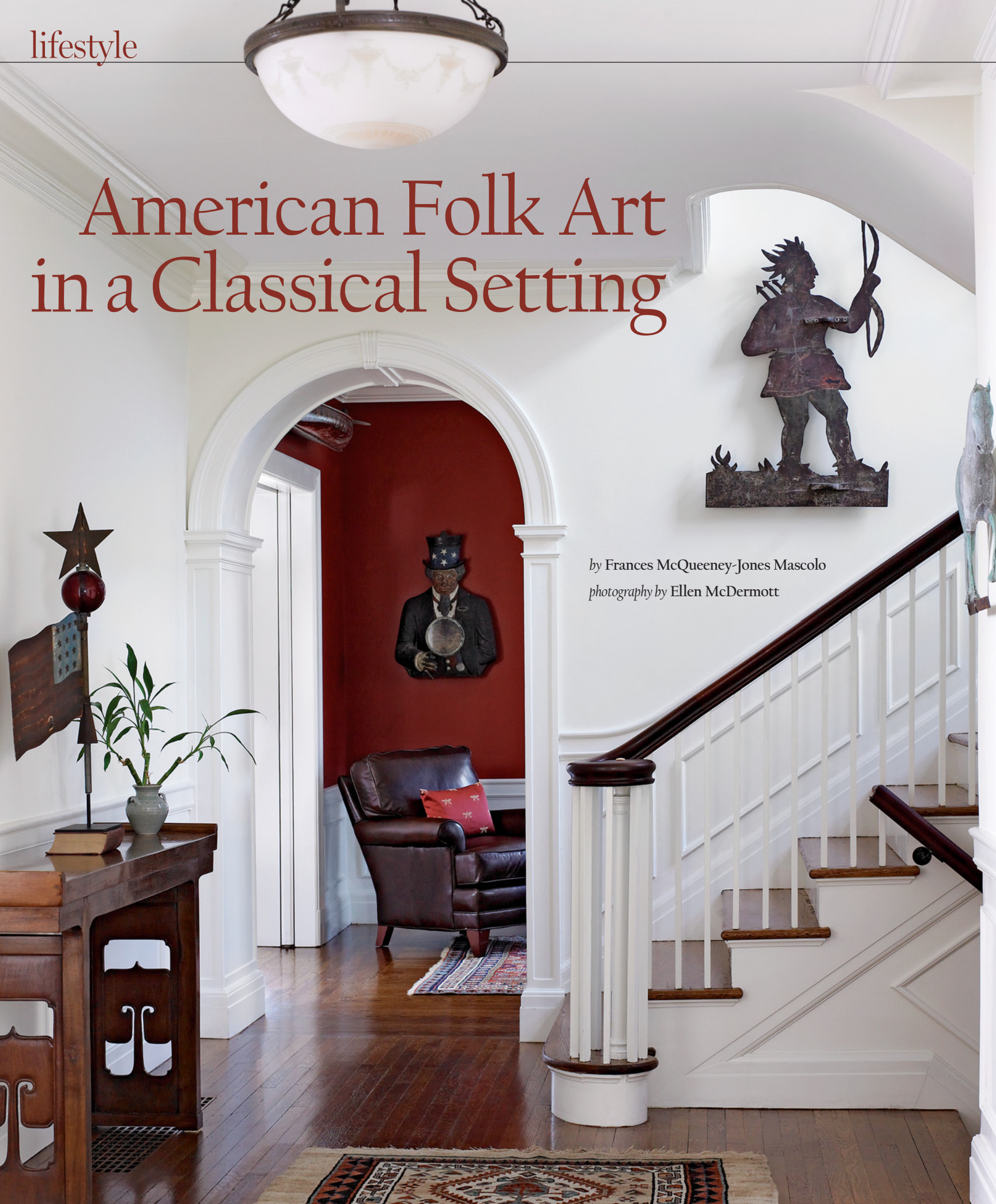


American Folk Art in a Classical Setting

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The classical architectural elements of a Connecticut couple's 1912 Italianate style house provide the perfect backdrop for their captivating array of folk art. Objects acquired over the past thirty years are artfully placed within the spacious floor plan, which, with its large open rooms, allows every piece its own setting. The collection began quite unintentionally when the owners were attracted by the fluidity and movement of a running horse weathervane made in the late 1860s by Cushing and White of Boston. They have since continued to be drawn to pieces that capture the spirit, vitality, and creativity of young America as it was just coming of age, full of optimism and pride. The pieces express these feelings with style and beauty. "Folk art is what we love," say the couple.

