

HOLLY HILL MIDDLETOWN NJ



*the view from*  
**Holly Hill**

*Built in 1934 for a colorful Judge and his wife, this sprawling estate is planted with prize holly trees and imbued with an effortless air of elegance*

By Alice Garbarini Hurley  
Photography by Lewis Sasaki

*“We’re on high ground, and we have views of both the ocean and the river. In summer, you have the marinas, the beach and ponds.” In winter, her kids loved sledding down the steep field out back, and ice-skating on their own personal farm pond.*

New Jersey Judge Thomas Brown was not just a passing fan of holly—decking his majestic dining room with sprigs of the traditional holiday favorite would not have been enough. No, his quest was to plant and preserve as many different kinds of the American beauty as he could find. And his gift lives on. Come winter, you can start to catch views of the glistening red berries and glossy leaves from the balconies, the great room, and the charming kitchen windows at Holly Hill, the house the judge built.

Located on 12.71 acres on Navesink River Road in the Locust section of Middletown Township, across the river from Rumson, Holly Hill feels special even before you arrive at the door. The rolling road that carries you there rises and dips with ease, offering a glimpse of lush horse pastures and the historic river. You might also see the school bus transporting kids to Rumson Country Day School.

The grounds seem worlds away from bustling New York City, yet the ferry runs 12 months a year, so you can glide between a tranquil retreat and the hub of business and culture.

And adjoining the property (turn at the clutch of cattails just down the road, or use the private entrance on the property) is another gift: the peaceful Huber Woods Environmental Center, originally a donation of 118 acres in 1974 from the Hans and Catherine Huber family, now expanded to 258 acres, with trails for hiking, jogging and mountain biking, and bridle paths, too.

#### DOUBLE VISION

“This area is the best-kept secret,” says owner Elaine Chevalier, who bought the house with her husband in 1986 and raised their son and two daughters there. “We’re on high ground, and we have views of both the ocean and the river. In summer, you have the marinas, the beach and ponds.” In winter, her kids loved sledding down the steep field out back, and ice-skating on their own personal farm pond. And Chevalier, who holds a graduate degree in botany from Rutgers, has nothing but appreciation for Judge Brown’s horticulture.

“The word is that he also hired local craftsmen to build the house. It even has pressed copper gutters. They say this is the last country estate built on Navesink River Road,” Chevalier notes, adding that it was constructed in the time of dirt roads and Model Ts (the original garage on the property, still there, was built to accommodate the longer cars). “The house was like Great Gatsby. Judge Brown’s wife was an opera singer, and she’d sing and they’d have a lot of parties. The local kids would sneak up and look in the windows.”

The Chevaliers added their own lovely touches, but still honored the tradition of using local craftsmen, such as for the hand-carved cherry wood details in the kitchen. The gracious dining room offers timeless elegance—it’s Judge Brown’s original, with just a few updates, such as the antique corner cabinets Chevalier added to showcase heirloom china. Other originals in the house include marble fireplaces, a floating staircase and a cherry-wood-paneled library that speaks volumes about good taste.

The master bedroom has a roof deck/widow’s walk that the family uses for sunbathing. “On a clear day, you can see everything—the ocean, the river, and every ship on the sea,” says Chevalier. In an estate with seven bedrooms, four full baths, and three powder rooms, what better view could you want? ■

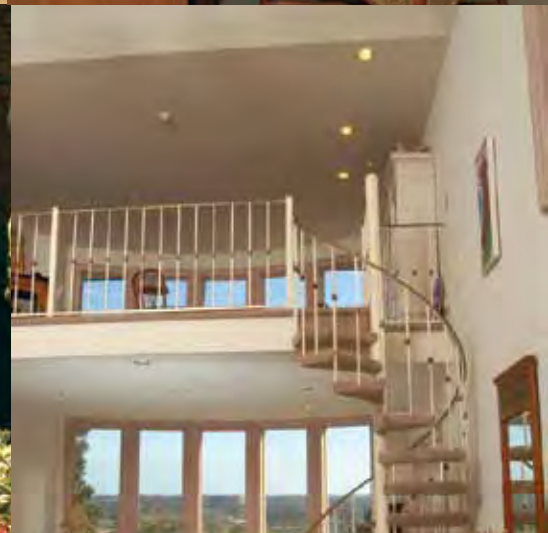
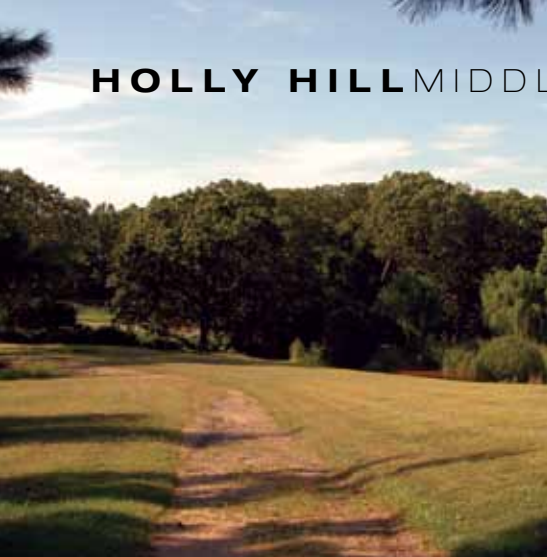
#### SOURCES:

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Stay tuned for details about the Stately Homes by the Sea designer showhouse at Holly Hill, to be unveiled next spring by the Visiting Nurse Association of Central Jersey. Over 25 of the region's top interior designers, decorators and landscape artists will transform this pre-war treasure, honoring its history but incorporating contemporary elements. Doors will be open May 3 through June 12, 2011, Tuesday through Sunday from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M. All proceeds from house tour, gourmet café and shops will benefit VNACJ. Mark your calendar now.

