



THE LEGACY

Exploring the history of the Garrett-Jacobs Mansion

2022

GARRETT-JACOBS MANSION ENDOWMENT FUND, INC.

Herter Brothers, Decorators of the Gilded Age

The Frick Family and Victorian Era Values

Herter Brothers, a New York City-based interior design firm, defined the esthetic sense of the ultra-rich during the Gilded Age, the term for the era after the Civil War until the early 20th century. The firm's best work in Baltimore is in the stunning foyer of the Garrett-Jacobs Mansion. The foyer is a soaring two-story space topped by a coffered ceiling and embellished by carved paneling, Tiffany windows, and a masterful spiral stair crowned by a multihued Tiffany dome. Architect Stanford White designed the foyer to be a showstopper, and the



Robert and Mary Frick Garrett

Herter Brothers craftspeople's woodworking skills and design sensibilities transformed White's ideas into the magnificent room we still enjoy today.

Young and Wealthy: Robert and Mary Frick Garrett

Baltimore's Robert and Mary Frick Garrett were among the newly rich seeking a grand presence in society. In 1884, Robert succeeded his father, John Work Garrett, as president of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad (B&O) and became a colleague of other wealthy Gilded Age industrialists, including the Vanderbilts, Morgans, and

Goulds. To entertain in the grand style their position required, Robert and Mary Frick transformed their Mount Vernon Place home, a gift from John Work Garrett upon their marriage in 1872, into a magnificent mansion where they hosted not only the luminaries of Baltimore society, but also the elite of New York, government officials, business and railroad leaders, and influential politicians.

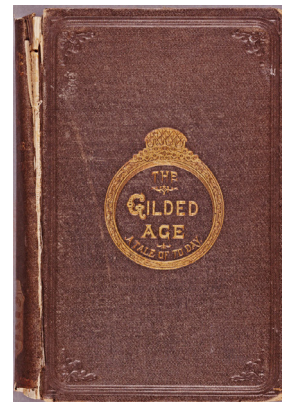
Herter Brothers and McKim, Mead & White

The Garretts selected Stanford White of the firm of McKim, Mead & White as



The foyer of the Garrett-Jacobs Mansion

their architect. White, whose name would become synonymous with the Gilded Age, was adept at melding features from the past and trends of the present into exciting and eclectic designs. Like his clients, White appreciated the massive and beautiful European mansions, estates, and monasteries that many American travelers marveled at. To create the breathtaking entrance foyer in the Garretts' mansion, White turned to Herter Brothers, relying on the firm's renown for designing beautifully crafted and resplendent interiors. Herter Brothers' furniture, flooring, and drapery testified to their reputation for artisanship and creative vision and could be found across the nation.



The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today is an 1873 novel by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner that satirizes the greed and political corruption following the American Civil War. Its title introduced the name "Gilded Age" for an era that created great wealth for some Americans. New industries – railroads, mines, steel plants, and investment banks – evolved into giant moneymaking businesses that produced a new class of very rich who wanted to proclaim their wealth and enter high society. The Gilded Age's "new money" found recognition and inclusion by creating extravagant mansions where they could host elegant entertainments followed by sumptuous suppers.

Gustave and Christian Herter: Founders of the Firm

Herter Brothers was the culmination of the vision and expertise of Gustave and Christian Herter. Born in Germany, the brothers immigrated to New York City – Gustave in 1848 and Christian in 1859 – where they found great opportunity during the Gilded Age.

Gustave (1830-1892) and Christian (1839-1883) learned their skills in Stuttgart, Germany, first as members of the demanding woodworking guilds, and then as assistants in the workshop of their father, Christian Herter. As woodworkers in Germany, they were familiar with designs and furniture popular in Germany and European cities, especially Paris. The elder Christian Herter was an “ebenist,” a highly skilled woodworker adept at adding veneer and inlay. This skill in inlay would become one of the brothers’ characteristic techniques in furniture design. Gustave’s early designs and later Christian’s adaptation of Japanese motifs in marquetry (where one wood is inlaid into another) often identifies a piece as a Herter Brothers masterpiece.



This chair in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art represents a typical highly decorated and carved Gustave Herter design.

