



"Miss Liberty"
by Norman Rockwell,
Saturday Evening Post, 1943

Made in the U.S.A.

*New Haven
natives
museum
in Newport
pays homage
to a truly
American
art form*

By Sandi Kahn Shelton
Register Staff

NEWPORT, R.I. — Nestled among the mansions, Judy and Laurence Cutler, two natives of New Haven, have founded a one-of-a-kind museum honoring American illustrators.

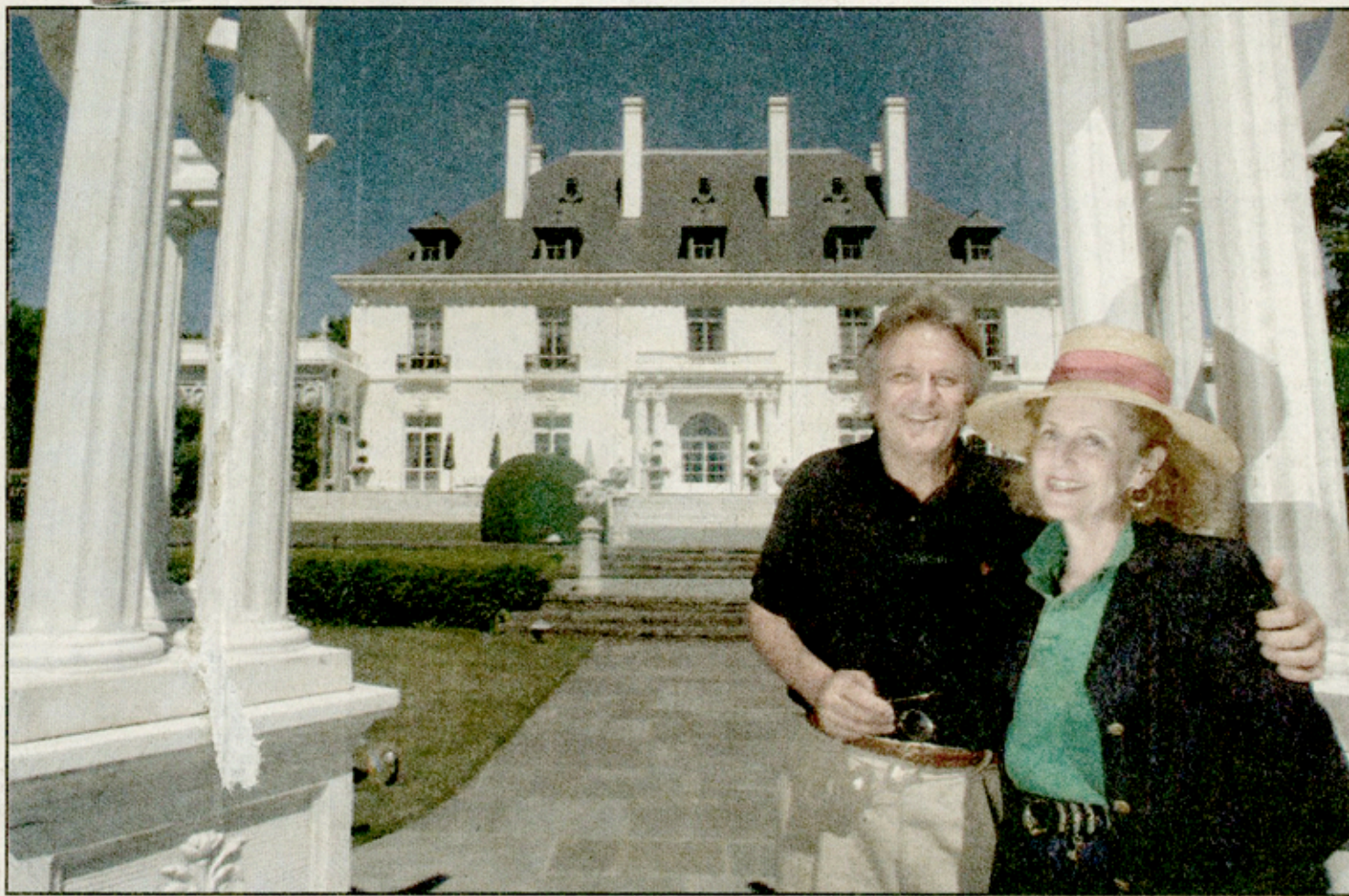
Think of the James Montgomery Flagg poster of Uncle Sam pointing his finger and saying "I WANT YOU." Think of Norman Rockwell's tender paintings of everyday American life that became covers of the Saturday Evening Post. Think, even of the famous smiling Gibson Girl in advertisements painted by Charles Dana Gibson.

