

# Rhode Island

MONTHLY

## A Night at The Elms with Christine Baranski

*The Preservation Society of Newport County welcomes The Gilded Age star Christine Baranski to speak at summer lecture series.*

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“The Gilded Age” star Christine Baranski stopped by The Elms mansion Thursday night to give a talk as part of The Preservation Society of Newport County’s summer lecture program. The HBO series is partially filmed in the iconic Newport mansions, specifically The Elms, The Breakers, Marble House, Rosecliff, Chateau-sur-Mer and Hunter House. During a pre-lecture press conference, Baranski, who plays Agnes van Rhijn in the HBO series, spoke about her time filming in Newport, her connection to the real-life Gilded Age and even touched on what viewers should expect from the season 3 finale.

Baranski recalled how being immersed in Newport’s historic environment aided in her journey to slip into character, especially while filming scenes in the ballrooms at The Breakers and The Elms.

“It just takes you in. You put on those clothes, and you step into the ballrooms, and you feel that you’re in that world. You don’t have to act that much and you don’t have

to pretend,” says Baranski. “It’s sort of magical for the actors. We all pinch ourselves to think how lucky we are to be on a show where we get to be part of this extraordinary world that is depicting this time in American culture and American history.”

Baranski also shared that she takes inspiration from her mother when getting into her character’s mindset. Her mother, raised during the Great Depression, was a “tough old broad,” according to Baranski. Her mother was left as the sole provider and parent for Baranski and her brother after Baranski’s father died suddenly. It’s this tough mentality that is the commonality between Agnes and Baranski’s mother.

“The longer I play Agnes, the more I think I draw upon the memory of my mother,” says Baranski. “Agnes is of that mold of tough ladies who do what they need to do and they play the hand they’re dealt. If they’re a little tough, well you know what, they had to be tough.”

Baranski also spoke highly of Newport and her experience filming in the smallest state, calling it “a most unique place.” “The Gilded Age” splits filming between Rhode Island and New York, with Baranski typically in Newport during the colder months of November and December.

“I’ve not been in Newport in the summer; I was when it was cold. It was beautiful, but I’m thrilled to be at The Elms in the summer,” Baranski says. “When I say enchanting kingdom, it really does feel that way. I mean look at what The Elms looks like on a summer evening, it’s unbelievable.”

As fate would have it, Baranski has a direct Gilded Age connection that was unbeknownst to her for some time. Baranski’s late-husband, Matthew, was related to the Drexel family. His great-grandfather, Joseph Drexel, was a prominent banker before retiring and devoting himself to philanthropy. Baranski was not aware of her late-husband’s connection to a Gilded Age family, as when she first met Matthew, he had a motorcycle, wore a black leather jacket and smoked unfiltered cigarettes, which she says gave her more of a James Dean impression. Over time though, she discovered his family history.

“My late-husband was a great-grandson of a man named Joseph Drexel, and his aunt Bessie’s portrait is in The Elms. The Drexels are a fascinating family,” says Baranski. “It’s marvelous, as I became involved in ‘The Gilded Age,’ to talk to Julian [Fellowes] and say I have some stories for you.”

“The Gilded Age” left off on quite a cliff hanger, and for those dying for spoilers and information regarding the last episode of season 3, Baranski stayed coy and tight lipped, offering only a small, reassuring statement about what fans should expect.

“What they have to look forward to is an extraordinary final episode,” says Baranski.

‘The Gilded Age’ was recently renewed for a fourth season. The season 3 finale premieres August 10 on HBO.