

Chanticleer:

A Pleasure Garden for the Senses

Text and photographs by Greta Latzel and Celia Holmes

Stumbling across oversized stone acorns at the entrance of a European-style ruin might be unusual at a typical garden, but visitors to Chanticleer gardens in Wayne, Delaware County, quickly come to expect the unexpected. From April to October, the gates of this 31-acre pleasure garden are flung open for you to explore the playful yet peaceful grounds and savor its horticultural feast for the senses.

"There's a wonderful sense of whimsy here," says Pat Lenz on a recent summer visit to the garden from nearby Swarthmore.

Spend a day blowing soap bubbles from a rocking chair, searching the expressions on marble faces beneath a waterfall or meandering from sunlit explosions of color to shady expanses of green, and even the most jaded visitor will have to agree.

Chanticleer, which opened to the public in 1993, is the legacy of the Rosengarten family, which owned a pharmaceutical company for 100 years before merging it with Merck & Co. in 1927. Rather than join the chemical business, Adolph Rosengarten Jr. became a lawyer and later distinguished himself as a scholar, a philanthropist and an active member of his community. Before his death in 1990, he took steps to ensure that his family home would remain open land by creating the Chanticleer Charitable Trust to preserve the property and the Chanticleer Foundation to develop and maintain a public pleasure garden on the property.

The stylistic rooster at the wrought-iron entrance gate is the first indication that Chanticleer is decidedly different from other public gardens. The game bird appears throughout the property in ceramic tiles and moss-adorned stone



Visitors can't resist a closer look at the plentiful water lilies in the ponds of the Water Garden.

statues. "Chanticleer" has been synonymous with rooster ever since a fowl of that name was featured in a French fable that was popular in England in

A trio of Adirondack chairs, made by the Chanticleer staff, offer a shady respite for visitors. The art deco pool and bathhouse just off the gardens of the Chanticleer Terrace border a large lawn still used for entertaining.



the 15th century. Perhaps the Rosengartens named their home after a rooster upon encountering the image during their travels in Europe, or maybe they thought of the name after reading about the fictional manor of Chanticleer in a novel by William Thackeray.

Your tour of these enchanted grounds begins at the garden's administration building, which is located in a house built in 1935 as a wedding present for Emily Rosengarten, Adolph's younger sister. Inside the walled courtyard of this house, you will find the Tropical Teacup Garden, a riotous mass of colorful, tropical foliage reminiscent of a Mediterranean or Mexican village square. Surrounding a fountain urn that gives the area its name, ceramic pots overflow with cacti and succulents, and large blue and green hostas have taken root around the courtyard's perimeter.

From here, traverse an easy one-mile path that meanders down the hillside through ever-changing scenery. Although the trail leads to all of the gardens on the site, Chanticleer encourages its guests to take a shortcut across the inviting swaths of green grass or to rest on one of the many handmade chairs found around the property.

A short distance from Emily Rosengarten's house, a wide stone staircase leads down to the Tennis Court Garden, the first garden developed after Adolph's death. The five formal, yet relaxed, perennial beds pay homage to their athletic beginnings, with a central planting replacing the net and orange yarrow, pink poppies and bright daylilies

now occupying the four sections of the prior court. At the far end of the garden, a bench within a rose-covered arbor invites visitors to linger and enjoy the fragrant perfume of the flowers surrounding them.

Climb a small incline from the Tennis Court Garden, and the regal mansion of Chanticleer soon comes into view. Built as a summer country house by Adolph's parents in 1913, the suburban estate is now on the National Register of Historic Places. Two columns, topped with roosters, mark the main entrance, where the gravel is artfully raked to match the shape of the mansion's circular drive. The interior of the house is open only to group tours, but on the open porch, once a favorite of Adolph's mother, Christine, you are invited to sit on comfortable wicker furniture and enjoy the view of the gently sloping landscape below.

Blue and pink hydrangeas flank the driveway, and a flagstone path guides the curious beyond the porch to the Chanticleer Terrace, which runs the length of the back of the house. Originally designed by Thomas Sears for the senior Rosengartens, the garden here has been expanded, and improved upon, in subsequent years. Glass doors from the mansion open on to a slate patio adorned with terra-cotta pots containing cheerful, orange Asiatic lilies, blooming citrus trees and the purple-and-white spiked flowers of the unusual *Acanthus mollis*. Two wall fountains, interconnected by a reflecting pond, flank espaliered fruit trees, and, below the terrace, a sparkling blue pool and an art deco bathhouse bring to mind elegant, Great

Gatsbyesque parties.

