

## The Barbados National Trust

*For the preservation of places of historical and architectural interest,  
of natural beauty and ecological importance*

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### *Welcome to Cockade House!*

March 22, 2017

Please, no photography or drinks inside the house.  
Sir Henry Fraser will deliver the Lively Lecture at 3:15.

Once you've got your ticket, please continue all the way up the driveway. En route be sure to look up at the grand, theatrical **west side of the house.** It's a marvellous combination of styles – Palladian, Classical, Barbadian vernacular and Messel's own unique flair. Today's lecture will take place there. Continue around the curve, then straight past the rear entrance to the main house on your right.

The fenced area you just passed is the Franklyn Stephenson Academy, which offers training for youngsters and established cricketers, both local and visiting, as well as golf instruction and practice facilities. A celebrated all-rounder, Stephenson would have brought brilliance to the dicey West Indies team, but got into trouble when he joined the anti-apartheid rebels during a South African tour in the early 1980s. He subsequently played primarily in English county cricket—very well, we might add. Now he's giving back to the community. So is Cockade House's owner; he built the clubhouse for the academy.

### **The history**

As a sugar estate in the 1670s, this property had its own mill and belonged to John Sampson, who also owned nearby Mangrove Plantation. It was later owned by Walter Bennett, who gave it the name Bennett's, which is what the area across the highway is still called. For a time it was named Giddy Hall, after a property in England associated with Bennett's wife, Anne Hothersal. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was owned by Alleynes, then by a Tappin until 1830 and then Nathaniel Forte in 1831.

By the 1930s the house was a ruin. A largely new house was built on the site by a Trinidadian, Wilfred Alston, but by the late 1960s the house and its 5.5 acres had yet again been abandoned. It was in this state that the house was found by Mrs. Emma Pauline Haywood. She showed it to her friend, the celebrated British designer Oliver Messel, who had designed houses in Barbados and Mustique. He was not immediately enthralled. "It looks like a post box, darling, but never mind, we'll make something wonderful out of it."

Messel was as good as his word, and the house today stands as one of the most charming examples of Palladian architecture in the Caribbean. The transformation in the early 1970s took some 2 ½ years to complete. The building material was coral-stone blocks, a durable and beautiful substance that weathers to a soft patina, quarried on the island. To the basic box of a house he added a pedimented entrance with four columns, French doors with fanlights, loggias, lattice and other trim. Messel was working for much of the same time on the costumes for the Broadway production of "Gigi," for which he earned a Tony award.

### **Oliver Messel**

From the early 1920s to his death in 1978, Mr. Messel had a brilliant career as a designer of scenery and costumes for theatre, ballet, opera and film on both sides of the Atlantic. In Mustique and Barbados, where he spent his later years, he began a second design career, applying his sense of visual drama to homes. In addition to possessing exceptional talent and energy, Messel was also quite handsome and charming. Put this together with being Lord Snowdon's (Princess Margaret's husband's) uncle, and you can imagine the gilded circles in which he moved. No wonder he was sought-after enough to become the most highly paid person in his field, in the world. He seems to have sprinkled stardust wherever he turned his hand. We are fortunate to possess so many samples of it here in Barbados and we are grateful to Terra Luxury for arranging an Open House here today and to owners Emma and Timothy Oulton for granting permission.

### **The house**

Timothy Oulton used to have a branch of his global furnishings business in Cane Garden. His signature style involves reinventing antiques, often repurposing salvaged materials. Between Benedictine boarding school and his father's antiques business, he grew up with classic design and craftsmanship. Wood, leather, metal and British heritage figure strongly



in his work. You'll see plenty of it here. Chandeliers bridge the styles of Oulton's pieces and their Messel surroundings.

Please pass the entrance to the main house on your right and enter at the end, through the kitchen. The floor and backsplashes of this two-part space are done in reclaimed tiles brought from France. The pale cabinets have crown moulding and the windows are arched, as they are throughout the house. Go through, exit, and turn right.

