

# TimeOut



Photograph: Shutterstock

## Live out your Gilded Age dreams by visiting these Newport mansions

The historic gems are all featured in the HBO show.



Written by [Shaye Weaver](#) Monday February 7 2022

HBO's new television series [The Gilded Age](#) features incredible mansions with ornate interiors and verdant gardens and while the majority of the show takes place in NYC, much of it occurs in Newport, Rhode Island at places you can actually visit today.

The show begins in 1882 with Marian Brook moving from rural Pennsylvania to NYC after the death of her father to live with her old-money aunts, Agnes van Rhijn and Ada Brook. On the way, she makes fast friends with Peggy Scott, a Black writer looking for a fresh start. It quickly becomes apparent that there's a social war going on between one of her aunts and her newly rich neighbors—a ruthless railroad tycoon and his ambitious wife, George and Bertha Russell.

Aside from Bethesda Fountain in Central Park, NYC doesn't actually feature prominently in the show. Many of the outdoor street scenes were filmed on a backlot. In fact, production spent about 30 of about 160 filming days in Rhode Island in 2021, according to a [Providence Journal](#) interview with executive producer David Crockett.

According to [The Preservation Society of Newport County](#), the show was filmed at several of Newport's historic house museums from February to April 2021. Much of the ornate scenery comes from the beautifully preserved interiors and exteriors of The Breakers, Marble House, The Elms, Rosecliff, Chateau-sur-Mer and Hunter House—all of which you can visit today.

Early on in episode one, for example, there's a gorgeous party in Newport hosted by Mrs. Fish at [The Ledges](#) mansion and the Russells' house is made up of several rooms of Newport mansions, including the music room of The Breakers and the kitchens of The Elms.

"We have been excited for a long time to see this first season of *The Gilded Age* come to fruition," Preservation Society CEO and Executive Director Trudy Coxe said. "Our houses are like time capsules where Gilded Age architecture and decor can be seen in all their glory, and the Preservation Society is honored that Lord Fellows recognized the authenticity these settings lend to his stories. The plots may be fictional, but they are based on the historical reality of the Gilded Age. Nowhere is that reality better preserved than here in Newport."

Below are some of the gorgeous mansions and buildings featured in *The Gilded Age* that are open to the public:

## The Breakers



Photograph: John W. Corbett



The Breakers is the grandest of Newport's summer cottages, according to the preservation society, and it's a symbol of the Vanderbilt family's social and financial preeminence in turn of the century America. The grandson of Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, Cornelius Vanderbilt II, commissioned architect Richard Morris Hunt to design a 70-room Italian Renaissance-style palazzo inspired by the 16th-century palaces of Genoa and Turin. One of his descendants opened The Breakers in 1948 to raise funds for the preservation society and in 1972, the Preservation Society purchased the house from her heirs. Today, the house is designated a National Historic Landmark.

In episode 2 of *The Gilded Age*, the billiard room is where George Russell intrigues with City Alderman Patrick Morris over a game and the music room was introduced as the Russells' ballroom.

## Marble House



Photograph: courtesy The Preservation Society of Newport County

The Marble House was built between 1888 and 1892 for Mr. and Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt as a summer house but it became a "social and architectural landmark that set the pace for Newport's subsequent transformation from a quiet summer colony of wooden houses to the legendary resort of opulent stone palaces," the preservation society says. As the leading hostess in Newport, Alva Vanderbilt envisioned Marble House as her "temple to the arts" in America and cost about \$11 million, \$7 million of which was spent on marble. Eventually, Alva Vanderbilt had a Chinese Tea House built on the seaside cliffs, where she hosted rallies for women's right to vote. She sold the house to Frederick H. Prince in 1932 and then in 1963, the preservation society acquired the house in 1963. In 2006, Marble House was designated a National Historic Landmark.

In *The Gilded Age*, Consuelo Vanderbilt's bedroom at Marble House stands in for George Russell's bedroom.

## The Elms



Photograph: Gavin Ashworth

The Elms was built for Mr. and Mrs. Edward Julius Berwind of Philadelphia and New York in 1901 and modeled after the mid-18th-century French chateau d'Asnieres outside Paris. Inside, they showcased Renaissance ceramics, 18th-century French and Venetian paintings and Oriental jades, the preservation society says. Its Classical Revival gardens featured bronze sculpture, a park and garden featuring marble pavilions, fountains, a sunken garden and carriage house and garage (these gardens were recently restored). After their descendants died, the house and its contents were sold at public auction in 1961 and in the next year, the preservation society purchased The Elms and opened the house to the public. In 1996, The Elms was designated a National Historic Landmark.

