NEWPORT MANSIONS | The Preservation Society of Newport County

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Newport Mansions Announces Fall 2026 Event Lineup

Newport Symposium to examine "What Makes It American" with speakers from Tiffany & Co., Smithsonian, Fashion Institute of Technology and more

NEWPORT, R.I. — Newport Mansions has announced its lineup of events for fall 2026. Highlights include the annual Mid-Autumn Festival, Trick or Treat at The Breakers and the annual two-day Newport Symposium, to be held Nov. 5-6 at Rosecliff and Marble House, focusing on the theme "What Makes It American." Schedule and tickets are available now at newportmansions.org/fall.

Through a series of lectures and tours, this year's Newport Symposium will examine the origins and legacy of art, architecture, landscape and design in the United States. Robyn Asleson, curator of prints and drawings at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery, will present a keynote lecture titled "Facing the Nation: American Portraiture and American Identity." Additional lectures will be offered by Raissa Bretaña, a fashion historian at the Fashion Institute of Technology; Justin Martin, author of "Genius of Place: The Life of Frederick Law Olmsted"; and Christopher Young, vice president and creative director of Tiffany Patrimony and Global Creative Visual Merchandising at Tiffany & Co.

Founded in 1993, the Newport Symposium has been an annual convening of fine and decorative arts experts and enthusiasts from across the country and the world. Attendees listen to stimulating lectures, experience behind-the-scenes study opportunities and gather to network and discuss the future of history.

A full outline of Newport Mansions' fall events and the Newport Symposium's schedule, speakers and lecture information can be found below.

For more information, visit newportmansions.org.

Mid-Autumn Festival
Saturday, September 26 | 3:30-5:30 p.m.
Marble House Back Lawn

The Mid-Autumn Festival, also known as the Moon Festival or Mooncake Festival, is a 3,000-year-old tradition from China that celebrates togetherness. This family program celebrates the festival on the grounds of Marble House, near the Chinese Tea House.

Plein Air Intermediate Painting Class with Bill Lane
Friday, October 2 | 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.
The Breakers
Join Bill Lane, award-winning local watercolor artist, for an intermediate level day-long workshop on plein air painting at The Breakers. This day provides a unique opportunity to paint in this historic setting as well as gain valuable instruction from an accomplished artist. Watercolor and oil painters welcome.

Putting Your Garden to Bed
Friday, October 2 | 10 a.m.-11 a.m.
Green Animals Topiary Garden

Evan Aten, Horticulturist Supervisor at Green Animals Topiary Garden, leads a fall walk through the gardens and shares how to prepare landscapes for winter. Aten will discuss seasonal gardening techniques, including caring for perennials and dahlias, protecting plants and setting the stage for a successful spring.

State of the Collections Lecture (Members Only)
Tuesday, October 6 | 6 p.m.-7 p.m.
Rosecliff

Exclusive to Preservation Society members, Director of Museum Affairs and Chief Curator Leslie Jones and Chief Conservator Patty Miller will give a wide-ranging update on the state of the Preservation Society’s collections.

Explore Chepstow’s Ties to America’s Founding Families
Thursday, October 8 & 15 | 11 a.m.-12 p.m.
Chepstow

Preservation Society Archives Fellow Grace Acton highlights connections between the Morris family archives and furnishings collected by Alletta Morris McBean at Chepstow. Guests will learn about the people behind the paintings, documents and decor on view at Chepstow, from religious leaders to revolutionaries, politicians to socialites, and discover the many ways that Mrs. McBean's ancestors influenced American history and how the women of Chepstow preserved their family history for future generations.

Trick or Treat at The Breakers
Friday and Saturday, October 23 and 24 | 5:30 p.m.-7:30 p.m.
The Breakers

Witches and vampires, angels and princesses, skeletons and superheroes, get ready. There's big Halloween fun for the whole family at Newport's largest mansion. A sensory-friendly option will be available Friday, October 23, from 5:30 p.m.-6 p.m.

Breakers Greenhouse Tour with Jeff Curtis, Director of Gardens and Landscapes
Saturday, November 7 | 10 a.m.-11 a.m.
The Breakers Greenhouse

Jeff Curtis, Director of Gardens & Landscapes, will provide a tour of the greenhouse and discuss how the work done there provides thousands of bedding plants and cut flowers for Newport Mansions.