"These paintings were for years not considered to be true art," says Judy Cutler, co-founder of the National Museum of American Illustration, and who has been called the premiere art dealer in America in American illustration.

"It was commercial because the artists were given deadlines by magazines or ad agencies, and they were paid money. It didn't matter that they'd been trained in fine arts schools. Their work was dismissed. In many cases, they didn't even get their work back. They painted these pictures and then moved on."

Not so today. Now, hanging among the beautifully restored surroundings of a mansion called Vernon Court, are our old American favorites, including 121 Norman Rockwell paintings (the most, says Laurence, under any roof, with the exception of the Rockwell Museum itself, which has approximately 400); Maxfield Parrish, Howard Pyle, N.C. Wyeth, and J.C. Leyendecker, among others.

The Cutlers have displayed a fraction of their collection, about 500 original paintings from the Golden Age of Illustration — and



Judy and Laurence Cutler's collection of American illustrations hangs in their Newport mansion called Vernon Court.



Photos courtesy of the National Museum of American Illustration

Museum visitors start at this grand entryway.

beside them, they've included the magazine covers or advertisement in which the paintings were featured.

It's been a long road to Newport — and to their lives as museum directors.

"We were actually childhood sweethearts," says Judy. She and Laurence were both born, two years apart, at the Hospital of St. Raphael and dated during high school and even went to the prom together. He attended the Milford School and she graduated from Amity Regional High School.

"After high school," she says, smiling, "I chased him to the University of Pennsylvania. But things weren't ready to work out then, and we both married other people. We ended up getting married to each other on the 40th

anniversary of our first date."

Perhaps the most significant part of their shared past, though, is the fact that Laurence, who was going to become an architect, gave Judy an art book for a present back when they were still kids. "He said to me, 'You should look at this. I think you'll like it,'" she remembers. "It changed my life."

Indeed, Judy Cutler became an influential art dealer and collector, and was one of the first to recognize the significance of illustration art as an important part of our national heritage and as a major part of the fine arts spectrum. In 1965, she established the American Illustrators Gallery, which soon earned the reputation

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Maxfield Parrish's "Griselda"



Joseph Christian Leyendecker's "New Year's Baby Blacksmith, 1931," Saturday Evening Post.

Museum showcases U.S. illustrations Grills fire up the outdoor kitchen trend

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of being "the Tiffany of the American illustration art world."

In the last few years, she's curated over 35 exhibitions throughout Asia, Europe, and across the country. Recently, her exhibit of Rockwell's work toured Japan, and more than 220,000 visitors came to see it.

