inspired the décor.



Lombardi had paint and wallpaper samples microscopically analyzed in a laboratory. He was fortunate in that the original wide-plank floors had never been sanded, and all 10 previous paint layers were right there.

He commissioned Scalamandré Inc., the textile company, to reproduce the original dining-room wallpaper, which was light brown with sage-green leaves (now named "Old Parsonage at Peru").

Mr. Lombardi engineered the house so that the lighting and heating can be historically correct, should he be in the mood. Lighting fixtures run on electricity but can revert to kerosene use. The central-heating system can be forsaken for the more picturesque wood-burning cast-iron stoves throughout the house, including one Gothic Revival beauty in the shape of a church with steeple.

Finding historically accurate furniture proved thorny because most Greek Revival pieces around were "too citified," Mr. Lombardi said. He was looking for "lesser Greek Revival," in a style that is known locally as high country or country Sheraton. Clues for the Shakerlike furnishings came from a couple of broken pieces of green-painted Hitchcock chairs in the attic, remnants of a time when homeowners left behind a piece of furniture in a house to welcome a new family.

The spare interiors are decorated with hooked rugs,

scrimshaw, antique Vermont maps, gilded mirrors, paintings and old Vermont legislative directories. In the study, an 1850 parson's desk where weekly sermons were written (it folds flat for traveling) now holds Mr. Lombardi's blueprints.

The architect spent years without hinges on the doors, awaiting the discovery of some that were historically accurate. (He eventually did find cast-steel Baldwin patent hinges and latch sets.) But historical purity goes only so far. The house has working bathrooms. And no doubt the parson would be surprised by the sauna for two.

The Octagon House, Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y.

The vision of an eight-sided house with a dome and colonnaded veranda is something a Victorian poet with a penchant for opium might have imagined.

In fact, it was the creation of Joseph H. Stiner, a prominent New York City tea merchant, who in 1872 transformed an existing house into a fantastical villa with painted and stenciled ceilings and trim in gold, silver and bronze leaf.

Humor, as much as obscure architectural theory,

dictated the design. Witness the decorative cast-iron porch railings bedizened with the head of Prince, Mr. Stiner's white English terrier.

This polychromed wonder, now a National Historic Landmark, was literally coming apart at the seams when Mr. Lombardi bought it in 1979 for \$75,000 from the Endangered Properties Fund of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. He has since spent "many times over" the purchase price restoring it.

"The purpose of the restoration was not to remove all traces of age, but to hold together the fragile exotic beauty," he said.

The cupola had sunk two feet and the dome was disintegrating. The architect approached the gargantuan task of rescuing the dome in the manner of an orthodontist. He jacked up the roof while cinching the structure tight, stretching airplane cables from opposing corners within the dome and around the base.

For two and a half years, he slowly raised the jacks while tightening the turnbuckles on the cables until the dome inched its way into place. One late fall afternoon, the big moment came. A steel tension ring was installed, the cables were removed and the dome aligned with the baseboards and wainscoting.

"Everyone has their thing," said Mr. Lombardi, who

is writing a book on the Octagon. "Mine is the mystery of bringing it all back together."

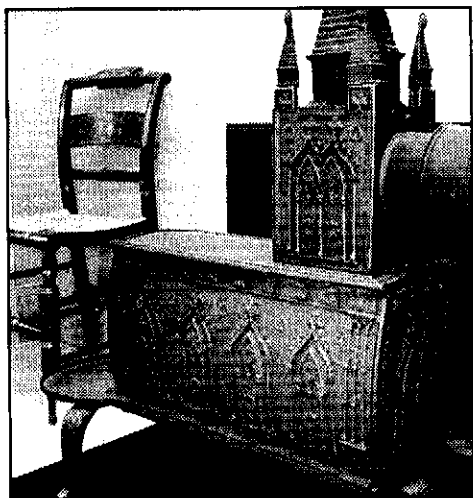
Ever the historical sleuth, Mr. Lombardi undertook extensive color research, sensing that more vivid colors lurked beneath the white and gray exterior. His persistence unveiled the original Victorian palette now lighting up the landscape: rose, light blue, cocoa brown, deep red, violet and Pepto-Bismol pink.

The house, which has four stories plus an observatory, is rife with octagons, from etched glass patterns on the yellow pine doors to the formal Victorian garden, which Mr. Lombardi has restored using only plants and flowers available in the 19th century. The observatory is reached via a staircase surmounted with cupids bearing etched-glass orbs.

"You lose your sense of orientation," he said of the circular plan. "Someone once called it an arrested carousel."

Mr. Lombardi does not think of himself as a property owner, but as a steward. The reason he goes to such lengths may be found in one of his favorite quotes from the Victorian critic John Ruskin:

"Old buildings are not ours. They belong, partly to those who built them, and partly to the generations of mankind who are to follow."

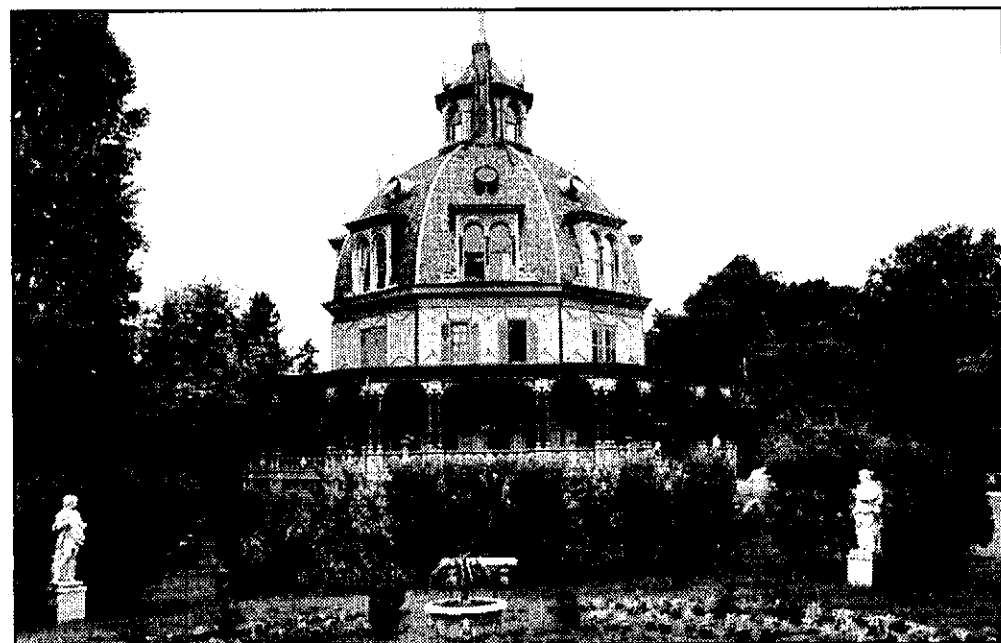


Photographs by Paul O. Boisvert for The New York Times

ABOVE The Old Parsonage in Peru, Vt., photographed last winter.

FARLEFT The heating is historically correct; this Gothic Revival woodburning stove is in the shape of a church.

LEFT The country Sheraton dining room.



Photographs by Stephen Castagneto for The New York Times

The Octagon House, which a visitor once called "an arrested carousel," Mr. Lombardi said.



ABOVE The sun room's odd angles. RIGHT As if not exuberant enough, the dome is painted six colors, including violet.

