

New Britain Museum of American Art gives close-up view of 'I Spy' artist and CT native Walter Wick



Christopher Arnott/Hartford Courant

Christopher Arnott The Walter Wick exhibit at the New Britain Museum of American Art includes the scale models of castles and cottages he's photographed for some of his books.

By [CHRISTOPHER ARNOTT](#) | carnott@courant.com | Hartford Courant
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[Walter Wick](#) may not be the household name he deserves to be, but you certainly know him as the “[I Spy](#)” guy. His books of dense, intricate, colorful photographs of household items — first published in 1992, and, by 2010, sold tens of millions of copies — have made him one of the most celebrated children's book creators of the past few decades.

“Hidden Wonders!,” a suitably overwhelming, detailed and sprawling exhibit of Wick's work opened at the [New Britain Museum of American Art](#) in March and is on view through Sept. 3. The first of the many rooms of the exhibit contains a handy timeline of Wick's life and accomplishments. Born in Hartford in 1953, Wick attended East Granby High School and [Paier College of Art](#) before establishing himself in New York in the late 1970s as a commercial photographer before shifting to photo illustrations. Wick, who renovated a Hartford Fire Department building into a new studio for himself around 20 years ago, has since moved to Florida.

The museum's interest in Wick extends back to at least 2006, when its exhibition, "Walter Wick: Games, Gizmos and Toys in the Attic," toured at 15 other museums. In 2015, the artist and his wife, Linda Cheverton Wick, gave 84 of his photographs to the New Britain Museum of American Art. The museum bills "Hidden Wonders!" as "the largest survey of Wick's work to date," covering half a century. Hundreds of pieces occupy the gallery rooms on the museum's second floor. Many are incredibly detailed, carefully lit photos from Wick's "Can You See What I See?" series of picture puzzle books.



Christopher Arnett/Hartford Courant

The colorful entrance to "Walter Wick: Hidden Secrets!" at the New Britain Museum of American Art through Sept. 3.

There are nine pieces from the 2020 "Can You See What I See?" book "Curiosity Shop" alone. As extraordinary as the photos can be, especially in crisp prints at a size much larger than the books, the highlight of "Hidden Wonders!" is the scale models of castles and cottages specially built for Wick to photograph. One is the size of a HO gauge model railroad, and the others are much larger. There are also plenty of framed images that can be appreciated on their own terms as studies in color, light and perspective. Some of these were taken in the 1970s and play with natural optical illusions. Some spotlight items are leaves and rocks that Wick found in his Connecticut backyard, which may be the cleanest and tidiest ones you've ever seen in a photograph.

The New Britain Museum of American Art has created a "Hidden Wonders Summer Camp" program around the exhibit. A printed guide to the exhibit contains a "scavenger hunt" section where visitors are directed to certain works and asked to look with specific small objects within them. "Three mice and an ice cream soda," for instance, or "a fish and a flying saucer," just as with the "I Spy" books. But "Hidden Wonders!" is not just "I Spy" writ large. It is greater than the sum of its shiny little parts. It adds dimension, history and perspective to a multi-faceted artist whose work has stood up to intense scrutiny from young and old spying eyes for generations.

"Walter Wick: Hidden Wonders!" is on display through Sept. 3 at the New Britain Museum of American Art, 56 Lexington St., New Britain. The museum is open Sundays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and Thursdays from 10:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. Admission is \$17, \$12 seniors, \$10 college students, \$10 for ages 13-17 and free for ages 12 and under. nbmaa.org/exhibitions/walter-wick-hidden-wonders.