



*Douglaston and Little Neck
Historical Society
House Tour*

*Sunday, October 14, 2012
1-4 p.m.*

*Reception, 4:30 p.m.
406 Shore Road*



**TICKET,
MAP
&
HOUSE ESSAYS**

Douglaston and Little Neck Historical Society
328 Manor Road, Douglaston, NY 11363
718-225-4403 www.dlnhs.org

www.dlnhs.org

You may visit the five locations in any order.

Tickets for subscribers
will be available at any of the addresses.

- 1. 11 Melrose Lane
George and Christine Schmidt
- 2. 1 Alston Place
John and Marion Iorio
- 3. 6 Arleigh Road
Michel and Lynn Fiechter
- 4. 225 Hillside Avenue
Richard and Dorothy Ammirati
- 5. 120 Warwick Avenue
Ed and Andrea LaGrassa

followed by

A SPECIAL RECEPTION

- 6. 406 Shore Road,
Bob and Maruja Coddington



1. 11 Melrose Lane

George and Christine Schmidt

Tucked into a hill at the bottom of Melrose Lane, the home of Christine and George Schmidt is barely visible from the street, its weathered shingled sides blending nicely into the trees and rocks of this hilly landscape. There is nothing at the street side to indicate the treasure that lies within—two levels of nearly 50 foot-long loft-like spaces oriented to a knockout view of Little Neck Bay.

When George found the site in 1973, the view of the Bay was barely visible. The hill that the house now nestles into was densely covered with trees. But George had lived for 8 years just a few hundred feet to the west, having rented the old barn at the Parsons estate on Van Nostrand Place, which also overlooked the Bay. When the owner announced the barn was being sold, George never thought he would find anything to replicate that incredible spot. And then, through a series of circumstances and Douglaston connections the Melrose Lane parcel came up for sale. He borrowed some money from his father and two years' rent up front from two friends who pledged to live with him once the house was built; he bought the lot and set to work.

With a background in industrial design—George is a designer of flatware, housewares, and small appliances, to name just a few—he used his design skills and made a topographical scale model of the site out of foam core. Using the model to test out ideas, he designed the house himself, carefully modeling it to the view and the hilly site. A graduate of Pratt Institute and former teacher, he was inspired by a visit many years before to a Pratt professor's renovated Greenwich Village brownstone that had exposed brick walls on the sides, and no walls anywhere else.

"I just loved the openness of that space," George recalls, "and that you could see from one end to the other." While the Village brownstone was decidedly urban, George had the advantage of his lot being located at the base of the Douglaston peninsula, with a prime open view north capturing all of Little Neck Bay, and including the Throgs Neck Bridge.

Within the limits of his very tight budget, George realized that to keep costs to a minimum he had to

design a basically rectangular box, and make it interesting in the simplest possible way. He designed a first level with a studio from which he could design products, and with a separate model workshop to make mock-ups of his designs. The second level became the living floor with an open kitchen and dining area at one end, and a living area closest to the Bay, as one continuous unobstructed space, and with lots of glass.

There was one unexpected glitch during construction. While excavating the site for the foundation, bones turned up prompting a shutdown of work and a visit from the police. The site turned out to part of a Native American burial site, not the first to be uncovered on the Douglaston peninsula. Once that was resolved, George persevered.

Today, clerestory windows high up on one side of the simple pitched roof bring morning light into the living area from the east; a huge plate glass window captures a view of the Bay off to the west, and sliding doors and panels of floor to ceiling glass directly face the Bay. Bedrooms—all modest in size—are located off the living space, and, at an in-between level, an intimate den for TV and reading.

George married Christine Ward in 1982 following a whirlwind long distance East Coast/West Coast relationship in an age before cell phones or the Internet. She is the Director of Conference Management at the College Board, and she typically organizes large-scale conferences for 3,000 to 4,000 people at a time. As a result, she thinks nothing of holding an impromptu barbecue for 20, or a party for 50 in the magnificent living space or on the barbecuing deck. Sons Charlie and Robert, both grown and out on their own, are quick to return for visits, often dragging along friends and grand dog Frankie to share in the fun.

Christine and George like to travel, and the house has objects and artwork that reflect not only the exotic, but also the salvaged and the antique, mixed in with icons of contemporary furniture design. There is the Victorian era mantel donated by a friend for the fireplace, works by artist friends, and a front door salvaged from the Ledogar house on Beverly Road, one of the first unfortunate Douglaston tear downs of the 1980s. And there are the wonderfully carved wooden monkeys framing an opening, which Christine jokes can never be removed, as they are “holding up the house.”

