



taft
MUSEUM OF ART

DECORATING THE TAFT GALLERIES

A Look at the Museum's Window Treatments,
Carpets, and Other Furnishings



In 1927, Charles and Anna Taft bequeathed their historic home and private art collection to the people of Cincinnati. Four years later, the transformation of the house into a public museum began. The institution's first director, Walter Siple, took charge of the project. Commenting on the renovation, he said: "The idea with regard to the installation was to provide a dignified background for the Taft collections—this background to reflect the feeling of a home of the first quarter of the nineteenth century. In order to do this, it was necessary to provide the rooms not only with window draperies, andirons and fenders, but also with floorcoverings and furniture." For decades, Federal-style (about 1780–1820) furnishings served as the primary setting for the Taft's treasures.

During the early 2000s, the museum's historic house galleries were redesigned. The goal was to present an evolution of the history of American interiors documenting a 100-year period, from initial construction of the house in about 1820 through the residency of Charles and Anna Taft in the 1920s. New window treatments and carpet that replicate historical styles were created between 2001 and 2004. They were installed alongside the lighting, fireplace mantels, and furniture Siple purchased in the early 1930s. For the window treatments, Beverly Hafemeister, a professional seamstress based in Cincinnati, spent countless hours sewing dozens of custom-made creations. Joe Vennemeyer of Spaces then draped the fabric, creating a variety of one-of-a-kind designs. The carpets, made by the English firm Grosvenor Wilton, were woven on 27-inch-wide looms and assembled in Cincinnati. Colors and patterns were chosen to complement the art or period of each gallery. Today, an eclectic mix of styles can be found throughout the historic house. The information that follows will help guide you through these uniquely decorated spaces.

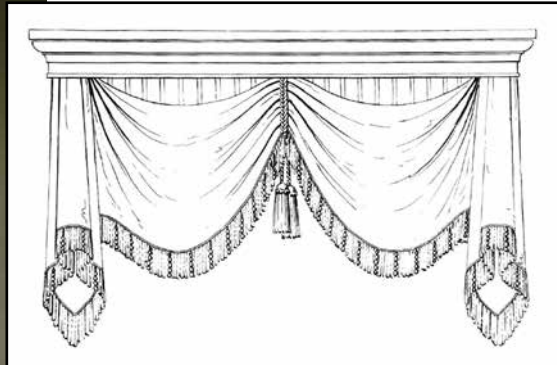
1: Welcome Gallery and East Hall

Federal- and Greek Revival-style designs from the early to mid-1800s—which exude elegance and simplicity and favor classical motifs—served as the source of inspiration for the carpet and window treatments within these two areas. Books such as *The Upholsterer's Guide* (1848) by the English designer Thomas King provided guidance on how to arrange the valances—the fabric that

hangs at the top of the window—in the Welcome Gallery and on the window in the east hall across from the Sacred Stories gallery. A luxurious red and green silk blend glitters with gold flowers and laurel leaves. The blown-glass light fixture in the hall dates to around 1800, while the carpet replicates a design from the same time.



Valance and Sheers, rayon, silk, and cotton, about 2003, with early 1930s hardware.



"A Drapery drawn up in the centre with ropes," in Thomas King, *The Upholsterer's Guide: Rules for Cutting and Forming Draperies, Valances, &c.* London: John Weale, Architectural Library, 1848, plate 10.

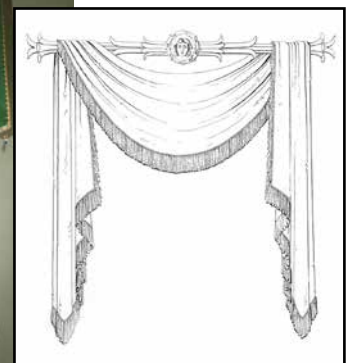
Valance and Sheers, rayon, silk, and cotton, about 2003, with early 1930s hardware.



Grosvenor Wilton, "Duxbury Trellis" pattern, after a design from about 1800, made about 2003.



Bell Jar Lantern, blown glass with metal fittings, about 1800.



"A single Swag," in Thomas King, *The Upholsterer's Guide: Rules for Cutting and Forming Draperies, Valances, &c.* London: John Weale, Architectural Library, 1848, plate 1.

2: Sinton Gallery

The window treatments in the Sinton Gallery mimic a set from the Richmond Room, a Federal-era Virginia parlor in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Here, blue and yellow silk valances hang over wool sheers. The carpet, like that in the hall, features a diamond-shaped motif seen in garden trellises, hence the names for both patterns.

