

# A tour of Oyster Bay

Behind the scenes of 'The Diplomat' at Planting Fields

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**T**he foreign, domestic and bedroom affairs of "The Diplomat" are on full display at Planting Fields.

The Season 3 finale of the hit Netflix drama starring Keri Russell and Allison Janney was shot at the Main House (formerly Coe Hall) of the estate in Oyster Bay. Now that experience is being recreated in "The Diplomat" Tour, which runs through March 29 and includes behind-the-scenes stories starting with how the 104-year-old mansion, which was created by bank executive and insurance magnate William Robertson Coe, was chosen to play the role of Chequers, the 16th century estate of the British prime minister.

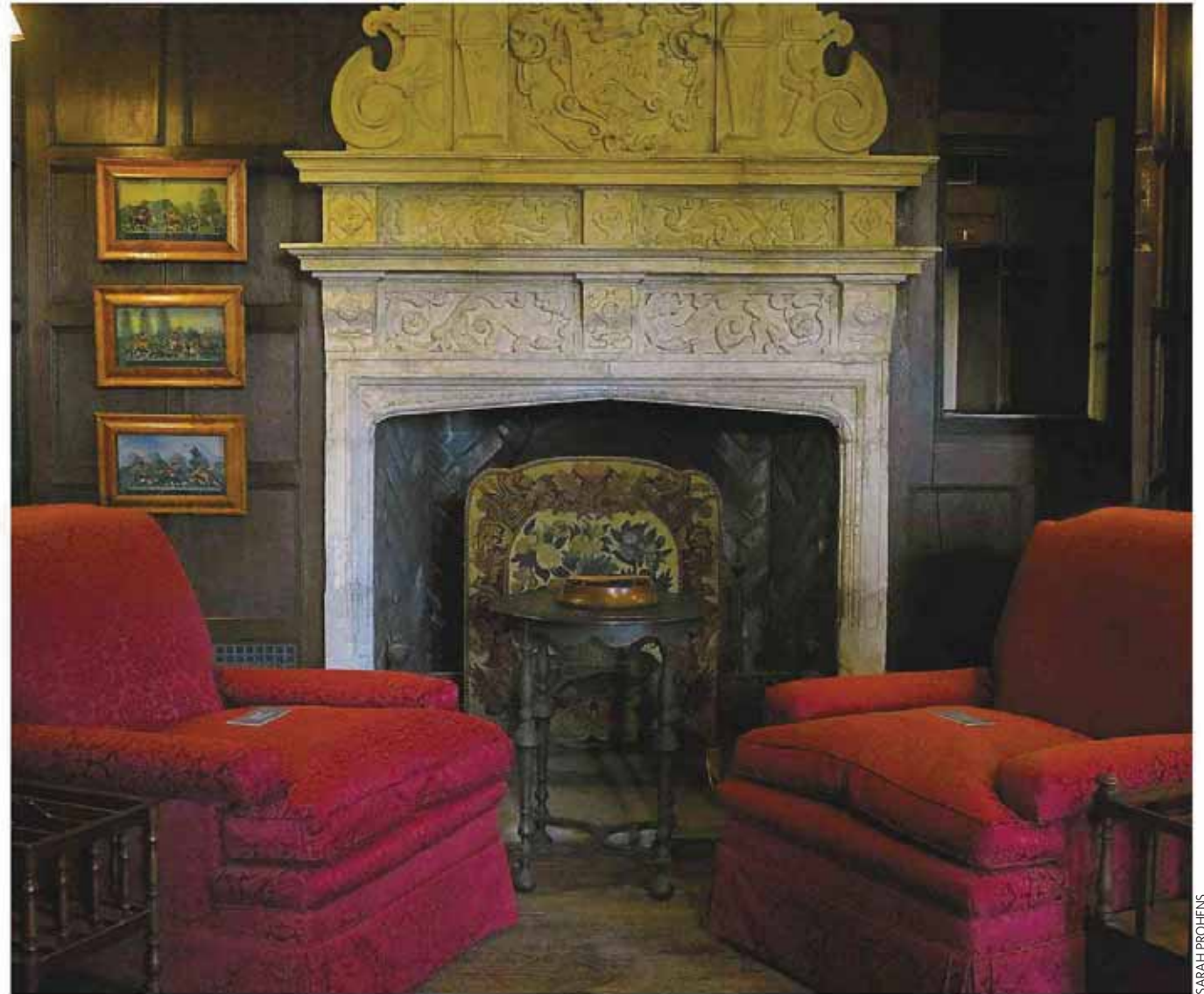
The crew had been shooting in Centre Island, which was standing in for Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts, upon realizing they also needed a location for Chequers. After scouting other sites, it was clear once the team came to Planting Fields that their search was over.

