

Inside and out, The Breakers offers a Gilded Age holiday experience



Gail Ciampa

Providence Journal

NEWPORT – What could be more appropriate for Newport's grandest mansion than to glow inside and out?

"Sparkling Lights" is an indoor-outdoor holiday experience that runs through December at The Breakers. Illuminated trees and shrubs on the grounds define the mansion's landscape with stunning colors.

But the stroll through the inside of The Breakers is equally spectacular. There are elaborately decorated Christmas trees and tasteful mantel displays with garlands and blooming vases of flowers in each of the rooms.

This holiday Gilded Age tour from the Preservation Society of Newport County is the perfect experience to put you in a festive mood for the season.

Inside

It's really beautiful how the Christmas trees are decorated to complement the décor and theme of each room.

The Great Hall is all about poinsettias. Cream-colored ones line the staircase that leads to the portrait of Alice Vanderbilt and 150 red plants make a 15-foot tree. It's a popular stop for family photos.



Gold glows in the fabulous Music Room, and the tree matches that richness. The room was created in France by the Parisian firm of Allard et Fils and transported to Newport to be reconstructed by French craftsmen. It was the setting for Vanderbilt weddings and debutante parties.

More recently, the Music Room was the setting for the Russells' New York ballroom and daughter Gladys' debut ball in HBO's "The Gilded Age" series.

The tree in The Breakfast Room is decorated with fruit and food ornaments, as this was the informal dining room for the family.

The decorations in The Morning Room are platinum colored. They match the room's shimmering panels, which are platinum leaf, something that is rare even in Gilded Age mansion design.

The light show

While visitors can tour the interior of The Breakers anytime, the light show outside was only introduced six years ago.

A serpentine garden path goes around the mansion, and the sparkling lights highlight the way. It is a historic landscape designed by Ernest Bowditch that had to be restored after it was destroyed by the 1938 hurricane. As you walk along it, there are views of the mansion and ocean.



Tips

If you pick the 4 p.m. entry time, it's easier to park in one of the designated lots. You aren't waiting for the next group to leave to snag a spot.

It's also fun to see the sky slowly darken and cast a lovely blue in your photos. That is as long as there aren't clouds. It's also generally warmer from 4 to 5 p.m. than it is from 7 to 8 p.m.

Enter the property through the main gates on Ochre Point Avenue. Going through the mansion first, which is nice and warm, means you aren't starting out cold on your stroll of the grounds.

If you get chilled easily, you can warm up at fire pits and enjoy holiday treats and adult beverages for purchase on the back terrace.

Exit through the basement gift shop if you want to do some shopping before enjoying the outdoor lights. Bathrooms are also down by the shops.

If you want to listen to the online commentary about The Breakers, you need to download an app to your phone and bring your own earbuds or headphones. You might find it too distracting with so much to see, between the decorations and the mansion.

It's better to pick up the Preservation Society's free welcome pamphlet, which tells you what you need to know about each room.

That's where I learned that acorns were used in the decor because it was the symbol of the Vanderbilt family. Acorns adorned the tree in the library. That room's upper wall panels are made of green Spanish leather with silver leaf that appears gold.

Sparkling Lights runs through Dec. 28.