

## Off-beat museums have homey charm

By RUS KAZAL  
Current Staff Writer

Three dozen years ago, an Army veteran exhumed by the line of the museum brought an expandable cardboard file and started collecting marine about submarines.

The file expanded until it swelled into a room. Today, Bernard Bastura has a 40-pound wooden replica of a nuclear sub on his porch, the tail section of a torpedo, and hundreds of plaques from undersea vessels scattered in the walls of his Middletown home.

Writers and naval officers drop by the modest three-story house, and Bastura turned into the Submarine Library Museum to serve into the marine file on the history of the silent service. Visitors come from as far away as Britain and Argentina to gaze at glass cases crisscrossed with memorabilia, submarine parts and more than 10 models.

"To me, this is not a museum," says Bastura, a retired machanic with large, expressive hands and a booming voice. "To me, this is still my own personal hobby."

The word museum may conjure up visions of ethereal marble halls and endless corridors lined with art. But what Bastura's museum could boast the homey charm of a collection where the curator's den is around the corner from the visitors exhibit.

Museum-goers in search of the personal atmosphere that springs up when a hobby becomes a collection can find it at Bastura's submarine museum, at the Sub Museum that Bastura keeps in her Old Lyme home, and at the Museum of the U.S. Navy, a labor of love by the same volunteers who soldier at the same commitment.

All three museums have reached the end of their official exhibit seasons — the Submarine Library Museum will have its last hour of the year this coming weekend, and the others are open by appointment only. For those who can't make it — and those who want a preview — the following are some short tours.

**Submarine student**  
Bernard Bastura, like many of the men whose pictures are scattered through his home, is a veteran of World War II. But his war and those were as different as the elements — land and water — where they fought.

His American submarine crew torpedoed Japanese shipping in the Pacific. Bastura rolled across Europe with the U.S. Army's 6th Division, serving as a field radio operator and seeing "limited amounts of combat" against German troops.

A decade after the war ended, Bastura was driving through Greece when he spotted a white stucco building near the Electric Boat Works with a sign that announced it as the Submarine Library and Museum. A look at the exhibits and a chat with the curator, and he was hooked to a fascination with how submarines "find, how they survived, the lure of the sea, the unexplained mystery of the sea."

Bastura purchased "one single, expandable, folding cardboard (file)" and quickly filled it with articles on submarines that he had clipped. The material ballooned into a room of 14 filing cabinets, his home filled up with submarine newsletters and plaques donated by crews, commanders and veterans, and by 1960 Bastura had enough material to open his collection to the public.



80 Curator Ed Olson of the Museum of the U.S. Navy in the history section of the museum. The display on the right was made in 1958 in Bloomfield by Ed Olson and Son. Museum of the U.S. Navy, 1000 Main St., Middletown, Conn.

Today, seven of the home's 11 rooms are taken up with glass cases and wall displays listing 48 submarine models, machinery from false versions and some 400 medals and life plaques and about 300 (clock) pictures that show the insights of individual boats. Bastura plans to devote two more rooms to exhibit next year: "I kept the kitchen, my den and my bedroom area — for myself," he says.

The cases hold a wealth of surprises, and behind each artifact line a story. Visitors to the upstairs Deney Room — named after a well-known U.S. submarine commander of the Second World War — will find a German chart of Long Island Sound that a scuba-diving friend of Bastura's fished out of the all-ter-

40 rooms of the U-853. The chart lies about 19 miles off Block Island in 160 feet of water; the war ended after torpedoing an American freighter. The chart has turned a green — "That's the way paper looks when it's submerged under water for a long time," Bastura says — but the red, high-contrast markings of the Reich navy are still visible.

The walls of the Lockwood Room just door display two American flags whose right half off into ragged threads. The tattered banners from World War II boats are not as much battle-worn as weather-worn; "In an emergency, they were left the flags flying when they dove," Bastura explains.

Many of the World War II crew portraits lining a dormitory room have an unlikely designer: the Wall Group, made in Australia, Calif., which created them to aid the war effort. Or one, a Japanese Christian who feels the force of a torpedo heaved by a midget submersible.

Visiting researchers — "students of submergence," Bastura calls them — frequent a room lined with seven gray file cabinets holding letters on every American submarine-like boat built for the United States since the first one entered the U.S. Navy in 1900. First on foreign vessels are in the kitchen, he says.

Bastura, who also tucked between the cabinets and a steel ladder salvaged from the torpedo room of the U.S.S. Cavalla, dismisses the suggestion that submarines have taken over his life.

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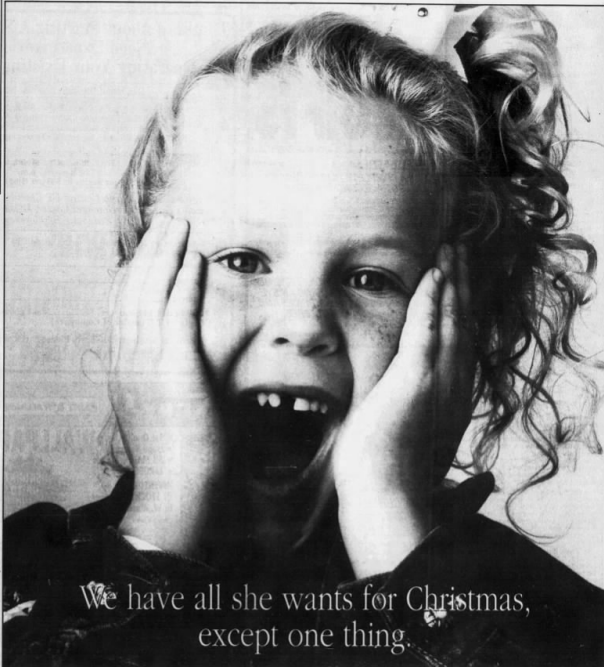
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