

THE SALON DE MAGIE EXPERIENCE

Ted and Marion Outerbridge recently visited with Ken Klosterman and his incredible rare collection of magic ...



Recently I had my most amazing magical experience since an egg was pulled from my ear at the age of 7. Marion and I were on a U.S. lecture tour this past January. While lecturing for IBM Ring 71 at Haines House of Cards in Cincinnati, one of the magicians mentioned there was an old guy who lived in the neighborhood with a big magic collection. I was interested and we were able to arrange a visit to his home. It turned out the “old guy” was Ken Klosterman who has one of the largest magic collections in the

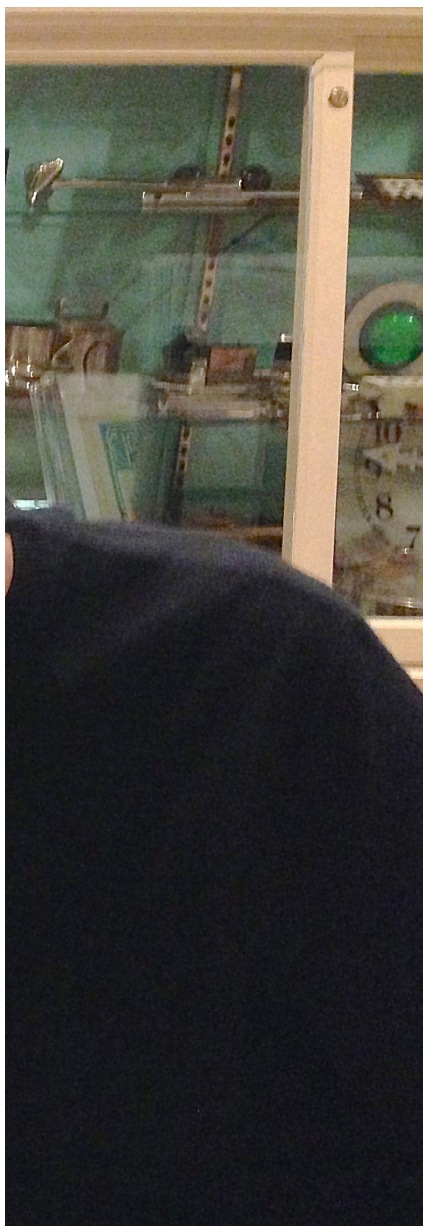
world and it is of extreme historical significance.

Our new friend Joe Farag drove us to Ken’s estate in Loveland, Ohio and an electric gate opened. We drove up a very long driveway, passed the stables which are home to 30 or more racehorses, and arrived at a spectacular log home. Ken welcomed us and we sat down in front of a monster-sized fireplace while Ken explained the story behind his Salon de Magie. Although 83 years old, Ken has the spirit and passion of a young man and he instantly took a shine to Marion. I believe this was part of the reason we received such a warm welcome! He explained that when he and his wife Judy were having their home built they discovered a deep hole that they first thought was a well. The well turned out to be an abandoned mine shaft. Ken’s magic collection is housed in seven rooms at the bottom of the mine shaft. The idea of going down a narrow 83-foot hole in the ground did not appeal to me, but I really wanted to see Ken’s collection. We were advised to use the plumbing before descending as

they had been unable to acquire a toilet that flushed seven stories up!

We stepped into a rickety old elevator that looked like it had been relocated from a horror film. While the elevator descended, Ken drew our attention to an old telephone attached to the wall which could be used in an emergency. This did not make me feel any better about the situation. I am a bit claustrophobic, so I was fairly uncomfortable in the elevator. Terrified is probably a better way of putting it. I was also very excited, in fact I don’t think I have been this excited for many years. Finally the creaking elevator stopped abruptly, the door creaked open and we found ourselves in a dimly-lit tunnel. The floor was rough stone and the wooden walls and ceiling were reinforced with steel beams. We turned a corner, passing a dead rodent, and arrived at a massive vault door. There were in fact two vault doors, each weighing one ton and each with its own combination lock. When Ken opened the doors we stepped into the Victorian Room of the Salon de Magie.

The room was bursting with antique magic, posters and ephemera from the grand masters of magic. I am talking about Houdini, Alexander Herrmann, Howard Thurston and Harry Kellar. It was at this moment I was glad I had a spare pair of pants in the car! It was absolutely incredible! The first item I noticed was a spectacular, ornately carved, gold table which turned out to be Harry Kellar’s Center Table. It contains 13 different magical devices including five pistons that brought his famous Devil’s Head illusion to life. As an illusion designer and builder, I had to drop to my knees and look underneath. I was blown away by the intricate mechanical engineering. Other highlights included Germain’s Flower Growth illusion, Robert-Houdin’s



The room was bursting with antique magic, posters and ephemera from the grand masters of magic. I am talking about Houdini, Alexander Herrmann, Howard Thurston and Harry Kellar.



Ted with Robert-Houdin’s Light and Heavy Chest



Aerial Clock, Thurston's Die Box, Robert-Houdin's Vanishing Bird Cage, and Houdini's Schlosser Blooming Rose Bush. Schlosser was in a league of his own as far as illusion building goes. I took a break to sit down in Alexander Herrmann's chair which has the likeness of his wife Adelaide carved into it. I made a mental note to start carving Marion into some of our furniture when we returned home. I love antique patina and my eyes landed on a gorgeous set of cups and balls that had obviously been used for a lifetime or more. They belonged to Milton Henderson who was not well known but had great taste in cups. Each cup weighs almost a pound and they are thick; I did not see any dents.



