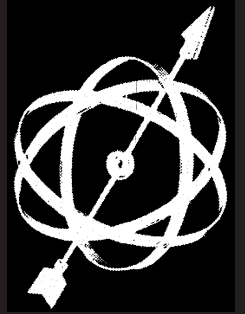


December
2005
Volume 12
No. 4

Northeast



ANTIQUES • ART • HISTORIC HOMES • COUNTRY LIFE • PRESERVATION & RESTORATION • INTERIOR DESIGN

The State of Antiques • Hudson, NY

Part one of a two-part article
By Philip Alvaré

Editor's Note: With the end of 2005 upon us, Northeast thought it might be interesting to look at some of the major players in the city of Hudson, NY, and ask them what they think of the state of the business. Hudson is an important stop for any antiquer that lives, or travels through, the Hudson Valley region. Philip Alvaré, a dealer who came to Hudson in the second wave of the 1990s antiques boom, seemed a per-

fect match for the job. What follows, in separate parts this month and next, is an honest and straightforward look at the antiques business today, where it's been, and where it's likely to go in a global age where changing consumer tastes, the Internet and a still-shaky economy are dictating the direction.

The antiques market in Hudson went from boom to bust. There was an unprecedented level of spending, antiques sales soared through the mid-1990s. Then the dot-



The stylish interior of the Alain Pioton Antiques, a fixture on Warren Street.

com bubble burst. Combined with the fallout from 9/11, this delivered a gut-punch to the business. Five years later, retail antiques and fine arts sales are still anemic, but it's not just Hudson and it's not just about the money.

In this two-part article, I'll explore why the retail antiques market in Hudson and maybe throughout the rest of the country, is faltering. The antiques business has changed. The Internet, global marketing and the rise of auction houses are

part of the change. Changes in taste, style and (the obvious trend for Mid-century Modern and "less is more") approach to decorating, have eschewed the frowsy clutter often associated with antiques. You can't *give away* "brown furniture."

In addition, there's a multinational explosion of marketing vehicles: glossy shelter magazines, television shows, catalogues and the Web foist fashionable home design products –

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With a new space in Hudson, Stair Galleries has brought some new energy to the venerable antiques row of the town.

History in Lake George, NY

In Search of Sir William Johnson's Military Road

By Tom Calarco

It's the search for something missing, something lost or something important to be rediscovered, which motivates historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists, or anyone who seeks to reclaim the past.

Generally, it takes time and perspective to appreciate the value of history, which is why you usually find historical and genealogical societies populated mainly by seniors and retirees. Historian Tom Nesbitt of Warren County, New York, however, became fascinated with this search for history at the tender age of seven.

"As a little boy, a friend of my father gave me a book, *The American Heritage Book of the Civil War*," said the Glens Falls native, whose ancestry in the county reaches back to 1784. "It had lots of maps and little figures, and was full of pictures, so I became interested in military history."

Around the same time, in 1954, Nesbitt recalled seeing the reconstruction of Fort William Henry, now one of Lake George's foremost tourist attractions. It piqued his interest, and because there were no Civil War battles fought in this area, he was drawn to the French and Indian War, most of whose major battles were



A painting by Ferris, showing the Highlanders fighting at the Battle of Fort Ticonderoga during the French and Indian War.

fought in upstate New York. Around the age of 13, he read James Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*, which describes the destruction of the original Fort William Henry in 1757 and the massacre that followed.

Nesbitt's fascination grew and he got a job at the fort at the age of 14, putting bumper stickers on cars in the parking lot.

"I had applied to be a guide, but this was all they offered me," he said.

Finally, at the age of 18 he became a full-fledged guide there, and it was during that summer he met a tourist who was a Civil War re-enactor. It spawned the idea to put together a re-enactor group for the French and Indian War. He did the research and published an article in *Military Collector and Historian* on Fraser's Highlanders, a Scottish regiment that fought in several French and Indian War battles, including the victory for the British at Quebec in 1759,

which proved to be the turning point of the war. It formed the basis for his re-enactment group, his own Fraser's Highlanders, which he organized in 1975.

