

Villa Toradale, Darien, Connecticut

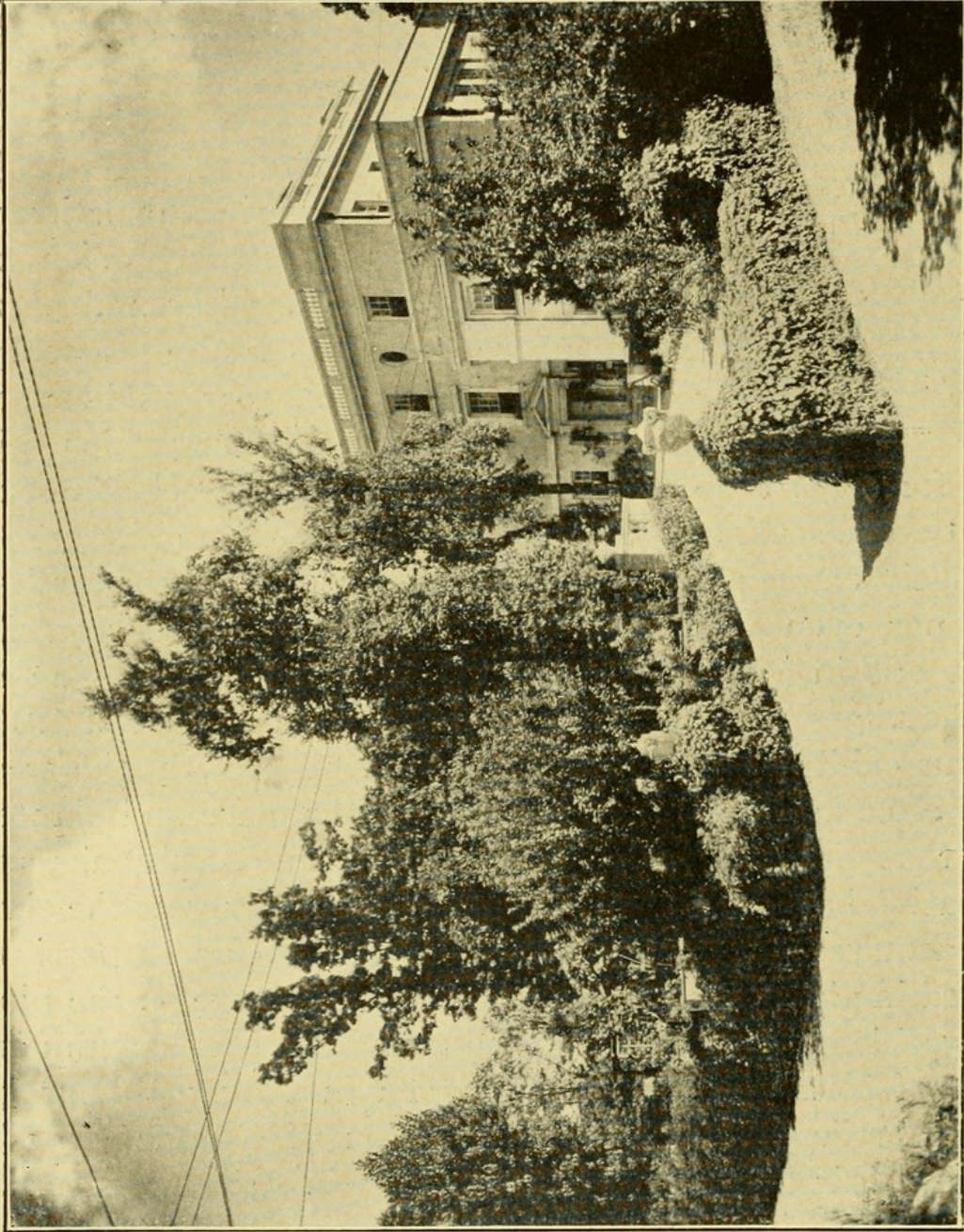


VILLA Toradale is an interesting experiment which depends for its success, as much on *floral* treatment, as on its architectural planning; so far as we know it is the only attempt made on the Atlantic Coast to reproduce, on a scale appropriate to conditions which will prevail for some time at least after the war, the elegant and fragrant stage setting of the Riviera or Lake Como.