A Newport Songbook: From European Opera to Local Classics with Historic Music of Newport
Thursday, November 12 | Pre-Reception 5:30-6 p.m., Program 6 p.m.-8 p.m.
Rosecliff

A Newport Songbook celebrates both the city's cultural heritage and the artists who shaped it. The program brings Newport's musical past to life through the works once heard in its opera houses, theaters, churches and salons. Drawing from 19th-century performances and local composers, the first half revisits music performed in Newport during this vibrant musical era. The second half of the program includes music of composers from the Astor, Wetmore and Oelrichs families, as well as music celebrating Ida Lewis, the "Heroine of Newport."

NEWPORT SYMPOSIUM: "WHAT MAKES IT AMERICAN"
November 5-6 | 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m.
Rosecliff & Marble House

Facing the Nation: American Portraiture and American Identity (Keynote)
Robyn Asleson, Ph.D.
Thursday, November 5

The desire for a distinctive American school of art may have originated in the colonial era, but efforts to discern a unifying national style gained momentum in the 19th century and extended well into the 20th. The elusive concept of “Americanness” remained a hot topic in 1968, when it provided the theme of the National Portrait Gallery’s inaugural exhibition. The catalogue stated, “American art historians obsessively ask, ‘What is American about American art?’ Or, as the question the present exhibition poses, ‘What is an American?’” The implied connection between American art and American identity was apt, as preconceived notions of essential American character traits had always influenced the analysis of national style. This presentation looks back at the enduring quest to discover unifying threads linking successive generations of American artists, from the colonial era through the Gilded Age, focusing on key moments that shed light on the evolving conception of the United States itself.

Robyn Asleson, Ph.D. is curator of prints and drawings at the Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery. She specializes in 18th- and 19th-century American and British art and has published extensively on transatlantic crosscurrents in the history of art. Her most recent exhibition, “Brilliant Exiles: American Women in Paris, 1900-1939,” received the Smithsonian Secretary’s Research Prize. Previous exhibitions include the spotlight series “Portraits of the World” (2018-2020); “The Lost Symphony: Whistler and the Perfection of Art” (2016), “Great British Paintings from American Collections” (2001), and “A Passion for Performance: Sarah Siddons and Her Portraitists” (1999). She is currently developing an exhibition about writers who shaped the idea of America.

Asleson’s publications include “Notorious Muse: The Actress in British Art and Culture” (2003) and “British Paintings at the Huntington” (2001). She also contributed essays to the National Gallery’s History of Early American Landscape Design database. She holds B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from Yale University.

Fashion of the Gilded Age: The Origins of American Style
Raissa Bretaña, M.F.A
Thursday, November 5

It was not until the mid-20th century that the “American Look” emerged in women’s fashion, characterized by a distinctive sportswear sensibility and a democratic approach to both design and distribution. Yet its origins can be traced to the Gilded Age, when the foundations of this uniquely American style began to take shape. In this lecture, fashion historian Raissa Bretaña will explore how department stores and mail-order catalogs democratized fashion in the United States at the end of the 19th century, making versions of coveted Parisian designs available across the country. She will consider the rise of the New Woman and Gibson Girl as new models of American femininity and examine the transatlantic fashion system that continued to shape women’s dress in America for decades.

Raissa Bretaña is a New York City-based fashion historian who works as a writer, researcher, lecturer and educator. She hosted the Glamour video series “Would They Wear That?” in which she fact-checked historical costumes in popular media, and has appeared as an expert in

documentaries for CNN and Turner Classic Movies. She currently works at the Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology, and freelances as a consultant to costume designers for period film and television productions.

She received a BFA in Costume Design from Boston University and an MA in Fashion and Textile Studies from FIT, where she served as an adjunct faculty member in the History of Art department. Bretaña is the author of “Shoes” (2021), “Moxie: The Daring Women of Classic Hollywood” (2024) and “Fashion of the Gilded Age” (2026).

Frederick Law Olmsted: American Visionary
Justin Martin
Thursday, November 5

Frederick Law Olmsted may be the most important American historical figure that the average person knows least about. Martin will provide a brief sketch of Olmsted's amazing life as a sailor, farmer, journalist and abolitionist — and all that is before he settled into the profession for which he's best known, as a pioneering landscape architect. Martin will focus on Olmsted's greatest landscape creations such as Central Park and Boston's Emerald Necklace, with special attention to his work in Newport.

