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Newport's Rosecliff Mansion: Restored for Future Generations

Architect Stanford White modeled the design for Rosecliff after the Grand Trianon garden retreat of French kings at Versailles, near Paris, France.



Showcasing the front of the mansion, this aerial photograph of Rosecliff also displays how the structure was positioned on the property so that the back view overlooks the Atlantic Ocean. Carefully manicured topiary enhances the balanced aesthetic. (Hawk Visual, LLC./Courtesy of The Preservation Society of Newport County)

By Deena Bouknight

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Sea views, mild spring and fall weather, and proximity to New York City settled the port city of Newport, Rhode Island, as a gilded-age destination, and one of the most beautiful is Rosecliff Mansion.

Turn-of-the-20th-century architect Stanford White modeled the design for Rosecliff after the Grand Trianon garden retreat of French kings at Versailles, near Paris. Completed in 1902, Rosecliff's main distinctions among the area's other grand dwellings are its heart-shaped staircase and the 3,200-square-foot ballroom, considered the largest in Newport.

Another indication that the mansion is a Stanford White project is the covered arcade, or loggia, of arched windows flanked by classic square and round columns decorated with scroll patterns.

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Age always takes a toll on structures, but The Preservation Society of Newport County oversees several historic mansions and recently completed a nine-month restoration of Rosecliff to make sure the magnificent site is sound and viewable for years to come. The \$7.4 million project included refurbishment of gilding (application of gold leaf or gold paint) on exterior doors as well as sandblasting and repainting all the elaborate wrought iron, another distinct and contrasting architectural feature that sets off the all-white mansion.



The grand façade of Rosecliff displays the H shape of the building and features arched windows across the center section. The entrance is graced with with reflecting pool. (Carol Ann Mossa/Shutterstock)



Guarding the main entrance or “cour d’honneur” of Rosecliff are two marble lion statues, so lifelike that details such as fur, claws, and even ribs are evident. The two lions sit atop a layered pedestal made of marble and are framed by the home’s numerous arched windows and columns. (David Hansen/Courtesy of The Preservation Society of Newport County)



Classical column designs flank the 10 sets of solid or glass double doors surrounding the massive ballroom. The flooring is made of 305 white oak 3-foot-by-3-foot panels. The ceiling was painted with a sky scene, and there are eight medallions depicting urns and flowers atop a garden wall. The continents of Africa, Europe, Asia, and America are represented in grey panels in the corners, with the remainder of the ceiling adorned with molded plaster designs. The chandeliers and wall sconces are of gilt bronze and French Baccarat crystal. (Courtesy of The Preservation Society of Newport County)



Made of Caen limestone, a cream-colored stone quarried near Caen, France, Rosecliff's signature heart-shaped staircase is most likely modeled after a similarly designed staircase in Nancy, France. The lush red velvet drapes and red carpet dramatize the heart-

shaped design, while the wrought-iron stair railings add additional décor to the already distinct display. (Courtesy of The Preservation Society of Newport County)



The pea-green, heavily draped spacious dining room was, in the early 1900s, the scene of 200-seat elaborate, seven-course dinners as well as costume balls. Like the mansion's ballroom, the flooring is oak and the focal points are the numerous moldings as well as the marble fireplace mantel and intricately designed chandeliers. (Courtesy of The Preservation Society of Newport County)

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The painting of a Newport socialite, Mrs. Crawford Hill, by Hungarian artist Louis Mark graces a main wall in Rosecliff's salon. The chimney piece, artistically created in the late Gothic/early French Renaissance style, features a scene in plaster from the legend of "The Miraculous Transport of the Casa Sagrada." Gilded furnishings as well as gold-hued fabric wall and window treatments embellish the grand room that sits beneath a gilded, molded-plaster ceiling. (Courtesy of The Preservation Society of Newport County)



While much of Rosecliff's exterior was constructed of marble, it is primarily made of brick that has been faced with a glazed terra cotta. The main entrance is to the right and is adorned with intricate, black-painted wrought iron. Symmetrical gardens surround the mansion and accentuate floral plantings and carved sculptures. (David Hansen/Courtesy of The Preservation Society of Newport County)

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