

Fooling the Eye

TROMPE L'OEIL AT THE SPRINGVILLE MUSEUM

The Art of the Garden Wall

Tromp L'oeil Painting

The wall paintings in the Garden Wall Restaurant at Thanksgiving Point continue a tradition known as "trompe l'oeil," a French term meaning "to fool the eye." Since antiquity, the simulation of material has been used to great effect, and the imitation of, for instance, wood, marble, stone, textiles and mosaic, executed directly on a wall, has created embellished decorative schemes. The careful manipulation of light and shadow, perspective and color has long been used to fabricate an architecture within an architecture, achieving optical illusions, intensifying depth, raising ceiling heights, bringing gardens inside the house, confounding the true and the false.

The Story Behind the Rooms

A storyteller and avid gardener, Karen Ashton wanted dining rooms and public spaces that would reflect these interests. Ideally, the rooms would have a magical quality, momentarily blurring the distinction between outdoors and indoors, with details that might only be discovered after several visits. A team of artists was assembled from New

York, Los Angeles, Mexico and here in Utah Valley. Under the direction of Richard Pettit of New York and using traditional techniques including wood graining, transparent glazes and specially designed, hand-cut stencils, the rooms took shape over a four-month period. Drawing heavily on the romantic Classicism so popular in American art and designs of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the team incorporated motifs and symbols unique to Utah history. For the visitor, the aim is to create the experience of stepping into a Turn-of-the-Century storybook.

The Garden Terrace Room

The painted brick and limestone walls in this room were adapted from a 19th-century French garden pavilion and echo the horizontal masonry banding of the outlying buildings at Thanksgiving Point. The imaginary vista on the west wall features the Greenhouse Warehouse, which is a good example of this style of building. The border, or frieze, that wraps around the room, appropriates scrollwork found on a desk belonging to Brigham Young, crafted by William Bell in the late 1850's. The scrollwork was turned into a repeating pattern that incorporates a beehive, honeycomb and paired seagulls, Utah state symbols. The painted tilework opposite the reception desk is embellished with honey bees, sego lilies and several of Mrs. Ashton's favorite quotations. The animals found in this room were inspired by those in Thanksgiving Point's actual barnyard.

The Garden Wall Room

While the Garden Terrace room represents daytime, symbolized by the crowing rooster, the Garden Wall room depicts evening, with a barn owl perched on the painted ledge of the north wall. Other nocturnal creature (including a partially camouflaged praying mantis) populate this portico room, designed to mimic a protected, terraced patio. The painted carving at the cornice line is a variation of a classical pattern known as the "egg and dart," while the frieze utilizes the oak leaf and acorn, a motif that is repeated throughout the building. (The slide included in the packet of the Pig and dessert cart is from this room.)

The Gallery Room

In the 1904, the great American novelist and amateur gardener Edith Wharton wrote a book entitled *Italian Villas and their Gardens*. The book was illustrated by the most popular artist of the day, Maxfield Parrish. Inspired by the future Italian garden at Thanksgiving Point, the eleven oil paintings in this room are variations on Parrish's originals. A common practice through the beginning of the 19th century was to hang paintings from decorative ribbons and elaborately carved "rosettes," here, seen against the backdrop of the hand-stenciled walls, a technique practiced for centuries before the event of commercially printed wallpapers.

The Restaurant Atrium and Salad Bar

Walls, ceilings, domes and rotundas covered with repetitive grids of recessed panels are commonly found in public spaces. This surface decoration is known as coffering and dates back to antiquity; a good example of this is the dome of the ancient Roman Pantheon. The Restaurant Atrium walls are painted with illusionary wooden coffers decorated with stylized botanical designs. The inspiration for these leafy medallions was

found in Victorian stencil patterns. The grand staircase is actually constructed of steel and has been painted to simulate wood. The coffered walls are hung with reproductions of the naturalistic watercolors of Pierre Joseph Redoute, recognized in France as the most accomplished botanical artist of his day. They were first published as a collection in 1833.