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3 show house dazzlers

The season begins with designer events in Mill Neck, Old Westbury and Nissequogue

PEEKING AHEAD

A handful of other stately homes on Long Island will open their doors to the masses during the next few months. Here's a sampling of what's in the offering:

- On May 21 between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., visitors can ogle five lavish homes in Centerport, Huntington Bay, Lloyd Harbor and Muttontown as part of **The Sammis Family House Tour**. Lunch (\$25) will be served at the Thatched Cottage in Centerport, accompanied by a fashion show by the Pink Link. Proceeds benefit the Family Service League. Tickets are \$55 in advance. To reserve, call 631-427-3700, ext. 255 or visit fsl-li.org/news-events-house-tour08.html.
- **The Hamptons Cottages and Gardens Idea House** traditionally musters first-rate designers while asking them to set aside extremes of individualism in favor of a coherent whole — a home that a family might actually live in. This year, the theme is green. The 1860 Sagaponack farmhouse, which once belonged to the writer James Jones, has recently undergone a sustainable renovation using organic everything: paint, flooring and fabrics. The Hamptons Cottages and Gardens Idea House, at 151 Sag Main, Sagaponack, will be open July 25 to Aug. 24. For information, call 212-286-5700 or visit candgpublications.com.
- **The Hampton Designer Showhouse** will be in late July. Watch for details at hamptondesignersshowhouse.com.

— ARIELLA BUDICK

The Kips Bay Designer Show House, at 200 E. 66th St., Manhattan, opens today. Through May 22nd. For more information, call 718-893-8600, ext. 245 or visit kipsbay.org/show_info.html.

The mother of all interior-design pageants is probably the Kips Bay Designer Show House, which gathers the best talent in the business and sets trends for seasons to come. What began in 1973 as an uncomplicated fund-raiser for the local Boys and Girls clubs has swelled into a crucial event on the design calendar. Past shows have generally taken place amid town house lavishness, but this year's affair sprawls throughout four condos in a 1950s-era Manhattan apartment building. With seven of the 21 spaces going to first-timers, old-time opulence may be giving way to more modernist — but probably no less expensive — restraint.

BY ARIELLA BUDICK
Special to Newsday

Entering someone else's house can satisfy secret voyeuristic desires. How does this stranger group the pots and pans, which books are displayed and which are hidden at the back of a shelf, what artworks hang on the walls and which family photos have edged out other relatives on the piano? All these details accumulate into a subliminal story.

Show houses, on the other hand, offer a different sort of pleasure: the indulgence of fantasy. Could I paint my kitchen just that shade of mauve? What would that leopard-skin fabric look like in my living room? Could I, too, live like the kings and queens of society who once inhabited these echoing halls?

A few of this year's show houses take place in the former homes of America's most coddled class, and there's a certain satisfaction — vindication, even — that their former playpens now open their doors to us plebes. Professionals have taken over the palaces to advertise their most flamboyant visions. True, if we mortals of modest income actually enlisted their services, we might have to hock the house once it's decorated. But we can always dream. And the more privileged among us can efficiently audition designers, testing one sensibility against another in a concentrated space.

The three showcases discussed here take place in historic properties, and the participants have all been asked to adjust their aesthetic to the traditional nature of the architecture.



Port Washington designer Keith Baltimore's room at the Mill Neck



This Nissequogue home will be for show — and for sale.

The Lane Estate, 707 Short Beach Rd., Nissequogue, opens May 31. Through June 29. For more information about tickets and reservations, call 631-734-5894 or visit 2008designersshowhouse.com.

The Lane Estate in Nissequogue boasts a colorful history. Built in 1860 as a shingle-style Victorian, it came into

the possession of Albert Stewart, whose lucrative affiliation with the Barnum & Bailey Circus and friendship with New York City Mayor William Gaynor didn't save him from death aboard the Titanic.

