

Labrador Heaven

MR. AND MRS. J. PEPE FANJUL, FLORIDA



An antique silver dog collar resting on some books in Mr. Fanjul's library

It was raining when I left Palm Beach to visit Mr. and Mrs. Jose Pepe Fanjul at their ranch in central Florida, but as I pull up to the gates of Amistad, the rain stops and I realise that I am in a very special place. Immaculately groomed houses are discreetly hidden behind lush groupings of exotic plants, and it is only when I stop to ask, that I learn how to get to the main house, past the kennels where the Fanjul's famous field trial Labrador Retrievers and Pointers are housed. Amistad is a working ranch where Pepe, as he is known, and Emilia entertain weekend guests. Only a short drive from their home in Palm Beach, it is the ideal retreat for their family and the sporting friends they invite to their home.

Christine Merrill had visited Florida in 2000 to paint Pepe's favorite Labrador Retriever, Irish Field Trial Champion, Turramurra Woody, known affectionately as Mambo. Though he was old at the time, Christine visualized



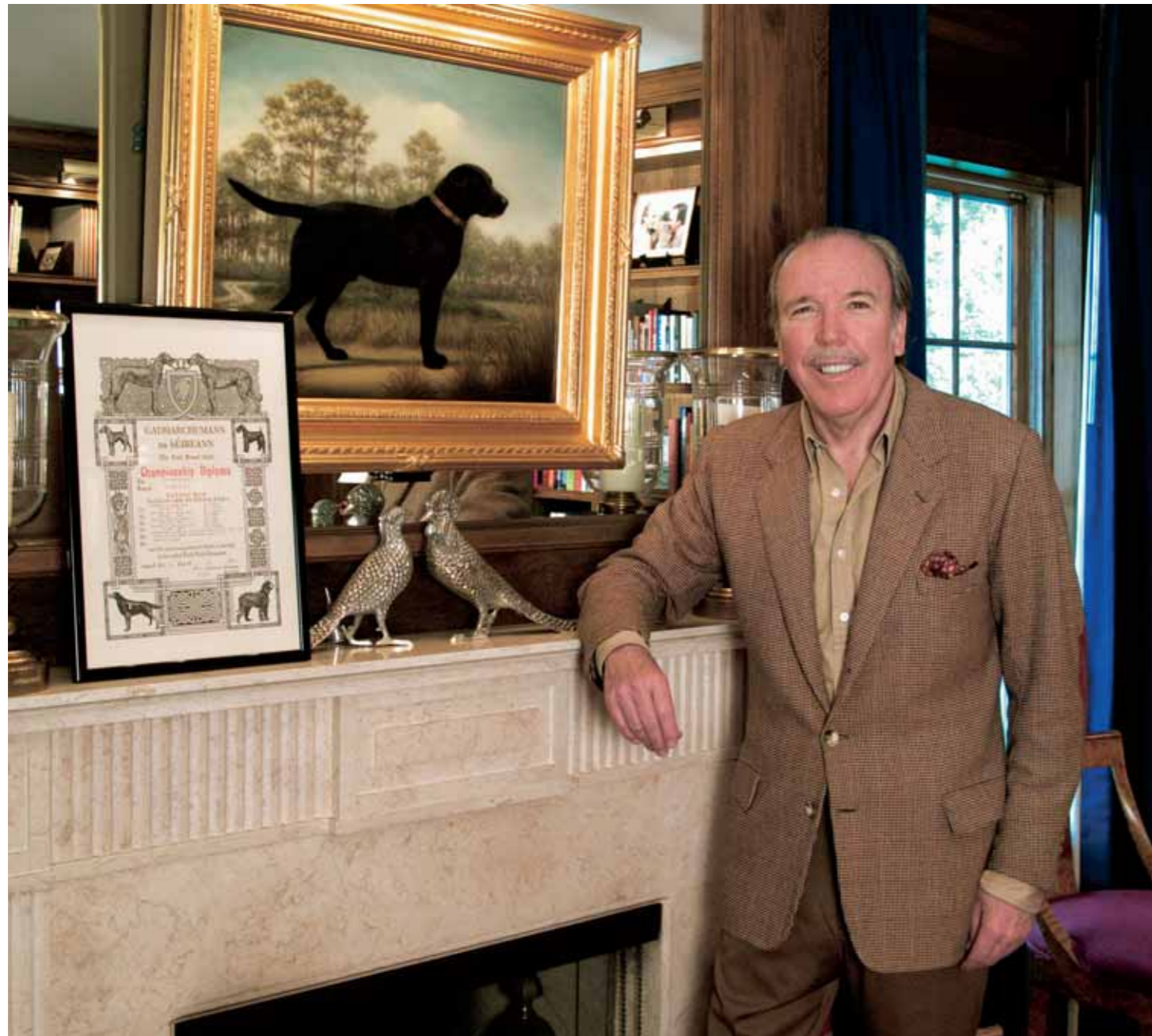
A view of the landscape at Amistad



Mr. and Mrs. J. Pepe Fanjul relax on the veranda with five of their dogs, Van, Blue, Glen, Belle and Heather

him in his youth, and painted him in a southern landscape, in profile, with pine trees in the distance. The painting now hangs above the mantelpiece in Pepe's mahogany-lined library at Amistad.

