

The Riches of an American Country Estate

WINTERTHUR MUSEUM

Winterthur, Delaware

Winterthur, one of America's most renowned mansions, was first conceived in 1837 as the relatively modest 12-room residence of Evelina Gabrielle du Pont, daughter of DuPont company founder

E. I. du Pont (see previous page), and her husband, Jacques Antoine Bidermann, in the lush Brandywine Valley straddling Delaware's border with Pennsylvania. The place operated as a farm, but E.I.'s great-grandson Henry Francis du Pont, an obsessive collector and passionate horticulturist, had other plans for it: He transformed it into the world's premier museum of 17th- through 19th-century American antiques and decorative arts. Opened officially in 1951, the connoisseur's collection of more than 60,000

objects (later acquisitions have brought the figure to about 90,000) ranges from exquisite furniture to fine porcelain to silver drinking vessels made by Paul Revere. Collections are arrayed in over 175 period rooms, most of which you can visit on tours led by knowledgeable guides. At Christmastime, expect to find several of the interiors lavishly decked out with historic holiday decorations—Yuletide at Winterthur is a beloved event.

The estate's garden, however, was H. F. du Pont's first love: He studied horticulture at Harvard well before he began to collect; he even selected the house's ever-changing textile arrangements and place settings according to what was in bloom outside. Today some 60 of the estate's 982 acres are given over to magnificent massings of native and exotic plants. The gardens are located close to the museum and are accessible via the garden tram, which supplies a running commentary. You can expect to find something in bloom almost year-round.



The extensive gardens feature snowdrops, yellow Adonis, Chinese witch hazel, winter jasmine, and lavender crocus.

Not far away, on a former part of the estate, you can see where, if not exactly how, the other half lived. Montchanin Village used to be populated mostly by workers at the du Ponts' gunpowder mills; today it's a meticulously restored luxury inn. The old 1850s barn houses the reception and gathering area; nine old residences dating from 1799 to 1910 have been divided up into 28 rooms and suites outfitted with antiques and marble bathrooms. The old blacksmith shop is now the inn's restaurant, Crazy Kat's, serving such delicacies as grilled elk medallions with rabbit sausage.

WHERE: 6 miles northwest of Wilmington. Tel 800-448-3883 or 302-888-4600; winterthur.org. *When:* closed Mon. **THE INN AT MONTCHANIN VILLAGE:** Montchanin. Tel 800-269-2473 or 302-888-2133; montchanin.com. *Cost:* from \$192; dinner \$35. **BEST TIMES:** Sun, 1st full weekend in May for the Winterthur Point-to-Point Steeplechase; mid-Nov–early Jan for Yuletide at Winterthur.