

Lefferts Manor

{JUNE 3, 2018}

ECHO

THE 48TH ANNUAL PROSPECT LEFFERTS GARDENS House & Garden Tour

Sunday, June 3, 2018 • Noon–5PM

HOSTED BY The Lefferts Manor Association

TICKETS/\$25 IN ADVANCE AT:

Ix Café 43 Lincoln Rd.

The Chameleon BK (formerly Tugboat) 546 Flatbush Ave.

Trixie's Pet Food & Supplies 575 Flatbush Ave.

PLG Coffee House and Tavern 499 Rogers Ave.

Little Mo Wine & Spirits 1125 Nostrand Ave.

Online: click on the **Eventbrite** link at leffertsmanor.org

TICKETS/\$30 ON TOUR DAY AT:

Ix Café 43 Lincoln Rd.

This year's tour is poised to please!

It will feature eight diverse stops including six private homes and two apartments. Tour goers will take in beautiful period detailing, meticulous renovations, quirky colors and collections, both modern and new with a view.

AND...enjoy live jazz at the refreshment stop and discounts from local merchants and restaurants!

[NOTE: No children under 12 except infants in front packs only]

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT: leffertsmanor.org

CALL: 917-207-6807 E-MAIL: plghousetour@gmail.com

FACEBOOK: **PLG House Tour 2018** #plghousetour

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Refreshment Donations: Cookies, brownies, cakes, cupcakes, muffins, crudites with dips, etc. are needed. These should be brought to 166 Rutland Road on Saturday, 6/2, noon–2PM or to 94 Midwood Street on Sunday, 6/3 (Tour Day), 11:30AM–noon

'Voices of Lefferts' To Debut on House Tour Day

Voices of Lefferts: The Flatbush-PLG Community Writing Journal will exhibit photographs by Alexis Holloway and artwork by Laura Thorne at three local venues during its House Tour Day debut.

A community writing journal, *Voices of Lefferts* brings together professional, lay, and novice writers, plus photographers, poets and illustrators from the neighborhood to tell Prospect Lefferts Gardens' stories.

The project is led by PLGNA board member Deborah Mutnick, a Long Island University English professor, writer and documentarian who lives on Midwood II.

Mutnick says the project started with the photographic portraiture of neighborhood residents by young photographer Courtney Mooney and soon expanded to include oral histories and local writer contributions.

The project was able to secure funding from a Humanities New York action grant.

On House Tour day, photographs and artwork from the first issue will be on display at a pop-up gallery space at 360 Fenimore Street from 1 to 5 p.m., followed by receptions from 5 to 7 p.m. at Ix Café (43 Lincoln Rd.) and the Chameleon BK Café (546 Flatbush Ave.) *(continued on page 2)*

If Houses Talked, Art and Carole Schaffer's Would Have a Lot To Say

by Milford Prewitt

Even now it's hard to envision the 2018 annual Prospect Lefferts Gardens House & Garden Tour without the guiding spirit and charming fussiness of Carole Schaffer.

Though she passed four years ago, the vitality, vigor and vision with which she orchestrated the PLG House Tour for more than 30 years will linger in neighbors' memories for years to come. Not that she pulled it off single-handedly, but she was the conductor whose passion for a successful tour extended into virtually every element and activity of the event.

Whether it was recruiting homeowners to let strangers roam through their private spaces, or coaxing neighbors to be house sitters, getting other neighbors to sell tickets, corraling merchants and restaurants to offer tour-day specials and discounts, or even fact-checking and proofing the *Echo's* house tour coverage, Carole was a whirling dervish of attention.

This year will carry on her gusto for the event and memorialize her love of the neighborhood in an awesome way. Carole's husband, Art, has put their stunning Midwood I home on this year's tour, only the third time in the 42 years since they bought it.

The current incarnation of the Schaffer house is light years removed from the forlorn one the Schaffers first saw in 1975.

Built in 1898, the four-story brick-and-limestone manse was a "neglected and abused" rooming house, Art recalls. There were dropped ceilings, much of the original molding and wood trim was missing or damaged, and the basement flooded right after they moved in.

"One contractor gave us an estimate of \$25,000 to restore the place," Art chuckles. He says he knew the bid was way too small to cover the costs of renovation just as he knew that "\$25,000 was a lot of money in the late '70s and it was very unrealistic."

Met at Work

Art and Carole were briefly coworkers at General Foods in White Plains. They met on the job and began a courtship. They married in 1967 and lived in Manhattan, in an apartment on the East Side. Later, in 1975, they began looking for a larger apartment, specifically in Brooklyn Heights. They had no intentions at the time of buying a house.

They had little knowledge of this neighborhood, but their interest was piqued when buying tickets for the Cobble Hill

house tour, Carole heard of two open houses on Midwood Street happening the same day.

