

# AMERICAN BEAUTIES IN ESSEX

## DESIGNER JOHN COTTRELL'S MASSACHUSETTS SOURCES



"Concentrated in the small town of Essex are terrific antiques shops offering the highest-quality pieces," says John Cottrell. LEFT: "Friendship Antiques is housed in a great old barn."

BELOW LEFT: The designer, right, looks at Japanese ceramic bowls with William S. Friend. BELOW: The American Queen Anne chest-on-stand from Maine is attributed to Samuel Sewall.

Text by Hunter Drobojowska-Philp  
Photography by Richard Mandelkorn

SOME TWENTY-THREE MILES NORTH-east of Boston is the community of Essex, one of the comely towns that pepper Massachusetts's Gold Coast. Founded in 1634 as part of Ipswich, from which it separated in 1819, the tiny town was long celebrated for the construction of wood fishing schooners, a past commemorated in its Shipbuilding Museum. These days the cluster of structures straddling the Essex River refers to itself as "America's Antique Capital."

John Cottrell, an interior designer with a long commitment to the American vernacular, prefers to call Essex the "capital of American antiques." "There are only about thirty shops, but they have a



wealth of Americana that's hard to come by," he says. "The town is frequented by dealers from the East Coast; they get antiques that never make it to auctions. A handful of stores feature American furniture, which has always been my first love. My second choice is French; my third, Italian. But I love American pieces. They have more in Essex than I've ever seen anywhere in one place."

Cottrell particularly favors four shops that are grouped side by side at the

east end of Main Street. He begins with Susan Stella Antiques at Brick House Antiques, named after its eighteenth-century brick building. "She specializes in blue-and-white Chinese Export ware. I discovered a pair of cider pitchers, with lids, which is very unusual," he says. "She has American glass, hooked rugs, tiger-maple furniture from the mid- to late 1700s."

Stella combines her eighteenth- and

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nineteenth-century American furniture with quilts and samplers, marine antiques, naive paintings and weather-vanes. "She has an eye you can't believe."

L. A. Landry Antiques is right next door. Proprietor Robert Landry has operated his Essex shop for twenty years, since he inherited the business from his father. "He has a collection of all different kinds of objects but concentrates on the Federal period, especially secre-



LEFT: "Two of my favorite stores, Neligan and Neligan and Alexander Westerhoff, are located in the same charming circa 1910 building on Main Street," says Cottrell.



ABOVE: "Westerhoff's emphasis is on more formal things." The Massachusetts North Shore sideboard is circa 1860. ABOVE RIGHT: Tom Lang and Cottrell inspect a mahogany Hepplewhite-style shield-back chair.



taries," notes Cottrell. Landry shows him a Federal secretary from the North Shore. "He's one of the foremost people on the East Coast for buying *real* furniture and an expert at getting a piece or two from the old established families," says Cottrell. "He carries incredible museum-quality American antiques. I've gotten two or three marvelous things from him—for example, a hanging that was once a painted canvas top for a games table."

Cottrell next goes to a nearby 1910 building that houses the antiques shops of both Neligan & Neligan and Alexander Westerhoff. According to the designer, they have different missions.

David Neligan opened the store with his wife, Gretchen, in 1993 after spending many years with Christie's in New York and a New England auction house. "They buy from estates," Cottrell explains. "They have Continental and English furniture as well as decorative arts. I bought a fantastic eighteenth-century German tall case clock." David Neligan

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RIGHT: "You'll discover the best English and Continental antiques at Neligan and Neligan." A grouping of early-19th-century French pewter plates rests on the Edwards and Roberts mahogany desk.





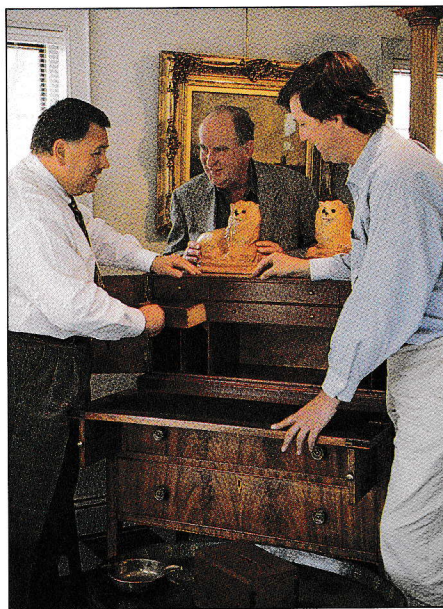
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points out an American coverlet woven in a reversible pattern of blue and white. "Although they have the smallest amount of American furniture, I purchased a complete set of early American silver flatware from them. They also have American pewter."

Alexander Westerhoff was raised in his family's castle amid the vineyards of southern Germany. Through his extensive travels, he developed a taste for "sophisticated furniture," remarks Cottrell. "He has elegant, well-documented antiques. He knows the cabinetmakers of the various periods and has good, pretty things—not country, not primitive."

The shop's main focus is on furnishings for a formal dining room. Westerhoff's partner, Tom Lang, calls attention to six



LEFT: Robert Landry and Peter Combs, right, of L. A. Landry Antiques show Cottrell a Federal secretary. BELOW: "This shop is known for its fine American and Continental objects."



BELOW LEFT: A 19th-century Irish tilt-top table arrayed with a Staffordshire lusterware dinner service and a Nevers tureen centers the main gallery. Beneath it are two rare Rookwood planters.



