Prolific architect Michael Graves, who has designed everything from skyscrapers to home goods for Target, on Wednesday will be named the 2012 winner of the Richard H. Driehaus Prize. Named for its sponsor, Chicago venture capitalist Richard Driehaus, the award of $200,000 — twice as much as the Pritzker Architecture Prize, which is given to a single individual — recognizes a leading practitioner of classical or traditional architecture.

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Graves (left), 77, an Indianapolis native, has designed more than 350 buildings around the world, including the Portland Building in Portland, Ore., the Humana corporate headquarters in Louisville, Ky., and the Dolphin and Swan hotels at Walt Disney World in Orlando, Fla.

His postmodern style, characterized by simple shapes, references to history and warm colors, is evident in his Target product line, which includes a teakettle that retails for $26.19 — a steal compared with the $100-plus teakettle Graves designed for the Italian company Alessi (below).

“There are very few architects that have the spectrum of work from urban design and the new cities to the objects we use in our daily life,” said Michael Lykoudis, the chair of the Driehaus Prize jury and the dean of the University of Notre Dame School of Architecture, which sponsored the prize.

“More than any other architect,” Lykoudis said of Graves, “he’s democratized design.”

Graves will receive the award March 24 in Chicago.

Since 2003, after a spinal cord injury, he has been paralyzed from the waist down and uses a wheelchair. But he continues to lead his Princeton, N.J.-based architectural firm, Michael Graves, Associates, and the Michael Graves Design Group, which does product design.

“I was delighted,” Graves said in a telephone interview Tuesday. “I thought this was wonderful, not just for me, but for the award, that it opens it up to more and more people.”
Established in 2003, the Driehaus Prize has been awarded in some cases to architects for their strict adherence to classical design.

In contrast, Graves said, he views classical principles as part of a continuous series of developments that are relevant to contemporary life. "Classical thinking is one thing," he said. "But thinking of architecture as a language and a continuum is another.

Graves, who has no compunctions about designing in Chicago, has a little-known University professor who taught at the University of Illinois. In 1976, he designed an office building in downtown Chicago's Loop area, which is considered a masterpiece of modern architecture.

His controversial design for the construction of a boxy high-rise building in London was met with protests from architects and the public. But in 1987, the Tribune's Sundial newsletter featured Graves among other notable figures in the world of architecture. His work was predicted to be "in vogue," with "deadly" results.

"Better I didn't see it," Graves said in a prediction. "My skin is still intact."

Yet Graves persisted, bringing a postmodern approach to some of his projects as the Denver Central Library and to such commercial ventures as the Disney Channel in New York City, which sported playful gargoyles of dolphins and swans on their roofs.

A career-changing break came in the late 1990s when Minneapolis-based Target commissioned Graves to design a new store for the restoration of the Washington Monument. The collar, which was completed in 2002, contained an elegant temporary covering for the great obelisk, but it also added Target's logo to the exterior of the building.

"The things that we did for Target and all the buildings that we do in the world are human-centered objects for their own sake," he said. "I suppose that's what gets me into trouble today because the press wants objects. And that's where they want cutting edge. And that's not what I do. And I will persevere."

His selection marks the second consecutive year that a celebrated East Coast architect has been awarded the Driehaus Prize. Last year's winner was the New York architect Robert A.M. Stern.

The winner of the Driehaus Prize is chosen by a seven-member jury that this year included the prize's sponsor, an architect, a real estate developer, and the president of the American Academy in Rome and two architecture critics.

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