

NEW · YORK · SOCIAL · DIARY

YOUR LINK TO SOCIETY

SOCIAL DIARY • PARTY PICTURES • CALENDAR • SOCIAL HISTORY • THE LIST/CAMEO • HOUSE • DINING • PHILANTHROPY
ART SET • TRAVEL • ACROSS THE WORLD • GALLERY • GUEST DIARIES • CLASSIFIEDS • SHOPPING DIARY • ARCHIVES • SEARCH



*By Sian Ballen & Lesley Hauge
Photographs by Jeff Hirsch*

*By day, **Andrew Jones** works in finance but by night, and any other available times, he paints*

elegant—and elegiac—pictures of city stoops and their shadows. A member of one of America’s oldest families, he has an ancestor with the un-improvable name of Noble Jones. His own restored townhouse in the Village, which he bought in 1994, is full of sinuously beautiful Duncan Phyfe furniture and he has also committed time and money to preserving the Savannah Georgia house of Major John Berrien, who served under George Washington. When the restoration of the once-derelict 18th century house is complete, Andrew says, he will mainly use it “for having parties.” He likes parties, and served us champagne, with no preamble—we left a bit flushed and squiffy—but we hope the interview isn’t affected.

So what did you start with – the collecting of furniture, the painting, the renovation of the house? You seem to cover the lot.

It goes way back. I’ve just always loved to draw and paint. Apparently I did my first drawing at the age of sixteen months—my mother has a photograph of it. I grew up in Baltimore.

When you hit upon the idea of painting stoops, was it a relief to find your subject?

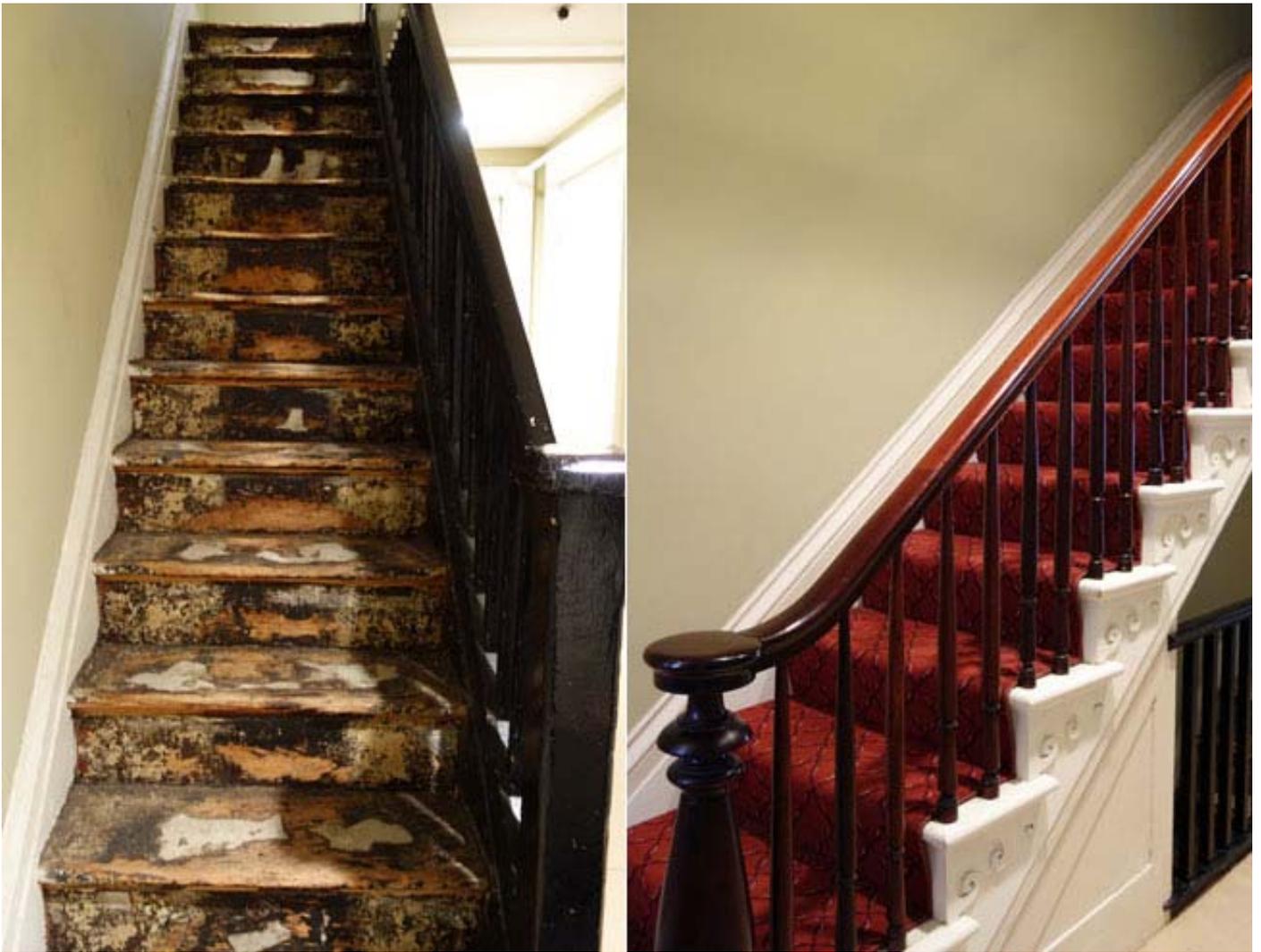
Absolutely. I had painted in many different styles and I was always waiting for a time when there would be something that was really me and I knew that it would happen if I didn’t try too hard.

