

Winchester House Absolute

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 19 Jul 2002

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Jeff Wilson — 19 Jul 2002, 03:59

From: Michael Andre-Driussi <mantis at siriusfiction.com>

Update: I saw in the progress report for Con Jose that they are organizing a tour of the fabled Winchester Mystery House. I had not realized that access was so restrictive, I thought people could just drop in any time, pay the money, go inside, which shows how little planning I had done.

Anyway, I decided to let the cat out of the bag and ask Gene Wolfe if he'd ever been, if he would like to go while at Worldcon, and if he would, would he rather go on the organized tour or on a separate one.

He has been there before (D'oh!) and he recommends it. He is interested in going while at Worldcon, but as his wife would not likely be able to go (wheelchair access issues), he would probably have to go without her and cannot commit as yet.

As I recall from a documentary some time back, Sara Winchester was disabled herself and much of the house is accessible with only 2-3 inch risers; a stout but gentle help ought to be able to navigate a wheelchair without much trouble, though some of the corners might be tight.

Those who have occasion to visit the campus of Texas A&M in College Station should visit the Sterling C. Evans library. The sprawling structure has gradually accreted around the blocky, utilitarian 3-4 story building present when GW matriculated there 50 years ago and now completely concealed by the present expanded facility. When I was there ca 1988, there were numerous intertwined sections separated by a single wall or locked door that required very circuitous routes to otherwise travel between, including a shadowy gallery from which exultant brats could lash the poor slobs underneath on their way to Periodicals. (Fortunately, they were more interested in making out.) The original building is mostly(?) intact, though its had new floors inserted between the originals IIRC, in order to fit more archival shelving. There's no rodents living among the stacks, though there are some interesting architectural decisions, including a stairway styled like a stopped escalator that gives it a declined-age feel. There's more than a little House Absolute and "Date Due" to be found there.

Jeff Wilson

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"If your SecOp can see you, so can the enemy." -Cpt Law

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Josh Geller — 20 Jul 2002, 00:39 · follows Jeff Wilson

On Thu, 18 Jul 2002, Jeff Wilson wrote:

From: Michael Andre-Driussi <mantis at siriusfiction.com>

He has been there before (D'oh!) and he recommends it. He is interested in going while at Worldcon, but as his wife would not likely be able to go (wheelchair access issues), he would probably have to go without her and

cannot commit as yet.

As I recall from a documentary some time back, Sara Winchester was disabled herself

She had arthritis.

She was also 4'10" and of slight build.

and much of the house is accessible with only 2-3 inch risers; a stout but gentle help ought to be able to navigate a wheelchair without much trouble, though some of the corners might be tight.

This is incorrect.

I've been there many times.

The staircases that have the teeny tiny risers also have walls that are three feet apart and multiple 180 degree turns.

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Tony Ellis — 20 Jul 2002, 22:42 · follows Josh Geller

Jeff Wilson wrote:

Those who have occasion to visit the campus of Texas A&M in College Station should visit the Sterling C. Evans library.

<snip>

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House Absolute and "Date Due" to be found there.

The Haunted Boardinghouse too, by the sound of it.

House Absolute hunters might also find a visit to the Doge's Palace in Venice of interest.

Although the Doge did have apartments there, the primary function of the building was to house the ruling councils and law courts of the Republic. Enjoying the public tour of the Palazzo a while back it struck me, as it had on a previous visit, that these grand chambers with their Tintoretto and Veronese ceiling panels were all very nice for looking at, but you couldn't possibly run a complex, corrupt city like Venice from them. This time I enquired, and discovered that, if you booked it two days in advance, there was another, private, tour of the Palazzo you could take.

As the name suggests, the Itinerari Segreti takes in all the secret rooms visitors to the Palazzo were never supposed to see. A warren of chambers and passages that, like the Secret House, interconnects with the public palace at a number of different points. At one, you actually find yourself looking down from a high inner window into one of the public rooms, the tourists milling around below you entirely oblivious. I had been that room on the public tour, and had never even noticed the window.

Elsewhere we saw the office where the Chancellor, the most powerful man in Venice, worked. He was paid a salary of a billion lira a year to free him from the temptation of bribery, and he worked in a bare, cramped wooden room hidden above one of the sumptuous ceiling panels.

In another of the public rooms there were four ornate matching wardrobes, one in each corner.

Three were genuine. The fourth concealed a little staircase leading to a minimalist torture chamber Master Palaemon might have approved of. It had a strappado, a bench for inquisitors where they could question without being seen, and tiny en suite oubliettes where enemies of the state could hear what was coming to them next.