

antiques

WRITTEN BY MARILYN MYERS SLADE • PHOTOGRAPHED BY INSIDE OUT PHOTOGRAPHY

LIVING BY EXAMPLE • Peter Eaton and Joan R. Brownstein demonstrate that fine vintage furniture and art are at home in modern spaces



ON A BRIGHT SPRING morning several years ago, antiques dealer Peter Eaton and his wife, folk art specialist Joan R. Brownstein, had an appointment with a young couple who wanted to start a small antiques collection. However, when the clients arrived at Eaton and Brownstein's home and shop at 24 Parker Street in Newbury, Massachusetts, they were certain they had the wrong address.

Rather than the historic structure in which they expected to find such mavens of vintage treasures, the building before them was a stark, white modern box. Yet once inside, the now



THE MODERN HOUSE Peter Eaton designed (ABOVE) offers a contemporary backdrop for the American regional antiques and folk art (TOP) he and his wife, Joan R. Brownstein, collect and sell.

regular visitors found a treasure trove of early American furniture and primitive art beautifully displayed against simple contemporary interiors.

Eaton, a 40-year veteran of the antiques business, became acquainted with Brownstein over 30 years of exhibiting at some of the more prestigious antiques shows, such as the Philadelphia Antiques Show, the Delaware Antiques Show, and the American Antiques Show in New York City.

PETER EATON
ANTIQUES
978-465-2754
petereaton.com
JOAN R. BROWNSTEIN:
AMERICAN FOLK PAINTINGS
978-465-1089
americanfolkpaintings.com

Both at 24 Parker St., Newbury, Massachusetts. Open daily by chance or by appointment.

In 2002, they married, and their businesses inevitably began to merge. At the time, Eaton's home/shop was a renovated 1851 brick commercial building in downtown Newburyport, Massachusetts, just a mile from the gently rolling bucolic hillside where the couple live now. He was ready for a change, and Brownstein concurred. As an artist who specialized in abstract painting before devoting herself full time to dealing in folk art, she saw the value of creating a new minimalist space that showcased how the fine craftsmanship and artistry of the past

and the Connecticut River Valley. Brownstein's focus is on American folk paintings, particularly portraiture, from the mid-18th century through the early decades of the 19th century, as well as schoolgirl art and portrait miniatures. Both are authorities in their fields, and each has a master's degree in a discipline indirectly related to his or her work: Eaton in American studies with a focus on New England Colonial history, Brownstein in fine arts.



EATON AND BROWNSTEIN in front of a 16th- to 17th-century Chinese cupboard, its original lacquer surface cracked with age.

could fit into a contemporary setting.

From the beginning, Eaton, who designed the 5,300-square-foot flat-roofed house himself, had a clear idea of how it would combine work and living space. There would be no crowding, so visitors could clearly see the elegance and grace of the period pieces in his inventory. All three floors of the house double as both showroom and home — an 18th-century silver candlestick, thick with wax drippings, is proof. "We light it every night for dinner," says Eaton.

As a dealer, Eaton specializes in New England furniture dating from 1680 to 1820, particularly Massachusetts-made furniture dating from 1700 to 1740 and 18th-century furniture from the state's North Shore, New Hampshire,

To this mix of Americana, art, and modern architecture they also bring a remarkable assortment of antiques from China. Eaton bought his first piece of Chinese furniture almost 20 years ago, attracted to its purity of form and surface (untouched old lacquer), qualities that are, for him, the most important considerations when assessing American antique furniture. Likewise, Brownstein sees those same qualities in folk art paintings and in the 20th-century ceramics she also began collecting and selling.

"Our personal collection of Chinese furniture [16th through 19th century] and Chinese ceramics [Stone Age Neolithic through Northern Song Dynasty] is displayed throughout the house," says Eaton. "It's a unifying element."

Brownstein, who still does abstract painting in her studio on the third floor of the house, notes her experience in modern art gives her a special perspective on the folk pieces she sells. "It is today's abstract artists that buy the most folk art paintings — the portraits and the landscapes."

And while all the American furniture in the house is for sale, Eaton has favorites he'll miss once they find new homes with his customers. "The



BRASS CANDLESTICKS are part of a collection of examples of 15th- through 17th-century pieces from western Europe.

things I like best are those that, because of their form and surface quality, have a 'presence' or 'soulfulness' to them," he says. Yet he and Brownstein remain practical about their attachment to pieces. "Since we do this to make a living," says Eaton, "we can't get too sentimental about what we have." ■

18TH-CENTURY DUTCH bottles were found in a Suriname riverbed, where minerals in the soil and water gave the glass its iridescent quality.