The group was especially active during the national bicentennial, participating in events throughout the northeast. Their objective was to do living history by recreating battles and encampments.

"Being in the history business is a lot of fun," he said. "It's interesting how many misconceptions people have, but that's how folklore is generated."

Nesbitt said that because peoples' memories of the same events often differ, it complicates the truth about history.

"Not everything you see on the History Channel is necessarily correct," he said, "because they start out with a preconceived notion and are subject to the same stories and folklore as all of us."

Nesbitt cited a typical example of a legend that grew up about a local landmark called Blind Rock. Reputedly, it was a place where the Indians tortured people, yet he said that no verifiable evidence has been found that such torture ever

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many relatively inexpensive, nicely made, stylish knockoffs of period antiques peddled by Pottery Barn and the like – to an increasingly susceptible American consumer. The market is saturated with great looking, cheap stuff. Why pay \$6,500 for an eighteenth century wrought iron English regency settee when you can buy a new one from Smith & Hawkins for \$650? Something else, though, seems to have changed; something's been lost. The cultivation and development of an appreciation of decorative and fine arts from the past and the time it takes to develop a sensibility and see the importance of doing so, may itself be a thing of the past.

In the mid '90s Hudson was hot, sizzling hot. *Architectural Digest*, *Elle Decor*, *The NY Times*, *New York Magazine* and scores of other national and international publications profiled Hudson as a kind of "It" place, a destination market for antiques on the East Coast. Lots of buzz. Celebrity spotting was commonplace. Major international architects, designers and decorators arrived with their clients (who sounded like the Forbes 400, because they were the Forbes 400) in tow spending money like drunken sailors.

Then, in 2000, the high-tech bubble burst, the country plunged into recession and a pall fell over U.S. after 9/11. The music stopped and it hasn't quite picked up since. If it has, it's a different tune. There are very few antiques dealers in Hudson, or elsewhere crowing about how good business is. It's mediocre at best.

In this article, I'll attempt to place my finger on the pulse of the antiques and arts market in this little city on the banks of the Hudson River with the eponymous name. I conducted interviews with six professionals in the antiques, fine arts and design related fields, who collectively share more than 100 years of business experience in the town. They revealed a remarkable depth, history and a scope of knowledge and information about the town that bills itself as "The Friendly City," and of an industry that seems to be going through growing pains. It is a multi-faceted story that goes back about 20 years.

The Past

Byrne Fone and Alain Pioton of Alain Pioton Antiques/The Hudson Antiques Center, Carey Maloney of M(Group) Architects and Interior Design, Colin Stair of Stair Galleries and Restoration, Inc., Peter Jung of Peter Jung Fine Art, Michael Krieger of A. Michael Krieger, Inc, and Vince Mulford, of Vincent R. Mulford Antiques, all graciously consented to interviews about the state of the antiques and fine arts business in Hudson. They take a look at the past, chat about the present and speculate over what the future may hold.

After the boom years came the bust, and despite nearly catastrophic market conditions, many antiques dealers scratched their heads wondering, "What went wrong?"

Lurking at the back of everybody's bonnet was the troubling old saw, usually applied to fashion, that goes some-



Alain Pioton Antiques, at 536 Warren Street in Hudson. One of the town's original antiques shop.

thing like this: "Once you've heard about it, it's over." Or, as Maloney of M(Group) said: "The moment you say something is 'out' it's almost automatically 'in.'" And vice versa.

While the antiques and fine arts markets may not be quite as variable as hemlines, the ups and downs of the industry are now subject to larger market forces like the Internet, globalization and multi-national marketing that has dramatically changed the rules of the game not just in Hudson, but across the board.

Hudson's seen a lot of changes, with its origins dating back to an eighteenth century mercantile port on the Hudson River called Claverack Landing, and an economy based on shipbuilding and the whaling industry. Later, during the nineteenth century, industry grew up and commerce plied its way along the Hudson River, which was at the time, a trade superhighway. Still later, Hudson earned notoriety as a honky-tonk town, chock a block with bordellos and speakeasies. But eventually, as with many Upstate New York river towns, industry dwindled, the region fell upon hard times and towns languished and died. Hudson was no exception, maybe even worse off than other towns. It became, according to some longtime residents, "a ghost town." By the mid 1970s half of Hudson was boarded up

and the other half should have been.