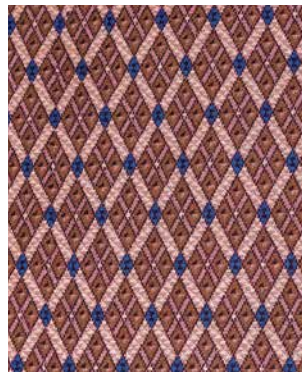


Valance and Sheers, silk and wool, about 2003, with early 1930s hardware.

In 1932, the museum purchased this light fixture from Curtis Lighting Inc. of Chicago. Bronze snakes slither over the top of the frosted glass shade. You will find identical fixtures hanging in four other galleries throughout the historic house.



Parlor from the William C. Williams House, 1810–11, Richmond, Virginia. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Joe Kindig Jr., 1968, 68.137



Grosvenor Wilton, "Washburn Trellis" pattern, after a design from about 1843, made about 2003.



Curtis Lighting Inc., Light Fixture, Chicago, glass, bronze, and brass, about 1930.

3: Sacred Stories

A Gothic Revival library in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection served as the inspiration for this gallery's design. It incorporates motifs found in Gothic art and architecture, a style that flourished in Europe between about the mid-1100s and 1500. Woven with a quatrefoil pattern, the drapery panels hang from rings on a wooden rod, much like those in the Met's period room.

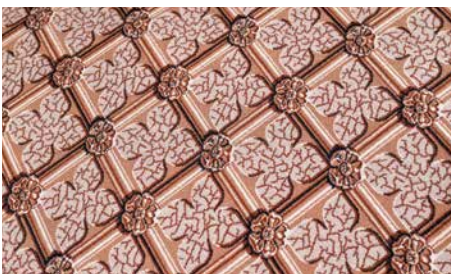
Likewise, the carpet features a rosette similar to one held by the Virgin Mary in the ivory sculpture in the center of this gallery. A wooden fireplace mantel made around 1800 rounds out the furnishings in this space. This is the first of six Federal-period mantels you'll find in the historic house galleries.



Gothic Revival Library, from the Frederick Deming Villa, 1859, Balmville, New York. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Hamilton Fish, 1977, 1977.7.1



Valance, Panels, and Sheers, rayon and cotton, with mahogany hardware, about 2003.



Grosvenor Wilton, "Gothic Tracery" pattern, after a design from about 1825, made about 2003.



Fireplace Mantel, from a house in West Chester, Pennsylvania, about 1800, carved and painted wood.

4: Tiny Treasures

The red and gold harlequin-pattern valance found in this space was inspired by a similar treatment hanging in a dining room at the Winterthur Museum, Garden, and Library, which houses an important collection of early American decorative arts.

The light fixture, acquired around 1932, was made by Edward F. Caldwell & Co., a preeminent manufacturer of light fixtures in the early 1900s. It features stars and a pineapple-shaped finial. Another example hangs in the Taft's Serving Pantry.



Du Pont Dining Room, Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library, Delaware.



Edward F. Caldwell & Co., Light Fixture, New York City, glass and brass, about 1930.



Valance and Sheers, silk, polyester, and cotton, about 2003, with early 1930s hardware.

5: Myths & Mortals

The carpet in this room, called “Renaissance Strapwork,” was chosen to complement the artwork on display. Artisans often used this decorative motif, which consisted of interlaced bands, during the 1400s and 1500s. The silk valances and wool sheers, copied from an early-19th-century hand-colored engraving in the museum’s archives, hang from holdbacks of crescent moons and stars.



Grosvenor Wilton, “Renaissance Strapwork” pattern, after a design from 1842, made about 2003.



Valance and Sheers, silk, cotton, and wool, about 2003, with early 1930s hardware.

Draperies de Croisées (Window Draperies), no. 309, in *Collection de Meubles et Objets de Goût* (Collection of Furniture and Objects of Taste), edited by Pierre de La Mésangère, published by Au Bureau du Journal des Dames et des Modes, Paris, 1809, hand-colored engraving. Taft Museum of Art Archives, 1932.49

Walter Siple purchased these engravings when planning the museum’s window treatments in 1932. The wallpaper border above the chair rail and below the cornice dates to the 1930s renovation. Siple purchased it from Nancy McClelland, Inc. of New York. McClelland—an esteemed interior decorator working in the early 1900s—specialized in historic interiors.