"This house, which is a 20th century creation, was designed to look as if it stood for centuries, that you're stepping somewhere in the countryside of England when you come here," says Gina Wouters, president and CEO of Planting Fields Foundation. "That's what they wanted to convey and that's what they saw when they came into this house."

Wouters admits to being unfamiliar with Chequers, but after the production crew showed her photos of the English estate, she was astonished at the resemblance. From the Main House's clustered chimneys and gabled roofs, arched windows throughout the dining room and the stone fireplaces, it was a perfect match for Chequers.

Filming took place last January through March, which made for a Currier and Ives-worthy opening scene shot at Planting Fields featuring a motorcade around the home's circular driveway.

"When they started filming the motorcade, there was snow on the ground. A day later when they came back, the



The flames seen in this fireplace during the Netflix series' Season 3 finale were achieved with CGI effects.

snow had melted," sustainability coordinator Rebecca Slagle says. "So most of that opening shot is video effects that were added in postproduction. They had a fake snow machine for continuity to make it look like there was still snow on the ground."

#### ROOMS WITH A VIEW

A visit to the formal dining room is a highlight of the tour and features stained glass window panes similar to those at Chequers; one of two working fireplaces in the home; and the original dining table decorated with candelabras, gold flatware, glassware, napkins and custom plates from 1937 emblazoned with images of various properties owned by the Coe family. Not that the cast got to use any of

#### 'The Diplomat' Tour

**WHEN | WHERE** Through March 29; guided tours: 11 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. Friday and 11 a.m. and noon Saturday-Sunday; self-guided tours: 1 and 2 p.m. Friday-Sunday; Planting Fields Arboretum State Historic Park, 1395 Planting Fields Rd., Oyster Bay  
**TICKETS** Guided tours: \$18, \$5 ages 6-17; self-guided tours: \$15, \$5 ages 6-17  
**MORE INFO** 516-922-9210, [plantingfields.org](http://plantingfields.org)

those museum pieces.

"They put in all of their own furniture and props," says Emily Leger, collections and exhibition manager.

"They built a false top for the table so they could use it without damaging it and then put all of their props on it."

And while it may have looked like the actors were getting set for a feast, no food or drinks were permitted in the building. "We don't allow food here because of pests and the food might melt under the lights. So they used whipped cream and shaving cream and things like that," Leger says.

Real plants were also off limits, she adds, because they have pollen and can attract insects. Fake foliage was used for set decoration, though real plants were added for exterior shots, Leger says.

Rich, dark wood paneling dominates the study, which served as the reception room where some of the show's

# diplomacy



**Keri Russell, left, Rufus Sewell, Allison Janney, Rory Kinnear and David Gyasi in the Season 3 finale of "The Diplomat," which was filmed at Planting Fields.**



**Many of the paintings at the Main House had to be taken down during filming to prevent any damage.**

most intense moments took place. Though it looked like the study's fireplace was ablaze during the episode, Slagle says it was all achieved by CGI effects. In addition, none of the room's actual furniture could be used and was stored on the second and third floors of the museum. The production team brought in their own period-appropriate pieces, Wouters says. "Sometimes what they had looked even better than some of the furniture we have on display," she jokes.

Many of the artworks adorning the wall of the gallery rooms had to be taken down during filming to prevent them from being damaged.

In a few cases, some rooms received dramatic makeovers,

including Wouters' office and an exhibition room, which was turned into a bedroom.

"They are mostly white walls and don't have any of the historic pieces and they completely changed them. They put up wallpaper and wall-to-wall carpeting and light fixtures," Wouters says. "Those rooms were so completely transformed to the point where people didn't even recognize them, even those on staff."

## CHANGES FOR THE BETTER

While those two rooms are back to their original states, the Netflix crew made a few important building upgrades that remained.

"The radiator in my office would squeak. There was one valve for all of the heaters in the house," she says. "They needed it completely quiet while they were filming. So during that preproduction time, they had HVAC specialists and plumbers come in and they made changes to some of those major infrastructural issues."

Another big expense Netflix took care of was replacing the tungsten lights throughout the house with LED bulbs that were more conducive to filming.

Not surprisingly, Wouters binge-watched Season 3 as soon as it premiered in October. And she had nothing but raves for the house.

"The drone view in the opening scene with the snow through the forest and then to the house, they did such a spectacular job," she says. "It already is so evocative but on film it looked really wonderful."