



JAMES  
RENWICK  
ALLIANCE

## “At Home With Crafts”: The Gala Dinner and Craft Auction

by Ann Milne

Among all the stunning events of Craft Weekend '98, the highlight for many was the dinner and auction on Friday night. The setting was gorgeous, the weather perfect, the food marvelous, and the auction a huge success. Sharon Buchanan, with a large and excellent committee, was our hostess for the evening. The scene was Decatur House, close by the White House. Alliance members took advantage of the cocktail hour to tour this historic home, as well as to examine the auction offerings and stake claims on the craft pieces by local artists which B.J. Adams had arranged on each dinner table.

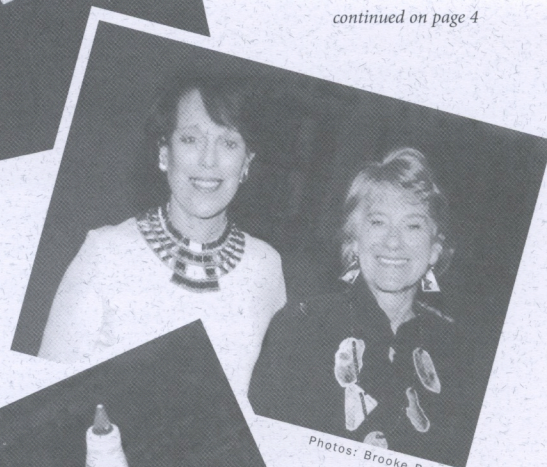
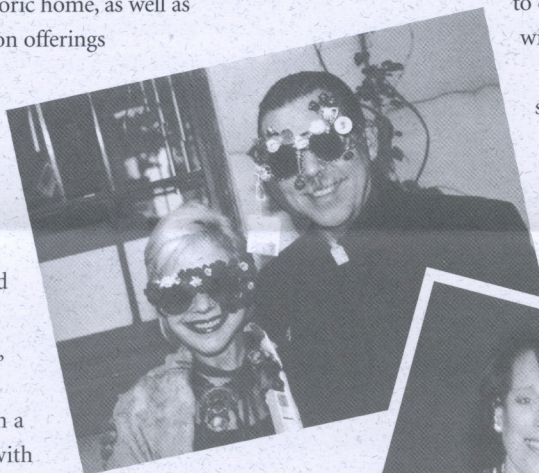
Dinner was served under a tent in the courtyard. The meal, planned by Barbara Berlin, culminated in a spectacular dessert with sponge cake and mint ice cream, covered with chocolate sauce and edged with a spun-sugar confection resembling a feather. Then, in an expansive (and hopefully, a buying-oriented) mood, we settled back for the auction.

As with the table centerpieces, the auction pieces were home-oriented in one way or another: David Ebner's *Twisted Stick Ladder Chair*, Therman Statom's

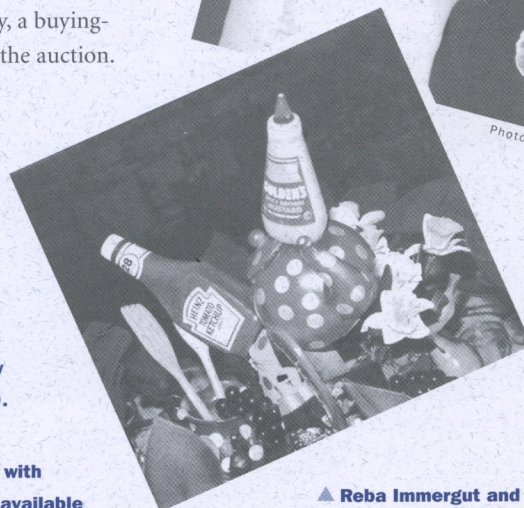
*The Catskills* table, Mary George Kronstadt's *Majolica Platter, Leaf Motif*, among others. The catalogue listed 43 items, but the number grew as spirited bidding led many donors to offer duplicates. When the bidding over an Albert Paley candlestick went high, for example, it became known that a companion was available and it, too, was auctioned. Joan Wessel, the auction's organizer, had persuaded six of the artists to donate their pieces outright, without commission.