Some recent changes to this ever-evolving house include the charming viewing garden and fountain visible from the cozy Master Bedroom, and a water side addition that expanded the living area, including a new seating area with table and chairs and a couch, and a new deck with clever glass railings that don't block the view.

If you look around, you might also spy some of George's award winning industrial design work—many versions of stylized cutlery in the downstairs studio, for example, and work “on the boards”—or his most recent design for an elegantly rendered laser cut bamboo basket, which MOMA recently chose to sell in their design-curated gift shop. Some of George's work is also part of the permanent collection of the Cooper Hewitt (Smithsonian) Museum of Design.

—Kevin Wolfe

2. 1 Alston Place John and Marion Iorio

The signs on West Drive say “dead end,” but 1 Alston Place, down the road and at the water, is very much alive. John and Marion Iorio have truly restored this, their third house in the Manor, and brought it to a new and stunning presence on the Douglaston waterfront. Allowed to gently fade in the recent past, today the house boasts much basic and necessary re-construction, coats of authentic stucco, and inspired landscaping that provides a quiet and congenial setting for the 1911 Colonial Revival home. The architect was George Hardway.

Although fronting on Alston Place, the house benefits from four floors of welcome exposure to Little Neck Bay: an extensive terrace at ground level; living room on the first floor, bedrooms on the second floor, and what is presently a study and gym above.

Entering at the front door there is a large open vestibule inviting you to living room, dining room, and kitchen, and introducing you to three re-built stairways, the first pleasingly changed from a single rise to one with a landing and new east-west rise.

The ground floor – let's not ever call it a basement or cellar – has a summer kitchen, other rooms, and French doors opening to the terrace. The first-floor living room has Marion-inspired panels, molding, and seductive colors. There is a French desk, many windows with orioles, and French doors leading to a

balcony. A 150-year-old bench at the north wall was a wedding gift from Marion's 97-year-old mother.

In the dining room stand two enormous late-17th-century mirrors. They are furnishings from the family of Thomas R. Gaines, who lived there from 1942 until 2010. Upon Tom's death the house was sold to John and Marion.

The second-floor interior doors, made of ash and displaying unusual grain, were carefully re-finished; many have a moveable transom. The master bedroom combines two rooms with east, south, and west exposure. There is an 1860s English dressing table there and male and female armoires.

The third-floor study/den/gym has two balconies, these and the large one off the living room were restored by the Iorios, according to and with the help of old photographs supplied by members of the Gaines family.

Beige shutters are being crafted, again based on earlier photographs, and will probably be in place when the house tour visits. There are many unusual lighting fixtures throughout the house, including chandeliers in the kitchen – such a blast. John Iorio is a lighting specialist with important work in many locations.

At the waterfront a wall of natural stone borders the property – a low wall but extending six feet below grade for stability. A simple lawn, the stone wall, and two pignut hickory trees beyond the wall define the view. At the north end of the property, the garage has been moved forward and the slope is landscaped for access to the ground-floor terrace. There is now visibility to the waterfront and to 15 Shore Road, where Helen Khan presides in her incomparable home. She is now a neighbor and also a friend for the Iorios.

Enjoy the renaissance experience of 1 Alston Place. It has been restored in the best sense and no site in Douglaston deserves it more.

–Julia Schoeck

3. 6 Arleigh Road Michel and Lynn Fiechter

From the crunch of the gravel at the driveway to the pristine white clapboards, classic dark green shutters and lemon yellow front door, the outside of the Fiechter house looks as if it hasn't changed since the day it was built in 1910.

That picture perfect classic gambrel roofed

Colonial raises expectations that one is about to enter a gracious old house that respects tradition. Owners Lynn and Michel—she's an interior designer and he's a partner in TPG Architects—have brought a deft design touch to these elegant interiors, as well as the lovely garden behind the house, all of which is lit up by an occasional design surprise, to make a most inviting and comfortable home for their young family of two boys and one girl.

Jimmy, 12, Michael, 6 and Jackie, 9, know they can sit anywhere, play anywhere, and so can anyone else, despite the beautiful antiques and artwork throughout the house. Nothing is off limits, and nothing is too precious for the family to use, and that's the way they like it, according to Lynn, who has done a scheme of mostly neutrals and beiges. Every room is actively engaged in the art of everyday living.

