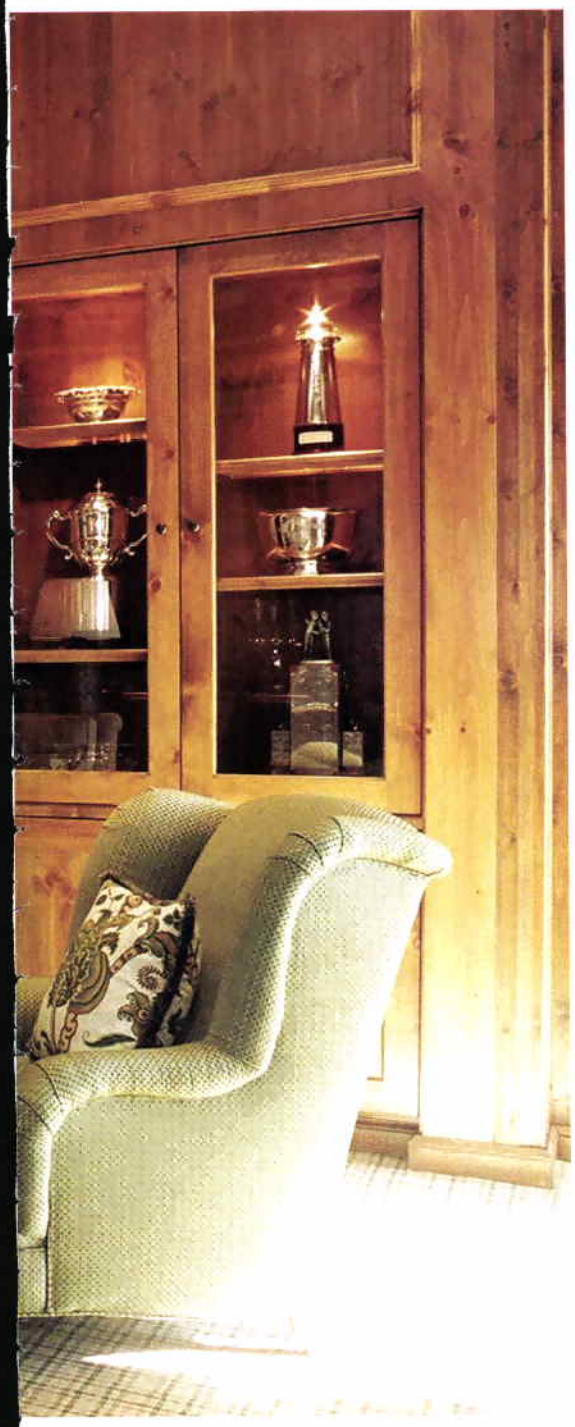
ART CONSULTANT

Tailoring a Collection

How the Oyster Harbors Club built a contemporary collection of art that reflects the history, the area and the people.

By Lauren P. Della Monica

Susan Randall's commissioned painting, *The 17th Hole*, hangs over the fireplace in the Club's Pub Room.



Club Manager Douglas Mayo and Lauren Della Monica placed Ellen Welch Granter's *Beach End II* in the less formal Club entry.

Nestled on a bluff between the idyllic south shore of Cape Cod and a famed Donald Ross golf course sits a country club rich in history yet thriving in a new home. The 80-year old Oyster Harbors Club re-opened July 1, 2006, in a new building, the third on this site. Shortly before the building was completed, the project leaders realized there were many large walls and no appropriate artwork to hang on them. They enlisted my services to find just the right artwork to enhance the architecture and design of the new Clubhouse.

The Manager and Club President, Douglas Mayo, wanted the artwork to reflect the people, history and area surrounding the Club, rather than to simply fill the walls with typical country club art—impersonal prints and an occasional painting by an unknown artist. We decided that the history, both of the Club and of the fertile Cape Cod art community, would make up this collection. To meet the needs of the large, empty spaces, as well as the art budget, I decided to build a collection of contemporary, local artwork. Though historical Cape Cod artwork was certainly in the forefront of our minds, we began to put together a collection influenced

Buffalo Bottle with Pewter, Orange and Lime by Katherine Anne Hartley graces the Grill Room of the Oyster Harbors Club.

by the past yet forward-looking. My collection strategy was to find the best artists working on the Cape today, whose works were beginning to be appreciated and would ripen into a valuable and esteemed historical collection over time.