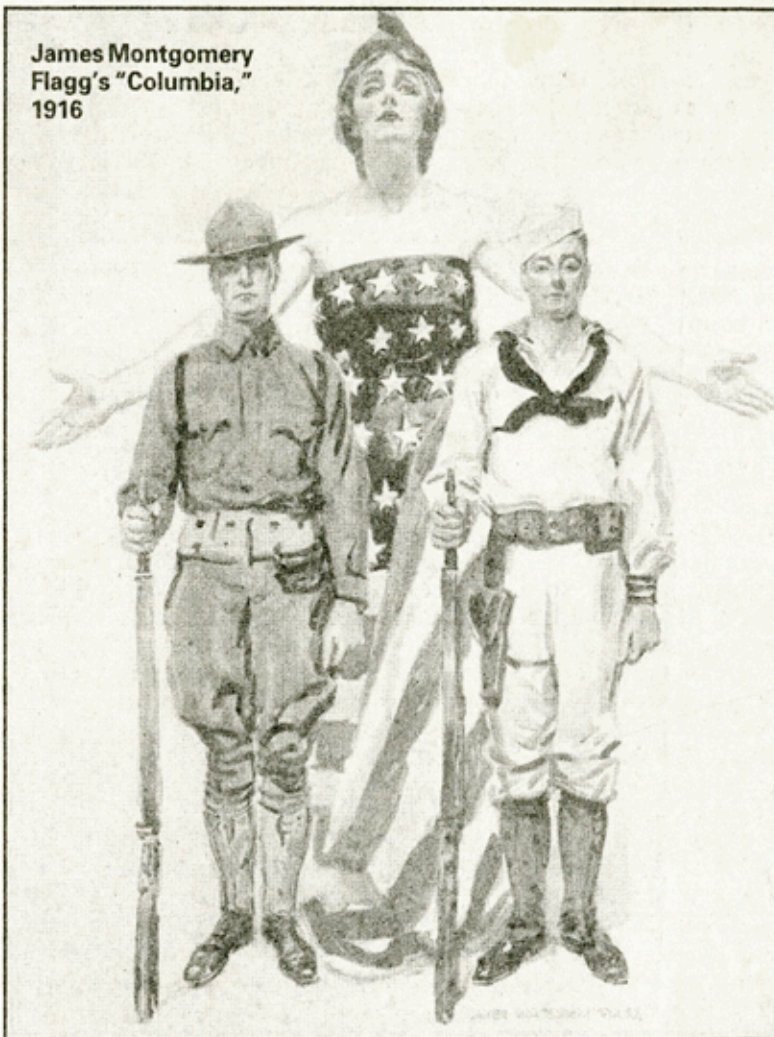
"These paintings are not only our country's art but part of our history as well," says Laurence. "No one else was collecting these works. They were mostly given away, and felt to have no intrinsic value. But they clicked with Judy — and now she's built that segment of the American art market."

Despite objections from the neighbors, the Cutlers opened their museum on July 4, 2000, and these days welcome visitors on Fridays and Saturdays, by reservation only. Vernon Court, the mansion in which the museum is housed, is worth the trip in its own right.

It's a Beaux Arts adaptation of 17th-century French chateau from the Gilded Age, designed in 1898 by Carrere & Hastings, architects of the Henry Morrison Thayer Museum in Palm Beach, the New York City Public Library and the U.S. Senate Office Building. The 3-acre grounds were inspired by Henry VIII's gardens or Anne Boleyn at Hampton Court Palace.

And an adjacent 3 acres were designed by the first American

James Montgomery Flagg's "Columbia," 1916



landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmstead, who designed Central Park in New York. Eventually, Laurence, who is an architect, urban designer and former professor of architecture at Harvard, MIT and the Rhode Island School of Design, intends to restore and revitalize the area into The Frederick Law Olmstead Park.

For now, though, the Cutlers are settling in to their new lives in Newport. "We believe that people should be able to share this art," says Laurence. "It's the most American of American art."

Norman Rockwell's "Bridge Game (The Bid)," Saturday Evening Post, 1948



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range-top burners, for example, is not for the faint of heart, at \$4,995. Such sophistication goes hand in hand with today's grill menus.

In recent months, Weber's quarterly Grill Out Times newsletters have featured quesadillas with smoked salmon and caviar, Chilean sea bass, crisp Asian roasted duck and lobster with champagne-vanilla sauce. Some are from Weber's new "Big Book of Grilling," now available in bookstores. It joins dozens of grilling books, many of which focus on ethnic seasonings from Italy, Greece, Korea, Mexico, India and Thailand.

When the late James Beard wrote about grills surrounded by "elaborate outdoor kitchens" in his 1975 book "Barbecuing With Beard," it was a notion fanciful to most. But that's not true today.

"Grilling is an enormous part of the whole outdoor lifestyle phenomenon," says Samantha Thorpe, editor of Outdoor Casual, a Better Homes and Gardens special-interest publication.

Since the magazine was launched in 1998, there has been an explosion in the industry, Thorpe says. And although the big buzz is at the glamorous end, the industry is not neglecting the need for smaller, well-designed products.

"Grilling is not limited to how big the back yard is," says Thorpe.

"There are portable grills meant for small patios or apartment balcony situations." Small hibachis start at less than \$20, but for a few hundred dollars, you can add artistry to your grilling.

