



## MARBLE HOUSE

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### OWNERSHIP AND ARCHITECTURE

Marble House was built between 1888 and 1892 for Mr. and Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt. It was a summer house, or "cottage," as Newporters called them in remembrance of the modest houses of the early 19th century. But Marble House was much more; it was a social and architectural landmark that set the pace for Newport's subsequent transformation from a quiet summer colony of wooden houses to the legendary resort of opulent stone palaces.

Mr. Vanderbilt was the grandson of Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, who established the family's fortune in steamships and the New York Central Railroad. His older brother was Cornelius II, who built The Breakers. Alva Vanderbilt was a leading hostess in Newport society, and envisioned Marble House as her "temple to the arts" in America.

The house was designed by the architect Richard Morris Hunt, inspired by the Petit Trianon at Versailles. The cost of the house was reported in contemporary press accounts to be \$11 million, of which \$7 million was spent on 500,000 cubic feet of marble. Upon its completion, Mr. Vanderbilt gave the house to his wife as a 39th birthday present.

The Vanderbilts had three children: Consuelo, who became the 9th Duchess of Marlborough; William K., Jr., a prominent figure in pioneering the sport of auto racing in America; and Harold, one of the finest yachtsmen of his era who successfully defended the America's Cup three times.

The Vanderbilts divorced in 1895 and Alva married Oliver H.P. Belmont, moving down the street to Belcourt. After his death, she reopened Marble House and had a Chinese Tea House built on the seaside cliffs of the property, where she hosted rallies for women's right to vote. She sold Marble House to Frederick H. Prince in 1932. The Preservation Society acquired the house in 1963 from the Prince estate. In 2006, Marble House was designated a National Historic Landmark.