

# The Cloisters: A Brief History

The Cloisters is much more than simply a beautiful wooded estate and a spectacular event venue: it also represents the life's work of Sumner A. Parker (1881-1946) and his wife G. Dudrea Parker (1883-1972), who dared to dream of constructing an authentic Gothic manor house in the Maryland countryside. The Parkers spent the decades between their 1905 marriage and the outbreak of World War II working towards this goal.

To this end, they traveled extensively throughout Europe, collecting artwork and artifacts as well as architectural elements and antique furniture. All of these were shipped to a warehouse in Baltimore, where they were stored while the Parkers meticulously prepared to build their unique home. Finally, Mr. and Mrs. Parker found the ideal location, 60 wooded acres on a hilltop in Baltimore County that reminded them of their favorite part of France, and began construction around 1929.

The house took three years and \$50,000 to complete. In order to achieve an authentic look and feel, Mr. Parker based the design for the house on sketches that he had made of European country manors. He and Mrs. Parker chose random-sized blocks of grey and gold Butler stone for the walls of the house and flagstones of the same material for the roof. These flagstones, which are an inch thick and up to 12 inches across, weigh as much as 210 pounds each and form a massive roof that is the only one of its kind in the United States. The Parkers' attention to detail extended inside the house as well. For example, each of the massive timbers found throughout the house was painstakingly hewn by hand and then left outside to weather for two years in order to give them the look of old wood.

Although The Cloisters itself only dates from 1932, many of the architectural elements are far older, lending the house an ancient feel. For example, the massive, half-timbered gables on the main facade originally graced a medieval house in Donremy, France, while Mr. and Mrs. Parker acquired the pale gray medallions on the same facade from a 16<sup>th</sup> century house in Venice, Italy. Similarly, the elaborate stained-glass door leading from the chapel to the cloistered garden originally decorated a 16<sup>th</sup> century house in Verona, Italy, and several of the doors on the first floor date from medieval France as does the beautifully carved wooden panel over the Dining Room's mantel. The mantels of the four fireplaces on the first floor, which feature carved geometric designs in a late-medieval style and wooden Renaissance figures, were salvaged from a chateau in Brittany, France.

In addition to acquiring antique building materials directly from Europe, the Parkers also salvaged authentic medieval pieces from the renowned Glen Ellen mansion, which once stood near the Loch Raven reservoir in Baltimore. For example, the Gothic tracery above the windows in the Chapel and in the first-floor Solarium came from Glen Ellen as did the French doors that open from the Gallery to the cloistered garden.

Mr. and Mrs. Parker also creatively reused wood from antique furniture for architectural elements in the house. For example, the beautiful carved paneling on the third floor still bears the marks of hinges from when the panels functioned as the doors to medieval cupboards. Similarly, ornate panels set into the walls throughout the lower floors were taken from antique chests and date from as far back as the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

The Parkers were natives of Baltimore, maintaining their primary residence at 913 St. Paul Street in Baltimore's Mount Vernon neighborhood, and both graduated from the Johns Hopkins University. They had three children: Sumner A. Parker, Jr. (who died in infancy), F. Jameson Parker (1909-1971), and Katherine S. Parker (1914-1978). They also had several grandchildren, among them television actor Jameson Parker. Mr. and Mrs. Parker and their older son are interred on the property.

Mr. Parker was president of the Armstrong and Parker Company, which produced ornamental ironwork (such as balconies, gates, and fences) and which was located where Lake Clifton High School now stands. Beautiful examples of the ironwork made by Mr. Parker's company can be seen around Baltimore and throughout The Cloisters. For example, Mr. Parker designed the railing of the stunning four-story spiral stair tower in the center of

the house; the gothic-inspired banister of the library staircase; the decorative (and functional) grates on the windows of the stair tower and on the ground floor; and the balconies on the upper floors.

Mrs. Parker wrote short stories, plays, and poetry and was a member of a number of civic organizations. She also took an active interest in the design of The Cloisters, going so far as to climb on to the roof to place clumps of moss in exactly the right places.

Throughout their lives, the Parkers frequently opened both of their homes to the public, allowing the people of Baltimore to view their remarkable collections of tapestries, rugs, porcelain, paintings, and antique furniture. In fact, they specifically designed The Cloisters so that portions could be open to the public as a museum, while preserving the family's privacy in their living quarters. Visitors entered through the south entrance directly into the library where they could view the rare manuscripts there before proceeding into the gallery to examine the extensive display of tapestries and other art objects. They could then climb the back staircase to enjoy Mrs. Parker's collection of 18<sup>th</sup> century dollhouses on the second floor and the family's collection of colonial-era heirlooms on the third floor.