That’s interesting. I think it’s true that you can chase something so hard and never get it but if you just sit and wait quietly, it might suddenly appear out of the bushes.

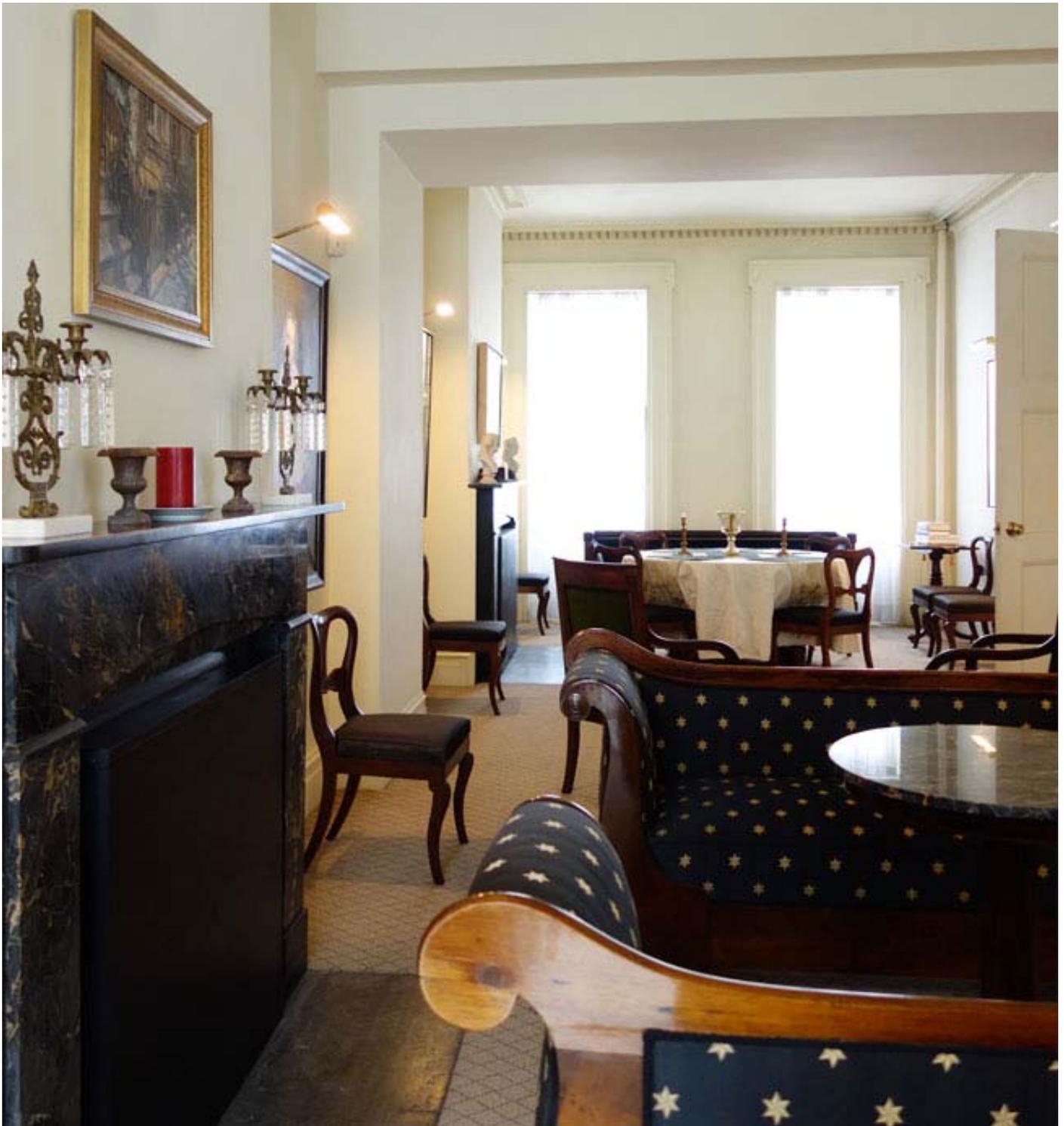
Yes. The way it started actually was when I was looking at buying houses. I took photographs of stoops because I was trying to understand the architecture. I was trying to [record] what an 1840s house is like or what an 1860s house is like. And then started looking at the pictures and I was, like, hmm, these could make interesting paintings. And it was odd because very few artists have specialized in stoops and it’s such a quintessential icon.



Andrew's West Village townhouse.