Wallpaper Border, hand block printed paper, purchased from Nancy McClelland, Inc., New York City, in 1932.



Fireplace Mantel, from a house in Leesburg, Ohio, about 1800, carved and painted wood.

6: Virtue & Vice

A French Empire textile from about 1805, purchased by Siple, called *Les Sphinx Medallions* served as the inspiration for the drapery panels and cornices in this gallery. The Emperor Napoleon's campaigns to Egypt sparked interest in these ancient motifs. When it came to hanging the fabric, museum staff looked to window treatments at King Caesar House,



Panels, Cornice, and Sheers, cotton and wool, late 1980s and early 2000s fabric.



Wallpaper Border, hand block printed paper, purchased from Barrie & Desmond, Inc., New York City, in 1932.

an 1809 Federal mansion in Duxbury, Massachusetts. The carpeting in this gallery, after a design from about 1810, echoes geometric floor patterns often found in Dutch interiors of the mid-1600s, as seen in Pieter de Hooch's *A Woman with a Cittern and a Singing Couple at a Table*, on view in this room.



West Chamber, King Caesar House, Duxbury, Massachusetts. Property of the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society. Image from *The Magazine Antiques* 131, no. 3 (March 1987), p. 621.



Jean-Baptiste Huet (French, 1745–1811), designer and engraver, *Les Sphinx Medallions*, France, Oberkampf Factory, about 1805, cotton. Taft Museum of Art, 1932.218



Grosvenor Wilton, "Parquet with Ebony" pattern, after a design from about 1810, made about 2003.



Fireplace Mantel, from a house near Dillsboro, Indiana, about 1800, carved and painted wood.

7: Portraits & Prosperity

When designing this neoclassical-style interior, museum staff looked to fashionable French sources from the early 1800s, as well as to designs that drew upon ancient Greek and Roman motifs. The pale blue fan-shaped valances and embroidered sheers, for example, derive from a French engraving in the museum's archives.

The carpet, which replicates ancient Roman mosaics, reproduces a design from about 1800. The classically inspired wallpaper border features vases among swags. Swags also appear on the delicate carving on the fireplace mantel, which came from a home in Milford, Connecticut.



Valance and Sheers, cotton and silk, about 2003, with early 1930s hardware.

Draperies de Croisées (Window Draperies), no. 309, in *Collection de Meubles et Objets de Goût* (Collection of Furniture and Objects of Taste), edited by Pierre de La Mésangère, published by Au Bureau du Journal des Dames et des Modes, Paris, 1809, hand-colored engraving. Taft Museum of Art Archives, 1932.49



Grosvenor Wilton, "Small Roman Tile" pattern, after a design from about 1790–1810, made about 2003.



Wallpaper Border, hand block printed paper, probably purchased from Nancy McClelland, Inc., New York City, in 1932.



Fireplace Mantel, from a house in Milford, Connecticut, about 1800, carved and painted wood.

8: Green Parlor and 10: Plum Parlor

The furnishings in the Green Parlor and Plum Parlor mirror one another and look to decorating trends popular in the early 1800s. The elaborate silk window treatments are based on an illustration found in *The Cabinet Dictionary* (1803), a popular book filled with ideas for interiors circulated by the English furniture designer Thomas Sheraton.

Green and yellow Greek Revival–style carpeting with classical medallions derives from a design dating to about 1827. Black marble fireplace mantels with Ionic columns and a wallpaper border with acanthus leaves and flowers—both added during the early 2000s renovation—complete the decorative scheme.



Valance and Sheers, silk and cotton, about 2003, with early 1930s hardware.

"Window Drapery and Cornice," in Thomas Sheraton, *The Cabinet Dictionary*. London: W. Smith, 1803, plate 80. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Art & Architecture Collection, The New York Public Library



Wallpaper Border, serigraph on paper, early 2000s.



Top, Green Parlor: *Fireplace Mantel*, from the Judge A. V. Parson Mansion in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, late 1800s, King of Prussia marble.

Bottom, Plum Parlor: *Fireplace Mantel*, 1800s, Nero Portoro marble.



Curtis Lighting Inc., *Chandelier*, Chicago, glass and metal, about 1930.



Grosvenor Wilton, "Empire Medallion" pattern, after a design from about 1827, made about 2003.