Justin Martin’s specialty is American history, meticulously researched but delivered in a narrative style that’s akin to fiction. He’s the author of five books, including “Genius of Place: The Life of Frederick Law Olmsted” (Da Capo Press, 2011). Other works by Martin have covered subjects ranging from America's first Bohemian artists to the Battle of Antietam, a Civil War turning point. He is a former staff writer at Fortune magazine. His articles have appeared in publications across the country, including The New York Times, San Francisco Chronicle and Lawrence (Kansas) Journal World.

Martin is a 1987 graduate of Rice University in Houston, Texas. He lives in Forest Hills Gardens, a landmark New York City neighborhood designed by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.

Designing American Identity through Colonial Revivalism
K.L.H. Wells, Ph.D.
Thursday, November 5

From the mid-19th century onwards, Colonial Revival design has recreated ostensible familiar, domestic environments from the past for American audiences. Colonial Revival design was spearheaded by “old stock” Americans who sought to shore up their declining prestige in the face of the nouveau riche, mass immigration and other forces of modernization. But as colonial revivalism professionalized in the early 20th century, its designers increasingly appealed to a wider audience of Americans who did not necessarily descend from the nation’s early European settlers. Colonial Revivalism continued to draw on the familiarity of the domestic environment but increasingly pursued a perfection of detail and harmony of design to create immersive experiences of feeling history. By directly engaging with the past through one’s bodily senses, Colonial Revival design democratized history and made it accessible to more Americans. But the

movement still focused on a relatively narrow slice of history by glorifying founding fathers, pioneers and other figures who could safely be understood as White. By inviting White Americans of different regions, ethnicities and social classes to imagine themselves as heirs to this early American history, Colonial Revival design turned the pre-Revolutionary past into a broader collective heritage that helped forge a new national identity.

K.L.H. Wells, Ph.D. is Associate Professor of American Art and Architecture at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, where her research focuses on the politics of decorative art and design. Her newest book, “Uncanny Revivals: Designing an American Identity” (Yale University Press, 2026) explores the uncanny aesthetics and White nationalist politics of Colonial Revival design in the 1930s and 1940s United States. Wells has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the New York Public Library, the Terra Foundation for American Art and the Winterthur Museum, among others. She is also the author of the award-winning book “Weaving Modernism: Postwar Tapestry between Paris and New York” (Yale University Press, 2019).

‘Woven of Numerous Threads’: Bunny Mellon and Her Many Legacies
Rachel A. Heslop & Thomas Lloyd
Friday, November 6

Rachel “Bunny” Lambert Mellon is perhaps best known for designing President Kennedy's Rose Garden at the White House. Yet the story of that garden began not in Washington but at her Cape Cod beach house, where Kennedy — newly returned from Europe — asked her to imagine an official garden that could rival the great gardens he had encountered abroad while serving the very different needs of an American presidency. That tension between European inspiration and American adaptation ran throughout Mellon's work. Deeply informed by French gardening traditions, botanical literature and art, she translated those influences through the particular landscapes and materials of the places she loved: the fields and fieldstone of Oak Spring in Virginia, the New England vernacular of Cape Cod and the wildflowers and coastal landscape of Nantucket. Drawing on Oak Spring's collections alongside personal family photographs and recollections, Thomas Lloyd and Rachel Heslop will explore how Mellon developed a distinctly American garden language of structure, restraint, practicality and naturalism — and why that story has particular resonance in Newport, a city whose architecture and landscapes reflect America's long and fascinating dialogue with Europe.

Rachel Heslop is the Senior Project Coordinator at the Oak Spring Garden Foundation, set up by Rachel “Bunny” Mellon to facilitate and inspire scholarship and public dialogue on the history and future of plants. Originally from the U.K., she holds a BA in Archaeology and History of Art and an MA in Egyptian Archaeology, both from University College London. After a decade in the rare book trade, she studied for a new career in the horticultural industry. On moving to the United States, she worked for the landscape architecture firm Oehme, van Sweden in Washington, D.C., and was part of the project team that led to the 2020 renewal of the White House Rose Garden. She joined the Oak Spring Garden Foundation in 2023.

Thomas Lloyd serves as President of the Gerard B. Lambert Foundation, a private philanthropic organization founded by his grandmother, Rachel “Bunny” Lambert Mellon. As a Certified Financial Planner, he directs the foundation's philanthropic efforts across healthcare, historic preservation, education, horticulture and the arts. In addition to his foundation work, Thomas co-authored “Bunny Mellon Style” and “Garden Secrets of Bunny Mellon.” He holds positions on the boards of the Trustees Council of the National Gallery of Art, the Institute of Classical Architecture & Art, the World Monuments Fund and the PEN/Faulkner Foundation. He resides in Washington, D.C., and considers his greatest joy to be his family — his wife, Hadley, and their two children, Teddy and Fiona.

