

LIFE

Open Call: Winterthur to celebrate legacy of Black fashion design pioneer Ann Lowe

Ann Lowe blazed a path for others and her legacy is still strongly felt in fashion culture.

Chris Strand Guest columnist

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To some of our neighbors, Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library remains a mystery tucked behind a hill off Route 52.

To first-time guests, we're such a delightful destination that they can't believe they haven't visited before.

To longtime members, we're a constant source of beauty, nature, history, and art.

First-time and repeat visitors might have an idea of what Winterthur is – a gorgeous estate and garden on nearly 1,000 acres surrounding a 175-room house that contains an unparalleled collection of nearly 90,000 objects made or used in America since 1640.

But that's only part of our story.

You're going to see national news coverage about an upcoming exhibition that's drawing interest from historians, fashion designers, changemakers, journalists, artists, and more.

For decades, Ann Lowe designed gowns for America's most prominent society brides, actresses, and heiresses, including Jacqueline Kennedy, Olivia de Havilland, Marjorie Merriweather Post, and others among the du Ponts, Rockefellers and Roosevelts.

Rethinking history: Discovering, sharing Delaware history, from the celebratory to the complicated and difficult

Ann Lowe blazed a path for others and her legacy is still strongly felt in fashion culture. However, this Black couturier remains virtually unknown to the wider public.

Winterthur Museum is making 2023 the year that her legacy receives the acclaim it has deserved.

"Ann Lowe: American Couturier" – running from Sept. 9 until Jan. 7, 2024 — will be the largest-ever exhibition of her work, featuring 40 iconic gowns, many of which have never been on public display, and it will illuminate her evolution as a designer from the 1920s to the 1960s.

As part of the exhibition, we recreated the wedding gown that Lowe designed for Jacqueline Kennedy. That painstaking process has been a remarkable exercise. The original dress is too delicate for display or transport.

The exhibition also will feature the work of contemporary fashion designers whose practices, perspectives and careers reflect the trajectory of fashion emanating from Lowe's foundation.

A Delaware legend: Irénée du Pont, patriarch of Delaware's du Pont family, dead at 103

We will open an exhibit in May 2023 about a special collaboration between the University of Delaware's MakerGym and Winterthur's textile conservation lab to create custom mannequins for the Lowe exhibition.

In March, Winterthur debuts "Winterthur: House of Style", a month-long series of events where attendees will, with industry experts, examine the latest design trends and how those trends can translate into their own homes.

Speakers will offer workshops on subjects from flowers to rugs. Details and tickets will be available soon at [Winterthur.org](https://www.winterthur.org).

Of course, in addition to new explorations, we are indulging in our beloved annual traditions as well.

One that's coming up quickly is "Bank to Bend" on March 11 when we will celebrate the wild-garden design aesthetic of the March Bank. Events include a lecture, a plant sale, and tours, both guided and self-guided.

Another returning favorite is the 45th Annual Point-to-Point Steeplechase on May 7. This event is a festive day of steeplechase horse racing, pageantry, and fun and raises critical funds to support our work protecting and preserving the woodlands, meadows, and wetland habitats around the estate

And July 15-16, the annual Artisan Market returns, which supports Winterthur's mission to inspire and educate audiences about American material culture, art, and design. This event showcases modern-day artisanship from the region's most talented craftspeople.

Did you know that we also house a research library with a collection of more than 100,000 books, manuscripts, periodicals, and more? This wonderful collection is open by appointment Tuesday to Friday, 10 a.m. to 4 pm; please contact reference@winterthur.org for more information or to schedule a time to visit.

Winterthur's state-of-the-art conservation lab is the home to ongoing scientific work, such as the Poison Book Project, which is exploring the materiality of Victorian-era publishers' bindings, with a focus on the identification of toxic pigments used as book cloth colorants.

More: The couple who bought the 107-year-old Padua Academy convent reveal their grand plans

At the moment, we are closed to the general public while we prepare for a busy year ahead. Our members enjoy daily, year-round, dawn-to-dusk garden and estate access. We reopen to all visitors on Feb. 28, Tuesdays through Sundays.

During our Yuletide celebration, we're open every day, with evening hours on selected days.

As part of the "House of Style" in March, visitors will get a sneak peek of this year's Yuletide display at the pop-up exhibit called ""Fashioning Yuletide," which will feature work from local designers Shawn Baron Pinckney and Asata Maisé Beeks. These two talented artists will speak about their design process and demonstrate some of their techniques. Their work is a reflection of modern designs influenced by Ann Lowe and H. F. du Pont's interior designs at Winterthur.

There's always something happening at Winterthur, and we can hardly wait to see you in 2023.

Chris Strand is the Charles F. Montgomery Director and CEO at Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library.

