



Duke homestead, Durham, North Carolina

THE DUKE FAMILY

The flash of light off the facets of a diamond is designed to catch our eye. It is brilliance and sparkle, but there is more. The ice is only the tip of the berg in a creation that is a combination of design, craftsmanship, aesthetic detail, geology, and a certain amount of passion. There is history too.

Whether she was at age twenty-five or seventy-five, Doris Duke consistently devoted painstaking attention to her homes and collections. She was a woman of passions, and her outlook on life was both grand and intimate. Only now after her death are her complexity and her many interests becoming evident to those who lived outside her private circle. She was a collector with an educated and perceptive eye, but her interests went deeper than that. She had a passion for all things aesthetic, whether it was Islamic art, historic preservation, music and dance, or the natural environment around us. She also had a particular gift from her father in the form of financial resources to pursue these many interests.

The jewelry of Doris Duke is fascinating. Because of the very personal nature of jewelry, it offers us an intimate insight into her interests and her history. Throughout her adult life, Doris Duke had a fascination for art and decorative arts from the Middle and Far East, and a large part of the jewelry collection reflects this lifelong interest. The jewelry also gives us a rare glimpse into the personal history of the Duke family beyond what can be gleaned from the other Duke collections. Within its gold, gemstones, and craftsmanship are captured the personal character of one hundred years of this family that rode the crest of American wealth.

The foundation of the Duke family's prominence was laid in the years shortly after the Civil War when Washington Duke, Doris Duke's grandfather, built a successful regional business in tobacco growing and processing. His sons, Benjamin and James Buchanan Duke, through good salesmanship, clever use of technology, and a goodly measure of business acumen, built this into an empire that became the American Tobacco Company, one of the earliest and most powerful monopolies of its day. Upon this fortune James B.

“Buck” Duke built yet another, based on electricity, when he founded Duke Power and lit up the Piedmont of the Carolinas. Although the Duke tobacco business and Duke Power were based in North Carolina, James B. Duke found it necessary to establish offices in New York, the economic capitol of the United States. It was from these offices that he transacted most of his business. He was at heart a product of the southern countryside, not the big city, but his greatest love was building and maintaining his business empire. Living and working in New York was for him an unfortunate side effect of his success, and for a long period of his life, he was truly married to his work.

He married in 1904, but the union did not last long. In 1907, he married a beautiful and recently widowed native of Macon, Nanaline Holt Inman. For Nanaline, New York was a great and welcome adventure. Far more socially aspiring than her husband, she was only too happy to leave her native Georgia behind. It was with Nanaline that James B. Duke embarked on his great domestic building program. At the time, he owned houses in Durham, North Carolina, New York City, and Hillsborough, New Jersey. Construction of his estate in New Jersey was already well underway at the time of his second marriage, but for his new wife he determined to add a palatial house overlooking its 2,700 rolling acres of forests, fields, and ponds, most of which he had created himself. He also sold his house in New York and replaced it with a substantial new residence on the corner of Fifth Avenue and 78th Street. Both of these structures were designed by the renowned architect, Horace Trumbauer, in a French palatial style that was in keeping with the grand houses of their social peers.

November 22, 1912 saw the entrance into the world of James B. and Nanaline’s first and only child, Doris. She was born into one of the wealthiest families in America and a rarefied atmosphere of privilege. From the first, Doris was the darling of her father, a man already in his fifties. He offered her the best that he could provide, but he also conveyed to her much of his own philosophy and sensibilities. Throughout her life, she enjoyed the large estate that her father had left her, but she was at the same time careful never to fritter away money, as so many other children of fortune had.