In a final act of generosity to the city that she loved, Mrs. Parker willed The Cloisters and its contents to the City of Baltimore. Since acquiring the estate, the city has used the house and grounds in a variety of ways. From 1977 until the 1990's, The Cloisters was home to a children's museum. Today The Cloisters is primarily an event facility, hosting 250 weddings, retirement parties, holiday balls, bar mitzvahs, and business meetings each year. Most famously, it was the site of actor Will Smith's 1998 wedding to Baltimore native Jada Pinkett.

In addition "The Castle," as it is known, with its distinctive architecture and breath-taking landscape has been featured in a variety of television shows (such as *Homicide*, *The Wire*, and *Ace of Cakes*) as well as several movies (including *Absolute Power* and John Water's *Cry Baby*.)

# Decorative Elements at The Cloisters

**Exterior:** The house is principally composed of large, random-sized blocks of grey and gold Butler stone quarried in Maryland. Some of the stone was quarried on the estate. The roof is made of heavy Butler stone flagstones arranged in an overlapping pattern and secured by iron pins. The stones are of irregular sizes, approximately one-inch thick and 8-12” across. This roof is the only one of its kind in America.

The two projecting sections of the main façade are topped by massive, half-timbered gables, originally part of a medieval house in Donremy, France. The two pale grey circular medallions incorporated into the main façade are from a 16<sup>th</sup> century Venetian house.

The cloistered garden, from which the house takes its name, is located at the north side. “Cloisters” is an architectural term used to define a covered walkway with an open colonnade on one side, usually enclosing a garden.

**Interior:** The Entrance Hall has a Gothic-style ribbed, vaulted ceiling executed in plaster made to resemble stone. The floor is grey slate decorated with small inset grey marble medallions. The diamond-paned, iron casement windows are fitted with random circular panes of stained glass known as bull’s eye glass.

The enormous Gallery was designed to display the Parkers’ paintings, furniture, and other art objects. The mantels of the fireplaces here and throughout the first floor are composed of chest sections decorated with carved designs, especially the linen-fold motif. The sides show carved wooden Renaissance figures as well as panels of ornate late medieval geometric motifs. The interiors of the fireplaces feature blue and white Delft tiles with craft and floral designs. The fire backs are ornate cast iron.

The Chapel adjacent to the Gallery has plaster walls made to resemble stone blocks. The top of the windows are decorated with wooden Gothic tracery from the renowned Baltimore Gothic Revival mansion, Glen Ellen. The elaborate door leading to the cloistered garden is from a 16<sup>th</sup> century Veronese house and features an antique stained glass window. The floor is of random-sized butler stone.

The vertical molded panels between the bays of shelves in the Library conceal ladders to provide access to upper shelves. The Gothic-style stairway has an unusual rope ornament on the supporting archway.

The beams in the Living Room are hand-hewn from chestnut trees grown on the estate. The doors to the Library, Entrance Hall, and the small closet are medieval French in origin. Each is decorated with a variation of the linen-fold motif, as are the panels below the windows. The fireplace is made of plaster shaped to resemble stone.

The Dining Room features a late medieval wooden panel on the chimney breast over the mantel. The panel has five vertical sections with carved floral and animal figures and an oval medallion with an intricately carved coat-of-arms. The windows in the Solarium behind the Dining Room incorporate wooden Gothic tracery from Glen Ellen.

# The Cloisters

January 1, 2016 thru December 31, 2017

## **Atlantic Caterers**

Kristin Olsson  
410-254-6662  
[www.atlanticcaterers.com](http://www.atlanticcaterers.com)  
[kristin@atlanticcaterers.com](mailto:kristin@atlanticcaterers.com)

## **Biddle Street Catering and Events**

Ruthie Schwartzman  
410-727-7777  
[www.biddlest.com](http://www.biddlest.com)  
[rschwartzman@biddlest.com](mailto:rschwartzman@biddlest.com)

## **Catering By Alan Weiss – Kosher**

Alan Weiss  
443-394-8338  
[www.cateringbyalanweiss.com](http://www.cateringbyalanweiss.com)  
[info@cateringbyalanweiss.com](mailto:info@cateringbyalanweiss.com)

