



# WIGHTWICK MANOR: ARTS & CRAFTS IN THE ENGLISH MIDLANDS

By Dennis Barrett

If you drive from London northwest to Birmingham (or if you don't like driving on the wrong side of the road, take the train from London-Euston—2.5 h on a slow train, 1.5 h on a fast train), you have only a little further to go to Wolverhampton, a northwestern suburb of Birmingham. I concede, gentle reader, that there's not much chance of your so doing, so in this article I'll tell you about a gem of a house, Wightwick Manor (Fig. 1), in Wolverhampton; and also note why you might want to visit both Birmingham and Wolverhampton.

*Fig. 1. Wightwick Manor, main entrance, Tudor half-timbered. At the far right is a hint of the scaffolding which covered the whole east wing of the house in summer 2023 and is slated to do so in 2024 and 2025, while original timbers are repaired and restored.*



## WIGHTWICK (cont.)

A visit would be appropriate if you're in that small subset of A & C enthusiasts who consider the artists of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood to be the best part of the Movement. The likes of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Everett Millais, Ford Madox Brown, Edward Burne-Jones and William Holman Hunt formed the secret Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB) in their youth, in the years around 1850, with intent to reform painting and sculpture, particularly as taught at the Royal Academy of Art. John Ruskin and William Morris joined and defended their cause. They believed that art had gone wrong at the time of Raphael ("We sympathise with what is direct and serious and heartfelt in previous art, to the exclusion of what is conventional and self-parading and learned by rote.") In two ways the PRB led to the later Arts & Crafts Movement: 1) the artists returned to nature for inspiration, in rebellion against the Industrial Revolution, and 2) they elevated Medieval modes and styles.

If you go in search of Pre-Raphaelite paintings, you might be satisfied with the excellent collection at the Tate in London. If not, you might travel to the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery and to Wightwick Manor. (Or you might save the cost of passport and transatlantic travel, and go instead to the Delaware Art Museum, a short distance from the Philadelphia airport, which has the best collection outside of Britain.)

As to Wightwick Manor: there has been a Wightwick Manor on the current site for eight centuries, but the current structure was built in 1887, when Theodore Mander, at 34 years old, had built up the family paint and varnish business very successfully, and had married his wife Flora (whose surname, serendipitously, was Paint!). He commissioned a house on the outskirts of town with 17 acres of surrounding land for gardens (Fig. 2), and they moved three miles out of busy, dirty Wolverhampton.



*Fig. 2. A considerable acreage surrounds the manor, with arches and topiary. In the distance, the author's daughter and chauffeur.*

## WIGHTWICK (cont.)



Fig. 3. A settle in the Great Parlour from Morris and Co. The family spent much of their time in the comfort of the parlour.

Fig. 4. Tiles in the fireplace of the Great Parlour were imported from the Netherlands. Once a proper fireplace, the hearth now hosts an electric fire.



Fig. 5. "Love among the Ruins," painted by Edward Burne-Jones in 1893-4 to replace an earlier version that was thought to have burned in a house fire. It shows the fine detail and naturalism of the Pre-Raphaelites.



## WIGHTWICK (cont.)

Theodore and Flora Mander wanted a house both stylish and comfortable, so they furnished the new place with furniture, carpets etc. from Morris & Co. (Fig. 3), imported other decorations (Fig. 4), and installed the newfangled electric lights and central heating. But both died young, and it fell to their son Geoffrey, and his wife Rosalie, to acquire much of the art work – in the

1930's, when the Pre-Raphaelites were out of favor. A major coup was Ned Burne-Jones' *Love among the Ruins* (Fig.5), which now dominates the Great Parlour. Geoffrey and Rosalie Mander strengthened the Morris holdings too, with wallpaper, fabrics, and curtains. And they hung a portrait of Morris (Fig. 6).



And while Geoffrey and Rosalie continued to collect Morris and Pre-Raphaelites for Wightwick, and lived in a small part of the house in the decades till they died, in 1937 they donated the whole estate to the National Trust! Which is why we can see and enjoy the architecture, the Morris furnishings, and the Pre-Raphaelite paintings and drawings, in 2024.