You'll then pass a small office with a collection of globes, and arrive at the **dining terrace** with a fabulous view over the Sandy Lane golf course. Here, the floor is Messel's original, and is made of cement that has been finished to resemble terra cotta. Making things look like something else was a skill that Messel honed not only in set and costume design, but also during World War II, when his specialty was camouflaging pillboxes. Cement floors are among his hallmarks.

Turn right into the **sitting room** at the front entrance. It is furnished in comfy armchairs with faux antique sideboards done in a distressed, crackle finish. As is the case in most of the house, the lighting is provided by elegant crystal chandeliers.

Turn right again, and you'll find yourself in the **second bedroom**. The bed is framed by a leather sofa that could have come straight from a gentlemen's club. Its side tables are done in riveted aluminium that resembles an airplane's construction.

Now please cross the sitting room and go into the spacious and airy **master bedroom**. Its comforts are obvious, and the views are wonderful. The bathroom is just as impressive; beyond it is an addition that allows for showering or tub bathing in an outdoor setting, while retaining privacy. The walls here are blocks of rustic coral-stone. Pushed up from the sea long ago, this is what the island is primarily made of. Once back in the bedroom, please exit through the private patio that faces the pool. Harlequin patterns give visual flair to some of the furnishings.

Ahead and to the left, the **son's cottage** is octagonal with plenty of veranda space and is decorated in very masculine style. The "Aviator Tomcat" chairs in the sitting area are particularly striking. Behind the wall is the bedroom. On your way to the next cottage, which you reach by taking a path between the pool and the master bedroom's patio, you might look down to the far end of the pool, where Messel placed a stone folly with trellises and lily pond as a dramatic backdrop.

You should now be at the front of the house with the **daughter's cottage** in the trees ahead of you. Elegant and rustic, it has a fantasy feel to it that is helped by the chandeliers and the casual sleeping loft above. Long draperies can be pulled to shield the bed from view. Do not miss the bathroom/dressing room!

Now feel free to wander the grounds, described below. On the **west side of the house**, by the ballustraded steps that lead up to the Italianate terrace are coral-stone tubs that came from the original house. To the side of the steps is a door leading to the semi-subterranean yam cellar that has been preserved from the original structure.

### **The gardens**

The gardens were also laid out by Messel, carefully preserving the old-growth trees. The gardens are a quite enchanting place to spend a languid tropical afternoon, especially when refreshments are so conveniently offered there. While enjoying the steelpan music by David Hutchinson of PanGroove, do browse for books, crafts and art, which make lovely gifts or mementos of your visit in Barbados. It's a pity we won't be here after dark; Sir Peter Glenville, the former stage director of Covent Garden, devised theatrical lighting for the outdoors and the effect is magical.

As you go, you'll find the **Pavilion** in the southwest garden. This charming, octagonal structure was built later following original Messel plans, and complements the house beautifully. With renovations incomplete, it is currently being used for storage and is not open today. There is also another **guest cottage** near the main house, designed by Michael Gomes.

Associates (MGA) in harmony with the existing style of the property. It is not really open today, except for use of the washroom. In fact, MGA was responsible for the complete renovation of the existing house and new extensions, such as the outdoor master bathroom, and did the cottages too. The Oultons were involved in all design and material decisions, and were adamant that the charm of the property be preserved.

If you love Cockade House and are prosperous enough, you're in luck: It's for sale. Terra Luxury agents are on the premises, ready to answer your questions.

**Thank you for coming! Please join us on Saturday, March 25, at Morgan Lewis Mill, and on the 29th at Leamington House**, a Messel masterpiece right on the sea. Located just south of Speightstown, it's a perfect prelude to dinner in one of the quaint town's many attractive restaurants.

We also thank the Barbados Tourism Product Authority for sponsoring the 2017 Open House season.



Sarah Venable (c) Barbados National Trust