## **The Classic Catering People**

Larry Frank  
410-356-1666  
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## **Linwoods Catering**

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## **The Pantry**

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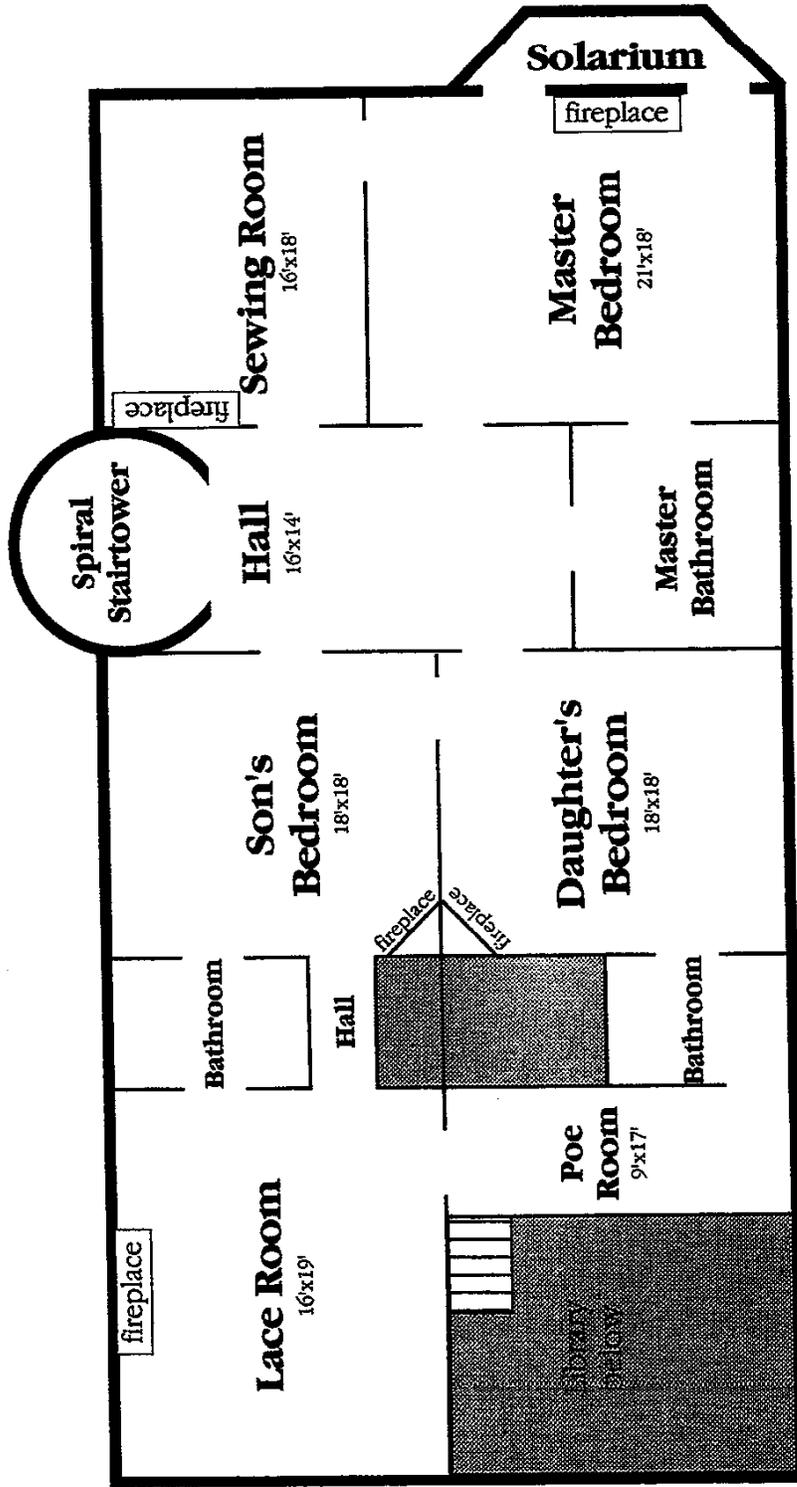
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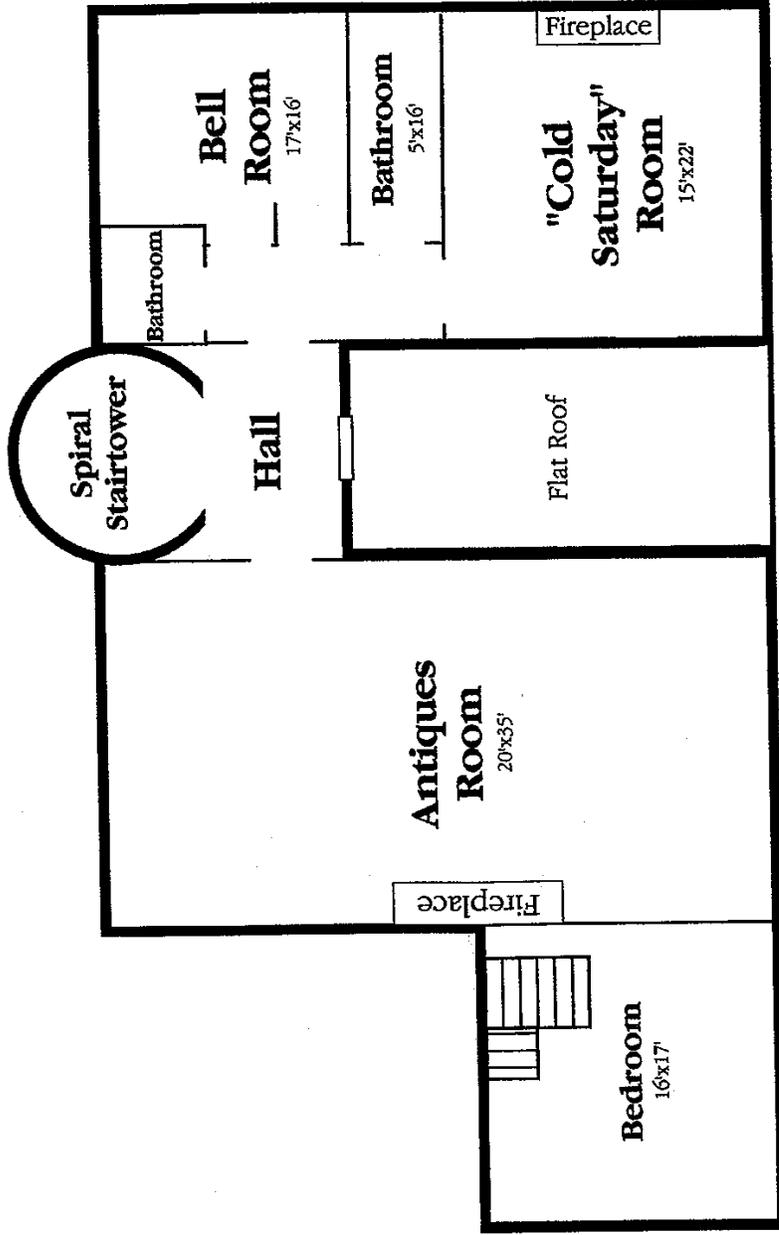
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## Second Floor of The Cloisters

