



FRIENDS
of
VILLA FINALE

THE BEE LINE

Friends of Villa Finale Quarterly Newsletter

September 2022 www.VillaFinale.org

Vol. 1 Issue 3

Board of Directors

Dru Van Steenberg,
Chair of the Board

Jay Loudon, Vice-Chair of the Board

Elizabeth Marie Lutz, Secretary

Anthony White, Treasurer

Nancy H. Avellar

Mallory Baird

Romanita Matta-Barrera

Merribell Parsons

Elizabeth Reed

Al Rendon

Jeff Schmidt

Olin B. Strauss

Beth Wells

Rick Wilson

Ex-Officio Representative from
the National Trust for Historic
Preservation

Laura Farrell Bracis, CPA, CFE
Chief Financial Officer

Villa Finale Staff

Jane Lewis, Executive Director

Sylvia Gonzalez-Pizaña, Manager
of Collections & Interpretation

Orlando Cortinas, Manager of
Buildings & Grounds

Farrah Varga, Manager of
Marketing & Programs

Lisa Stewart,
Visitor Services Coordinator

Doug Daye, Museum Interpreter

Sara Taylor, Museum Interpreter

The Bee Line
© Villa Finale 2022

From the Desk of the Executive Director

Dear Friends & Supporters:

Although my calendar says it's September, it sure still feels like summer. But we're excited that it's after Labor Day and we're open to the public, once again!

June and July brought record numbers of visitors to Villa Finale. Maybe it was the air-conditioning, but we like to think it was our beautiful museum full of interesting objects that drew guests in. The site was closed in August so that we could repaint the formal areas in the downstairs interior of the historic house. See more on this very labor-intensive project in the following pages.



A special shout-out with much appreciation goes to the fabulous Villa Finale staff, who flawlessly executed the coordination of our repainting project: Sylvia Gonzalez-Pizana, Orlando Cortinas, Farrah Varga, Lisa Stewart, Doug Daye, and Sara Taylor. With their planning and careful attention to every detail, our deadlines were met with room to spare.

Now, with the promise of cooler weather and seasonal holidays, we are very excited to be able to offer a wide range of in-person tours, programs, and events in the coming months. A calendar of upcoming activities is in this Bee Line; but please follow us on social media (Instagram, Facebook) or check our website (www.VillaFinale.org) for up-to-the minute information and updates.

We always love to hear from you, our friends and supporters! Please share your interests with us so we can continue to provide enriching, entertaining, and educational opportunities for you at Villa Finale! As stewards of this beautiful historic site, it is our pleasure to share it with you.

With warmest regards,
Jane Lewis
Executive Director

Operational Updates



October

7 - Closed for special events.
8 - Closed for Federal Holiday.

November

11 - Closed for Veterans' Day Holiday.
22 - 26 - Closed for holiday decorating & Thanksgiving.

December

1 - Closing at 2:00pm for special event.
23 - 24 - Closed for Christmas break.
30 - 31 - Closed for New Year's break.

Upcoming Program Highlights

OCTOBER

7th - Friday

***Hello From the Other Side:
Live Séance & Paranormal
Exploration***

7:30pm - 9:30pm

**\$30 member / \$40 non-member
(13+ only)**

This incredible evening will feature a presentation and live seance by The Austin Seance inside historic Villa Finale, built in 1876. Learn about the history of spiritualism in America and commune with a spirit or two! Villa Finale – including the basement!



31st - Monday

***Trick or Treat! Halloween at Villa
Finale***

**5:00pm - until candy runs out!
(Ages 5 - 12)**

Villa Finale continues its now-annual tradition of participating in the King William neighborhood's trick or treating festivities! Villa Finale staff will be handing out candy, so bring your little ones early and wear your spookiest gear. **If you would like to donate candy to keep the fun going a bit longer, let us know!**

NOVEMBER

5th - Saturday

***"Who Done It?" A Murder Mystery
at Villa Finale***

6:30pm - 8:30pm

\$25 member / \$30 non-member
There's been a murder committed at historic Villa Finale and it's up to you to solve the crime! Join us for this macabre evening and enjoy refreshments, adult beverages, and murder mystery mayhem!



