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**Government House:
Recounting History
Room by Room**

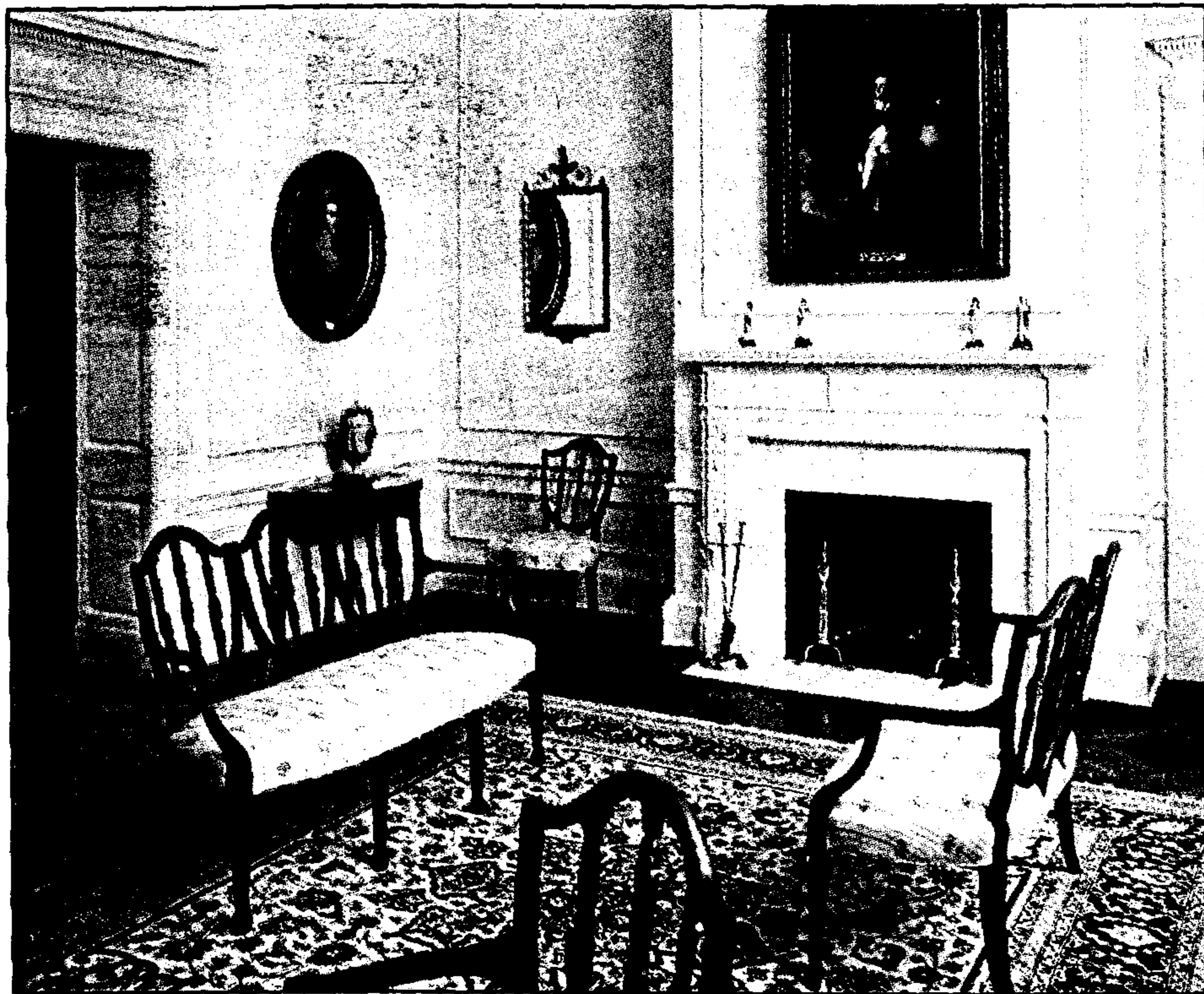


◆ The new look of Government House is largely the result of the initiative of Patricia Hughes, wife of Gov. Harry Hughes, and the historic expertise of Stiles T. Colwill, chief curator of the Maryland Historical Society.