A note about pronunciation: Wightwick is pronounced Wittick, as you would expect if you know that Leicester (as in Leicester Square in London) is pronounced Lester. My grandson started school in Cirencester; when I asked how the town's name is pronounced, fully expecting some two-syllable short version, I was regarded like a somewhat retarded six-year-old. It's sire-en-ces-ter, obviously, with every last letter pronounced. Whence I conclude that British abbreviated pronunciations are designed to identify and expose outsiders.

*Fig. 6. Cosmo Rowe's portrait of William Morris in the 1890's, not long before his death.*

# FRESH ARTWORK FROM THE BUNGALOW CRAFT

By Julie Leidel

I wanted to update all of my CACS friends on some new artwork that I've been working on over the past few months. I've been busy in the studio working on a large series of original paintings for the new Lutheran Hospital that's being finalized in Wheat Ridge. I was commissioned to create 32 new gouache paintings for the hospital, 16 focused on Colorado Landscape, and 16 focused on the Colorado Urban Landscape. I've never taken on such a large project, and I was up for the challenge. I spent the better part of 9 weeks working on the new artwork. These are a bit bigger than my

normal style coming in at 22" x 30" and in order to hit my deadline, I knew I would have to work with scale in mind. So, instead of grabbing my tiny, 25-hair brushes, I opted for larger ones. The entire collection will be in the corridors and gathering rooms of the hospital which is slated to open in May or June of this year. I learned a lot about painting more quickly, letting go of perfection, and just enjoying the ride. One from this collection that I wanted to add to my Colorado Series is entitled "Red Rocks Concert."



# BUNGALOW (cont.)

This is my favorite painting of the 32, and admittedly, I spent about 2-3 times as many hours on this one as I did the others because I knew I wanted to add it to my print series. Painting the rows of seating was intriguing as I captured the patterns and perspective. This painting is offered in two ways, with and without custom text. I wanted to create a painting that could be customized to each person's favorite concert details and memories and I love the idea of capturing that special concert for people in this way.

I recently finished a new gouache painting featuring a quote by Frank Lloyd Wright for the Grove Park Inn show in Asheville, NC. I've always loved his words about form and function, which stand in slight contrast to his mentor's take on how form and function relate to one another. Many remember Louis Sullivan's quote "Form Ever Follows Function." Sullivan's ideal became a touchstone for many architects of the era, but as Wright grew and created independently of

Sullivan, he ventured out in a different direction and is quoted as saying "Form and Function should be one, joined in a spiritual union." Both architects wanted their work to be artistically beautiful and functional. From my perspective, Wright's quote speaks more to the bond between form and function, treating each with the importance it deserves, leaning into the idea that function can (and should) inspire and inform the artistic form.

I don't put down tape lines to make these straight lines, because they could ruin the more delicate gouache painting underneath. I use good old fashioned pencil and ruler for my work, and a lot of deep and steady breathing as I go. I use the side of my brush almost exclusively as I work on important straight lines because I'm relying on fewer points of contact by pulling a few side hairs of the brush along for contact, versus all of

*(continued on next page)*

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# BUNGALOW (cont.)

the uneven tips of the whole. Sometimes I'm more successful than others. When looking closely, you can see that many lines on my painting are not truly straight. To me, that shows the hand of the artist and represents our human "seeking of perceived perfection" metaphorically in the form of straight lines in nature, of which there are very few.

My third new open-edition artwork is a new quote by John Muir. As with many things on the internet, the quote "Wilderness is Necessity" is currently attributed incorrectly to author Edward Abbey. However, the Scottish-born John Muir said it first since he passed in 1917, which was a full decade before Edward Abbey was even born. I found this quote within a larger context from

his famous book "Our National Parks" which was written in 1901, and caught the attention of President Theodore Roosevelt "Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life." I couldn't agree more with Muir. Resetting and recharging in nature is arguably even more important today, 123 years since Muir first wrote about it. Those of us deeply entrenched in concrete jungles, suffering from "tech neck" and staying indoors too much can all take a lesson from this man wise beyond his years.