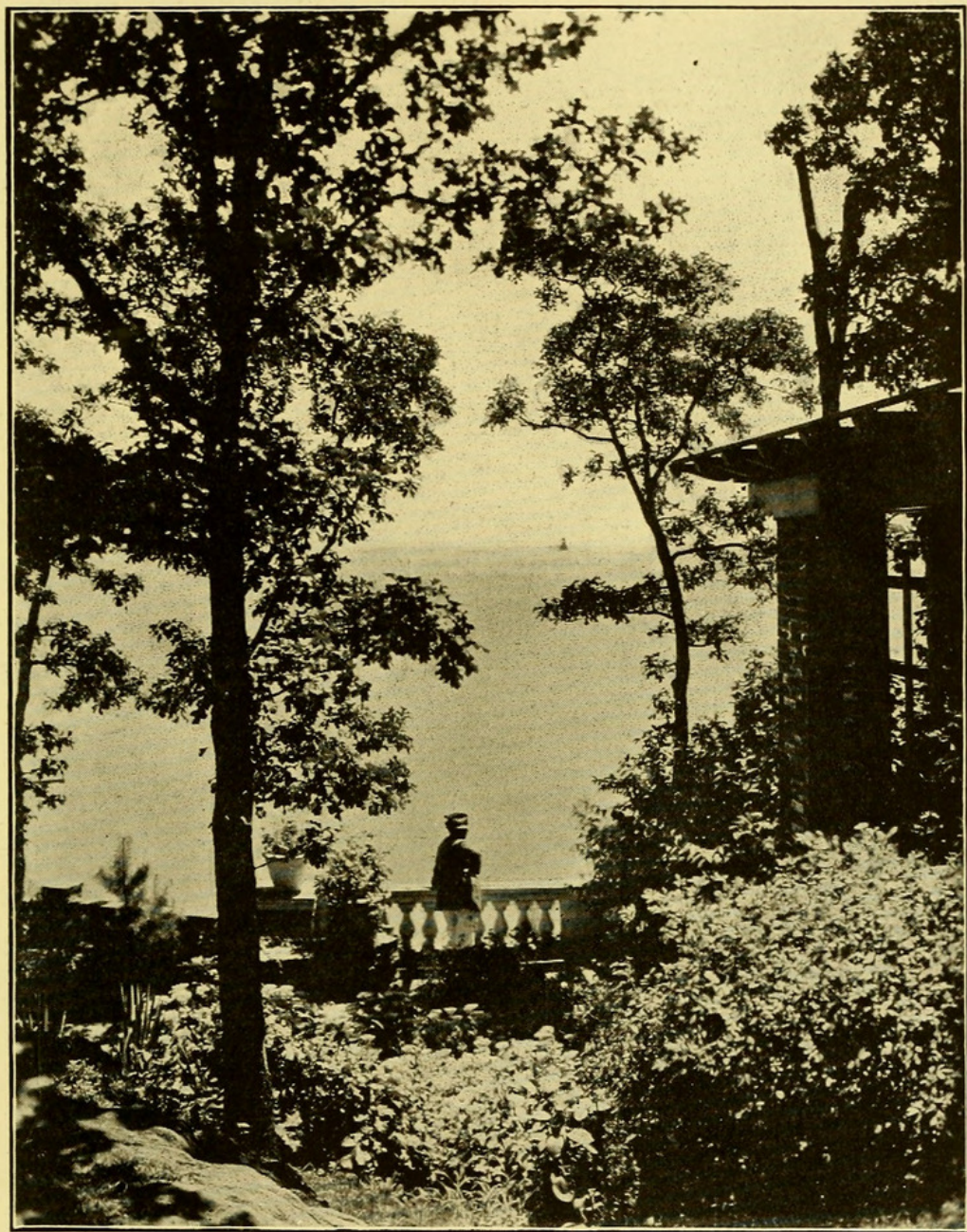
Strangely enough, it was not undertaken after the war had begun, nor even with the war in view—for it was carefully thought out in 1912, and actual construction was begun in 1913; the views which we show were taken in August of 1917; they thus exhibit the result of 4 years floral growth, the trees which we see having all been brought to the place and planted during that time—with the exception of some scrub oaks and a few native beeches which existed on the property at the time it was acquired in 1912, and which were, as far as possible, preserved in placing the house and a double garage on the plot.

The problem was fourfold—produce within easy commuting distance of New York and New Haven (not over 1 hour by rail or 38 miles by motor)—the illusion of Europe—with a minimum of first cost and maintenance—in such a way as to permit its use with the maximum of comfort and style, when desired, in all 4 seasons.

The site selected affords sea-bathing directly from the south terrace of the Villa by steps fashioned through the natural horizontal cleavage of the rock, so that the bedroom is the bath-house—and as the rise and fall of the tide is only about 4 feet, one may take a dip at any time of the day desired.



ENTRANCE TO VILLA (NORTH SIDE)
SHOWING COURT



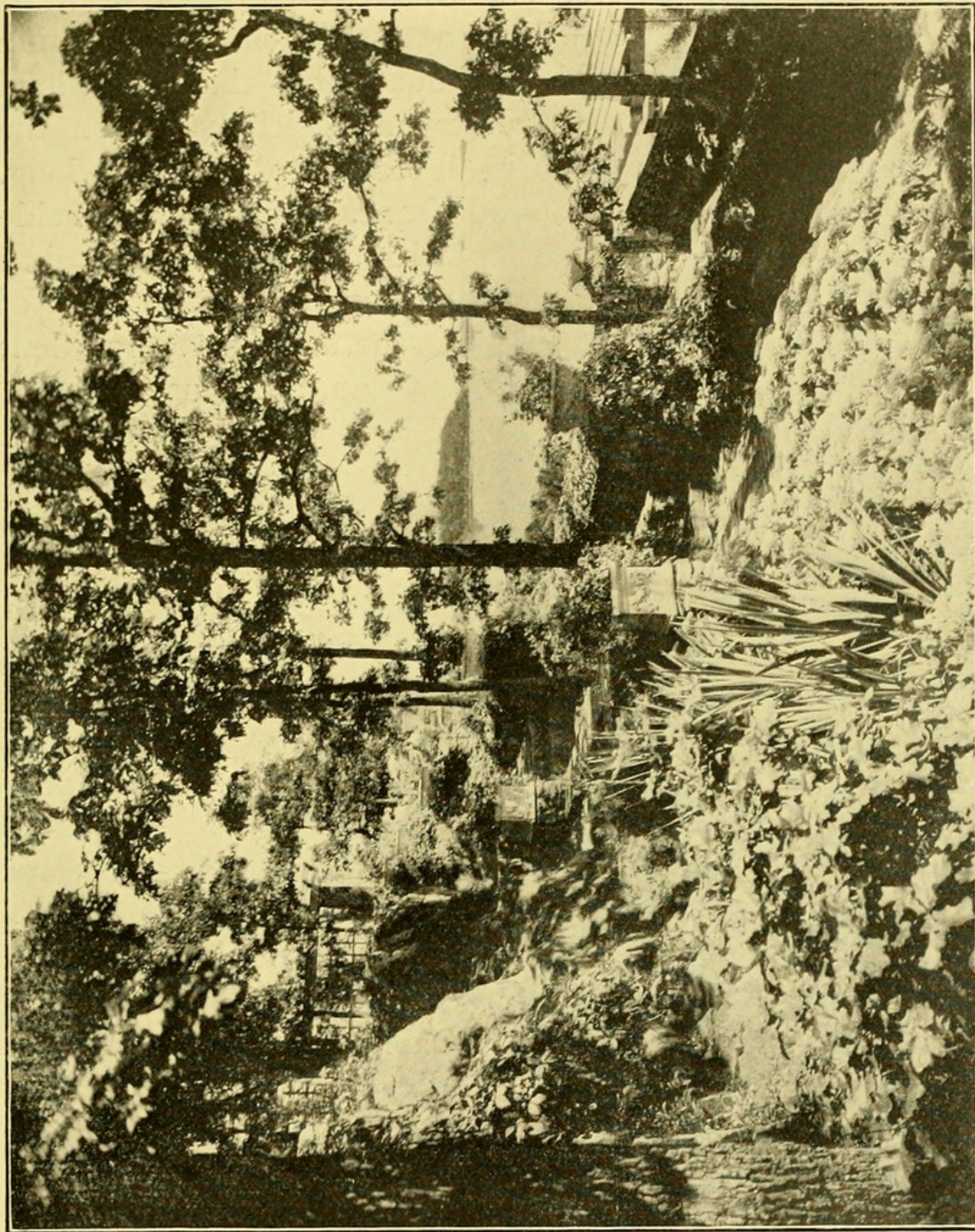
VIEW ALONG PERGOLA
LOOKING SOUTH OVER THE SOUND

