

# Dine in elegant surroundings at auto baron mansions

Order up a little luxury with lunch today. Skip the fast food or brown bag sandwich and head for a former auto baron's home. Dine with good crystal and china, amid sumptuous gardens and historic furnishings in a mansion.

"We've had a summer dining program for at least 20 years. What we did this year was revamp it a bit. We changed the menu. We offer lighter fare as well as full lunches," said Sally Victor, external relations director for Meadow Brook Hall, the former home of Oakland University founder Matilda Dodge Wilson and auto pioneer, John Dodge.

"We added the ability to have a glass of champagne or wine if you'd like. And what we started doing is on nice days, putting tables outside."

The dining crews look to the skies each morning and decides if it should set tables outdoors or in the Christopher Wren dining room, the Dodge's former family dining room which seats 94 people.

"We have been surprised this year by the diversity of the groups (at lunch)," Victor said.

"We get groups of people celebrating birthdays, people coming from a company saying, 'Let's have lunch there today,' and a lot of people who take the tour."

Summer Tours (Memorial Day to Labor Day), run every half hour from 10:00 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Monday-Saturday and 11:30 a.m., 12:30 p.m., 1:30 p.m., 2:30 p.m. and 3:30 p.m. on Sunday. The tour costs \$8 for adults, \$6 for senior citizens and \$4 for children, age 4-12.

But patrons can eat lunch without taking the tour. "We might do a lobster bisque or gazpacho. We make sure there's a salad entree," said Victor, describing the menu. "We have five (entree) choices every day and two desserts."

Prices range from \$10-15 for an entree salad and \$10-\$18 for a full lunch (soup, hot entree, dessert). They average \$4 for dessert and \$3 for a cup



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Lunch served outdoors at Meadow Brook Hall includes white table cloths, crystal and fine china.

of soup.

Visitors seeking lighter fare can buy a wrap sandwich or iced coffee drink from the cafe in Meadow Brook Hall's lobby. Victor said the new cafe extends the museum experience and offers visitors an opportunity to snack while waiting for their tour to start.

Meadow Brook Hall has halted lunch service until after Concours d'Elegance, the vintage auto show that will fill the mansion grounds this weekend. It will resume lunch next week.

The mansion is located on the grounds of Oakland University, at Adams and Walton in Rochester Hills.

The daughter is going to lunch at the pool restaurant. Can I include a swimsuit? When they opened the restaurant they filled in the pool," said Gail Raby, food service manager. "Oh gosh, it's been longer than 20 years."

Raby says the skylight and warming benches may be the only remaining hint of the room's former use.

A picture on the wall shows

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Sally Victor  
External relations director for Meadow Brook Hall

Ford and his wife, Clara. Lunch is served 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Monday-Friday in the Pool Restaurant, the room formerly housed the family's swimming pool.

"The first question people ask is 'Where is the swimming pool?'"

"You can't believe the phone calls we get - 'My daughter is going to lunch at the pool restaurant. Can I include a swimsuit?'"

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then people from the university. We do a very good lunch business."

■ **Edsel Ford Estate - Grosse Pointe Shores**

"People can come and just have lunch. In fact, we have lots of regulars who do - A lot of ladies who just come in and have lunch and business people do," said Ann Fitzpatrick, marketing director. "If you have lunch in the tea room, you can walk the grounds for free."

The 87-acre estate grounds, planted with tulips and daffodils in the spring and "cutting" flowers, including roses in the summer, hugs the shoreline of Lake St. Clair.

During the fall, extensive wooded areas become a blaze of golds, reds and yellows. Vistors can buy a \$3 pass to walk the grounds - an audio tape tour rents for \$2 - or eat lunch and walk for free.

Grounds are open from 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday.

Tours of the house, which was used as the Edsel Ford

family residence from 1929-1976, start every half hour, beginning at 10 a.m., with the last tour starting at 4 p.m., Tuesday through Sunday. The mansion was opened to the public in 1978. Tours are \$6 for adults, \$5 for seniors and \$3 for children, age 6-12.

"You don't see the main house from the tea room. You take a shuttle to the house, because it's a quarter mile away," Fitzpatrick noted.

The tea room is a misnomer. The estate serves more substantial fare than scones and finger sandwiches.

The menu specials change daily. Typical items include soup, sandwiches, salads and wraps, lemonade, iced tea, soda pop and coffee. Prices average \$6 for a sandwich and \$6.95 for salads with meat.

"We also have hot daily specials. Our most popular salad is the new garden salad, with chicken, pine nuts and dried cranberries."

The tea room is located in the 12-year-old activities building.

"There are parts of the original structure. This is the site where the gardening sheds and utility sheds were," Fitzpatrick noted. "The design looks like a greenhouse."

She called the setting "casual but nice." Visitors can eat inside the tea room or outdoors.

The Edsel Ford estate is located on Jefferson south of Nine Mile in Grosse Pointe Shores. (313) 884-4222. Or visit [www.fordhouse.org](http://www.fordhouse.org) on the Internet.

■ **Fisher Mansion - Detroit**

The mansion, former home of Lawrence Fisher, was opened in 1976 as the Bhaktivedanta Cultural Center.

The center offers guided tours and operates Govinda's Restaurant, a vegetarian eatery, on site. However, tours are suspended and the restaurant is closed while the facility renovates, according to a recorded phone message. (313) 331-6740 or [www.fishermansion.com](http://www.fishermansion.com)

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