(not to scale)



**Third Floor of The Cloisters**  
(not to scale)

# The Cloisters

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Alcohol

**May I purchase my own alcohol?** Yes, as long as your caterer allows it. However the caterer must serve all alcohol.

**Is it okay if I have champagne or other alcoholic beverages while I am upstairs dressing?** Yes, if the caterer serves you. The caterer must serve all alcohol consumed on the premises, both prior to and during your reception.

**Do I need to get a one-day liquor permit from Baltimore County?** Yes – if you are a non-profit organization that has sold tickets to your event and / or you are having a cash bar. If so, call 410-887-3191 for more information. All others do not need a liquor permit.

**When does the bar close?** The bar must close no later than one-half hour before the scheduled end of your reception.

**What happens if one of my guests has too much to drink?** The bartender(s) will cut off inebriated guests.

**What happens if one of my guests forgets her / his ID?** According to Maryland law, only people who are 21 or older may be served alcohol. If a guest's age is not clearly older than 21, he or she must provide identification as established by Maryland law. Adults are not allowed to take alcoholic drinks and give them to underage guests.

### Bathrooms

**How many bathrooms are there?** 8 – 2 in the basement, 2 on the first floor, 2 on the second floor and 2 on the third floor. One of the bathrooms on the first floor is handicapped accessible. If you indicate on the Detailed Event Sheet that you are expecting a handicapped guest, our staff will make sure this bathroom is available.