As additional attractions—there is excellent fishing on this coast, and a land-locked harbor, known as “Five-Mile-River” furnishes opportunity for yachting and powerboating, while the Wee-Burn Country Club, which is about a quarter of an hour by motor, provides golf and tennis.

The natural features of the property have been skillfully taken advantage of in planning the terraces—and a rock garden in addition to a formal sunken rose garden, blend harmoniously both in form and colour, while pergolas covered with honey-suckle and various varieties of grape and other vines ensure, on the east and west lines of the property, privacy as complete in the landscape as if there were no neighbours; these lines are at right angles to the north-shore of the Sound and create a vista 8 miles long, directly across to Huntington Bay on Long Island, over a sheet of water which is rippled by a south-westerly breeze, almost as regular from May to September, as the trade-winds in the Tropics.

Like the famous “Bagatelle” in the “Bois” in Paris, this property could well bear the motto “Parva sed Aptā,” for its extreme dimensions are only 100 feet along the high-water line of the Sound by 200 feet in depth at right angles to the water line—in short, exactly one-half of an acre in area—situated on a peninsula appropriately christened “Riva Bella,” and constituting a private park of some fourteen properties, six of which run on to the high ledge of rocks which form the south shore of the peninsula.

From the main southerly terrace, which is on the same level as the dining and living rooms of the Villa, a descent of about 40 feet to the water’s edge is negotiated by secondary terraces—arranged in lengths of about 10 feet each, in steps running diagonally in Italian fashion, from the east and west lines of the property and along the lines themselves, and providing walks of about 1000 feet, including by-paths and north and south terraces, each walk and terrace being bordered by beds of flowers which succeed each other in time and colour, *Iris*, Peonies, *Gladiolus*, with Dorothy-Perkins and other fall-ing plants softening the walls of rounded stones which furnish



TERRACES (SOUTH)
ON SOUND FRONT

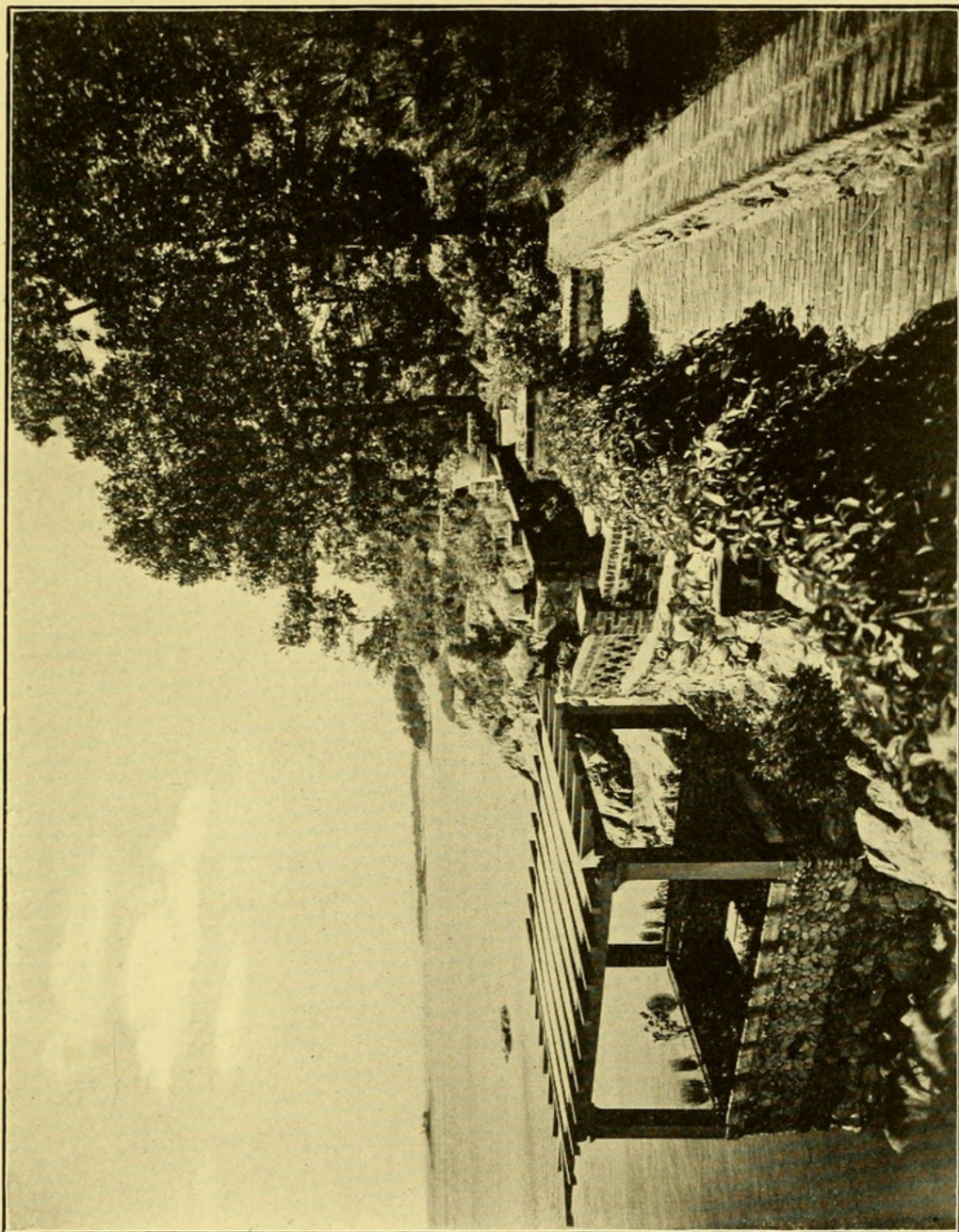
a succession of level surfaces on which the eye is forced to rest—surfaces made interesting by marble benches, a sundial, trellis, work and balustrades.

