HARVARD SQUARED

“butler” brimming with tidbits on family history and the eclectic décor. The story is that Richard Crane, a fanatical sailor, was on a yacht in Ipswich Bay when he first saw Castle Hill and decided to buy it. He snapped up the first parcel in 1910 and would amass a total of 3,500 acres before his death in 1931—including what’s now Crane Beach. (Privatizing it earned him no friends in town.)

The imposing, Stuart-style English manor—a patchwork of architectural styles such as Baroque and Palladian—was designed by David Adler and completed in 1928. The side facing the allée features a main building with an inset terrace buttressed by two symmetrical wings. Second-floor porches and bay-windowed bedrooms offer stunning views of the water. The interior has a surprisingly rustic and homey feel for a mansion, perhaps due to the hodgepodge of decorating styles—ornate Georgian (Adler salvaged and installed wood-paneled rooms from a 1732 London townhouse, for example), along-side Greek Revival, Italian Renaissance, and Art Deco.

Most impressive, however, are the bathrooms—befitting a plumbing millionaire. Each of the seven bedrooms has its own, many outfitted with then-cutting edge Art Deco fixtures and one decorated almost entirely in Delft tiles. Richard Crane’s features a large tub with gleaming silver-plated piping and faucets, a shower with 12 nozzles, a white marble floor, and heated towel rack. His wife’s is pale green with delicate glass shelving and loads of gray-veined marble providing an archway over the sink, the tub-surround, and flooring accents.

The Crane Company manufactured iron and steel pipes, valves, and fittings, but starting in 1914, when Richard Crane inherited the top post, he expanded into modern bathroom fixtures; the company’s exhibit at the 1933-34 Chicago World’s Fair featured the “world’s largest shower.” “We like to joke,” says the butler during one tour, “that this is the house that toilets built.” In fact, it was the second one. The Cranes initially built (between 1910 and 1912) a lavish Italian Renaissance Revival mansion designed by the Boston archi-

CURiosities:

Animating a New Species

PVC tubing and zip ties form the essential “bones” of Dutch artist Theo Jansen’s otherworldly yet mobile strandbeests (“beach animals”), eight of which are on display at the Peabody Essex Museum (PEM) starting September 19. Included is his latest and never-before-seen Animaris Umerus Segundus, along with sketches that offer insight into Jansen’s creative process during the last 25 years; “fossils” of creatures no longer “alive”; and video of some “beests” traveling in gangly equine elegance along a sandy seacoast in The Netherlands. Also on view are original photographs by Lena Herzog (published last year in Strandbeest: The Dream Machines of Theo Jansen) who spent seven years documenting the origins and inner workings of this new kinetic species. This marks the first major American show of Jansen’s large-scale works; it moves on to the Chicago Cultural Center and San Francisco’s Exploratorium. Jansen himself will visit the Greater Boston area for a few events, such as a panel discussion (to be webcast) with Trevor Smith, PEM’s curator of the present tense, and MIT associate professor of media arts and sciences Neri Oxman, taking place on September 10 (3-5 P.M.) at the MIT Media Lab—followed by a live, outdoor demonstration of a walking strandbeest (5:30-7 P.M.). ~N.P.B.


Photographs courtesy of Theo Jansen


Sweeping views are well worth the half-mile walk across the hilly Grand Allée.