Then, in the 1980s, there was a resurrection led by a few notable artists, intellectuals, dealers and cooks with a keen eye for fine nineteenth century architecture and real estate bargains. Among the earliest pioneers, Byrne Fone and Alain Pioton of Alain Pioton Antiques/The Hudson Antiques Center, 538 Warren Street (who specialize in French antiques of all periods with an eclectic mix of dealers at the Antiques Center), were some of the first intrepid souls "open for business" on Warren Street.

According to Fone, when Pioton opened the Hudson Antiques Center, there were only about 10 dealers. Among them, long time dealer Jennifer Arenskjold, of Arenskjold Antiques (who was unavailable for comment because she's gone to the opera in St. Petersburg, Russia), who is still prominent in the antiques community.

"Hudson was very quiet with little street activity," he said. "Many stores were empty."

Colin Stair, whose father, John Stair, a vice-president at Sotheby's, came to the area around the same time, 1986 – 1987, bringing Sotheby's Restoration to Claverack.

Colin recalls being told: "Don't go downtown."

Vince Mulford who opened Vince

Mulford Antiques in October 1990 remembers, "The 500 block was all that was left of downtown business. There were no meter maids and a lot of abandoned cars on Warren Street."

Fone, Emeritus Professor of English and American Literature at the City University of New York, a pioneer in the field of Gay Studies, author of six books – most recently, *Historic Hudson: An Architectural Portrait* – is currently finishing a novel. He recalls business improving, traffic increasing and some dealers (originally with spaces at the Antiques Center) opening their own shops. The Hudson Renaissance began to gather steam.

By the mid-90s things were in full swing. Hudson was suddenly filled with antiques dealers, and Warren Street was revitalized from top to bottom with scores of new shops, art galleries, restaurants, boutiques and gift shops; all the result of the first few pioneers from the '80s. This is what put Hudson on the map. These days, however, most dealers admit business is mediocre at best. It's as if a second wave of retail has arrived, one with a much lower price point, catering to tourists and day-trippers willing to spend \$200, but not \$1,000. The housing market, though, is still seeing a boom.

While the price point for a nineteenth century Italianate Victorian Town House with a storefront on Warren Street is considerably higher than a chest of drawers from the same period, you'd be hard pressed to sell the chest of drawers (particularly if it's "brown furniture"), while the town house will fly. The recent defeat of a multimillion dollar behemoth St. Lawrence cement plant proposal in the town, led by the grass roots organization "Friends of Hudson," has helped stabilized the Hudson real estate market.

The Present

Hudson may not be what it appears to be. It sounds ominous the way that "objects in mirror may be closer than they appear" seems creepy when you glance into your side view mirror. It's not as if there's a T-Rex lurking around the corner, but there's a world class auction house called Stair Galleries, with clients on seven continents, and International *Cognoscenti* with country places here, as well as a rapidly expanding and diversified marketplace where the hottest trend in antiques may very well be those nineteenth century architectural gems lining Warren Street. Most likely, what's happening in Hudson is an ebb and flow echoing national, if not global, market currents.

Colin Stair likens what happened to the antiques business in the mid-'90s to "being blown apart like an asteroid."

"More people found auctions," he said. "Auctions got in the way of the retail business. My grandfather hated auctions for that reason. The way people conduct business is different. Also, eBay has made the word 'auction' not sound like the word 'whore.' People now think an auction's okay. I credit (eBay) with promoting the auction and Internet business."

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An outside view of Stair Galleries' new space at 549 Warren Street.



The Stair family is now into its' fourth generation in antiques.