In four years, Virginia creepers have covered the stone walls on which the pergolas rest—while apple, peach, cherry, plum and other fruit trees, pruned for shade rather than fruit, lend peculiar softness to the grass plots and brick walks on the north side of the house, which is 40 feet deep by 50 feet long, and runs parallel to the Sound front. On the west side of the house and communicating with its ground and first floors is a garage for 2 large or 3 small cars; the south wall of the garage forms the background for the sunken rose garden; its second story includes servants' bath and sleeping rooms.

The house is built on the plan of the "Petit Trianon" at Versailles. This is made possible by the rock formation which, rising abruptly from the water falls away as sharply towards the north, so that by properly placing the house, its north façade, at the entrance court is of 3 stories and the south side towards the Sound only 2 stories above the main terrace; French collapsible canvas awnings advance over this terrace, stained in the yellowish-red of the sails in the lagoons of Venice, and form a contrast with the greyish-white stucco of the house itself.

The garage being 30 feet deep by 22 feet broad, passageways 14 feet broad from the north side of the property to the main terrace on the Sound (south) side, are left on either side of the buildings; these passageways each have natural rock steps and afford along the west property line shaded beds which are filled with lilies of the valley and indigenous American flowering plants requiring moisture as well as shade.

The easterly passage affords a service entrance to the kitchen, as well as access to the south fronts, and as the ground drops away along the north line of the property, in proceeding from the west towards the east, delivery wagons are completely hidden while standing in front of the east passageway; this leaves the court approach entirely free for the use of the ownership and their visitors. The passageways are closed by trellis



VIEW ALONG SOUTH TERRACES
OVERLOOKING THE SOUND AND
IN WESTERLY DIRECTION

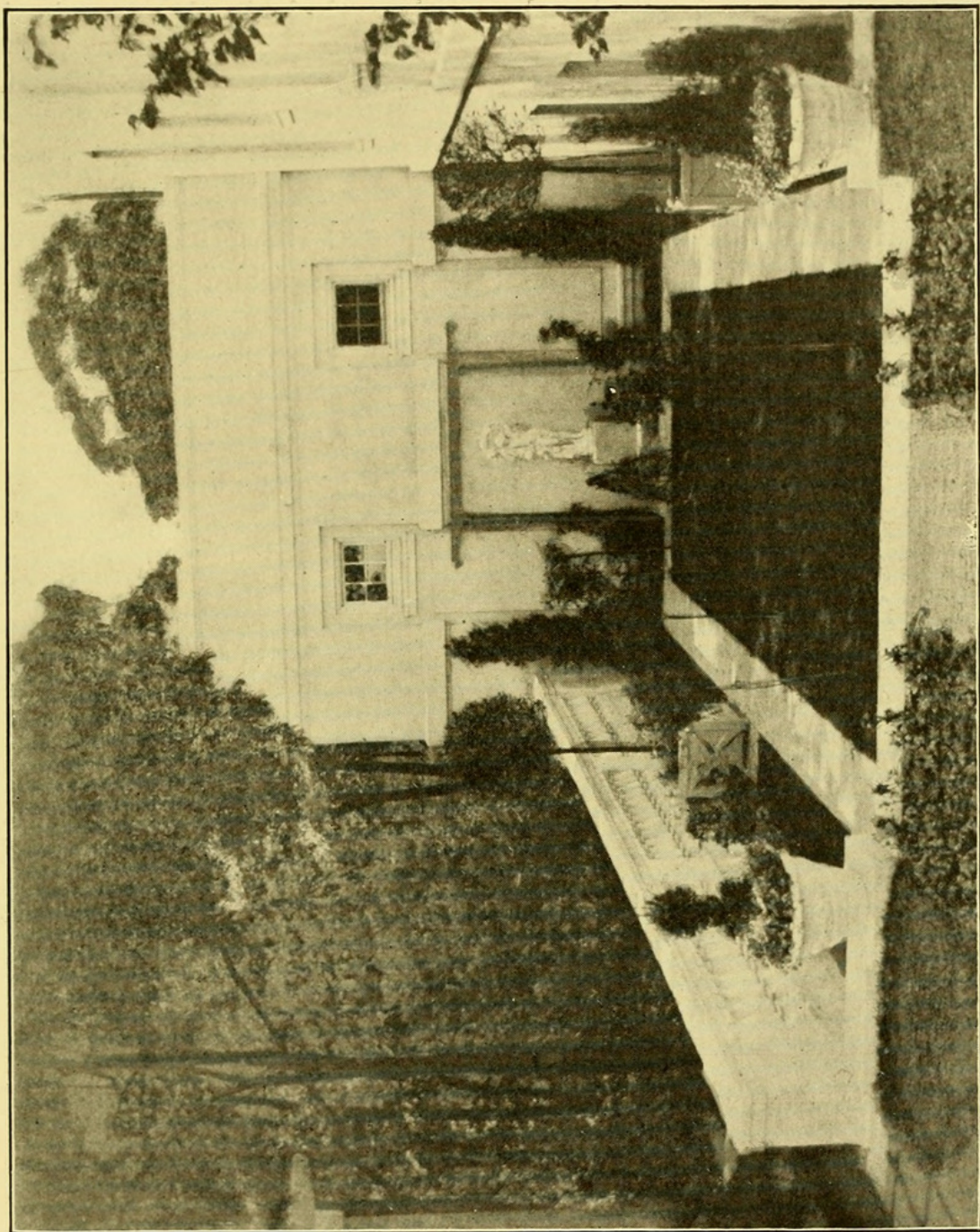
work gates, which effectively block access from the north line of the property to the main south terrace and thus ensure absolute privacy on the Sound side. By means of trees and lilac bushes, as well as wistaria, ingeniously placed, the trellis gates are completely hidden from the view of the passer-by on the north side of the property.

