

# CAROLWOOD DRIVE

## *Fleur de Lys*

**T**HE ERA OF THE GREAT NEW Beverly Hills, Holmby Hills, and Bel-Air estates was over by the late 20th century. Or so some skeptics claimed, based on three beliefs:

First, no one could find enough flat or gently rolling land for a grand estate in those legendary neighborhoods. Too-big houses were being constructed on too-small lots that lacked space for large lawns and ornamental gardens, let alone the long and winding driveways that would provide evocative glimpses of the residence.

Second, the age of skilled craftsmanship had ended. People were building large, costly homes, but they were weak attempts—even parodies—of the solidly built, exquisitely crafted mansions of earlier decades.

Third, the art of great landscaping had been lost. Homebuilders—even if they could find large properties—simply could not create the grand grounds of earlier estates. Mature trees were nearly impossible to find, so owners would have to wait years for trees and shrubs to grow. Skilled landscape architects were scarce, and they didn't have the experience to plan extensive grounds because so few genuine estates were being created.

For once, however, the skeptics—and the naysayers—were wrong. Very wrong.

In 2002, the grand gates swung open to the new Fleur de Lys estate. By any measure, the property was born a legendary estate and a grand rival to the greatest residences of the 1920s and 1930s.

The five-acre Fleur de Lys had a 41,000-square-foot French limestone

mansion inspired by France's magnificent Vaux le Vicomte palace outside Paris. Surrounding the mansion were flat lawns, ornamental gardens, and mature trees that gave this Holmby Hills estate a secluded country air. The property also included a 3,000-square-foot manager's house, staff quarters for ten people, a spa and pool with a pavilion that had its own kitchen, a championship tennis court, and—a necessity for any French palace—a garden folly.

Planning, constructing, and completing such an estate was not easy.

One of the greatest challenges was acquiring enough land—particularly flat land—for the motor court, the mansion, and its rear lawns. Throughout Los Angeles, Spanish- and Italian-inspired mansions and their immediate grounds had been placed on hilly or uneven sites, and these residences were both attractive and true to their stylistic origins. By contrast, constructing a genuine neoclassical French palace required a relatively flat site, because elegant symmetry was so essential for this style.

After five years of negotiations with various landowners, the owners purchased six adjacent parcels along Angelo and Carolwood Drives, one by one, to create a five-acre property with adequate flat land for Fleur de Lys. Only one house had to be demolished. The rest of the land was empty.

As befitted such an important residence, a formal groundbreaking ceremony was held on January 1, 1996, on the vacant parcel—complete with leather-handled shovels, Fleur de Lys hardhats, and plenty of Cristal champagne.

The three years of construction required the greatest skill and patience.



After the foundation was dug, workers erected a steel frame to assure the mansion's structural integrity and minimize any impact from earthquakes. The steel frame was built atop huge steel rollers in the foundation, so that the mansion would glide back and forth—not shake—in an earthquake.

Each limestone block on the elegant façade was cut to precise specifications (to the smallest fraction of an inch) and finished in France, then shipped to California and attached to the steel frame.

Managing the construction of such a large residence in the heart of Holmby Hills was a challenge, too. Excess noise and commotion would not win friends among the neighbors. After the steel frame was erected and the basic interior structure complete, crews went on a twenty-four-hour schedule. Exterior work was done during the day, when noise was less of a nuisance to neighbors; interior work was carried out at night.

Upon its completion in 2002, Fleur de Lys was instantly acclaimed as one of Los Angeles's greatest estates. Its massive wrought-iron gates on Angelo Drive, just up the block from the Jack Warner residence, opened onto a 600-foot-long driveway that went up a gentle hill, past the tennis court on the left. The driveway turned left at the estate manager's 18th-century French-style limestone house, then made a complete U-turn into a tree-lined allée, ending at a pair of large limestone gateposts and the cobblestone-paved motor court. On either side of the allée were vast, formal gardens.

The front entrance to the elegantly restrained French palace opened onto a two-story reception hall, with a white and gold-leaf paneled ceiling and a marble floor, which ended at twin staircases that rose to the second floor. A pair of marble columns topped in gold leaf framed a doorway and views to the lawns and gardens at the rear of the house.

Double doors at the right of the reception hall opened onto a hallway that led to the formal dining room overlooking the motor court, a family room overlooking the rear terraces and gardens, and a room for china, silver, and crystal. Beyond these public areas was a vast service wing, including the butler's pantry, a commercial-grade kitchen, staff dining room and offices, and the security center.

