

The Southampton Press

www.27east.com

THURSDAY, MAY 28, 2009

ONE DOLLAR

An Inglorious Death for the Controversial Dragon

By Brendan O'Reilly

Fashion designer Calvin Klein's Southampton Village mansion—or, some would say, castle—started coming down this month, ending an era—or, some would say, error—that dates back to the 1980s, when financier Barry Trupin reimagined the estate without a building permit in a way that flew in the face of zoning codes.

Mr. Trupin's illicit expansions of the mansion he renamed Dragon's Head resulted in \$1 million worth of legal costs and years of litigation for Southampton Village. He had added 20,000 square feet to the house before the village stopped him in 1984. *Newsday*, at the time, called the remodeled house "the height of hideosity" and critics often referred to it as "Disneyland on LSD."

Now the mansion, which Mr. Klein paid \$28.9 million for in 2003, is being torn apart by backhoes and the remains are being crushed and hauled away to make room for Mr. Klein's new oceanfront



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Heavy machinery tears into the former Dragon's Head mansion on Meadow Lane to make way for Calvin Klein's new house.

DANA SHAW

DEMOLISHED: Dragon's Head Is Razed

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home, a sleek, white, modern structure, with 13,000 square feet of floor area above ground. It will be three buildings attached underground.

Long before the Meadow Lane home became Dragon's Head, it was horticulturist Henry Francis du Pont's Chestertown. He built the house in the mid-1920s and named it after the colonial town in Maryland from where he imported pieces of 18th century American homes that demonstrated the popular architecture of the era.

"Du Pont bought these colonial houses and had them stripped of their interior wood details, from cupboards to moldings, to wainscoting," said Anne Surchin, an East End architect and writer who included Chestertown in the 2007 book she co-authored with fellow architect Gary Lawrence, "Houses of the Hamptons, 1880-1930."

The pieces of the colonial homes in Chestertown the town were reinstalled in Chestertown the house.

"It was a grand Georgian house, and it was magnificently and intelligently designed," Ms. Surchin said. "It really made use of the site in a way that was ingenious."

Architect John Cross designed Chestertown, but Mr. du Pont was very hands-on during the process, down to picking the brands of grease traps in the kitchen, Ms. Surchin said. "He couldn't keep his nose out of anything."

Local architectural historian Zachary Studenroth surmised that Mr. du Pont later may have moved all of the historic architectural elements to his Delaware estate and museum, Winterthur, before he died in 1969, or they might have been compromised when Mr. Trupin renovated the house in the 1980s.

Even the brick skeleton of Chestertown barely remained by the time Mr. Klein moved into the estate, according to Mr.



Demolition crews do their work on Dragon's Head last week.

DANA SHAW

Klein's architect, Michael Haverland of East Hampton

When Mr. du Pont died, Chestertown was sold to "Baby" Jane Holzer, a Warhol Superstar. When Ms. Holzer and her husband, Leonard, defaulted on their mortgage a few years later, the house was auctioned on the steps of Town Hall to coal industrialist John Samuels III.

Mr. Samuels sold Chestertown in 1979 to Mr. Trupin, who reconstructed it without village approval into a faux-Norman chateau, replete with ostentatious turrets. The house was built up so big and tall and that to resolve some of the height issues, the first floor was buried in dirt so the mansion would appear shorter.

The Trupins' Meadow Lane neighbors and the community at large were shocked at Mr. Trupin's disregard for the law and how he could do so much under the village's nose.

"He poisoned things for people in government in Southampton Village for quite some time," said Peter Boody, the

editor of The Southampton Press from 1984 to 1998 and the editor of The East Hampton Press from 2007 until earlier this year.

When it came to light that the mayor at the time, Roy Wines Jr., had the plumbing contract for the mansion, the controversy deepened. He was ousted from office in 1985 when he was defeated at the polls by Bill Hatrick, who was the chairman of the Zoning Board of Appeals.

"It was the biggest political upheaval, I think, that had ever wracked the Village of Southampton," Mr. Boody said.

