

Chalet Monet

INSIDE THE HOME OF
DAME JOAN SUTHERLAND
AND RICHARD BONYNGE

by RICHARD BONYNGE
Foreword by MARILYN HORNE
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This sumptuously produced coffee table book captures the essence of the fairy tale that is *Chalet Monet*.

Inside its pages over 1000 photographs bring to life the lavish home of the greatest international cultural icons in opera, Dame Joan Sutherland OM AC DBE and her husband, Maestro Richard Bonyngé AC CBE.

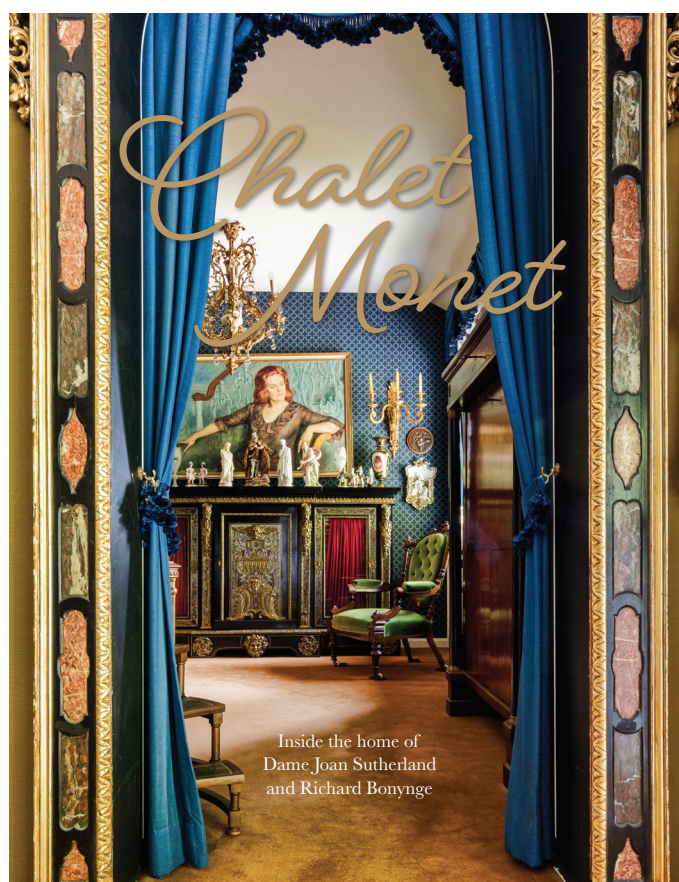
High on the slopes of the village of Les Avants, overlooking Lake Geneva in Switzerland, Chalet Monet is a spectacularly unique residence, a tower and picture windows, surrounded by beautiful gardens give way to a home brimming with antiques, paintings and objet d'art. The opulence of each of the distinctive rooms over the four floors and vistas is artfully captured in stunning photography.

Each item has its own provenance; gifted by royalty or celebrities, embroidered by Dame Joan or collected by Richard. A who's who of artists, designers influential figures and living legends. A house of a thousand stories, the house breathes with living history.

In his charming, eloquent, conversational style, Richard Bonyngé takes us inside the home he has shared with Dame Joan, and in so doing provides rare insight into their lives, and the lives of stars, royalty, presidents and cultural icons whom they called friends and neighbours.

For those fortunate enough to have discovered and experienced the thrill of opera and all the larger than life characters associated with it, to enter Chalet Monet is somewhat of a fairy tale experience that could be taken right out of a Cinderella story ...

Chalet Monet is a house with a thousand stories. It is living history, theatrical, a beautiful home with enormous spirit like its owners. It radiates grandeur yet intimacy with places to sit and contemplate, views to linger over, books to be read, paintings to admire and music to listen to. It is a treasure trove



for the senses where many a story has been told or begun. Only its walls and its owners remember the decades of music making here and possibly the odd neighbour and the cows on the grassy slopes ...

Thank you, Richard for allowing us to enter your private and colourful world.