I spent the next six weeks scouring local art publications, galleries, museums, websites and artists' studios for just the right mix of works to tell the story of this place. Given that this was a country club, as opposed to an individual's home or an office building corporate collection, it was critical to find the balance between art that appropriately accented the physical space of dining rooms and lounges while also making the membership feel at home. For the members, this would be a home-away-from-home, a place where they could dine, relax, celebrate or play cards on a regular basis. The members are a group accustomed to living in

Cotuit Bay by Susan Randall captures the mood of a warm summer's day.

By the Sea by Anne Packard, found a home in the formal entry foyer and serves as a welcome to members.

Careen Bottles by Leslie Packard of adorns the elegant stairway.

beautifully appointed environments, many with long-term connections to the Cape area, so the Club's art collection was designed both to reflect who they are, how they live and their roots in the community.

Cape Cod has long been the home of a rich artistic tradition and has made a major contribution to the development of American art movements. From the days when Provincetown served as an artists colony in the late 19th Century to the tenure of Modernists such as Blanche Lazzell and William Zorach, to the times of the Abstract Expressionists Hans Hoffman and Jackson Pollock, artists have been drawn to the colors and sights of the Cape Cod sea and sky. The artists working today follow a rich heritage with their own varied interpretations of the area, but each one is mindful of his or her predecessors.

When figuring out where to begin with such a large undertaking, I decided to focus on the largest spaces first, the three large walls above the fireplaces in the Pub, the Grill Room and the Formal Dining Room. In order to truly reflect the landscape of the place, I commissioned Susan Randall, a local painter and sculptor with her own gallery in town, to paint one of the holes of the beloved golf course to hang over the fireplace in the Pub. Working from trips in a golf cart to view the various holes and snapshots taken back to her studio, Randall painted her first golf course scenes, working her way up to the large, green canvas now prominently displayed against the backdrop of the rich feathered-edge pine paneling and nestled among the cases full of silver golfing trophies. *The 17th Hole* (page 58) presents the rolling, manicured lawn surrounded by lush trees and a favorable sky over one of the favorite holes on the course.

Susan Randall's second commission was to depict the bayside of the Clubhouse and something reflecting the spectacular view of the bay below. Randall's *Cotuit Bay* (page 60) perfectly captures the sense of a warm

Great Island III by watercolorist Elizabeth Pratt perfectly weds the colors of the interior spaces and the seaside location of the Club.

summer day, the blues of the sky competing only with the deep hues of the sea, and with two small sailboats effortlessly working their way past a spit of land that is so familiar to local residents. The light reflecting off small swells in the water draws the eye from across a room. The vibrant local colors and the simplicity of the composition perfectly suit the walls of the intimate formal dining room; the painting also serves as a "window" for those seated facing away from the true water view.

The Grill Room is the most used room in the Club, where diners enjoy lunches and informal dinners. As this is where people spend the most time, it was critical to find just the right painting that would appeal to a large range of people and that was appropriate to the dining function of the room. I was searching for a timeless still life that subtly incorporated the notion of "dining" and that was visually important enough to carry itself across a large room with soaring two-story ceilings. When I saw a painting by Katherine Anne Hartley in a local art magazine, I knew she was the artist I was looking for. On my first visit to her studio, I found the perfect painting right there on the floor leaning against a sofa. *Buffalo Bottle with Pewter, Orange and Lime* is a metaphor for a well-enjoyed feast as the red candle has burned down to a stub, the drippings carelessly easing down over their brass candlestick, and the fruity remains of the meal lie haphazardly scattered across the tabletop.

Anne Packard is the most widely recognized Cape Cod artist today, and the creator of one of the jewels of the Club's

▲ The Grill Room entrance to the Club with the painting *Beach End II* by Ellen Welch Granter, and beyond a glimpse into the Pub.

◀ This painting, *Beach Walk*, by Joyce Gardner Savorskas, is filled with potent warm browns and vibrant blue colors and graces the main dining salon.

collection. Living and working in Provincetown and soaked in artistic and creative tradition of that area, Packard has won the respect of fellow artists, critics and collectors nationwide. Her most successful works are often studies of the atmospheric nature of the Cape's misty mornings and dusk light. In *By the Sea* (page 61), Packard paints a compelling landscape and a seascape in one as she balances the "pretty" quality of the luscious green rolling earth in the foreground with the developing shadows creeping along the slope. In the final stage of building the Oyster Harbors collection, with most of the artwork already in place, I recommended *By the Sea* for the formal entry foyer to serve as the welcoming piece of art and a visual announcement of the Cape Cod art collection to those entering through the main door.