The Salon de Magie is a dreamlike experience of mystery in a secret location. It is filled with hidden doors, sliding bookshelves and revolving walls that connect a total of seven rooms. Abb Dickson was involved in part of the design and Charlie Payne lent his fine cabinetry skills to the project. The rooms include the Salon Theater, the Green Room, the Egyptian Room, the Hall of Psychics, the Library, the Secret File Room and the Victorian Room.



We moved into the Salon Theater which has seating for twenty-five people. The seats all have brass plaques with the names of celebrity visitors such as David Copperfield, Harry Blackstone and Penn and Teller. The walls are covered in original stone lithograph posters of magic legends. The stage boasts curtains from the original Karl Germain show. At one point Houdini offered to purchase these curtains from Germain and had them hung in his theatre to try them out. Then Houdini tried to renegotiate the purchase price to a much lower amount. When Houdini arrived at his theatre the next day, the curtains had disappeared and materialized back in the hands of Germain. Houdini performed without curtains that night!





The Salon de Magie is a dreamlike experience of mystery in a secret location. It is filled with hidden doors, sliding bookshelves and revolving walls that connect a total of seven rooms.



We moved past Alexander Hermann's Decapitation Illusion, Kellar's Vanishing Lamp, and more lithographs and props, and went into the Green Room. The Green Room contains signed photographs and props from Dante, Kellar, Thurston, Okito, Dell O'Dell, Houdini, Fu Manchu, Cardini, Tarbell, Germain, Herrmann, Will Goldston, Horace Goldin, Chung Ling Soo, Ching Ling Foo, Hardeen, Charles Carter, and more legendary magicians. Ken was running out of things to collect so he even began a unique collection of famous magicians' cuff links. Hidden behind a poster of Alexander Herrmann we discovered the Secret File Room which contains 30 drawers packed with magic ephemera and memorabilia. There are rare documents, photos, scrapbooks, business cards, bookplates, postcards and blueprints.

Marion was the first to walk through the looking glass, a secret door built into the frame of a mirror in the Victorian Room. This led us into the Egyptian Room. At

the center of this room there is a very large table which looked to me like a sacrificial altar ready for some bizarre ritual. Hidden inside it are more posters and a substantial collection of magic wands. Ken's life story is told in hieroglyphics in a frieze that runs around the room above the glass display cabinets. I took a moment to fall in love with a stone lithograph of a Harry Kellar Levitation. (Ken ran out of wall space to display posters years ago so he has racks of them scattered throughout the Salon de Magie.) A secret mechanism caused a sarcophagus to expose a Punch and Judy collection. The glass cabinets display a huge quantity of magic treasure, with objects such as Robert-Houdin's Crystal Cash Box, Jaks Book of Mysteries and Hofzinsler's Rose Mirror.

While in the Egyptian Room, the topic of Robert-Houdin's Light and Heavy Chest arose and Ken said "yeah it's right there." "You mean THE Light and Heavy Chest?" I inquired. "Yes," he said pointing to a wooden chest. Incredible does not do justice to this experience. When I realized that I was in the same room as Robert-Houdin's Light and Heavy Chest I had to drop to my knees. It is the "holy grail" of magic and I trembled as I lifted it up in the air. WOW! Robert-Houdin is referred to as the father of modern magic. He was the first magician to dress in formal clothing as his audience did, instead of the outdated magic cloak and pointed wizard's hat. He was famous to the point that Harry Houdini stole his name and added an "i" to it.

Robert-Houdin performed the Light and Heavy Chest in his shows starting in 1845. In 1856 a rebellion was breaking out by Marrabout warriors against the French colonial government in Algeria. Robert-Houdin was asked to help make this situation disappear. He explained to the warriors that he would take away their strength so they would be unable to fight. He lifted a small box with no effort, and then asked a warrior to lift it. The warrior was unable to lift it, and the rebellion ended! An electromagnet was the method Robert-Houdin used. It reminds me of the King Arthur "Sword in the Stone" legend.

A revolving wall granted us access to the Library which is bursting with over 7,000 volumes of magic secrets and history. Ken invited me to remove a book from one of the hundreds of shelves and he explained to me that it came from Houdini's collection. It turned out to be the *Magia Naturalis* ("Natural Magic") written by Giambattista della Porta and first published in Naples. The frontispiece indicated that the book was printed in 1644! I was holding a book printed 372 years ago!! *Magia Naturalis* was published before *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* and it explains many naturally-occurring scientific wonders. This book saved many "witches" from



↑ THURSTONS PLAYING CARDS

an untimely death, although it was very controversial (to put it mildly). Ken asked me what I thought about the binding and I replied that it was a rather unusual pink colour. Ken explained to me that the book I was holding was bound in human skin! Had it not been 372 years old I probably would have dropped it. Another highlight was Robert-Houdin's *Confidences et Révélations* inscribed by Robert-Houdin to J. N. Maskelyne. I still can't believe I was holding these books in my hands!

No magician has ever moved me the way Ken Klosterman did that day. Ken delivered an experience of wonder that I will never... ever forget! Before leaving Ken offered us a gift... well, he offered Marion a gift. Both Ken and Marion are of German descent and to celebrate this connection Ken offered Marion a Kalanag promotional item from the 1940s. A plastic tube is inserted into a small box that has a photo of Gloria, Kalanag's assistant and wife, mounted on it. By blowing into the tube the spectator hopes to blow the dress off Gloria. The spectator fails of course, but through a secret

move known only to the magician, Gloria's dress is blown off and she is left topless. I discussed the idea of creating a similar giveaway for our show with Marion's dress being blown off but she did not think it was a good idea! Interestingly enough I discovered that Kalanag died the same day I was born, December 24, 1963.

For some reason Ken invited us back to visit. Well, I know the reason... it is Marion! I look forward to writing about our return visit to Ken Klosterman's Mill and White Hall which house even more magic.



Ken and Marion