And what they love is exceptional. Every object in the house shares the same properties: excellent surface integrity and color, pristine condition, and an innate grace. The couple began with strong instincts for form, surface, and proportion, and a fine appreciation of humor and whimsy so often evident in folk art. Along the way, they met dealer Fred Giampietro; twenty-five years later they continue to work as a team, including the placement of objects in their current home, acquired two years ago and meticulously restored prior to moving in. In this home they have worked together on everything from the selection of antique Oriental rugs and carpets that pick up the colors of the folk arts' original painted and gilded surfaces, to the placement of specific pieces to create a dramatic effect. "The use of natural light rather than track lighting was a particular challenge," says Giampietro. "The outcome reinforces the goal of making the home a place of comfort and enjoyment rather than a museum."

The couple initially had some concerns about how the exuberant forms of the folk art would mesh with the classical elements and strict geometric architecture of the house. Once they began placing the pieces, however,



THIS PAGE: A breakfast room off the kitchen overlooks meticulously maintained gardens. Four old reproduction Pennsylvania Windsor fan-back chairs in blue-green paint surround a mahogany birdcage tilt-top tea table with foliate carved legs, circa 1790, from New York. Above the table hangs a period Art Deco Holophane lamp; the mate of those in the kitchen. Canton plates are arranged above the windows and below the arched ceiling.

PREVIOUS PAGE: The entrance hall provides visitors with a sense of the collections they will see in the rest of the house. Punctuated along the white walls and open space is an American flag sheet iron weathervane with blown glass ball, circa 1919, and a nineteenth-century sheet iron Indian from Pennsylvania. On the far you can shake hands with Uncle Sam and test your strength. The early-twentieth-century arcade game hanging in the library is an excellent representative of the form.





ABOVE: The cast-iron late nineteenth-century images of George and Martha Washington, originally made as stove top radiators by Mott furnace, New York, guard the entrance to the dining room. They are rare in their survival as a pair and in the retention of their original painted surfaces. Washington was often portrayed in a toga to associate him with the founders of democracy in ancient Greece; here he wears contemporary garb beneath his robes. Period lighting used throughout the house illuminates the room. An anonymous American nineteenth-century still life with fruit hangs above the Delft tiled fireplace. A gilded mid- to late-nineteenth-century apothecary trade sign stands in the window to the right.

PREVIOUS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Now standing sentinel in the kitchen, the tall, slender World War I era carved wood figure of Uncle Sam may have been a trade sign. It is remarkable for its form, surface, and spectacular condition.

On a wall in the foyer hangs an exquisite J. Howard Index prancing horse weathervane. It is a prime example of the form with outstanding surface.

Flanked by ferns and bathed in sunlight, this carousel camel figure stands in front of the dining room bay window. Carved and painted, circa 1900, by German-born immigrant Charles "I. D." Loeff (1852–1919), the figure exhibits the pleasant, yet playful facial expression characteristic of the craftsman's work. Loeff, the earliest and best known of the Coney Island carousel builders, was responsible for training other skilled carousel carvers including M. C. Illions and Charles Carmel. After leaving his first shop in New York he relocated to Rhode Island and then to California.

they realized that the seemingly divergent aesthetics were in fact complementary to one another.