The house was purchased in 1914 by James Lane, who moved it up to a nearby hill, re-dressed its exterior in Greek Revival fashion and hired the legendary



NEWSDAY PHOTO / BILL DAVIS

Designers' Showcase; the show's theme is "yesterday's architecture, compatible with today's lifestyle."

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See more photos of the Mill Neck Designers' Showcase.

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The Mill Neck Designers' Showcase, 40 Frost Mill Rd. in Mill Neck, opens Saturday. Through June 15. For more information, tickets and reservations, call 516-628-4333.

The setting is haute for the Mill Neck Designers' Showcase '08, which takes place at Mill Neck Manor, a jazz-age palace set on 86 acres of prime Gold Coast real estate. The 34-room mansion, once called Sefton Manor, was owned by artist Robert Leftwich Dodge and his wife, the cosmetics heiress Lillian Sefton Dodge.

The house evokes an olde blend of Gothic and Tudor, with glowing stained glass windows commissioned by Lillian Dodge. Golden light filters through evocations of "Hamlet," "Romeo and Juliet," "The Tempest," "Macbeth" and "The Merry Wives of Windsor." Many of the accouterments come from English country houses: 16th century oak doors, stone fireplaces, and the wood paneling that sheaths the walls. (The English Oak woodwork in the dining room comes from Sherwood Forest, Robin Hood's home turf).

Even those who've never set foot in Mill Neck might succumb to déjà vu when they arrive. Scenes from the 1974 Charles Bronson film "Death Wish" were filmed here, as was the Eddie Murphy-Dan Ackroyd vehicle "Trading Places." It has appeared in ads for Mercedes-Benz and Ralph Lauren, as a symbol of luxe living. But the house's most enduring impact may be its starring role in the classic whisky ad, in which one billionaire asks another: "Can I borrow a cup of Johnny Walker Black?"

Since 1950, the house, on the National Register of Historic Places, has harbored the Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf.

The theme of this year's event is "yesterday's architecture, compatible with today's lifestyle," says one of the show's organizers, Arlene Travis. "We are trying to retain the architectural integrity of each room, while each designer has the freedom of creating for today." The 38 design teams and numerous artisans are mostly from Long Island, she says.

Elsie De Wolfe to festoon the interiors with trellis work, mosaics, murals and fountains.

By the time Deborah Dufton and her husband bought it in 1998, the mansion's walls were crumbling, its floors leaking sticky residue, its infrastructure a shambles. The couple diligently restored the mansion to the heights of its De Wolfian splendor, then decided to sell. But the ailing market forced them to lower the price, and Dufton worried that the home might not attract a buyer who could appreciate it. So she decided to organize a show house on the premises, featuring just under 20 designers who are based mostly on Long Island.

Dufton has stipulated that they work around the De Wolf fixtures and integrate them into a relatively cohesive, traditional style. She is putting the house back on sale the day her event opens.

The Orchard Hill Designer Showhouse, Old Westbury Gardens, debuts with a gala preview party May 2.

Through June 15. For more information, call 516-333-0908 or 212-980-1711.

Orchard Hill, the setting of the first Orchard Hill Designer Showhouse, was a gift bestowed on American aristocrat Peggie Phipps Boegner by her father, John S. (Jay) Phipps. Boegner lived in the restrained, white-shingled Quaker farmhouse from the time she married in 1930 until her death in 2006, two months before her 100th birthday.

The 200-year-old house, which once belonged to the Hicks family, stands on a patch of Old Westbury Gardens, resplendent with summer roses, draped in wisteria and crisscrossed by allées of beeches and lindens.



PHOTO BY PATRICK MCARTHY

A room by Glen Cove-based designer Greg Lanza at the Orchard Hill Designer Showhouse

Boegner reigned over her gardens even after she turned them into the nonprofit it is today. She called her legacy "a picture garden created to give delight. Surely, beauty is a

precious gift."

Her refined taste lives on in the choice of 20 top interior designers and decorative artists chosen to ornament Orchard Hill (about half are

based on Long Island). All will work in the traditional manner of the house and the gardens, which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

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