



The northwest façade of the house, which was probably once a carriage barn on this former estate property, presents as a country manor house, thanks to new French doors, iron balconies, and trim painted a well-mannered antique blue.

A Houseful of Friends

♦ BY GLADYS MONTGOMERY ♦ PHOTOGRAPHY BY ELLEN McDERMOTT

Some collector's analyze purchases, assessing potential appreciation or gauging how good a deal they're getting. Others buy from the heart; acquiring objects that are specific to a particular place or to a particular time in life. Some objects are kept forever; others are liberated to new owners. In this collection, one thing is constant: "I have to have a passion for the piece itself," the collector says. "When I walk into the house, it's as if I'm being greeted by my friends."

The lady quoted, an avocational interior designer, and her husband, a retired New York investment banker, reside in a historic town

near the Hudson River. The house they acquired eight years ago—a presumed carriage house with a decidedly French influence—changed the focus of their collection, from American furniture, Chinese export porcelains, and American Impressionist paintings, to Continental furniture, Dutch Delft ceramics of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and American Hudson River School, still life, and luminist paintings dating from about 1840 to 1880.

It took nearly two years to remodel the house. Behind it, gardens were added, replete with a folly, a brick courtyard lined with

PAINTINGS ON OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:

This brilliant painting of an autumn sunset by Jasper Cropsey (1823–1900) is one of the artist's later works and communicates his loving treatment of light and landscape. Cropsey's autumnal landscapes were influenced by the work of Thomas Cole and Asher Durand.

Fishermen Waiting for the Rest of the Party, Cohasset, Massachusetts, painted circa 1865 and signed Francis Augustus Silva (1835–1886), purchased from Godel & Co., New York, is "exactly what I would want in a Silva," the wife notes. Born in New York, a member of the so-called "second generation" of the Hudson River School, Silva was one of the leading marine painters in the luminist style. Particularly valued for his vivid sunsets and representation of atmospheric effects, Silva focused much of his work on the Hudson River and the coastline from Cape Ann, Massachusetts, south to Chesapeake Bay.

Aaron Draper Shattuck (1832–1928), *Midsummer*, 1862. Oil on panel, 4¾ x 8½ inches. Signed & dated lower left: A. D. Shattuck 62. Courtesy of MME Fine Art, New York.

Severin Roesen (1815–1972), *Floral Still Life*, circa 1860. Oil on board, 10 x 8 inches. Signed lower right: S. Roesen. Courtesy of MME Fine Art.





THIS PAGE, LEFT:

A small Hudson River scene by Robert Spear Dunning (1829–1905) entitled *Fishing at Twilight*, is from dealer Lou Salerno, of Questroyal Fine Art, New York. The sunset scene, all the more intense in a small canvas, is an example of Dunning's interest in color, his attention to detail, and his devotion of a great deal of time to a single painting. Dunning won critical acclaim for his still lifes and is best known for that work. This canvas is a wonderful example of the couple's level of connoisseurship. "These are very passionate collectors," Salerno remarks. "They are certainly aware that Dunning is better known for his still lifes, yet they also can appreciate the quality of his landscapes. That sort of appreciation separates the true collector from the mere buyer. They deserve credit for choosing the right examples by the right artists over a period of years."

PAINTING, OPPOSITE PAGE:

Edward Moran (1829–1901), *Early Dawn New York Harbor*, 1871. Oil on canvas, 18 x 16 inches. Signed & dated lower left: *Ed. Moran 1871*. Signed, dated & titled verso: *Early Dawn New York Harbor / Ed. Moran 1871*. Courtesy of MME Fine Art.

THIS PAGE, ABOVE:

A View of West Point from Fort Putnam, signed and dated 1838 by James Salisbury Burt (active 1835–1849) and purchased from Godel & Co., welcomes visitors in the collectors' front hall. Measuring 21 by 30 inches, the painting is one of a few accomplished in the Boston artist's relatively brief career. A landscape painter, Burt sometimes collaborated with Samuel Lancaster Gerry (1813–1891), a leading painter in the White Mountain School of the 1840s.





