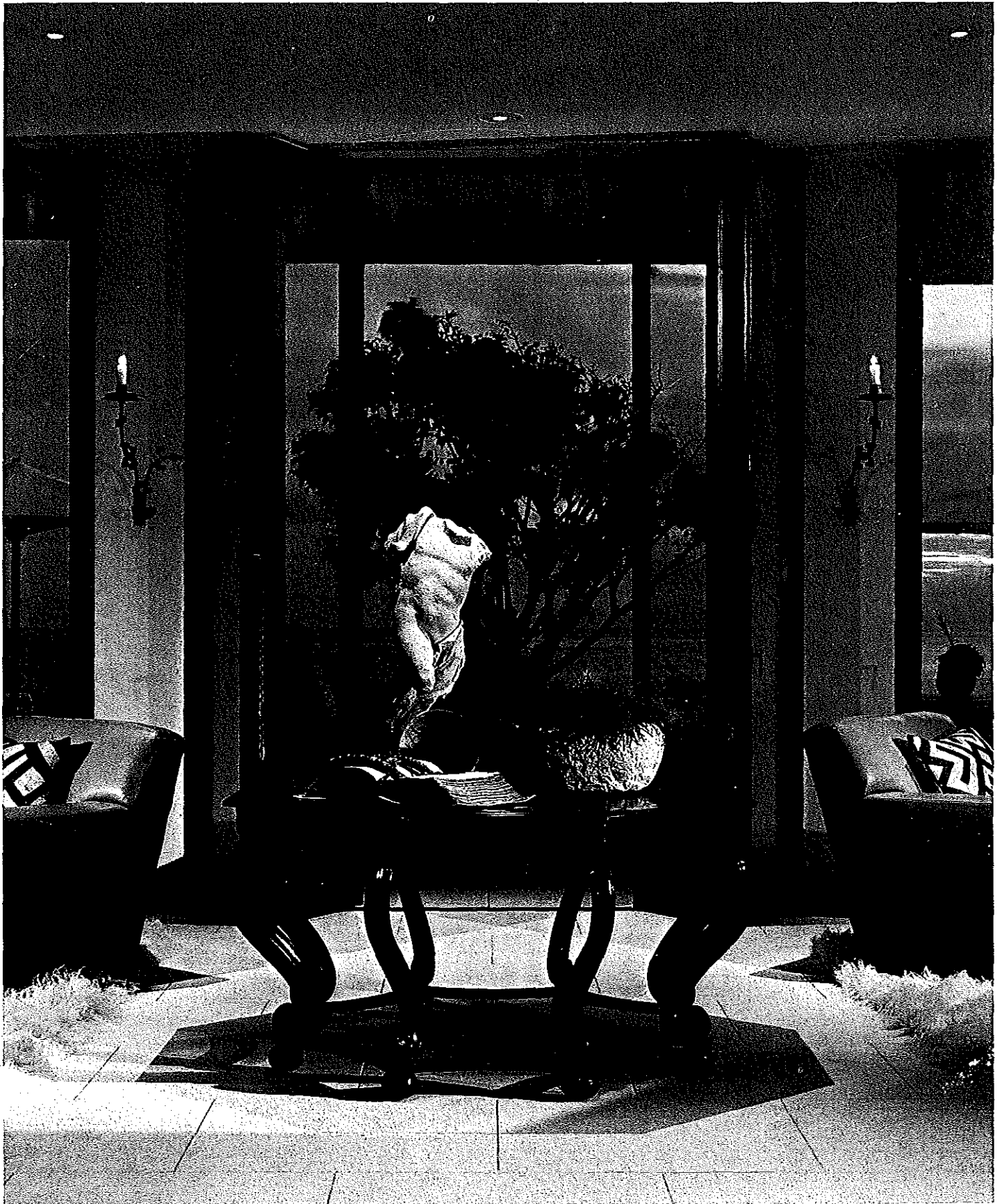


ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

THE INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE OF FINE INTERIOR DESIGN

AUGUST 1992 \$5.00



HISTORIC HOUSES: ANDRE DERAIN

Preserving the Artist's Residence and Studio in Chambourcy

By Nicholas Fox Weber



PHOTOGRAPH: MARINA FAUST

In 1935 the French painter André Derain (1880–1954) moved with his family to a house in the village of Chambourcy outside of Paris and set up his studio on the second floor. LEFT: La Roseraie, which dates to the 18th century, can be toured by special arrangement with the current owners. BELOW: Derain's easel, brushes and pigments in the studio.