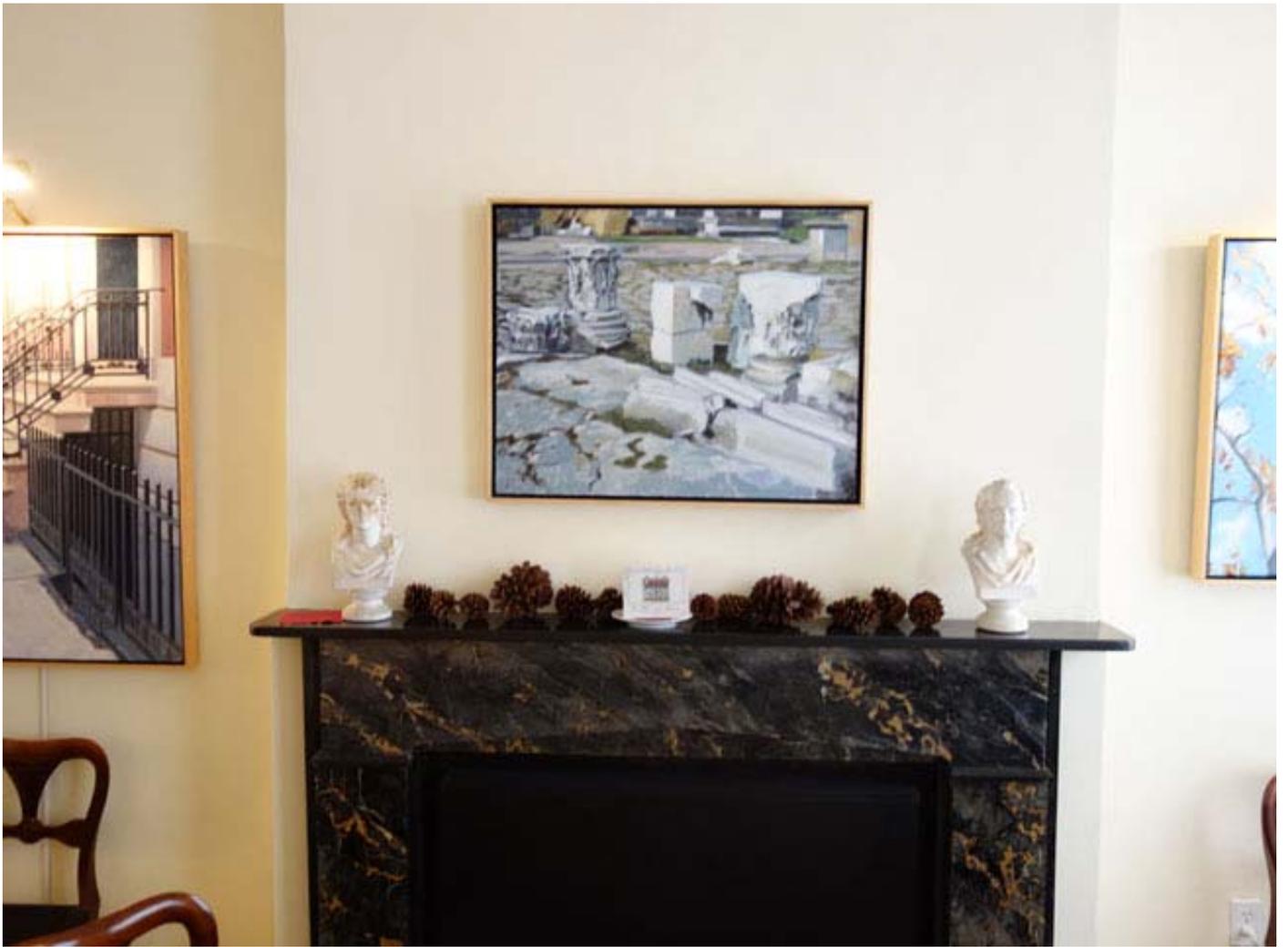
The main (original) staircase, both partly finished and fully carpeted.



The main drawing room is furnished with carefully chosen American Classical antiques, many by Duncan Phyfe and Joseph Meeks.



In the drawing room two paintings by Andrew, the first depicting marble architectural fragments in the Roman Forum and the second portraying the treetops at the Connecticut farm of J. Alden Weir, the American Impressionist. On the table is a French compote from the Pierreponts of Brooklyn Heights, who are related to Andrew. Duncan Phyfe balloon back chairs, c. 1837, are arranged around and near the drawing room table.



A 19th century bust of Goethe and Schiller rest on the mantel.



A painting by Andrew of the servant's staircase at the historic Salmagundi Club, an historic artists club on lower Fifth Avenue, where Andrew once served on the Board.



A pair of rosewood reclining sofas by Duncan Phyfe, ca. 1837, provide ample seating in the main drawing room. A painting of West Village townhouses hangs above the marble fireplace mantel. To the right of the fireplace is a haunting portrait of a young girl with her doll, painted in the mid-nineteenth century in Rhode Island.



West 16th Street Newels hangs above a marble top pier table by Duncan Phyfe. The set of old Paris compotes came from the Jones summer house in Newport Rhode Island. Later named "Kingscote," the architect was Richard Upjohn, most famous for designing Trinity Church on Wall Street.



West 21st Street Newels, 2008, hangs above a balloon back chair by Duncan Phyfe.



Autumn Treetops.



A portrait of Senator George Jones of Savannah, Georgia, ca. 1810, One of Andrew's direct ancestors, hangs above another balloon back chair by Duncan Phyfe.



Washington Place, 2008, leans against a wall in the drawing room. The chair is one of a pair of ca. 1820 French Restoration fauteuils.



I think it's fascinating that you can tell a period from the designs of the actual wrought iron work on the stoops.

You can tell a house within two years. I was walking by my friend's house and he said, "When was my house built?" and I said, "1836". Who does the Streetscapes column ...?

Oh, Christopher Gray.

Yes. So once he sent me an email with pictures of ten stoops and I was very busy that day. He said, "Can you identify these by year?" and I said, "1842, 1837 ...". I was off on one, which I should have known because it was 1830s style but had later elements added to it.

That's like a party trick! And what was the point of him doing that, may I ask?

Someone said that and his reply was something like, "I want to join your religion."

Can you do it in other cities? London used to have fabulous wrought iron work but they stripped it away to melt it down for munitions or something during the war. And then they found out they couldn't use that type of metal for anything much.

They did – so in London you just have those spears everywhere. There are still some wonderful cast iron balconies there, rather in the same style as you might see in New Orleans or San Juan or Montevideo.