The rear of the collectors' home, showing the new addition at left, reads like a French provincial house, with stucco walls, finely detailed bay windows, and trim in a particular shade of blue, which is based on a historic color palette.



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European hornbeams, and a koi pond bracketed by a pair of sixty-foot katsura trees. High windows were converted into French doors, and shutters and exterior trim were painted a historic blue. A new wing containing a kitchen, dining area, and generous sitting room was added by architect Rad Opacic. Its salvaged stone mantel from France, massive hand-hewn wooden beams, flooring of terra cotta tile, and walls of textured plaster are completely consistent with the home's sophisticated Continental aesthetic. As the renovation project evolved, the husband and wife experienced a surge in their dedication to collecting.

As a child and teen, the wife

remembers "being dragged" by her mother from her home in Oklahoma City to visit relatives in Tennessee, where antiquing was the adults' favorite pastime. Though she says her mother's paintings would not interest her now, she did grow up in a house full of art and antique furnishings. One object, which enjoys pride of place in the dining room, is an heirloom sterling silver epergne.

Though the couple had collected before they purchased this house and were buying American paintings some twenty years ago, they "got serious" in this new setting. "We called Ron Bourgeault at Northeast Auctions, loaded up a truck with things we no longer felt attached to, and said 'take it





away,” the wife recalls, noting that the couple has also bought from the Portsmouth, New Hampshire, auctioneer.

“I am a person who focuses, possibly to a fault,” declares the lady of the house, who is responsible for its interior design. The couple’s

BELOW:

A pair of seascapes, jointly called *Ocean Study*, by William Trost Richards (1833–1905), purchased from Lou Salerno, are two of the many “small jewels” in the couple’s collection. “Sometimes,” the wife observes, “small paintings are so much finer than large ones.” Richards paintings represent not only the details, but the atmospheric qualities of nature.



LEFT:

In the living room, an antique French marble mantel is topped with a nineteenth-century neoclassical mirror, its original glass worn in places to a lovely tarnished patina; it was purchased from Gary Sargent Antiques of Woodbury, Connecticut. The chairs are eighteenth-century French. The late-nineteenth-century Chinese rug is a piece that the owner has cherished for forty-some years: “I had to have a house where I could use that rug,” she remarks. The living room’s decor, though somewhat formal, derives its relaxed air from the wife’s choices from a possible range of the “hundreds of blues” deployed throughout the interiors. Some of the collectors’ finest Dutch Delft pieces are displayed in the cabinet. “What I love about Delft is that the Dutch made plates to eat on every day,” the wife says, “and made very fine display pieces as well.”



LEFT:

A glorious oil on canvas, signed and dated by Henry Ary (1802–1859), shows the *View of the Hudson from Mount Merino* as it appeared in 1851. Purchased from Godel & Co., the painting represents one of the artist's most loved subjects. Ary is best known for his views of Mount Merino and of Olana, the home of fellow Hudson River School painter Frederick Church. Ary's career as a landscape painter began in 1831, when the painter met Thomas Cole, who urged him to switch his subject matter from portraits to landscapes. A long-time resident of Hudson, New York, Ary often sketched with Sanford Gifford, and is credited with having influenced the early work of that artist who achieved greater fame than Ary himself.



THIS PAGE:

A finely inlaid early eighteenth-century Northern European secretary is flanked by a symmetrical arrangement of eighteenth-century French side chairs and pieces of Dutch Delft ceramics. Beyond, is a hall gallery where south-facing floor-to-ceiling French doors provide views of the garden.

PREVIOUS PAGE, TOP:

Above the living room sofa, Robert Havell Jr.'s (1793–1878) landscape purchased from New York's Berry-Hill shows a Croton Point scene that is now the seventeenth hole of a golf course, identified by the man of the house as one of his favorite golf holes. In 1839 the English-born Havell visited New York City, traveling along the Hudson, sketching the countryside. He became a painter of Hudson River landscapes; he died at his home in Ossining, NY.

collections and the restrained blue and white palette used throughout the home evidence this ability to focus. “I wanted the whole house to flow,” she says, “And I realized when I was designing this house: blue and white makes me happy.”