The beautifully proportioned living room, with nine-and-a-half-foot ceilings and large windows everywhere, invites one to hunker down in the sprawling couch or the linen covered chairs by the fireplace and stay awhile. This gracious living room is used on a regular basis, but really gets pressed into service every holiday season when Lynn's parents arrive from Arizona for a two-week visit. Christmas tree, all day long fires in the fireplace, and present opening all happen here. "We live in this room the whole time," Lynn notes.

The furnishings throughout the house are an eclectic mix but with a distinctly French vibe, thanks to pieces from Michel's family, and other European pieces that the couple has found in antiques stores over the years. In the living room, for example, a sensuously curved sofa and two chairs from the 19th century that Michel inherited and that could only come from France are upholstered in paisley, a subtle punctuation at the far end of the living room.

When they found the house 10 years ago, they weren't even looking. It's a very Douglaston story. Michel, who grew up on Hollywood Avenue, had persuaded Lynn, a transplanted Westerner, to leave Manhattan and try out the Manor. Lynn reluctantly agreed, and so they rented a house less than a block away on Shore Road.

A couple of months after moving here, 6 Arleigh Road came on the market. They hadn't even started

to look for a house. But the moment Michel heard this news he was excited. He had played in the house as a child, and knew it well. The owners were the same as in his childhood, Janet and Gordon Paulsen, who had lived there for nearly half a century. Michel and Lynn put in an offer, and were quickly outbid. But a heartfelt letter from Michel to the Paulsens about their feelings for the house and for the Manor in general turned the tide. Soon Lynn and Michel were moving in, fixing up the house by refining and sprucing up what was always there, and adding two more children to their family in the process.

First they stripped more than 100 years of paint from walls and moldings and lightened the palette. Michel threw a little zing into the muted scheme by making the dining room an unexpected, luminous orange with a special hand applied finish that, Lynn notes, has a wonderful warmth when lit by candles during dinner parties.

While Lynn sourced fabrics, Michel tackled the more architectural tasks. He recently put his design skills to the sun porch, which when they bought the house wasn't winterized, leaving them with a one-season room that wasn't habitable in winter or summer because the windows no longer opened. All new windows and heat were added, and a new, hipped roof replaced a flat one, giving a wonderful shape to the ceiling of the room, and height. Today this family room is one of the most popular in the house, outfitted with a flat screen TV and a comfortable sofa and chairs. The wrap-around windows on three sides give an enveloping sense of being in a garden, with glimpsed views of Little Neck Bay.

The 1960s-era kitchen is the last left on their list of major renovations. Future plans call for a complete gut redo, including moving the powder room to create flow through to the French doors in the main hallway, and the living room. For the time being though, the kitchen is perfectly serviceable, and has received a visual lift with some French decorative touches as well as the ever-changing art work of the children.

Upstairs, there are bedrooms for each child, some of which have special built-ins to save space, and the Master Bedroom. Lynn and Michel also recently completed renovating each of the bathrooms, including another one in the attic, enhancing the old house charm with their choice of materials and fix-

tures that retain the turn-of-the-last-century feel while providing all the modern conveniences. A clever rejiggering of closets and bedroom spaces and some moving of walls has given them spacious bathrooms and ample closets, including a beautiful walk-through closet at the Master. When walls were moved, door casings and moldings were carefully matched, so that the changes are seamless.

At the third floor, there are two guest rooms and a bath with its original claw foot tub, and Lynn's retreat, where she works part-time on interiors projects for TPG, which specializes in commercial and corporate interior design (Lynn and Michel met at work). More, subtle changes—light floods the hallway through a beautiful window that used to be hidden inside a closet, for example—have made this a special place that friends and family like to occupy when they come and visit.

Before you leave don't miss the garden out back. The house is pushed back farther from the street than is the norm in the Manor, and Lynn and Michel have turned what might have seemed like an awkward and narrow space into a great asset. New bluestone terraces, stone walls, lattice fences and a pergola carefully screen and frame views, directing one's attention to the beautiful vision of Little Neck Bay beyond.

—Kevin Wolfe

4. 225 Hillside Avenue

Richard and Dorothy Ammirati

The 1910 colonial Revival building at 225 Hillside Avenue once sat regally at the crest of the avenue with open space to Forest Road on the north and Center Drive to the west. A sweep of wildflowers could be seen from the circular solarium at the west corner of the porch. Subsequently this open portion of the block was developed with today's 20 Center Drive, 210, 220, 230, and 234 Forest, and 205, 211, and 217 Hillside, all built in 1961.

