

## Newport Antiques Show Upholds Reputation For Luxury

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By Laura Beach

MIDDLETOWN, RI: It is hard to imagine a better managed event than the Newport Antiques Show, which opened for its fourth consecutive year at St George's School in Middletown on Friday, August 13, and continued through August 15. All the organizers lacked was a bit of wet weather to bring the boating crowd indoors on what was an outrageously beautiful weekend.

The Newport Show's twin powerhouses, chairman Anne Hamilton and manager Diana Bittel, are seasoned pros. It shows. Working with the unflappable facilities manager Ralph DiSaia, Hamilton and Bittel have assembled the right stuff: an appealing, convenient venue; two popular charity beneficiaries, the Newport Historical Society and the Boys & Girls Club of Newport County; generous underwriters William Vareika Fine Arts Ltd and Brown Brothers Harriman; and an impressive roster of dealers well-matched to the tradition and formality of this posh resort town.



Quester Gallery, Rowayton, Conn., pulled out all the stops with top-notch American paintings, furniture and folk art. Ex-collection Brown University, the portrait of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry is by Jane Stuart, youngest daughter of Gilbert Stuart. Above is a Bellamy eagle plaque with an 8-foot, 3-inch wingspan. Top right is "Yacht Dauntless in the America's Cup Trials of 1871" by Antonio Jacobsen. Below, James Bard's "Henry Smith" of 1867.



Village Braider, Inc, Plymouth, Mass., is a fixture of garden antiques shows nationally.

NHS spokesperson Elizabeth Sulock confirmed that 600 people attended the preview party and 2,000 visited the show over the weekend, surely a disappointment to organizers, who heavily promoted the fair. Roughly \$100,000 was raised for each of the beneficiaries, a good result. Dealers said sales continue to be mixed at shows everywhere as the economy recovers.

"The weather really did hurt us. Plus, the Preservation Society of Newport County held its big, 60th anniversary ball at Marble House on Saturday night. Maybe people were tired. We normally have more people come back on Sunday to buy," said Hamilton.

The Newport Antiques Show falls one weekend after the Nantucket Antiques Show and this year the two fairs shared 19 exhibitors in common. (By contrast, only one exhibitor, Hilary & Paulette Nolan, took part in New Hampshire Antiques Week, also the week before.) Hamilton has big plans to grow Newport's attendance in coming years by marketing the fair to residents of other affluent summer communities nearby, such as Little Compton, R.I., and Marion, Mass., who find Newport easier to get to than Nantucket, which is accessible only by boat or plane.

From the beginning, Hamilton has counted on the support of fine arts dealer William Vareika, a Newport fixture. "As a local dealer, I enjoy hosting my dealer colleagues from around the country," said Vareika, who built his booth around Martin Johnson Heade's fiery oil on canvas view "Coast of Newport," \$3.5 million, and mounted specialty displays of works by William Trost Richards and John LaFarge in the show's entrance. Let's hope visitors made it to Vareika's Bellevue Avenue gallery to see "Historic New England," honoring the centennial of the Boston-based preservation organization on whose board Vareika sits. Vareika's next project is a Gilbert Stuart show, a benefit for the Gilbert Stuart Birthplace and Museum in Saunderstown, R.I.



Woodbury, Conn., dealer Tom Schwenke — Fabulous, Federal and Forty Years in Business — fielded questions about this winning portrait of a pedigreed pooch.

The show's nucleus of outstanding specialists in regional American painting included The Cooley Gallery of Old Lyme, Conn., Roger King Fine Art of Newport, Walker-Cunningham Fine Art of Boston, Melissa Williams Fine Art of Columbia, Mo., and Quester Gallery of Rowayton, Conn. Adding additional luster to the group was newcomer Hirschl & Adler Galleries of New York, which emphasized Newport and Boston furniture and New England painting.



Mo Wajselfish, center, of Leatherwood Antiques, Sandwich, Mass., shows clients "The Finding of Moses," an English naïve appliquéd and embroidered picture of circa 1815.

portrait of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry, a local War of 1812 hero, by Jane Stuart, youngest daughter of Gilbert Stuart. Also of interest was a 14-star Peace flag, a Bellamy eagle plaque with an 8-foot, 3-inch wingspan and canvases by James Bard and Antonio Jacobsen.

"I met many nice people and thought opening night was pretty strong," said Florio, who made small sales and has follow-up interest in his bigger items.

"We had a better show than last year but, surprisingly, we sold virtually no ceramics," said New York dealer Paul Vandekar, who specializes in Chinese and English porcelain and pottery, sailors' valentines, woolworks and framed engravings and watercolors priced from \$3,000 to \$30,000. "With new price levels, dealers are able to buy better. We are going back to prices we haven't seen in years. To capitalize, dealers have to work hard to offer good merchandise at the right price."

"Newport's not a market we've ever really approached before. We decided to show a huge range of things, from still life paintings to marine art and folk sculpture," said Elizabeth Feld. Watercolors at Hirschl & Adler started at \$2,000, but the star attractions were a pair of Hepplewhite card tables attributed to Newport cabinetmaker John Townsend and flower painter Jane Peterson's lush canvas "White and Pink Dogwood." Hirschl & Adler is moving to a bigger space on the fourth floor of the Crown Building on 57th Street in Manhattan later this year, so watch for details.

There was more Townsend-Goddard furniture, including a block and shell carved Chippendale tall clock and a block and shell carved knee-hole dressing table attributed to John Goddard, at Quester Gallery, where Michael Florio combined the furniture, marine painting and folk art to jaw-dropping effect. Front and center was a large

Newport's eclectic ornamental style favors variety and abundance, key ingredients at Leatherwood Antiques. Cape Cod dealer Mo Wajselfish obliges his fans by packing his display full of English ABC wares, Vienna bronzes, Black Forest carvings, snuff boxes, nautical art and garden antiques. "We always get a lot of attention. People love us," he said. Congratulations to Wajselfish, who has been invited to exhibit at the American Antiques Show in January.

There is a lot to love altogether about the Newport Antiques Show, beginning with its preshow dealers' party at a private Newport mansion ( ne plus ultra, we were told ) to this year's loan show, "Tooth and Bone," introduced by the great scrimshaw expert Dr Stuart Frank, senior curator at the New Bedford Whaling Museum, who led a guided tour of the exhibit on Saturday.

"Now we just need the economy to cooperate," said Bittel. She foresees the Newport Antiques Show returning next year to the same place, same weekend-after-Nantucket time.



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