Much of the really impassioned bidding centered around the trips — especially the trip for eight to Philadelphia, which included dinner at the home of

*continued on page 4*



Photos: Brooke Bralove



▲ Standing outside Decatur House and sporting some whimsical shades, Laney and Michael Oxman seem ready to enjoy the evening's festivities (top).

► Each table at the gala was adorned with a handcrafted “at home” centerpiece available for purchase by the guests. This one (below) was crafted by Laney Oxman.

▲ Reba Immergut and Joan Wessel get into the spirit of the weekend's theme “At Home with Crafts” by wearing pieces reminiscent of the favorite rooms in their homes (center).

# From the President



JAMES RENWICK  
ALLIANCE

Quarterly

Summer 1998

The Quarterly is published four times a year by the James Renwick Alliance, a national independent nonprofit organization created to celebrate and encourage American craft artists and their works, and to support the Renwick Gallery of the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

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I write this column as we come to the end of another successful Spring Craft Weekend. I can't help but think of how this one weekend involves all the types of events that the Alliance conducts. There are educational activities, fundraising activities, and just plain having-fun activities, as we get together with new and old friends within the community of our fellow craft supporters. Underlying these activities is what the Alliance does best — harnessing the efforts and enthusiasm of our volunteers.

Craft Weekend happens because a group of people agrees to spend the time and make the effort — a considerable one, I may add — to make it happen. Planning begins more than a year ahead, with the pace of activity increasing in the final days of preparation. It is truly a joy to see everything come together on a perfect spring weekend, with each event fully subscribed and running well.

Perhaps the most daunting task of the weekend is coordinating the primary fundraising event; this year it was the Gala Benefit Dinner and Auction. Sharon Buchanan rose to the challenge, with the expert help of Joan Wessel, auction coordinator; Barbara Berlin, dinner chair; B. J. Adams, head of decorations; and Ruth Conant and Barbara Dickstein, sales coordinators. We were fortunate to have Cathy Elkies and Cathy Sledz from Christie's contribute their time and expertise to conducting the auction.

The tone of the gala evening and of the overall weekend was set by Laney and Michael Oxman who designed the delightful invitation and the bid paddles. And yes, it was volunteers who assembled and hand colored all of the paddles. Reba Immergut was in charge of producing the printed program for the evening.

Every event of the weekend was ably led by a volunteer. Sherley Koteen ran a seamless and successful Acquisitions Meeting; Laurel Mendelsohn organized the lively Optional Dinner at the Mansion

on "O" Street; Toni Gordon and Susan Klaus planned the informative and beautifully executed Caucus Day; Cynthia Boyer and Mary George Kronstadt were in charge of the stimulating Symposium; Shirley Jacobs organized the elegant Patrons Dinner, generously hosted by Ryna and Mel Cohen; and Norman Mitchell and Walter Retzsch led Sunday's great Craft Study Tour. Processing reservations and keeping everything running smoothly for the myriad events was Julia Brennan, our Executive Assistant. She was assisted by her family, most notably her children Sara and Halsey who, with

Craft Weekend, have embarked on what we hope will be a lifelong habit of volunteering for craft art!

As you read your *Quarterly* and learn about the wonderful activities which comprised Craft Weekend 1998, think of the volunteers I have mentioned and the many others who worked alongside them. I know you will want to join me in extending to all a great big THANK YOU!

Susan Haas Bralove

President

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# “Home Again: The Arts & Crafts Revival” Symposium Focuses on the Heart of Craft

by Dalene Barry

Wouldn't it be grand to invite William Morris, or any other founder of the arts and crafts movement, to reflect on what has become of the new attitude toward the work ethic and aesthetics

that they introduced a century ago? In a way, we had an opportunity to do just that at the 1998 spring symposium sponsored by the James Renwick Alliance.

Alliance members and their guests met at the Renwick Gallery on April 25 to hear Curator-in-Charge Kenneth Trapp and four other speakers: Beverly K. Brandt, associate

professor of design at Arizona State University; Marian Burros, food writer for the *New York Times*; Tommy Simpson, artist and furniture maker; and Jeannine Falino, assistant curator of American decorative arts and sculpture at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Beverly Brandt suggested that the “words of wisdom” of early reformers “are as vital today as they were one hundred or so years ago.” Morris, she noted, assumed that an artful environment is “for everyday consumers as well as for sophisticated connoisseurs.” Echoing Morris, she said all of

us “should choose very deliberately what we incorporate into our homes.”

