

ED EDECOR

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Artist Hunt Slonem, the writer's brother, with nephew Finbarr Slonim in front of Cordts Mansion, Slonem's 1873 house in New York's Hudson Valley; Jeffrey Slonim's wife, Fiona Moore, holds their son Declan on the porch. Facing page: In the blue parlor, a late-19th-century Belgian chandelier hangs above a suite of Victorian furniture that Slonem covered in vintage curtain fabric; an antique zebra-hide chest serves as a cocktail table.



The Manor Reborn

Artist Hunt Slonem infuses his Hudson Valley mansion with lush textiles, Victorian furniture, and, of course, plenty of art

Text by Jeffrey Slonim · Photography by Fernando Bengoechea · Styled by Carlos Mota

"The first time I drove up to Cordts Mansion, it looked like an ice palace," remembers artist Hunt Slonem about the Second Empire-style house looming high above a broad bend in the Hudson River two hours north of Manhattan. "Eight inches of snow had blanketed the grounds. I was speechless—I just flipped for it."

Slonem, whose Modernist canvases of butterflies, birds, silent-film stars, and society figures are exhibited at Marlborough gallery in New York and included in some 70 museum collections, became the owner of the historic 1873 mansion two years ago. Originally called Edgewood Terrace, the ten-bedroom center-hall Victorian with a cast-iron-crested tower



An Edwardian tufted sofa and a set of 19th-century Eastlake dining chairs in the breakfast room; Slonem's portraits and other artwork hang on the wall. Facing page: Victorian draperies and an antique French silver-and-crystal chandelier in the second-floor sitting room; the walls are glazed in an ochre raised-plaster finish.



was built by John H. Cordts, a brick merchant who kept track of ships on the Hudson and his nearby brickyard through a telescope in the tower.

An early photo of the house shows Matilda Stock Cordts, who was married to Cordts's son, State Senator John N. Cordts, standing on the front lawn with their young daughter, Florence. Matilda lived in the house until she was 104, and Florence, who cared for her, lived to 91. By the late 1960s Matilda and Florence were still entertaining guests at the mansion, serving soda crackers and ginger ale. They kept six safes there (two so large that they were emptied but never removed) and an aging Buick limousine with whitewalls in the carriage house. Florence was bathing Matilda when the tower was struck by lightning in the early '70s.

A fireman pounded on the front door. "Mrs. Cordts," he shouted. "Your house is on fire."

"Young man, do not come in this house," Florence replied. "Mother isn't dressed." Much to Florence's distress, he broke through a panel of hand-etched Tiffany plate glass, though to his credit the rest of the house went undamaged.

Once Slonem, an indefatigable collector of mid-19th-century antiques, moved in, he quickly filled the structure with timeworn treasures: a pair of gilded chairs reputedly by A. W. Pugin, a neo-Gothic Italian chair from Carlos de Beistegui's Le Corbusier penthouse on the Champs-Élysées, and an Astor-family marriage bed attributed to Herter Brothers.

Within a few months, the upriver parlor, which Slonem had painted deep red, appeared grand but welcoming. He accessorized the room's ornate white cast-iron mantel cover with a French Gothic clock, an 1860s Gothic candelabra, and for hip whimsy, a

Orchids, ferns, palms, bougainvilleas, and other plantings bloom in the first-floor conservatory; the early-19th-century ebony-and-rattan furniture is from Ceylon, and the carved-teak furniture is Indian. Facing page, from top: A side table is Indian. Facing page, from top: A Victorian gilt-wood chair in the black parlor; Stonem's Lories & Heliconias, a 2000 oil on canvas, is propped on the mantel. A Gothic Revival armchair and a carved-ebony table form a seating area in the red parlor; the cast-iron mantel cover is original to the house. See Resources.



Christopher Makos photograph of Andy Warhol in drag. Two 19th-century Gothic chairs and a parlor set by George J. Henkels provide commodious seating around a 19th-century Gothic Revival center table. "Hunt is breathing new life into the house," says Matilda Cortis Davenport, Florence's niece. "I think my Aunt Florence, who was a great patroness of the arts, would be very pleased indeed."

Meanwhile, in the blue, or downriver, parlor, a zebrahide ottoman serves as a cocktail table for a Venetian settee and chairs, part of a suite of furniture from New Orleans that Stonem—à la Scarlett O'Hara—had re-covered in vintage curtain fabric. In the window is a full-height plaster Venus that once belonged to Fred Hughes, Warhol's business manager.

"At first I found it intimidating to try to make the place mine," explains Stonem. "So I decided to have one big project done each weekend. On one, I had the kitchen painted tangerine; on another, designer Guy Clark installed orange Schumacher fabric on the walls of the dining room," he says, adding that he "quickly painted over all the reproduction-Victorian wallpapers that were so busy they were keeping me up at night." Longer-term projects included restoring two gazebos, repainting exterior

From top: *Butterflies*, a 2001 oil on canvas by Slonem, and a 1950s Murano-glass collection in an attic gallery/bedroom. The low stool next to the pedestal sink is upholstered in Schumacher's Domino fabric. Facing page: *Pinwheel*, a 2001 oil on canvas; Geoffrey Bradfield and *Picul Eclectus*, 2000 oils on canvas, all by Slonem, in a guest room. The 19th-century Spanish carved-wood bed is dressed in a flea-market bedcover and pillows. See Resources.



trim that hadn't been touched in 40 years, and turning the carriage house into an artist's studio.

Coming up with enough artwork to fill a 30-room mansion would derail most homeowners, but not Slonem. A black sitting room houses a menagerie of his black-and-white canvases of butterflies and bunnies, a trio of figurative works enlivens a guest room, and the breakfast nook is peopled with his colorful portraits of Georgette Mosbacher, Mary Todd Lincoln, and Lady Patricia Cottenham.

But no visit to Cordts Mansion would be complete without a peek inside the tower. Two steep flights of stairs lead from the third floor to a trapdoor that opens onto what looks like a bell tower with a hangman's platform. The room is lit with a single bulb swinging at the end of a long wire. From there one ascends a rickety ladder to a latched roof panel, which pops open for bird's-eye views of mountainous riverbanks that turn banana-yellow and rust in the setting sun. The vista brings to mind the canvases of Slonem's historic Hudson River School neighbors: Bierstadt, Church, Cole, Cropsey. In fact, the previous owner insisted that Slonem climb out on the tower's roof before he would sell him the house. "Let's just say," deadpans the artist, "I haven't done it since." ■