From the Preface by Fiona Janes Artistic Director | General Manager Joan Sutherland & Richard Bonyngé Foundation



The drawing room is positioned in the central part of the original house, off the main hall with the card room at one end, the dining room at the other, all with views of the lake. Red and green are my favourite colours. I am always happiest when I am surrounded by these colours and this room is full of them.

The room is light and intimate, mostly used when visitors come around and is where Joan used to needlepoint on the sofa before dinner. Many hours have been spent here chatting with visiting friends and colleagues. Among those were singers Marilyn Horne, Huguette Tourangeau, Lauris Elms, Renée Fleming, Anna Catarina Antonacci, Cecilia Gasda, Sumi Jo, James Morris, Luciano Pavarotti and Alfredo Kraus. In 1974, Ricardo Domingo was keen to buy a house in the area. His wife Marta came for a lovely lunch one day and off we went house-hunting. Unfortunately, they never found anything suitable.

Other visitors included the English designer Michael Sennett, the actor James Mason and his wife who lived nearby, Joan's biographer Dame Norma Major, and dress designers Barbara Matera and Heinz Weber. Riva and of course countless visits by Noel Coward, family and many other friends, especially from Australia.

The two green meridian sofas came from the Talleyrand Château de Valençay in France. I loved the furniture of the Charles X period and bought everything I could find and afford. There are also two armchairs, probably by Jacob, a family of Parisian master carpenters appointed by French royalty since Louis XV, a Charles X table covered with snuff boxes and figurines of royalty which sit below a painting of Jenny Lind. The glass coffee table is almost always stacked with books and auction catalogues which are always of great interest to me.

I don't know why I bother with wallpapers as I cover them with paintings but this one, I found in New York with our dear friend Barbara Matera and I love it. Barbara designed and made many of Joan's concert gowns which were stunningly elegant and much admired.

Facing south, the room receives sunshine most of the day which is why we found the need to use the heavy shutters at times. It houses many of my favourite paintings including three portraits of Maria Malibran.

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JENNY LIND

Jenny Lind (1820–1887) conquered my fascination when I moved to Europe. The soprano, known as the Swedish Nightingale and probably the most famous singer of her day, was the first singer I discovered. It was at this time that I also discovered Staffordshire porcelain figures of her, almost given away. I was hooked on the dangerous disease of collecting and have never recovered.

So many great souvenirs of her were to be found, lovely lithographs by the dozen and beautiful figurines, at the time for only a few pounds.

After triumphant European operatic performances, the famous impresario P.T. Barnum of circus fame, took her to the U.S.A. and made a fortune for her. She gave hugely to charity, endowed orphanages, schools and several hospitals, including London's Royal Brompton Hospital. Lind mania took over both England and the U.S.A., attracting admirers just as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones would do over a hundred years later.

Our house has become almost a Lind museum with countless figurines of her as well as dozens of books and hundreds of pieces of nineteenth century music with Lind illustrations, as well as newspapers from the 1840's containing many fascinating details of her life and performances.

The large oval painting of Jenny Lind, ca 1861, is by the German artist Eduard Magnus and I treasure it.