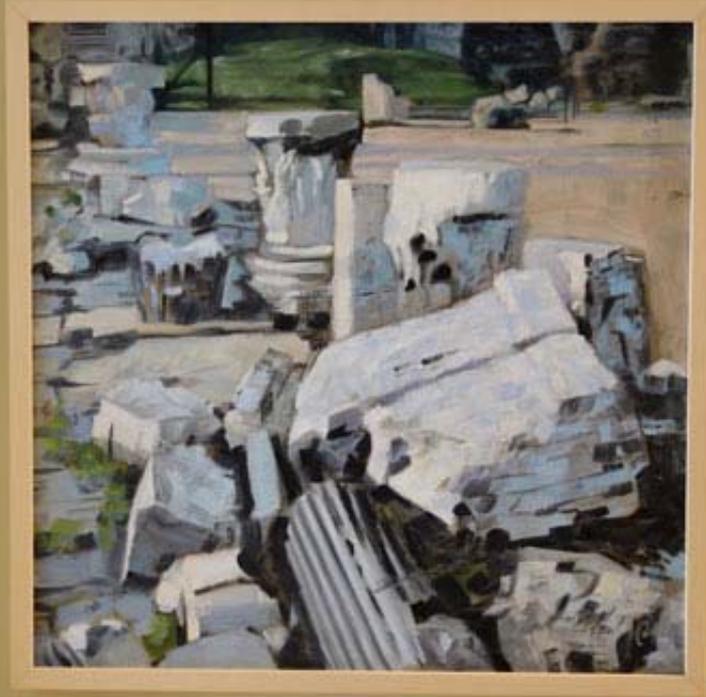
Hanging on a wall in the sun-filled kitchen eating area is Andrew's oil *West 12th Street Italianate Shadows*, 2008.



Wild Flowers at Weir Farm, 2010.



The painting on the left depicts the home of J. Alden Weir, the American Impressionist, in Wilton, Connecticut. On the right is *Wagon Graveyard*, one of a series of paintings depicting decaying 19th century wagons abandoned in one of the meadows of the farm. In 2010, Andrew was artist-in-residence at the farm.



This painting is another from the Roman Forum series.



In the front hall landing, *Bethune Street Shadows* lies next to a drop leaf table by Phyfe or one of his contemporaries, ca. 1815. This painting was one of the focal points of Andrew's 2009 exhibit "Railings and Shadows: Stoops of Manhattan" at the Museum of the City of New York in 2009.



Looking up the main staircase to the second floor. The painting on the right side is one from the "Wagon Graveyard" series.



What is the difference between cast iron and wrought iron then?

In a typical stoop, often it's mixed. Sometimes they cheat and they have one element wrought and the rest are cast.

So give us some clues as to what to look for so that we can have a go at judging stoops by period.

Gothic is easy – most Gothic stoops are late 1840s with little Gothic arches. There are some on Charles Street [in the Village]. The classical period is late 1830s—so Greek urns and so on. Also in the late 1840s, you get Greek revival but it is more eclectic because this was also the period of the discovery of the great Mayan temples. Something that looks like a Greek key is actually a Mayan square [symbol].



In the master bedroom: an 1830s mahogany classical sleigh bed from Tepper Galleries and paintings by Andrew. On the left and right are paintings of cast iron railings on West 11th Street and Jane Street, just blocks away. In the center is a painting by Joyce Jones, Andrew's mother, depicting a Victorian mansard roofed house in Cotuit, a charming town in Cape Cod, where Andrew's family spent summers in nearby sea captain's house.