Frank Lloyd Wright urged his followers to “eliminate the inessential,” according to Brandt. Charles Francis Annesley Voysey evoked the image of the well-proportioned room, “with whitewashed walls, plain carpet and simple oak furniture, with nothing in it but the necessary articles of use, and one pure ornament in the form of a simple vase of flowers.”

Even today, said Brandt, we are attracted to these visions. “There is something comforting and even ‘old hat’ in Voysey’s words. What I find most intriguing is his focus upon creating an interior that supports human introspection.”

Our next speaker was *New York Times* (and former *Washington Post*) food writer Marian Burros, who began by asking why an expert on food was talking to an audience of craft artists and collectors. Her answer focused on the resonances between the turn-of-the-century culture of a hundred years ago and our own. “Many of the issues about food, food safety, and nutrition that resonate at the end of the 20th century are similar to those that faced Americans at the end of the 19th,” she noted. “Sylvester Graham’s crackers and William Kellogg’s cereals were a reaction to what put more than 300 pounds on William Howard Taft.”

Burros continued, “The Pure Food and Drug Act was passed in the early part of this century. Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* produced reforms in the food-processing industry.” But, Burros noted, “After the second World War, when the country was interested in getting prosperity going again, reform was twisted into everything the reformers would have despised.”

But just as the arts and crafts movement was born in

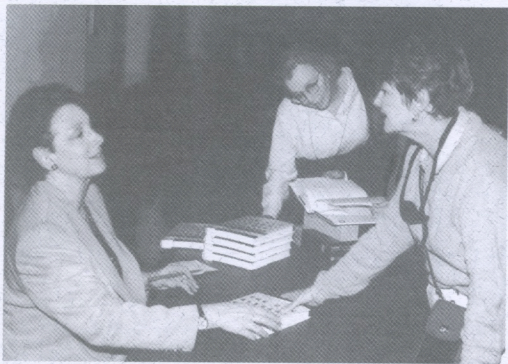


Photo: Paul Parkman

▲ After the spring symposium, *New York Times* food writer Marian Burros signs a copy of her book “*The New Elegant But Easy Cookbook*”.

## Beverly Brandt’s Guidelines for Collectors

- ▶ Strive, as William Morris put it, to “have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful.”
- ▶ Be mindful in your thinking and doing, and urge others to do the same. Look for evidence of “human thought and feeling” in the pieces you collect.
- ▶ Know the history of the craft category you collect.
- ▶ Know your medium or media, and be familiar with the technical challenges faced by the artists you support.
- ▶ Be passionate about what you collect, and be articulate in explaining what it means to you.
- ▶ Be philanthropic. Remember Morris’s rhetorical question, “What business have we with art at all, if we cannot share it?”
- ▶ Unleash the power of whimsy; cultivate joyfulness in all you do.
- ▶ Last but not least, be hopelessly optimistic, like Morris and his followers, about the power of crafts to make the world a better place to live and work.

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## Gala Dinner from page 1

Suzanne and Norman Cohn. The trip sold for twice its value.

Most of the items sold at well over their estimated value. The bidding, encouraged by Cathy Elkie from Christie's, was fast and furious all evening, and you had to be alert and determined to get what you wanted. The result: a raft of happy attendees clustered outside the carriage house gates, loading their purchases into their cars.

A number of craft artists attended the gala, among them Tommy Simpson, Albert Paley, and Tracy Rose, along with Alliance stalwarts like



Photos: Brooke Bralove

▲ Gary Smith and Jamie Studley, her gown festooned with ornaments, get ready to enjoy an evening of delightful food and competitive bidding.

## Symposium from page 3

reaction to the excesses of Victorian life, the stifling attitudes of the fifties gave way to the free spirit of the sixties. Part of the counter-culture agenda, said Burros, was to “change what we ate and how we took care of the land. The people who pushed for organic food in the sixties are the affluent yuppies who are powering the movement today.”