9: Duncanson Foyer

This space features a suite of eight landscape murals by the African American artist Robert S. Duncanson (1821–1872). Between 1994 and 2000, conservators and Taft staff looked at archival photographs and conducted paint layer analysis on the surrounding woodwork—then painted white—and confirmed that it had originally been faux-grained to resemble expensive tropical woods like mahogany. This was a fashionable practice in the mid-1800s and looked more appropriate with the murals. In the early 2000s, the museum hired John Canning & Co. to add faux

grain to the front doors and panels below the chair rail to recreate the original domestic setting of the years when Nicholas and Susan Longworth, who commissioned the murals, lived in the historic house (1830–1863). Dating from the 1820s or 1830s, the ceiling medallion features acanthus leaves and eagles. A skilled craftsman created these designs in sections by pressing wet plaster into molds, allowing it to dry, and then adhering the pieces into place. The blown-glass light fixture also dates to the early 1800s.



Panel, faux-grained wood, early 2000s.



Mural, before restoration, 1931.



Ceiling Medallion, plaster, 1820s or 1830s.



Bell Jar Lantern, blown glass with metal fittings, about 1800.

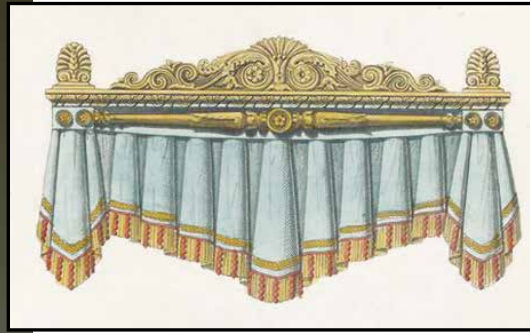


Grosvenor Wilton, “Duxbury Trellis” pattern, after a design from about 1800, made about 2003.

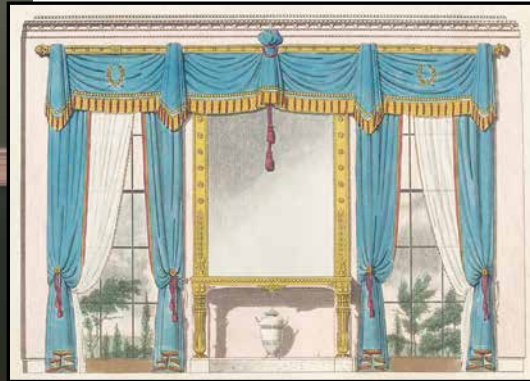
North and South Halls

To hang the crimson-and-champagne-colored fabric at either end of the hallway, museum staff used illustrations in Michael Angelo Nicholson's *The Practical Cabinet-maker, Upholsterer, and Complete Decorator* (1826) as models.

Walter Siple purchased the lighting in 1932. The hanging fixtures with frosted glass shades and domed reflectors were probably made in Sandwich, Massachusetts, around 1800. Wall sconces by Edward F. Caldwell & Co. also illuminate the space.



"Window Curtains," in Michael Angelo Nicholson, *The Practical Cabinet-maker, Upholsterer, and Complete Decorator*. London: H. Fisher, Son, & Co., 1826.



"Curtains for Two Windows," in Michael Angelo Nicholson, *The Practical Cabinet-maker, Upholsterer, and Complete Decorator*. London: H. Fisher, Son, & Co., 1826.

Valance and Sheers, silk and cotton, late 1980s and early 2000s fabric, with early 1930s hardware.



Edward F. Caldwell & Co., *Wall Sconce*, New York City, glass and brass, about 1930.



Bell Jar Lantern, probably made in Sandwich, Massachusetts, glass and brass, early 1800s.

11: Fields & Flowers

This room incorporates a number of classically inspired elements. The fabric for the alternating swag valances is the same used in Gallery 6: Virtue & Vice, which was reproduced from *Les Sphinx Medallions*, a French textile designed around 1805. It combines classical Greek and Roman as well as Egyptian motifs.

To hang the fabric, staff may have modeled the swag valances after a set of window treatments at Rosendal Palace, a grand neoclassical residence in Sweden built between 1823 and 1827. Museum staff also may have been inspired by a watercolor and graphite rendering in the Taft archives after a French engraving from 1809.



Valance and Sheers, cotton and wool, late 1980s and early 2000s fabric, with early 1930s hardware.

