



Great American Castles

You don't need to travel overseas to experience the romance and allure of mysterious, towering structures that call to mind a bygone era. ::

BY TROY ANDERSON

AMERICANS LOVE GOING OVERSEAS TO VISIT THE historic castles of Europe. But the fact is we have our own castles here in the United States, complete with towering turrets, romantic drawbridges, and secret passageways.

A dozen awesome American castles, from Castello di Amorosa in the Napa Valley to OHEKA Castle along Long Island's Gold Coast, grace the American continent.

These magnificent estates transport visitors back to a golden age in American history, a time when rich eccentrics spared no expense treating royalty, heads

of state, and Hollywood stars to lavish parties and the grandeur of a mysterious "dream castle."

Each of the soaring stone edifices mentioned is open for tours. Some double as luxury hotels. A few feature dungeons. And all contain fascinating stories and secrets within their castle walls.

BOLDT CASTLE *Alexandria Bay, N.Y.*

■ At the turn of the last century, George C. Boldt, the millionaire proprietor of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City, wanted to build a dream castle for his wife Louise on a heart-shaped island in Alexandria Bay. Boldt

commissioned 300 stonemasons, carpenters, and artists to fashion the 6-story, 120-room castle complete with tunnels, a turreted powerhouse, Italian gardens, a dove cote, and a yacht house. But tragedy struck in 1904 when Boldt's wife died suddenly.

"Mr. Boldt was so inconsolable that he never finished its construction," says Shane Sanford, castle director.

For more than seven decades, the castle was left to the mercy of the wind, rain, snow, and vandals. The Thousand Islands Bridge Authority acquired the property in 1977 and restored the monument to Boldt's love.

Today, the castle is the largest attraction in the region, drawing 180,000 annual visitors. Tourists can visit from May to October. **Heart Island, Alexandria Bay, N.Y., 800-8ISLAND, www.boldtcastle.com.**

OHEKA CASTLE *Huntington, N.Y.*

■ OHEKA Castle between New York City and The Hamptons is the second-largest private estate in the nation.

Millionaire financier and philanthropist Otto Hermann Kahn — his image was the inspiration behind the "Mr. Monopoly" character in the popular board game — built the 109,000-square-foot, 127-

room French-style chateau in 1919 at a cost of \$11 million — \$110 million in today's currency, says Nancy Mellus, the director of marketing and design at the castle.

Kahn constructed the castle and its world-class golf course to entertain dignitaries, celebrities, and other members of high society during the Gilded Age, Mellus says. "It's what inspired the book, *The Great Gatsby*," says Mellus, whose father, Long Island developer Gary Mellus, now owns the castle. "Author F. Scott Fitzgerald's inspiration was all these lavish parties held throughout these mansions. It was a very decadent time." After Kahn's death in 1934, the estate changed hands several times and was abandoned in the late 1970s. Mellus purchased it in 1984 and invested



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\$37 million to restore it. Today, the historic hotel is a premier venue for elegant weddings and romantic weekends. It has appeared in many films and TV shows, including *Citizen Kane* with Orson Welles and the USA Network's *Royal Pains*. 135 West Gate Drive, Huntington, N.Y., 631-659-1400, www.oheka.com.

CASTELLO DI AMOROSA *Calistoga, Calif.*

■ Fourth-generation Italian winemaker Dario Sattui says he picked up an “incurable malady” while studying medieval architecture in Italy and Europe — that malady was the urge to build a castle.

The owner of the V. Sattui Winery in St. Helena, Calif., spent 15 years constructing a 13th century, Tuscan-style castle. It opened to the public in 2007. “I wanted to honor my Italian heritage, and I wanted to bring a little slice of medieval Italy to the Napa Valley,” Sattui says.



SATTUI

Castello di Amorosa is replete with five defensive towers with battlements, a drawbridge, and a moat. Reminiscent of Old World castles, the 121,000-square-foot, 8-level castle features secret passageways, a dungeon, a torture chamber with a genuine iron maiden from the Renaissance, a stretching rack, spike chair, and other

