

## Philly Museum Reopens Historic Mansion

The \$1.6 million job illuminates the mansion's origins and history.

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After a 24-month, \$1.6 million restoration project, the [Philadelphia Museum of Art](#) has reopened [Mount Pleasant](#), a mid-18th century Fairmount Park mansion. The extensive preservation project included restoring the roof, wood shingling, dormers, and balustrade of both the main house and two smaller pavilions.



“The restoration of Mount Pleasant offers a remarkable window onto a particular moment in Philadelphia’s—and the nation’s—history,” says museum director Anne d’Harnoncourt. The house will reopen without furnishings, allowing visitors to enjoy the space first and foremost as a work of architecture, and guided tours will focus on the floor plan and other architectural details. The house’s original views of the Schuylkill River have also been reestablished.

The manse was originally constructed for Scottish sea captain John Macpherson in 1765 by Philadelphia-born builder Thomas Nevell. Nevell served as an apprentice of Edmund Woolley, who built the structure now known as Independence Hall. The house’s distinctive edifice features a hipped roof and balustrade, adherence to classical symmetry and balance, and carved details throughout the interior and exterior. The City of Philadelphia acquired the property, now a National Historic Landmark, in 1869.

Preservation carpenters salvaged as much of the original material as possible and replaced damaged sections with historically and structurally appropriate materials. The process of interpreting Mount Pleasant’s original design and function was aided by Macpherson’s original letters and diaries, which provided insight into how the house was used during his time.

“The entire process has given us a new understanding of the design and construction used to build Mount Pleasant,” says David deMuzio, senior conservator of Furniture and Woodwork at the museum, who oversaw the project since it commenced in spring 2004. “From a craftsman’s standpoint, what Nevell achieved was sheer brilliance.”

The museum’s team clearly has its own talent: The multifaceted restoration project has been selected to receive a 2006 Preservation Achievement Award. The Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia will bestow the award on May 3rd.

To celebrate the reopening, a special exhibit, “Saving a Colonial Masterpiece: Restoring Mount Pleasant,” will run for the next year. The show illustrates the complex restoration process via a

combination of text, illustrations, and original unused building materials that were discovered stowed in the roof rafters during the project.

Mount Pleasant will be open to the public Tuesdays through Sundays year round.

Image courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

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