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ABOUT THE COVER: Timothy Lambert has been at Martin Guitar in Nazareth, Northampton County, for more than nine years. Ginnie Lodge’s tour of the iconic guitar maker begins on page 20. CANON EOS 77D, 75-300MM, 1/40, 150-800, 1/50, 5

THESE PAGES: Joe Endy of Sinking Spring photographed this American kestrel in Lancaster County at the Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area in January 2019. He observed it as it hunted the fields, and when it unexpectedly flew nearby, he was able to obtain this closeup.

CANON EOS 5DIII, 400MM IS II, 1/250, 1/1000, 1/1500, 85-200MM, 1/250.
Tales from the Gilded Age

The Frick complex showcases art, fashion and transportation at industrialist’s former home

by Hilary Daninhirsch, photographs courtesy of The Frick Pittsburgh
Frick Art Museum visitors view painting “Sir Joshua Vanneck and His Family,” which Arthur Devis created in 1752 in London. This painting and others that are part of the Frick collection are viewable with detailed information online at artsandculture.google.com.
The Gilded Age is alive and well in Point Breeze, a quiet residential Pittsburgh neighborhood that was once the home of noted industrialist Henry Clay Frick. Within a city that today is a hub for education, medicine and technology, the Frick Pittsburgh museum complex pays homage to the region's industrial heritage when Frick was at the helm. Mostly known for being a key player in creating the Steel City, Frick was also a noted art patron and collector of carriages and automobiles.

His home rests on five and a half picturesque acres and is a tranquil oasis in the heart of an otherwise bustling city. The property features a car and carriage museum, an art museum and Frick's Italianate mansion, Clayton, alongside a café, greenhouse and museum store. Plans are in the works to open the historic Frick family children's playhouse to the public. The cozy scale of the museum complex makes it easy to digest in a pleasant afternoon.

A Family's Story

AT THE FRICK, STORIES are told about Pittsburgh's past, its connection to the world today and how one family lived at the height of the city's industrial age. The Frick tells its stories via nearly 12,000 objects from its collections. Clayton, built in 1870 and enlarged in 1892, accounts for 10,000 of those. In fact, an astounding 94 percent of objects in Clayton are original and date to a time when Frick's daughter, Helen, occupied the mansion at the end of her life.

"Clayton is really a time capsule of her family's holdings," executive director Elizabeth Barker explains.

“It is largely unchanged since 1892,” Dawn Reid Brean, associate curator of decorative arts, says. “It’s really grand and is almost overwhelming in its impressiveness.”

The museum uses the family’s life experience as a springboard to tell a broader societal story about this bygone time and to showcase how one family lived during Pittsburgh’s golden industrial manufacturing era. Yet the stories also provide a connection to present day.

“We want to use our collections and resources to make the Frick relevant to more people,” says Amanda Gillen, director of learning and visitor experience.

Fashion Focused

HELEN, WHO SHARED HER father’s strong interest in art, was the force behind creating an art museum on the property. A year after Helen’s death, the Frick began to host traveling art exhibits of traditional paintings connected to what was in the permanent collection.

"It is interesting to think of the Pittsburgh roots of one of the great art collections in the U.S.,” Barker says.

Recently, the Frick has started what Brean calls a “more ambitious line of programming to connect to social history and popular history.”

One of the things that make the Frick Pittsburgh so unique is its focus on fashion, drawn from its own textile collections, as both Helen and her mother were highly interested in fashion. Over the years, the younger Frick saved a great deal of the family’s clothing, from undergarments to ball gowns. This focus on fashion is also a way for the museum to carve out a unique niche.

As for whether Helen would have supported such an endeavor, Brean says, “I think she understood the power of artifacts and how they can tell history from a different perspective.”

Previous traveling exhibits celebrating fashion have included “Killer Heels,” an homage to shoes; “Undressed,” an underwear exhibit that came straight from the Victoria and Albert Museum in London; and most recently “Maker & Muse: Women and Early 20th Century Art Jewelry.” On the horizon for this spring is an exhibit featuring Mexican painter Frida Kahlo and how she defined herself as an artist through fashion. Another exhibit planned for the summer will showcase women’s athletic fashion as a springboard for examining women in sports and their changing role in society.

Going Virtual

MUSEUMS HAVE SUFFERED DURING the pandemic, and the Frick is no exception. In normal times, the museum welcomes more than 120,000 visitors a year from throughout Pennsylvania and the world. Since COVID-19 hit, the Frick, in collaboration with several other regional museums, used a grant from the Richard King Mellon Foundation to develop a means for delivering...
Visitors enjoy the grounds (top) at The Frick Pittsburgh and the Car and Carriage Museum (above).

1970, and Clayton opened to the public in 1990 after a six-year restoration process. The dual anniversary year made the Frick staff more introspective, especially about how it could better serve the community.

“We want to think a lot about the next 50 years and what are the stories we want to tell our visitors,” Barker says. “That is a big shift. We are trying to be more conscious and self-aware in putting our visitors first and seeing every experience through their eyes.”

Whether you use the word “boutique,” “focused,” or “eclectic” to describe the museum, it is apparent that the Frick is small enough to be a welcoming place capable of delivering a personalized experience.

“We hope people leave feeling that they were welcome and that we cared that they were there,” Gillen says. “We have this overarching initiative of radical empathy with our visitors and with each other, this idea of trying to meet people where they are and being a site that responds to what people need and want.”

— Hilary Dannahirsch writes from Pittsburgh.

**WHEN YOU GO**

The Frick Pittsburgh is located at 7227 Reynolds St. in Pittsburgh. During the pandemic, check before going to see if the museum is open to the public. The Frick also offers a full lineup of virtual options, including curator talks, exhibitions, tours and events. 412-371-0600; thefrickpittsburgh.org