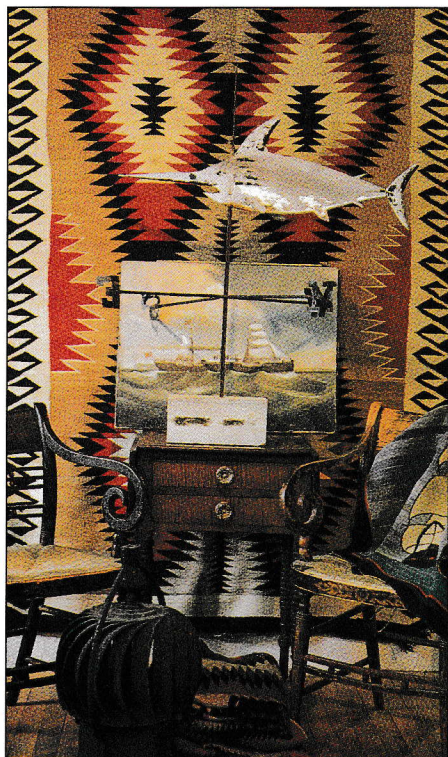
mahogany Hepplewhite-style shield-back chairs with a Prince of Wales feather motif on the backs. The design had a resurgence of popularity in the 1920s and was modeled after the earlier Derby family chairs made in Salem. Cottrell says, "You can put these around a stone table or anything. Somehow this furniture is always worth owning. It takes a certain sensibility to appreciate country furniture, but people can recognize the attraction of high-quality furniture."

On Route 133 on the north side of Essex, Friendship Antiques is situated in a renovated barn with a large window and a massive sliding door. It's a structure of such integrity that it was painted by Edward Hopper, who frequented nearby Gloucester. Cottrell praises owner William S. Friend for having "the most wonderful things." On top of a Queen Anne chest-on-stand are nineteenth-century French gilt pineapples, a symbol of hospitality. "In Williamsburg you see pineapples in Christmas wreaths on front doors or over their frames." Cottrell admires seven Japanese graduated bowls. "Each one fits inside the other, and each has a different pattern and color, ranging from terra-cotta to blue and white."

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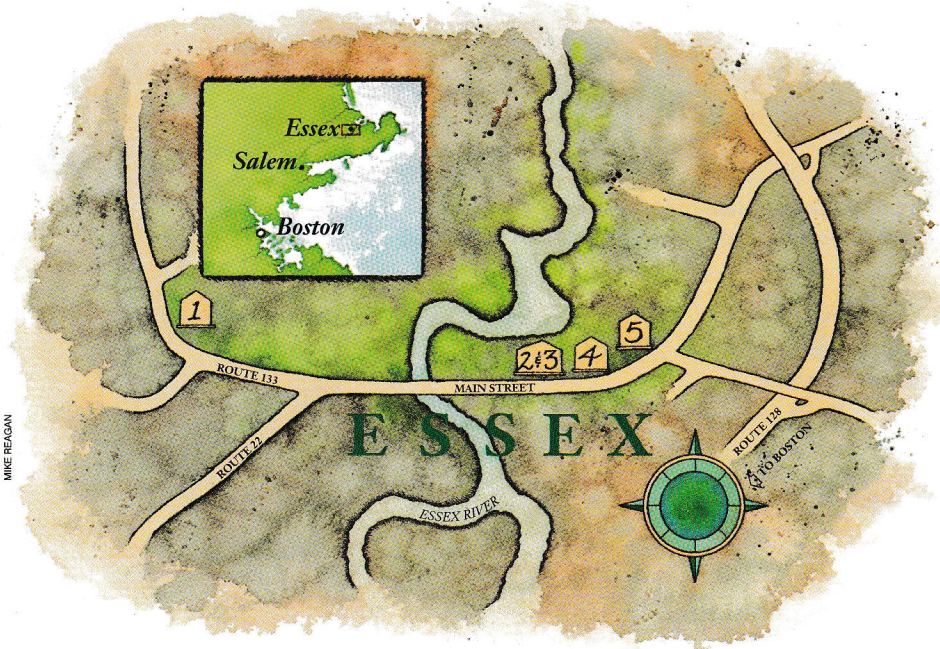
"He has corner cupboards and eighteenth-century chairs," continues the designer. "In the past I picked up a terrific tiger-maple slant-front desk. I also bought a chest-on-stand and a couple of lowboys. He has them in woods like walnut and maple." Cottrell, grateful to encounter such rarities, promptly sent them to his projects in California and Indiana.

According to John Cottrell, American

antiques are growing in popularity, and more visitors will undoubtedly come to Essex. Asked about the enduring interest in American furniture, he says, "It has a charm about it. I've always liked it. In Attica, the small town in Indiana where I grew up and where I still restore buildings [see *Architectural Digest*, February 1993], people used to collect furniture in the thirties and forties. I was raised with friends who had amazing step-back cupboards, hutches and tall case clocks, the likes of which you don't see today. Their houses were filled with fine American furniture meant for the East Coast. I fondly remember that as being the coziest kind of house." □

LEFT: A pair of painted scroll-arm fancy Sheraton chairs stand before a hanging Navajo rug and a sword-fish weathervane at Susan Stella Antiques.

ABOVE: "Susan Stella has the most wondrous country Americana and folk art." The display includes a star quilt and a circa 1830 group portrait.



## ESSEX SOURCES

- 1 FRIENDSHIP ANTIQUES  
Route 133  
508/768-7334  
*American and Continental antiques*
- 2 ALEXANDER WESTERHOFF  
144 Main Street  
508/768-3830  
*American and European antiques*
- 3 NELIGAN & NELIGAN  
144 Main Street  
508/768-3910  
*English, Continental and American antiques*
- 4 L. A. LANDRY ANTIQUES  
164 Main Street  
508/768-6233  
*American and Continental antiques, crystal and china*
- 5 SUSAN STELLA ANTIQUES  
166 Main Street  
508/768-6617  
*American antiques, Oriental porcelain and textiles*