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Lunch with Monet

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Alfred Atmore Pope, whose daughter, Theodate, designed the Farmington home that later became Hill-Stead Museum, was a self-made, successful 19th-century Cleveland industrialist with a passion for art. Pope carefully collected a small group of what he considered the finest of the then contemporary impressionist paintings. It was unusual for Americans to collect impressionist paintings in the 1890s, and Pope clearly had an appreciation of this new style and its practitioners. During a stay in Paris in 1894 Pope visited Claude Monet at his home in Giverny. He immediately posted his observations of the experience to his close friend, business associate, and fellow collector Harris Whittemore of Naugatuck, Connecticut. The following is an excerpt from the letter he wrote describing his lunch with Monet.



*Alfred Atmore Pope, c. 1890.
Archives, Hill-Stead Museum, Farmington, CT.*

Hotel Westminster [Paris]

August 25, 1894

Harris dear-

The ladies are off for a day to Fontainebleau. I am just in from a trip to Giverny with Mr. Glenzer to

see Monet and his cathedrals. Naturally I think of you on such an occasion. Although too sorry that I could not speak the language I enjoyed it more than I could describe in two languages.

It has been a most beautiful day. We took the train about 8 o'clock, went to Vernon & drove over to Monet's - some two miles - arriving about half past ten. We went through a door in the wall that surrounded a cluster of buildings - small ones to the right - stables & sheds - down a pair of steps into a beautiful garden - large & beautifully cultivated as the wonderful amount & variety of flowers testified. Going along a walk a little distance to the left we met Mr. Monet coming to meet us - the house is to the left but a short distance backed up against the road & facing the garden & the south - a fine exposure - We entered at the side from the garden a large studio - Simply a large window at the end & smaller at side - There the Cathedrals were exposed on easels - two pictures on each & others standing about 7 which were afterwards exhibited - The room is about 18 x 40 feet - We entered at the side - it is high - has strips running around from which pictures, or more properly sketches, were hung entirely covering the side walls - When I went into the Garden later I saw the house was long, quite long & that the studio occupied in height the two stories of the balance of the house. 3 or 4 of the cathedrals were interesting, fine, a number of them like pictures in any of his series - we would not care for. Monet & G had a business talk. G said M said he has spent 3 years over these pictures & was going to have 15000 frs for them (-\$3000) that he wouldn't be paid for his time at less price - He is "on to it" that dealers have an agreement to stand out against his price & says he will get it or box them up - I don't know how they will come out - I would like two of them - don't know which one of the two. We were invited to lunch. The dining room is lovely - a symphony in yellows - from lemon on the moldings - so high it looked like gilt - to yellow salmon body color - yellow curtain - yellow chairs - Lots of wood work in room & ceiling. Madame Monet - fine appearing woman - 3 single daughters in - salmon pink & white dresses, the son in law - Butler [painter Theodore Butler] & his wife Mrs B. in beautiful light low tone green dress - All made fine color effect. Monet had light coat & trousers - Cotton or linen - in blue & white - fine - indistinct - A loose soft shirt in lilac with white spots - ruffled front & cuffs - all simple - easy - top boots - with leather strap buckled around below the knee to keep them from slipping down. Just the boots he wears in the fields & garden. The lunch was fine nicely served by butler. We then walked in garden & over the road at foot of garden into an aquatic garden - water lilies - rushes &c - Monet is chief gardener himself - he has two men. Butler - who is American

told me he, Monet, was up at half past four in the morning - either painting or at his flowers - it's one or the other pretty much all the time - I will just say Monet's dining room & hall are just hung full of Japanese prints in quiet little frames - everything is nicely kept up about the house & grounds - Monet strikes you as sturdy & strong in physique & intellect - a fine soft-brown eye - one that sees everything - A lovely smile - a clever man - you wouldn't take him for an artist - more like a business man turned from town to country - .

My love to "you all" as they say in the south.

As ever thine, "Mr. Pope"

(Hill-Stead Museum archives #W778; the original letter is in the Harris Whittemore Trust, Naugatuck CT.) Polly Pasternak Huntington is archivist at Hill-Stead Museum. Alfred Atmore Pope's collection is on permanent display at Hill-Stead Museum . Four paintings by Claude Monet as well as others by James McNeill Whistler, Mary Cassatt, Edgar Hillaire Degas, and Edouard Manet hang on the walls of the 1901 Colonial Revival house, complete with the furnishings as they were during the Pope's lifetime. The house became a museum upon the death of his daughter in 1946, with the stipulation that everything remain as it was. Today, visitors have the opportunity to enjoy these works of art as Pope and his family did 100 years ago.