

77th Tour of Tours

Story and photos
by Matt Freeman

THIS YEAR'S CHESTER COUNTY DAY HOUSE Tour—the longest running house tour in the country—takes place on its traditional first Saturday in October—on the 7th. For the 77th year of this fundraiser for the Chester County Hospital, the tour focuses on West Chester and the northwestern part of Chester County. (Learn more details at the end of this article.)

Both featured areas of the tour offer highlights of the historic character of The Day—as the tour is called by its many fans and supporters. But the tour also keeps some surprises in store to add spice to the more familiar sorts of things people come from around the country to see.

Here's a brief preview of a few of the featured homes on view to give you a sense of what you can look forward to.



20TH-CENTURY COUNTRY HOUSE



JUST OUTSIDE GUTHRIESVILLE, SCREENED FROM view on a wooded five-acre tract dotted with a variety of beech trees, is a residence that's very much a country house for its New-York-based owners. But not in the ways you might think.

The house is uncompromisingly 20th-century modern, a composition in rectangles—like a Mondrian painting—free of anything you could call decoration. But within the stylistic bounds of mid-20th century modern architecture, its creators at Koko Architecture + Design have woven together inspiration from different traditional sources, including their own Japanese heritage and the spirit of Pennsylvania's farm country.

The architects say the overall first impression is of two “black boxes” connected by a “bird cage.” But there's a surprise when you walk inside. That seemingly caged area, which looks like a corridor from the outside, is a stylishly furnished living room that's expansive by any measure and, framed by floor-to-ceiling windows, open to gorgeous views of the wooded grounds. The room is also home to Gus, the smooth fox terrier, pictured above.

If you enjoy modern design—or are open to its appeal—be sure to visit this sleek house of glass, steel and Pennsylvania bluestone. See why it was also featured in *Elle Décor* and *International Architecture & Design*. You'll discover a refreshing new approach to blending compelling architecture and our region's natural beauty.





LYONS RUN FARM



ONCE YOU WEND YOUR WAY UP THE long, winding drive and finally see the farmhouse of Lyons Run Farm to your right, you'll know what the owner means when she says what attracted her was "how private and tranquil it was." The increasingly noisy, built-up Route 100 corridor is less than four miles away, but the distance seems measured less in miles than in centuries.

The original parts of the house do date to the 18th century, so it's no surprise the owners had to extensively renovate what was there. The home needed a lot of work, but it had good bones.

Although geothermal heating and cooling were added and a new stairway tower was built, these and

other modern improvements were meant to complement the oldest parts of the house and not change its inherent appeal and character.

Visitors will notice that the home's decor is comfortable but rewards a closer look almost everywhere, as the family are lovers not just of history but music and art as well. Original artwork by family members is on display throughout.

Be sure to visit the charmingly decorated springhouse—possibly the original dwelling on the site. And even the hardest core natural history buffs will enjoy contemplating the peri-glacial marsh it overlooks, with its unique diversity of mosses and ferns.

Fortunately, a conservation easement ensures that the peaceful natural world of this 86-acre oasis will be preserved in perpetuity.





THE EAST NANTMEAL HOUSE NOW OWNED by Tyler and Tildy Wren was originally built in 1789, and nothing much in the hilly landscape shows any sign the world has changed a bit since then. If you're addicted to the charm of 18th-century fieldstone farmhouses, beautifully maintained and landscaped, this is the pure, uncut stuff.

Of course you have the requisite walk-in fireplace, wide plank oak floors, oil paintings and Oriental rugs. But the decor isn't just that; it's interestingly eclectic.

Yes, there are traditional styles aplenty represented here, certainly, but mixed with Asian and folk art pieces as well. You'll also see a 2015 kitchen renovation blending modern appliances with traditional pine cabinets and soapstone sinks and countertops.

Extensive landscaping surrounds the home, and there's a two-story party barn to visit up the hill. Another Old World touch is the livestock—the Wrens share their property with a flock of chickens and a miniature goat named Tigger.

Just more elements that harken back to an earlier time in a home that's rich in them, inside and out.





SERPENTINE STONE

MARION AND JEFFREY WHITE'S WEST Chester home was built in 1929 of serpentine, the famous often-green stone much quarried in the area and used in a number of well-known local buildings, including many on the West Chester University campus. You might not notice this fact about the White's home, since the color is more of a natural, subdued hue. The exterior is a traditional Colonial style, with a porch on its smaller wing and a pent eave across the larger.

You wouldn't know it, but the house was extensively renovated recently. The original facade wasn't changed much, but the interior is new, with new arrangements of rooms and hallways and wider doors and windows.

And if larger windows help visitors see the variety of artworks and striking decorative elements on display,

so much the better. The dining room, for instance, has several glass pieces on the wall, cabinet and table, tied together by a lamp of hanging glass globes. The overall effect is a kind of retro modernity that would have been familiar when the house was built.

The entire house is studded with striking fine arts and decorative pieces in settings that form elegantly simple, yet strong visual compositions. At one corner of the dining room is a lovely baby grand piano, two paintings above it, and a decorative chest underneath. Through an opening in the wall you can see the foyer, one side of which features two small fanciful glass heads, a painted ceramic vase, an abstract painting and a striking bust, and so on through the other rooms.

In short, there's something unusual and eye-pleasing in every direction.





PAT BURTON LOEW'S 1859 ITALIANATE HOME on North Matlack Street in West Chester is this year's VIP house. Even if you're just walking by, you'll understand why. The three-story house does have the characteristic Italianate extended eaves, but in many ways it's more a handsome, impressive Victorian with beautiful landscaping outside and interiors that artfully blend high style and a spirit of comfort and welcome.

Loew used to live near Crebilly Farm in southern Chester County but wanted to have more neighbors around her. And so she found a special house in a developed neighborhood in

the Borough. The Matlack Street house needed extensive renovation, so after buying it in 2014, Loew spent another year and a half restoring it, later earning a West Chester Historic Preservation Award for her efforts.

The coffered ceilings are among its most impressive interior features, but with a daughter-in-law's help, Loew put her own stamp on her new home in other ways both large and subtle. "I wanted to create, in the interior, a comfortable house for my family to come and visit," she says.

The comfort is certainly there. Loew modestly doesn't mention the bowl-you-over beauty, but the house speaks for itself.

IF YOU GO:

Join Chester County Hospital in celebrating its 125th Anniversary on this tour of homes and historic landmarks in and around West Chester's Marshall Square Park, where the Hospital once stood at its inception in 1892. The tour continues throughout the northwest quadrant of Chester County.

When: Saturday, October 7, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Location: Enjoy a self-directed walking tour of Marshall Square Park area in West Chester and drive through the northwest quadrant of Chester County

Tickets: \$50 per person; \$100 VIP ticket

Benefits: Chester County Hospital's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit Expansion Project

Information: ChesterCountyDay.com

VIP TICKETS: In addition to an exclusive tour of the three-story Loew home, VIP ticket holders also enjoy a Preview Party with the Tour's homeowners at French Creek Golf Club on Sunday, September 24th.

You'll have a chance to tour for the day in a BMW or Mini from Otto's BMW of West Chester and Otto's Mini of Exton (while they last!), and enjoy a gourmet boxed lunch prepared by Montesano Brothers Italian Market and Catering on The Day.

VIP Tickets cost \$100, with 100% of your contribution benefiting The Chester County Hospital. For information, call 610-431-5301.