**Can I take a bath at The Cloisters before I get dressed?** No.

### Caterer

**What is the role of my caterer?** In addition to preparing and serving your food and alcohol, your caterer is responsible for the set-up and break-down of all tables and chairs and for cleaning the house before departure. A good caterer will also manage the flow of your event.

**Do I have to choose a caterer on your list?** YES!

## **Cloisters' Staff**

**What does The Cloisters' staff do at my event?** First, they oversee the set-up to make sure you, your caterer and your decorator are abiding by Cloisters' rules and regulations. Then, they help your guests to park. During the event they will float around, checking into safety issues, making sure the bathrooms are supplied and clean, and directing guests to the bathroom. Near the end of your event, they will make sure the bar closes down one-half hour before the scheduled end of your reception. After your event, they will oversee the caterer putting away the tables and chairs and cleaning up.

## **Decorations**

**May I use rose petals inside for decorations?** Yes—but they must be white, pale pink, pale lavender, or pale yellow. (Dark colors stain the floor when guests step on them.) Let your caterer know you want to use petals, since they will be responsible for cleaning them up.

**May I use candles?** Yes—you may use tea lights in votives or candles in hurricane globes. (If you use the latter you must put something under the candle to catch the wax). Candles placed in the fireplaces don't need to be enclosed in glass, but they do need to have something underneath them to catch dripping wax.

**What can our guests do to wish us well on our way?** We prefer that you use Waste-Free Bird Food because it does not make a mess and does not harm wildlife. Alternatively, you may also use bubbles, rice, and pale-colored rose petals as long as you use them outside and as long as your caterer will sweep them up. Whatever you choose, please do not wrap it in little pieces of tulle – the discarded tulle gets stuck in the plants and is very hard to remove. Silly string and sparklers are not allowed, inside or out.

**May I use strings of little white lights to decorate?** Yes, as long as you drape them or tie them up. They may be used outside, too, if they are the kind made for outdoor use. Don't forget to take them with you at the end of the event.

**Nails, tape, staples, glue, etc., may not be used in the hanging or placing of decorations.** See The Cloisters' Rules and Regulations, attached as part of your contract, for all the regulations regarding decorating. We recommend monofilament fishing line for securely and invisibly tying up decorations.

**May I drop some decorations / favors / other items off in advance?** Contact us. Depending on what the items are, we should be able to accommodate you. However, we claim no responsibility for any items left. No area can be locked when the building is open, so we strongly urge you not to leave anything of value.

## **Equipment**

**What equipment do you have?** The following is available at no extra cost:

200 white wooden chairs	four 48" round tables
five 8' and six 6' rectangular tables	fifteen 60" round tables (seat 8-10)
one 36" round table	nine 36" cocktail elbow tables
one 36" square table	3 coat racks (50 coats each)

**Do I have to use your equipment?** No, you don't. However, you need to let us know what you will be renting, when it will be delivered, and when it will be picked up (unless the caterer is bringing it in and taking it out with them.) Depending on when other events are scheduled and the size of your items, you may not be able to have anything dropped off before your set-up time and it may have to be removed at the conclusion of your reception. (That could mean you have to pay for a Saturday night pickup, or a Sunday delivery, for example.)

## **Hours**

**When are you in the office?** Generally, office hours are on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 10:00am until 4:00pm; however, office staff is often here at other times. If you would like to stop by to tour the house or drop off paper work outside of those hours, please call ahead to let us know.

**When can I visit?** Open houses are the best time to visit, since staff members will be available to give you a tour and answer your questions. You may also visit during the office hours outlined above, but you should call ahead to make sure there are no events scheduled. Visits are **never** allowed during private events.

## **Insurance**

**What insurance do I need?** A one-day commercial general liability insurance certificate with a \$1 million limit, naming The Cloisters, the Baltimore Office of Promotion & The Arts, and the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore as additional insured. (This is separate from the insurance the caterer must provide.) This is insurance to cover you.

**Do I need to send you proof of my insurance?** Yes—have your insurance company mail a copy to us at 10440 Falls Road, Lutherville, MD 21093. (Please note that our zip code has recently changed. This is the correct one.)

**How do I get insurance through the City's Tenant User Policy?** At least one month before your event, send us a check (payable to the Director of Finance) for \$60, if you are expecting less than 100 guests, or \$100, if you are expecting 100 or more.

