

WELCOME TO THE PLEASURE- DOME

The inspiration for *Citizen Kane's* Xanadu, Hearst Castle remains one of the most intriguing – and extravagant – residences in America. The palatial Californian landmark stands as a fitting monument to its single-minded creator, media mogul William Randolph Hearst.

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Immortalised in the popular imagination by Orson Welles' classic 1941 film *Citizen Kane*, a fiction loosely based on his life, American newspaper tycoon William Randolph Hearst was nothing short of a financial colossus during the first half of the 20th century. The owner of the largest newspaper and magazine business in the world in the 1930s, he was once said to have the power to sway governments and even start wars, while his own political aspirations saw him run unsuccessfully for both governor of New York and the US Democratic presidential nomination.

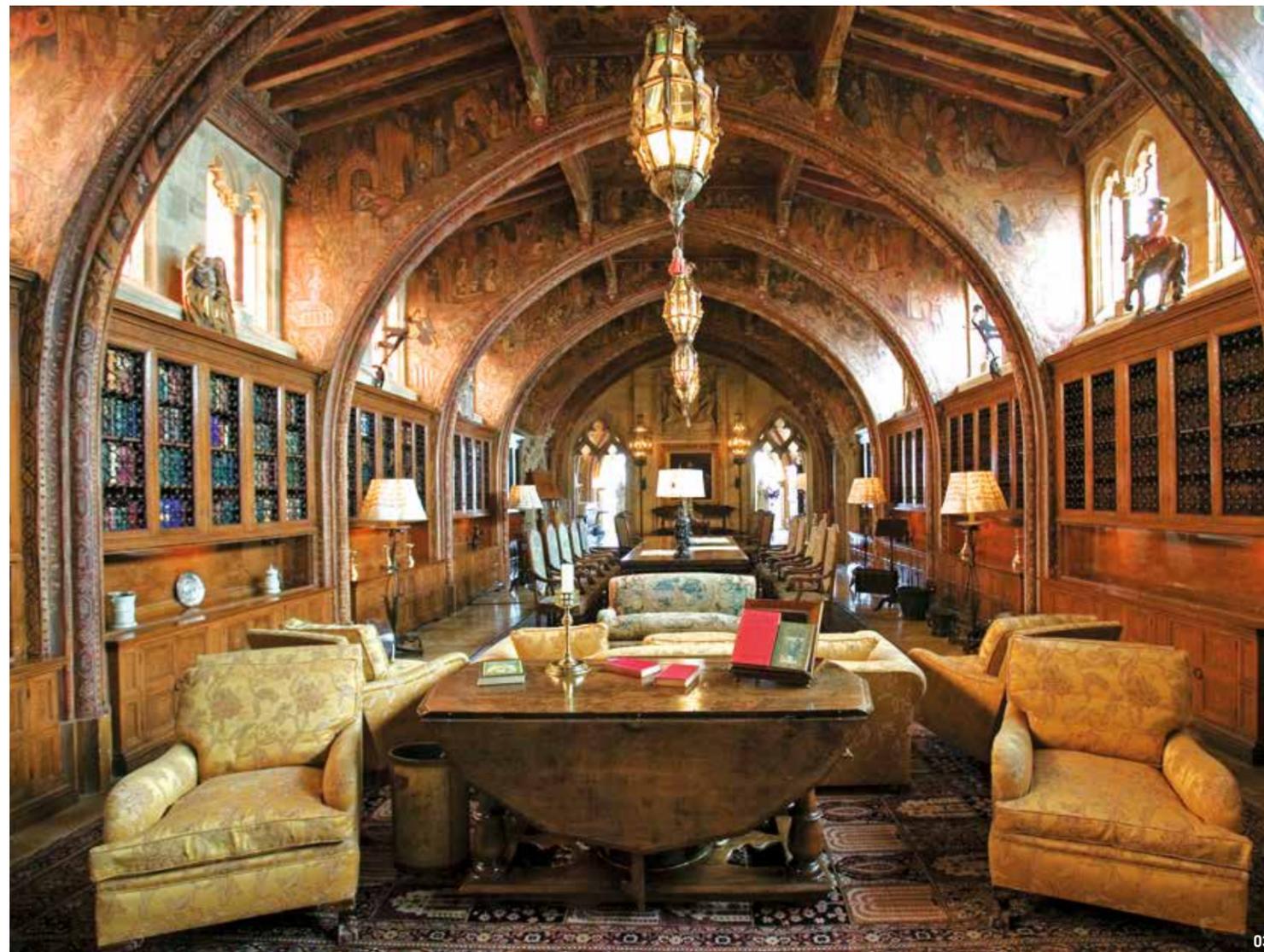
Though he died in 1951, at the age of 88, Hearst's influence can still be felt today: as a pioneer of "yellow journalism", the sensationalist and factually questionable form of reporting that used scandal-mongering and shocking headlines to



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THE 80-FOOT LONG MAIN LIBRARY LOOKS LIKE IT COULD HAVE BEEN TRANSPORTED STRAIGHT FROM THE MIDDLE AGES AND HOLDS MORE THAN 4,100 RARE BOOKS

boost readership, as well as an unabashed proponent of using the publications he owned to further his own political ends, Hearst set the tone for the modern media landscape of tattle-filled tabloids, clickbait content and brazen bias.

Though few may rush to thank him for this contribution to the world, Hearst is more fondly remembered for one of the more

tangible legacies he left behind: Hearst Castle. Perched high on a hill overlooking California's sweeping Central Coast near the town of San Simeon, roughly halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco, Hearst Castle was the largest and most impressive of the media mogul's numerous residences, and a continually expanding labour of love for the last 30 years of his life.

