

## **New Newport Show Looks To Be A Winner**

By Laura Beach

Attention, shoppers: The new Newport Antiques Show looks to be a winner.

Benefiting the Newport Historical Society and the Boys & Girls Clubs of Newport County, the glamorous, 42-exhibitor show opened with a gala preview on Friday, August 10, at St George's School. The event continued through the weekend.



We are told that this is the most ambitious antiques fair ever mounted in America's yachting capital. It took the determination and experience of two dynamos, Anne Hamilton and Diana Bittel, to pull it off.

Hamilton, past-chairman of the Philadelphia Antiques Show, served as preview party chairman. Bittel, a Philadelphia Show exhibitor, managed the show. Three pillars of Newport society — Oatsie Charles, Maureen Donnell and Dorrance "Dodo" Hamilton — were honorary co-chairman. These practiced Newport hostesses threw a preshow dealers' party not to be forgotten. "It was, wow, we are back to the 1920s," said one impressed guest.

"Anne and I had been talking about doing this show for years. I finally said, 'it's now or never,'" Bittel told *Antiques and The Arts Weekly*. After initially lining up a hospital charity, the organizers ultimately joined forces with the Newport Historical Society, which operated a show of its own, and the Boys & Girls Clubs.

"When I met Ruth Taylor, the Newport Historical Society's executive director, I knew she was someone we could work with," Hamilton said appreciatively.

Hamilton, a part-time Newport resident, lined up backers. Celebrating its 20th anniversary in Newport, William Vareika Fine Arts was the presenting sponsor. Sotheby's helped underwrite the preview party. Other corporate sponsors included Antiques and Fine Art, Flather & Perkins, and Northeast Auctions.

Hamilton and Bittel knew when to schedule the show. "Only one weekend in August would fit into the Newport calendar," said Hamilton. Bittel, meanwhile, shrewdly targeted dealers on their way to or from other summer shows in New England. Half of Newport's exhibitors came directly from the August 2–5 Nantucket Antiques Show, managed by Bittel on behalf of the Antiques Council.



The Newport Antiques Show was a rich stew: Newport with a bit of Nantucket and a dash of Charleston and Palm Beach. The Newport-Palm Beach connection seemed especially pronounced at the preview party, which treated 650 colorfully attired, bejeweled patrons to passed hors d'oeuvres and live jazz.

Exhibitors loved the facility, a level, spacious skating rink with a high ceiling and plenty of parking space. The rink is on the grounds of St George's School, whose 125-acre campus offers sweeping views of the bay. Through historic Newport, down Memorial Boulevard, and past the Atlantic Beach Club, St George's is reasonably easy to find if you follow directions posted on the school's website.

Dealer selection reflected Newport's formal, eclectic style, strategically splashed across the "House & Home" section of *The New York Times* on August 2 in a story describing the

decorating activities of Oatsie Charles, Howard and Nora Cushing, Guy and Mary Van Pelt, Nuala and Claiborne Pell, and other Newport notables.

The show's strongest suits were fine art, marine art and artifacts, Chinese Export porcelain and paintings, American and English furniture, ceramics and garden antiques. Rockwell Stensrud's new book, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, was in every booth and Ralph Carpenter, the Newport fixture behind the book project, signed copies during the show.

Exhibitors agreed that, if first year sales were not as dazzling as wished, the Newport Antiques Show has immense promise. "It's going to be a major show," said New York dealer Paul Vandekar, who had greatest interest in his China Trade watercolors and sailors' woolwork pictures. "Everyone in Newport is from somewhere else. I saw clients from Palm Beach, New York, Ohio and other wealthy places. I didn't stop talking all weekend. It was exhausting, but encouraging."



"Anne and Diana did such a terrific job. It was far and away the best first-time show that I have ever been involved in. Attendance was through the roof. There must have been 800 people on opening day," said Elle Shushan, a Philadelphia specialist in portrait miniatures.

American furniture was well represented by Heller-Washam Antiques of Woodbury, Conn., and Portland, Maine, who featured two reverse serpentine chests of drawers, a Queen Anne burl-maple flattop highboy, and a Queen Anne wing chair.

"This show has all the potential in the world," said Don Heller. "It enjoyed enormous local support. Patrons were engaged and sophisticated. About 30 percent of the people who came through I knew from other shows. The rest were new faces."

"I came to Newport one summer on my way to law school and never left," said American paintings dealer Bill Vareika. In celebration of its 20th anniversary, William Vareika Fine Arts, Ltd, is presenting "A Precious Muse: Art of The Narragansett Bay Then and Now" through September 9 at its 212 Bellevue Avenue gallery. Occupying a prime spot in the center of the floor, Vareika's booth showcased major American paintings of Newport interest, including two monumental works, "Breakers: Narragansett Bay" by William Trost Richards and "Coast of Newport" by Martin Johnson Heade. Side walls supported portraits by Gilbert Stuart and Charles Bird King.

Joseph A. Hekking's watery landscape "An American Littoral" was a centerpiece at The Cooley Gallery of Old Lyme. Boston fine arts dealer Walker-Cunningham included the Gilded Age portrait "A Lady and Her Companions (Mrs Elenor Feigenspan Ballantine)" by Ernest Ludwig Ipsen. The gallery also specializes in the work of Lemuel D. Eldred, whose atmospheric Gaspe Peninsula landscape, "Off the Coast," was marked \$125,000. Marine arts expert Louis Dianni treated visitors to a period painting of the 1930 America's Cup Race by James Gayle Tyler. The artist observed the first Cup race ever held off the coast of Newport.

Newport's formal gardens found their match in Barbara Israel, a New York specialist in garden statuary. Pieces of interest ranged from a George II lead cistern, \$17,500; to a pair of composition stone game birds, \$12,500; and a circa 1930 curved cast and wrought iron bench manufactured by Leinfelder of Wisconsin, \$10,500. Sales included a clock at Charles Edwin, Inc, and a bagatelle table at Jane McClafferty Antiques. Diana Bittel, Gary Sergeant, Georgian Manor Antiques, Danielle Ann Millican and Carlson & Stevenson were said to have had good shows.

"This show was my whole summer," said Hamilton, busy getting her children off to school after the fair ended. "I put out every card and posted every sign, but it really came together."