Although they saw the two homes subsequently, it was the home they've lived in since 1976 that impressed them the most and prompted them to put in a bid. Contract negotiations lasted from November 1975 until May 1976 and they closed in July of that year.

Little could they have known that they would become eye-



witnesses to history. PLG was a troubled enclave with high street crime, manipulative banks and real estate brokers that exploited racial tensions with blockbusting and redlining, and where merchants were burned out in the riots following New York's historic, citywide blackout in 1977.

But the Schaffers were unbowed by the social and economic turmoil and buffeted themselves by doing something about it. They devoted themselves to the improvement of the neighborhood and an embrace of diversity. They were not going to be passive property owners.

Both became community active. Shortly after moving in, Carole became an LMA board member and also worked on the PLGNA house tour committee. After a couple of years, she became the chairperson of the PLGNA house tour, but when that organization temporarily folded, she continued as house tour chair under the LMA's sponsorship.

Restoration Continues

Meanwhile, restoring the house from its 1970s decline back to its Gilded Age glamour was part and parcel of their commitment to the house. They scrupulously and discerningly found parts to restore the columns, missing doors *(continued on page 2)*



Block of Midwood Street Will Be Designated CAROLE SCHAFFER WAY

In what he calls a "perfect tie-in" to the house tour his late wife coordinated for more than 30 years, Arthur Schaffer announced that the city will co-name the first block of Midwood Street at Bedford, "Carole Schaffer Way." The ceremony will take place the day before the house tour, Saturday, June 2, at 11 a.m. All welcome.

Eight diverse, exciting homes are featured in this year's tour, which extends from Lincoln Road to Fenimore Street and from Flatbush to Rogers Avenues. And for a treat, the always popular complimentary refreshment stop will feature live jazz in the back garden where you can relax, listen to some music, enjoy a refreshing drink and sample some goodies donated by local businesses and residents!

Here is a taste of what you'll see on the 48th annual PLG House & Garden Tour:

Axel Hedman Townhouse

Built in 1908, this four-story, thoughtfully re-designed home caters to the family's changing needs, yet the goal has always been to let the house speak for itself. It is also a home full of family treasures, each with a fascinating story.

Art-Filled Pre-War Apartment

A one-bedroom apartment in a pre-war building is decorated with art by local artists. More than a dozen different artists are represented. There's also a view of the Freedom Tower!

1898 Four-Story Limestone

This limestone-and-brick townhouse is

PLG HOUSE TOUR 2018 WHAT'S ON VIEW

among the oldest buildings in the PLG Historic District. You might think you stepped back 120 years when you see its magnificent woodwork, wallpaper, stained glass, and antiques.

Scenic Views of the Park

Take in the view from a new 18th floor, decked-out apartment and check out some of the shared amenities offered in the building. If



you are wondering what the roof of the LeFrac Center at Lakeside looks like, now is your opportunity to find out!

Benjamin Driesler Brownstone

A brownstone designed by architect Benjamin Driesler in the early 1900s is a delicate blend of Old World charm and modern sophistication. The coordination of the added pass-thru in the kitchen wall, adjacent to the family room with its wood paneling, is an excellent example of this respectful relationship.

Neo-Renaissance-Style Townhouse

Home to two fashion designers, this Neo-Renaissance-style townhouse with its rounded bay front and decorative double-leaf wood-and-glass entry doors is bound to please. Original detailing and filigree woodwork is complimented by the owners' extensive and varied collections of visual art and textiles, which are display throughout the house.

Romanesque Revival Townhouse

A meticulous restoration and renovation rejuvenated this late Romanesque Revival townhouse that had been left in serious disrepair for *(continued on page 2)*



Sky Mural Adorns Marvins' Midwood II Townhouse

House tour participants Elaine and Bob Marvin have been in their Midwood II townhouse since 1974, but it was only recently that Elaine's long desire for decoratively painted ceilings has been fulfilled. The couple hired distinguished muralist Ingrid Van Shipley to create the works. The front parlor ceiling has a mural of a sky with clouds, birds and butterflies. Other rooms feature paintings that are more abstract such as the fern and scrollwork pattern, based on the original raised plasterwork, in the hallway. Be sure to check out the stenciled pattern above the dining room that is based on an art deco light fixture in the hallway.

Couple Finds Home with Room To Grow on Midwood I

by **Roberta Woelfling** • Looking for a new home was serious business for Jack and Victoria Cole. They were living in a condo in Long Island City and wanted more space. Not only were they searching for a family home, they were searching for a neighborhood.