The color scheme is the perfect complement to a collection of Dutch Delft, which encompasses varied pieces — chargers and ewers, lobed dishes, tobacco jars, even an early-nineteenth-century tambourine and a very heavy windmill weight mounted on an iron block and used as a doorstep — many purchased from Norma Chick at Autumn Pond Antiques in Woodbury, Connecticut, and from Mark and Marjorie Allen, of Manchester, New

Hampshire. Antique furnishings include neo-classical mirrors, Spanish church carvings hung above doorways in a hallway, lanterns and sconces, and a stunning inlaid early eighteenth-century northern European secretary in the living room, purchased from Westport, Connecticut, dealer George Subkoff. Elsewhere, in both formal and informal rooms, is a comfortable array of Italian, Portuguese, English, Welsh, and French furniture. “Antiques evoke not only past lives, but future lives,” the wife says. “We’re just renting them. They give you a feeling of continuity with other human beings.”

Items from the couple's extensive travels also play a decorative role. Among their



favorite display pieces are silver-embellished shells from Cambodia and Nepal, silver vessels from Oman, Mongolia, and Peru, a tureen from Uzbekistan, and a late-eighteenth-century English pearlware punchbowl that features early transfer decoration and measures some twenty inches across. “I love objects and their social histories,” the wife says, “particularly when two cultures come together and what they produce—Dutch, Flemish, French, Spanish, English, Chinese. That’s fascinating to me.”

The blue and white interiors are so easy on the eyes that the décor defers to the couple’s collection of paintings, pushing them to center stage, which is as it should be. The first important piece they purchased, from dealer Lou Salerno of Questroyal at his summer sale in Saratoga, New York, was an oil depicting a



BELOW:

Water Lilies, an oil on canvas measuring 10 by 13 inches, completed in about 1880 and signed by Robert M. Pratt (1811–1880), was purchased from Howard Godel. “I really do daydream about that painting when I’m away from home,” the collector says. Godel explains, “As a dealer I feel my job is to help curate collections by guiding people to the right paintings. I hoped that this painting would go to the right collector, someone who would really appreciate it. And this collector has an exceptional eye.”

ABOVE:

In the dining room, a table and eighteen chairs — a mix of original antiques and reproductions — “doesn’t begin to accommodate” the couple’s entire family, which includes seven children and seventeen grandchildren between them. A circa 1810 inlaid Federal sideboard attributed to Boston cabinet-makers John and Thomas Seymour displays a silver nineteenth-century Philadelphia tea service, and Dutch Delft “garlic” vases, which complement a breathtaking selection of still life paintings. Among them are William Mason Brown’s *Still Life with Cherries and Fruit on a Marble Ledge with Wine Glass* by Severin Roesen (1815–1871), both of which the collectors purchased from Godel & Co. To its right is *Fruit Still Life*, from MME Fine Art, painted in 1867 by Eliza B. Duffey who, during the 1860s worked as a still-life painter and writer in Woodbury, New Jersey, and in Philadelphia. At the far end of the room hang two small still lifes, the lower by Morston Constantine Ream and the top one by Adelaide Dietrich. The Roesen painting is one of the first paintings the couple bought after buying the house. Roesen continued the tradition established in seventeenth century Dutch and German still life painting, and became a pioneer of the genre in America.

single blood-red rose against a charcoal background, by Martin Johnson Heade (1819–1904). It is in good company with still life works by several nineteenth-century American painters including William Mason Brown, Severin Roesen, and Andrew John Henry Way.

The dealers who have played the largest role in establishing the couple's significant collection of paintings, the wife says, are Howard Godel of Godel & Co. Fine Art and Mindy Moak and Elizabeth Stallman of MME Fine Art, both located in Manhattan. "Howard advised me, in terms of quality, on a scale of one to ten, not to choose anything below a nine. Mindy has taught me generally what to look for, and to look more critically at the work itself and not at who painted it."

Godel praises the collector as having "an exquisite eye in terms of art, furnishings and taste in general," an assessment with which others concur. In the last two or three years, the couple have also been grateful for insights gleaned from Mark Mitchell, curator of the National Academy Museum and School of Fine Arts in Manhattan. Their formative attitude toward their collections is perhaps best summed up in a lesson Mindy Moak learned from a mentor: "The purpose of art is to enhance your life every time you look at it."

