



Preventive  
Conservation  
in Historic Houses  
and Palace  
Museums:  
Assessment  
Methodologies  
and Applications

SilvanaEditoriale

# **Preventive Conservation in Historic Houses and Palace Museums: Assessment Methodologies and Applications**

Conference of the National Museum of the Palace of Versailles (EPV), the Association of European Royal Residences (ARRE), and the Research Centre of the Palace of Versailles (CRCV)

In collaboration with the International Committee for Historic House Museums (DEMHIST), held at the National Museum of the Palace of Versailles and Trianon

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# Het Huys ten Donck: Steps Towards Professional Collection Care

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## **Abstract**

This three-years project aims at a methodical implementation of collection care that complies with the limited means of the foundation. It was developed as a step by step approach of knowledge development, knowledge transfer and team building. Exchanges between the local community, professionals and students gathered around a common interest in this important Dutch manor house resulted in an enchanting first year. The involvement of professionals from the fields of textiles, metals, stucco, historic interiors, preventive conservation, collection management and communication also made this an interdisciplinary project.

The project fits in a broader plan to reconnect the manor house to the local community and to the cultural community of the nearby city of Rotterdam. The first year showed promising results.

## **Keywords**

Housekeeping, collection care, volunteers, local community, academic cooperation, knowledge transfer.

*H*et Huys ten Donck was built in 1746 by Otto Groeninx van Zoelen (1704-1758, mayor of Rotterdam), as *maison de plaisance*. Finishings were added all throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, mainly in Louis XV style and include great plasterworks by the Italian stucco masters Castoldi and fabulous woodcarvings by anonymous Dutch craftsmen. The French gardens were later adopted to landscape style with addition of several follies (also national monuments). Since the 1920s the house has been inhabited on a permanent base, after the first adaptations since completion of the house. The moveable collection is strongly related to the house's and family history and consists of objects from the 16<sup>th</sup> until the 21<sup>st</sup> century [Thoen, 2006]. Today the estate is run by a charity foundation, set up in 1978 and the house is inhabited by the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> generation descendants of the builder. This results in a warm authentic homey style. Guided tours are provided every season and the house is let for photo and film productions, weddings and corporate dining.



*Fig. 1*  
Staff and volunteers of *Het Huys ten Donck* and students of the Reinwardt Academy at the rear of the house after a joint session of knowledge transfer in June 2017. (© Johan Kruithof, De Combinatie Ridderkerk)

Goals of the Foundation and its collection care project:

- to attain an economically, environmentally and materially sustainable exploitation of the estate;
- to reposition the estate for the future and re-establish close connections with the local community;
- to develop and install a collection care plan including good housekeeping with the support of local volunteers;
- to protect the vulnerable collection for side-effects of the upcoming project on renewable energy.

### **A Three Years Project and a Pilot in 2017**

Funds were raised to start a pilot under professional guidance. The ambitions include installation of a team of volunteers, knowledge transfer, customized working methods and procedures for good housekeeping, collection management, cooperation with the academic field and sharing the results.

### **“Work in Progress”**

At the end of 2017 the intermediary results show:

- a team of 12 volunteers, driven and enthusiastic, who are working at the house two to three times a month under professional guidance. Several workshops held, knowledge transfer, development of some procedures, methods and schemes for housekeeping.
- Exchange between volunteers and 12 students from the University of Amsterdam, 30 students from the Reinwardt Academy and their professors (fig. 1).

*Fig 2*

The Grand Reception Hall with temporary storage for curtains and paintings with regard to the building works. (© C. Groeninx van Zoelen)



– Completion of global risk analysis, basic list of objects per room, damage assessments, advices. Establishment of protective measurements, including the development of a temporary storage for textiles and paintings (fig. 2).

### **Looking Forward to 2018 and 2019**

Steps for the upcoming period include:

- completion of the *Donck's Guide for Good Housekeeping*. Short videos to share the experiences. Formulation of a collection management plan. Start monitoring on pests, climate, light and physical damages.
- Summer projects, master classes and special interest gatherings to publically share the house's craftsman work.

### **Bibliography**

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