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ARTLAND

DISCOVERING A PRIVATE SCULPTURE GARDEN
IN WATER MILL **B2**

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PHOTOS BY GORDON M. GRANT

The late Nova Mihai Popa's "Soldiers" is one of his many sculptures on the grounds at Nova's Ark Project in Water Mill.

95 acres of art

Nova's Ark, with more than 30 giant sculptures, opens for public tours

BY SYLVIA E. KING-COHEN
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Imagine a grassy field with horses and sheep grazing alongside 40-foot steel sculptures. Picture yourself wandering through it, stopping to touch or stare up at a work of art that's three stories tall. That's the experience in store at Nova's Ark Project in Water Mill.

The 95-acre privately owned sculpture garden in the Hamptons has recently begun throwing its gates open for occasional public tours of the 30-plus massive installations. Such evenings include access to galleries housed in barns and other

outbuildings, plus performances by local musicians and refreshments.

ABOUT THE PARK

Nova's Ark was the brainchild of the late Nova Mihai Popa, a Transylvania native

Nova's Ark Project Twilight Tour

WHEN | WHERE 6 p.m.
Saturday, call for additional dates, 60 Millstone Rd., Water Mill
INFO 631-537-0004, thearkproject.com
ADMISSION \$15

who moved to Water Mill in 1986 with companion Tundra Wolf. Popa lived and worked there until his death in 2009. All the artwork on the site is Popa's — the soaring steel structures jutting up from the natural landscape have long piqued the curiosity of passersby like Susan Rubin, who drives along Millstone Road on her way home from work.

"It is just unbelievable to



ON THE COVER Kiara Zambari and Henry Avila check out Popa's "Settlers."

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think this place is just right near my home," says Rubin, of Bridgehampton, who finally stepped foot on the property at last month's inaugural public tour.

WALK OR RIDE

Guests can take a 20- to 30-minute wagon ride through the property to see the sculptures or pick up a map for a self-guided walk.

The tour begins at "The Astronauts," five towering structures meant to represent space exploration. Popa believed in the idea of settlements on other planets, Wolf explains, and often depicted that concept in his art. His abstract pieces include his own interpretations of the moon, constellations and entire galaxies.

Several visitors said they were struck by the magnitude of the sculptures — and the property itself.

"It is massive, monumental," says Leslie Lowery, 56, of Water Mill. "Driving by, you have no idea all this is back here." For Lowery's daughter Steff, the space conjured up a different association.

"When my mom told me about this place, I pictured 5-foot-tall sculptures," says Steff, 26. "This is like Stonehenge."

As the evening progressed, people felt freer to roam the fields. Children climbed the art, others posed for photos alongside the structures. It all felt right to Wolf, who had previously opened the property only for big-ticket gala benefits and other Hamptons fundraisers. "It is wonderful that the



Castle Barn is the performance space in the sculpture garden.

evening is intergenerational, and people are experiencing art in a way that is comfortable for them," she says.

THE ENTERTAINMENT

After the tour, guests who were staying for the entertainment portion of the evening moved into the Castle Barn, which doubles as a gallery and performance space. Guests at the inaugural tour heard a classical string concert by the Salomé Chamber Orchestra. Future evenings might entail international dance troupes or other rather unexpected contemporary performance artists.

For Wolf, it's a chance to share her late companion's perspective with a broader audience. Says Wolf: "I think the tour helps people see not only Popa's art, but his playful side."