What IS American? Thomas Jayne and the Making of a Statesian Interior
Thomas Jayne, M.A. & Leslie B. Jones
Friday, November 6

Together in conversation, Thomas Jayne of Jayne Design Studio New York and Leslie Jones, Preservation Society Director of Museum Affairs and Chief Curator, will explore his portfolio of iconic interior design. Over the course of his acclaimed career, Jayne’s projects are a collective testament to the notion that there is not any one style which makes something American, rather it is the variety which defines our visual identity.

Thomas Jayne founded Jayne Design Studio in 1990. His academic training greatly influenced his design philosophy. He received a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Oregon’s School of Architecture and Allied Arts where he studied with the noted architectural historian Marian Card Donnelly, followed by a master’s degree from Winterthur Museum’s program in American material culture and the decorative arts. After, he pursued advanced fellowships at the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Historic Deerfield and the J. Paul Getty Museum before moving on to a position at Christie’s estates and appraisal department. His interest in architecture and the decorative arts eventually lead him to pursue a career in interior design. He was fortunate to work in two of the most influential design studios in America – Parish-Hadley & Associates and Kevin McNamara, Inc. – before opening Jayne Design Studio in 1990.

Leslie B. Jones serves as the Director of Museum Affairs and Chief Curator for The Preservation Society of Newport County. She joined the society in 2019 to oversee research, curatorial, conservation, collections management, exhibitions, interpretation and programmatic initiatives such as family programs and lectures. Previously, Jones served in leadership and curatorial roles at Cheekwood Estate & Gardens in Nashville, Tennessee, and the White House Historical Association.

Tiffany & Co. and Gilded Age Modernity
Christopher Young
Friday, November 6

Join Christopher Young, Vice President & Creative Director, Tiffany Patrimony & Creative Visual Merchandising at Tiffany & Co., for an exploration of Tiffany & Co. and its role in shaping a distinctly American expression of luxury during the late 19th century. As unprecedented fortunes transformed American cities, homes and social life, Americans looked both to the great traditions of Europe and toward a new visual language that reflected the modernity of the United States. Tiffany & Co. helped define this transformation. Through extraordinary jewels, decorative arts, international exhibitions and commissions for some of America's most prominent families, Tiffany helped articulate expressions of luxury that were cosmopolitan yet unmistakably American. Drawing upon examples from the Tiffany Archives and Heritage Collection, Young will consider the designers, patrons, materials and innovations that shaped this remarkable period.

Christopher Young is Vice President & Creative Director, Patrimony & Creative Visual Merchandising at Tiffany & Co., overseeing global brand storytelling, window design, product presentation and The Tiffany Archives. He curated "Vision & Virtuosity" at London's Saatchi Gallery in 2022 and "Tiffany Wonder" at Tokyo Node in 2024. Most recently, Young collaborated with filmmaker Guillermo del Toro on Tiffany's involvement in "Frankenstein," integrating 27 pieces from the Tiffany Archives into the film and co-creating special windows for the Tiffany Landmark in New York. He has contributed to numerous publications, including "Windows at Tiffany & Co.," "Vision & Virtuosity," "The Tiffany Landmark," "Tiffany Wonder" and "The Tiffany Archives." Earlier in his career, Young created the award-winning Tattoo collection for Harry Winston and served as Salma Hayek's painting coach for her Oscar-nominated performance in "Frida." Since 1998, he has taught drawing and watercolor in NYU's Graduate Design Department at Tisch School of the Arts.

ABOUT THE PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF NEWPORT COUNTY

The Preservation Society of Newport County is Rhode Island's largest cultural organization, protecting, preserving and presenting the best of Newport County's architectural heritage. As a nonprofit organization accredited by the American Alliance of Museums, the Preservation Society's 11 historic properties – seven of them National Historic Landmarks – span more than 250 years of American architectural and social development from the Colonial era to the Gilded Age.

Through its historic properties, educational programs and related activities, the Preservation Society engages the public in the story of America's vibrant cultural heritage. Today, these "Newport Mansions" are an integral part of the living fabric of the city in which they stand.

For more information, please visit NewportMansions.org.

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