Doris Duke and her father, James Buchanan Duke



Doris Duke and Aletta Morris at Bailey's Beach, summer 1924



An outing to Rough Point with friends in the mid 1950s

Nanaline was never fond of the New Jersey estate, and ultimately the new house there was never completed, although plans were drawn and a foundation was built. What Nanaline had set her sights upon instead was the more prestigious social mecca of Newport. After summering there from 1915 through 1921, the Dukes finally purchased the former home of Frederick Vanderbilt at Rough Point. Set on nine acres of beautiful waterfront property, it was one of the finest building sites that Newport had to offer. Once again, architect Horace Trumbauer stepped in, this time to alter an existing structure rather than to build anew. The resulting summer home, finished in 1924, was clearly an expression of Nanaline's taste and desires. James B. Duke saw only two summers there before he died on October 10, 1925. Just twelve at the time, Doris was devastated by his death.

Nanaline and her daughter were left with each other at the start of Doris's teenage years. Doris grew up in many places, but spent most of her time in New York, where she received private tutoring. She adored Duke Farms near Hillsborough, New Jersey. The estate was truly a creation of her father, and she associated it with him. It was certainly a touchstone through her life and was the house that she identified as her home and principal residence. Her business affairs and personal finances were managed through its offices, and it was where all of her family photographs were kept. At all of her houses one can find evidence of her pursuits, but it is at Duke Farms that one finds them in abundance. Playing the piano was an obsession for her. In Newport and Honolulu one finds pianos, but at Duke Farms there are six.

Through the rest of her youth, Doris Duke spent her summers at Rough Point. The surviving diary of her close childhood friend, Aletta Morris, gives a good picture of her activities. As children the girls were very close, and Aletta's diary records in detail the round of activities that included tennis, various outings, and games, as well as lengthy visits to Bailey's Beach, the private beach of which both families were members.



Doris Duke and James Cromwell in India

One suspects that Doris Duke chafed at the bonds that held young women captive in the 1920s and 1930s. She felt the urge to travel and explore cultures and lifestyles different from those within which she had been raised. In 1935, at the age of twenty-two, she married James Cromwell, and the two embarked on a honeymoon tour of the world. She traveled to Eastern destinations for the first time, visiting such countries as Egypt, India, Thailand, and China. These travels had a profound effect on the rest of her life for they spurred her interest in Asia and the Islamic world, an interest which expressed itself subsequently through Doris Duke's perpetual travels and her passion for collecting.

Though she collected broadly on her honeymoon, in time Doris Duke focused her energy on building two particular collections: one of Southeast Asian art and the other of arts from the Islamic world. It was during her honeymoon that she also began collecting jewelry from these cultures.

In her lifetime, Doris Duke was unable to identify a locale she felt would be suitable to house her Southeast Asian art collection, and, as a result, much of the collection has recently been donated to the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore and the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco. In contrast, Doris Duke envisioned her Islamic art collection as an integral part of the only home she ever built for herself, Shangri La, in Honolulu, Hawaii, where the collection remains to this day.

The origins of Shangri La as a home also stem from Doris Duke's honeymoon. The final stop on their world tour, Honolulu, proved to be a hit with the newlyweds. They extended their planned stay of two weeks to nearly four months, purchased property in the following year, and began building the estate soon after. Likely influenced by recent travels, the couple decided to design Shangri La with an eye towards the forms and functions seen in Islamic architecture and to furnish the home with examples of Islamic art.

To some, the synthesis of a Hawaiian locale and Islamic art at an estate called Shangri La may seem peculiar, but it posed no dilemmas for Doris Duke. She was drawn to the aesthetics of Islamic art and loved the outdoor lifestyle of Hawaii, so pairing the two in what was to be a very private retreat was natural. Participating in the designing and building of the estate afforded Doris Duke with what was probably her first real opportunity for creative expression on a grand scale. She was intimately involved in every decision from landscaping to the number of rooms, from materials used in the building to the placement of her collection around her home. The estate was substantially complete by 1939, but, in a sense, Doris Duke's work at Shangri La had only just begun. She initiated and monitored several major renovations, both conceptually and physically, in every decade of her life.