From the terrace, the pathway winds through a meadow past rocking chairs with baskets of bubble solution and an old shed now used to display dried flowers. Serpentine patches of seasonal plantings lead to a stone formation inscribed "Flora," a perfect place to sit and relax a moment. The meadow soon gives way to The Woods, a forested stretch at the far end of the property. Smaller, mulch-covered side paths roam through this shade- and sun-dappled spot, where largely Asian plantings mimic a natural American woodland glade.

Blue and white blooms scattered among the green leaves are soon replaced with bountiful lace-cap hydrangeas, orange daylilies and purple Japanese irises as the trail crosses a bridge over a gurgling stream into the Water Garden. Here, in the multiple pools of varying sizes and shapes, you might glimpse a turtle amidst the yellow, white and pink water lilies that float serenely on the water's surface. Move past the picturesque



Giant acorns welcome visitors to the seemingly ancient structure of the great hall of the Ruin Garden, which was built on the site of the Minder House, the former residence of Adolph Rosengarten Jr.

springhouse, which cleverly conceals the pump for the pools and waterfalls, to a large pergola, decorated with gourds, urns and several thronelike wooden chairs. From this vantage point, visitors may view the ponds and the woods beyond.

The trail continues past the Stream Garden, a sprawling green lawn along the deep banks of Bell's Run stream, to a waterwheel from the 1940s. Just beyond, a walled path winds up a hill to the remains of a seemingly ancient stone structure. The three rooms of the Ruin Garden were built on top of the foundation of Minder House, a former residence of Adolph Rosengarten Jr. Due to its instability, the stone farmhouse was torn down in early 1999, and construction of the Ruin Garden began just months later. The garden was officially opened to the public in the spring of 2000.

Walk past the oversized acorns at the entrance into the great hall, also called the dining room, where an obsidian reflecting pool looms more like a stone coffin than a dinner table. In the next room, a smattering of stone books with puns for titles decorate the library. In the flooded or pool room, marble faces peer out from under the water tumbling into their pond.

As the path winds back to its beginning, the Cut-Flower and Vegetable Garden beckons visitors to wander off the trail, past greenhouses, along the



The bowers of the Cut-Flower and Vegetable Garden rise from the colorful flowers that inspired the garden's name.

Visitors Information

Chanticleer is located at 786 Church Rd. in Wayne, Delaware

County. From Rt. 476, take exit 5 toward Villanova. From the Pennsylvania Turnpike, take Valley Forge interchange 24/326, and then follow 76 east to exit 27. Take Rt. 320 south, and turn right on to Conestoga Road. Turn left at the second traffic light on to Church Road. Go under the trolley bridge, and proceed a half-mile to Chanticleer on your right.

The site is open April through October, Wednesday through Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and until 8 p.m. on Fridays during June, July and August. A contribution of \$5 per adult is suggested. Frequent visitor passes may be purchased for \$25, and family passes are available for \$30. Guided tours of the house and gardens for groups of 10 or more are available with an advance reservation. The path is handicapped accessible, and public restroom facilities and



Staff member Janet Hall welcomes guests at Chanticleer's entrance, located in a house built in 1935 for Emily Rosengarten.

water fountains are available. For more information, contact 786 Church Rd., Wayne 19087; 610-687-4163; chanticleer@earthlink.net; www.chanticleergarden.org. ■

bower-covered grass path between beds laden with cheerful black-eyed Susans. Partially concealed by the colorful flowers, a fence-enclosed vegetable garden bursts with sage, thyme, broccoli and peas. Bent willow chairs and bamboo trellises add a rustic flavor to this garden, which is reminiscent of the simple plots tended by pioneers traveling westward.

Throughout the gardens, unobtrusive boxes contain a list of an area's vegetation. Since the gardens at Chanticleer are designed to seduce visitors with ambiance rather than dazzle them with horticultural trivia, tags are not used to identify individual plants.

Upon exploring the gardens of Chanticleer once, you will want to come back—if not today, then tomorrow or next month or next season. "We're always experimenting with new things. Nothing stays the same from one year to the next," explains Janet Hall, a staff member who has worked at Chanticleer since its public opening. With the acquisition of two adjacent properties, located beyond the Stream Garden, Chanticleer will most likely be expanded.

From its beginnings as the summer country estate of the Rosengarten family, Chanticleer has been transformed into a truly unique pleasure garden for the senses.

"Each day, when I walk through those gates, I leave the real world behind and enter a place where there's nothing but beauty," says Hall.



Gourds and urns decorate the shady pergola overlooking the bountiful flowers and cooling pools of the Water Garden.

Without a doubt, no matter how many changes are made in the future, Chanticleer will continue to surprise and enchant visitors with its beauty, imagination and whimsy. ♡

Greta Latzel and Celia Holmes are freelance photojournalists who live in Bucks County. They are frequent contributors to Pennsylvania Magazine.