It is impossible in a short description to enumerate in detail all the peculiar features of this unique property but as the architectural and floral treatments are so interwoven as to form a concrete whole, we show plans of the various floors of the house and garage and a sketch-map of Riva Bella, showing the orientation of the property and its approach.

The exterior lines of the "corps de batiment" were suggested by a "bastide" (villa) near Marseilles. The interior of the Villa is in Colonial for the masters' bedrooms (5 in number) and in period styles for the living rooms (parlor in Louis XVI, mirror gallery in Louis XV, living room in Italian Renaissance, dining room in Adam).

Unlike the Trianon the house contains every modern convenience, a large elevator capable of taking up and down an invalid's lounge, furniture, etc.—a vacuum cleaner, house and long distance telephones to rooms, public service water, electric light and power, open fireplaces and a hot-water heating system throughout for winter occupation; the hardware in the living portions of the house was imported from France; the fixtures are by well-known art metal workers and the plumbing and drainage are by the two best known firms in that line; besides large closets, storage and refrigerator rooms, there is a laundry and indoor hot-air dryers; the kitchen is so arranged as to be cool in summer and by closing doors in passage-ways, warm in winter; the pantry is large, light and airy; there is a servants sitting room.

The building is fireproof, the floors are on arches, and all spaces under sills and bare boards are filled in with plaster to prevent vermin from entering the house, and as a protection against fire there is an outside hydrant besides indoor floor connections.



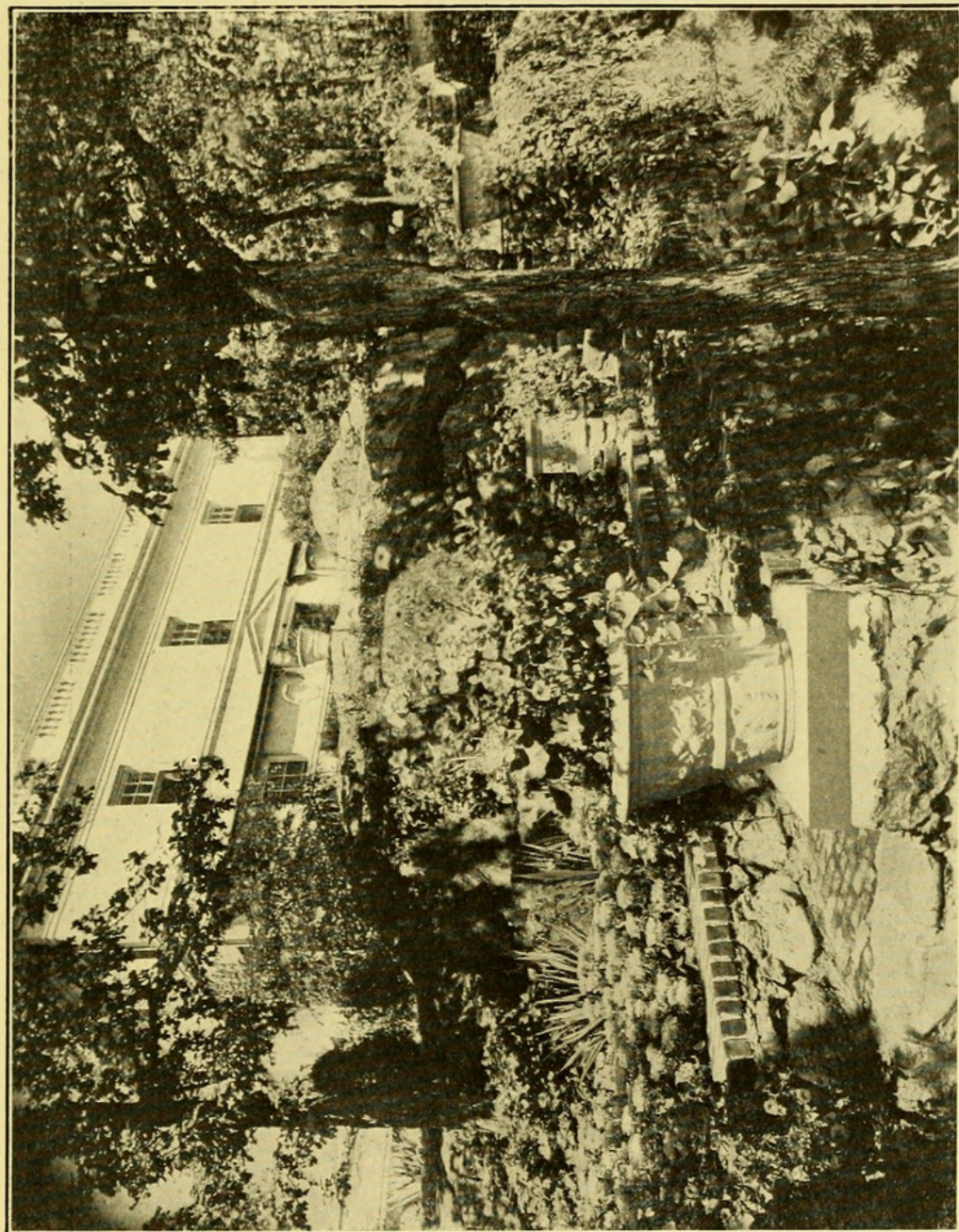
SUNKEN ROSE GARDEN

The property is cared for by a couple, the man keeps the grounds in shape and runs a small car, etc.; the woman is cook and attends to the upstairs part of the house. When members of the ownership inhabit it, they bring their butler and ladies maid.

