

## HISTORY

# Rosecliff has hosted lavish Gilded Age parties. It just got a \$7.4 million makeover.

**[Savana Dunning](#)** Newport Daily News

Published 5:17 a.m. ET Aug. 25, 2023

NEWPORT – Rosecliff, one of Newport’s most famous Gilded Age mansions, is reopening to the public following an extensive \$7.4 million renovation.

“All the projects that were involved were necessary. If we hadn’t moved forward we could have lost this building,” said Trudy Coxe, CEO of the Preservation Society of Newport County.

The sparkling white of the Rosecliff’s terracotta facade was one of the most noticeable improvements The Preservation Society of Newport County made to the building when Director of Properties Mike Taber guided The Newport Daily News and other members of the media around the building Thursday, but it certainly was not the only change made to the building.

Thirteen improvements made to the Gilded Age property were highlighted before the tour, including the complete replacement of the old 5,000 square foot asbestos roof, the replacement of the 600 feet of balustrade that runs the perimeter of the roof, restoration of the central garden in front of the house, restoring all of the doors with handpainted gilding and the installation of new white oak flooring in the ballroom.

The Rosecliff rivals only The Breakers and Marble House in fame, having served as the backdrop for the films "The Great Gatsby" (1974), "The Betsy" (1978), "High Society" (1956), "True Lies" (1994) and "Amistad" (1997). The building is used as a museum, exhibition space and wedding venue, with 64 weddings scheduled to take place on the property from Sept. 1 through the end of December.

It was one of the few mansions open during the pandemic due to its popularity as a tourist destination, Coxe said.

“This is really one of the most beautiful houses in Rhode Island,” Coxe said. “It’s just a beautiful, beautiful building that is worthy of protection and preservation for many decades to come.”

The organization began its eight-month renovation project on Jan. 2 and, thanks to the mild winter weather, the restoration team was able to finish two months ahead of schedule. Taber said the early completion of the main project allowed the team to complete other projects around the property, such as replacing the stone wall abutting the Cliff Walk and cleaning the statues around the fountains.

The building will reopen to the public on Sept. 1 with a new exhibition on Newport’s connection to China and the Chinese community that thrived in Newport during the Gilded Age. The Preservation Society’s Food and Wine Festival will also be held on the property starting Sept. 22.

“There’s so much history here and this particular spot is such an iconic part of Newport and to have it revitalized in this way, even from someone having been here before, seeing it refreshed and just so vibrant is pretty amazing,” Discover Newport’s Director of Communications Cassandra Earle said. “Having this back both from the leisure-transient perspective and then also from the events perspective...to be able to have the number of guests that are going to be coming through here... it’s going to have a wonderful impact on the tourism economy for all of Newport County.”

## **The history of Rosecliff**

Completed in 1902 at a cost of \$2.5 million, Rosecliff was commissioned by Nevada silver heiress Theresa Fair Oelrichs in 1899, according to the Preservation Society.

**Watch the Gilded Age:** Want a sneak peek at 'The Gilded Age' season 2? Trailer suggests lots of drama, intrigue

Theresa and Hermann Oelrichs purchased the property in 1891 from the estate of historian and diplomat George Bancroft.

"An amateur horticulturist, Bancroft grew thousands of roses at Rosecliff and his gardens along the Cliff Walk were famous. The Oelrichs later bought additional property along Bellevue Avenue and commissioned Stanford White to replace the original house with the mansion that became the setting for many of Newport’s most lavish parties. Rosecliff is now

preserved through the generosity of its last private owners, Mr. and Mrs. J. Edgar Monroe, of New Orleans. They gave the house, its furnishings, and an endowment to the Preservation Society in 1971," the Preservation Society notes.