



# Maryland's Government House

*Governor and Mrs. Harry Hughes in Annapolis*

TEXT BY CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DERRY MOORE





THERE ARE FEW PLEASURES AS SWEET as that of moving into a house that needs no work, and whoever succeeds Harry Hughes as governor of Maryland this January should include at least a paragraph of thanks to Patricia Hughes in his inaugural speech.

Built in 1868, Government House, as the official residence is called, was decidedly "shabby," recalls Mrs. Hughes, when the couple moved in. "Without being stuffy about it," she continues, "I wanted the house to be something people would take pride in."

What began as a Victorian Second Empire-style mansion was remodeled in 1936 along the lines of a Georgian Revival country house. (This made it more stately but also rendered the dozen-odd fireplaces defunct.) As for the interior, says Patricia Hughes, it was a confusing mix of styles. Soon after she became the state's First Lady in 1979, Mrs. Hughes made what she now refers to as the "terrible



ABOVE: Governor and Mrs. Harry Hughes of Maryland moved into their official residence in 1979. That year, Patricia Hughes began her collaboration with the Maryland Historical Society's chief curator, Stiles T. Colwill, and associate curator Gregory R. Weidman. The six-year project involved redesigning each of the public rooms to reflect a different period of Maryland's history.

LEFT: Government House, built in 1868 by the state of Maryland, was renovated in the 1930s to resemble an English country house.





The Billy Baldwin room represents the 20th century in Government House's sequence of historical rooms. Baldwin was a native of Baltimore, and the room typifies his groundbreaking interiors. The artworks too are exclusively by Maryland artists. At the window, *Standing Woman* by Reuben Kramer. Lamps from Wicker Works.

mistake" of calling the residence a "bastard house." The phrase was not taken for the technical description it was, and a brief hullabaloo ensued. But all has been forgiven, needless to say. Six years later, Government House was pedigreed to a fare-thee-well.

The idea of setting each of the mansion's six public rooms in a different period of Maryland's history grew out of conversations Mrs. Hughes had with friends, especially Leonard Crewe, Jr. He set up Friends of Government House, which would eventually raise the necessary \$1.4 million to do the job. The project's guiding force, according to Mrs. Hughes, was Stiles T. Colwill, chief curator of the Maryland Historical Society. Together with Gregory R. Weidman, associate curator, they devised a master plan for all the rooms. With an eye to the future, Mrs. Hughes decided the project should not reflect her or the curators' particular tastes. There were only two criteria: The rooms had to be historically correct and useful.

"My first thought was to keep it a home," she says. "We







the furnishings in the Empire parlor were made in Maryland, including the center table and circa 1830 painted pier table. A portrait of Governor John Eager Howard by Thomas Sully hangs over the sofa. Upholstery and drapery fabric from Brunschwig & Fils; carpeting by Stark.







entertain here as we would in our own house." Entertain they undeniably have. Since 1979 they have hosted over two hundred fifty balls, dinners, receptions and buffets, for the likes of Vice President and Mrs. Bush, the duke and duchess of Kent, the Maryland School for the Blind, and groups of Maryland farmers and fishermen. Given that kind of traffic, delicacy in décor had to coexist with utility.

The first room to be reinstalled was the Federal reception room. Remarkably, the work was done in six weeks. Colwill and Weidman took their cue from the existing Neoclassical mantelpiece and decorated in the Federal style. The room is dominated by *George Washington at Dorchester Heights*, a painting dating from the mid-nineteenth century by Jane Stuart, daughter of Gilbert Stuart.

This was not a natural selection, however, since General Washington was not a Marylander. "They—the historical society—allowed us to have it only because he resigned his commission in 1783 across the street," Mrs. Hughes explains. Her favorite painting in the room is a portrait by Sarah Peale: "She was the first woman artist in America to sustain herself, and since I'm interested in women's issues that gives me great pleasure."

Eight months after the Federal room, the Empire parlor was finished—a gift from Leonard Crewe, Jr. The yellow of the walls was the exact shade used in the home of a prominent Baltimorean, Charles Carroll of Homewood, son of a signer of the Declaration of Independence. The drapery design was selected after the curators consulted a design book published in England in 1826 and known to have been sold in Baltimore bookstores later that year. Once the Empire room was unveiled in late 1979, Mrs. Hughes decided to hold one "room opening" a year in order to build public momentum for the project. It worked.

Mrs. Hughes calls the next room to be renovated, the eighteenth-century drawing room, "the most important room in the house." The Charles Willson Peale portrait above the mantel is of Governor Thomas Johnson, "the first elected governor of Maryland," says Mrs. Hughes, "so we gave him the place of honor." Ten of the exquisite shieldback chairs now in the room, as well as the Chippendale tea table, were owned by Johnson.

At the opening, the room was still incomplete. To entice donors, the curators placed blown-up photos of desired objects around the room. One visitor gave a Chippendale sofa—no small acquisition—but it was discovered to have been made in Pennsylvania, not Maryland, so with some

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RIGHT: In the 18th-century drawing room is a Charles Willson Peale portrait of Maryland's first elected governor, Thomas Johnson. Upholstery fabric by Bruntschwig & Fils.

