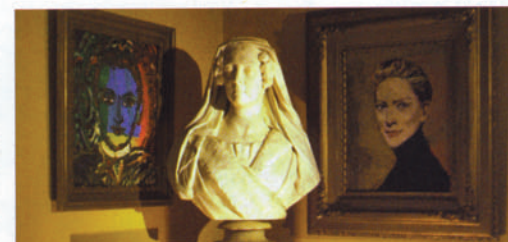


# Gloriously Gothic

Artist Hunt Slonem finds inspiration in his  
Second Empire country retreat



Edgewood Terrace has lovely views of the Rondout Creek to the south, and the Hudson River to the east. But this imposing grande dame of Second Empire architecture is a spectacular view in itself. Built in 1873 by brick manufacturing magnate John H. Cordts, who made his fortune in the Rondout area, the house (also called the Cordts Mansion) was one of the largest private residences in the city. With its gardens, lawns, fountains and gazebos, it's grand enough to have been mistaken for Kingston's city hall. After passing through the hands of three generations of Cordts, the estate assumed a brief life as an upscale B&B. Then, in 2001, artist Hunt Slonem purchased the property.

"I just fell in love with it," says Slonem, a longtime collector of Gothic furniture and art. "Growing up, I lived in a Second Empire-style home for a while and had always wanted my own. This one was absolutely perfect."

Even if you're a neophyte when it comes to contemporary art, chances are you've seen Hunt Slonem's work, which is on display in major museums throughout the world. Though he has painted portraits of notables ranging from Bette Davis to Donald Trump, most of his

A brick beauty: Edgewood Terrace features a three-story tower (right). Above, a trio of ladies occupies a shadowy corner in one of several parlors

by Constance Carlson ✦ Photographs by Dub Rogers







Classic Victoriana: The rich wall colors throughout the house are enhanced by special touches, including the ornate sofa (opposite top), cast-iron mantel cover (far left), and 19th-century statuary (below). Much of the artwork, including the collection of rabbit portraits, is Slonem's own



works are neo-expressionistic, with themes often drawn from nature, and with birds as a recurring motif. (Slonem loves birds, and shares his New York City studio with flocks of finches, macaws, parrots, cockatoos and toucans, who serve as muses and models.)



For Slonem, residential perfection was Edgewood Terrace: a nine-bedroom center-hall mansion of about 10,000 square feet, set on 13 acres. Constructed mainly of Cordts brick, the house has all the architectural hallmarks of the mid-Victorian period: mansard roof and dormers, iron cresting on its rooflines, bracketed eaves, and an airy porch that extends the width of the ground floor. A central three-story tower rises high above the roofline. It's said that John H. Cordts and his son, John N., frequently went to the tower with a telescope to check on doings at their brick plant or shipping activity on the Hudson River.

And what views there are from the top of the tower — though getting there is not for the faint of heart. From the third floor, there are three flights of stairs that decrease in grandeur the higher you go. The third flight is just a sturdy ladder that takes you to the roof. "The previous owners insisted that I climb out of the tower and onto the roof before they sold me the house," says Slonem. "Let's just say I did it. But I haven't done it since."

The original entry foyer floor remains intact — a simple tile mosaic in soft green, mauve, cream and gold. These colors also appear on the brick exterior, columns, window trim, and cornices.

Original Tiffany glass-paned double doors lead to the formal center hall, where the floor, staircase, wainscoting, and moldings are made of wood. One of a pair of 19th-century pier mirrors from India sits in this hall; its twin is in the same spot in the hallway on the second floor. Deep mauves, reds and burgundies are repeated in Oriental carpets and runners, paint and textiles, all reflecting the house's period. "I love red — it's so elegant and so Victorian," says Slonem.

Front parlors on either side of the hall have many original features, including the ornate cast-iron mantel covers on the fireplace and the window valences in the right-hand parlor. Slonem's Gothic furniture is very much at home here.

An exceptionally cheery place, the breakfast room faces south, so it's bathed in natural light no matter how dreary the day. Punchy bright green walls showcase Slonem's art and collections. "I really enjoyed playing with color throughout the house," Slonem remarks, noting that Victorians weren't shy when it came to interior decorating. "I can't stand white, so I



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used slightly different shades of green in the breakfast room and conservatory, and tangerine in the kitchen. I always wanted a tangerine kitchen."

Where he could, he notes, he worked with colors already in the house. "Even in my bedroom. The previous owners put a lot of effort into painting the ceiling moldings shades of green and blue. I tried to use a color that complemented it."

In the dining room, delicate candle sconces highlight the bold orange of the Schumacher fabric on the walls. An elaborate candle-powered Bavarian chandelier provides light over a Davenport dining table. For everyday, the table is set for eight, but could easily accommodate 12. (The Cordts family did their share of entertaining; President McKinley was among dignitaries who dined here.)



Each of the nine bedrooms in the house has a different color and theme. Even the patterns of the wood floors vary from room to room. An early riser, Slonem chose a master bedroom suite that faces southeast. His sitting room, which overlooks the Hudson and the Rondout, is painted in soft coral tones. Among the furnishings is a rare gilded Victorian parlor set from Chicago, upholstered in soft green brocade. His art, as well as a prized butterfly collection, is on display.

Slonem's favorite among the other bedrooms is the pink room. With walls painted a shade of Pepto-Bismol, the room has an Oriental feel and features one of his paintings of a prized cockatoo.

The third floor contains a north-facing room that Slonem once considered using for his studio. It's the only white room in the house, though the walls take on pale hues from light streaming through colored and translucent glass objects in the room. In one corner stands a beautiful, gilded, three-paneled mirror — one of Slonem's prized finds. "I love flea markets and salvage yards, and have been lucky with my sources for Gothic Victoriana," he says, citing dealers in nearby Hudson and Saugerties. Among the other rooms on this floor is a game room with its original dark wood paneling and more than a dozen chandeliers (not all of them functioning). It's a good place to escape, Slonem notes.

Across the lawn, past three restored gazebos (two of them angled toward river views), is a magnificent carriage house. Most of its Victorian details — dormers, iron cresting, bracketed eaves — remain intact. Today, the main level is used occasionally for large-scale entertaining, its antique mahogany bar setting a party mood. Upstairs is the artist's sometime studio (he does most of his work in New York City). A caretaker's house on the periphery of the estate completes the property.

With expansive rooms and high ceilings that show off bold hues to their best advantage, it's no surprise that a Gothic treasure such as Edgewood Terrace caught the eye of a painter whose work is so colorful. Says Slonem of his extraordinary country retreat: "As an artist, I've communed with nature here and come home full of inspiration. It's the perfect place for me to breathe, reflect and meditate." ■

Sweet dreams: The pink guest room (opposite top) features a New York mirror with a sunflower motif. The kitchen (lower left) retains its original coal stove. Elaborate chandeliers illuminate a pair of yellow-painted parlors (this page)

