





ROUNDWOOD MANOR IN DAISY HILL

Extraordinary Mansion in Need of Extraordinary Treatment

By Michael Fleenor



Often adaptation makes historic preservation possible. In Cleveland, we have beautiful examples of warehouses and office buildings adapted as housing, churches adapted as offices and banking lobbies adapted as restaurants. Less often seen is the need to adapt a single family home in order to preserve it. But, most homes are not 55,000 square feet! One such “home” is Roundwood Manor in the Daisy Hill enclave of Hunting Valley.

Sylvia Korey, the owner of Roundwood Manor, believes the Manor could be sensitively converted into six residential units without losing its historic character nor impacting the bucolic nature of Daisy Hill. The Cleveland Restoration Society agrees. Toward this end, Ms. Korey and her legal team have applied to the Village of Hunting Valley for a special zoning variance which would allow for the massive manor to be adapted into condominiums of still-generous size. We support this adaptation of Roundwood Manor as a practical strategy to ensure its survival as a landmark. Roundwood is significant for its association with the Van Sweringen brothers, their master architect, Philip L. Small, and the succession of business leaders who have stewarded this property through the decades.

Located at 3450 Roundwood Road in Hunting Valley, the Manor was built in 1923 as a corporate retreat center, not simply a country home. The Van Sweringen brothers — Oris Paxton (1879-1936) and Mantis James (1881-1935) — used Roundwood Manor as a place to entertain business associates and potential investors. Set on 600 acres, it contained a working farm until the brothers’ empire was dismantled and the acreage carved into large lots for homes.

Originally, Roundwood Manor was over 90,000 square feet in size, truly a mini-hotel with 24 guest suites. The Manor was designed by Cleveland’s master architect of the Colonial Revival style, Philip L. Small. Small was one of the Van Sweringen brothers’ favorite architects. He earned many commissions from the brothers including Shaker Square (one of the country’s earliest planned shopping centers), demonstration homes in Shaker Heights and the Greenbrier Suite in Terminal Tower. Small also designed the “new” Country Club, after the Vans donated the land in Pepper Pike that made a move from Glenville possible.

To create Roundwood Manor and to build his design quickly, Philip Small remodeled a nearly new, hollow tile and concrete dairy barn. Using the architectural vocabulary of the already popular American style — Colonial — Roundwood is executed in red brick with stone and wood trim. Windows are multi-paned, flanked by operable shutters. The central block features two-story columns and a central entrance. A massive wood door is surmounted by roundel-style thick glass lights, an elaborate surround and a broken pediment. The Manor featured enormous living and dining rooms, a library full of leather-bound books, a pub or bar, sitting



Originally, Roundwood Manor was over 90,000 square feet in size, truly a mini-hotel with 24 guest suites. The Manor was designed by Cleveland's master architect of the Colonial Revival style, Philip L. Small.

rooms, an Olympic-sized indoor swimming pool and tennis courts. A full-time telephone operator managed the estate's 80-line switchboard.

Philip Small worked with the important Cleveland interior design firm, Rorimer-Brooks, to create a Colonial interior at Roundwood that appeared as though it had always been there. The Manor was furnished with fine antiques and well-executed reproductions, meals were served on English bone china with sterling silver flatware. An art collection on the walls completed the setting. For those visiting Roundwood — usually potential investors — the impression was not unlike visiting an estate along the James River of Virginia. The Manor was grounded with a sense of history and stability that reflected well on the Van Sweringen brothers.

During the Great Depression, the Van Sweringen Empire began to crumble. Mantis died in 1935 and Oris in 1936. The house sat empty while their financial matters were untangled. Finally in 1946, Gordon Stouffer, restaurateur and frozen food magnate, purchased Roundwood Manor. Stouffer removed 35,000 square feet, reducing the size from 90,000 square feet to its current 55,000 square feet. The massive living and dining rooms that flanked the two ends of the main block were reduced in size. Off the main block is the guest and servant wing, half of which was removed. Roundwood Manor went from 50 to 20 rooms.

