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Photographer Documents Interiors Of Sagamore Hill

By *Lorin N. Diaz*
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An interior of the Theodore Roosevelt family home at Sagamore Hill. Photo by Xiomaro.

The exhibit "[How I Love Sagamore Hill.](#)" which opened on March 8th at [Oyster Bay Historical Society](#), contains remarkable photographs from artist Xiomaro that document the interiors of the Theodore Roosevelt family home.

The photos show rarely seen architectural ornamentations and personal features in the home that regular interpretive tours cannot provide. Due to the fragility of the artifacts, tours of the home are usually limited to the roped areas. Therefore, Xio's exhibit shows powerful moments in the house where both the family's presence and the structure's personality are married in a historic, artistic story.

Theodore Roosevelt's Sagamore Hill home has been undergoing a \$7.2 million structural rehabilitation that began in spring 2012. This three year project will give the home a comprehensive interior and exterior renovation from its roof to the foundation.

Thomas Ross, [superintendent at Sagamore Hill National Historic Site](#), said that the partnership with Xio began when Linda Cook, [Superintendent at Weir Farm National Historic Site](#), where Xio was an [Artist in Residence](#), provided his contact information due to the similarity of their projects.

Ross was excited to have Xio capture the exceptionality and idiosyncrasies of Sagamore Hills as they began removing the 14,000 objects from the house in preparation for rehabilitation. He thought this would be an indispensable opportunity to have the artist come in and capture the interiors of the Roosevelt home, much as they appeared in 1887 when the family moved in.

"The last time the house was empty was in the 1950s," he says. "This was a once in a lifetime opportunity to see the house in a different light. The photographs are artistic rather than interpretive, more free and from a rich perspective. Xio's work at Sagamore Hill could lead to new interpretive opportunities after the exhibit. This might lead to iPad usage for visitors who cannot see the original location of the photo, due to the limited access into the rooms. For example, the original wallpaper in the 'North Room' has this ornate, beautiful pattern. I can't tell you how many times I have seen it, but never really *looked* at it; not like Xio did. He got a close up of these two peacocks looking at each other. It's really great, now others can see this wonderful, detailed moment too."

Another option for the collection to remain in circulation after the exhibit has finished is to offer people the opportunity to take the photos home with them by purchasing a coffee-table book. Xio recently was asked to prepare such a book on his Weir Farm photographs.

"I can see the same thing being done with Sagamore Hill," he said. "It's a way for the public to own a conversation piece that will continue the interpretive experience."

Xio prepares for a new project by reading as much as he can about the house, its occupants, the park site and he also studies floor plans. To capture the "spirit or a sense of place," Xio tries to imagine what it was like to be these people, almost like the way an actor would prepare for a role.

"My goal is that the photographs will make these iconic historical figures – especially a larger than life personality like Theodore Roosevelt – become more real for people," he says. "It's one thing to read about a person or to see a painting or grainy black and white photo of them. But I think seeing contemporary photographs of where they worked, slept, ate and even showered adds that dimension and makes the history come alive."

What is really remarkable about these photographs is how they change one's perspective. Comparatively, it's like moving out of your house; you live in it every day but the second everything is boxed up and the rooms are empty, the spaces are completely unfamiliar. Xio had his own analogy saying, "It's like going back to a childhood neighborhood – it's both familiar and alien at the same time."

The video that was created on [YouTube](#), explains and celebrates the significance of Xio's work. Xio's photographs are effective in many ways, but they are exceptional in the way they transform the history version of the Roosevelt family into a human one.

The photographs are on exhibit at the Oyster Bay Historical Society in partnership with Sagamore Hill National Historic Site, and will be there through June 2nd. [Click here](#) to read the *New York Times* article "An Unorthodox Look at a President's Home."