Jack is in television production and development and has worked on shows such as *Amish Mafia*, *Breaking Amish*, and *Wife Swap*. He is also a self-professed data nerd. To streamline their real estate search and make things easier for his eight-months-pregnant wife, he used online apps to research what properties were available in Brooklyn at the time. Jack and Victoria spent four-plus weekends navigating various plotted driving routes and checking out the “pins” on Jack’s maps. They didn’t get out of the car at each location but they would find the house and then drive around to locate trains, coffee shops, grocery stores, and parks to try and get the feel of each neighborhood. By the end of their search, they knew well the Brooklyn housing market of late 2014.

Victoria is an interior designer who honed her craft working for A-list architects across the US and abroad before starting her own firm in 2014. She specializes in high-end residential, commercial and retail spaces. Because of Victoria’s design background and passion for all things architectural, she took on the restoration of a weekend house in the Litchfield Hills in early 2014 and caught the “renovation bug.” She figured she could work her magic on their future for-

ever home as well, so the option of taking on a renovation project in Brooklyn was added to the real estate matrix.

As they are both city people, they wanted a culturally rich and convenient neighborhood to call home. The charm of PLG hooked them from the beginning and they instantly fell in love with an “orphaned” house on Midwood I—missing front door, plywood-covered windows, bicycle lock and all!

Victoria and Jack state that once they purchased the Midwood house, they had absolutely no idea what they were in for. It had suffered from years of neglect and fire damage. Out of necessity, it required total rehabilitation. Approvals, permitting, engineering and demolition took more than 18 months to file and complete. Permits were also needed from Landmarks because of the house’s location in a historic district. A restoration of the front and rear façades was done, as well as all new doors and windows. New utilities from the street were required to bring the house up to current code. Construction took an additional 14 months. Besides the amazingly well-preserved floor joists and a few other historical treasures sprinkled throughout the house, almost everything had to be replaced. After two and a half long years, they finally moved in!

Victoria and Jack are happy to report that they definitely got the neighborhood they were looking and hoping for. They pinch themselves daily for being so lucky to call this their home!



Clothing Designers Deploy Their Talents On Lincoln Road Charmer

by **Renee Michael-Prewitt** • It’s a cliché, but true: Be it the love of your life, a great job or a financial windfall, oftentimes the thing you want most comes to you not when you want it, but right on time.

Take what happened to women’s clothing designers Penelope Chan Jansens and her husband, Jimmy Chan. Back in 2005, the house-hunting couple was making a fast exit from a mess of a home near Ditmas Park when Jimmy’s eyes happened to fall on a flyer promoting a home for sale on Lincoln Road in Lefferts Manor.

Jimmy was curious enough to want to take a look-see while Penny, exhausted from looking at homes the past six months, took a pass.

But when Jimmy returned home he was excited about what he had found. The property, built

on the parlor floor doubling as a bedroom, despite having a hole in the ceiling.

“It was a huge mess,” says Penny, “but Jimmy saw immediately what we could do with it.”

A couple of months later the house was theirs. What house tour attendees will see when they arrive at Penny and Jimmy’s home is what the couple found 13 years ago made new.

Says Penny, “We touched every inch of the house but a lot of the work just involved cleaning up, not major structural work,” says Penny. “We did our initial renovations within three months of moving in. Then we didn’t touch anything for 10 years.”

The most significant work done in the home can be seen in the kitchen, located on the garden level, as well as the garden itself.

“One of the reasons we bought the house,” she says, “is that we wanted a garden. So having it be functional was very important.”

Three years ago she and Jimmy finished the basement in order to have a space that could serve as both a place where their son Connor could hang out with his friends and guests could have a place to stay when visiting.

Still, they want more space for their garden, so much so that they’ve even considered asking neighbors who don’t use their backyards if they’d sell them theirs.

The couple love applying their fashion design talents to decorating and renovating their home. They find it challenging and enjoyable.

But Penny speaks a truth that almost every homeowner cannot deny: “What I love about doing this house is that it never ends.”

Rutland II Family Loves Living on the ‘Best Block’ in the Manor

by **Carlene Braithwaite** • Siobhan O’Neill and Rob Adler, and their two sons, 9-year-old Jasper and 14-year-old Raphael, are proud owners of a home on Rutland II, which they consider the “best block” in Lefferts Manor.

In fact, Siobhan unabashedly says of her home and neighborhood that she feels like she has “won the lottery.” They have lived in the neighborhood since 2003 and put their house on the House Tour a couple years after their arrival, while they were still tackling household renovations and a newborn baby.

Like many homeowners in the Manor, the Adler-O’Neills, who are only the fourth owners of their home, found a place that had been well maintained through the years. They still remember fondly the well-known veterinarian, Dr. Maddox, who sold their house to them.

Siobhan and Rob share a not unfamiliar story for Manor residents: living in Manhattan and being drawn to the neighborhood when they were starting their family. They wanted some space, a backyard, and for Siobhan, her dream, a home with a fireplace; now she has five.