◆ The first room completed in the reinstallation was the Federal reception room off the main entrance to the house. Among the furnishings are a portrait of "George Washington at Dorchester Heights" (circa 1820) by Jane Stuart after her father Gilbert Stuart, and Rembrandt Peale's portrait of former first lady "Priscilla Ridgely" (circa 1805).



◆ The warm tonewalls of the Billy Baldwin 20th Century Room are popular in the '50s contemporary Maryland style.



Redecorating Recounting History Room

By Rob Howe

If home is where the heart is, then Maryland's figurative home resides at the Government House in Annapolis. As politically simplistic as that may sound, it was not always culturally and historically true.

In fact, it is only in the past six years that the 117-year-old, 51-room Georgian mansion, the official residence of the governor, evolved from a hodgepodge of uncoordinated rooms into a coherent, living storybook of Maryland's diverse heritage.

Shortly after his inauguration in 1979, Gov. Harry Hughes and his wife, Patricia, began a comprehensive reinstallation project designed to remake the mansion's seven public rooms into individual representations of Maryland's various historic periods. Each room was to aspire to the historic accuracy demanded of a museum yet remain fully functional for parties and various official occasions.

The successful completion of the project, funded to

date by \$1.4 million in gifts and cash donations, was celebrated in June with a gala christening thrown for the Billy Baldwin 20th Century Room.

"Restoring governors' houses is sort of 'in' now," says Patricia Hughes, "but we're unique in that we are approaching this project the way we are, by doing each room in a different period of its own state's history and using its own state's furnishings and artworks."

The Billy Baldwin room, intended to represent the cream of Maryland's cultural crop from 1950 to the present, is an excellent case in point. The late Baldwin, a native Baltimorean who became a nationally celebrated interior designer from the '40s through the '70s, had originally agreed to redecorate the 19-by-33 foot former conservatory himself. After he grew ill and died in 1983, the room was formally dedicated to his memory and esthetic philosophy. Most of the furnishings and colorings reflect themes he made popular in the '50s.

The room is also a showcase for a number of well-known contemporary Maryland artists. Works by



▲ The view from the Empire room into the Billy Baldwin room shows the dramatic contrast between the two periods. The circa-1850 marble bust is of General William Henry Winder (1775-1824) by Hugh Cannon after Antonio Capellano.

PHOTOS BY ERIK KVALSVIK

rm tones, white slipper chairs, sisal carpeting and black lacquered Billy Baldwin 20th Century Room reflect themes Baldwin made the '50s. The room also showcases a number of works by well-known, try Maryland artists.