Thanks for taking a journey with me through a few new paintings, and the inspiration behind them.

Tying back into nature and those from the past is the best thread for me to weave with as an artist.

Julie Leidel

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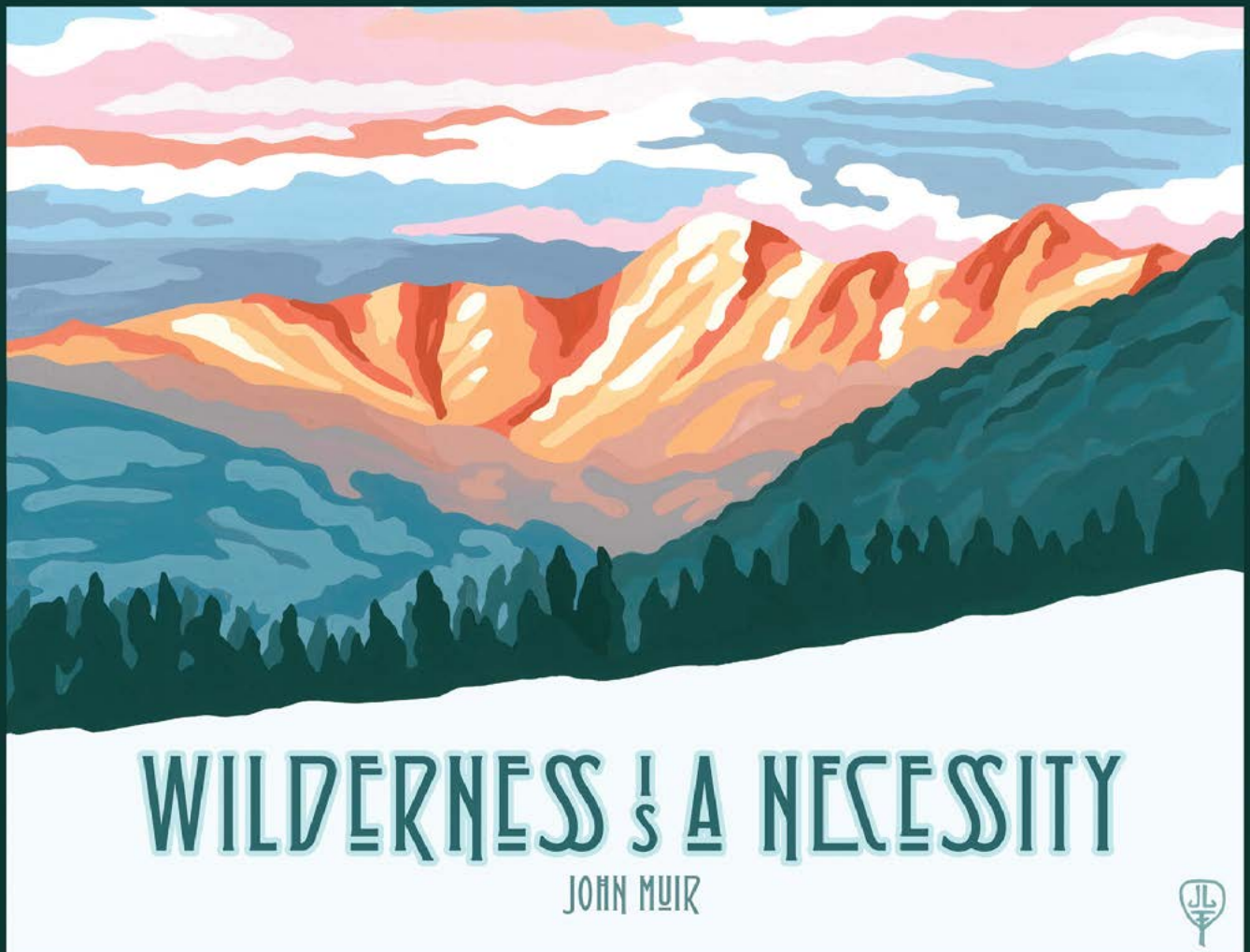
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