When the Ammiratis began work on their new home at 225 Hillside in 2004 they removed the material that had enclosed the front porch, and behind the wall they discovered the railing with open-circle insets which now graces the long porch and solarium. The design was

copied and used on the front gate. This was one of many surprise finds in the house they devoted two years and more to restoring and renovating.

Upon entering the house you are in a generous vestibule where you see an unusual brass chandelier with lamps extending horizontally from the base; this was found in the cellar and had strangely been painted black, as were the wood front-door frame and sidelights. The brass is cleaned and polished and all the woodwork has been restored to its original lustrous finish. After passing an opulent lamp with graduated fringe, there is the music room to the right, a dining room behind with an 1886 music box (“Ideal Cenecila”), and living room on the left. The kitchen has a more modern style but with traditional cabinets and plenty of room for the creative talents of Dorothy, principal chef and cook. Outside the kitchen door is an herb garden.

The original staircases, and there are many in this comfortable four-level house, have heart-shaped cutouts in the railing panels. The front-porch swing repeats the heart design.

There are clocks everywhere; one of the many cuckoo clocks at the back stairway on the second floor seems to be supported by a horse, driver, a great pile of logs and perhaps a Christmas tree. In addition to a fondness for clocks, Richard is a collector of model trains, and there is a set in the third-floor loft that runs around the entire room on an elevated glass shelf. Dorothy says her husband claims that the transformer could operate the Long Island Railroad system.

Richard’s father, Carlo Ammirati, a painter and also the art director for Lord and Taylor, is represented by pieces of his work in the stairwells and elsewhere.

A 1914 addition to the east houses bedrooms, one of which was once an open porch. A small room, conveniently open to the back staircase, has been converted to a much-needed walk-in closet. In a second-floor hallway there is another surprise, discovered behind an opened wall. A framed display includes a 1911 newspaper clipping and below a set of

pockets for soap and other bathroom accessories, probably used by visiting family members long ago.

By now you may be wondering where all the unusual and eclectic furnishings in this house came from; they were harvested over the years by Dorothy, who does have an eye for finds, and cannot pass a store or E-Bay site without making sure there isn’t something in there for which she could provide an appropriate setting in her home. Their bulldog “Amelia” gently agrees.

An intriguing story about early owners of 225 Hillside came to our attention recently. The source was Mitch Sorenson who lived across the street at 139 Prospect Avenue from 1939-68. Although we cannot vouch for its authenticity, we cannot resist including it in this essay as perhaps a colorful chapter in the history of Douglaston. Mitch writes, “...there were tennis courts behind the house and the owner ‘Mr. Thompson’ (James N. Thompson with a connection to the Pilgrim Mortgage Company, according to the Douglas Manor Association property cards) was a man of mystery. When I was a young boy my father told me that Mr. Thompson was a big gangster during the bootleg days of prohibition. He employed ‘Mr. Coates’ and a man named ‘Edward’ as caretakers. Mr. Coates was the chauffeur and also the overseer of all of Mr. Thompson’s business enterprises. Mr. Thompson had another home in Florida and because of this spent very little time in Douglaston.

As a reward for their loyalty and devotion, Mr. Thompson, upon his death, left the house to Mr. Coates who lived there with Edward until they both passed away. The body of Mr. Coates was said to have been found by a cleaning woman, adding to a young boy’s sense of intrigue. (No word as to who found Edward’s body.)

“As kids we used to cut through the property to save time getting to our house on Prospect Avenue and we were always a bit intimidated and scared to be cutting through Mr. Thompson’s property.

“Vacant for a while, the house was purchased

by Hazel Stephens, a well-known Douglaston realtor. The vacant property was sub-divided, and Hazel Stephens and her husband rehabilitated and lived at 225 until it was sold to Frank and Adelaide Mace in 1964.

“In 1973, Dr. John Farrell and his wife Bernadine along with their five children moved into the eighteen-room house. There was a billiard room in the basement with a pool table and built-in benches. At some point the full-length porch was enclosed.

“Dr. John, as many people fondly called him, entertained mightily! And many dignitaries shared convivial moments in this beautiful house. Among Dr. John’s greatest legacies were the establishment of a scholarship program for students at the Kings Point Merchant Marine Academy, where he was proclaimed an honorary Admiral, and the founding of the Queens Flag Day Committee in 1994 to honor those members of our work force who daily come in harm’s way – firemen, police, sanitation workers, armed service members, and others: little people who do big things for society and are never publicly recognized. Dr. John stood for them! This great man who passed away in 2008 was a great Manor resident!” Hear! Hear!