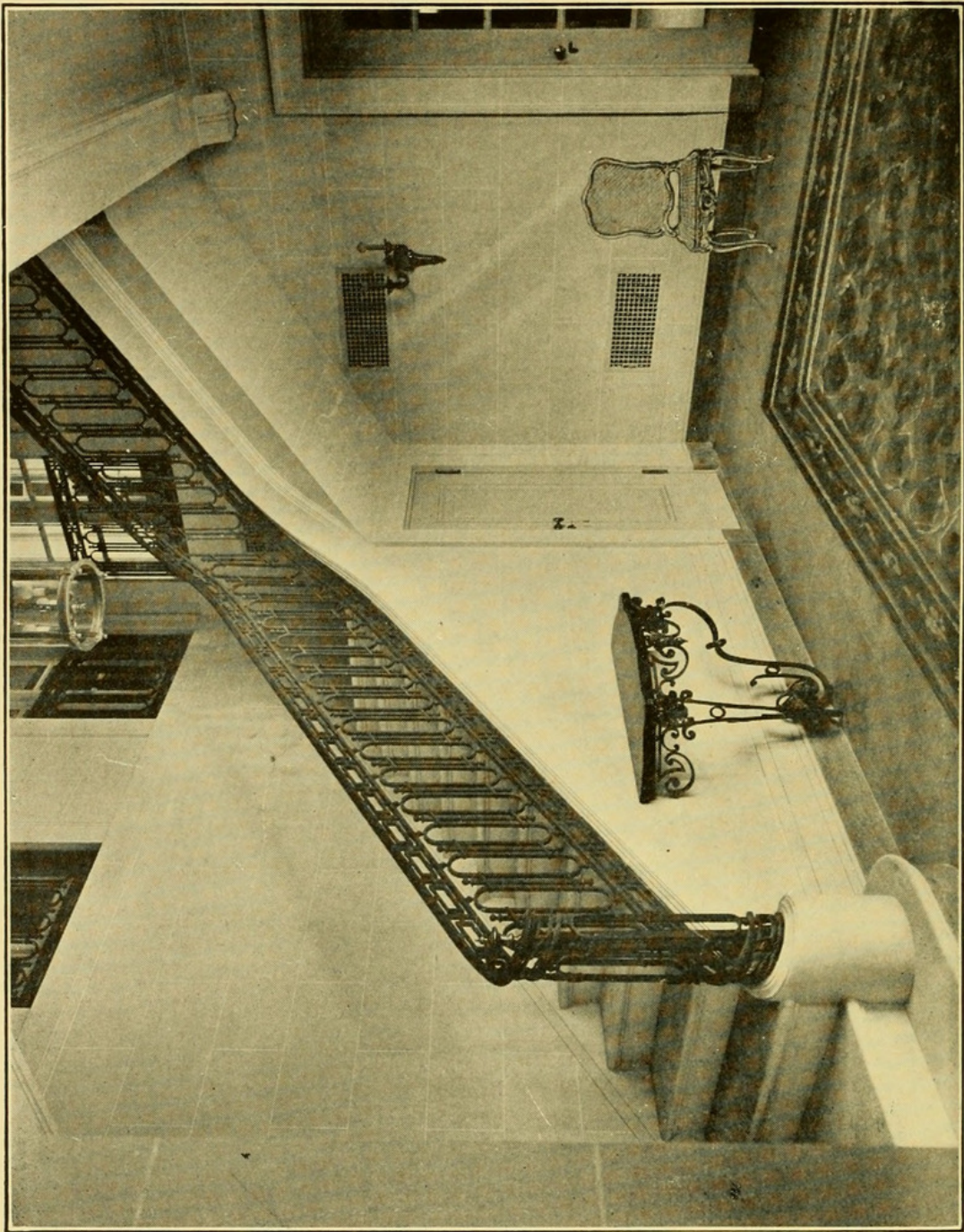
This Villa was the property of the late Mrs. W. Wright Hawkes of New Haven and Darien—it now belongs to the family, one of whom is a governor of the International Garden Club; he has in a public spirit authorized the Club's Secretary to issue passes to members—on their application, to view the property which should be seen in June, July or August.

Following is a list of the plants in the Rock Garden:

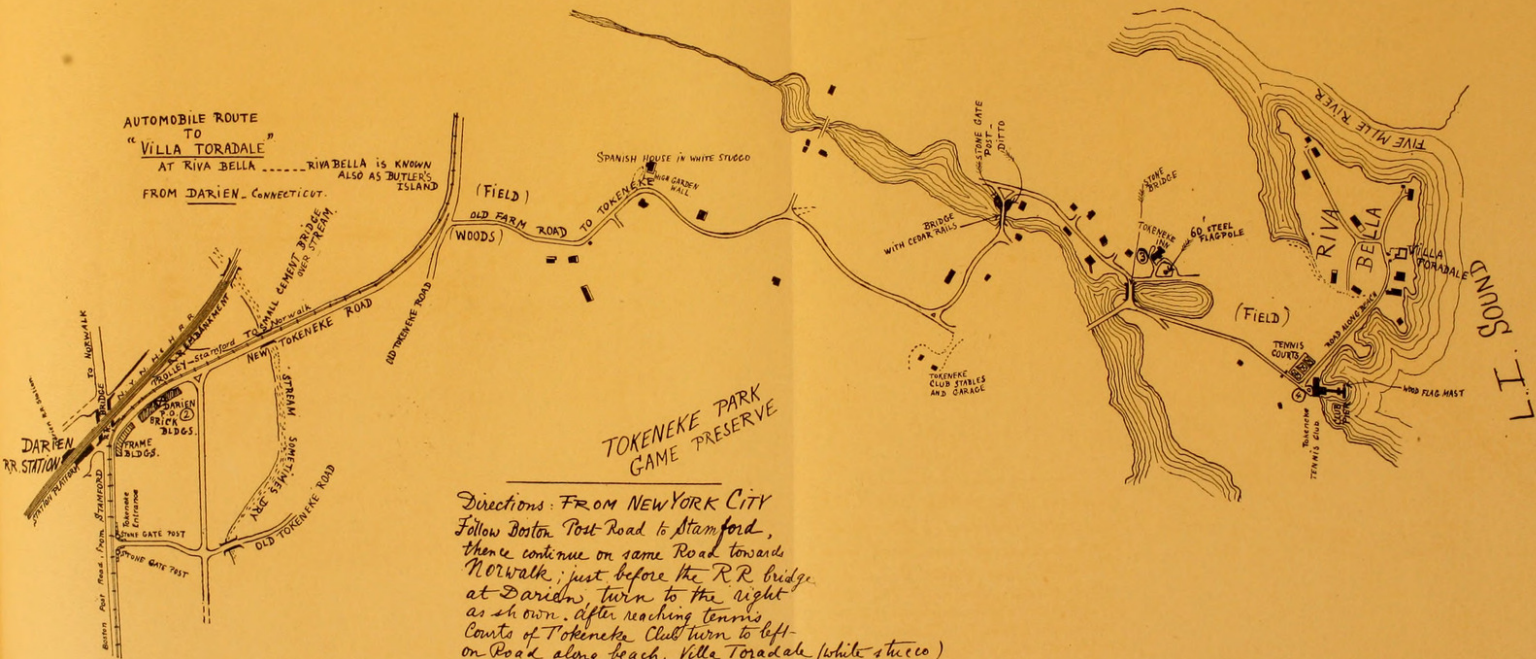
<i>Alyssum saxatile compactum</i>	<i>Eryngium</i> in var.
<i>Aquilegia</i> in var.	<i>Heuchera</i> in var.
<i>Arenaria balearica</i>	<i>Iberis sempervirens</i>
<i>Armeria maritima</i> in var.	<i>Iris pumila</i>
<i>Aubretia</i> in var.	<i>Linum perenne</i>
<i>Bellis perennis</i>	<i>Saxifraga</i> in var.
<i>Campanula</i> in var.	<i>Sedum</i> in var.
<i>Dianthus deltoides</i>	<i>Sempervivum</i>