ABOVE: A photograph of Derain rests on a table next to a vase he made with a Chianti bottle and an old trumpet. His cluttered studio shows the delight he took in collecting the everyday objects that fill his many still lifes.

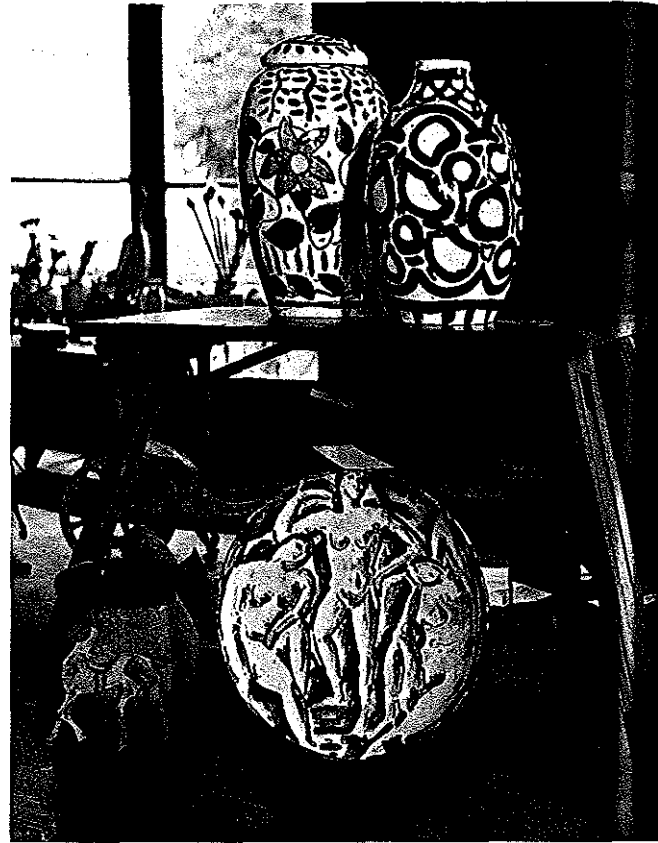


THE SCULPTOR Alberto Giacometti once said: "Derain excited me more, has given me more and taught me more than any painter since Cézanne; to me he is the most audacious of them all." It is no wonder that Giacometti, so tirelessly devoted to the real issues of making art, felt this way. André Derain was one of the most ardent and engaged artists of our century, however counter his passions ran to the accepted mode of the day. He had been one of the pivotal Fauves, those "wild beasts" who unleashed color and form with unprecedented expressiveness. And then, just as the Fauves' unacceptable revelations gained public approval, he had again turned his own way—to a manner of painting anchored in the French tradition, this time startling for its apparent eschewal of modernity. What was consistent was