Rob, who grew up in lower Manhattan, found their house, and at the time did not realize that it was in a place where he had deep roots. Rob’s mother, who grew up in Bensonhurst, was visiting Siobhan and Rob when she exclaimed that she had lived on Beekman Place in the 1940s. Rob was astounded at the revelation.

The house is on the tour once more this year, and their love of the home, and its wonderful bones, shows through in everything they have done. Their renovations reflect the discernment of a couple determined to preserve the historic

19th-century character of the house while being mindful of 21st-century design elements.

Their basement project, for example, reflects this dual goal. Siobhan incorporated an original pedestal sink from the house into her new bath-



room. They saved much of the original wood molding and doors from upper floor renovations to re-create functional and beautiful pocket doors as entrances to the new guest bedroom and bathroom. For their laundry and craft space, they reused tiles from a third-floor renovation, a deep sink from Rob’s mother’s apartment, and delightfully turned old doors into custom shelving around the washer/dryer. In a nod to the new, they had the stairs leading down to the basement rebuilt with storage space cleverly tucked in under the stairs to store their sons’ toys and other items.

On the first floor, they have transformed the former dining room into an elegant sitting room that doubles as Siobhan’s office. The room is furnished with many antiques from her family’s history, from Vietnam (where her parents met), to Ireland (where Siobhan was born), to Hong Kong and Macau, where her father still resides.



in 1901, needed work, he told Penny, but the owners, who had possessed the three-story Neo-Renaissance-styled townhouse for 45 years, had left virtually all the original wood details intact.

Five people were living there and they used only a few rooms in the house, including a library

‘Voices of Lefferts’ Debuts (continued from page 1) Other house tour venues will display art and illustrations. Check your brochure for locations.

Looking ahead, at 7:30 p.m. on June 18, Greenlight Bookstore (632 Flatbush Ave.) will be hosting a reading by *Voices of Lefferts* authors. Copies of the debut issue will be for sale at the event.

For more information on contributing to *Voices of Lefferts* or participating in its workshops, contact Deborah Mutnick at Deborah.mutnick@lie.edu.

If Houses Talked (continued from page 1) moldings, and located antique furniture from the period that was functional and decorative.

But the centerpiece of the place was their ground-floor modern kitchen, which they installed in the early 1980s and updated over the years. It is an atrium with a dramatic ceiling-to-floor window wall overlooking the well-tended garden and backyard.

“We considered the kitchen the focal point of our lives,” Art says. “It’s where we spent most of our time.”

The Schaffers were also proud to have neighbors who would make history. In the debut issue of *Voices of Lefferts: The Flatbush-PLG Community Writing Journal*, a community-centered publication, Art penned an affecting article about his and Carole’s purchase of their home. Among his many anecdotes was that Deval Patrick, who would become the first black governor of Massachusetts and is a possible 2020 presidential candidate, lived and married in 55 Midwood Street. Approximately seven years earlier, novelist Alice Walker lived at the same address, and shortly after she left the neighborhood, she published *The Color Purple*, which earned her the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1983.

All the house photographs for this edition of the Echo are by **Martin Friedman**.

WHAT’S ON VIEW (continued from page 1)

years. A comfortable, modern interior was created that was also respectful of the home’s historic lineage. Even the stained glass windows were carefully remade to match the originals.

An 1899 Limestone

A home designed by architect George Lawton in 1899 has a Neo-Renaissance limestone façade at the two lower levels with an angled bay topped off with a balustrade. Above are three Romanesque Revival arched windows with projecting stone lintels. The interior features period detailing that is complemented by the addition of beautiful trompe-l’oeil painting and stencil art on the ceilings.

AND ENJOY ARTISTIC DETOURS—Jenkins Johnson Projects

Explore the new Jenkins Johnson Projects, an art gallery at 207 Ocean Avenue. It will be presenting “Pride & Loss,” a group exhibit featuring works by South African visual activists and photographers.

Dorsey’s Art Gallery

The oldest, continuously active, black-owned art space in the city, located at 553 Rogers Ave. is featuring an exhibit titled “Figuratively Speaking,” showcasing the works of Otto Neals and Tyrone Geter.

House Tour Day Merchant Discounts

Nearly two dozen neighborhood businesses, ranging from wine stores and restaurants to flower shops and yoga studios, will offer generous specials and discounts on House Tour day to tour-goers. A list of the participating merchants will be included in the house tour brochure and at www.leffertsmanor.org. Just show your tour wristband to enjoy the savings.



For a stronger community, join the

Lefferts Manor Association

Dues are \$25 per household or \$15 per senior citizen household.

Dues cover January through December 2018. Make checks payable to **Lefferts Manor Association**. Send payment and form to: Martin Friedman, 214 Rutland Rd., Brooklyn, NY 11225 or drop in the mail slot at 214 Rutland Road.

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