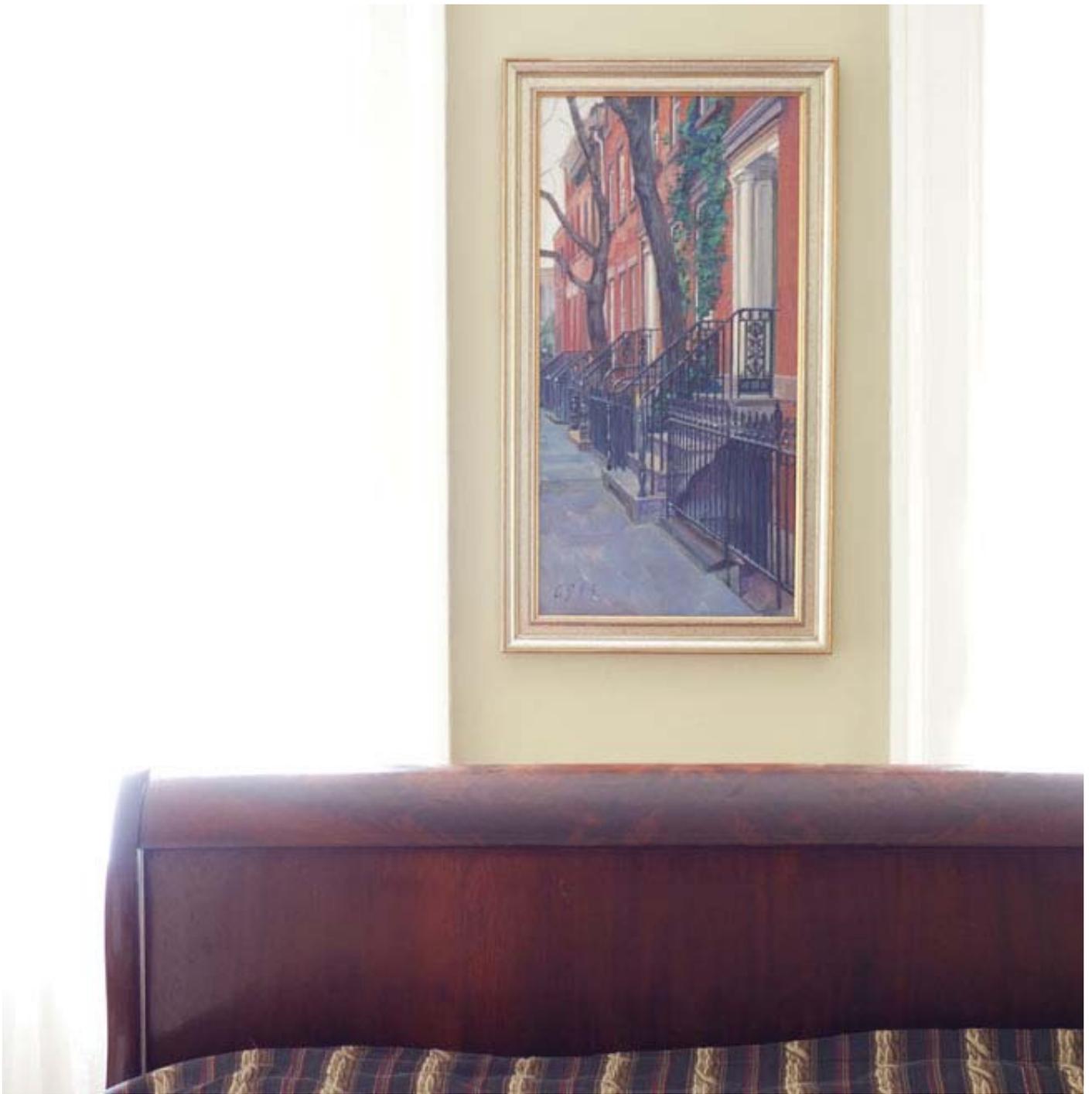
West 11th Street Anthemion Shadows. This painting paints only the shadows cast by a stoop railing across the façade of a nearby townhouse, leaving the actual iron entirely out of the frame of the picture.



These railings on Jane Street in the West Village are in the Greco-Gothic taste of the mid-1840s.



A painting of railings on West 11th Street date from the same 1840s era.



A painting of a typical West Village street lined with Federal townhouses hangs between the master bedroom windows.



Looking across the master bedroom towards the main staircase.



This painting, *Portrait of a Sunflower*, according to Andrew, "mysteriously brings forth the soul of a sunflower."



A pair of lamps by Baldwin Gardiner ca. 1835 came from a now defunct antiques store on Bleeker Street. They stand atop a matched pair of Duncan Phyfe card tables purchased from separate dealers. Phyfe made a similar table for his friend and patron John Jacob Astor.



A mahogany Duncan Phyfe drop leaf table stands front and center in the upstairs drawing room. Similar to a table Phyfe made for his daughter Eliza, it came from the estate of Francis (Skeeter) McNairy, a well-known Savannah dealer. The portrait above the fireplace mantel is a family heirloom.



A pair of girandoles, inherited from Andrew's mother, flank a figurine from Tanagra depicting an ancient Greek dancer.



A Duncan Phyfe recamier stands near a mahogany bureau purchased on Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn in the 1980s. The corner fire screen is also by Duncan Phyfe.



Looking across the upstairs drawing room. The painting hanging above the mahogany bureau is by Savannah artist Hattie Saussy, c. 1920, and possibly depicts the gardens at Womsloe Plantation near Savannah, Andrew's ancestral home.

In your paintings, the shadows seem as important as the architecture.

