



The gardens at Oxmoor were designed in 1911 by noted female landscape architect Marian Coffin. Photo by Shirley Harmon.

# TOASTING HISTORY

An inaugural two-day Derby week event combines Southern fare and flair with West Coast wine to benefit the Oxmoor Estate

*Written by Bridget Williams*

Now penned in by retail and commercial development, a subdivision and an expressway, few understand the significance of the Oxmoor Estate and its owners, five generations of the Bullitt family. An inaugural and unique two-day Derby week event aims to change that. Proceeds from A Toast to Oxmoor, scheduled for May 1st and 2nd, will be designated to help preserve and restore the Estate, which was granted nonprofit status in 2017 and is on the National Register of Historic Places. The events are the creation of local author Michelle Mandro, with support from a steering committee that includes event planner Danielle McKenzie, Laura Rice, Debra Locker and Shirley Harmon, Director of the Oxmoor Estate. "A Toast to Oxmoor Estate and the Garden Luncheon at Oxmoor Estate combine our passions as epicureans and lovers of all things Southern to create events that don't currently exist in Louisville," explains Mandro, who is a Louisville native.

Capped at 200 guests, the invitation-only Toast to Oxmoor Estate and VIP reception will be held on the evening of May 1,

and feature a celebrity chef and West Coast winery owners and winemakers, including Kelleen Sullivan of Sullivan Vineyards, Suzanne Phifer Pavitt of Phifer Pavitt Wines and Sara Fowler of Peju Province Winery and Liana Estates. Those interested in being added to the event's wait list can email [toastoxmoor@gmail.com](mailto:toastoxmoor@gmail.com). Mandro hinted that the evening will end with a surprise that's not to be missed.

Heather French Henry will host the open-to-the-public Garden Luncheon at Oxmoor Estate the following day, May 2. Farmer and chef Josh Moore of Volare is creating the menu for the farm-to-table lunch. Guests at each table will be joined by a winery owner or winemaker who will share their wines. Award-winning landscape designer and native Kentuckian Jon Carloftis will attend the luncheon with his mother Lucille and provide a 30-minute guided tour of the gardens (weather permitting). For more information or tickets email [toastoxmoor@gmail.com](mailto:toastoxmoor@gmail.com) or call 502.640.4138.

Guests at the both events will be privy to an insider's view of the home and gardens, which have a fascinating history. The



Kelleen Sullivan of Sullivan Vineyards  
Photo courtesy of Wine Country Women, LLC.



Sara Fowler of Peju Province Winery and Liana Estates.  
Photo courtesy of Sara Fowler.



Suzanne Phifer Pavitt of Phifer Pavitt Wines.  
Photo courtesy of Wine Country Women, LLC.

original house at Oxmoor was completed by Alexanders Scott Bullitt in 1791, a year before Kentucky was granted statehood. Alexanders helped author Kentucky's first constitution in 1792, served as speaker of the senate, and as the Commonwealth's first lieutenant governor when the office was created in 1800. After his death in 1816, his youngest son William Christian Bullitt inherited the property. A working hemp plantation, William and his wife Mildred built a Federal-style brick central addition in 1829, along with all of the outbuildings that are still on-site today.

In the fall of 1862, with the Civil War raging, the Bullitts closed Oxmoor and moved to the safety of the city. After William's death in 1877, the farm was divided between his six surviving children. In 1908, one of William's grandsons, William Marshall Bullitt, successfully purchased the land that had been divided between family members and reassembled the property. In 1912, he was appointed Solicitor General by President Taft,

and during his time in Washington he met his future wife Nora Iasigi. The couple began a building spree, expanding the house to its present-day configuration. They called upon New York architect F. Burrall Hoffman and noted female landscape architect, Marian Coffin, who is most famous for designing the gardens at Winterthur, the DuPont family home in Wilmington, DE.

Marshall Bullitt passed away in 1957. After his wife Nora died in 1976, the estate was passed to their son Thomas W. Bullitt, who lived there with his second wife Kay Stammers Bullitt, a two-time Wimbledon doubles champ. A few months before his death in 1991, Thomas placed a preservation easement on the 79-acres surrounding the house, and his widow Kay continued to reside at Oxmoor until her death in 2005. The house is still used occasionally by family and by the local historical society for lectures and events.

A limited number of sponsorship opportunities are available. Those interested should contact Michelle Mandro at [michelle@winecountrywomen.com](mailto:michelle@winecountrywomen.com) or 707.260.4848.