Visit our website www.villafinale.org for additional programs and updates.

Program Highlights Cont. NOVEMBER

19th - Saturday

Game Night at Villa Finale!

6:30pm - 9:00pm

**\$20 member / \$25 non-member
(21+ only)**

Villa Finale opens its doors to fun-loving folks for our second game night! Enjoy board games and adult beverages while rotating through gaming stations set up throughout Villa Finale – including the basement!



DECEMBER

1st - Thursday

Merry Friendsmas Holiday Party!

Time TBA

MEMBERS ONLY EVENT

Join us on December 1st for our *Merry Friendsmas Holiday Party!* This members-only celebration will welcome the Christmas season with drinks, delicious food, and festive music. Call us at (210) 223-9800 to check your membership or to join the Friends of Villa Finale!

15th - Thursday

Villa Finale's Holiday Open House

5:30pm - 7:30pm

FREE

The holiday season means holiday décor at Villa Finale, and we want to share the spirit of the season! Join us for our second annual free holiday open house and enjoy first floor access to this beautiful historic home and its festive holiday finery.

7th & 14th - Wednesdays

Music for Your Eyes - Holiday!

\$20 member / \$25 non-member

6:30pm - 8:00pm

This holiday evening experience highlights the music machines in the museum's collection with demonstrations of unique music boxes, antique turntables, and more. Guests will be treated to a glass of champagne as they enjoy a fifteen-minute concert of traditional holiday songs played on our automated 1921 Bechstein-Welte reproducing piano.



Summer 2022 Programs Recap

The much-anticipated return of the Murder Mystery night took place in June at beautiful Villa Finale! A “truly criminal” cohort of players met on a Saturday evening to enjoy cocktails on the front patio before receiving their character names and biographies. After breaking the ice and receiving instructions from the staff of “Anonville Manor” (Villa Finale staff in disguise, of course) players were free to meet and mingle in character and, ultimately, to solve the murder of one of their own. This was a tough one and, despite the crackerjack detective work displayed by the players, the murderer wasn't unmasked until the very end!

Villa Finale hosted its first-ever Game Night in July and what a fun night it was! Guests enjoyed drinks and snacks as they rotated throughout Villa Finale's rooms (including our mysterious basement) playing classic board games, modern card games, and more. The competition got “heated,” but with the able instruction of Villa Finale staff and the great attitudes of our attendees an amazing time was had by all.

Be sure to check out our upcoming programs section and mark your calendars for our next Murder Mystery and Game Night!



“Bee” An Insider

Behind-the-Scenes at Villa Finale



Paint Me Like One of Your Italian Villas

The Villa Finale Painting Project of Summer 2022

By Sylvia Gonzalez-Pizaña, Manager of Collections & Interpretation

It was January 2022. We had just rung in the New Year. As I was thinking ahead to all the projects in store for Villa Finale for the year there was one I purposely kept putting out of my mind: the repainting of the first floor, for I knew it would be a daunting task!

In 2017 we had completed a rewiring of the entire house and that project was intense, even though we only moved about a quarter of the objects in each room. The painting project, however, would require every single item be moved out of six areas: the Main Hall, Napoleon Parlors, Library, Dining Room, and Bar hallway. A couple of months prior to the project, we finally put together a plan for the movement of the collection.



July 28th: we began the project by moving objects on the main staircase.

We knew going into this project it would take a lot of planning and creative solutions to problems. The staff stepped up and did a great job, helping get this project done without any problems and on time to open to the public again. -- Orlando Cortinas, Manager of Buildings & Grounds

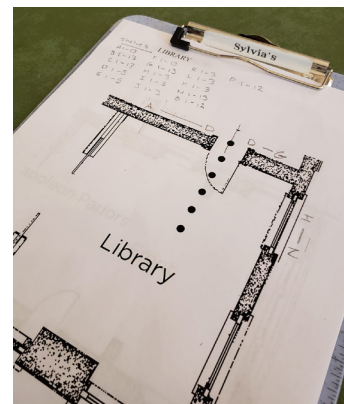


The key was to keep everything from each room together and to take detailed photographs to refer to during the reassembling. Orlando and I began taking paintings down and packing smaller objects from the top of the main staircase down to the Main Hallway on Thursday, July 28th in anticipation of the arrival of the painters the following Monday.