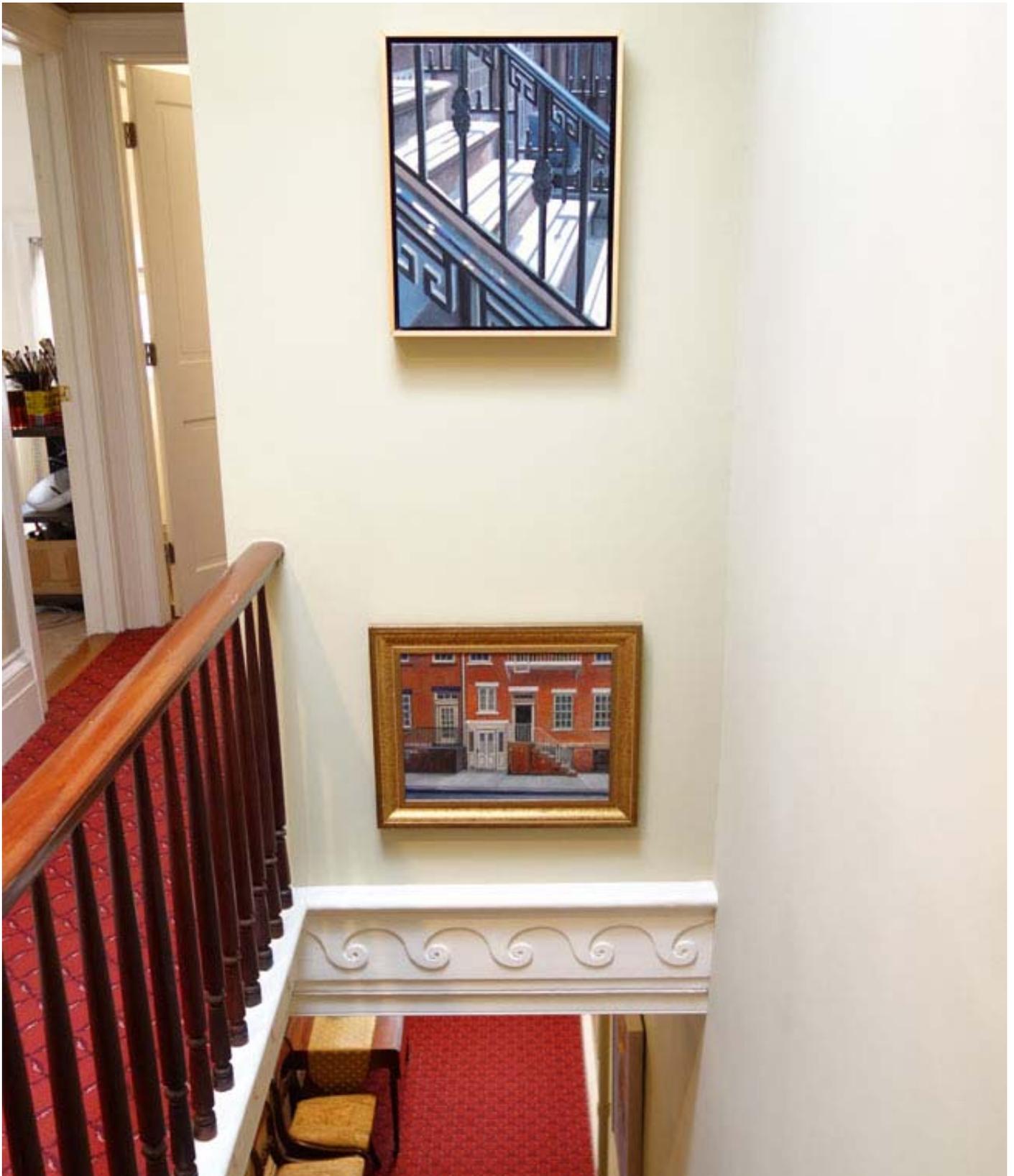
Yes, some of my paintings are just shadows. Shadows create certain music.

Why don't you just take photographs?

Because I've never taken a photograph that actually conveys what I feel. For me a photograph is like a sketch. It has information in it.

Let's talk about preservation of architecture. Where is the balance between preserving and turning a vibrant city into a lifeless museum?

I think the goal is to leave what is good alone.



Paintings of railings on West 12th Street and townhouses at the corner of West 1th Street and Hudson hang on a wall of the staircase well.



Andrew's top floor painting studio. On the easel is a work in progress, showing snowfall on a series of stoops on West 11th Street just a few doors down the block.