A truly engaging design is the Eclipse Gourmet Barbecue grill. What's intriguing is the shape — an old-fashioned kettle-style that seems to float on its

arched trolley. The support for the porcelainized steel bowl and lid features a weather-resistant wood base and shelf. The grill, at 28 inches wide by 28 inches deep by 39 inches high, uses a standard 20-pound propane tank and sells for \$499.

Still another unusual silhouette is a sculptural grill designed by the Kalamazoo Grill Co. Described as an original, the handmade piece is signed and numbered by the artist. Front and back, the grill is shaped like a wave that sensuously flows in and out from top to bottom. An optional base adds wheels and locking casters for mobility. At poolside or stationed at the edge of a patio, the piece adds an architecturally elegant element to outdoor decor. A charcoal version costs \$800; add \$400 for gas.

Even conventional grills are taking on streamlined looks. One 24-inch-wide model from Frontgate is boxy, but the sheen of all-stainless-steel construction makes it slick, and a pair of large black casters at one end allows easy moving. It sells for \$899.

Just as indoor cooktops can be installed on kitchen islands or peninsulas, there are outdoor versions that include grills and plenty of work surface. Frontgate combines a boulder like base and a tile counter along with a grill that features a rotisserie, side burner and warming drawer. This grill is among options that can be select-

ed for a customized outdoor kitchen designed by the company's specialists.

If you go that route, a fully assembled kitchen arrives in four to six weeks. It'll set you back a little less than \$10,000 for a 36-inch grill with dual range-top burners, warming drawers, countertops with 8-inch square granite tiles and a pair of ready-to-wire outlets.

As kitchens should suit the architectural style of a home, so should their outdoor counterparts blend with the landscape. A grill set into a stucco base with terra cotta tile counter might perfectly complement a Southwest or Western locale — perhaps with decorative tile to border the side walls and top.

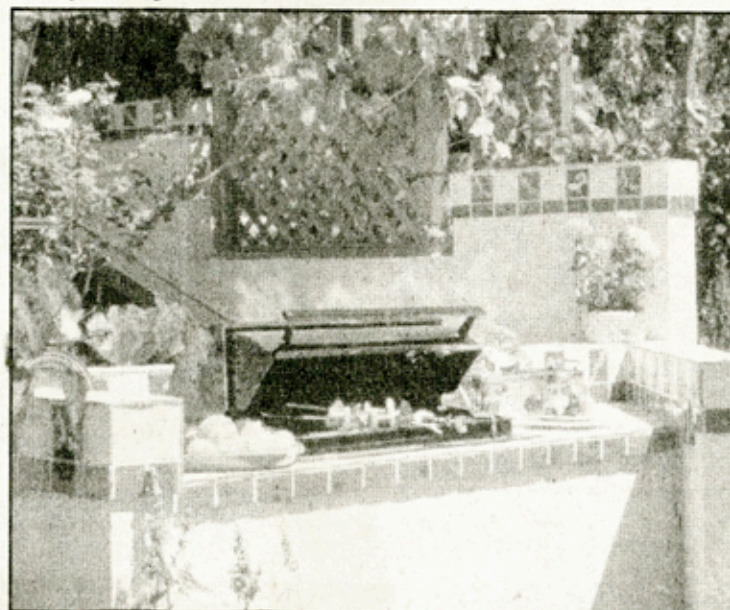
Another customized installation might feature a fireplace that doubles as a pizza oven, perhaps even with hand-painted or stenciled designs providing a decorative personal touch.

Outdoor Casual magazine, which includes an outdoor kitchen in almost every issue, recently featured an Oklahoma grill nestled in brick and stone and designed with a counter in the same materials to serve as a bar and buffet. It was part of an outdoor kitchen with such accessories as a sink, garbage disposal, icemaker and oodles of storage, all fitting neatly into a three-season gazebo. Weather-resistant

construction materials were selected to withstand Tulsa's high winds and cold winters.

And that's an indication of yet another trend in grills. Thorpe says she sees fancier grill setups and even full-blown outdoor kitchens appearing more frequently in northern back yards, no longer confined to the sunny south.

"Pretty soon there will be no seasonal boundaries," she predicts. It's a trend that promises to fire the imagination of a new generation of backyard cooks.



Meredith Corp.

Outdoor kitchens with everything from sinks to garbage disposals are showing up in back yards. This grill is built into brick and stone.