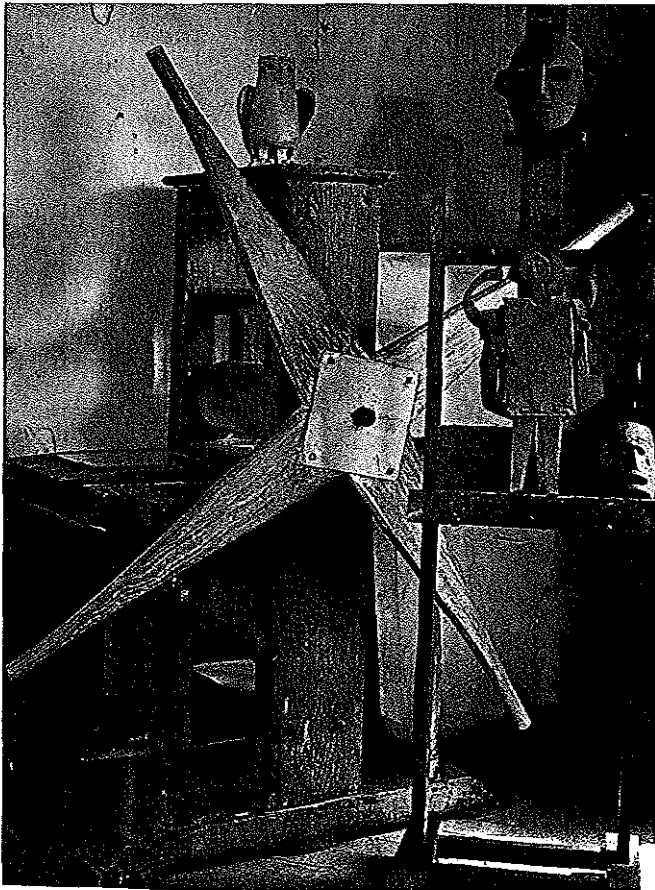
HISTORIC HOUSES: ANDRE DRAIN

Preserving the Artist's Residence and Studio in Chambourcy
continued from page 48

Although Derain had been a prominent member of the Fauves and was familiar with Cubism, he adopted a more conservative style in his own work in the 1920s. He was particularly influenced by the French classical tradition. **BELOW:** A 1949 portrait of his niece, Geneviève.



ABOVE: In addition to painting and sculpting, Derain also illustrated books, designed sets and costumes for operas and ballets and created imaginative ceramics. **LEFT:** His old wooden etching press still stands in the studio.



Derain's goal of making the natural world come alive on canvas, and giving full voice to the possibilities of painted forms, and their unique rhythms and relationships.

The man who so easily went his own way was a powerhouse. Consider Alexander Liberman's depiction of him: "His face had the impassivity of a Roman emperor's bust.... There was something majestic in his bearing.... The massiveness of his head, the thick, strong hands, the slow, curving volume of his body gave monumentality to the living Derain.... He reminded me of the great actors of the Comédie-Française." Liberman wrote this after he visited Derain in Chambourcy, a small Ile-de-France village about an hour from Paris, where the artist had his studio toward the end of his life.

Today, on the north wall of that studio hang two models for marionettes that Derain painted in the late 1940s, several years before he died. Though he was then more than ever out of the mainstream of contemporary art, his days offered a surfeit of pleasures. He was painting some of his boldest and most exuberant works, making sculpture and ceramics, fashioning household objects, illustrating books and designing sets—when he wasn't charging home in

continued on page 52

HISTORIC HOUSES: ANDRE DERAÏN

Preserving the Artist's Residence and Studio in Chambourcy
continued from page 50

his silver Bugatti or enjoying a long Sunday lunch with a crowd of family and friends. Those insouciant marionettes, so casually displayed, are evidence of that fertile period.

In Paris, Derain's paintings are exhibited among the treasures of the city's finest museums; in Chambourcy one feels the wit and passion, as well as the practical tasks, that their creation was all about. Derain revered nature, and he reveled in the materials and the decisions that underlie the crafts of painting, sculpture and printmaking. All of this comes to life with sharp immediacy in the room where he worked.


The position of the studio makes it clear how inseparable Derain's work and his life were. It is on the second floor of La Roseraie, the large and impressive eighteenth-century house in which he, his wife, Alice, her sister, Suzanne, and Suzanne's daughter, Geneviève, lived from 1935 on.

The other half of the studio floor was the couple's bedrooms. Living and dining spaces were below; additional bedrooms were above.

With its rough plaster walls, gentle mansard roof and adjacent gardens and farmland, La Roseraie was—during the artist's lifetime—one of the grandest structures in the village. His bedroom and the studio have two pairs of large windows at either end, with views of large chestnut trees and smaller lime trees. An artificial pond still has ducks as it did during Derain's day, and nearby are outbuildings that were especially useful back when there were also goats and rabbits being kept on the premises. The life outside, as well as the happy domestic scenes within, all figured in Derain's art. He worked in the midst of a joyful existence in which nature was always at the fore.