Just across the foyer from this painting hangs the work of another Packard—Leslie Packard, Anne's daughter, and the third generation of Packard artists. The color

palette of her work, *Green Bottles* (page 61), produces an electricity that draws the eye up the grand staircase, towards the high ceilings, and merges the effect of the art and the architecture.

As a counterpoint to the weightier feeling of some of the oil paintings, the collection includes two watercolors by quintessential Cape Cod artist Elizabeth Pratt. Pratt, a Copley Master at the Copley Society in Boston, specializes in richly colored watercolors of the sea and its coves. When thinking about what Cape Cod is on a natural, biological level, I realized that it was very simple: the sea and the creatures that live in and alongside it. Pratt captures this balance perfectly in her work. In *Great Island III* (page 62), Pratt shows her virtuosity in rendering the shades of the sea in a tidal pool swirl of blues and greens and the rocky, sandy land that bends to greet the water.

In the main dining room, the largest function space in the Clubhouse, there is very little wall space for hanging artwork as two of the walls are actually pocket doors that retract to allow for room size adjustments during large functions. There are two identical spaces, however, flanking the three sets of French doors. I needed to find two paintings that worked well as companion pieces to provide a sense of continuity in the large room. On a warm day in June while visiting the bright, airy studio of painter and monotype artist Joyce Gardner Zavorskas I found the first of the Club's two dining room paintings still wet on the easel. Zavorskas relies upon her impressions of a landscape while painting plein air style to capture the essence of a place or a quality of light. *Beach Walk* (page 63) is a perfect piece for the main dining room as the colors are potent warm sandy hues and strong blues of sea and sky and the expansive vista Zavorskas depicts carries well across a large ballroom.

The companion piece to *Beach Walk* is LaVerne Christopher's *Row Boats*, which depicts a haphazard arrangement of wooden rowboats piled along the shore awaiting their next voyage. Had she been commissioned to paint the Club beach itself, Christopher could not have captured the sense of the place any better. Seeing the painting in person confirmed my initial impression. This graceful rendering of the shore is a peaceful reminder of this place, and conveys an alluring sense of possibility.

Also showcased in the main dining salon, *Row Boats*, by LaVerne Christopher, captures the essence of a Cape Cod beachfront.

To greet entrants to the Grill Room portion of the Club, the less formal area of the building, I hung a pared-down landscape in a simple wooden frame by Ellen Welch Granter. *In Beach End II* (page 59), Granter presents a grassy, seaside landscape with an inlet of water boring through the marsh. The majority of the canvas is filled with this natural landscape demonstrating its importance over the small structures on the horizon that are poised high on the water's edge to capture the best view of the distant sea.

The other three pieces I chose for the Grill Room were a selection of pastels by two of the best pastel artists on the Cape. Carole Chisholm Garvey presents sunsets over the still water in her two small but unflinchingly beautiful pastels, *Goodnight, Edgartown* and *It's Over* (page 65). The remaining daylight explodes through the darkening sky pushing the clouds aside in reds, blues and purples.

Also part of this collection is an American Impressionist painting called *Eastern Rigs* (not pictured) by Peter Kalill, featured in the June 2006 issue of *American Art Collector*, which lends the collection its maritime element. When I visited Addison Art Gallery in Orleans, Massachusetts, in June I saw a few paintings by Kalill hanging on a wall and was immediately drawn to their light-capturing quality. As soon as I saw *Eastern Rigs* hanging on its own it was obvious that the composition was perfect for a large space as were the deep colors that could carry across a room. Helen Addison then showed me the *American Art Collector* story featuring this painting, and I was sold on it.

In all, the Club purchased sixteen primary works of art (paintings, watercolors and pastels), seven fine art prints, various local maps, charts and decorative pieces, and collected 45 historical photographs for the photo gallery. In all, this was a collective effort. In the final days before the grand opening some members donated historical and contemporary works from their own collections to accent the newly acquired works of art. Each of the acquired pieces brought something of the character of Cape Cod, its history, its geography, its people, and its ecology to the Oyster Harbors Club collection. ●

It's Over, by Carole Chisholm Garvey, is a beautiful enhancement to the Club's popular Grill Room.

Aerial view of the new Oyster Harbors Club building and its surround beach and sporting facilities.

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