Greeted into the house, and taken to an expansive veranda overlooking tropical gardens, I know that I am in a truly doggy home. A Norwich Terrier is resting on the sofa, and as Emilia Fanjul comes in to greet me, she is followed by five Labrador Retrievers, all eager to say hello. Pepe greets me warmly, and as we sit to talk about the dogs, he explains that his new pride and joy is Glen (Claybrow Earl), an International Field Trial Champion of the World. I had never heard the expression, and he explains to me that Glen was a field trial champion in both England and Ireland, competing against other Labrador Retrievers, but that he has also won the Irish Championship stake for retrievers of all breeds from all over the world. He has only weeks before been competing in Great Britain, and now he is sitting at my knee, affectionate and friendly as can be.



Mr. Fanjul in front of Christine Merrill's portrait. Mambo's framed Irish Field Trail Championship Certificate rests to the left of his portrait

As it turns out, all of Mr. Fanjul's hunting dogs are trained in Great Britain, competing in field trials in England and Ireland, before being imported to the United States. Pepe imported his first British field trial dog almost 35 years ago, a daughter of the famous Holgate Willy. Pepe is a great admirer of British field trials and training techniques, breeding dogs for their original function in the field. Labrador Retrievers originated in eastern Canada but were first imported into the United Kingdom in the early nineteenth century where they eventually became the breed of choice for retrieving game. His deep affection for his dogs is clearly evident, and he describes each one in detail, with their individual personalities, and unique abilities.



Christine Merrill, Mambo, 2000, Oil on canvas, 20 x 24 inches

Pepe explains that he has always had dogs, showing me a black and white photograph of him in his native Cuba with his Boxer sitting obediently by his side. He immigrated to the United States with his parents and family in 1959, upon Fidel Castro's overthrow of the government. The Fanjul family is well known for their business acumen as well as their philanthropic pursuits, and Emilia – a long time board member of the Animal Medical Center in New York City – is genuinely puzzled that anyone would not like dogs. Their own dogs travel everywhere with them.

“When I first came to this area,” Pepe explains, “there was nothing, just open land. I had looked at other locations to establish a sporting ranch, but they

seemed too far away from our home in Palm Beach, so I decided to buy and develop this as a sporting retreat.” Amistad is named after a sporting plantation which his great-grandfather built in Cuba in 1905. “I have very fond memories of visiting the plantation as a child,” he explains. “The entire family would meet there for weekends. It was a magical place.”

Pepe is an internationally known sportsman who has shot game birds all around the world and he visits Amistad almost every weekend during the winter season when he and his family are in Palm Beach. The property is maintained year round by his ranch manager, David Blower. They have a stable of horses and some forty dogs in their kennels: Labrador Retrievers and Pointers.

The Fanjuls’ favorite dogs, however, are very much house dogs as well, and the couple defines the expression ‘doggy people.’ Their rambling house at Amistad is hung literally floor-to-ceiling with images of dogs and sporting birds. Paintings by contemporary artist Henry Koehler join nineteenth-century prints by George Earl, Heywood Hardy, and other well-known nineteenth-century British artists. Pride of place, however, is reserved for Christine Merrill’s portrait of Mambo, painted in 2000. The painting was a gift for Pepe from his wife Emilia.

A field trial champion in Ireland, Mambo was imported to the United States, where he became a favorite of Mr. Fanjul’s. “He was not what I would call an easy dog,” Pepe explains, “But he was very loyal, a good companion and a great field dog. When he would meet someone new, however, he would often emit a low, somewhat intimidating growl, but of course he never injured



Two doggy pillows in the living room



A still life of family photographs and a small bronze sculpture of a Labrador Retriever

anyone.” Mambo was more of a one-person dog, and he could rise to the occasion when required. “One day our dog walker was exercising Mambo in New York’s Central Park. All of a sudden, two young kids appeared, knocking her to the ground and running off with her purse. Well, Mambo immediately went after the thieves. He not only got the purse back but he also stood over it and protected it until help came. He was the smartest dog I’ve ever known.”

“When I first met Mambo,” Christine remembers, “he was old and stiff, but I could see the fire in his eyes...that is why I painted him looking off into the distance, perhaps remembering the glories of his hunting days.” Mr. Fanjul will certainly have other dogs, and some will become favorites. But none will replace Mambo.