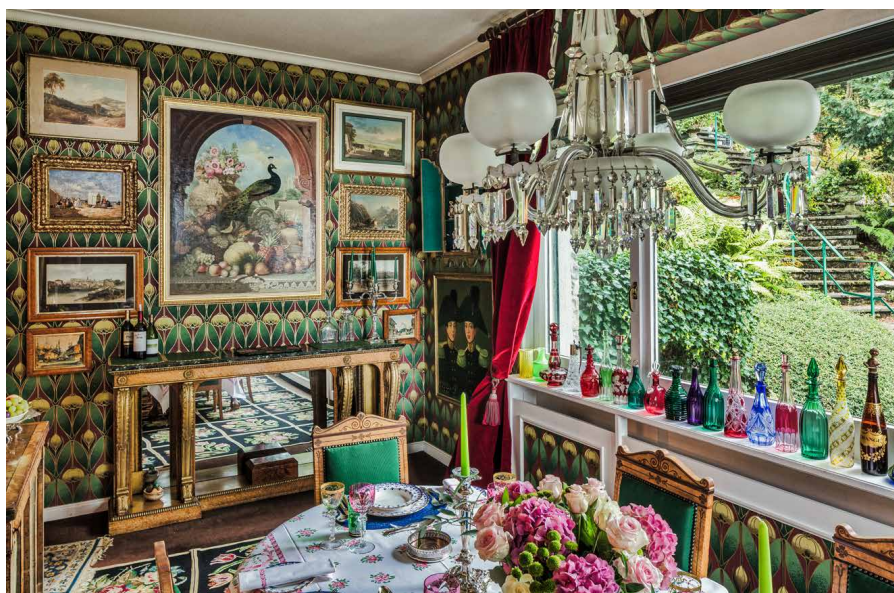
The pretty papier-mâché corner cabinet behind the dragonfly lamp was found in Italy and I have filled it with Lind memorabilia, notably of her in Robert le Diable and La Fille du Régiment. The little birds, Nightingales representing Lind, one with head up and one with head down, are called Confidence and Diffidence.

She was always painted extremely glamorously but I imagine with some licence judging by early photos of her!



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Chalet Monet sample spreads



The relaxed and colourful dining room that adjoins the drawing room, has a large picture window that looks straight up at the Rochers-de-Naye mountain which is part of the Bernese Alps. To reach its 2,042metre summit, there is a cog railway from Montreux. We often take guests to the summit where there is a typical Swiss restaurant overlooking the lake with delicious food. The climb by train is very beautiful and quite breath taking.

In this region, the steep green hills are dotted with cows and the odd small cheese factory. From the dining room, you can see two of these huts or alpine farmsteads, where the shepherds spend the summer. They have typical roofs covered with wood shingles and are called taulins in French.

You will notice I love coloured glass and have many pieces throughout the house, including in the entrance hall, my studio and here on the dining room window sill overlooking the side garden. Joan started this particular obsession having bought me the middle one from Holland, others I found in Adelaide, Sydney and London.

Six of the dining chairs are by Jacobs from the period of Charles X and two are modern copies. The carpet was made for us by my mum in Portugal. When we visited the convent and saw them making the carpets, we ordered one for ourselves. The peacock painting was the first painting I found in London's Portobello market in 1950 – the artist unknown. The early nineteenth century chandelier I discovered shortly afterwards in the same place.

The green painting of two soldiers I dragged home on a plane from St Petersburg in fairly recent years and above this is a cabinet with Bloor Derby and Chamberlain Worcester figurines including Mme Vestris (1791/1836) who was a highly popular English actress and contralto as well as being a successful theatre producer and manager. Born Lucia Elizabeth Vestris, she was always referred to as Madame Vestris. The renowned German soprano Henriette Sontag (1806-1854) is also here. On the bottom shelf are five figures of the world-famous Tyrolean singers, the Rainer family, who were once very popular with English and European royalty.

On top of the two-door blond wood cabinet by the window facing the lake are a Paris Porcelain jug and a vase with operatic scenes, Norma on the left, I Puritani on the right.

There is large portrait of Joan, Adam and myself showing us relaxing in our dressing gowns in the music room surrounded by my favourite objects and pictures. It was painted by Michael Stennett whilst staying with us many years ago. I drove him mad by constantly bringing more pieces to add to the painting including my favourite figurines of Rachel, Maltrian and Lind whom, I'm happy to say, are included in the composition.

I particularly like the way he has cleverly painted Joan, portraying many of her favourite roles, into nearly every portrait hanging on the walls.

The Bernese shepherd dog in the painting with Adam was called Asta. She was with us for ten years and shortly before she died, gave birth to a single tiny puppy, Benji, which we kept for the next ten years. After his death, we went to the same monastery where we had found Asta and came home with a beautiful Bernese shepherd puppy called Dolly. She lived with us for fifteen and a half years, quite an age for this large pure-bred dog.

Chalet Monet sample spreads