## **Location**

**Where are you located?** Lutherville in Baltimore County, Maryland.

**What is your address?** Our address is The Cloisters, 10440 Falls Road, Lutherville, Maryland 21093.

## **Marriage License**

**Where do I get my marriage license?** The Bureau of Licensing is in the Baltimore County Courthouse in Towson. Call 410-887-2607 for more information.

## Payment

### How do I pay you?

1. By check made out to The Cloisters. Please make sure to write the date of your event on your check. (Please note that there is a \$30 fee on all returned checks.)
2. By Visa or MasterCard. Fill out a Cloisters' charge form and return it to us.

**When is my final payment due?** Six weeks before your event.

**What do I do if my payment is late?** First, call and let us know. If it is your final payment, it will have to be made with a certified check, money order, or credit card. We prefer not to accept cash.

## Rehearsals

**When can I book my rehearsal?** Rehearsals will be booked 2-3 months before the event. The exact time of the rehearsal will be determined based on your schedule and on our event schedule.

## Set-Up

**Who does my set-up and what are my options?** The caterer does the set-up, so you will plan the event layout with them. Here are some recommendations on the maximum number of seats / tables for the gallery, living room, and courtyard:

- For a ceremony in the gallery, 120 chairs can be set up in the lower part of the room and 30 chairs can be set-up, at an angle, on the stage.
- For seated dining inside, six or seven tables of ten fit in the lower part of the gallery and three can fit on the stage. Six tables of ten fit in the living room.
- For a ceremony in the courtyard, seating can be arranged for 150.
- For seated dining in the courtyard, twelve tables can be set up.
- For a ceremony in the amphitheater, up to 175 guests can be seated.
- To accommodate more guests at a ceremony in the courtyard or gallery, the seating can be reduced to allow standing room at the back.

## Timing

**What does the ten hours in my contract include?** The ten hours include: 1) an hour-long rehearsal; 2) three hours for set-up; 3) five hours for the ceremony (if any) and reception; and 4) one hour for the caterer to clean up and for the renter, caterer, and any other vendors to remove their property, equipment, decorations, etc., and to depart. (Please note that hours may not be taken from set-up and added to the reception or ceremony.)

**What do I do if I want my reception to be longer than five hours?** We charge \$500 per hour (or part of an hour) to extend your reception and \$200 per hour (or part of an hour) to extend your set-up time. Please let us know at least a month in advance if you would like to extend your event, so that we may adjust our staff's schedule to accommodate you.

**What time does my event have to end?** All events must end by 11:00pm, which means guests must leave then so the caterer and other vendors can clean up and depart by midnight. If you want to extend your event beyond 11:00pm, it costs \$500 per hour or part of an hour. You must make arrangements with us to do so at least one month in advance.

**Do I have to have my event in the evening?** No. Your event may begin as early as 11:00am (set-up would begin at 8:00am).

**Do you have any recommendations I should keep in mind when I schedule my event?** If you are planning an evening event Monday through Friday, don't forget about rush hour. Consider starting your event either before 4:00 or after 6:30, so guests aren't delayed in traffic.

If you are considering extending your event beyond five hours or beyond 11:00pm, think about how you want your event to end. Particularly if you are having a wedding, most of the older guests will leave before the end, sometimes right after the cake is cut. If you want a large crowd there to wish you well as you depart, it is better to keep the reception shorter and / or end it earlier in the evening. Similarly, if you are having a Sunday through Thursday event, keep in mind that most of your guests probably have work the next day, so you may want to end your reception earlier.

## **Weather**

**What do I do if it rains?** While many clients plan to hold part of their events outdoors in our beautiful gardens, sometimes bad weather forces them indoors. Luckily, The Cloisters castle is more than big enough to accommodate these last-minute emergencies. For example, you could move your wedding ceremony to the Gallery and then have the guests retire to the Living Room or even to one of the upstairs rooms for cocktails and hors d'oeuvres while the caterer sets-up tables in the Gallery.

To be on the safe side, please speak to your caterer and 'The Cloisters' staff in advance to draw up the contingency plan that works best for you. Also, bear in mind that while your rental fee includes exclusive use of all three floors of the castle, there is an additional fee if you choose to serve food on either of the upper floors.

**What do I do if it is snowy or icy?** If the weather is going to be snowy or icy, contact us so we can discuss your options. If you choose to, you may reschedule to the first available date that works with your schedule. However, we do have an excellent snow-removal contractor, and, if you can get to The Cloisters, we will have the driveway, parking lots and front walkway cleared. And if the weather turns bad during your event, we will have the contractor clear the driveway before your guests leave.

