



## Montclair Homes: Cobble Court

CONTRIBUTED BY MIKE FARRELLY,  
MONTCLAIR TOWNSHIP HISTORIAN,  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREW WANDER

**T**HE HOUSE in the picture is one of the best known in Montclair. Besides being on the cover of *Stately Homes of Montclair* with photography by Andrew Wander and text by John Reimnitz, it is used as an example of a home influenced by English cottages and manors in the chapter on "Turn-of-the-Century Changes" in the book *The New Jersey House* by Helen Schwartz, with photographs by Margaret Morgan Fisher. It represents the Tudor style manor. The house is set high on Upper Mountain Avenue. It commands the Greater New York area.

It was called "Cobble Court" by its first owner because of the cobblestone driveway leading up to it. It was built in 1935 at a reported cost of \$500,000. To put that in perspective, in 1935 America was in the middle of the Great Depression. The unemployment rate was over 20%. The National Board of Realtors did not tabulate median house prices for those years, but, according to several sources and my own deed research, the average house cost between \$4,000 and \$6,000 dollars. You could get a plain vanilla house for \$1,000 to \$2,000, or a nice one for \$10,000. This house cost 50 times that much. As can be imagined, the architectural details and workmanship are superb.

The couple that built Cobble Court was Curtis "Curt" E. Forstmann and his wife, Elizabeth. Curt succeeded his father,

Julius G., as the CEO of the Forstmann Woolen Co. of Passaic. The headquarters and main plant were located near the Passaic River, about where the Kmart on Barbour Ave. is.

Unfortunately, this Kmart won't serve as much of a landmark since it is scheduled to close in 2019. The main plant was huge. The Forstmann Woolen Co. was one of the largest producers of woolen goods in the world. They had held large contracts for woolen coats and uniforms for American soldiers during WWI. Curt was a 7th generation wool manufacturer in a family that began production in Germany at the beginning of the 16th century. Curt was also president of the Julius Forstmann Co., Inc. which developed new fabrics and became very important to the US government during WWII. He was president of the Carl Forstmann Foundation which helped students with tuition costs. It was set up by his father in memory of another son, Carl. Curt was an uncle to billionaire, Theodore "Teddy" Forstmann, who ran a private equity firm until he passed away in 2011. The Forstmann family had the distinction of commissioning the world's largest motor yacht in 1929, the Albatross Orion. The US Navy bought the yacht in 1940, rechristened it as the USS Vixen. It served as the flagship for 4 admirals during WWII.

The cobblestone driveway that leads up to Cobble Court splits about 20 feet from the curb. The other leg goes to the next house over, which Curt built for his mom, Adolphine, in 1939. Adolphine was from Argentina. She met Julius, the patriarch of the family when he was on a world trip in 1902. When Julius died

in 1939 she moved in next to her son on Upper Mountain Ave. Adolphine's house has a smaller frontage than Cobble Court. It appears to be a smaller house, but it actually contains more square feet of living space. Another of Curt's brothers lived in Montclair. Rinehold Forstmann, son of Julius and Adolphine, lived at 173 Gates Ave. with his wife, Kathryn. Like Curt, Rinehold was also involved in their father's wool business. Julius and Adolphine lived normal long lives, but it seems that several members of the next generation of Forstmans were doomed to pass away young. Rinehold died in 1940 at the age of 37. Curt died in 1950 at the age of 43. The remaining brother, Julius G. Jr., Teddy's father, only lived to be 53. Julius G. Jr. was the final CEO of the Forstmann Woolen Co. which went out of business in 1958.

The Forstmann family had a 2,200-acre summer estate in the Catskills. They played on their name and called it "Frost Valley". The YMCA bought it in 1958 and has run a camp there ever since; also with the name Frost Valley. The Forstmans had a 4 story summer "cottage". The "Y" calls it the "Castle" and schedules tours during the regular camping season. The tour guides love to tell stories about how Julius G. Sr. loved to hunt. Julius Sr. didn't care much for the local deer so he imported herds from the Midwest. Part of the estate was fenced in. He would send a "driver" out along the fence in one direction and another "driver" in the other direction. The drivers "drove" deer in front of the Castle's porch where Julius was waiting with his shotgun. Julius didn't care for the local fish either. He imported trout to stock the ponds. He paid a bounty to any local citizen who killed a local osprey which dined on his precious trout. The spectacular woodwork and meticulous architectural details of the Castle, the family's vacation home, serve as a reminder that the woodwork and details of Cobble Court are something to behold. ■

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