

Inside the Guggenheim Estate Design Showhouse at Hempstead House

October 30, 2014 by VALERIE KELLOGG / valerie.kellogg@newsday.com



How would the Guggenheims live in their towered, 40-room, 50,000- square-foot Hempstead House today? That was the whimsy decorators were asked to consider as they adorned spaces at the Design Showhouse at the Guggenheim Estate, opening Saturday at Sands Point Preserve.

Daniel and Florence Guggenheim moved into the mansion in 1917, turning the then-250-acre estate into a family gathering place for almost three decades. The show house, with its

"Home of an American Renaissance Family" theme, aims to celebrate the Guggenheims' lifestyle, interests and achievements.

Some of those moments might be considered salacious. Two adjoining rooms are devoted to the out-in-the-open affair between Benjamin Guggenheim, one of Daniel's brothers, and a young French cabaret singer. No matter that Benjamin died before the family moved here: The designers were allowed artistic license.

Says Karli Hagedorn, chair of Friends of the Sands Point Preserve, the nonprofit charged with protecting the estate-turned-Nassau County park: "You want a little fun and excitement in the telling of history." The first show house last year certainly did that, with a partly nude model at a soiree; this year, take note of Freeport designer Jo Anne Sparaco's bedroom.

Many show houses are held at newly built homes, serving the dual purpose of advancing interior design while mechandizing a property. Proceeds from this one will help preserve the home, which this year has seen many improvements, including a new bathroom and central air-conditioning and heat on the second floor. "It's not just a vanity project," Hagedorn says.

Sex and the castle?

Freeport designer Jo Anne Sparaco imagines what Benjamin Guggenheim's bedroom might look like today, with three satin robes on mannequins -- one for him, one for his wife and a much skimpier one for Léontine Aubart, his French mistress. His dressing gown has "Mr. Big" embroidered on it, a reference to Chris Noth's character in HBO's "Sex and the City" series. Each of the others says, "Her's." The charcoal and red room features dramatic crystal floor chandeliers inside silver chain cages, with accents such as mercury glass bowls, a mirrored

stainless steel bar cart and a console table with a stainless steel and black mirror.

DIY TIP The room doesn't receive a lot of light, but that didn't stop Sparaco from going dark. "Embrace what your room is," she says. If she had whitewashed the walls, the space would still be dark. With the dark gray wallpaper and accent lights, "it makes it warm and cozy," she says. **WHAT** Design Showhouse at the Guggenheim Estate

The Lindbergh connection

Harry Guggenheim and Charles Lindbergh were friends. After Lindbergh's 20-month-old son was kidnapped and later found dead, he stayed for several months at the estate. Decorator Patricia Mendes of Williston Park-based Bela Casa Decors and Sewing says she was inspired by the tragedy to conjure a nursery, complete with a stack of blocks with "H" and "G" atop. The crib is enveloped by a canopy for privacy. The decorators were given the leeway to fictionalize, says spokeswoman Beth Horn. Here, Mendes envisioned Harry and his wife at the time, Alicia Patterson, Newsday's founder, as parents of a newborn. They didn't live in Hempstead House (they were at Falaise, elsewhere on the grounds), and never had children, though Harry had three daughters.

DIY TIP Everything is hand-sewn in the room by Mendes' firm, including the faux silk basket-weave drapes. "Faux silk is affordable," she says, and weaving is something anyone can do. "It's something you do in pre-K with construction paper." She suggests using safety pins to piece the fabric together and then sewing them into place.

The getaway

The inspiration in Glen Cove designer Shirin Woods' lounge for guests came from the wallpaper -- Lee Jofa by Eric Cohler Mille Fleur, French for 1,000 flowers (one of the other homes on the former Guggenheim estate is called Mille Fleurs, the house Florence built after Daniel died). The luxury wallpaper features deer and antelope in coral red with blue, gold and off-white accents.

DIY TIP "You can spend more money on a wallpaper and do just one wall," Woods says. "Make the rest of the walls neutral."

Gone green

Manhattan decorator Gabrielle Knable's bedroom is titled "The True Heiress." She imagined the room would be a space for Daniel Guggenheim's daughter, Gladys. Her brother, Harry, became the standard bearer, she says, although writer John H. Davis described Gladys as "the real successor" to their father. "I wanted a room with the theme of a strong woman," Knable says. The space is mostly a dark green, both to reflect the gardens outside and to represent the money the family made so much of.

DIY TIP Curtains hang dramatically from a carved wood canopy bed crown, becoming the focus of the room. Knable suggests painting over the crown in a typical home. "Match the wall color," she says, explaining that the crown will look like molding.

Hot, hot, hot

Color also takes center stage in Uniondale designer Fahron Nibbs' meeting and dressing room, which she calls Leontine's Lair. It's an ode to French cabaret singer Léontine Aubart, Benjamin Guggenheim's much younger mistress, whom he took with him on his ill-fated journey on the Titanic (she survived). "She had to be vivacious and vibrant," Nibbs says. The color scheme reflects that, especially in the long window bench of pillows -- in magenta, orange, pink and red. "Because of the size of the room, you can pull it off," says Nibbs of the 15-by-23-foot space with 11-foot ceilings.

DIY TIP In a room with more common dimensions, use fewer pillows, even just one or two, and use flowers to bring such vibrant colors inside, Nibbs says.

A room of her own

Great Neck designer Nadia Vee's bedroom is an homage to Florence Guggenheim and her love of flowers. The highlight is a \$55,000 large-print rug patterned with fans, flowers and butterflies, which Vee had flown in from Los Angeles in time for the event. The woolen silk rug in pink and green is supposed to reflect the exotic plants and birds on the property, Vee says. A nearby harp represents Florence's philanthropy in the arts.

DIY TIP "The bed is about resting and softness and to promote a good mood," Vee says. Use soft fabrics, soft edges, soft trim. "You can do it on a budget," she says.

WHERE | WHEN Opens from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday through Nov. 30, except Tuesdays and Thanksgiving, at Hempstead House, Sands Point Preserve, 127 Middle Neck Rd.

INFO \$30 a ticket; tickets are valid for daily performances and presentations, such as concerts and fashion shows, throughout the month; parking is an additional \$10; 516-571-7901, thesandspointpreserve.com

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