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Jay Leno at his Newport estate. Photo: David Hansen Photography
CELEBRITY STYLE

Jay Leno on His Love for Newport's Historic Mansions and Jazz-Age Cars

The talk show icon and owner of a 14-bedroom estate in this storied Rhode Island town is geared up to chair the forthcoming Audrain's Concours & Motor Week

By

[Kristen Bateman](#)

So enchanted with Newport, Rhode Island, was Jay Leno, that he bought his nine-acre, 14-bedroom, \$13.5 million estate on the spot in 2017, totally on impulse. “My wife and I were driving on Ocean Drive and she said, ‘Look at that house!’” he recalls. At the same time, a gardener happened to be exiting the gate, so Leno jokingly asked

his wife if they should find out if it was for sale, turned the car around, and knocked on the door. “They said it was, but it’s not currently listed. So, I said, ‘Get the owner on the phone!’ and I bought it on the spot.”



Hopedene is the private home of Nicholas Schorsch, owner of the Audrain Automobile Collection, who will have his private collection on view.
Photo: Shawn Connell

“Here’s the thing,” Leno says. “You don’t get water in California. Not for anything less than \$150 million.” He bought the estate fully furnished, too. “I didn’t have to sit there and look at swatches and be like, ‘Let me see

that fabric on the wall.' I'm not a spontaneous purchase guy, but just living in California, for the price of a condo on Wilshire Boulevard you get a home in Rhode Island."

Yet, being that Leno is an avid car collector, it makes total sense that he found a dream home in the historic Newport area. The town's automotive history is extensive: Many call it the birthplace of motor racing, courtesy of Willie K. Vanderbilt and the 1900 Vanderbilt Cup, the first American car race. Now, to celebrate all that history and his love of Newport, Leno is chairing the city's Audrain's Newport Concours & Motor Week at the beginning of October. "I tend to like the '20s and '30s cars," says Leno of what he's most looking forward to. "That's when the automobile was here to stay. I like that era because anything goes."



An aerial view of Leno's Newport estate.
Courtesy of Lila Delman Real Estate



Doris Duke's art-filled mansion also has camel-shaped trees (a nod to the real camels she once owned on the property).

Photo: Shawn Connell

From October 3 through 6, over a billion dollars' worth of rare and vintage cars will gather in the town, and some of the most historic mansions will be open like they never have before. The legendary Breakers (the Vanderbilt mansion located on Ochre Point Avenue) will remove its ropes and barriers for guests of certain events to explore the Loggia, Ballard Room, Dining Room, Music Room, Entrance Hall (where Kenny Loggins is performing), and the Terrace. Elsewhere, Rough Point, the stunning former home of stylish tobacco heiress Doris Duke, will have its gorgeous mother-of-pearl furniture and high windows on display as the Great Hall, Solarium, Music Room, and the lawn hosts guests for cocktails and car viewing. The significant aspect of it all is that Newport has never allowed public events at this scale to happen within these historic homes.



The Breakers, designed by renowned architect Richard Morris Hunt, with interior decoration by Jules Allard & Sons and Ogden Codman Jr., is the main site of Motor Week.

Photo: Shawn Connell



A 1939 Alfa Romeo from the Audrain Automobile Museum will be on display during the event.

Photo: Shawn Connell

Beyond fancy cars and classic New England architecture, the events vary—there's a private Opus wine event at the National Museum of

American Illustration, a John Legend concert at Bill Talbert Stadium, seminars at the Casino Theater, and more. Bugatti, Mercedes-Benz, and Rolls-Royce will be there to showcase one-of-a-kind cars, and Leno believes the event will rival the legendary Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance.

“I’m from [the Northeast], so I have some history here, which is great,” explains Leno, who was born in New Rochelle, New York, grew up in northeastern Massachusetts, and studied at Emerson College in Boston. “I like New England architecture, and I like the fact that in California you’re never really on the water. There’s your house and then there’s Pacific Coast Highway. Newport is ocean all around. Newport is also one of those places that has that New England attitude—it’s funnier than any place in America. That suspicious ‘What brings you here?’” he says with a laugh. “We moved to Andover, Massachusetts in 1959, and we’re still the new people in town.”

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