

DESIGNER SHOWCASE AT VENTFORT HALL



Photos by Kevin Sprague

Among the 14 spaces featured in the Berkshire Designer Showcase opening at Ventfort Hall in Lenox this weekend are a whimsical sitting room, at top, by Eric Hilton of Eric Hilton Ltd; a stair landing seating nook, above left, by Valerie Winig of Wingate Ltd.; and a ladies lounge, above right, by Allison B. Crane of Places + Spaces and Carol Newton Rumph of the Comfortable Home Interior. Show is on view until Jan. 15, 2012.

Updating the Gilded Age

By Charles Bonenti
Berkshire Eagle Staff

LENOX

Visitors often ask guides at Ventfort Hall, the mansion built for George and Sarah Morgan in 1893 and now open to the public as the "Gilded Age Museum," what the unfurnished second floor of the house would have looked like when the Morgans lived there.

Started this weekend, they can get a sense — albeit an imagined and updated one — as the Berkshire Designer Showcase at Ventfort Hall opens to the public.

The showcase, featuring some of Berkshire County's top interior designers, antique dealers, artists and artisans, will be on view until Jan. 15, 2012.

The house, rescued from demo-



If you go ...

What: Berkshire Designer Showcase at Ventfort Hall.
Where: Ventfort Hall Mansion and Gilded Age Museum, 104 Walker St., Lenox.
When: Weekdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Fridays until 7 p.m.; and weekends from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Admission: \$20.
Information: Call (413) 637-3206; email info@gildedage.org or visit www.gildedage.org.

Wicker tête-à-tête chair set is part of display by Thomas and Katheen Tetro of Corner House Antiques in Sheffield.

lition in the mid 1990s after years of standing vacant, had virtually none of its original furnishings, said Tjasa Sprague, founding board member and treasurer/clerk, on a press tour Tuesday. Everything was auctioned by the family after the Morgans died.

As a result, the designer showcase, which Sprague envisioned with Ventfort Program Chairman Thomas Hayes some years ago, is less a restoration than a reimagination of the era in modern terms.

On the tour Tuesday, Allison B. Crane of Places + Spaces and Carol Newton Rumph of the Comfortable Home Interior welcomed visitors to a "ladies' lounge" they created with banquet seating, silk burlap walls and a honeysuckle pink ceiling in what

SHOWCASE, continued on E3

Wicker furniture popular in Victorian times

SHOWCASE from E1

was formerly a nine-foot-wide bathroom.

They wanted, they said, to create "an inviting space where ladies would gather to dish the dirt, enjoy a cocktail or just slip off their Jimmy Choos."

Valerie Wing of Wingate Ltd., turned the second floor stair landing into a wood-paneled seating nook overlooking the main staircase. Wing said she envisioned it as a masculine place where family and houseguests might gather before dinner for games or cocktails.

Thomas and Katheen Tetro of Corner House Antiques in Sheffield, which specializes in antique American wicker furniture, said that wicker, often elaborately fanciful, was popular in many American homes during the Gilded Age. It would have appeared on the terraces and in many rooms of a summer house like Ventfort Hall, Kathleen Tetro said.

They arranged a display of wicker pieces at the head of the stairs.

Art director Carl Sprague was working on a still-unfur-

nished portion of the master suite that he was converting to a period approximation of Mrs. Morgan's bedroom, complete with wallpaper recreated by John Burrows from a fragment found in an adjacent bathroom.

Eric Hilton of Eric Hilton Ltd., brought nature indoors in a sitting room with flooring of green wool felt and AstroTurf.

"I love color and texture," he said, "and putting things together in cozy, unexpected ways."

Among the unexpected was a botanical-style chandelier inverted and used as a table lamp.

With a mix of plaid and floral fabrics and an array of live flowers and ferns, he said he was evoking the look of the Victorian without the discomfort of its furniture.

Other designers and their projects were:

■ Vivian Kimmelman of Berkshire Home & Antiques with an Italian loggia overlooking the Great Hall;

■ Barry Webber of Marlborough Cottage Arts and Interiors and the Source

Collection, Inc., demonstrating how to create intimacy in an extra-large room;

■ Kate Morris of Morris House Antiques & Interiors, with tiny space turned into a debutante's dressing room;

■ Evan Hughes of Evan Hughes Design, LLC, exhibiting Hollywood glam in a gentleman's dressing room

■ Cecil Pollen of Designers Furniture Showcase, Ltd., DBA Kitchens & Interiors, with a setting for a bride and her bridesmaids preparing for a wedding;

■ Karen Beckwith of Karen Beckwith Art & Interiors with a meditation space beneath artful willow trees;

■ Karen Cedar of Interior Design, Decoration & Display, with an Art Nouveau setting.

The Lenox Garden Club, is celebrating its 100th anniversary with a retrospective exhibit, "Then and Now."

Berkshire landscape designers, including Ben Webster and Terrence Trapp of Webster Ingersoll, Inc., and Valerie Locher, are creating displays on the grounds surrounding Ventfort Hall.