

ARTS & CULTURE

Helen Klisser During

DIRECTOR OF VISUAL ARTS,
WESTPORT ART CENTER

The Westport Arts Center is aptly named. It is the center, or heart, of the arts in town and a crossroads for all things artistic and cool here. Kudos to Helen Klisser During, curator, photojournalist, and artist's rep, who keeps the center buzzing year-round as the organization's director of visual arts.



Helen Klisser During, an engaging New Zealand-raised people-magnet who has lived in Weston for the past twenty years (and in Westport for four), spends her days (and nights) out amongst the people—heads of state, big-time art collectors, local and international artists, and orphaned children in Haiti for the UN and AmeriCares—finding art all around her. As much as she enjoys introducing Westporters to big-time artists like Christo and Jeanne-Claude, she celebrates local and lesser-known artists as well, striving to make art more accessible to the community. “It’s all about getting the town involved,” she explains. To this end, she brings all WAC exhibits to life with creative programs, like **Friday ArtCafés** held on the center’s riverfront deck.

With the popular **Foodies** exhibit, for example, she kept the buzz going after the standing-room-only opening. The first event was an outdoor ArtCafé, offering food and conversation about everything from food policy to climate change, with guest speakers **Watts Wacker**, **Michel Nischan**, **Bill Taibe**, **Jennifer Boyd**, and **Dina Brewster**. Next, she sent her team to local restaurants with dinner napkins and asked diners to submit their free-form doodles, which she then hung in the gallery. Finally, she hosted a festive film screening of Stanley Tucci’s *Big Night* where guests dined on a delicious Italian feast by **Mario Batali’s Tarry Lodge** (30 Charles St.).

Her forte is building bridges to local organizations, including the **Westport Historical Society** (25 Avery Pl.) the **Westport Public Library** (20 Jesup Rd.), the **Westport Country Playhouse** (25 Powers Ct.), the **Westport Farmers Market** (50 Imperial Ave.; 7 Sylvan Ln. in winter), **The Y’s Men & Y’s Women** (59 Post Rd. E.) and area schools.

Outside of WAC, Helen does a fair amount of gallery hopping to “artist studios anywhere and everywhere,” she says, including the **Aldrich Museum** (Ridgefield), **Yale Art Gallery** (New Haven), **Storm King** (New Windsor, NY),

and **New York City galleries**, such as **Dia:Chelsea**.

She also cherishes her time racing out on the Sound from **Pequot Yacht Club** (669 Harbor Rd.). Her after-work getaway? **Longshore Sailing School** (260 Compo Rd.). “I try to catch the last Hobie Cat rental of the day—5 to 6 p.m. during the summer—at least three times a week!”

On the dining scene, she enjoys an espresso at **Terrain** (561 Post Rd.), sitting at the bar at Tarry Lodge, and being able to pop into **The Dressing Room** (27 Powers Ct.) alone, which she did on a recent evening. The staff brought out a bottle of her favorite New Zealand sauvignon blanc, which is stashed in the back, and Joanne Woodward waved her to join her table to watch Lissy Newman’s set.

Over at **Gold’s Deli** (421 Post Rd.), she doesn’t have to say a word when it’s time to place her order. They know she’s having half a roasted turkey on whole wheat with lettuce, tomato, and Russian dressing and a matzo ball soup. She says, “When my kids were babies, [Gold’s] would warm up the milk bottles with hot water. That’s what I love about this town.”



“IT’S ALL ABOUT GETTING THE TOWN INVOLVED.”

—HELEN KLISSER DURING

Good food and good friends at Tarry Lodge