Playhouse at Shangri La



Ocean front of Rough Point

A woman of contrasts, she reveled in the sweeping, tremendous ocean views from her homes in Newport and Honolulu, swimming often in both the warm Pacific and chilly Atlantic. But she was just as attentive to the details of a lovely piece of jewelry or the appearance of a particular orchid. Sometimes the refinement of Newport society called to her, sometimes the casual beach life of Hawaii. She was fascinated by the heritage of Newport, but also by distant cultures in the East.

As Nanaline Duke aged, she eventually stopped using her houses in Newport and New York, and she and her daughter pondered what should be done with them. In 1958 the house at One East 78th Street was donated to New York University for its Institute of Fine Arts, a purpose that it fulfills to this day. Rough Point's fate was less certain. An initial attempt was made to donate it to Newport Hospital, but the offer met with little interest. Most of Newport's Gilded Age houses were considered to be white elephants at the time, and Rough Point apparently fell into that category as far as the trustees of the hospital were concerned. At some point, Doris Duke changed her mind about discarding the house, although sadly there is little evidence for how or why her affections for the property grew. What is clear is that during the last years of the 1950s, she began to purchase works of art for the house. Evidence from this period indicates that the house was nearly empty, a blank canvas. Tapestries, a few pieces of furniture, and antique wallpaper started the redecorating campaign. Eventually much of the art and furniture from the New York house also found its way to Newport, but throughout the next thirty years, she continued to fine-tune the house and its appearance. She had an extraordinary aesthete's eye and a gift for assembling ostensibly uncoordinated items into an attractive and dynamic pattern. Over time the house became one of her favorites, and towards the end of her life she spent as much time in it as she spent in any of her houses. Rough Point became a focus for collections of European fine and decorative arts, just as Shangri La had been a focus for her superb Islamic art. Although Doris Duke assembled many interesting collections over the course of her life, no other house became a center of such focused collecting activity as did these two residences.



*Pierced-work Ming wine jar
in Rough Point collection*



*Pair of eighteenth-century
doors from Turkey at Shangri La*

An intrinsic part of Doris Duke's eye as a collector was her interest in using her own hands in the pursuit of craftsmanship, and her ceramics are an outstanding example. Careless cleaning and the hazards of everyday life took their toll on the huge number of ceramics that furnished every house. Feeling a keen interest not only in the objects themselves but also in their care, she received tutoring from a ceramics conservator and took great pride in repairing and restoring broken items great and small. In every house she kept a collection of ceramic conservation supplies. She also hired Philip Mello, a skilled, local Newport woodworker and carver, to care for her extensive collections of furniture. He worked not only with the furniture at Rough Point but for the other residences as well. Most of his work was carried out in a shop on the third floor at Rough Point, where Doris Duke was a frequent visitor to see what activity he was pursuing. However, she was also a participant, sometimes working for two or three weeks on a single, intricate project. This work was not restricted to Rough Point; she was also actively engaged in caring for the collection at Shangri La, including cleaning, repairing, and assisting restorers. Jin deSilva, a longtime resident and employee in Hawaii, recalls that she climbed up on scaffolding to work on tile panels and that she and her staff would sit around the patio working on the collections in an assembly-line manner. Such participation always produces a greater appreciation for craftsmanship and was certainly a factor in choosing the art and jewelry that she acquired.

The jewelry is but one of many collections that included such diverse tastes as ancient bronzes and English portraiture, but the woman who kept and assembled this jewelry had a depth and a history that are part and parcel of the collection itself. Ultimately, Doris Duke's legacy is the charitable expression of her many passions, through agencies such as the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the Newport Restoration Foundation, the Duke Farms Foundation and the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art. Jazz, dance, the natural environment, and the many beautiful things that caught her well-practiced eye represent her bequests to the public, but the intimacy of this outstanding collection adds a unique and intriguing facet to the story.

*Pieter N. Roos, Executive Director, Newport Restoration Foundation
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