

**Dr. Loewinger:
A Successful Transition**

Article by Gerald Watelet in Society Magazine L'Eventail

June 15, 2011

Nothing predisposed Dr. Loewinger and her husband to be assigned in this wonderful U.S. Ambassador Residence in Brussels. If I use 'Dr.' it is because Mrs. Howard Gutman is first and foremost a famous and renowned dentist in her country. During 28 years she worked as a high level dentist before accompanying her husband in our beautiful Kingdom.

Howard Gutman is a lawyer and an advisor in U.S. political circles. He actively participated in the campaign of Barack Obama, who became U.S. President. To thank him for his help, the President offered him to be his Ambassador in Brussels. Dr. Loewinger recalls: 'My husband came home one night and told me 'the President might call and ask me to accept an Ambassador job, what should I answer him?' Without hesitating one second I told him that it was OK with me. This is how their Belgian story began!

Dr. Loewinger thought that the timing was perfect and that, although she loved her job, that it was time to do something else. This function was therefore a wonderful opportunity. Europe was not totally unknown to them, as they had spent most of their vacation with their two sons in Europe. But this time they were going to actually live in our good old continent.

Dr. Loewinger and her husband fell in love with our country. They are convinced that, once they return to the U.S., they will stay in touch and keep many friends in Belgium. She describes Belgians as friendly people, who care about others, and who take the time to enjoy life. She compares Brussels with Washington, two cities with the same rhythm, while Paris and New York are more speed and individualist.

The U.S. Ambassador Residence in Brussels is a superb house in Louis XVI style which was built at the end of the 18th century. It is a house that is much older than our country and located Rue Zinner between the inner ring road and the Royal Park. The house had several owners before it became U.S. property in 1947. There are several elegant rooms in this residence whose furniture is in classical style. However, each spouse of Ambassador can bring and leave her own touch in the house.

Dr. Loewinger loves modern art and this is the touch she brought. She decided to promote U.S. artists, both well known and unknown ones, in a mixture of ancient and resolutely modern art. During the visit, one immediately notices the big butterflies on the wall in the atrium. One would think that they have always been there. They were made by Nancy Blum. In the stairs, the contrast between two Flemish tapestries – which were offered by U.S. Ambassadors – and two paintings by Greg Drassler and John Hardy offer a nice clash of cultures. Many other artists are represented in the various reception rooms.

Fashion is also well represented with this ‘Fluted Dress’ by Karen Lamonte, a surprising art piece in glass. As an exception, Dr. Loewinger has displayed a dress in paper by Isabelle de Borchgrave, whose work she likes a lot. Dr. Loewinger pointed out that her selection is only based on whether she likes the art piece, not on whether it is a well-known artist or an expensive piece.

As an efficient and organized woman, Dr. Loewinger is already thinking about her second reconversion. She envisions being active in the textile sector once she leaves Belgium. Having always been fond of fashion, she is thinking about promoting exchanges in that field between our two countries. She added that, having no personal wealth, she and her husband must work for a living when they return in the U.S., where they left their eldest son, who has a job, while the youngest has followed them to Belgium but deeply misses his home country.

When we address the issue of the ‘art of the table,’ Dr. Loewinger humbly admits that she is not a great cook, but she has a keen interest in the art of receiving guests at the Embassy. Immediately after her arrival, she wanted to change things and to offer her guests a more modern and creative cuisine, but first and foremost a lighter one. It is why she reads numerous cooking books and looks for the inspiration, and passes on to her Belgian chef the ideas that she would like him to implement. Of

course, the detail that makes the difference is ‘the American twist’ which reminds us that we are on U.S. territory.

Yet, and it is a difference with the U.S., a typically Belgian business lunch must include three courses – out of the question to just serve one salad. If it is a lunch among ladies, it would be lighter. The table was set for a lunch, in a traditional American way. But it is modern crockery, Dr. Loewinegr points out, which enables her to serve the dishes the way she has seen in books and she likes. Here as well, her only guide is her sensibility.

I left the Ambassador’s residence with an impression of a mixture of a typically American professionalism with a touch of sensibility and human warmth. There is no doubt that the U.S. President picks the right persons to be his representatives!