

## TRAVELOGUE

### A Report from Fairfield County



*“Great Houses of Connecticut’s Fairfield County” took place June 5 – 9, 2013. The tour was organized by Kathryn Herman, chair of ICAA’s travel committee and a principal with award-winning Doyle Herman Design Associates, Landscape Design; Briana Miller and Elisa Cuaron, committee members, and Tom Hayes, director of Classical Excursions and author of the following essay. Accompanying photographs were taken by Houston architect Virginia K. Kelsey, AIA.*

GREAT ARCHITECTURE AND GARDENS look fabulous in all kinds of weather, and we experienced all kinds during our tour of Fairfield County. Highlight: Dinner in a drizzle with Kathryn and Ron Herman at their glorious Pepperidge Farm property was served in two undercover locations, an outdoor porch and a charming rustic garden house once reserved for chickens. Such events at the table always bring forth exciting conversation among like minds—drizzle or no drizzle.

Cleverly enlarged by Oscar Shamamian of Ferguson & Shamamian, the Herman home, winner of both a Stanford White Award and Palladio Award, is subtly decorated by Mona Hajj of Baltimore (whose helping hand and home will be evident on the upcoming fall tour in that city), the essence of comfort. Oscar and senior associate architect Stephen Chrisman were on hand during the tour and Kathryn had us guess who designed the gardens. She, by the way, gave a wonderful personal and historical introduction to Fairfield County the night before.

I found the H-shaped design and details of the Westport house also by Ferguson & Shamamian (another Stanford White Award winner) to look even better standing before or in it rather than looking at its photos. Inspired by Georgian Colonial, it’s definitely 21st century and certainly a tour favorite. Very well sited on a difficult narrow lot, you pass by a sunken tennis court before reaching the front door, creating a clear and dramatic view from the distant entrance gate. There is a clean-sweep-of-a-view of Long Island Sound out back.

Cricket Hill by Hamady Architects and interiors by Bunny Williams (sea foam, creams, and beiges) was a superb lesson in taking a decent Georgian house and turning it into a much better one. Kahlil Hamady and colleagues from his office were there to show us how.

Harmony Farm, also by Hamady, is an add-on farmhouse with the simple but serene aura of Gustavian style by decorator Kitty Hawks. The garden by Kathryn’s firm, with Matthew Willinger as our guide, met the owner’s brief of having space for growing fruit, flowers, and vegetables, and included other areas for outdoor living. The steep, narrow lot is handsomely terraced, bordered by heavy, low stone walls. The perennial garden, enclosed by hornbeam hedges and flower borders took us back to England.

Architect Jon Halper showed us through the house he designed in Southport, the front of which was inspired by Lutyens’ glorious Gray Walls (on the ICAA 2012 North England/Scotland tour) with a similar curved and centered entrance façade. Furthermore, the house has the concept of more wall and fewer windows compared to the garden/Long Island Sound side that has the reverse, more windows than wall space, again a Lutyens theme. Unfortunately, because of rain it was hard for some of us to make the comparison, but the tour’s accompanying and well-researched study guide came in handy particularly in this case.





Ashken House by Gary Brewer of Robert A. M. Stern Architects is based on the Shingle-Style House and is cottagey with a wonderful sense of open space, but at the same time each room felt self-contained. Gary was on hand to guide us through this project, which was a 2012 Stanford White Award winner.

Googe House is a Normandy-style, turn-of-the-20th-century residence tripled in size by Grandberg & Associates with Ira Grandberg guiding. It has extraordinarily beautiful detailing and careful thinking behind it all. Worth going back and looking some more.

Stuart House, also by Grandberg, also has beautiful detailing and a spectacular two-story Great Room with an enormous multi-paned arched window for that view of the sound. Although you wouldn't know it, it's a recently completed house planned for the young family who live there.

A delightful surprise was in store as the participants toured the Landman Residence and Lake Avenue Farm, both located on the same property, and designed by architect Charles Hilton and landscape architect Charles Stick. The Landman house started out as a 1940s Georgian with one wing to the left and another added by Hilton to the right. The latter contains a trellised sunroom in the hyphen and a family room in the pavilion. The architect was sensitive to the integrity of the original beautiful design, and added a complementary wing to complete the symmetry.

The property basically has two extreme levels connected by a long and narrow allee of steps bordered by tall hedges reminiscent of Villa Cetinale near Siena or Villa d'Este at Tivoli. At the bottom, perpendicular to the allee, is a greensward garden edged with tall clipped serpentine hedges topped by topiary shapes. The hedges are surely inspired by Jefferson's brick serpentine walls in Charlottesville. At one end of the greensward is a dramatic red Chinese pavilion and at the other is Atlas and globe. Talk about surprises!

And that's not all. Hilton designed the most beautiful French farmhouse that features hand-hewn timber framing inside and out. The design is based on Marie Antoinette's Petit Hameau at Versailles (nothing modest here!) and strikingly decorated by Isabelle Vanneck of Davenport North. It was one of those sites that was hard to break away from. We were all in awe.

Project architect Marti Cowan of Austin Patterson Disston Architects and interior designer Paul Rankin created a unique experience as they guided us through a hilltop Colonial Revival estate in New Canaan, totally renovated for the second generation of ownership. The project's focus was on sustainability in all its core values, the house itself, up-to-date energy sources for all buildings on the property, and the growing of fruits and vegetables.

The final dinner of the tour was held at the showroom of award-winning SBD Kitchens in Darien, hosted by its owner Sarah A. Blank and her husband. Tables were arranged in each of the model kitchens that she and her staff have designed. The firm's work illustrates a sincere and thorough respect for the theories of classicism including the unusual Jeffersonian-like building itself.

The tour ended at the historic Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts estate, built in the 1930s by Walter and Lucie Bigelow Rosen at Katonah, New York. Lucie was a music lover who started the famed summer concert series in 1946 with the help of her friend, impresario Sol Hurok. She and Walter filled their Tuscan-style home (open courtyard, loggias and all) with representation of 2000 years of decorative arts, particularly from Renaissance Italy and 18th-century Venice. Period rooms originated in Italy, France, England, and Spain. The initial architect was Christian Rosborg of Powell & Playford with a later wing added by Mott B. Schmidt to display collections from the couple's New York townhouse.

And there you have it. Another extraordinary tour.

—Tom Hayes



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