by Room

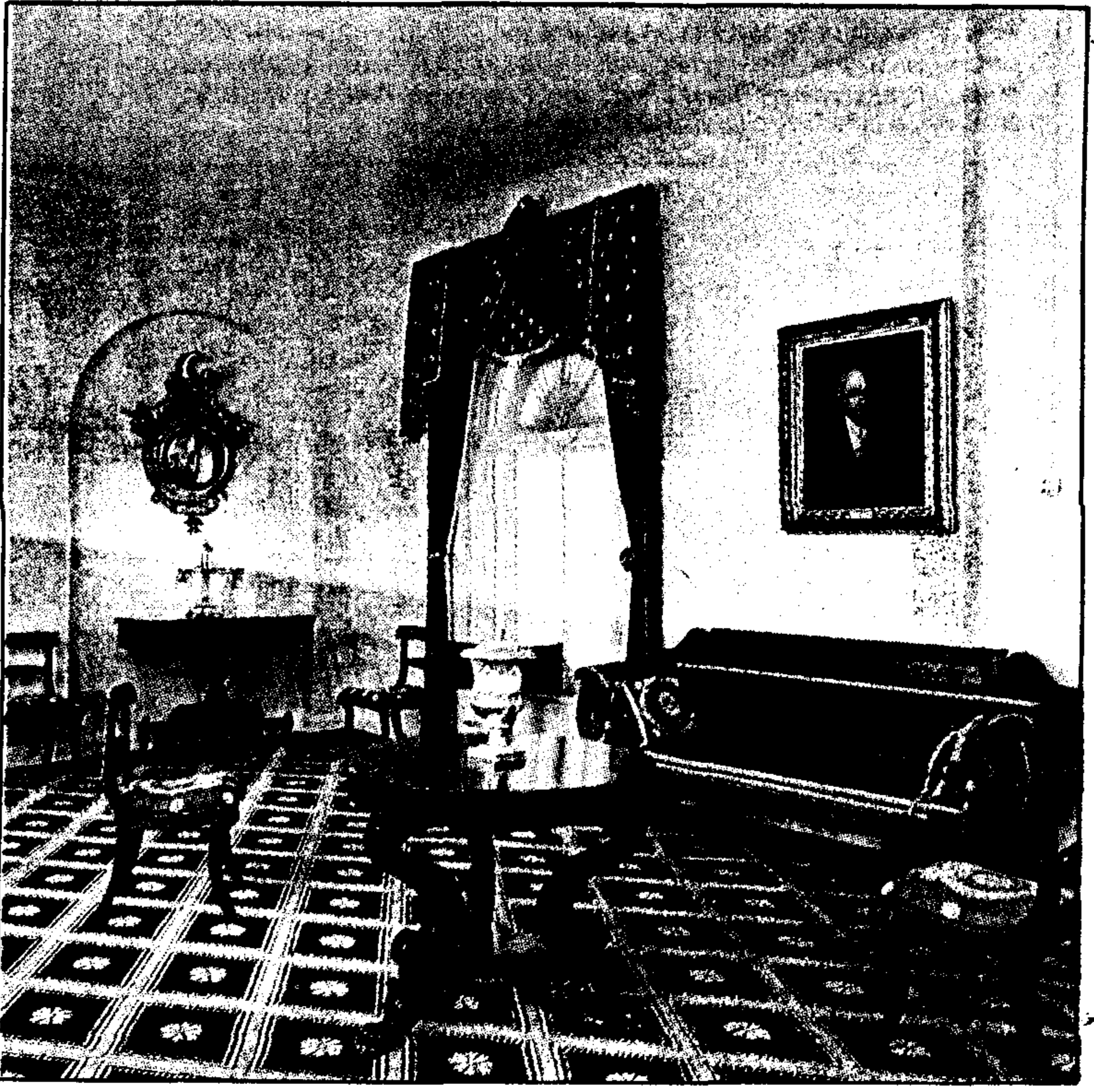
Grace Hartigan, Morris Louis, Grace Turnbull and others enliven the soft tones of the furnishings with the bright splashes and surprising sculptural forms of 20th-century tastes.

Constructed in 1868, the Second Empire mansion was transformed in 1936 into a Georgian-style country house during the administration of Gov. Harry W. Nice. The interior workings of the house were modernized under former governor Spiro T. Agnew in the late '60s—air conditioning was added, plumbing updated and even a sauna installed (the last at the family's own expense).

Over the years, though various first ladies had made partial improvements to the decor, no administration had ever addressed the interior decoration with a comprehensive design.

"I think that before, in each administration," says Patricia Hughes, "it was thought that decorating was what first ladies did: They came in and they rearranged the furniture, painted the walls, hung new

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▲ Completed in 1979, the Empire parlor is one of the house's most striking rooms. The chrome yellow of the walls and the emerald-green of the swagged curtains were popular colors during the 1800s. The green carpeting repeats the medallion motif of the anthemions adorning various pieces of furniture. The portrait of former governor John Eager Howard (1752-1827) is by Thomas Sully (circa 1820).

curtains. And that's pretty much the way it worked So then you got a mixture. This first lady would like this, and another that. A lot of things had just accumulated over time."