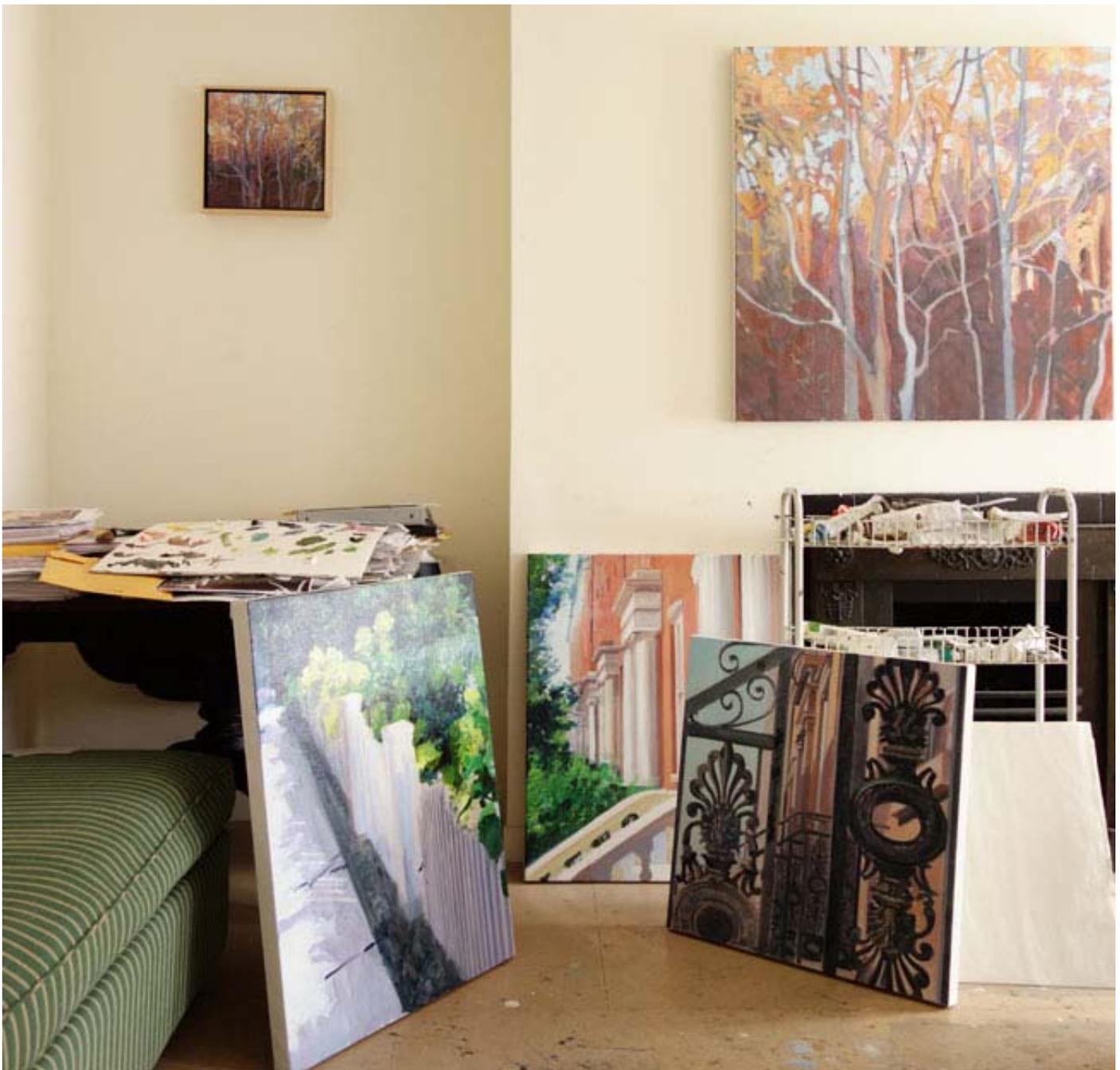




Dozens of paintbrushes are stored in old coffee cans.



The house on the easel is the Davenport House in Savannah Georgia, an 1820s Federal house just one block from the 1791 John Berrien House, another ancestral home, which Andrew is in the process of restoring.



More paintings. The far left is a view of autumn trees at Weir farm. The view is from the balcony of the artist-in-residence studio. Above the fireplace is a larger version of the same subject. Leaning upright are views of wooden fences in Essex Connecticut and a scenes of "The Row," the series of 1830s Greek Revival townhouses on the north side of Washington Square Park.



Oil paints are sorted by color and stored in open wire baskets.



A series of small oils, mostly scenes from the West Village, line the walls of Andrew's upstairs studio.





Paintings for Andrew's series of railings and stoops fill another studio wall. The one in the center depicts a mid-1850s stoop on West 11th Street.



A paint palette is temporarily stored atop piles of photos that Andrew takes and uses as part of his creative process.



But the modern can be lifeless too. My husband got mad at me when we were in Oslo looking at the part of the city that is undergoing a building boom and is full of huge, new buildings – I found it impersonal and said I felt like one of the little human figures you see walking around in architectural rendering. Then he yelled, “Why do you always prefer the past?”

People are afraid of the past. And anyway, no matter the building, everything has Greek and Roman references.

Well, I wish I had said that. I just stomped off in a huff. But I have to say, I feel comforted by the past. What is the appeal or the beauty in ruin and decay and old things, would you say?

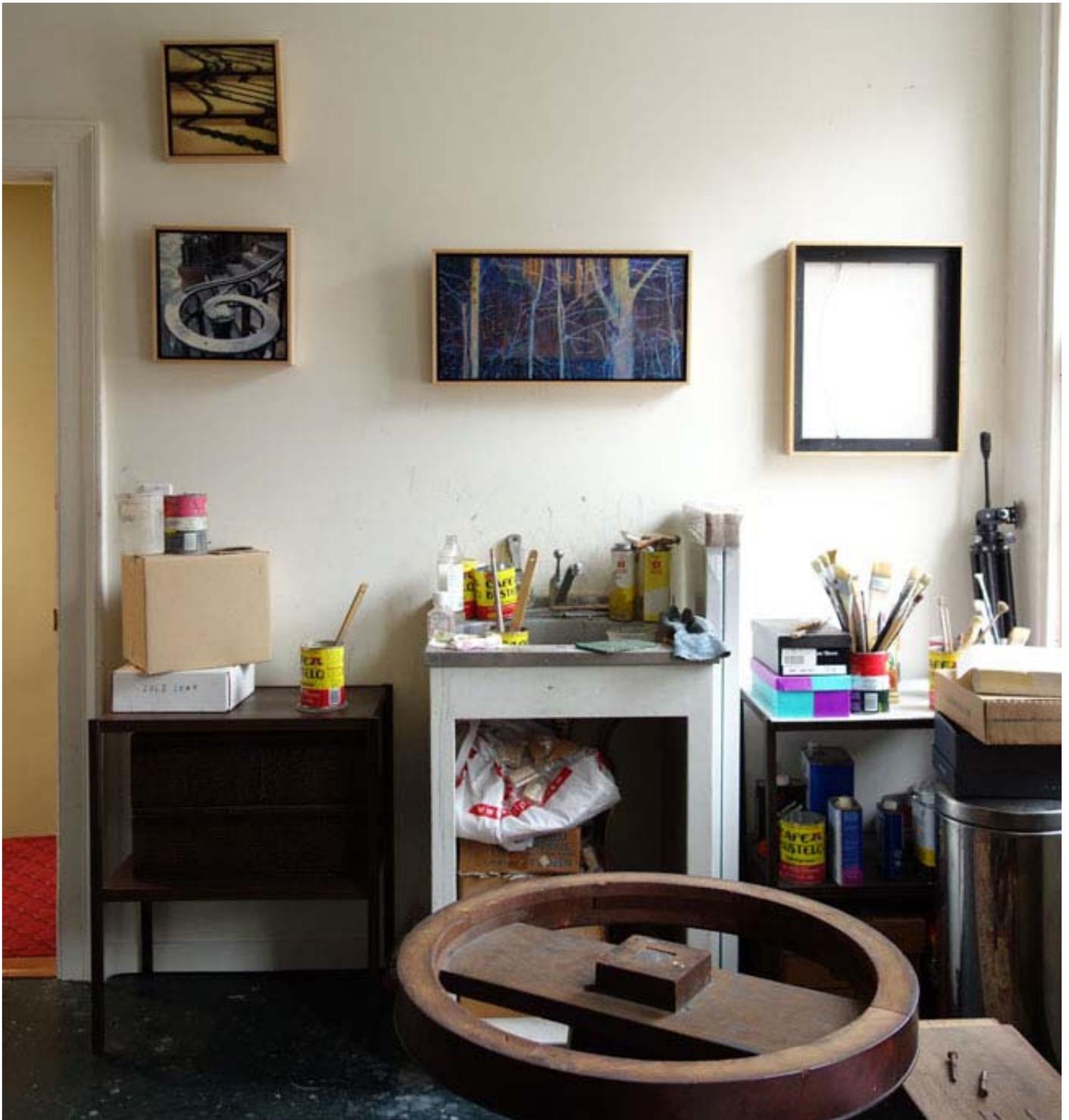
I don't know. When a stoop is rusty, it's so beautiful. And it can't stay that way. Either it rots or gets preserved. My mother says, “I feel sorry for broken chairs.” When you look at a chair [*gestures to one of the Duncan Phyfe chairs*] that chair is about the people who sat in that chair, their taste and their elegance and their refinement. It meant something. And just look at the poise!