Tommy Simpson, whose furniture has brought whimsey and joy to private homes and major museums, provided the artist's point of view. In a slide tour, he gave us an intimate view of the habitats artists build for themselves. He began his talk by noting, “One starts collecting because things don't evaporate like words — a color, a texture, a shape — they all help stimulate and educate us.”

The tour was filled with images as diverse as Albert Paley's carriage house; Thomas Mann's grandmother's baking cabinet; Mara Superior's selection of favorite works by her friends, kept close by to remind her of the people; Leo Sewell's computerized collection of trash-turned-sculpture; and Bennett Bean's rosewood floor with copper foil trim.

At last we were treated to a glimpse into the home of Tommy and his wife, weaver Missy Stevens, where they “collect things that make me warm,” as Tommy said. Flowers were everywhere, including

Solveig Cox, B.J. Adams, Andrea Uravitch, Cynthia Boyer, Mary George Kronstadt, and Laney Oxman.

People came from up and down the eastern seaboard and from across the country to join in the festivities and to support the Alliance. ■



▲ Herta and Hans Loeser from Boston are greeted by Colleen Kotelly (center).

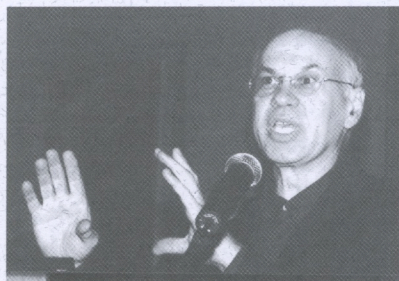


Photo: Paul Parkman

▲ With slides, artist and furniture maker Tommy Simpson brings us into the homes of his friends.

Tommy's own sunflower side table. The warmth of this artistic couple was also evident in the wall-to-wall carpeting, wall hangings, coverlets, and pillows woven by Missy.

Bringing the discussion full circle, Jeannine Falino mused about how we choose the things in our lives. “If we fill our homes with art and craft objects,” she asked, “does that mean we're living the good life?” At mid-century we rejected nature as too unsettling, she commented; then in the sixties we defined “natural” as the rejection of corsets and bras and the wearing of Native American-influenced clothing and decoration. “Perhaps,” she suggested, “we were playing with a subject that deserved more seriousness.”

The sixties saw the art world moving toward the forefront of fashion, and hand-crafted objects became more generally available. Home became a hideaway, and we filled our rooms with all that seemed good — Navajo, Nakashima, Stickley — often assembled in the same room.

“How do we today identify with the materials around us?” Falino asked. “Are we using them as our forefathers in the arts and crafts movement intended?” Each time we make a purchase, we bring into our homes another object full of the dignity of its creator. Falino reminded us, “A well-crafted object is the true expression of its maker.” ■

# The Sunday Alliance Tour

by Gary Smith and Bob Sinclair

With Jim Graham's elegant apartment as the setting for his collection of arts and crafts furniture, pottery, books, and sculpture, only the people look out of place. Under the watchful eyes of Roger and Dodger, his lively canine companions, Jim led us through a tour of the arts and crafts movement, illustrated with the many museum-quality pieces that surround him.



▲ Jim Graham speaks to the tour group about his arts and crafts furniture, pottery, books, and sculpture.

The highlights included a Mission-style desk, complete with its original leather top, that was once owned by the president of Union Carbide; a desk chair formerly owned by Chief Justice Warren Burger; and

a bow arm chair by Gustave Stickley that seemed ready to bound away.

The furniture served as a platform for Jim's pottery collection, including works from Hull House, Newcomb College, and Thomas Wheatley. Jim described the working conditions that produced these wonderful pieces and the circumstances of those who would come to own them. He gave us a quick insight into the challenging process of firing, decorating, and refiring that produced their unique glazes. Our turn-of-the-century interlude left us educated and uplifted as we headed to Linda and Beau Kaplan's Kalorama townhouse, which is steeped in a very different aesthetic.