Built on land purchased by Hearst's father, who made millions from gold and silver mining in the 1860s and 70s and purchased an astonishing 270,000 acres of prime coastal land around San Simeon, the castle was begun in 1919 after the then-56-year-old Hearst inherited the site following his mother's death. Inspired largely by a trip he had taken with his mother

01 Hearst and his guests at a dinner party

02 The top of one of the bell towers at Hearst Castle. The landmark property sits on a hill and the towers can be seen for miles

03 The gothic library of Hearst Castle

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around Europe aged 10, Hearst engaged architect Julia Morgan to build an estate that would emulate the architectural wonders he had seen in the continental cultural capitals, then set about filling it with priceless art from around the world.

The result was the most spectacular home that America had ever seen, a collection of Mediterranean Revival-style mansions that housed 165 rooms across an area of 90,000sq ft, with a further 127 acres of gardens, terraces, pools and walkways. The main building alone, known as Casa Grande, boasts 38 bedrooms, many of which feature 500-year-old decorative ceilings and furniture that Hearst had shipped from Italy, France and Spain. However, even these seemed restrained in comparison to the grandiose rooms elsewhere in the castle.

The 80 foot-long main library, for example, looks like it could have been transported straight from the Middle Ages and holds more than 4,100 rare books – just a fraction of the estimated 100,000 that Hearst collected. There is also a 50-seater movie theatre where Hearst would screen films from Cosmopolitan Productions, the Hollywood studio he owned, while the grand dining room, known as the Refectory, is so replete with medieval charm that it was the inspiration for Hogwarts' dining hall in the Harry Potter films.

The castle's grounds were no less impressive, and were loaded with all manner of attractions for Hearst and his guests to enjoy. This included a private zoo, which at the time was the largest of its kind in the world, containing an estimated 300 different species, including giraffes, polar bears, tigers and an elephant. Most of these animals are long gone, but a few – including zebras – can still be seen roaming the grounds.



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HEARST CASTLE REMAINS ONE OF THE MOST INTRIGUING AND EXTRAVAGANT RESIDENCES IN AMERICA – A FITTING MONUMENT THEN FOR A MAN WHO ONCE HELD THE COUNTRY IN THE PALM OF HIS HAND – OR AT THE TIP OF HIS PEN

There was a private airfield, too, where Hearst's plane would drop off guests – as well as a copy of each and every one of Hearst's newspapers every day for the tycoon to review and critique. The magnate also kept 100 telephones stashed in every corner of the estate so he could keep tabs on his empire at the drop of a hat.

Perhaps most spectacular of all, however, is the Neptune Pool, a preposterously lavish swimming pool believed to be modelled on the Baths of Caracalla in Rome. Expanded and completely rebuilt twice over a 15-year period after the first two versions failed to satisfy the exacting Hearst, the final iteration of the pool holds 345,000 gallons of water and features the façade of an ancient Roman temple that was transported to the castle and reassembled on site.

Hearst shared this lavish home with his mistress, Hollywood actress Marion Davies, far from



04 The grand dining room, known as the Refectory, is filled with rare museum-quality furnishings

05 Interior of a guest bedroom at Hearst Castle

06 The tiled indoor pool



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AS A PIONEER OF “YELLOW JOURNALISM”, HEARST SET THE TONE FOR THE MODERN MEDIA LANDSCAPE OF TATTLE-FILLED TABLOIDS, CLICKBAIT CONTENT AND BRAZEN BIAS

07 The Neptune pool at Hearst Castle

08 A statue in the outdoor gardens

09 The five-acre Beverly Hills estate was sold back to the Hearst family for US\$1 by Hearst's mistress Marion Davies, after his death

Ill health forced Hearst to move out of the castle in 1947, and when he died four years later, he left the property to Davies. In a grand gesture demonstrating she had never been after her husband's money, Davies sold it back to the Hearst family for US\$1, and they in turn handed it over to the State of California to become a National Historic Landmark in 1957. It opened to the public the following year, and today it attracts around one million visitors annually.

Even stripped of its most valuable treasures, which were largely sold or moved to private collections in the 1950s, Hearst Castle remains one of the most intriguing and extravagant residences in America – a fitting monument then for a man who once held the country in the palm of his hand – or at the tip of his pen.

Though Hearst Castle is no longer in private hands, you can still live and entertain guests in a manner that William Hearst would have loved. The castle can be rented out for private parties and events, though a substantial pre-booking time of four months is required. But if a spectacular getaway to remote coastal California and a spectacular private party is what you fancy, the castle is ready. 🍷

his wife and children in New York. It was a relationship that was parodied to savage effect by Orson Welles in *Citizen Kane*, with the Davies-inspired character of Susan Kane portrayed as a talentless alcoholic singer and Kane/Hearst depicted as a domineering recluse rattling around his imposing gothic mansion, Xanadu.

In truth, however, an invite to Hearst Castle in its heyday of the late 1920s and 1930s was among the hottest tickets in the country, and Hearst would

typically invite several dozen acquaintances to come and enjoy his hospitality there at any given time. During this period, it was not uncommon for the castle to play host to everyone from Charlie Chaplin, Errol Flynn and Greta Garbo to Franklin D Roosevelt and Winston Churchill. Famously, guests could stay as long as they liked – although their place setting at dinner was moved further and further from Hearst the longer they stayed, as a subtle reminder not to overstay their welcome.



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