



## Emilie Harting: RHINEBECK BECKONS

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*Emilie C. Harting has written on historic restoration, art vacations, hiking, archaeology, food, literary sites, and walking cities.*



WWI Caudron G.III, Pioneer Aircraft Day at Old Rhinebeck Aerodrome. Photo: Sean Traynor

I've been visiting Rhinebeck since the 1960s, and always stop by whenever I'm on my way to northern New York State or New England. When I'm recommending the village to friends, I find myself waxing lyrical about how Rhinebeck is the most enchanting place in New York State, and has the kind of tranquility you just can't find in urban areas. Because of its location, ninety miles of New York City, Rhinebeck is an ideal place to spend a weekend and explore the Hudson Valley. By the way, if you are not familiar with New York State, the Hudson Valley is that over 200 mile swath of lush, oftentimes mountainous green that stretches from Manhattan to Albany on either side of the Hudson River. I was not surprised when Chelsea Clinton chose Rhinebeck for her wedding.

The surrounding landscapes bring to mind settings in Washington Irving's stories. County roads meander, with farms and forests on the horizon. Fairly often a small old church and cemetery will appear off to the side. Several miles west steep cliffs dip down to the Hudson River at Rhinecliff.

Rhinebeck is a Victorian village. Built largely in the 1800s with designs promoted by the famous architect Alexander Jackson Davis, its streets are lined with farm houses, gate houses, rustic cottages, and English and Oriental villas. However, its shops, restaurants, and galleries are *au courant*.

A number of store windows display Soho style clothing. An old church has become the restaurant Terrapin. Well-known artists sell their paintings and sculpture here. The older anchors remain: the Beekman Arms Hotel with its tavern, an old stagecoach stop dating back to 1766, Sickle's General Store, the Smoke Shop, where locals come each day for cigars and newspapers, and the Wine and Liquor Shop, one of my favorites. I stop each summer to chat with the owner and buy gifts. The Antiques Barn and a number of smaller shops provide venues for antique lovers, as do nearby villages such as Red Hook and Pine Plains.

For those who want to visit historic sites, Wilderstein, the recently restored mansion of the late Margaret Suckley, sixth cousin and intimate friend of Franklin D. Roosevelt, is located in Rhinebeck. The Franklin Delano Roosevelt National Historic Site, the family's Federal style mansion overlooks the Hudson River in Hyde Park, ten miles south. Top Cottage, where Roosevelt and Margaret often met secretly, is now open. The neighboring Vanderbilt Mansion, a lavish structure with sweeping lawns down to the water, hosts outside concerts each Wednesday in summer. Fifteen miles south of Rhinebeck in Poughkeepsie, Locust Grove, the nineteenth century estate of telegraph inventor Samuel Morse, offers gardens and three miles of trails, and Vassar College Art Museum has a stunning collection of Hudson River School Paintings.

The Dutchess County Fair, which I loved as a child, runs each year at the end of August, and has agricultural contests and entertainment. Craft Festivals are held on the fairgrounds in June and October. The [Old Rhinebeck Aerodrome](#) hosts air shows on Saturday and Sunday in summer.

My idea of paradise is staying at a B & B right in the village, dining at one of the local restaurants, checking out a local concert, an evening event at nearby Bard College, or an art flick at Upstate Films, and walking back to our room on the quiet, tree lined streets.

Check out the official [Rhinebeck website](#). Note: many Hudson Valley sites are open from May through October.



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