

The castle in the heartland of Minneapolis

American Swedish Institute

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American Swedish Institute

For more than 90 years, the American Swedish Institute's "Castle" with its turrets, towers, and gables, otherwise known as the Turnblad Mansion, has gracefully presided over what was once Park Avenue's "Golden Mile" in Minneapolis, with some 40 other mansions.

ASI's crown jewel and distinctive home, the spectacular, castle-like mansion was commissioned by Swedish immigrant Swan Turnblad from architects Christopher Boehme and Victor Cordella and completed over five years from 1904 to 1908. Turnblad emerged from farming, printing, and modest means to become a civic leader and the publisher of *Svenska Amerikanska Posten*, the largest Swedish language newspaper in America. Turnblad built to show his wealth and impress the community.

The imposing structure is one of the Twin Cities' grand historic houses. Family trips to Europe inspired the home's French chateau style, and the 33-room limestone masterpiece showcases intricately carved oak, walnut, and mahogany interiors with sculpted ceilings. Room styles vary, from the Moorish den to the Baroque music room with 11 porcelain-tiled stoves imported from Sweden.

The Turnblad family only lived in the home until 1929, reportedly somewhat uncomfortable with its grandiosity. It was donated by Swan, his wife, Lillian, and daughter, Christina, to become what is now a muse-



The Dala horse, the iconic symbol of Sweden, stands in the snow in wintertime in front the historic Turnblad Mansion at the American Swedish Institute in Minneapolis.

Photo courtesy of the American Swedish Institute

um, cultural center, and a popular attraction for hometown visitors and traveling tourists alike. A haven for Instagrammers, the Turnblad Mansion is an architectural treasure. Turnblad wanted to build a castle that would rival what he was seeing in Sweden and other countries, a mansion to last thousands of years

to celebrate Swedish arts, culture, and contributions to our society. And he succeeded.

Located near downtown Minneapolis in the diverse midtown Phillips West neighborhood, ASI now "engages locally and connects globally," serving hundreds of thousands of guests each year. ASI opened again to the public as of Sept. 11, 2020, after temporarily closing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the new visiting procedures are advance, timed museum admissions (to reserve, visit to ASImn.org), new hours (Thursday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.), and directional signage to encourage social distancing. While the pandemic has put many in-person events on hold, the ASI has rapidly adjusted to the challenging new reality by adding online programming to the mix.

In-person visitors are being welcomed back with an attractive and lively schedule of new and continuing art exhibitions. ASI's eclectic virtual programming (with live activities when possible) also includes Swedish and Finnish language classes for all lev-

els and ages, Swedish school programs for youngsters and teenagers, *Nordic Handcraft* workshops, *Nordic Table* food classes, virtual book events, plus a combination of activities for youth and families.

A must-see is ASI's 90th anniversary exhibition "extra/ordinary: The American Swedish Institute. At Play," which showcases the fascinating stories behind objects in its extensive collection, such as furniture, textiles, wooden carvings, and musical instruments. This imaginative new exhibition, which ASI will incorporate as part of its famed display of decorated holiday rooms, has been extended through January 2021. It invites visitors to rediscover the wonder of the featured objects, many on public display for the first time, and see them in new ways, by pairing the artifacts with original watercolor paintings and ink illustrations by the Minnesota mother-son team of Tara Sweeney and Nate Christopherson. The installa-

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Photo courtesy of the American Swedish Institute

The interior rooms of the Turnblad Mansion exhibit an elegance that belonged to former times. The family only lived there for a few years after it was built, reportedly uncomfortable with the grandiosity.



Photo courtesy of the American Swedish Institute

The American Swedish Institute "Castle" comes alive in winter, illuminated by glowing lights. For more than 90 years, it has been a landmark on what was once Park Avenue's "Golden Mile" in Minneapolis.

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tion also offers such fun surprises, including a 20-foot-tall inflatable Dala horse, a kitchen ceiling full of spoons, and a ballroom (that never saw a ball) full of balls.

Other current exhibitions include “We Are the Story – We Who Believe in Freedom,” a new quilts installation organized by the local Textile Center and the Women of Color Quilters Network, which builds upon symbols of Black history and is free for visitors to view. The “Swedish Dads” exhibit highlights photographs by Johan Bävman, depicting fathers who choose to stay at home with their children under Sweden’s generous parental leave policy. It is installed not only online, with text translated into four languages, but also outdoors on ASI’s perimeter fence for free public viewing.

The 2012 addition of the modern, 34,000-square-foot, Carl and Leslie Nelson Cultural Center transformed the museum’s campus with architecture that embraces handcrafted, Swedish-inspired aesthetics and Nordic values: respect for nature, use of quality materials, and sustainable building practices. The LEED Gold-certified center features a sloping green roof to promote pollination. There’s even a hidden geothermal well field for heating and cooling.

The expanded space also enabled ASI to incorporate a new café, a museum store, event halls, workshop studios, and more classrooms. A spacious outdoor courtyard allowed the launch of innovative public programming, including the popular *Cocktails at the Castle* parties, in addition to the traditional Midsommar celebration, further fulfilling ASI’s mission of being a gathering place for all, Swedes and non-Swedes alike.

The award-winning FIKA Café, named after the Swedish coffee-break custom, showcases both New Nordic “farm-to-table” food, as well as traditional Swedish fare (meatballs and gravlax, anyone?). It has been toasted by no less than *The New York Times*, NPR, and the Food Network, among others. The flexible event space and the in-house



Photo courtesy of the American Swedish Institute

This year, “An extraordinary Holiday in Extraordinary Times” is a new indoor-outdoor, immersive exhibition experience encompassing the richly decorated Turnblad Mansion and an open-air Nordic story trail.

Slate and Stone catering service attract an increasing number of weddings, meetings, and other special events. And if it is contemporary Scandinavian design you’re after, look no further than the ASI Museum Store. This destination-shopping locale carries Nordic glassware, unique items of décor, housewares, jewelry, books, imported sweets, and more. The carefully curated selection reflects Scandinavian innovation and practicality. The store, while open for in-person business, is also fulfilling orders through shipping or with contactless, curbside pickup.

ASI thrives under the leadership of President and CEO Bruce Karstadt, who has

been at the helm since 1990. Karstadt is a native of Lindsborg, Kan., a town founded by Swedish immigrants in 1869, to which his great-grandparents immigrated. Karstadt is also honorary consul general of Sweden for the state of Minnesota, and his many awards include being twice honored by King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden.

The American Swedish Institute is a celebration of old and new, changing with the times, and emerging as a vital and innovative institution. Since the era of mass Swedish immigration to North America between 1850 and 1930, no other ethnic group has been so closely identified with a single state

as Swedes are with Minnesota. Scandinavians formed tight-knit communities that affected politics, education, the arts, and health care. For 90 years, and, with providence, many more ahead, ASI has been a communal center for prolific cultural productivity, a symbol of immigrant success and ultimately a gathering place where generations of families and individuals continue to gather to foster traditions and make new memories. ASI invites you to visit soon and often.

For additional information, visit ASImn.org or call (612) 871-4907. ASI is located at 2600 Park Ave., Minneapolis, MN, 55418.



Photo courtesy of the American Swedish Institute

The Visby window on the stairwall landing of the Turnblad Mansion is an enamel-painted glass copy of a Swedish painting that depicts the citizens of Visby on the island of Gotland in Sweden as they were forced to bring their valuables to the Danish King Valdemar Atterdag in 1361.