Seeking an impartial and informed leadership for the reinstallation project, Patricia Hughes turned to the Maryland Historical Society. Chief curator Stiles T. Colwill and Gregory R. Weidman, the society's furniture curator, were chosen to develop an overall approach and then execute individual room plans. Their design decisions were subject to the approval of the Society's Gallery Committee. (In 1979, that review process was made law by the passage of legislation establishing the Government House Trust; according to the legislation, the Gallery Committee serves as the Trust and safeguards the historical character of the rooms against potential attempts to disassemble them.)

During a preliminary tour of the house, Colwill was stunned by the poor quality of some of the furniture that sat beneath valuable portraits of revered figures from Maryland's past.

"It was really pretty appalling what was there," says Colwill.

"There were paintings that were magnificent and then there were some dime-store kind of pieces of furniture."

In some cases, rather valuable pieces were being treated with unintentional brutality. A silver tea service that now sits in a glass case in the Federal reception room dates to the early 1800s. Prior to the Hughes administration, the set was subject to frequent use and a mechanical dishwasher.

In general, Colwill and Weidman allowed the architecture of each room to dictate the period of the individual designs. In some cases renovations that had altered the historic character of a particular room had to be eliminated.

"The Victorian parlor was chosen as the Victorian room," says Colwill, "because it is the only one of the seven rooms that retained its original mantelpiece from when the house was built in the 1870s. It had some Colonial molding that had been added [in the 1930s] to make it seem Colonial. So you had this high-1870s marble mantel, and this pseudo-1790s paneling below the chair rail. It just didn't go together at all." The paneling was subsequently removed.

The first room completed was

the Federal reception room off the main entrance to the house. After a somewhat remarkable eight-week preparation time, the room was dedicated in March 1979 by Joan Mondale, then White House advocate for the arts. Subsequently renovated rooms include an Empire parlor, an 18th-century drawing room, a Victorian parlor, an 18th-century dining room and a ceremonial entry.

Completed in December 1979, the Empire room is one of the most striking. The chrome yellow walls reflect a time in the early 1800s when residential interiors in the Baltimore era were painted a similar dazzling color. The emerald-green, swagged curtains take their cue from design books published in England at the time. And green carpeting repeats the medallion motif of the anthemions adorning various pieces of furniture.

It's a bit of a visual shock to stroll through the sumptuously appointed Empire parlor to the adjoining Baldwin room and its more sedate contemporary tones.

"I think it flows fairly well," says Patricia Hughes, "and that's been a concern, that [the transition from room to room] not

Though various first ladies had made improvements to the decor, none had ever addressed the interior decoration with a comprehensive design.

be a terrible shock to people. But when people come here, they understand; they've been told that each room is different. And, in fact, the purpose of the project is to educate and teach history, as well as show the esthetic cultural heritage of the state."

According to Colwill, no other governor's mansion has honored the 20th century, tending to favor older, more traditionally respected periods. Still, given the design team's reliance on architectural detail for historic cues, the decision to make a 20th-century gallery from the former conservatory was logical.

Though the conservatory and the workroom below were constructed during the mid-'30s remodeling, the character of the

room was drastically modified by the addition of two bathrooms in 1967, during Agnew's term of office. Fixtures in the bathrooms were decidedly contemporary.

Architecturally, the primary challenge of the Baldwin room was to relocate the bathrooms and return the room to its original volume.

"The plan was to create a complete room again, not a part of a room that had been chopped off for convenience," says Bob O'Hatnick of James R. Grieves and Associates, the Baltimore architectural firm that took on the task.

