Hunt Country Network

September 14, 2026 | Reach out to us at Editor@TheMiddleburgPage.com

Sandy Lerner's Collection Comes to Auction

By Leland Schwartz

Sandy Lerner, famous for building network router company Cisco Systems in Silicon Valley, for preserving Jane Austen's family home in England, and for her organic farm in Virginia's Hunt Country, is auctioning an array of art, furniture and other objects from her house on Ayrshire Farm in Upperville, which recently sold for $20 million.

The collection ranges from paintings — including the "Near Yet So Far" fox-in-a-barn painting attributed to British artist Edmund Bristow — to an original Punch magazine cartoon of Prime Minister Tony Blair and Queen Elizabeth.

Lerner's love of animals is evident, as many of the 382 lots depict everything from Siberian tigers to her true love passion: cats and kittens. (She wrote the book "Caticons: 4,000 Years of Art Imitating Cats" in 2017.)

The auction includes several dozen pieces of China, including a Spode pattern, blue-ground, two-handled chocolate cup, cover and stand from circa 1825. There are also candlesticks, such as a Georgian neoclassical white and blue enameled copper pair, circa 1770.

Lot 1119 is a German 16th-century style half-armor. There is a Louis XV small sword and leather scabbard from the 18th century and two circular etched iron shields, one from the Italian Renaissance.

There is a Chippendale mahogany slant-front bureau from the late 18th century, a John Widdecomb mahogany silver chest and, among dozens of other pieces, a Regency brass-mounted mahogany folding book stand from the early 19th century.

In the collection are works of Jamie Wyeth, Edouard Manet, William Hugh Jennings and Clare Turlay Newberry.

The timed auction, held by the Potomack Company, ends on Sept. 22 at 10 a.m. The catalogue can be viewed at potomackcompany.com. (Potomack recently sold George Washington's treasured pastel likeness of St. John the Evangelist for $250,000. The company auctioned the collection of the historic Virginia estate, Long Branch.)

"Sandy Lerner has been driven by a passion for collecting as well as her drive to innovate," Potomack owner Elizabeth Wainstein told us. "With the sale of her celebrated Ayrshire Farm in Upperville, Virginia, nearly 400 pieces of her collection from the estate are being offered at the auction. Spanning decorative objects, fine art, furnishings and personal treasures, the auction offers a compelling window into her world, shaped by bold ideas and relentless curiosity.

"That same curiosity that defined Lerner's career as a visionary across technology, beauty and sustainable agriculture is vividly expressed in her collection," Wainstein continued. "She collected with intention across an extraordinary range of objects and periods, never bound by a single category or convention but always drawn to objects of beauty, wit and meaning."

Indeed, Sandy Lerner's curiosity led her to launch Cisco from her living room in the 1980s, to found Urban Decay, the cosmetic company that "upended the beauty industry with bold, unconventional aesthetics" and to establish Ayrshire Farm, among the first farm of its kind in Virginia totally dedicated to organic, humane and sustainable agriculture.

Of particular interest was Lerner's love of author Jane Austen and her world. It was watching the BBC's adaptation of "Pride and Prejudice" when she was studying computational mathematics and computer science at Stanford in the early 1980s that let her to read all six of Austen's novels.

Lerner has said that Austen "provided an antidote to the intense, highly technical world she was living in." She first joined a Jane Austen group at Stanford and in 1992 acquired a long-term lease on Chawton House in Hampshire, the former home of Jane Austen's brother, Edward Austen Knight. Lerner put more than $15 million of her own money into restoring the house, transforming it into what became Chawton House Library, a research center devoted to early English women's writing.

The Potomack Company auction house, based in the Washington, D.C., area, serves an international clientele of collectors, estates, historic institutions and museums. Estates such as those of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren Burger and Secretary of State Colin Powell chose Potomack to sell their collections, as have museums, the Society of the Cincinnati, corporate art collections and owners of historical material, including letters of our Founding Fathers.