

# Homer had here a perfect palette

► **HOMER**  
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originally designed by Portland architect John Calvin Stevens. Along the way, artifacts and anecdotes emerged. One story recalls that this scenic section of Scarborough once could boast of eight hotels. One of them delivered lunch whenever Homer hoisted a flag from the second-floor porch he called the piazza. So much for his reputation as a loner.

Only one hotel, the Black Point Inn, remains in the exclusive enclave of elegant cottages that are handed down from generation to generation. Located 12 miles from Portland, the community has long been off-limits to the public.

Beginning Sept. 24 and by reservation only, the museum will offer guided tours of the studio. By agreement with neighbors, tours are small (10 visitors maximum) and scheduled only in fall and spring. Self-guided visits are not allowed.

The 2½-hour tours will begin and end at the museum and



JONATHAN WIGGS/GLOBE STAFF

Winslow Homer's second-floor porch (which he called the piazza) looks out to the sea. On occasion, Homer would have lunch delivered here from one of the Scarborough hotels.

travel by van to the studio where interpretive talks, interactive exhibits, and walks to the shore (weather permitting) will provide glimpses into Homer's life and impact on the world of art. Earlier this summer I had a chance to visit the studio.

Homer was already a major artist when he moved here in 1883 to join his brother, Charles, and his family. Charles had purchased most of the 2.34-acre neck as a summer home for the extended Homer

clan with plans to develop a portion as a summer resort. Museum director Mark Bessire calls Winslow Homer's arrival an "anchor moment" in the history of American art. The Industrial Revolution had dramatically changed urban life, causing many to yearn for a bygone time when life more closely reflected the back-to-nature ideas expressed by 19th-century Transcendentalists, Bessire said.

For many, Maine defined wilderness. Other artists, including Frederick Church, had come before Homer to paint the region's unspoiled rural landscapes and dramatic ocean views. They launched a Maine arts tradition that continues today and flourishes in Portland. But Homer's arrival had a powerful effect.

"This place, this Maine, was Homer's vernacular and everything in American painting changed," said Bessire. "American art was being defined and much of that identity was captured by him. Painters came to see what he saw. His vision still influences how countless artists approach nature."

In the studio, penciled on

one wall in Homer's hand is "Oh what a friend chance can be when it chooses." On another he scribbled a woman's name; her story is unknown. Mementos recall the outdoor sporting life he loved — photographs of him and his brother fishing on the rocks, and two strange fish trophies he made by mounting flattened Atlantic salmon on plaques that hang near ceramic plates painted with florals in watercolor by his mother, Henrietta Homer. There's a wicker daybed on which it is said he took his last breath.

"All of these walls had to be stripped right to the bones, every piece of wood removed to bring the building up to code," said Geoff Goba, site superintendent for Truant Construction. "Everything had to be replaced exactly where it came from. Homer's writings had to be protected. Bits of Harper's Weekly that were tacked on walls upstairs went back up. It all had to be exact."

Dana Baldwin, the museum's director of learning and interpretation, joined me on the piazza. Silently we soaked up the lawn's sweep to the wa-

## The busy Portland art scene

PORTLAND — The Portland Museum of Art's upcoming exhibition "Weatherbeaten: Winslow Homer and Maine" (Sept. 22-Dec. 30) will complement the opening of Homer's renovated studio. Personal objects, including Homer's easel, will help connect the man to his work, with more than 35 important oils and watercolors he painted during his Prouts Neck years.

Among works on loan are several from the Art Institute of Chicago, the Smithsonian American Art Museum, and The Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute.

Beyond Homer, there are many ways to enjoy the city's art scene. The downtown Arts District, anchored by PMA and the Maine College of Art (MECA), spills into nearby neighborhoods where galleries and other museums await, from the Maine Historical Society to the Museum of African Culture and MECA's Institute of Contemporary Art.

First Friday Art Walks provide a great introduction. Scheduled monthly throughout the year, the informal festivals run from 5 to 8 p.m. It's a big, all-ages scene. December's Art Walk reportedly is the busiest.

At Aucoisco Galleries, my friend Pat Tobey and I met the owner, Andy Verzosa, on the First Friday in June. The self-declared "primary founder" of Portland's First Friday Art Walk, Verzosa told us how it began 11 years ago. "The idea was to get people in front of the artwork, people who normally

are intimidated by galleries, think they don't know how to dress or that they have to buy. This appeals to everyone, it's fun and it's free."

Typically 60 to 80 venues — galleries, bagel bakeries and coffee shops, tattoo parlors, retailers and museums — participate with exhibits, live music, or theater. Buskers and bands set up on sidewalks.

By 6:15, we had a hard time walking on Congress Street, the area's core. Crowds clustered around a talented chorus of Breakwater School middle school students in painted jumpsuits who sang beside two buses spray-painted with bold environmental designs. The kids had worked with Portland aerosol artist Tim Clorius during his Breakwater residency.

Pat and I explored art and venues we would otherwise miss, such as recent photography in the cozy old Maine Charitable Mechanic Association Library. Near MECA, the trend-setting Space Gallery featured a sound installation worthy of New York's SoHo or Chelsea.

A rental truck parked on Congress contained an artist painting on clear plastic sheeting. Amy Jorgensen, from the nonprofit MenskMaine.org, which each First Friday invites a different artist to use the truck, said, "Our goal is to keep Portland weird by providing alternative outlets for artists in Maine."

After dark, fire dancers appear.

JANET MENDELSON

## If you go . . .

### Winslow Homer Studio Tours

Reservations required; call 207-775-6148.

portlandmuseum.org/about/homerstudio/visit.php

Pending availability, reservations open to the general public beginning Sept. 4. General public \$55, members \$30; 10:30 and 11:45 a.m., and 2 p.m., Tue-Sun, Sept. 25-Dec. 2 and April 2-June 14.

### First Friday Art Walks

www.firstfridayartwalk.com

Throughout Portland, free, 5-7 p.m. on the First Friday of every month. Maps and listings available day-of at venues and online.

### Black Point Inn

510 Black Point Road, Prouts Neck

207-883-2500

www.blackpointinn.com

Inquire about packages that include studio tickets.

ter's edge, hearing only bird-song. Later she said, "We toyed with what we should do to enhance the experience out on the piazza. Then we realized just being here is enough."

Rather than fully furnished rooms, there are intimate spaces that Homer loved and set pieces that provide talking points for docents. Visitors can flip archival copies of Harper's Weekly newspapers to see illus-

trations by Homer early in his career when, during the Civil War, he sketched troops on the battlefield. Flexible exhibits created by Amaze Design of Boston will change as new scholarship about Homer emerges.

Janet Mendelsohn can be reached at [www.janetmendelsohn.com](http://www.janetmendelsohn.com).

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