The Kaplans graciously welcomed us on short notice. Beau is a collector of late 40s Chrysler memorabilia and mementos of the Washington Senators; Linda seeks out art deco boxes and copper costume jewelry of the 1950s. Together, they collect art from the period between the two world wars.

Disciplined by the dimensions of even a generous town house, the Kaplans demand an important statement from each piece in their collection. No two pieces are alike, no themes repeat, but the underlying consistency is striking. The elegiac quality of the Thomas Hart Benton river scene in the dining room is a pointed contrast to the rowdy bar in the Paul Cadmus oil at the top of the stairs, but both deal with loneliness and emptiness.

Although craft is not their focus, the Kaplans have incorporated contemporary masters as well. An Albert Paley plant stand dominates the corner of the living room, and a bold elephant mask from Cameroon stands guard at the front door. The Richard Meyer table and Peter Danko chairs make the dining room a modern and comfortable setting in which to view their collection.

After lunch, we visited the new location of Veena Singh's Sansar Gallery. Veena said her turnover has risen in the new space, which is on a pedestrian-friendly street and is filled with eye-catching furniture and furnishings.

Veena was displaying examples of Ronald Puckett's furniture and Robert Carlson's ceramics, and the two artists were on hand to talk to us. We were impressed with their intensity and with the demands they put on themselves. They are being pushed by something more than the need to make a living — as Ron Puckett said, "I would be doing this whether I was paid or not" — and the rest of us can only be the grateful beneficiaries.

The tour's final stop was the home of Sam Rose, a lovingly updated old brick house tucked away among latter-day Bethesda housing tracts. The Rose collection is centered on glass — Therman Statom, Sidney Hutter, and Concetta Mason are all represented — but includes many fine pieces of craft furniture and several ceramics by Laney Oxman. The group had a welcome moment to relax over excellent snacks and stroll around the secluded grounds before reboarding the bus back to the Renwick Gallery and home. ■



Photos: Sue Bralove

► Furniture craftsperson Ronald Puckett discusses his work during the visit to Sansar Gallery.

# Alliance Funds Three New Purchases for Gallery Collection

The first order of business at Craft Weekend '98 was to build on the Renwick Alliance's past support for the Renwick Gallery's permanent collection. At its meeting on April 23, the Acquisitions Committee approved funding for the purchase

of three craft artworks: "Theatre Tickets" (1994), a fiber piece by Helena Hernmarck; "Dining Chair" (1993), by Kristina Madsen; and "Rosette" (1994), a cast glass piece by Karla Trinkley. ■

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## Praise from the Gallery's Younger Patrons

by **Shelly Brunner**

The Renwick Alliance generously supports an outreach program with the District of Columbia public schools. Twice a year, classes come to the Renwick Gallery on busses provided by the Alliance for a series of three visits. During the first visit, students learn about craft art with docents who use the Renwick's study collection, the Touch Pack. Working with objects and materials donated by artists in the Permanent Collection, they have a hands-on experience as well as a gallery tour. The second visit is a tour of a temporary exhibit such as Michael Lucero's; the third is

a presentation of student art projects in the Renwick's Grand Salon. The artwork, which is completed at school with materials donated by the Alliance, reflects ideas and information acquired in the museum. Students prepare individual presentations of their projects and answer questions about their work from docents, teachers, and fellow classmates.

The best gauge of the program's effectiveness is the comments of the students who participate. Below are a few unedited comments by third graders at Hearst Elementary.

**"We enjoyed the Game Fish alot, and I think the Ghost Clock was amazing. I loved our visits."**

Third Grade Student  
Hearst Elementary School  
Washington, DC

"It inspired me to make that great sculpture I made at school."

"He [Michael Lucero] is a neat guy. I noticed that he painted a picture about insects and he used a beetle in the heads. I have a question to ask him. Is a beetle one of his favorite insects? I liked that I got to know about Michael Lucero."

"I had fun when we went to the Renwick. Espeshaly the last time we went. When we displayed our work and answered questions. . . . One of my favorite times was when you let us touch and feel wood, glass, fiber, meddle, and clay. My favorite material is glass. Because if you shine it will look nice."