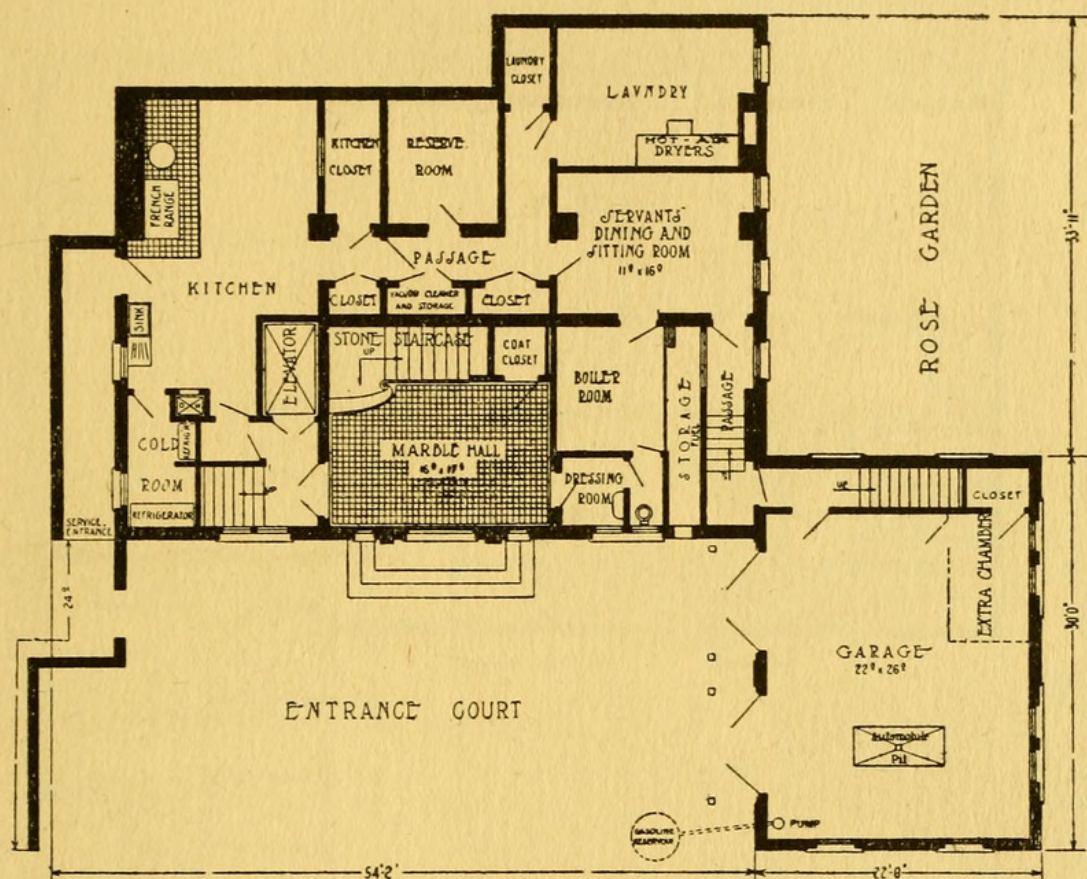
STEPS AND TERRACES LEADING UP
TO SOUTH SIDE OF HOUSE
OVERLOOKING THE SOUND



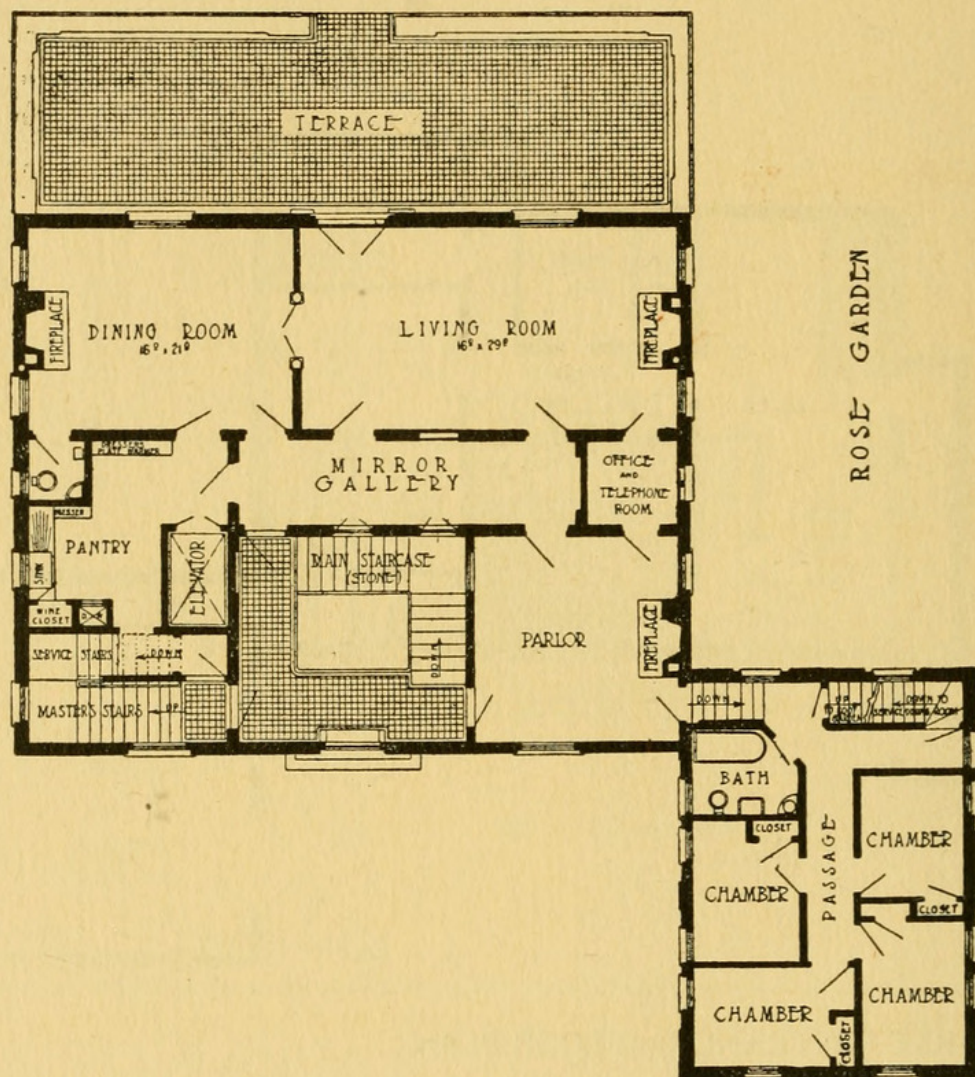
ENTRANCE HALL



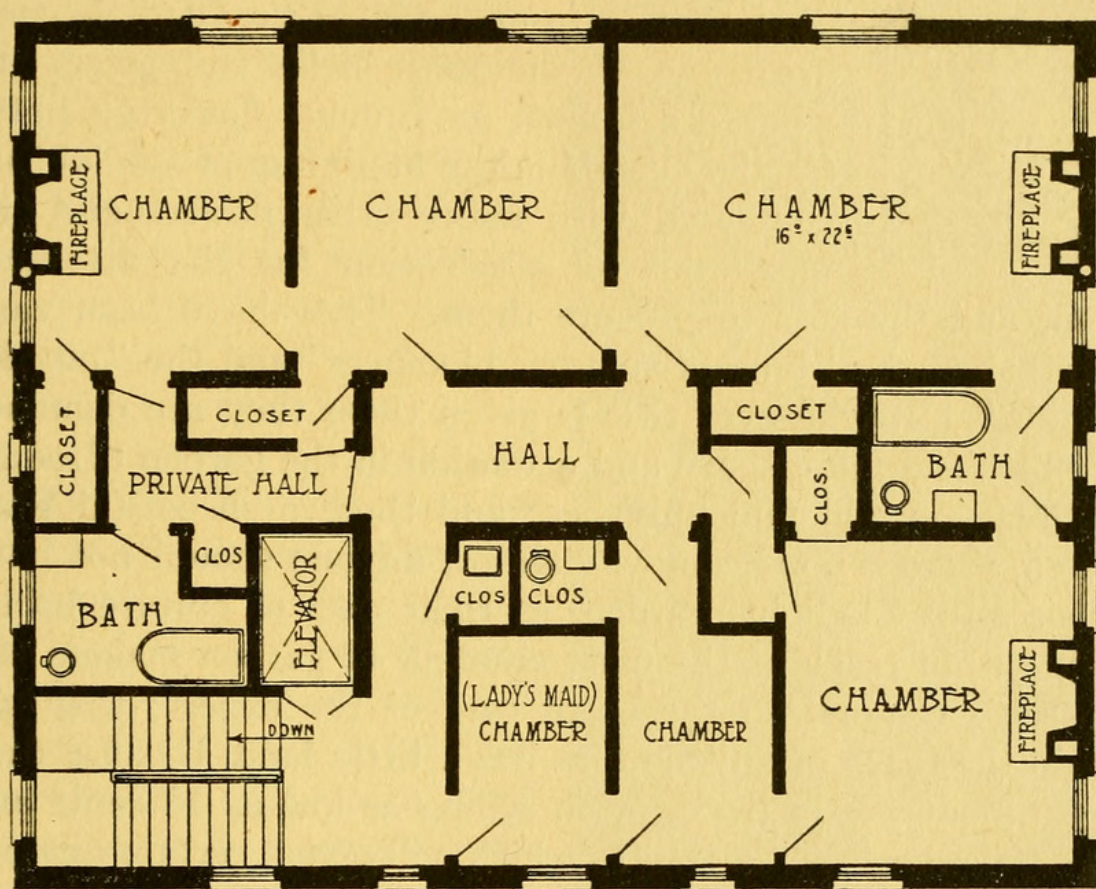
Directions: FROM NEW YORK CITY
Follow Boston Post Road to Stamford,
thence continue on same Road towards
Norwalk; just before the R.R. bridge
at Darien, turn to the right
as shown. After reaching Tennis
Courts of Tokeneke Club turn to left
on Road along beach Villa Toradale (white stucco)
is entered by a Court surrounded by a
white stucco balustrade; at the entrance
are 2 gate posts & stone on which are large Valls.
Landmarks to enquire for: (2) Darien Post-office (3) Tokeneke Inn -
(4) Tokeneke Beach Club.



FIRST (ENTRANCE)—FLOOR PLAN
North side of House



SECOND-FLOOR PLAN
North side of House



THIRD-FLOOR PLAN
North side of House



1918. "Villa Toradale, Darien, Connecticut." *Journal of the International Garden Club* 2(4), 555–569.

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