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Mrs. Hughes in the Victorian Parlor.

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Victorian style returns to home of Md. governors

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Annapolis — For sheer dazzle, few state executive mansions can equal Maryland's storied building here on State circle. Its sweeping, three-story stair hall, a wondrous re-creation of Colonial America, simply outclasses the rest with its gorgeous vistas.

You can stroll through its lofty "state rooms" on tours and see the roots of America's Colonial hospitality, preserved on a large scale.

But suddenly, right near the main door of the mansion, you make a right turn. Here is an authentic triple gold-leaf, rosewood and marble parlor right out of the days of Mary Todd Lincoln and P. T. Barnum, a mid-Victorian masterpiece.

Victorian? Shocking, some might have said a few years back, when preserving the late Eighteenth Century ethos of Annapolis was the first or—
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Governor's colonial home harbors Victorian enclave

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der of business — and the only one — in local architecture and design.

Actually, the glittering new room, opened officially on January 17, is perfectly in key historically with the state mansion (officially called Government House). The building was constructed 113 years ago as a rambling, mid-Victorian manse, only to be "colonialized" in a 1935 remodeling.

"The Nineteenth Century has been maligned," says Patricia Hughes, Maryland's first lady, of the tradition of looking on Victorian artifacts as embarrassing honors from a tasteless age. She has been one of the prime movers in the creation of the Victorian room and in the reinstatement, as well, of museum-quality furniture and artifacts to three other public areas in Government House.

The goal, Mrs. Hughes says, is to make the mansion a "showcase for Maryland culture and history." The program is well along. Four of seven state rooms on the mansion's first floor — the Empire Parlour, the Eighteenth Century Drawing Room, the Federal Reception Room and now the Victorian Parlor — have been

"reinstalled," as sponsors prefer to phrase it, with choice Maryland antiques and artifacts dating back as far as two centuries.

"We've become productive receivers of Marylandia," Mrs. Hughes says of the acquisition of gift and long-term-loan items. She adds that the approach to the project is what she calls populist. "We don't want people to get the idea that this is a museum." The mansion as it stands is "everybody's house," she says, and should be treated as such in the large-scale "reinstalling" project.

The refurnishing of the mansion's public areas is screened by the gallery committee of the Maryland Historical Society, acting as the Government House Trust, with Stiles T. Colwill, chief curator of the society, in charge.

Supporting the trust's work is a volunteer fund-raising organization, the tax-exempt Friends of Government House (P.O. Box 346, Annapolis 21404). "We've received gifts ranging from \$2 to \$25,000. Everybody can be part of this," the governor's wife says.

The core of the new Victorian Parlor is a virtually square, high-cei-



PATRICIA HUGHES

linged room with two huge windows and — as the only major survivor of numerous remodelings — a fine gray-marble fireplace of mid-Victorian mien. For years the place, equipped with interior French doors, was used mainly as a coatroom for mansion receptions.

The color scheme of the room is soft gray and brown, highlighted with green baize. Elaborate efforts have been made to make everything Maryland in source and unmitigatedly and absolutely mid-Victorian. A surviving Baltimore plaster ceiling taken from the old Buckler mansion at Charles and Centre streets, now being remodeled as a condominium, was installed in the room. The Historical Society loaned a sumptuous, seven-piece Victorian parlor set (circa 1875) and the ornate decorative accessories include parian ware, a mantel clock, andirons, cranberry glass and large Chinese porcelain vases. A silver salver from the old cruiser USS Baltimore adds a historic note.

The wallpaper and the draperies of the room proved the biggest design hurdles for the sponsors. The wallpaper is gray and soft gold and employs the popular Victorian theme of a "neo-Grecque palmette," a Victorian design so popular that it is repeated, quite accidentally, in the chandelier and andirons acquired for the room.

The windows stumped the designers until an 1875 photo of the State House turned up, depicting in good detail a typical lavish window treatment. These draperies were copied in damask and Scalandre silk, custom ordered and manufactured. The wallpaper, a copy of a mid-Victorian specimen, was also custom reproduced and will never be sold commercially. The trust has the rights to it.

At the center of the room is a parlor table of the period covered in hand-dyed green felt, topped by a characteristic shell-flower decoration encased in a period glass dome. Around the walls are important works by Nineteenth Century painters.

Stylistically, Mr. Colwill says, the room exhibits the "Renaissance Revival" mode of the Victorian period — heavy, ceremonious pieces that refer vaguely back to furniture fashions that swept Europe with the revival of classic learning during the Fifteenth and Sixteenth centuries.

Since the reinstatement project in Government House began in 1979, more than 250 social functions, many staged for foreign dignitaries, state officials and boards, business and professional societies and charitable groups, have been held in the state rooms. In addition to the four rooms that have already been completely refurbished, partial reinstatement has freshened up the state dining room. Authentic Maryland Georgian sideboards to match the Eighteenth Century style of the room are still being sought to replace inappropriate Empire models.

Mrs. Hughes says Government House somehow has great flexibility as a center for Marylanders and adapts itself to almost any group, whether it is a reception for 40 people or dinner for 80. "Everything is done in-house, without catering," she says of the domestic scene. "That way we can do a lot more for the budget and don't have to spend all our money on three events a year."

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Government House tours are conducted on Tuesdays and Thursdays all year round, by advance appointment only for groups of up to 25 persons. Tour hours are 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. For details on arrangements, call 1-269-3531.

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And so it begins...

The setting is Jakarta.

The time is 1965.