In 1956, Gordon Stouffer died and the Manor was sold to James A. Bohannon (1960). Bohannon was a wealthy industrialist, who had come to Cleveland in 1929 at the Van Sweringen's behest to assume the Presidency of

the Peerless Motor Car Company. As the Depression progressed, Peerless was dissolved and Bohannon changed the plant at E. 93rd Street and Quincy Avenue to the Brewing Company of America. Bohannon had overheard men joking that the empty banking halls of failed downtown banks should be turned into beer gardens. He approached The Brewing Company of Canada and negotiated the rights to produce and distribute their most popular brands in America. Bohannon sold the Brewing Company of America to Carling Brewing in 1949 and retired a multi-millionaire. In 1965, he donated \$1 million to John Carroll University for a new science center — a record at the time. The Bohannon Science Center served the University until 2011 at which time it was replaced by the Dolan Center for Science and Technology. Upon his death in 1968, Bohannon left Roundwood Manor to the University.

John Carrol University sold Roundwood Manor to John and Anita Fazio. Mr. Fazio was President of Fisher Foods, Inc., a grocery chain with a long history in Cleveland. Before moving into Roundwood in 1970, the Fazios spent a year remodeling the kitchen and baths and installing central air conditioning. The Fazios occupied Roundwood Manor for only eight years when it was sold for \$700,000 to Joseph F. Hrudka in 1978. Hrudka was the founder and former president of Mr. Gasket Company. Hrudka had raced cars with his brother as a young man, and figured out that gaskets could be prevented from over-heating and blowing off if they were made of asbestos. Hrudka sold Mr. Gasket for millions, although he later bought it back. The Hrudkas remained at Roundwood for about a decade. In 1988, Roundwood Manor was sold for \$1.4 million to Samir and Sylvia Korey.

Samir and Sylvia Korey purchased Roundwood because it was large enough for their four growing children, Sylvia's parents who lived with them, family visitors from across the world and a household staff of three! Samir was an international businessman who traveled extensively. He kept his main office in Roundwood, staffed by three employees. In addition to filling Roundwood



Photos by Michael Fleenor

Manor with life, the Koreys made many significant improvements. A deteriorated and leaking wood shingle roof was replaced with the superb Buckingham Slate product. Installation of this commercial-grade slate required substantial additional framing in the roof to support its weight. Buckingham Slate is featured on the Smithsonian's Castle and Arts & Industries Building in Washington, DC. It is also on the famous Dakota apartment building in Manhattan, a luxury co-op on W. 72nd and Central Park West. The Koreys also uncovered original slate floors that had been covered in cement and other flooring. For many reasons, we owe a debt of gratitude to the Korey family, especially Sylvia Korey, for the remarkable stewardship of this flagship Cleveland landmark for 30 years.

Since Sylvia's children are grown and living across the world, she has tried to sell Roundwood Manor, but to no avail. Unfortunately, no one has come forward for over several years now to purchase the massive 55,000-square-foot mansion. She could have sold it as a "tear-down," but fortunately did not do so.

As part of our work at the Cleveland Restoration Society, we surveyed Roundwood Manor for the Ohio Historic Inventory. In addition, we took the first step in listing Roundwood into the National Register of Historic Places. This step entails completing a rationale for the property's eligibility under the criteria of the Register. Upon submission of our work, the Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer for Inventory & Registration for Ohio, Barbara Powers, concurred with our findings, opining that Roundwood is likely eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion



Philip Small was a master of the Colonial Revival style. By breaking the house down into wings, utilizing gambrel roofs and dormers, and mixing materials, he created a home that, although massive, does not overwhelm the charming enclave.

B (for its association with the life of a person or people important in our past at the local, state, or national level) and Criterion C (the property has the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, method of construction, represents the work of a master, possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinc-

tion). Presently, we are completing a formal nomination to the National Register.

It is through flexible zoning and enlightened re-imagining of properties like Roundwood Manor that landmarks can survive into the future. In Cleveland and its surrounding communities, we are blessed with an infrastructure of remarkable architecture constructed during periods of time when superlative materials and old-world craftsmanship were readily available. It is our civic duty to consider these Cleveland monuments with care and sensitivity so that they may remain for future generation. We commend Sylvia Korey for her vision and her investment of time and money to see that Roundwood Manor can transition into usable real estate for future generations to appreciate. ❖