If the state and county roads are not passable, you will need to postpone your event.

**Do you have heat?** Yes—we have several large furnaces that will keep you warm!

**Can I have a fire?** Yes, you can have a fire in any of the four fireplaces on the first floor as long as the temperature outside is below 40 degrees. (In warmer weather, the chimneys won't draw the smoke out of the building properly.) Only Cloisters' staff can build and tend the fires.

**What's it like in the summer?** We do not have air conditioning. However, the hill-top location, countless shady trees, and thick stone walls work to keep The Cloisters remarkably cool in hot weather. In addition, we have several large, industrial strength fans to keep you and your guests comfortable.

**May I bring air conditioning for my event?** In the past we have not found the portable a/c units to be very effective, for a variety of reasons. If you want to try, feel free; some of the rental companies have them. If you want to do something more extensive than a couple small, portable units, you must have the a/c vendor meet with The Cloisters' caretaker. (You may need to bring in a generator if extra power is required.)

## **Miscellaneous**

**Is smoking allowed?** The Cloisters is a historic site owned by Baltimore city. As a result, we abide by the same laws that govern other city-owned properties. Therefore, there is absolutely no smoking inside the building. Outdoors, smoking is allowed under the portico to the east of the main entrance. We ask that you properly dispose of cigarette butts and cigar stubs in the receptacles provided. Smoking is prohibited elsewhere on the grounds.

**If I am getting married in the courtyard, where should I make my entrance?** There are three options: 1) the French doors leading from the Gallery to the garden; 2) the door from the circular stairway to the bottom of the garden; and 3) the kitchen door. If you choose to use the kitchen door, you would walk across the "terrace," down the stairway on the outside of the building, and up through the garden. Please note that the "terrace" is actually the roof of the garage and it is covered with tarpaper. You may want your decorator or caterer to put down runners to protect your dress and shoes. Also, if you choose the latter option, make sure the caterer knows that you will be going through the kitchen.

**Do we need to amplify our voices during the ceremony?** This is a decision for you, your officiant and your readers. If after consulting with them, you decide that you want amplification, talk to your band or disc jockey.

**Is music allowed?** Amplified music is allowed outside only during the ceremony. Music and dancing are only allowed inside.

**Is it okay to have children at our event?** Certainly. If the children are young, consider setting up a babysitting room where they can play and rest. We have a television with a VCR (not a DVD player) the kids can use to watch videos that you or their parents provide. You are also welcome to bring toys, books, etc., to entertain the little ones. The children must be supervised by an adult or responsible teenager at all times.

**Is there a full-length mirror?** Yes, there is one on the second floor in the room on your left when you walk up the stairs.

**Why and when do you need the Detailed Event Sheet?** This sheet allows us to double check your information; it also provides the staff with information that will help them to do their jobs on the night of your event. (For example, if you have a bus or a shuttle coming, they will park your guests differently.) Please mail or fax it to us at least two weeks before your wedding. We don't need the precise number of guests you expect—just a rough estimate.

**Do I need valet parking?** We have parking for 75 vehicles. If you expect more than 75 cars, please discuss options for shuttle service and / or valet parking with our general manager. You must contract with one of our parking vendors for valet or shuttle services. Your family and friends may not park your guests. To estimate how many parking spaces your event will require, keep in mind that family-oriented events (like weddings and bar mitzvahs) generally require less parking because 2 or 3 family members might ride together. On the other hand, business events generally require more parking because guests tend to drive alone. As a result, a wedding with 150 guests probably will not need special parking arrangements, while a business meeting with the same number of guests will.

**Can I or one of my guests leave a car overnight?** If necessary, a car can be left over night, but it must be picked up before the start of the next event. The Cloisters' staff can tell you when that is. Bear in mind, that the gates are locked on weekends and evenings when we do not have an event scheduled. As a result, you might not be able to pick up your car the next day.

**How do I reach you?**

The Cloisters  
10440 Falls Road  
Lutherville, MD 21093

Phone:	410-821-7448
Toll-Free:	1-888-330-9571
Fax:	410-823-7182
E-mail:	<a href="mailto:aapplegarth@promotionandarts.com">aapplegarth@promotionandarts.com</a>
Website:	<a href="http://www.cloisterscastle.com">www.cloisterscastle.com</a>