



Louis Comfort Tiffany's Laurelton Hall



Aerial view, Laurelton Hall, c. 1934.
Photograph from New York Daily News, January 26, 1934.

Laurelton Hall was the country home and estate of Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848–1933). It was located on Long Island, thirty-five miles from New York City and overlooked Cold Spring Harbor, an inlet of Long Island Sound. The estate consisted of nearly six-hundred acres of rolling land and an eighty-four-room main house with its own bowling alley and an electrically lit, cork-lined tunnel providing access to the beach. It also included stables, conservatories (greenhouses), and a working farm.



Loggia, or south garden entrance, Laurelton Hall, c. 1925.
Photograph by David Aronow.

A mile-long drive from the main road to the house meandered through an exquisitely planned landscape. Beautiful perspectives of heavily wooded and wild areas as well as gardens and paths of varying formality and horticultural intricacy abounded. Laurelton Hall was built for the most part between 1902 and 1905, when Tiffany and his family took up residence. Tiffany, however, continued to develop the estate for many years, adding buildings, terraces, architectural elements, and art objects often drawn from his other homes and his personal collection at Tiffany Studios.



Living room, Laurelton Hall, c. 1925.
Photograph by David Aronow.



Dining room, Laurelton Hall, c. 1925.
Photograph by David Aronow.

The Architecture

In creating Laurelton Hall, Tiffany turned stylistically, as he so often did, to the East for inspiration, producing an architecture that was distinctly different from the French châteaux, classical palaces, and Gothic manors that were the dominant forms for American estate homes of the day. In fact, the mansion's simplicity, its horizontal design elements, and its integration with the land—including vistas, gardens, and outdoor terraces—suggest a closer affinity with homes by Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959) than with any of the era's grand houses for the wealthy.

The Interiors

The house was vast, approximately 37,000 square feet, and the interior was resplendent. There were at least nine bedrooms, each with a fireplace, and an equal number of bathrooms on the three main living floors. A magnificent 1,500-square-foot reception hall rose three stories, more than thirty feet, while a fountain, ever alive with moving water and growing plants, defined its center. The densely decorated living room was about 1,600 square feet and the expansive dining room even larger. The smoking room was an Oriental fantasy decorated with a splendid mural depicting an opium dream. Beyond these marvelous spaces, there were dozens of other rooms and several outdoor terraces that provided for gracious living. The Daffodil Terrace was closest to the dining room both visually and physically. Atop the terrace's eight luminous marble columns were decorative capitals that Tiffany encrusted with golden-yellow glass daffodils from his studios.



Reception hall, Laurelton Hall, c. 1908.
Photograph from Henry H. Saylor, "Indoor Fountains," Country Life in America, August 1908.

Nature and Symbolism

Nature and beauty were central to Tiffany's vision of art and life. In nature he found expressive symbols that gave the beautiful things he created profundity and resonance. The importance he gave to symbol at Laurelton Hall was most powerfully and beautifully expressed in the role he gave to water, perhaps the most universal and quickly grasped symbol in all of art. At Laurelton Hall, water—in streams, pools, and fountains—ran over ground and underground throughout the estate in a mystical conduit of hope and renewal. It ran inside through the house feeding internal fountains, and outside it linked and supplied fountains and other water features at various points on a complex and continuous network that brought literal and symbolic nourishment to every corner of the estate.

After Tiffany: Decline and Dissolution

When Tiffany died in 1933, the operation and maintenance of Laurelton Hall—as both a museum to preserve Tiffany's artistic vision and as a residential school to support young artists through fellowships—fell fully to the foundation he had created earlier. But in 1945, the financially battered foundation decided to operate independently of the estate and without a residential program. This altered the course originally set by Tiffany. Most of the home's contents were sold at auction and its property subdivided to raise funds. The estate then passed through several hands. The house eventually was reduced to a few broken-down and burned remains. The Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, now located in New York City, continues to provide grants to emerging artists.

*Daffodil Terrace,
Laurelton Hall, c. 1925.
Photograph by David Aronow.*



A Unified and Beautiful Environment

At the height of life at Laurelton Hall, the buildings and grounds clearly embodied and fully expressed Tiffany's concept of a unified and comprehensive environment. In its day, this much-published estate was understood to be a great artistic success and, in retrospect, it is arguably Tiffany's greatest and most personal artistic achievement. Importantly, Tiffany's Laurelton Hall was as much a vision as a flesh-and-blood reality.

The Morse Museum's collection of surviving objects and materials make it possible to understand the splendid utopian experience that was Laurelton Hall—to see into and to some extent to share Tiffany's astounding imagination. In its presentation of these art and architectural objects from Laurelton Hall, the Morse invites our visitors to enjoy a deeper knowledge and appreciation of this great American artist through some of the most beautiful works he ever created.



*Daffodil Terrace, Laurelton
Hall south façade, c. 1925.
Photograph by David Aronow.*



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