Some people may wonder, why not hire movers to do the work? Moving items from a museum collection is not a common, everyday task. Every object must be picked up in a manner following best museum practices, the same with larger items although these require extra special care. Prior to moving anything, Orlando and I would discuss how we would secure and lift each piece for its protection. Many of the furniture pieces are well over a century old and are not as stable as they once were.

One person asked me, how did you know where you put everything? We took a printed floor plan of the downstairs of the house and marked out where every single piece – including boxes with smaller items – were moved. For this first part of the project – the packing and moving - Orlando and I worked alone while saving the rest of the staff’s energy for the reassembling of each room. Now, all this careful planning didn’t mean there wouldn’t be unexpected surprises along the way. We knew they were coming, it was just a matter of time.

One of the earliest surprises came when we removed the marble top from a table in the Main Hallway. This table didn’t have any drawers that we could see, but the top’s removal revealed a number of items stored there by Walter Mathis years earlier including programs to special events, theater booklets, and souvenir coins. Just when you think you’ve seen it all at Villa Finale, you realize you truly haven’t!



An early view of the Library floor plan as we plotted out how to move over 2,000 books.



Front Napoleon Parlor looking into the rear. We will never see the rooms like this ever again ... at least, I hope not!



Books were temporarily stored everywhere, including the Kitchen.

We also had a few mishaps with the smoke alarms in the house. The painters were incredibly careful with their preparations in every room prior to doing any work, even covering the smoke alarms prior to spraying inside. However, the alarms are so sensitive they did go off a few times despite being covered. Imagine our faces when sirens started blaring in the house! This did provide a bit of good news: we now know the alarms work great.

While we did remove 99% of collections in the rooms, there were a few things that we couldn't move because they were either too large – like the piano in the front Napoleon Parlor – or because movement posed a problem to the physical integrity of the object. A cabinet in the rear Napoleon Parlor and the mantel mirrors in the four main rooms stayed put as it was better for them to stay where they were. Also, as hard as I tried not having to move them, we did have to move the over 2,000 books in the Library. This task required most of our staff. Yes, we did take a rough count!

It was a unique and a once in our lifetime experience to move “ALL” the objects from the rooms and see the house and architecture apart from the collection items. We will never see the house in that state again and it was a privilege to experience that. -- Orlando Cortinas, Manager of Buildings & Grounds

August 24th was a big day: this is when we finally began to reassemble the rooms while the painters finished up in the Library. We brought in the staff and, using photos taken prior to the project plus other snapshots captured in the early days of the National Trust's ownership, everyone worked together to carefully unwrap and clean every piece before putting it back where it belonged. Again, the most arduous task was returning the books back to their proper shelf. Fortunately, we had a great system that produced very minor hiccups in the two-day book return process.

Thursday, September 1st we returned the last items to their home locations, swept, vacuumed, and mopped. Just in time for the Labor Day break! The entire process took 26 days from start to finish. We learned so much about the collection and the house itself. The painters told us the walls had only one layer of paint which meant we were still seeing the original coat from Walter Mathis' days in the house.

Speaking of, I would like to thank Daniel Mojica and Israel Garcia, the contractors for Hendrick Painting who not only did a beautiful job in the house, they were also respectful of the collection and were very communicative throughout the project. Of course, we could never have completed this arduous project without the help and cooperation of Villa Finale's staff. They were always game for whatever task Orlando and I gave them without complaining. And I'm extremely proud to say nothing was lost or broken by the staff!

When you visit us again, please take a second to admire Villa Finale's freshly painted walls. I think I speak for everyone when I say this was not only a labor of love, but also one of pride in this beautiful historic house. We can imagine Walter Mathis is just as proud as we are!



Interpreter Discoveries

The restoration project in August not only allowed us to brighten up Villa Finale but it gave us the chance to have a much more up-close and personal look at our collection. And we found quite a few surprises!