The studio in Chambourcy has the rich clutter preferred by France's

classic artists—the objects André Derain liked for still lifes, the tools of various media in which he was working, maquettes for projects and personal effects. The white pitcher and black bowls that Derain arranged on a bare wooden table in his dramatic late still lifes are there in all their simple grace on that very table. Derain's niece, Geneviève Taillade, who still lives nearby, often places fresh flowers in that same pitcher and fills the bowls with cherries and grapes and apples like those that he painted. There is nothing contrived about it. Her aunt Alice would cut flowers from the same garden and position them in that pitcher for Derain's painting; Geneviève Taillade is simply happy to help recapture the way the studio really looked on a springtime afternoon in the late 1940s. Elsewhere in the studio are jars of brushes and Derain's many palettes. The velvet fragments he



How
To Show
Proper
Respect To
Your Resident
Shakers.



are playing host to a large gathering of Shakers, or a few select neighbors. In the XIV, accord them the respect they deserve. By insisting on DuPont's LuxuraSM carpet. Its pile is thicker and more plush, and it comes

HISTORIC HOUSES: ANDRE DRAIN

Preserving the Artist's Residence and Studio in Chambourcy

used in his backgrounds hang over table corners as they do in the artist's pictures.

On one table stand some models for an opera set. Derain designed the sets and costumes for *The Barber of Seville* at the Aix-en-Provence Festival in 1953; what remains of those sets are these doll-size, handmade versions of it. No photographs of the actual production could be as exhilarating. There is a grand piano with an enchanting landscape on its open lid, a freestanding folding screen and windows and stairs.

An artist's imagination and vision are nourished by an accumulation of objects and views. In Chambourcy one sees what delighted Derain besides the scenes from the windows and the subject matter of his still lifes. In the studio is a large old magnet, an assortment of dried gourds, a collection of model boats—and within that cache a subcollection of clipper ships