Window Draperies, watercolor and graphite, 1800s. After a design in *Collection de Meubles et Objets de Goût* (Collection of Furniture and Objects of Taste), no. 296, edited by Pierre de La Mésangère, published by Au Bureau du Journal des Dames et des Modes, Paris, 1809. Taft Museum of Art Archives, 1932.100



Lantern Room, Rosendal Palace, Sweden. Photo by Gomer Swahn/Royalpalaces.se



Fireplace Mantel, from a house in Indiana, about 1800, carved and painted wood.



Grosvenor Wilton, "Empire Block" pattern, after a design from about 1834, made about 2003.

12: Dining Room and 13: Serving Pantry

In 1910, the Tafts hired the architectural firm of Elzner & Anderson to enlarge the dining room and install a late-1700s-style plaster ceiling. Its design recalls the work of Scottish architects Robert and James Adam, who were inspired by ancient Greek and Roman motifs. The classical anthemion, or petal-like, designs on the large oval medallion are echoed on the light fixture. Moreover, the fireplace mantel is fitted with a set of double Tuscan columns, much like those that support the museum's portico.

The window treatments and the carpet are based on designs that would have been fashionable around 1910, when this room was expanded. For example, Ogden Codman Jr. (1863–1951), an architect and interior decorator, installed a carpet of this same design in 1913 at Kykuit, the Rockefeller estate north of New York City, for which the pattern is named.



Ceiling, plaster, about 1910.



Edward F. Caldwell & Co.,
Light Fixture, New York City,
glass and brass, about 1930.



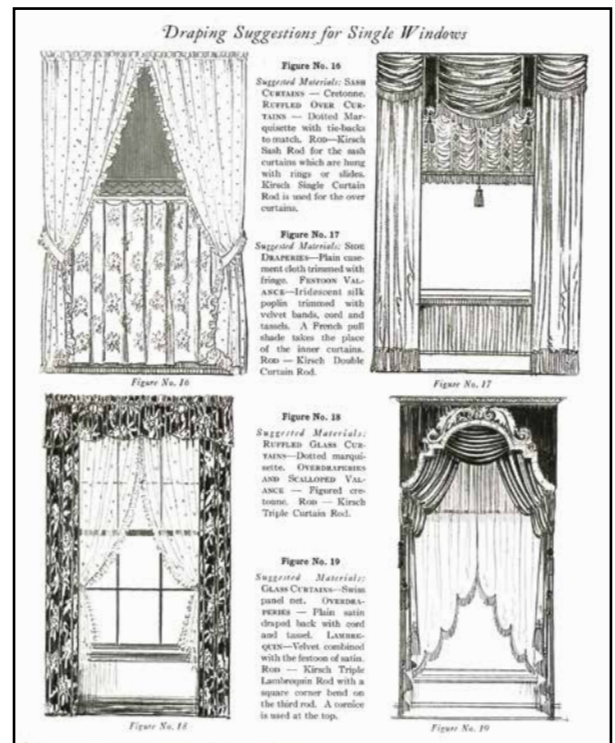
Fireplace Mantel, from a house
in Minerva, Kentucky, about 1800,
carved and painted wood.



Grosvenor Wilton, "Kykuit
(Codman) Turkey" pattern,
after a design from about
1913, made about 2003.



Valance, Panels, and Sheers, cotton and silk, late 1980s and early 2000s fabric.



14: Music Room

In 2004, the Music Room was refurbished with Rococo Revival–style carpet. The Rococo style, which flourished in France in the mid-1700s, is characterized by S-shaped curves, bright colors accented with gold, and the harmonious combination of naturalistic motifs, such as the peony design in the carpet. Many Americans looked to France for interior design ideas during the 1800s and early 1900s. The yellow and red window treatments, for example, are based on a Louis XVI design (late 1700s), while the crystal chandeliers are Empire style (about 1800–15).

Nearly ten thousand crystals make these elegant chandeliers sparkle. The museum purchased them from Curtis Lighting Inc. in 1932. The decorative plaster trim along the edges of the ceiling is original to the room and dates to the 1820s or 1830s. It features a grapevine pattern. Both Martin Baum—the first resident of the historic house—and Nicholas Longworth cultivated grapes on this property. Longworth’s vineyards extended behind the museum up the hillside now called Mount Adams.



Valance and Sheers, silk and linen, about 2003, with 1930s hardware.

Croisse a Grand Draperie Style Louis XVI, in Eugène Prignot, *La Tenture Moderne*. Paris: Ch. Claesen, 1884, plate no. 1.



Trim with Grapevines, plaster, 1820s or 1830s.

