



Norton delivers 5 patented layers of powerful protection. Introducing the all new Norton lineup. Built to keep you safe, no matter what you do online. FIND the RIGHT PROTECTION



The No. 1 source of news and information about Long Island—and your community

Roslyn Hgts photog captures Sagamore Hill

Story Image (2)

Share Print Font Size: - +

Tweet 1

Like 0

Previous Next

Posted: Thursday, May 16, 2013 4:48 pm

by Bill San Antonio | 0 comments



Xiomáro

Roslyn Hgts photog captures Sagamore Hill

Roslyn Heights photographer Xiomaro filmed renovation projects at Weir Farm in Connecticut and Sagamore Hill in Oyster Bay.

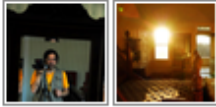
When Theodore Roosevelt moved into his estate at Oyster Bay's Sagamore Hill in 1885, its walls had not yet been decorated with paintings, bookcases or trophies from the president's hunting expeditions.

The house was new, its 22 rooms awaiting the famous Rough Rider and his family to fill it with history.

But now that the Sagamore Hill museum has been closed as part of a three-year, \$7.2 million structural rehabilitation project by the National Parks Service, and its interiors have been momentarily cleared and packed away, a Roslyn Heights photographer has given Long Islanders the opportunity to see the house the way Roosevelt did when he first moved in.

Richard Dieguez, who works under the pseudonym Xiomaro [pronounced See-oh-mar-oh], was given access to the Sagamore Hill house as its furnishings were being removed, and photographed the empty rooms for an exhibit called "Theodore Roosevelt: How I Love Sagamore Hill," which runs through June 2 at the Koenig Center in Oyster Bay.

"What I wanted to do was not just take random photos that were pretty to look at, but try and document what it felt like to be there while that person lived there and capture things that if someone were to go there after it had been renovated and tour the place, they'd see things in the photos they wouldn't typically notice because you're not able to get too close to the objects," Xiomaro said.



The 20-photo exhibit, selected from 144 photographs, takes an intimate look at the details of Roosevelt's Sagamore Hill home, from close-up views of the former president's bathroom sink to wallpaper designs that Xiomaro said had previously gone unnoticed by the museum's staff.

"They don't just renovate all the time," he said. "It's either now or never, and that totally changes your perspective of the place. It's a lot bigger when it's empty and you see a lot of details you wouldn't notice if it wasn't empty, like the woodwork on the walls, the wallpaper."

After its run at the Koenig Center, the exhibit will then travel to Harvard University, where Roosevelt earned his undergraduate degree, for a year-long display.

Xiomaro said there are even plans for documentarian Ken Burns, who has made films about the national park system and the Roosevelts, to speak during the Harvard exhibit.

Roosevelt lived at Sagamore Hill until his death in 1919. The estate had become known as the "Summer White House," because during his administration Roosevelt would spend his summers in Oyster Bay and continue his business away from Washington.

"One of the things I've concluded is that there's a dichotomy between the Theodore Roosevelt who is a larger than life figure today and the Theodore Roosevelt that existed as he was," Xiomaro said. "You stand in his living room or are right there where he slept. I took photos of his bathroom, and you realize he's just like all of us. He got up in the morning, put his pants on, went to the bathroom, brushed his teeth, and had a family that he cared for and spent time with."

The son of a cabinet maker specializing in 18th and 19th-century styles and the nephew of a painter, Xiomaro said he's dabbled in drawing and painting ever since he was a little boy, though as he's gotten older, he hasn't been able to devote much time to it. Photography, he said, is much more convenient.

"With painting, it's the kind of thing where you have to focus and really make a mess out of it all, and when you get going, you can't really just spend five minutes on it," he said. "Photography is something you can do a lot quicker. I literally do things on the train, little things here and there. I've come to find that the work really reflects how society has come to be, always so fast-paced and on-the-go."

Xiomaro, who has lived in the Roslyn Heights neighborhood since 1988, said he used to work as an attorney within the entertainment industry, representing mainly musicians and actors, but that came to a standstill after he was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2004.