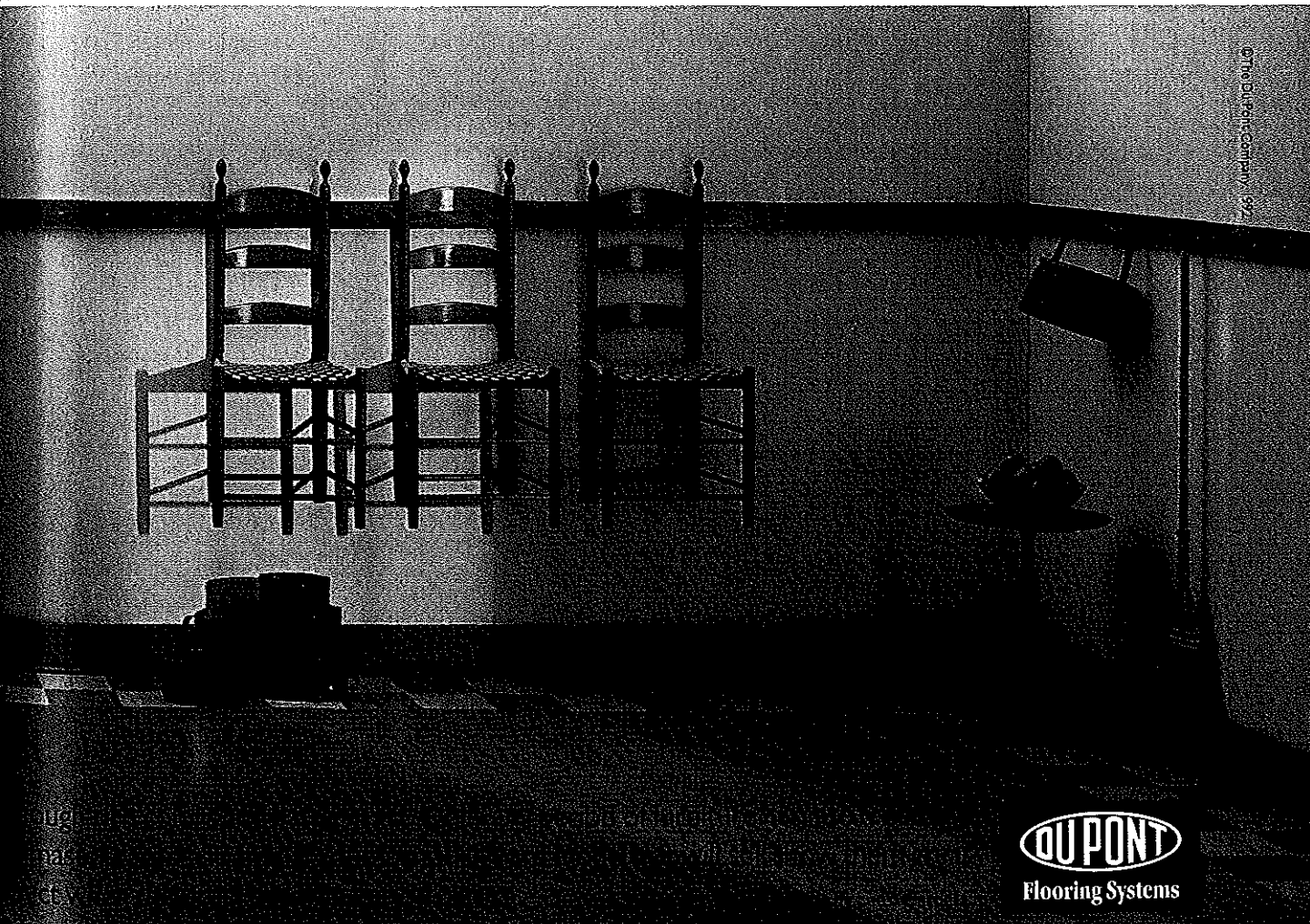
in bottles. Derain was often portrayed—by himself and others—with a pipe; the assemblage of a number of handsome pipes in a wooden bowl shows how much he relished his daily pleasures. He also relished his tools. His etching press at the back of the studio is an old wooden contraption with a propellerlike mechanism for moving the rollers, recalling the days of Johannes Gutenberg more than the postwar era. A pile of unused copper plates is stacked alongside the press.

None of André Derain's major paintings remain at Chambourcy. His enormous, triumphant *Return of Ulysses*, which covered most of the west wall of the studio, is now at the National Museum of Modern Art in the Georges Pompidou Center; other oils have gone to equally important collections. But chalk sketches by the artist remain, and above all, there is evidence of Derain's work as a sculptor. Part of

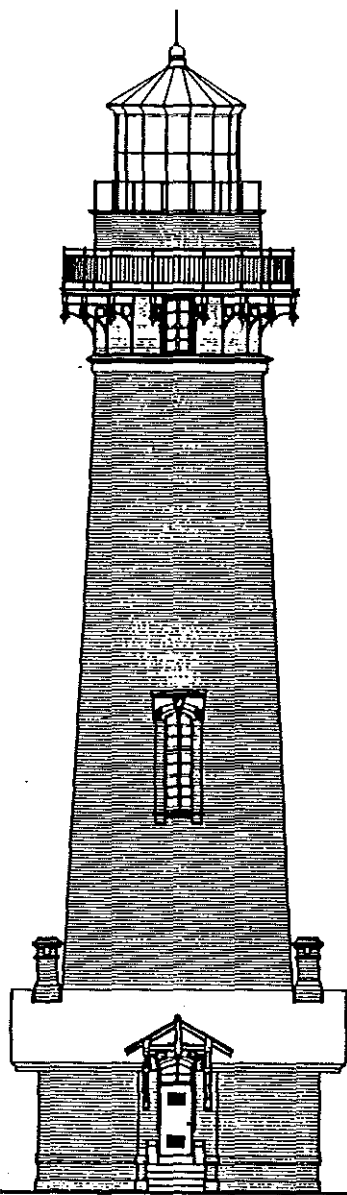
Chambourcy's appeal for the artist was the natural clay its soil produced. The charming clay figures he modeled—as well as some bronze castings of those figures, made posthumously by his widow, who had Giacometti's advice on the project—are all around. So are the colors he used for glazes, in long, thin sticks of vibrant hues. Derain would grind these into powders, which are still where he left them, on the shelf of his easel. He kept the different colors in the family's everyday drinking goblets. These lovely powder-filled glasses, still vibrant four decades after the artist's death, evoke the spirit of the household.

