

East Hampton State Of Mind

-Steve Mirsky

Renowned as a summer getaway for the rich and famous, it's sometimes hard to imagine that downtown East Hampton was once a remote community of farmers and fisherman. It all happened in the late 1800s when affluent New Yorkers, enabled by the newly built Long Island Railroad, began developing this village into a summer colony. The Tile Club, an enclave of influential artists, moved in shortly after further popularizing the town's cache. All this activity spawned a remarkable proliferation of shopping and dining venues that still characterize the town's village charm to this day. After strolling from Village Pond down Main St. to the Old Hook Mill and onto Buells and Newtown Lanes, you'll quickly see why East Hampton Village is the place to be for designer boutiques, eclectic restaurants, historic sites, art galleries, and public parks. Local families as well as international celebrities often mingle at the same hotspots attracted by the town's refreshing medley of country living and swank nightlife.

Depending on the size of your wallet or credit limit, it goes without saying that shopping can be a fulltime occupation here. But if you want to mix in some culture with your Ralph Lauren and Brown Harris Stevens, plenty of options await. Starting in the village historic district, check out a slice of history with sights including Clinton Academy, the first chartered secondary school in New York State and the Home Sweet Home Museum, a saltbox filled with English ceramics, American furniture, and textiles dedicated to

the memory of 19th-century poet, playwright and actor, John Howard Payne. Up a bit on Main St. across from the public library, Guild Hall, an unpretentious silver trimmed cultural center has three art galleries featuring changing exhibits of regional artists, an outdoor garden, and the John Drew Theater hosting dramatic productions, lectures, and a film series. Walking further down closer to the center, you can't miss the East Hampton Ladies Village Improvement Society to your left set back from the road on a wide expanse of emerald green lawn. Their Thrift Shop first opened in the 1950's and continues to be the area's best source of gently used (aka incredible bargain-rate) designer label clothing, and home furnishings.

They also have the East End's largest selection of second-hand books, including many first editions and collectibles. However, you should know that the Improvement Society's legacy offers more than just another shopping option. Since 1885, members have been working hard to preserve East Hampton's character. Over the years as many historic buildings faced decay and possible demolition, members ensured that Main St. remained lined with stately elms instead of gas stations. Countless historic gems now open to the public were saved from the wrecking ball including the rehabilitated Gardiner "Brown" House (circa 1740) at 95 Main Street and the Old Hook Mill, a fully functional wooden windmill built in 1806, on North Main Street.