The State of Antiques • Hudson, NY • Part II

By Philip Alvarez

Editor's Note: In the Dec. 2005 issue of Northeast, we brought you part I of Philip Alvarez's article about the state of the antiques business in Hudson, NY, a crucial stop on the antique roads of the Hudson Valley and for discriminating collectors from all over. Philip spoke with several important Hudson dealers – Byrne Fone and Alain Pioton of Alain Pioton/The Hudson Antiques Center, Carey Maloney of M(Group) Architects and Interior Design, Colin Stair of Stair Galleries and Restoration, Peter Jung of Peter Jung Fine Art, Michael Krieger and Vince Mulford – about where Hudson came from in the antiques business and where it is today as we start the second half of the first decade of the new millennium. That conversation continues in part II, with further discussion of the market today and a look to where the future might take Hudson.



Carey Maloney of M(Group).

Peter Jung of, Peter Jung Fine Art at 512 Warren Street, who deals in American and European paintings, 1850–1950, and has been conducting business in Hudson since 1993, recalls “when there were a lot of derelict properties and prices for commercial buildings were extremely reasonable.”

He recalls when “Warren Street (was) frequented by major NYC designers who felt they had found an undiscovered gem where the supply of antiques were plentiful and prices were lower than Manhattan.”

Jung sees current changes in the town positively.

“At present I’m very encouraged by the appearance of other types of business (restaurants, clothing, etc.),” he said. “The situation we had, with such a heavy concentration of antiques shops, was a bit fragile and vulnerable to economic downturn.”

When queried, he quickly characterizes the current market as such:

“The economic climate is not healthy,” he said. “Too much money at the top of the pile, not enough spread around throughout society.”

He also attributes changes in the market and the way business is conducted to a variety of factors.

“The Internet is becoming more and more important every day,” he said. “The art business, in particular, is carefully monitored on the Internet. As soon as a picture sells, the whole world knows the price and all the details of the sale. Art is being commodified, as though it were gold futures, or pork bellies, or something...”

Indeed, it’s hot at the top, the extremely high end, a trend that hasn’t helped Hudson, or most anyone else for that matter, except those dealers and auction houses at the same end of the spectrum, able to meet the acquisitive needs and desires of those with most of the money.

Byrne Fone asserts that the sluggish business environment and scant traffic in Hudson has something to do with this.

“One could speculate the old line designers who used to come here to shop for mid-level clients are now serving a much richer clientele who buy at a much higher level and price point of antiques than available in Hudson,” Fone said. “They shop for a client who will only be satisfied with, let’s say, a one of a kind eighteenth century French chest signed by Jacob with a price tag of several hundred thousand dollars. Hudson isn’t the place to go [for that].”

Most interviewed agree. The relatively well-heeled, upper middle class client, (a meat and potato customer in the 1990s), with a six figure salary, smart financial portfolio felt flush earning a good interest, now feels a squeeze. The good and bad news about low interest rates is: low interest rates. Nobody making three percent on a portfolio feels they have a lot of disposable income. So, in addition to a change in the way people are buying, there’s also been a major change in who is buying.

The Future

Michael Krieger, of A. Michael Krieger, Inc., 445 Warren St., an Interior

Designer who has had a New York-based business for the past 25 years, recently moved his base of operation to the building he and a business partner acquired in Hudson in 1995. Although Krieger’s work still consists primarily of clients based in the Metropolitan New York City area, he decided to move his design offices above his first floor shop, AMK, Inc. Antiques in Hudson, in an attempt to have more time in the country and be more involved with the antiques business.

He characterizes the change as a lifestyle move. Although his business is basically interior design and he doesn’t specialize in any particular period. It’s his “love of all things: Objects, machinery, furniture, art, modern, period, European, Victorian - anything that’s good,” that motivates him. The antiques retail space on the ground floor and the two design studio floors above reflect his omnivore enthusiasm for decorative arts. The spaces brim with color and light and a playful dynamic of bold and graphic objects in dramatic contrast and composition.

Krieger describes his client base as “Carriage Trade.” and feels the key to success is “quality, quality, quality.” He has the distinct advantage of not having to rely on the antiques business to make a living (based on his design business), which “allows [him] to be a little more relaxed about the underperforming [antiques] market.”

He speaks boldly about what bothers him.

“The market for decorative objects is too much driven by fashion,” he said. “What’s in today will be gone tomorrow. There’s too much marketing information to the consumer and the consumer is too moved by the ups and downs of the market and fashion. In general you can still buy high quality antiques, (particularly American and English) often for less than you will pay for new stuff of questionable quality.”