The esthetic tragedy of the bathrooms was that they blocked one of the dramatic Palladian windows that reach nearly to the top of the arched 16-foot ceiling. The two bathrooms were relocated in the renovated lounge downstairs, where a new ceiling was also added.

Grieves and Associates also added valance lighting along both lengths of the room and replaced a somewhat cramped spiral stairway to the downstairs lounge with a graceful curving oak staircase.

In terms of decor, Baldwin's work seemed a natural model, though other Maryland decorators were considered. The Baltimore

design firm of Jesse Benesch and Associates assisted in finding the pieces as well as determining the room's layout.

"Baldwin was a logical choice," says Colwill. "It was an idea from the very start, but we did try to find out if there was anybody else worth looking at, and we did find a number of people who had done some small pieces, but not enough to do a whole room."

In comparison to the formality of the other six rooms, the Baldwin room, with its dominant warm tones, pillowy white slipper chairs and textured sisal carpeting, is probably the most immediately familiar and comfortable for today's visitors.

"The other rooms are very formal, and if you really look at the Baldwin room it's a very formal, structured layout," says Colwill. "But it is immediately restful and inviting. That is what he was best known for: dramatic but somehow restrained design."

The layout of the furnishings consists of three symmetrical groupings. At the southeast end of the room are two arrangements of slipper chairs and matching sofas, bounded on either end by square, stained-oak Parsons tables with glass columnar lamps. The wood tables, cotton/linen fabrics, hard paper lampshades and sisal

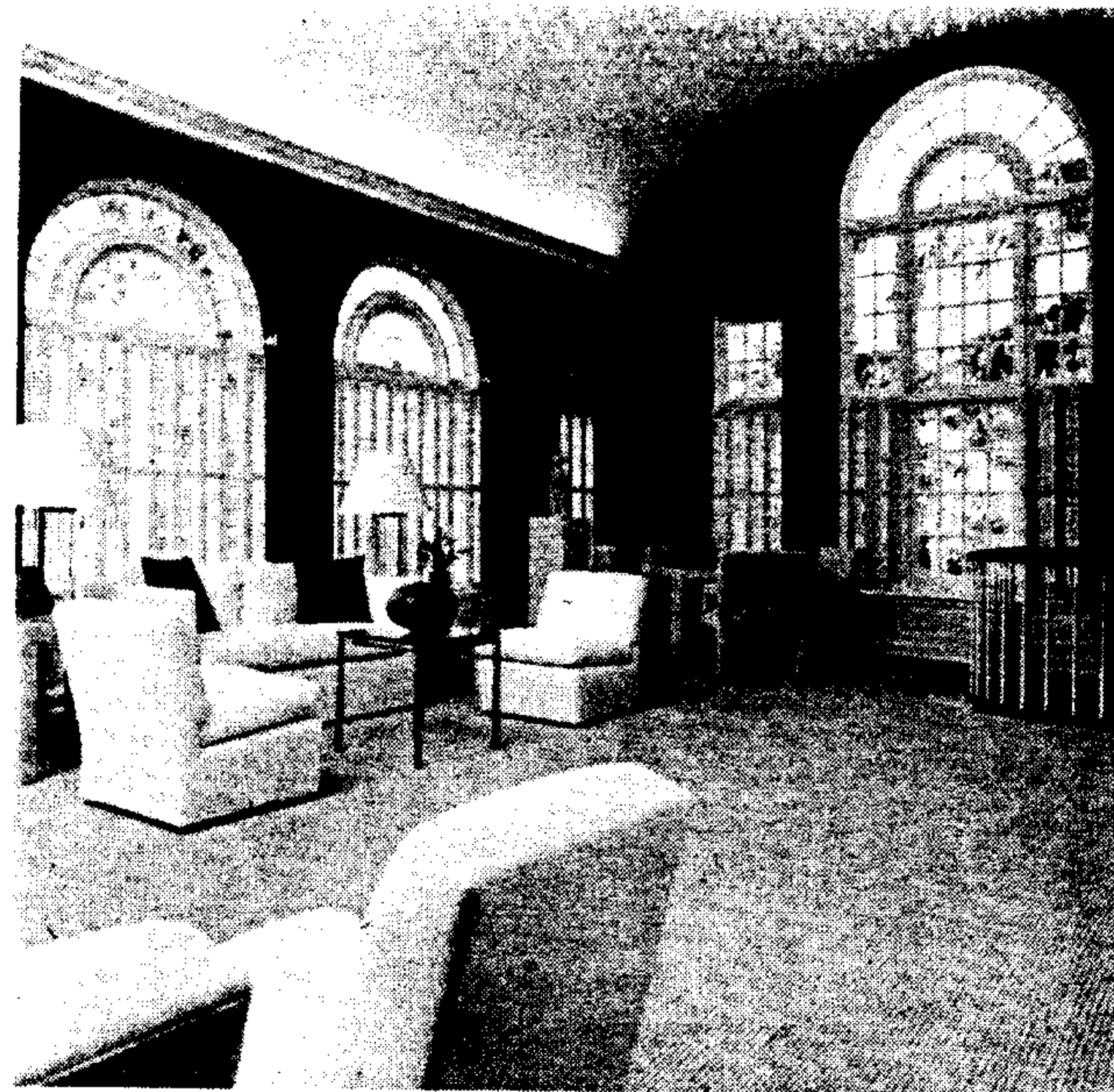
rug reflect Baldwin's preference for natural materials.