While cleaning upstairs during the renovation project, I came across a postcard from the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis. It had a beautifully colored drawing of the Grand Lagoon. On the front left corner of the card was a label that said, "HOLD TO LIGHT". So as soon as I did, the picture darkened with light coming from the buildings and the moon pictured on the card. I realized I was now staring at a night scene. There were holes in the card where the light shone through which gave off a cool illusion! I hope to do a video talking about this for our social media channels soon.

-- Doug Daye, Museum Interpreter



One thing that really stuck out to me was something we found while taking the books out of the library for painting. Tucked away on a shelf in a little archival box was a little pink book which turned out to be a commemorative book for the coronation of Queen Victoria in 1838. Inside were beautiful illustrations that unfold and show the celebrations of the coronation! Since we were busy moving two thousand books, we didn't get to stop and look at it for long, but anyone here at Villa Finale can tell you I am chomping at the bit for the opportunity to examine it more closely and take you along with me in a blog or video - possibly both!

-- Sara Taylor, Museum Interpreter

"Trust" In the News Updates from the National Trust for Historic Preservation

Alma McLemore and Katherine Malone-France Receive Awards from the Heritage Foundation of Williamson County, Tennessee

Alma McLemore, a Franklin resident and president of the African American Heritage Society, received the Patron Award for her efforts to preserve history and foster community among Black residents in Franklin. Katherine Malone-France, the chief preservation officer at the National Trust for Historic Preservation, earned the Tracy Frist Award.



Alma McLemore.

PastForward Conference Celebrates the Power of Place

With more than 100 thought-provoking speakers and more than 30 educational sessions, this year's National Trust conference will focus on telling the full American story and the role historic places play in social and environmental justice, will explore how we can better understand and advocate for the environment, and will explain economic benefits that older and historic places bring to our communities.

PastForward will take place virtually November 1st through November 4th. More details may be found at www.savingplaces.org.





Delightful Diversions

DID YOU KNOW?

When it comes to Christmas at Villa Finale, we don't hold back! We also don't clear away our collections to make room for holiday décor. We layer and mix until we get the look that final owner Walter Nold Mathis loved.

In fact, we utilize Mr. Mathis' own Christmas decorations every year when festooning Villa Finale for the season. His "international Santa" collection, his feather trees, and his hundreds of ornaments (many antique) are carefully removed from storage and placed throughout Villa Finale's first floor, where they continue to delight visitors. We even have a group of Meissen musicians - nestled in greenery by Mr. Mathis himself - positioned by the front door to welcome guests.

Be sure to drop by Villa Finale this holiday season, whether on a daily tour or as a guest at our holiday open house!



A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words

The Last Book Back on the Shelf!

Manager of Collections & Interpretation, Sylvia Gonzalez-Pizaña, triumphantly holds aloft the last book to be placed back on the shelves after the painting of the Library.



Ask Villa Finale's Staff

Have you got a burning question about Villa Finale that you've been dying to ask our staff? Do you have special interest in an item from our collection? Or maybe you just need to know more about what makes Villa Finale special?

Ask us!

Send us an email at villafinale@villafinale.org or give us a call at (210) 223-9800 and hit us with your questions. We can't wait to hear from you!



VILLA FINALE: MUSEUM & GARDENS
401 King William Street
San Antonio, TX 78204

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
San Antonio, TX
Permit No. 1701

Friends of Villa Finale Membership



Become a “Friend of Villa Finale”
and help support our educational
programming throughout the year!

Friend of Villa Finale -- \$100

Friend of Villa Finale – Plus One! -- \$150

Contributing Friend of Villa Finale -- \$250

Supporting Friend of Villa Finale -- \$500

Sustaining Friend of Villa Finale -- \$1000

Visit www.villafinale.org to discover full membership benefits
or call us at (210) 223-9800 to become a “Friend of Villa
Finale” today!

The Bee

Napoleon Bonaparte chose
the bee to represent his
status as emperor due to
the creature’s industrious
habits. The bee symbolizes
hard work, diligence,
industriousness, and
orderliness.



A Site of the
**National Trust for
Historic Preservation**