He also attributes a slow down in the consumption of antiques as a result of, “The Baby Boomers, the largest group of consumers now being in their 50s and 60s,” he said. “They’ve already done it. They’re looking to downsize, not upsize. The [demographic] group underneath is much smaller and has been weaned on catalogues, have a consumer mentality and mass market reference.”

In summarizing Krieger suggests that, “even if you have the money to acquire antiques, it takes a lot of time. To learn, source, touch and compare. For that reason eBay will never replace the antiques store and there will always be people who are interested in things from our past; things of quality, that are handmade, things that are unique. There will always be people who do not want to go out and buy what everyone else is buying.”

Finally, Krieger sees that if there is a general trend toward Modernism, as soon as it’s firmly taken a foothold it will be out the door.

“Modern to me is an attitude of mixing disparate objects,” he said. “Personalized interiors of quality, whatever the style will always be appealing.”

Less is more. Globalization has sent



Vince Mulford Antiques on Warren Street, in Hudson, NY.



An interior view of Michael Krieger's stylish inventory.

shock waves of change throughout the world affecting every market, regardless of how remote or seemingly insignificant, and economy on every level. There is no such thing any more as: “Business as Usual.” Change is the name of the game.

Out of all the people interviewed for this article, Carey Maloney, co-owner of M(Group) Architecture and Decoration, 152 West 88th Street, New York City, stands out as the most thoroughly modern – fully, twenty-first century citizen – of the bunch. Maloney, who holds an MBA, and architect co-founder, Hermes Mallea, A.I.A., built M(Group)’s internationally acclaimed reputation. The company reflects the complex global market place in which a successful business must compete. One needs a GPS Device to track down either Maloney, or Mallea at any given moment on the planet and the likelihood of finding them both in the same country at the same time is remote. They have been published in every major international shelter magazine, have been included in *Architectural Digest’s* AD 100, *House & Garden’s* Best of American Design, *New York Magazine’s* Top 100 designers, and *House Beautiful’s* 100 Best Decorators. The accolades are numerous.

Maloney has been sourcing pieces for his projects in Hudson for the past 18 years. He recalls one of his first purchases was a life size plaster cast of Agripina from Vince Mulford. He believes bolder antiques were offered then, or the dealers open then were what was bolder. Over time he’s seen more serious, yet less stylish things offered.

Yet, M (Group) has always found Hudson to be a great alternative to NYC dealers and Paris dealers. He shops there for his city, as well as country, projects.

“We’ve bought in Hudson for projects in Palm Springs and in Palm Springs for projects in Paris,” he said.

He considers his business’s work site

and client specific, suggesting M(Group) falls into a traditional group – eclectic but not forced. I’ve never met a designer or dealer worth their salt who will discuss “what’s hot” and “what’s not,” (an artifact of the shelter magazine industry) and Maloney’s no exception.

“This past week we installed a client’s collection of Voltaire related art, with Art Deco furniture and Moroccan rugs,” he said. “Sort of sums it up.”

M(Group)’s clients ages range from 35 to 75 and tend to be Forbes 400 types.

Maloney has seen Hudson transformed from a backwater with a handful of outré dealers to the “current plethora, [of antiques shops] which is daunting.”

As cited earlier Maloney says, “the moment you say something is ‘out’ it is almost automatically ‘in.’ We’re doing an apartment with fine American furniture – dull and brown and a challenge to make edgy and young, but it’s happening.”

He also finds the glut of “designers and magazines disseminating a lot of ideas to the masses, great on some levels and disheartening on others. But in the end quality trumps.”

Have the best years in the retail antiques business in Hudson have come and gone? In the final assessment, may we ask where all of this is headed? Fashion, taste and trends change in an ever-expanding global market inundated with the mass marketing of products from multinational corporations. The distribution of wealth – the haves and have-nots seems grossly disproportional. “Brown furniture” is definitely dead. But just stick around and it will change. Or, in the words of Colin Stair, whose observations resonate a knowledge and experience that only comes with four generations of prominence in the antiques business, “I think it will come full circle.”