"Thank you for showing us around the museum it was fun. I like craft art the most because it is

funner than painting. It was fun learning about the craft art meddums. . . . It was fun being with you. Thank you for leting us display are art work. Thank you for the compliments you gave me!"

"Thank you so much for showing us the Renwick. We enjoyed the Game Fish alot, and I think the Ghost Clock was amazing. I loved our visits. And I really liked the Michael Lucero visit."

"I loved the field trips! I truely love the 3rd one! P.S. - I hope we can have another field trip! Your artist, . . ."

"I mite stop by even if I'm not on a feid trip. Thank you thank you so much." ■

# Upcoming Events

*James Renwick Alliance and Related Events*

## June

### **June 2 (Sunday)**

Lecture, Renwick Gallery, 3 pm

Thomas Denenberg, NMAA research assistant, on "Rethinking the Arts and Crafts Movement in New England"

### **June 3-8**

**Craft Leaders Caucus trip to St. Louis**

### **June 11 (Thursday)**

Video, Renwick Gallery, 10 am-3 pm, 20 minutes (continuous)

"Daughters of the Anasazi." Lucy Lewis and her daughters demonstrate traditional techniques used in making Acoma pottery. An example of Lucy Lewis's work is in the Renwick Gallery collection.

### **June 12 (Friday)**

Lecture, Renwick Gallery, noon

Renwick Public Programs Coordinator Allen Bassing surveys American furnishings made between 1650 and 1850.

### **June 14 (Sunday)**

Family Day, Renwick Gallery, 11 am-3 pm

"Baskets, Nests, and Habitats" is the theme for this family program, with demonstrations and workshops in basket-making. Visitors are invited to participate and to learn how containers and nests are made by hand and in nature, as well as how basket-weaving techniques and materials are employed. For family discoveries, the program will provide a finder's list of clues to containers from the permanent collection exhibit.

*Supported by the Windgate Charitable Foundation*

### **June 18 (Thursday)**

Video, Renwick Gallery, 10 am-3 pm (continuous)

(Repeat of June 11 program)

## July

### **July 9 (Thursday)**

Video, Renwick Gallery, 10 am-3 pm, 57 minutes (continuous)

"Expressions in Wood: Masterpieces from the Wormick Collection," a survey of outstanding woodturners, including many that are in the Renwick's permanent collection: David Ellsworth, William Hunter, Ron Kent, Mark Lindquist, Philip Moulthrop, and Bob Stocksdale.

*Supported by Bernard Blain, producer and director*

### **July 10 (Friday)**

Building tour, noon

Renwick Public Programs Coordinator Allen Bassing discusses the Renwick Gallery as an historic structure and in the context of its neighborhood. Please meet in the lobby.

### **July 16 (Thursday)**

Video, Renwick Gallery, 10 am-3 pm (continuous)

(Repeat of July 9 program)

## August

### **August 6 (Thursday)**

Video, Renwick Gallery, 10 am-3 pm, 27 minutes (continuous)

"Beyond Wood, Portrait of an Artist: Ron Kent, the Translucent Bowl." Kent's goal is to design the most pleasing form and to highlight the intrinsic beauty of each piece of wood, to bring out the grain, colors, and patterns as provided by nature.

*Supported by Bernard Blain, producer and director*

### **August 7 (Friday)**

Gallery talk, noon

Renwick Public Programs Coordinator Allen Bassing looks at the Renwick Gallery's permanent collection and highlights some of the craft art in glass, wood, clay, metal, and fiber. Please meet in the lobby.

### **August 13 (Thursday)**

Video, Renwick Gallery, 10 am-3 pm (continuous)

(Repeat of August 6 program)

For further information on upcoming events, call Julia Brennan at (703) 812-4500.

### Save the Date!

Saturday, Sept. 26, 1998.  
Alliance trip to Wheaton Village in Millville, NJ, including a visit to the studio of glass artist Paul Stankard.



Photos: Chuck Pinkston



### ▲ Workshops: A Renwick Alliance Tradition

The last of the Alliance's spring workshops in 1998 featured ceramist Judith Salomon. Workshop participants and others gathered afterward at the home of Ursy Potter to meet the artist over a potluck dinner.

▶ Alliance-sponsored events are in bold



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# Quarterly

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