Every object in the house has come from Giampietro, who says that the couple buys only the best of each form; they use words like "trust" and "integrity" when speaking of the dealer. Their first acquisition was a Cushing and White running horse weathervane, still in their collection. Since then they have acquired a number of other horse weathervanes. Perhaps the most splendid of the group is a unique A. L. Jewell copper horse of monumental scale now placed above the living room fireplace; it exhibits impeccable surface and kinesthetics. A rare and also very large A. J. Harris & Co. molded copper vane with a cast-zinc head hangs over the fireplace in the upstairs study. Of a Howard index prancing horse weathervane hung in the downstairs foyer, Giampietro says "It is the best I've ever had." Another Howard horse vane adorns the wall of the master bath and



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Entering the library one is greeted by this classic example of a late-nineteenth-century cigar store Indian, attributed to Samuel A. Robb. Characteristic of Robb, perhaps the most famous of cigar store Indian carvers, is the sweet countenance of “Daisy’s” face. Native Americans were the favored subjects for this figural genre because of their link to tobacco; Daisy holds a bundle of cigars in her left hand. The quality of carving and retention of a fine early painted surface is notable.

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This Charles Loefft carousel goat, circa 1900, in the living room retains its original vibrant paint decoration and glass “jewels.” As Loefft’s career matured, his animals became more and more animated, as evidenced in the kicking feet and charging stance of this example. The circa-1875 trade sign of A. Crawford is in the form of a pocket watch, identifying his occupation as a jeweler.

At the far end of the living room a spectacular horse weathervane by A. L. Jewell & Company, Waltham, Massachusetts, circa 1870, seems about to take flight. The surface and the form are stellar.

A rooster weathervane by J. Howard has a prodigious copper tail and a zinc body. Its claws are exquisitely rendered.

Dealer Fred Giampietro described this late-nineteenth-century countertop cigar store Indian, attributed to the shop of Samuel A. Robb (1851–1928) of New York City, as a great example of the form, having exceptionally good scale. It holds a place of prominence on one of the many display stands used to emphasize certain objects within the collection.





is hung in such a way as to be seen in the mirror reflection from all angles.

Rooster weathervanes are also a favorite form. A J. Howard full-bodied rooster with an impressive large copper tail and cast zinc body has exquisitely and powerfully rendered claws. Another rare example by A. L. Jewell has three dimensional applied wings and tail feathers. One strutting fellow by Cushing and White exemplifies the term “cocksure.” Three sheet iron roosters from Pennsylvania are painted: one red, another green, and a third white.

Although the weathervanes are placed throughout the house, the largest concentration is along a formal staircase where over a dozen molded copper and sheet-iron weathervanes are hung. The center of the staircase features a bell jar lantern that serves to both illuminate and unite the area. Prior to mounting the vanes the couple arranged them on the living room floor to decide how they would be hung to optimize their individuality and form. “It was like a jigsaw puzzle,” say the owners. The grouping includes a sheet iron running fox that was used as a prop in the movie *You’ve Got Mail*; arranged by Giampietro and borrowed because the lead character’s surname was Fox.

The couple has also gathered some arcade games that have strong graphics and form. In the library, a colorful “Shake hands with Uncle Sam” strength tester machine dating from the early twentieth century, challenges visitors to a contest. To demonstrate, the husband squeezes the outstretched had, and the



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In the master bedroom is a rare carved and gilded plaque of a spread wing eagle with a painted American flag and shield. It was made around 1900 in Pennsylvania by George Stapf (1862–1958), who made his living carving eagles for government buildings.

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Ascending the stairs one can admire the full-bodied molded weathervanes, which include a Cushing and White, Waltham, Massachusetts, steer, circa 1870; a gilded codfish attributed to Fiske & Co., New York, circa 1885; a Cushing and White Hackney horse, circa 1870; a circa 1860 A.L. Jewell, Waltham, Massachusetts, gilded rooster with applied tail feathers; a peacock attributed to Cushing and White; and a finely detailed ewe attributed to Harris of Boston, circa 1880.



Sheet metal and molded vanes in the form of roosters, banners, a horse, and a plumed fox adorn the wall of the upper staircase. The red-painted sheet iron rooster was made in Pennsylvania, circa 1870; a J. Howard & Co., West Bridgewater, Massachusetts, banner with a pierced pinwheel, dates to circa 1870; an Eastlake style banner by Fiske is circa 1885; and three sheet iron weathervanes from New England, dating from 1880 to 1890, include a fox, rooster, and horse.



lifestyle

THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT: A weathervane in the form of a top-hatted rider and horse engaged in dressage, is a prime example of the form. Its surface is outstanding. Sturbridge, MA, circa 1860.