Double doors at the left of the reception room opened onto a hallway leading to the music room overlooking the rear terrace and gardens, a two-story paneled library facing the motor court, and a well-hidden bar. (The owners were determined to create a French palace so authentic that, if Louis XIV were suddenly transported to Fleur de Lys, he would find no jarring note. In his era, French palaces did not have bars.) At the end of this hallway was the two-story main salon, which extended the full width of the mansion and was furnished in museum-quality French antiques.

On the second floor were seven bedrooms, including a master suite with





his and hers dressing rooms and bathrooms, a hair salon, and massage room.

The basement level contained some of the mansion's most dramatic features. The design of the ballroom, which could seat 250 guests at a banquet, was inspired by the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles. The 3,000-square-foot wine cellar, which had space for thousands of bottles and two long tables for two dozen guests, was modeled after a 16th-century champagne cave in Reims, outside Paris. The basement also had its own commercial-grade kitchen, connected to the first-floor kitchen by an elevator, to serve banquets in the ballroom or wine cellar.

For authenticity, all the modern conveniences—light switches, outlets, air conditioning, and, of course, the elevators—were carefully hidden from view in the formal first-floor rooms. One concession was made, however. If the mansion was really going to evoke a centuries-old French palace, the parquet floors would have creaked slightly. That option was presented to the owners—it could have been done—but it was discarded.

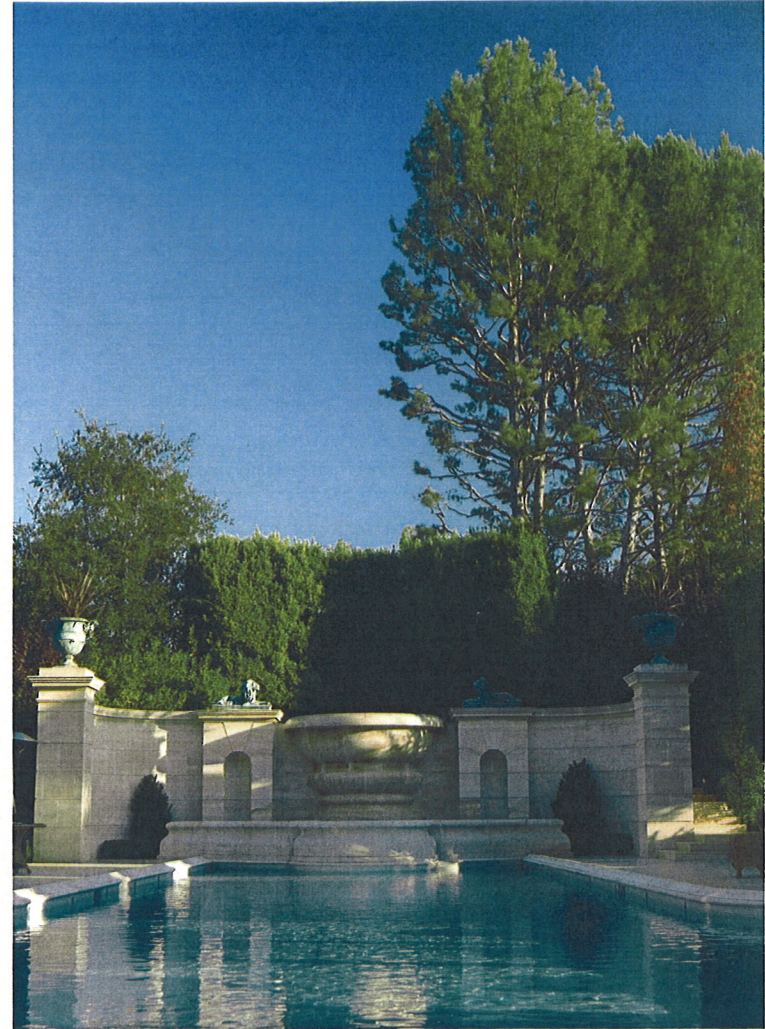
Decorating the mansion's main rooms was another challenge. A French palace requires the finest French antique furniture. That meant an exhaustive





three-year search for museum-quality pieces in Paris and New York shops, in private sales from collectors, and at auctions.

One of the greatest features of Fleur de Lys was its grounds. A large limestone terrace at the center of the mansion's rear façade led down a majestic sweep of flat lawn that ended—in a very neoclassical French style—at a Grecian temple folly set against a backdrop of dense foliage.



Fleur de Lys was an early-21st-century estate, created with consummate quality and attention to detail, and adequate time and budget to achieve extraordinary quality. Grand as it might be, the property lacked the history—and the great stories—of legendary estates from earlier decades. Time, of course, will bring those sagas to this Holmby Hills home, which will always be remembered as one of the greatest estates of its era.