100 woodworkers, many also from Germany. Similarly trained in the guilds, his fellow Germans were skilled craftspeople and expert carvers, capable of rendering intricate, detailed, and artful designs. Gustave understood what his audience wanted and was able to adapt European designs for the tastes of his American clients. As the head designer, he oversaw the design of all aspects of interior decoration. From his company’s huge stockpile of wood varieties, Gustave’s workers produced furniture and other interior design of excellent workmanship and beautiful ornamentation.

Gustave’s designs were dynamic. He kept up with the latest trends through exhibitions and publications, taking note of the elaborate furnishings and decor favored by Americans who wanted both function and ornament. While his esthetic leaned toward the Classical, he absorbed ideas from a variety of artistic sources and melded new trends and variations into his work. He was inspired by Owen Jones’ 1856 book, *The Grammar of Ornament*, which compiled examples of ornamentation from different historical eras and geographic areas. Wallpaper designs, fabric textures, and different woods all inspired the pattern, color, and shape of Gustave’s firm’s furniture.

Building a Reputation in America: Gustave Herter

Upon arriving in New York, Gustave Herter first settled in a Lower Manhattan German community where many other skilled immigrant woodworkers lived and worked. After laboring in various shops, he established a partnership with Auguste Pottier, a French woodworker. In 1851, he joined cabinetmaker Erastus Bulkley to found Bulkley and Herter. The firm relocated uptown on Broadway where other successful cabinetmakers and decorators also operated showrooms. During his time with Bulkley, Gustave designed two entries for the New York Crystal Palace exhibition of 1853 that demonstrated his artisanship and historically derived creative designs.

Gustave’s work attracted the eye of wealthy clients. As early as 1850, New Orleans hotelier Ruggles Sylvester Morse engaged Gustave to decorate his entire home as well as his summer retreat – Victoria Mansion – in Portland, Maine. The interior Gustave designed for Victoria Mansion is the only commission by Gustave that survives intact today.

By 1860, Gustave had established his own firm, employing over



One of the Herter Brothers’ interiors is this gold bathroom installation at Thomas Harrison Garrett’s mansion, Evergreen, in North Baltimore. In addition to the gold, it features a mosaic design on walls

The Younger Brother: Christian Herter

Gustave's younger brother, Christian, immigrated to the United States 11 years after his brother and became a full partner with Gustave in 1864. The firm, renamed Herter Brothers Decorations and Furniture, expanded its reputation and wealth. While Gustave was skilled and innovative, Christian brought a special spark of creative energy and synthesis to the business. His ease with borrowing of different styles was enhanced by a year in France.

Already a sophisticated, cosmopolitan creative artist who spoke several languages, Christian learned new design trends while in Paris, the globe's epicenter of design and style. While there, Christian he was influenced by Pierre-Victor Gallard, the most sought-after Parisian decorator of the time. Gallard was familiar with all grand decorative styles, though he specialized in "eclectic classicism." From Gallard, Christina experienced the entire scope of decoration and ways of synthesizing of styles. Working closely with Gallard and becoming familiar with the work of other important decorators resulted in a broadened vision and skill in adaptation and amalgamation of styles. The French remained the leading design influence on Americans through the 1860s, and Christian's gift for synthesizing influences and translating French styles and models to American needs and tastes brought decorating to a new level. Soon after Christian's return from Paris, in 1870, Gustave returned to Germany to educate his children, and the younger Herter became the firm's leader and source of its vision.

Christian Herter embraced another set of influences from Europe: that of the English. By the mid-1850s, two artistic movements arose in England that would complement his artistic inclinations. The Aesthetic Movement (1860-1900) and the Arts and Crafts Movement (1880-1920), both of which celebrated individually crafted objects. These movements sought to make everything – from furniture to vases – artistic. The two movements' followers valued "honest" handcrafted items – just what Herter Brothers excelled at – and deplored as "soulless" the mass-produced furniture that had become standard. Words like "reform" and "moral" were associated with these movements. The Gilded Age's newly moneyed class responded to the "honesty" of individually designed furnishings and held in high esteem pieces that were unique expressions of their creators.

Two English artists, Alfred Waterhouse (1830-1905) and Edwin W. Godwin (1833-1886), were particularly influential in revolutionizing Christian's designs. Reflecting a neo-Gothic inspiration, Waterhouse designed the Manchester Town Hall and its furniture in 1868. Waterhouse's chairs often featured a spool design inspired by medieval chairs. Christian's unique rendition of the spool made it a signature ornament for his furniture.