An early Pennsylvania George Washington whirligig is carved in detail and includes a tricorn hat and epaulets on his shoulders. The figure bears a sword in one hand.

This spectacular cigar store Indian was carved in Detroit, Michigan, circa 1850, by German-born Julius Melchers (1829–1909).



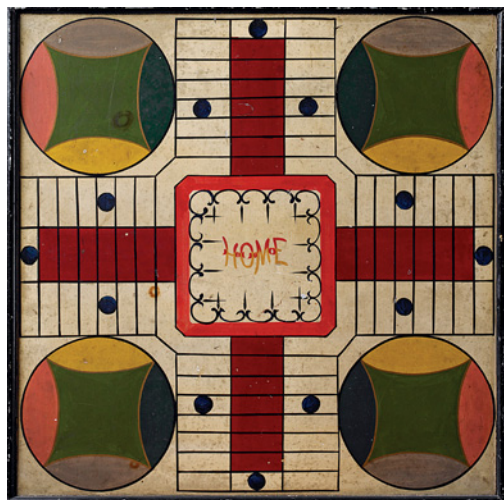
PREVIOUS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT: The clown face cast-iron shooting target was made in 1913 in Los Angeles at the J. T. Dickman Company. The surface is outstanding and the color is vibrant.

The dynamic carousel horse seems ready to jump over the second-floor hallway railing and gallop down the stairs. It is the one of three carousel figures in the collection made and painted by Charles Looff. An imposing barber's pole, circa 1880, is placed against the wall.

Strutting across a mantel shelf in the master bedroom, this proud rooster readies itself to crow. Found on a feed and grain store in Lajolla, California, this unusual circa-1920 full-bodied rooster trade sign is likely a unique example; it retains its original white paint.

This monumental running horse weathervane by A. J. Harris & Co., Boston, circa 1880, has a cast-iron head. It hangs above a second-floor fireplace lined with Grueby ceramic tiles with their original matt green glaze. When the owners purchased the home the tiles were covered in black paint.

dial registers “very strong.” The couple is also partial to arcade targets from shooting galleries. In the master bedroom a target, in the form of a cowboy about to draw his pistols, has a cast-iron bully’s-eye on his head and another over his heart. His sleek form is delineated with original paint. He was probably



made by William F. Mangels, who created many of the amusements and carousels for Coney Island. Down the hall is a cast-iron clown shooting gallery target made in 1913 by the J. T. Dickman Company of Los Angeles. The clown is wearing a mask and a hat and is a great example of the form, again with outstanding paint and surface.

The couple’s three hand-carved carousel animals add to the playfulness of the collection. A majestic camel in the dining room is in sharp contrast to the gamboling goat in the living room next door. Both are the work of Charles Looff (1852–1919), who in 1875 built Coney Island’s first carousel. Looff also made the couple’s third example, a leaping horse, which also retains its pristine paint. Other carved figures include three cigar store Indians: two attributed to New York carver Samuel Robb (1851–1928)—one nearly life size and the other made as a countertop display—and a third dating before 1850 and made by Julius Melchers of Detroit, Michigan.

Trade signs and trade stimulators are also found throughout the house. A 47-inch canoe



ABOVE: A circa 1910 cowboy shooting gallery target is a study in motion. The cast-iron figure is poised to grab his six shooters from the holster. Like every object in the house, his surface is spectacular; he was probably made by William F. Mangels Company of Brooklyn, New York. He lives in the master bedroom of the home.

INSET: A gameboard from an array of choice examples is mounted on an upstairs wall. Most gameboards in the collection, as with this piece, were made in Pennsylvania.

above a doorway once served as an advertising sign for Kennebec Canoes. The Planters Peanut man trade stimulator in an upstairs

guest bedroom encouraged the purchase of the product by providing a peanut when a penny was inserted into a designated slot. Another distinctive trade sign advertises “904 Families Supplied with Fresh & Salt Oysters.”

After three decades the couple continues to be attracted to the spontaneity, variety, and idiosyncrasy exhibited in folk art. When combined with the intrinsic appeal of the architecture and the natural light of the house, the folk art gives this home an air of harmony and joy. @