OPPOSITE: The Victorian parlor, with its Renaissance Revival décor, reflects 1870s Maryland. The marble mantel is the only one in the public rooms that survives from the original Government House.



ABOVE: State dinners are held in the 18th-century-style dining room. Chippendale-style table and chairs were made by a local firm. Silver from Kirk Stieff; dinnerware from Lenox.





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## GOVERNMENT HOUSE

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regret it was returned. Meanwhile, a Maryland Chippendale sofa was found, and now awaits re-covering.

The eighteenth-century-style dining room, which adjoins the drawing room, "is kind of neo," says Mrs. Hughes with a smile. (The remark is primarily directed at the room's reproduction furniture.) A gleaming punchbowl from the old *S.S. Maryland* is poised in a window bay. The shutters in this room were once nailed shut to keep out the throb of street noise. "I sometimes call it the Place de la Concorde," she says, referring to the busy avenue outside.

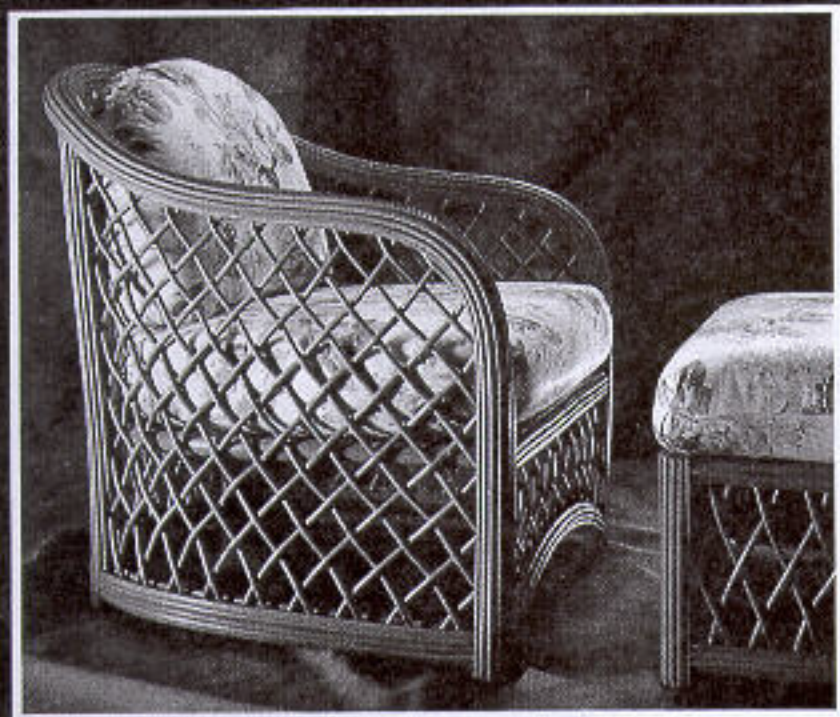
The penultimate room in the chronological sequence is the Victorian parlor, which, before the curators and craftsmen started work on it, had been a cloakroom. It is dark, full of armchairs and marble statuary and is precisely Victorian, right down to the paintings and taxidermy.

It is a giant leap from Victoriana to Billy Baldwin, but to those who prefer sisal to damask, a pleasant one. Baldwin, sometimes called the dean of American interior designers, was a native of Baltimore and had agreed to

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assist with the transformation of the Government House conservatory, formerly a dining area. Baldwin died in 1983, but his spirit is very much in evidence in the room that bears his name. The walls are lacquered a deep brown, just as in his New York apartment. The floor is covered in sisal, and the furniture is much the same as other pieces he designed, including his trademark slipper chair. A party for six hundred was held to celebrate the completion of the room, and with it the conclusion of the project that has done so much to banish the "shabbiness" of Government House. □

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From the Harvest  
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heaving greens of hemlock, fir and pine; vertical grays and whites; slim horizontals of twig and birch-score; crumpled russet-gray of oak leaf and puffball. Now dead weeds straggle, gray stone walls outline irregular rectangles, and emerging granite boulders push like whales with their great shoulders through the gray-brown sea of fallen leaves.

Finally we reach the shape of the durable enduring world, fundament, skull underneath the flesh of shouts and colors. We arrive at line and form, without feeling except feeling for line and form, strong in what they omit and what they oppose: Son and daughter attack nothing so much as the loins they start from. Fall, which begins as a Latin Quarter of passionate violent color—not so much French as Spanish, not so much Spanish as Italian, and not Italian of pope and doge, of Caravaggio and Michelangelo, but Italian of Cellini's breasted saltcellar and equally breasted self-esteem, or Italian of twentieth-century graveyard and wedding party—this fall dissolves flesh or flesh falls away to reveal that

**European autumn is a dust of centuries over the painter's light, taking winter's oncoming darkness into itself.**

in Heraclitean fashion the bones under the flesh are flesh's opposite.

Order and taste turn Japanese, the garden which is the analytic palette a thousand years early: beige sand and gravel, raked for direction without motion, sand-sea or frozen desert against the arranged precise madness of miniature mountains, artificial Fujis of restrained romantic grays and gray-blues; meanwhile on every side the framing gray-green moss, Kyoto's evergreen, and rocks that make more borders. New Hampshire's November is Zen Cubist de Stijl. □

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