Japanese art, made accessible to Europeans when the nation opened trade to the West in the 1850s, greatly influenced Godwin, who found beauty in its austerity and simplicity, as well as its rectilinear shapes, nature motifs, and stylized designs. Through Godwin's introduction of these elements into English design in the 1870s, Christian discovered new variations of ornamentation. With his great talent for synthesis and his individual creative genius, Christian masterfully translated this new influence into his own work. For the rest of his career, England and Japan were his principal sources of inspiration.



Christian Herter's designs often married Japanese-inspired effects with austere English style. For this piece, the Mark Hopkins Side Chair, housed in the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum in New York City, Christian "painted on" Japanese nature motifs through marquetry, using different woods to create color. The graceful legs, decorated with spooling, were a specialty of Herter Brothers. Gilding in design cuts added richness, as did the opulent upholstery for the seat. (Credit: Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum in New York City)



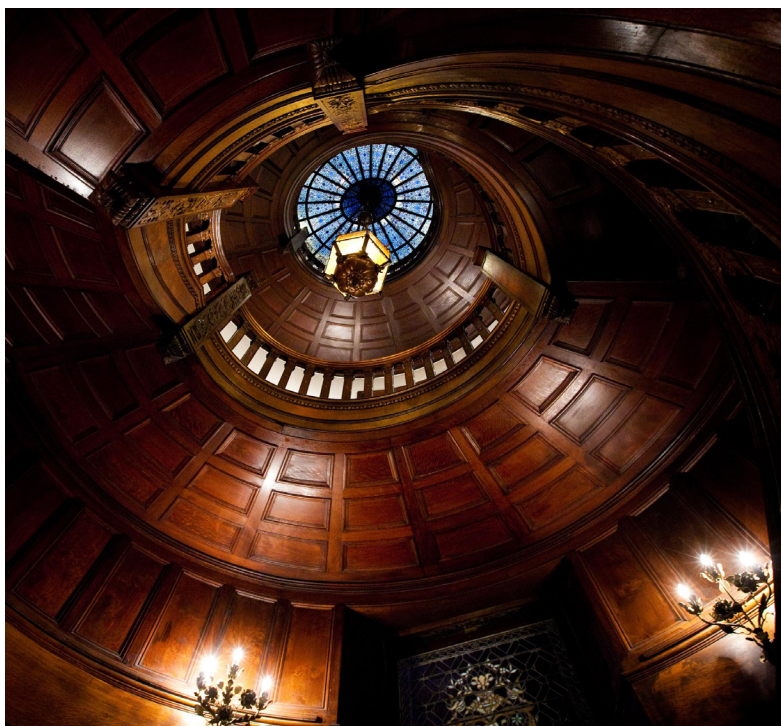
Herter Brothers advertisement

A Firm of Innovative Designers

While excelling in furniture building, Herter Brothers also was considered New York's leading decorating firm. Their wide-ranging expertise prompted William H. Vanderbilt, head of New York Central Railroad, to engage Herter Brothers to design his "Triple Palace," a project consisting of three neighboring mansions on Fifth Avenue. Here, Herter Brothers returned to Classical vocabularies while still incorporating new trends. Each room was designed with a different theme (Moorish, Japanese, Egyptian, Classical) and many featured carved interiors similar in design to the foyer of the Garrett-Jacobs Mansion.

Herter Brother's Legacy Lives On in Baltimore

In 1882, Christian retired from Herter Brothers and returned to Germany, leaving William Baumgartner and William Gilman Nichols to lead the firm. It was during this era that Herter Brothers designed the opulent interiors of the Garrett-Jacobs Mansion.



Spiral Staircase at the The foyer of the Garrett-Jacobs Mansion

In 1906, Herter Brothers closed its doors. While Herter Brothers furniture can still be seen at museums, auctions, and antiques shops, few of their crafted interiors remain. The Garrett-Jacobs Mansion's dramatic foyer one of the few places where visitors can experience the work of Herter Brothers on a grand scale. Baltimore has reason to celebrate the existence of this extraordinary space imagined by Stanford White and executed by Herter Brothers.

Bernadette Low, Ph.D., is a member of the Garrett-Jacobs Mansion Endowment Fund (GJMEF) Board of Trustees and Professor Emerita at Community College of Baltimore County, Dundalk.

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