In Andrew's office an engraving of Johann Kempen von Fichtenstamm, the Austrian uncle of Andrew's mother, an important field marshal and mayor of Vienna, hangs next to a copy of the commission to John Berrien from the Continental Congress in 1776, signed by John Hancock. John Berrien, one of Andrew's direct ancestors, built the house in Savannah that Andrew is now restoring.



The portrait in the center is of the great 17th century English architect Inigo Jones, also master of the English Masonic lodges. Andrew's ancestor Noble Jones followed in the Masonic tradition serving as Grand Master of Savannah Solomon's Lodge and named one of his own sons Inigo in honor of Inigo Jones. The religious paintings flanking the portrait are Grand Tour souvenirs from the 19th century and are museum copies of Italian renaissance paintings. The watercolor to the left is ca. 1850 of George Fenwick Jones, Andrew's great grandfather, and, to the right, an engraving of Noble Wimberly Jones ca. 1800. Known as the Morning Star of Liberty for his role in revolutionary Georgia, he was the son of Noble Jones, mentioned above.



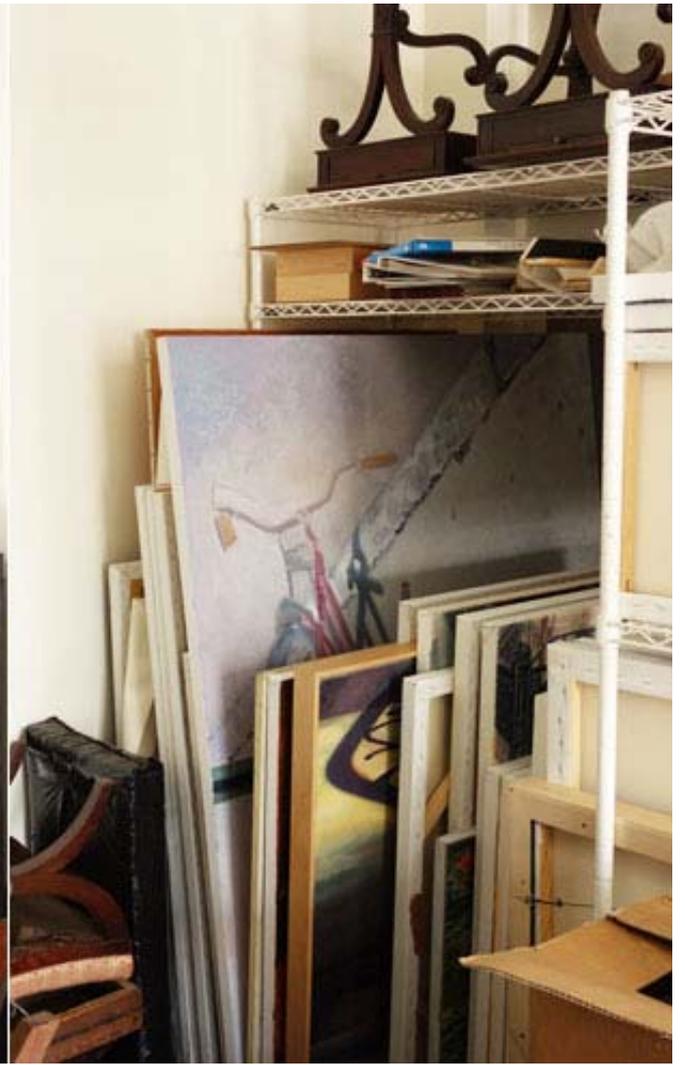
A second upstairs studio room is filled with more of Andrew's paintings and art supplies.







Stacked chairs and stockpiles of paintings by Andrew fill the room.





Ready to wash up and go.

Did you inherit all this furniture or have you collected it?

There is Duncan Phyfe furniture in the family but I have collected these. The market is actually very weak [for this furniture] and I'm very happy about that. Everybody is still chasing Mid-Century Modern. When Phyfe made that chair over there, he was basically a millionaire, so he made it just for the love of it. He charged ridiculous prices!

Do you believe in ghosts?

Oh, absolutely! [laughs] They're here. There are a lot of people in this room but they're not paying attention to us right now.



[BACK TO TOP](#)

 EMAIL

 PRINT



© 2013 David Patrick Columbia & Jeffrey Hirsch/NewYorkSocialDiary.com