The 1985 mayoral battle became very personal, he said, and Mr. Hatrick would speak in front of local groups, like the Southampton Rotary Club, and get nearly teary eyed talking about his white knight battle against the forces that allowed Dragon's Head to be built.

Mr. Hatrick was successful and the "old guard that had run the village for years were sent packing," Mr. Boody said.

"It's an epic of sorts that the house caused so much controversy," Mr. Hatrick said Tuesday, "and to see somebody pay \$29 million for it and then tear it town—at least it will be the right height."

The only reason he decided to run, and likely the only reason he won, was the Dragon's Head issue, Mr. Hatrick said this week. He also expressed great respect for the man he ousted from office 24 years ago: "I don't think anybody in this village has ever worked harder for the village than him," he said of Mr. Wines.

Wainscott author Steven Gaines chronicled Chestertown's transformation into Dragon's Head and the frenzy that surrounded it in his 1998 book "Philistines at the Hedgerow: Passion and Property in the Hamptons."

"The Trupins in that house grabbed the status quo by the shoulders and shook it and scared the hell out of everybody," Mr. Gaines said.

"This is a great thing that they're ripping it down," the author went on to say. He said the real end of an era—a golden era of gorgeous mansions on the beach—was when Mr. Trupin changed Chestertown.

It was also the end of the era of manners and restraint, he said, adding "Of course, the Hamptons is now about excess."

Mr. Gaines said the community saw the Trupins as ugly people, with ugly intentions whose avarice and greed would

destroy the way of life in the village. "It was the first symptom of the cancer that would eat up Southampton."

Mr. Trupin also changed Chestertown's interior, including installing a shark tank, which he and his then-wife Renee said they would swim in among the sharks amid boulders and banyan trees. The estate also housed Mr. Trupin's collection of medieval armor and American silver.

Mr. Trupin was arrested in 1997 for tax evasion totalling \$6.6 million and lying to the IRS. He was convicted of the charges in 1999, and also was convicted in 1996 of being in possession of a stolen painting.

Mr. Gaines said Mr. Trupin is still alive, but hasn't been heard from for quite some time. Renee Trupin now lives in the south of France, he added.

Mr. Trupin sold Dragon's Head in 1992 to Worldcom director Francesco Galesi for \$3.3 million. Mr. Galesi, who scaled back some of the house's most extreme features, put the estate on the market in 2000 with an asking price of \$45 million.

Once many of the turrets and other features were removed, the mansion, renamed "Elysium," stood 51 feet tall at its highest point, and 47,700 square feet of floor area remained.

The price came down, and Mr. Galesi eventually sold the property to Mr. Klein in 2003 for \$28.9 million.

Mr. Haverland told the Southampton Village Board of Historic Preservation & Architectural Review that four years were spent researching what could be done to rework Elysium before it was decided to tear it down and start fresh. "It was a challenge that was just too difficult to overcome," he said.

The Board of Historic Preservation & Architectural Review signed off on razing the former Dragon's Head in February, but the wrecking ball was held at bay until Mr. Klein's building application also passed muster with the village's Zoning Board of Appeals. The ZBA approved the plan for Mr. Klein's new home on April 23.

"The project he's going to be doing there is going to be beautiful, and it's going to be more fitting with the homes

in the area," Southampton Village Mayor Mark Epley said last week.

Mr. Gaines, who is also the author of a 1995 Klein biography, "Obsession: The Lives and Times of Calvin Klein," said Mr. Klein's architect, Mr. Haverland, is a genius who does tasteful and extremely admired work. "His work is really fantastic ..." he said. "I think the village has nothing to worry about in what the new place will look like."

On May 14, the Southampton Village Board of Trustees approved the building inspector's request that Mr. Klein hand over \$20,000 to the village to assure the

municipality does not end up having to pay to fix any damage done to village property as trucks and equipment are rolling up and down Meadow Lane during the demolition.

If there is no damage to the roads, the money will be returned to Mr. Klein, Mayor Epley said.

The mayor said the contractors will be grinding debris on site—rather than hauling concrete and stone chunks away in large pieces. This way, they can use smaller trucks for transport, so he doubts there will be any damage to Meadow Lane, he said.



Dragon's Head under construction in 1988.

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