Curtis Lighting Inc., *Chandelier*, Chicago, Illinois, about 1930, lead crystals and brass.



Grosvenor Wilton, “Peony” pattern, after a design from about 1830, made about 2003.



Attributed to J. S. McClean for Garber & Woodward, *Fireplace Mantel*, about 1930, probably Columbus, Ohio, carved and painted wood.

GALLERIES / SECOND FLOOR

Permanent Collection Galleries and Special Exhibitions

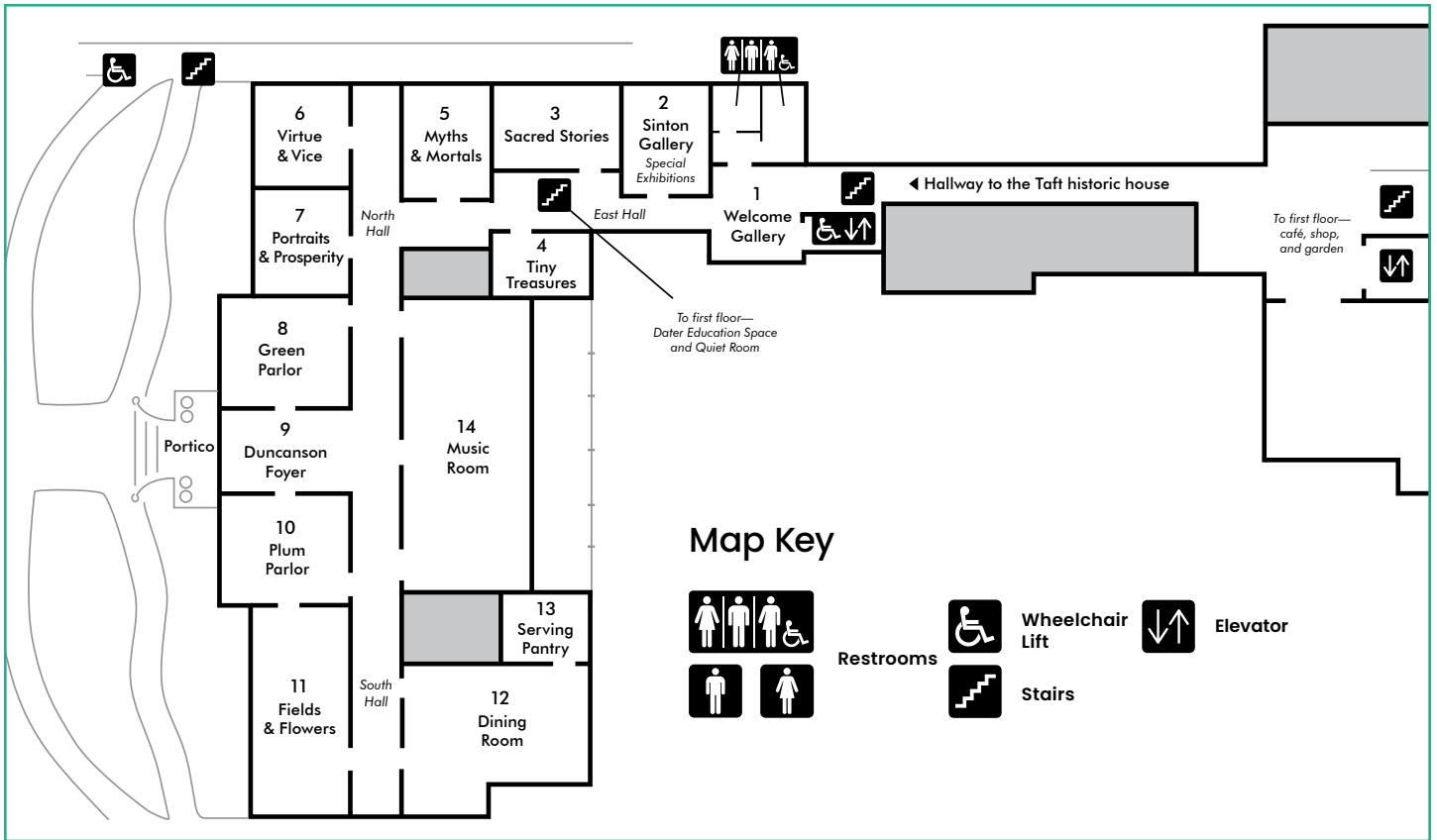


Photo by Ryan Kurtz