Though the wife is a self-confessed "fool for still life" and for the paintings of the Hudson River School, it is the latter that may hold a particular resonance for her husband, who grew up in the area and can identify places depicted in those landscape paintings. Among the works is a George Forster (1817–1896) painting of a fruit-and-flower still life — replete with a panoply of insects and a river in the background; the wife says, "It looks just like where we are." *A View of the Hudson from Mount Merino* by Henry Ary, *Sailing on the Hudson*, painted by Alfred Thompson Bricher in 1866, and *Midsummer*, signed and dated 1862 by Aaron Draper Shattuck, limn scenes and landscapes familiar to the collectors.

Luminist paintings have also been an area of interest. The magnificent *Early Dawn in*



In the dining room, an eighteenth-century Massachusetts lowboy displays an heirloom sterling epergne by Gorham, circa 1900, which belonged to the wife's mother. To the right of the lowboy is a late-nineteenth-century Dutch Delft jar. Above it hangs *Still Life with Oyster Crackers and Cheese* by Philadelphia artist John F. Francis (1808–1886), from Godel & Co. Francis achieved scant recognition in his lifetime, but became recognized as a key figure in the resurgence of still life painting in mid-nineteenth century America.

The Rose, by Martin Johnson Heade (1819–1904), in its exquisite original frame, is a small canvas by one of the most well-known painters of the nineteenth century. In 1884, the peripatetic Heade settled in St. Augustine, Florida, where he painted birds, seascapes, and still lifes, particularly magnolias and cherokee roses, of the sort depicted in this painting. Purchased from Lou Salerno at a summer sale in Saratoga, New York, it is one of the collectors' most important early acquisitions. If his work is an indication, Heade was fascinated by all he saw — New England seascapes and salt marshes (one of his most popular subjects), tropical rain forests, botanical treasures, and portraits of hummingbirds.



Above an eighteenth-century Massachusetts Queen Anne block-front chest hangs *Still Life with Wine and Strawberries*, signed and dated 1872 by Milne Ramsey (18447-1915) and purchased from MME Fine Art. It is one of several still life paintings that evoke a "life imitates art" sensibility in the dining room. Ramsey spent most of his career in Philadelphia and also lived for a short time in New York, earning a reputation as a still life, plein-air landscape and portrait painter. A trompe l'oeil approach distinguishes Ramsey's still lifes, as seen here in his depiction of the table linens, bottle, bowl, and berries. Atop the chest are a pair of eighteenth-century Dutch Delft "garlic" vases and an English Delft flower brick.





New York Harbor, dated 1871 and signed by Edward Moran, graces the front hall; it was purchased from MME Fine Art. Among the couple's luminist paintings are canvases by Aaron Draper Shattuck, William Trost Richards, Robert Spear Dunning, Augustus Silva, and Mary Blood Mellen. The Silva, also a favorite and a purchase from Godel & Co., is a small, luminous seascape, *Fishermen Waiting for the Rest of the Party, Cohasset, Massachusetts*, circa 1865. It is, the wife says, "exactly what I would want in a Silva."

Many of the paintings in the couple's collection are smaller canvases, distinguished by their wonderful attention to detail. Mindy Moak says, "You can see in these little jewels that the artist concentrated so deeply on them. Often a large painting, done over a long period of time, will have weak spots. The small paintings in this collection truly showcase the artists' abilities."

The couple's love for the pieces they have collected comes through loud and clear, not merely because they profess it, but because they relish the small-but-telling details that captivate them.

The sitting area in the home's new addition derives its European character from a French mantel and hand-hewn wooden beams. The blue and white color scheme is carried into this room through the upholstery on an early-nineteenth-century French wing chair, boldly patterned drapes, and with Delft pieces displayed atop the bookcase. The Edmund C. Coates (1816–1871) painting of Niagara Falls, done in 1850, at the time when the Falls was considered the nation's most stunning natural wonder, was one of the first pieces the couple bought (from Godel & Co.) after purchasing the house.