Geneviève Taillade lives across the courtyard from La Roseraie, and a visit with her gives a vivid impression of what the old days were like. For one thing, she has in her house some of Derain's beloved Gothic furniture, as well as his rough wood farmhouse

continued on page 54



Preserving the Artist's Residence and Studio in Chambourcy
continued from page 53



PIGEON POINT LIGHTHOUSE, SAN MATEO COUNTY, CA

PRESERVATION PLAN ON IT

Planning on restoring a house, saving a landmark, reviving your neighborhood?

Gain a wealth of experience and help preserve our historic and architectural heritage. Join the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Make preservation a blueprint for the future.

Write:

National Trust
 for Historic Preservation
 Department PA
 1785 Massachusetts Ave., N.W.
 Washington, D.C. 20036

pieces that date from the seventeenth century. Mme Taillade, who figured in a number of her uncle's canvases, also has an array of objects that reveal that Derain had, like Alexander Calder, the sort of inventive mind that enabled him to see the art and humor in practically everything. For example, he made a vase by using an old trumpet as a base for a broken Chianti bottle. To see objects used in this way is to understand that for Derain, art was an integral part of life, and life a series of pleasures.

Mme Taillade easily recalls daily existence at La Roseraie. There were visits by the painter Balthus, who once had studio space near Derain in Paris. The tall, slender Balthus—strikingly handsome in his boots during wartime—would regularly engage in such long, erudite conversations with Derain that the cook would fret that they would never come down from the studio to eat. Paul Poiret, the designer, was often there; he lived nearby and came on foot almost every Sunday. Serge Lifar and Jean Renoir were frequent callers. They were all attracted not only by Derain's skills

artistic transformations later, the painter who had been one of Derain's confreres in Fauvism remained part of his inner circle.

Life at Chambourcy had its glamour, but the primary focus was on work. Derain was in the studio by eight or nine in the morning, and although he broke for lunch, he generally did not stop working until five. He maintained that routine except during wartime, when La Roseraie was occupied for three years by German troops. The Derain family rehabilitated the house after the war; the artist died in the summer of 1954.

La Roseraie is now owned by a Chambourcy doctor and his wife—Albert and H el ene Badault. They live privately in some of the rooms, keeping the studio and several other spaces available for visitors by special arrangement. Adding a nice recent touch, a reproduction of Balthus's 1936 portrait of Andr e Derain hangs outside the studio door, conjuring the artist, in his striped bathrobe, as an image of concentrated power. In one of the downstairs rooms are some Derain drawings and a complete col-

There were visits by the painter Balthus.
 Serge Lifar and Jean Renoir were frequent callers.
 They were all attracted not only by Derain's
 skills but by his tremendous persona.

but by his tremendous persona. Plenty of guests were always there to partake of Derain's favorite foods.

Georges Braque—droll and enchanting, in spite of a certain reserve and the debilitating effects of the head injuries he suffered during World War I—was another regular at those leisurely Sunday lunches. When Alice Derain had taken the infant Genevi ve to Braque's studio, the artist had been horrified since he had no familiarity with babies, but he eventually was the official witness to her marriage. Decades and many

lection of publications relating to him. Like Derain himself, the people who are now responsible for his legacy value the spirit of art and the beauty of daily living, and have done their best to maintain it without regard to trends or shifting fashions. At Chambourcy, one breathes in the environment in which that courage and independence flourished. □

La Roseraie
 64 Grande Rue
 78240 Chambourcy, France
 1-30-74-70-04