

TRAVEL

Lavish Biltmore on 'must see' list

BY SANDIE PARROTT
SPECIAL WRITER

National Geographic Traveler has selected Biltmore Estate as one of its 50 "must see" destinations in America. The estate is featured on the cover of the October issue.

Biltmore was chosen as one of ten national wonders by the magazine, which described it as one of the "manmade or natural spots that America cherishes." If you would like to read more, the article has an essay by the owner, William A. V. Cecil and pictures of the estate.

Once you see it, there is no surprise as to why the estate has received such high accolades. The splendor and luxury can hardly be imagined unless you see it for yourself. In today's world it would be impossible to duplicate the materials, craftsmanship, art, European style, gardens and grandeur.

A little bit of history

George Vanderbilt created Biltmore to be a self-supporting and profitable estate; to rival other estates built by other family members and to house huge collections of art he had acquired in his travels throughout Europe. The area in Asheville, N.C. was selected in 1888 when George traveled to the popular resort area with his mother. He fell in love with the rugged beauty and started to acquire land. By the time he was done, he had purchased a total of 125,000 acres of land, including the 100,000-acre Pisgah Forest.

The estate has sold much of this land, but still owns approximately 10,000 acres. From windows on the top floor of the manor, there is still land as far as the naked eye can see.

The name Biltmore was derived from Bildt, the Dutch town where his ancestors originated and "more," an English word for open, rolling land. The estate took six years to build, countless craftsmen and two famous designers, architect Richard Morris Hunt and landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted. Family and friends were first welcomed on Christmas Eve, 1895.

Imagine if you will 250 rooms,

34 bedrooms, 43 bathrooms, 65 fireplaces, an indoor pool, bowling alley and three kitchens. The wood paneled library contains 10,000 books located on two levels with a Pellegrini canvas ceiling painting depicting the open sky at dawn with floating angels.

The estate includes a three-mile approach road, forest, several gardens, conservatory, vineyard, winery and large tasting room, riding and hiking trails, riding stable, a section of the French Broad River, several restaurants, the new Biltmore Inn and gift shops. Getting to the various areas involves going back to your car and driving several miles to the next area.

The technology utilized in this estate was unheard of in upper-level society homes, let alone the average person's home in the 1890s. For example, the indoor pool had heated water, underwater lighting and a vaulted ceiling which covered the span of the pool. The gymnasium offered a chain-driven rowing machine and wall-mounted pulleys with adjustable weights. It also contained the first bowling alley installed in a private home by Brunswick-Balke-Collender Co. If you are a bowler you must recognize the Brunswick name. The bathrooms had hot water available with the turn of a tap from coke-fired water heaters in the basement.

The Gardens

I would have liked to visit in the spring or summer, the gardens must be splendid. The conservatory and gardens are open year around; though the day I visited it was a real cold 25 degrees. Some of the garden areas include the forecourt in front of the manor called the esplanade, the terrace, Italian shrub, azalea, walled and rose gardens, along with the deer park, bass pond, lagoon and forest. The pergola and conservatory are magnificent structures. Biltmore also sells plants that have been propagated from those grown on the estate.

The winery opened in 1986, on the site that was the original dairy. The grand tasting room was once a cow barn. The state-

of-the-art vaults that were designed to keep dairy products at a constant 54 degrees are now used for storing and aging the wines. Although Biltmore is considered a relatively new winery it won over 100 awards in its first decade.

If you would like to pretend you are one of Vanderbilt's invited guests, you can stay at the newly completed Inn for a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The Inn is built at today's standard of luxury. Of course the prices are a bit expensive, but there are packages and off-season rates. Rates range from off-season, weekday rates of \$149 per night to high season, weekend, for \$369 per night.

Visiting Biltmore

The estate is open 363 days of the year, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. It is only closed on Thanksgiving and Christmas Day. General admission is \$34 for adults, \$25.60 for youth (10-16) and children under 9 are free. Plan at least a full day to properly visit the estate. The admission charge lets you visit all of the areas described; however specialty tours are extra.



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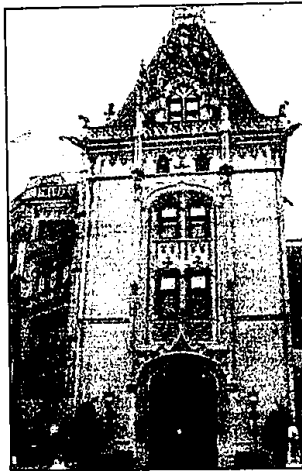
Visiting Biltmore during the holidays, dressed very similar to the way it was in 1895, made it easier to comprehend what it was like.

Biltmore is still self-sufficient to this day. The income from admissions, tours, the Inn and Winery keep the estate from requiring any state or federal assistance.

Go and see this magnificent estate and imagine what it was like to pull up in a carriage, be shown to your suite, freshen up in your own bathing room and attend dinner.

You would be splendid in your finery as you were seated in the Banquet Hall. You would dine on Wedgwood China with dinner served by servants from the three kitchens. This is an experience you must not miss.

Sandie Parrott of Clarkston is a freelance travel and garden writer



An American castle: The grand front entrance to Biltmore, the largest estate in the U.S.

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