Alfred Thompson Bricher (1837-1908), *Sailing on the Hudson*, 1866. Oil on canvas, 9¼ x 18 inches. Signed and dated lower left: AT Bricher ./66. Courtesy of MME Fine Art.



TOP LEFT:

Herman Herzog (1831–1932), *Inlet on Lake George near 14 Mile Island*, 1880s. Oil on paper on panel, 15½ x 21½ inches. Courtesy of Godel & Co.

TOP RIGHT:

A still life of peaches, plums, and cherries by Andrew John Henry Way (1826–1888), purchased from Shannon's Fine Art Auctioneers, Old Greenwich, Connecticut, caught the collector's eye at the auction preview. "This painting jumped off the wall at me," she says. "I had to have it. My son-in-law went to the auction for us and we said, 'don't come home without it.'"

BOTTOM:

In its balanced composition, a Mary Blood Mellen (1817–1872) view of *Gloucester Harbor* captures a sailboat in calm waters and the rocky shoreline at the last light of day. Born in Sterling, Massachusetts, Mary Blood married the Reverend Charles Mellen in 1840 and moved to Gloucester, Massachusetts, where in the 1850s she became a student of luminist painter Fitz Henry Lane. According to recent scholarship, the collaboration was a close one: Mellen completed several of Lane's paintings. This small landscape is evidence of the level of mastery achieved by this female luminist.



ABOVE, LEFT:

The kitchen's light-filled dining alcove derives its comfortable Continental ambiance from an array of eighteenth-century furnishings, which include an English drop-leaf table, a small, heavily carved Italian chest and table, chairs upholstered in a blue and white "furniture check," a brass chandelier that is either English or American, a French scone, Dutch Delft ceramics, and a large French faience bird. The focal painting is a still life with raspberries and a pitcher of milk by John F. Francis (1808–1886). "It's one of my favorite paintings, and in this spot, I get to look at it every day," the wife says. The small painting below the scone is a George Henry Hall still life of raspberries spilling from a basket, typical of the naturalistic style of the era; both were purchased from Godel & Co. Above the Hall canvas hangs a still life with peaches, painted by George Harvey (1800–1878), who designed Sunnyside, the Hudson River home of his best friend, author Washington Irving.

ABOVE, RIGHT:

The blue and white ceramics are all Dutch Delft, with one exception: the late-eighteenth-century, transfer-decorated English pearlware punch bowl, which measures about twenty inches across. The focal point of this corner of the kitchen is *Summer*, an oil on canvas measuring 15¾ x 24½ inches, by George Henry Hall (1825–1913), which he signed and dated 1870. One of his studies of the four seasons, it was purchased from Hirsch & Adler Gallery in New York. The Delft bowl in the foreground of the still life captivated the interest of the collectors: the painting marries two of their great passions.



Summer by George Henry Hall, purchased from Hirsch & Adler Galleries in Manhattan, shows a bounty of flowers and fruit, and includes a small Delft bowl filled with raspberries in the foreground, a detail they particularly love. An astonishing *Fruit Still Life*, painted by Eliza B. Duffey in 1867, offers an opportunity for the collector to point out varied hues and textures of fruit, raffia mat and pineapple skin, drawing a visitor's attention to the painting's masterly contreponts of formality and informality. Though it is by an artist who is not well known, it does not suffer by comparison with the superb Severin Roesen still life displayed to its left. Happily, there is room in this collection for big names, and for students of the masters—including the so-called "second generation" of the Hudson River School.

"My advice," says Mindy Moak, has been to look for quality first and foremost. I love the artists to have interesting resumes, not necessarily to be household names. Collecting art is not autograph collecting. The Severin Roesen floral still life in the living room is a jewel by a major name, but then there are paintings by other artists where the quality is undeniable, like Eliza Duffey, whose work is so rare, and so little is known about her. There are wonderful opportunities still to be had if you can find the best work by students of the masters."

One senses that this collection is not about the status of ownership. It is about quality, history, personality, strength of character, initial attraction, and staying power—exactly what one wants in one's friends. @