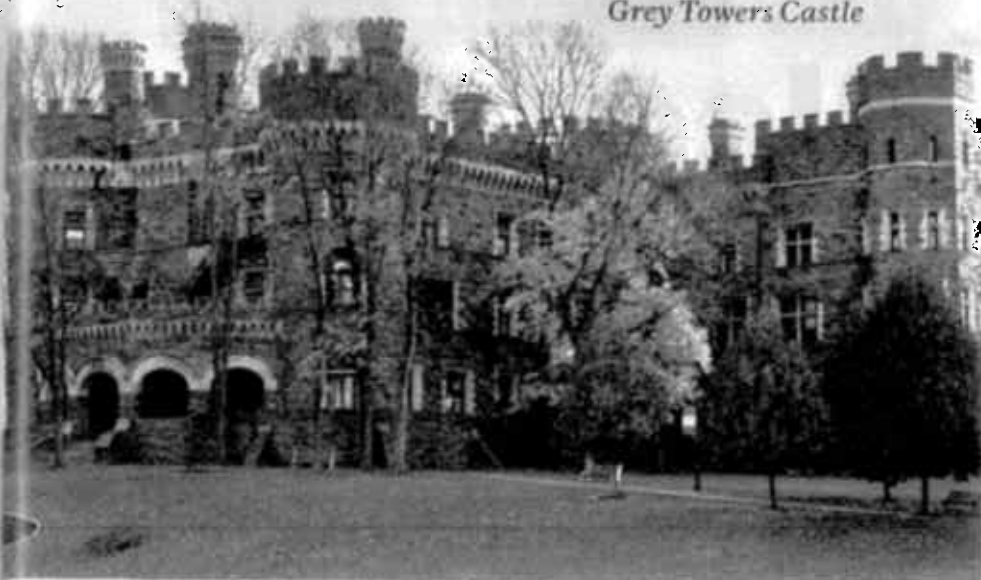


instruments of torture. “I wanted to be as authentic as I could with the castle,” Sattui says. “One thing they usually have is a prison and a torture chamber.” The castle, described as “undeniably impressive” by Fodor’s and a “must-see destination” by *The Wall Street Journal*, has more than 30 acres of vineyards planted with cabernet sauvignon, merlot, primitivo, and sangiovese grapes.

Currently producing 30,000 cases per year, the internationally acclaimed wines are sold at the winery and online to consumers.

Of the castle’s 107 rooms, 95 are used for winemaking or wine storage. Wine tasting and guided tours are available.

Grey Towers Castle



4045 North Saint Helena Highway, Calistoga, Calif.,
707-967-6272, www.castellodiamorosa.com.

GREY TOWERS CASTLE *Glenside, Pa.*

■ Modeled after Alnwick Castle, one of England's most iconic castles, sugar refiner William Welsh Harrison commissioned architect Horace Trumbauer to build the Grey Towers Castle between 1893 and 1898.

Using locally quarried grey stone, the "great American castle" at Arcadia University in Glenside, Pa., features 40 rooms with ornamental paintings, gilded ceilings, and hand-carved mahogany woodwork in French styles from the Renaissance to Louis XV.

Beyond the main stairway of the great hall, a sunken landing opens into the oak-paneled billiard room. Nearby is the mirror room, which was created in France and shipped to the castle along with workmen to install it. The castle also has secret passages and underground tunnels. The university offers self-guided tours and brochures detailing the castle's rich history. 450 South Easton Road, Glenside, Pa., 215-572-2900, www.arcadia.edu.

HAMMOND CASTLE *Gloucester, Mass.*

■ If a guest spilled wine at dinner, as the legend goes, he might soon find himself locked inside the dungeon at Hammond Castle. "He was considered a practical joker," curator John Pettibone says of the castle's owner, John Hays Hammond Jr. Known as "the father of remote control," Hammond built the medieval-style castle along the Massachusetts coast between 1926 and 1929.

A prolific inventor, Hammond was a millionaire by age 19. Second only to Thomas Edison in number of patents, he had hundreds

of inventions, including stereophonic sound and push-button radios, Pettibone says.

The 26-room castle, constructed as a wedding present for Hammond's wife, includes a great hall with elaborate rose windows, a pipe organ, an inventions exhibit room, and numerous alcoves and secret passageways. The castle also served as a backdrop for his collection of Roman, medieval, and Renaissance artifacts, including one particularly

macabre artifact, the head of one of Christopher Columbus' crewmembers. Pettibone says, "He did love Halloween. He considered himself a world explorer, and to have the bones of a world explorer in his house made sense to him." The castle offers self-guided tours. 80 Hesperus Avenue, Gloucester, Mass., 978-283-2080, www.hammondcastle.org. □

Hammond Castle



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