"It made me really re-evaluate what I wanted to do with my life," he said. "I thought art would be the best way."

Though the cancer was caught in its early stages, Xiomaro found it difficult to continue practicing law, and instead began playing music and painting.

"It's funny, I use the pseudonym so that when people look me up online for my art, they don't find my legal background," he said. "It's not really a secret, really just for convenience."

The pseudonym "Xiomaro," he said, does hold significance. In Spanish - his family's roots are in Spain - Xiomaro means "ready for battle."

"I figured that was perfect, having just beat cancer," he said.

Just after he beat cancer in 2005, Xiomaro began singing in coffee shops around the country, visiting America's national parks and photographing the sights around him.

Gradually, he began selling the photos alongside his CDs. They sold well.

"People were buying them up – even more than the CDs – and really connecting with them," Xiomaro said. "It made me think I should pursue photography more seriously, in more of an artistic way."

In early 2011, Xiomaro found himself at Connecticut's Weir Farm, the home of American impressionist painter Julian Alden Weir, with the help of an advertisement from AAA World magazine.

During his tour of the grounds, Xiomaro learned of the park's Artist-in-Residence program, in which 12 artists are selected through a rigorous application process to spend a month living at the grounds and creating art for exhibition.

On a whim, he applied.

"The people they accept are professors of art or they have history with exhibits, and I didn't have any of that, nor did I have a substantial profile," Xiomaro said. "It was definitely a bit of a shock that I was accepted, like, me?"

While Xiomaro was at work on his project, photographing the exteriors of various buildings at Weir Farm, Weir's grandson and Artist-in-Residence Commissioner Charles Burlingham suggested that he begin taking pictures of the interiors as well – just as the estate was being prepared for its own renovation.

Burlingham arranged for Xiomaro to photograph the interiors of the houses on the property, and after park administrators saw some of the finished photographs, they helped him secure access to the properties as they were being renovated, without furnishings.

Xiomaro's work was commissioned at Weir Farm and throughout Connecticut, eventually catching the eye of administrators at another northeast landmark - Sagamore Hill, which had begun planning its renovation project.

"If you go to the Web sites of these places, you might see one or two photos that shows the interior, but you don't really get the full experience of these places in any artistic way," he said.

To prepare for "Theodore Roosevelt: How I Love Sagamore Hill," Xiomaro said he researched the other people who lived with Roosevelt at the estate, from his family members to hired help, to get a well-rounded understanding of what it was like to live at the house.

"I always do a lot of research beforehand," he said. "I try to read about the other occupants of the house, not just the main figure, to get a sense of familiarity of what's there, and it enables me to pick and choose what I feel is important to photograph so I have a body of work that I can use to tell a story. I take the approach of how an actor would prepare for a role. If I were playing that person in a movie, I'd want to learn as much about him as I could."

Each 17-inch by 25-inch photograph in the exhibit is accompanied by a sentence, rather than a title, which Xiomaro said is part of the narrative he's trying to convey in the exhibit.

"I was trying to take enough photos and of enough variety where the park could later on put them together any way they could tell a story," he said. "A very common question I get is why would I want to write a story about a photo of an empty house, but once people see the photos, it all kind of makes sense."

Xiomaro describes his work as "ghostly" and "moody" and said he draws inspiration from painters, rather than other photographers.

Lately, Xiomaro said he's begun learning a kind of photography called "wet plate collodion," a method used in the Civil War era in which the photographer literally mixes the chemicals needed to produce individual photos that take

"It's a very unique kind of look that you can't capture in any other kind of medium, and it has a higher resolution than regular photography today," he said.

Xiomaro is currently photographing his third Northeast landmark currently in restoration, the William Floyd House at Fire Island. He is also working toward gaining access to photographing Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Hyde Park estate, though it is not under renovation.

"It would require a lot more self-editing because there are a lot more things to photograph and you can't possibly get it all," he said. "You think even more about the process of what to take out and what to leave in."

