

Deep Collections

Collectors bring together two different forms of art in their New England home

by JOHN O'HERN Photography by FRANCIS SMITH





The mahogany Chippendale secretary desk with glass doors is attributed to Ichabod Cole, Warren, Rhode Island, 1780. To the left of the secretary are, from top, *Along the Canal* by Martin Rico y Ortega (1833-1908) and *The Giudecca Canal*, 1908, by Federico del Campo (1837-1923). To the right is del Campo's *Canale della Giudecca*, San Giorgio, 1887. Next to the stairs is Rico y Ortega's *Gondolas on a Canal, Venice*. At the bottom of the stairs is one of a collection of paintings by Edouard Leon Cortés (1882-1969).



Lining the staircase are Paris street scenes and scenes of Normandy country life from the 1930s and 1940s by Édouard Leon Cortès (1882-1969).





The paintings are, from left, *Essai de l'Eau*, 1890, by Émile Munier (1840-1895); *Les Cerisiers*, ca. 1895-96, by Daniel Ridgway Knight (1839-1924); *Still Life with Roses*, 1858, by Simon Saint-Jean (1808-1860). The mahogany Chippendale desk with block front and carved ball and claw feet, was made in Boston, ca. 1770. The mahogany Queen Anne tall case clock with block and shell is by James Wady, Clockmaker, Newport, Rhode Island, 1752. The mahogany Chippendale five-legged card table is attributed to Marinus Willet, New York, ca. 1770.

Our collectors have deep collections in two different areas. They both like 19th-century impressionist flower and city scenes, and they have paired them with their other love, 18th-century American furniture. The collections live happily together in their New England home.

"The paintings came first," he relates. "We had found a stately old house that had gone into disrepair and we had the crazy idea that we would eventually make it into a bed and breakfast. It had lots of walls for art. Family and career ensued and, eventually, as their children moved on, the couple moved to a smaller contemporary home with

classic New England features but with high ceilings and lots of light. "The art looks better here than in the old house," he admits. "Having art and antiques in a home really warms it up. Sometimes people have fine old furniture but hang lesser art. We think our art and our furniture, although from different periods, go well together.

"Obviously we like impressionist paintings but we don't have the resources for great impressionism. We like academic art and look for quality within the work of both the painters and the furniture makers. We saw the work that Howard Rehs carries on the internet and liked it. We have

become loyal to him and his gallery for paintings and to Frank Levy at Bernard & S. Dean Levy in New York for furniture.

"When you work with a dealer, they get to know what you like and what you don't like. We don't generally search for things but may say we'd like something by a certain artist or a piece of furniture with a particular form or from a specific city."

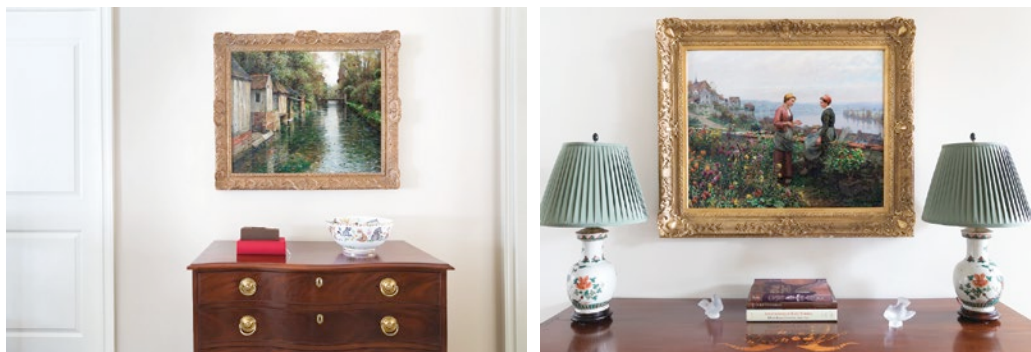
The couple are also partial to Venetian scenes and purchased a Martín Rico y Ortega painting in London. They bought another at Rehs Galleries and Rehs found paintings by Federico del Campo to fill out the niche in their



Left: The painting is *Village of Moulins* by Jean-Charles Cazin (1841-1901), which hangs above a mahogany Chippendale block front "knee-hole desk", Boston, ca. 1770. On the left is a mahogany Chippendale arm chair with shell-carved knees and ball and claw feet, New York, ca. 1765.