At the opposite end of the room is a stained-oak game table with four woven straw armchairs. Under the table's glass top is the top of a 1920s card table. Painted on the surface of the older tabletop is a rendering of Government House before the mid-'30s renovations.

White shutters cover the bottom sections of the six Palladian windows. And, reflecting Baldwin's sophisticated sense of flair, the walls are colored with a dark brown lacqueur, a favorite he used even in his own New York City apartment.

A special committee from the state arts community was convened to recommend artists and works that might be included in the Baldwin room. The original wish list contained about a dozen names of artists, at the top of which were Grace Hartigan and Morris Louis. Given limited wall space, only two paintings were included in the room: "Unit 62" (1962), a tall work dominated by bold stripes of color by Louis; and "Barbie" (1964), an abstract expressionist work by Hartigan.

Sculptures include: "Cat" (circa 1940), a granite work by Grace Turnbull; "X-Notion" (circa 1975), an abstract work of steel and



▲ *Valance lighting along both lengths of the room was added to the Baldwin room, and the cramped spiral stairway to the downstairs lounge was replaced with a graceful curving oak staircase.*

brass strips by Lila Katzen; and "Standing Woman" (1959), a bronze nude by Reuben Kramer that stands boldly before the large southeastern Palladian window. Sitting on a glass-topped table in the midst of one of the furniture

groupings is a raku piece by Harvey Sadow titled "Severn Flow #3" (1985).

Three more paintings have been placed in the downstairs lounge: "Western Run Valley" (circa 1965) by Trafford Klotts,

"West Liberty Farm" (1985) by Eugene Leake and "Game" (1958) by Keith Martin. "Nick" (1985), a painted steel sculpture by John Ferguson, sits on the lawn outside the lounge.

Currently all the artworks but the Martin painting are on loan from private collections and various galleries. Friends of Government House, a nonpolitical tax-exempt corporation established along with the Government House Trust in 1979 to help raise and dispense funds for the reinstallation project, hope to acquire these or comparable works through individual or group donations. To date, the Friends have raised \$100,000 in cash donations and \$1.3 million in gifts in kind for the seven-room reinstallation effort. Objects that are donated are inventoried and insured by the Gallery Committee.

With the completion of the Baldwin Room, the tour schedule for Government House has been expanded. Guided tours of the seven rooms and an accompanying slide show are by appointment, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. After a month-long summer break, tours will resume after Labor Day. For information or reservations, call 261-2961. ♦