In *The Gilded Age*, the kitchen was used as the kitchen at the Russells'.

## Rosecliff



Photograph: Shutterstock



[Rosecliff](#) is one of the more famous mansions in Newport. Commissioned by Nevada silver heiress Theresa Fair Oelrichs in 1899 to be modeled after the Grand Trianon, a smaller residence at Versailles, it was completed in 1902 at a reported cost of \$2.5 million. Oelrichs hosted many parties here, including a fairy tale dinner and a party featuring famed magician Harry Houdini, according to the preservation society. Her husband, George Bancroft, grew thousands of roses here, which became a famous attraction. Rosecliff is now preserved through the generosity of its last private owners, who gave the house, its furnishings and an endowment to the Preservation Society in 1971. Several films have been shot here, including *The Great Gatsby*, *True Lies*, *Amistad* and *27 Dresses*.

**Note: It's not currently open to the public but can be reserved for private events.**

## Chateau-sur-Mer



Photograph: Shutterstock

Like something out of a French fairytale, [Chateau-sur-Mer](#) was the most palatial residence in Newport from its completion in 1852 until the appearance of the Vanderbilt houses in the 1890s, the preservation society says. It hosted the "Fete Champetre," an elaborate country picnic for more than 2,000 guests held in 1857 and the debutante ball for Miss Edith Wetmore in 1889 among other major parties. It was built for William Shepard Wetmore, who died, leaving the home to his children. His son, George Peabody Wetmore had a distinguished political career as Governor of Rhode Island and as a U.S. Senator. He died in 1921 and his wife died in 1927. The house was purchased by the Preservation Society in 1969 and in 2006 it was designated a National Historic Landmark.

In *The Gilded Age*, the home's exterior is used for Caroline Astor's Beechwood House and its boarding house is used for a scene with Oscar van Rhijn, and another room serves as Agnes van Rhijn's bedroom, according to [parade.com](#).

## Hunter House



Photograph: Gavin Ashworth

Unlike the other mansions, [Hunter House](#) was built earlier in the 18th century, between 1748 and 1754 by Jonathon Nichols Jr. After he died, Colonel Joseph Wanton Jr. moved in and enlarged the house with a south wing and a second chimney, transforming the building into a formal Georgian mansion with a large central hall, the preservation society says. During the American Revolution, Wanton, who was a loyalist, fled and his home became the headquarters for the French around 1780. After the war, William Hunter, a U.S. Senator and President Andrew Jackson's charge d'affaires to Brazil, bought the house. Between the mid-1860s and mid-1940s, it was passed through a series of owners. This house was the first to be preserved by the preservation society, which was then just a small group of concerned citizens (in 1945). They restored Hunter House to the era of Colonel Wanton (1757 to 1779).

In *The Gilded Age*, Hunter House is used as the Doylestown, Pennsylvania, office of Brook family lawyer Tom Raikes, according to the Providence Journal.

## International Tennis Hall of Fame/Newport Casino





Photograph: courtesy of The Preservation Society of Newport County

[This National Historic Landmark](#) first opened on July 26, 1880 as the Newport Casino and social club for Newport's turn-of-the-century summer elite. James Gordon Bennett Jr. commissioned McKim, Mead & White to design something that would evoke an English design, according to the International Tennis Hall of Fame's website. The Newport Casino had a block of shops on Bellevue Avenue, a restaurant and gentlemen's lodging as well as archery, billiards, concerts, dancing, dining, horse shows, lawn bowling, reading, tea parties and performing arts as well as some of its present-day sports—lawn tennis, croquet and court tennis. Tennis became its big claim to fame in 1881 when the first U.S. National Men's Singles Championship was held here. By 1914, the event had outgrown Newport, leading the USNLTA to relocate the championships to the West Side Tennis Club in Forest Hills here in Queens. The tournament evolved to become known as the US Open.

You can plan your Gilded Age-themed weekend getaway to Newport by checking out the other incredibly preserved mansions and buildings [here](#).