Below: Gregory Frank Harris' *The Eventide of Spring Comes Gently* hangs in the stairwell. A mahogany Chippendale serpentine-fluted and stop-fluted card table, ca. 1775, from Newport, Rhode Island, is against the railing.





Top: On the left is *A Busy Street in Summer, Enkhuizen* by Willem Koekkoek (1839-1895). In the center is *Un Berger et son Trupeau* by Julian Dupré (1851-1910). *Marketplace, Rouen*, by Louis Aston Knight (1873-1948), is on the right. He is the son of Daniel Ridgway Knight (1839-1924). To the left of the sofa is a mahogany Federal Period Pembroke table with bellflower and urn inlaid attributed to Thomas and Stephen Goddard, Newport, Rhode Island, 1790. To the right is a mahogany Federal Period Canterbury, New York, ca. 1800. Bottom left: *La Risle à Beaumont-le-Roger* by Louis Aston Knight hangs above a mahogany Chippendale serpentine chest of drawers with ogee feet from Norwich, Connecticut, ca. 1770. Bottom right: *Confidence*, 1898-99, by Daniel Ridgway Knight.

collection.

“Generally speaking,” he says, “my wife and I zero in on the same work of art. She likes flowers and I’m more partial to Venice-like scenes. I usually do the scouting but we have an understanding that if one or the other of us is dead set against a piece, we take a pass. It may have happened once or twice.

“We like city scenes and have more of them in our New York apartment like the Guy Wiggins we have here. His work is later than that of most our collection, but the theme and the impressionist style are the same. We also like the Paris street scenes and scenes of Normandy country life from the 1930s and 1940s by Édouard

Leon Cortès. We have a long stairway, put in good LED lighting and hung a collection of his primarily 13-by-18-inch paintings on the stairs to the second and third floors.”

Their 18th-century furniture is displayed and used throughout the house. “A friend was sitting in an antique chair one day and I said, ‘That’s



Left: *Paysage Avec Animaux*, ca. 1896, by Julian Dupré (1851-1910), hangs in the dining room. Right: *A Winter Night in New York*, 1960, by Guy Carleton Wiggins (1883-1962), hangs in the dining room.

200 years old.' She jumped up but I assured her it had been used for 200 years and was very strong. If it broke we could have it repaired."

He notes that the furniture is primarily from the great East Coast furniture-making cities of Boston, Newport, New York, Philadelphia and Charleston. "The mahogany came primarily from Cuba and Honduras. The old-growth trees didn't last long. Most of the artisans were from England and as they passed on that skill kind of faded away. Later periods of furniture were nothing like those early pieces. Although we collect 19th-century paintings, late 1800s furniture never interested us."

He admits, "We're extremely fussy and unforgiving about condition. You can't always have everything as pristine as perfect as you'd like and sometimes you have to decide what's the priority. A little retouching in the corner of

a painting or removing a late varnish is OK. If it's been overcleaned or overpainted, we pass.

"On furniture," he continues, "sometimes the pieces have been over varnished or shellacked or waxed. That can be removed to reveal the original color of the wood. If legs have been repaired after years of use, we're fine, but if the fretwork has been replaced it's another pass.

"Some museums tell you not to touch anything. I'm of the opinion that if something went on centuries after it was made, it's fair game to be removed. Once in a great while we'll find something that's never been touched. It looks different and has a certain beauty."

The couple have three grown children who "have an appreciation but not the passion we have. We find that people change their viewpoint. They may appreciate it more as years go on."

I'm always curious about the

response of friends and visitors to collections. "We never mention anything proactively," he explains. "Most people don't comment one way or the other. One visitor commented 'Oh we went to visit X museum where they have the *real* antiques,' assuming we had reproductions. It's a pleasure to have this passion together and it's perfectly fine that others don't jump on the bandwagon. But it's sad in a way that art isn't more relevant for people.

"I think it's important to collect and to have art in your home," he continues. "You can have quality and buy it at reasonable prices. If you see the work of young artists that you like, jump in. Buy something that will give you joy every day, something that has more intrinsic and economic value. It's not like getting a stock. It has value in it. Some pieces may appreciate; some may stay the same; some may lose the economic value. So be it." ■