



Showcasing Sagamore Hill



Written by Dagmar Fors Karppi Friday, 01 March 2013 00:00

Photos by Roslyn Heights' Xiomáro

Viewers are in for a special treat as “How I Love Sagamore Hill: a Photographic Collection,” opens at the Koenig Center this weekend. The exhibit organized by Roslyn-based Xiomáro Art Studio in partnership with Sagamore Hill National Historic Site and The Oyster Bay Historical Society offers unseen looks into the home of the 26th president, Theodore Roosevelt. The mansion, now closed for renovation, is the lynchpin of the Sagamore Hill National Historic Site. The show, the vision of art photographer and Roslyn Heights resident, Xiomáro is aimed at giving people reasons to visit Sagamore Hill, Oyster Bay and national parks.



Like several famed photographers with singular names — think WeeGee and Disfarmer — Xiomáro does his artwork under a similar situation. Reaching into his Spanish background, his father was Cuban, mother Puerto Rican and with family roots from the Canary Island, he chose the name, which means “Ready for Battle.” Xiomáro, is pronounced cee-o-maró or CO or just “X” as Sagamore Hill National Historic Site Superintendent Thomas Ross calls him. “The name was also available as a web domain; and I love the way the letter X looks. [It makes its mark.] To me it was starting all over,” said Richard Dieguez, a resident of Roslyn Heights.

Down To Business

Xiomáro applied for the internationally acclaimed artist-in-residence program at Weir Farm National Historic. “You apply and they pick people of a distinctive caliber and I had the privilege to live there for a month in J. Alden Weir’s cottage. He is one of the founders of American impressionist movement. TR and J. Alden Weir were connected socially through being best men at friends weddings.

“The NPS commissioned me to take photos of their historic buildings and that exhibit caught the attention of Superintendent Tom Ross.” Seeing that Sagamore Hill was in a stripped down condition offering great access for taking photographs as the house was being emptied in preparation to restoration work, Ross invited Xiomáro to take on the project. “Things are all connected,” said Xiomáro, “we are all united in the interest of trying to help the national parks.”

The photographs of the Weir Farm are available on his website Xiomáro.com. They demonstrate that photography can be an art in the hands of a dedicated photographer. They take a small piece of reality and isolate it within the borders of the print, positioned to make the maximum emotional impact.

Xiomáro said, “Anyone can take a camera and take a photograph. Creating an image is different than taking a snapshot, it takes emotion, you have to be observant.” He tells a story in his photographs.

“I focus in on details many others don’t notice,” he explained. For instance the wallpaper in the North Room, he really focused on it and discovered patterns others haven’t noticed: peacocks and ribbons in the design.

“On a tour of the house you can’t see things close up. I was very humbled and felt very privileged that the staff gave me access to the house, every floor.”

Sagamore Hill reflects the custom design that made houses of the era so individual and that includes the fireplaces. “I was very attracted to the fireplaces at Sagamore Hill. We timed it so I could be there before they boarded them up before the workmen came in. It was a very short window of time to do that.

“It is a dark house as Victorians were. Edith’s room has a lot more color, it’s a more feminine room. There are red tiles around the fireplace. The paint colors on the surrounding tiles are intense blues. That portion of the house is a lot brighter.”

The Original Man Cave

On the other hand, Theodore Roosevelt’s North Room, built to entertain visiting heads of state has an entirely different feel. Xiomáro said, “The North Room is the original Man Cave. All the wood is dark and it has tons of stuff when it is fully furnished with the animal heads. There is not much natural lighting there.”

A photo he created has an eclectic mix of chairs, ready for guests to relax and talk.

Xiomáro also took pleasure in documenting the marks the children left on the house. He photographed the letter “E” carved into a door jam. “They were trying to get their sister in trouble. It is not a touristy photo. In another room, on the door is something writing done in a child’s hand.” He said it was a typical child’s message: to get out or stay out of the room.

Edith, the children and even the servants are all part of the collection he wanted to document. The servants lived on the top floor of the house. One of the rooms contained the sewing machine a seamstress used to fashion the clothing for the women and the children of the household.

“I wanted to cover all the occupants of the house. The servants’ rooms reflected their status. They had rudimentary beds and nothing extravagant especially when you juxtapose that with the Roosevelt’s bedrooms — which is in keeping with the times.

Like Downtown Abbey, which my wife watches.”

Time Management

“I am not watching Downtown Abbey because my time is so limited. An important part of an artist’s life: time management, is key. I’m creating the artwork but I also want to promote it in a holistic way. Discipline gets the work done. I get up early to go to work. My day job is as a corporate lawyer in Manhattan. So my brain has to be in function. I’m an artist and a lawyer and that business experience comes in handy. It pays the bills.” Xiomáro is inspired of the work of Ansel Adams whose photographs of Yosemite made people interested in visiting there. Xiomáro intends to do thoughtful deliberate collections so that the people who see them, will want to visit the NPS sites. His next project is Fire Island National Seashore. “I will be starting there in April. At Mastic Beach they have the original home of William Floyd — of the William Floyd Parkway — he was an American revolutionary and one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence.”

2014 Great for Roosevelts

Just as 2013 is the year for President Abraham Lincoln, so too, 2014 will be the year for the Roosevelts, said Xiomáro. The story of Sagamore Hill will be tied in with the work of Ken Burns, filmmaker, who is doing a documentary on PBS called The Roosevelts: TR, FDR and Eleanor.

“The exhibit I have here [at the OBHS] is sort of a preview to all the attention that will be on all the Roosevelts. This exhibit will be going to Harvard College next year. They hope to invite Ken Burns to speak there.

Xiomáro’s photographs are available to the public. They are available in different sizes and price points. There are 8.5” x 11” that cost \$20. Photographs printed on archival museum quality paper, framed are \$1,375: they are 17” x 25”. There will also be a drawing for a free print at the opening.

Internet Audience

Xiomáro sought a wider audience for his work when he initiated a contest by making his Sagamore Hill photos available for viewing on the Internet. The promotion asked viewers to tell what their favorite photo was. In return he sent them a free 4x6 exhibit poster. "I tried to make it fun and include them." There were two winners: Kelly Nichols from Connecticut and Denise Carlson from Iowa. "People participated from everywhere in the country and in England too," he said. The most popular by far was a photo of the North Room and that will definitely be in the exhibit.

"It was great to see what people connect with. Those selected will be in an ebook that is now available for download from my website Xiomáro.com."

The opening reception, free to the public, is on Friday, March 8, from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Angela Koenig Center, located at 20 Summit St., Oyster Bay, 922-5032.

"We're ready for him," said Mr. Blocklyn.