–Julia Schoeck

5. 120 Warwick Avenue Ed and Andrea LaGrassa

The LaGrassas and their children Hunter and Alexandra have lived in this French Normandy Tudor for twenty years and have made the house their own, furnishing it with prized possessions from the world over.

Beginning with Andrea’s family and early life in North Africa and the South of France, there are portraits, beautiful pieces of early French lace embroidery, grandmother’s Pre Russian Revolution samovar, rescued from its hasty burial place during a time of political stress, an 1870s Italian table with gold-leaf swans on black lacquer. And then you notice an extraordinary Moroccan mirror inside the front entrance which reflects the Tunisian carpets on the floors.

In the dining room there is a refractory table which opens to twelve feet and seats sixteen. Along the west wall of the living room is a collection of archive books, encyclopedic in its subject matter and ever-useful to Alexandra for paper-writing research. Andrea says if you need information on anything, just call her and she will invite you to come and browse. If you do, you will probably be distracted by the collection of monkeys nearby, including the famous four not three!

There is much original detail in the house – stair railings, cabinets, moldings and trim – and the restoration of Andrea’s and Edward’s beloved stained-glass windows. However, in 2000 the family decided they needed a family room. The addition at the back of the building holds plenty of space for all the many activities of this exuberant family, and plenty of new light from windows and stained-glass facing south, while allowing in the back for gardens featuring herbs and many property-line plantings. There is an enormous oak tree at the southwest corner of the screened porch providing shade, as well as an ornamental anchor for the house.

A description of the planning and execution of this addition, including negotiations with the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission for appropriate design within the historic district appeared in the Spring, 2009, edition of the DLNHS Newsletter and was a welcome narrative for a process that is observed for Historic District properties. A later alteration provided for kitchen renovation and new access on the east side of the building.

The cottage was built in 1925 by Harold C. Dean, the father of John Dean. John is a master wood craftsman and had a shop in the Village some years ago. John and his wife Althea are still local and live at 311 Kenmore Road.

The LaGrassas have respected the house’s original concepts, motif, and design in fashioning and completing all of their considerable improvements to the house over the years

–Julia Schoeck

6. 406 Shore Road

Bob and Maruja Coddington

The house tour concludes at 406 Shore Road followed by a reception at 4:30. This grand Arts and Crafts house, built in 1916 by architect William Worrall, Jr., embraces the water with two angled wings that maximize the views of Little Neck Bay.

The house has a name, “Coo-ee,” emblazoned above the front door on a blue-and-white tiled plaque. The name reflects the Australian roots of its colorful original owner, Annette Kellerman, later Annette Kellerman Sullivan. Kellerman was a celebrity in her day – a vaudeville star, film actress and distance swimmer, who designed and wore the first one-piece women’s bathing suit (its risqué design led to her arrest in prim Boston). Her unrestrained, adventurous lifestyle made her a pioneer of the “modern woman” movement. Like others involved in the movie business in nearby Astoria, Queens, she chose to live in Douglaston, until her return to Australia in the 1930s.

Kellerman evidently gave the house its obscure name. “Coo-ee” is a long, loud, high-pitched call used by Australian aborigines to indicate one’s location and was adopted by the settlers in the country. Rhythmic multi-paned windows provide scale. The handsome slate roof, punctuated by a central eyebrow dormer window, dominates and unites the composition.

Inside, the basic design of foyer and central staircase flanked by living room and dining room remains unchanged, although the original ground and second floor porches have been enclosed and the kitchen has been opened to the dining room. The second floor features a bathroom with original tile and fixtures.

Robert Coddington is the President of the Douglaston and Little Neck Historical Society, and he and Maruja have been the proud owners of Coo-ee since 1973. With the designation of the Douglaston Historic District in 1997, we trust that Coo-ee will grace the Douglaston shoreline for many years to come.

–Julian Bazel

We thank the residents of the Douglaston Historic District for offering their homes to be shown on today's anniversary Tour, and also our committee members and others who were generous with their time and talent in making the event a great success. Special thanks to the many docents who hosted at the houses and helped our guests to enjoy and be informed.

To Bob and Maruja Coddington, our reception hosts, we express our gratitude for their gracious and attentive ways in bringing the Tour to a happy conclusion.