United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s Visit to Dumbarton Oaks

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and his wife paid an unofficial visit to Dumbarton Oaks on May 16. Their visit commemorated the seventieth anniversary of the United Nations and coincided with the seventy-fifth anniversary of Mildred and Robert Woods Bliss’s gift of Dumbarton Oaks to Harvard University and the founding of the research institute. The Bans toured the areas at D.O. where, in 1944, delegates from the United States, Great Britain, Russia, and China met to discuss the possible creation of an organization to maintain world peace and security.

Before leaving, the Secretary-General signed the Dumbarton Oaks public guest book, writing:

I am privileged to visit Dumbarton Oaks on your historic 75th anniversary, and 70th anniversary of the U.N.
There is a direct link between the momentous conversations that began here and the creation of the U.N.

Let up keep alive the Dumbarton Oaks’ spirit and vision for peace, development and human rights of the world’s people.

Ki Moon Ban
Secretary General
United Nations
May 16, 2015

Read more about the Secretary-General's visit here.

Above: Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon with his wife, and Dumbarton Oaks Executive Director, Yota Batsaki.

Harvard Hero: Mario García

Mario García, Facilities and Services Coordinator at Dumbarton Oaks, was recognized in April as a 2015 Harvard Hero. Harvard Heroes is an annual program that recognizes and celebrates the exceptional contributions and exemplary achievements of Harvard staff. García has been at Dumbarton Oaks since July 1999, when he joined the staff as a part-time car attendant. Within the year he became a full-time building assistant, a role that allowed him to observe the changes at Dumbarton Oaks as the institution grew.

García said that he was surprised when Director Jan Ziolkowski called his name at a staff coffee to announce that he had been chosen for the award. His colleagues, however, agreed that the title of “Hero” was a clear fit. According to Events Manager Susannah Italiano, who works closely with García, “Mario completely embodies the description of the ideal Harvard Hero: his work ethic, his collegiality, and his willingness to always go above and beyond in order to make operations at Dumbarton Oaks run smoothly. What’s more, he is completely dependable and is always open to new ideas and suggestions. He’s the ideal colleague and I am grateful to be able to work alongside him.”

Read more about García’s time at Dumbarton Oaks on our website.
Dumbarton Oaks Welcomes Summer Interns

On Monday, June 1, Dumbarton Oaks welcomed the arrival of twelve summer interns from Cambridge—nine Harvard College students, one master’s candidate in the Harvard Extension School, and two PhD candidates in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. Selected from a competitive applicant pool, the 2015 intern class will work on a variety of institutional projects across several departments while honing their skills and gaining a greater understanding of professions in academia. View the list of interns and their projects online.

Garden and Landscape Studies Symposium

“River Cities: Historical and Contemporary”

The annual symposium in Garden and Landscape Studies, organized by Senior Fellow Thaisa Way and held May 8–9, 2015, was the inaugural event of the new Mellon Program in Urban Landscape Studies. “River Cities: Historical and Contemporary” presented urban rivers as city-making landscapes deserving of careful reading and analysis. To further the aims of the Mellon program, the symposium brought together the work of contemporary designers with the historical perspectives of scholars—some in collaborative presentations on the same river—encouraging practitioners and historians to bridge the gaps between their professional modes of thinking. Presentations ranged from ancient Rome and the fourteenth-century Yellow River Basin to contemporary New Orleans and Los Angeles, and presented both cultural adaptations and design responses to river systems. In a sign of the expanding reach of our program, we received over 180 abstracts in response to a call for papers; of the 16 speakers ultimately selected for the symposium, all but two were new to Dumbarton Oaks.

Five current master in landscape architecture students and recent graduates in the field attended this year’s symposium as recipients of Bliss Symposium and Mellon Travel Awards. Emily Drury, a Bliss Award recipient and MLA candidate at the Harvard Graduate School of Design reported the following from the symposium:

As a student new to the discipline of landscape architecture, the “River Cities” symposium provided a unique opportunity to hear the design research of contemporary practitioners in dialogue with the historical perspectives of landscape scholars. Lectures exemplified diverse approaches to historical inquiry. Methodologies shared by scholars and practitioners provided me with varied models of design research, and generated an inspiring, multidisciplinary conversation centered on the urban river.

Thinking toward the development of my own research interests and practices, I am inspired by the work and further possibilities suggested during the symposium. These will serve as precedent for critical, historical examination of urban landscape as I refine my design research and writing practice.
Read more of Emily's report, as well as the reports of the rest of the award recipients on our website.

**Rare Book Digitization Project**

In 2015, sixteen titles, in twenty-three volumes, were sent to Harvard's Imaging Services as part of a continuing project to digitize unique or very rare items from the library’s collections. After enhancing the catalog record and creating metadata for each item, librarians shipped the books to Harvard with customized instructions. This process, highlighted last month in the "Behind the Scenes" series, produces a digital facsimile of each title, available through the Harvard Page Delivery Service.

The extensive effort on the part of librarians at Dumbarton Oaks and the team at Harvard has begun to show results, as scholars within the institution and around the world access the digital facsimiles and request images of plates and text from the digital repository.

A searchable list of the forty-three titles currently available as digital facsimiles enables researchers to perform a general search of the records of the works, or refine by area of study and year of digitization. Links to the digital facsimile and to the full HOLLIS catalog record are available in the description of each work. The list will be updated as new titles are digitized in future years.

**Good Ink**

According to the May 27 issue of *New York Times Magazine*, incoming Early-Career Musician Resident Matthew Aucoin is “opera's great 25-year-old hope.” Read more *here.*

In a recent review, the *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* praised Anthony Kaldellis's *A New Herodotus*, released last year by Dumbarton Oaks, as “a brilliant work of scholarship.” The volume is a supplement to Kaldellis’s translations of Laonikos Chalkokondyles's *The Histories*(2 vols.), published by the Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library.

For their work on the new Fellowship House on Wisconsin Avenue, Cunningham | Quill Architects received the 2015 North American Copper in Architecture Award from the Copper Development Association (CDA). The award program identifies projects that display great success in blending various elements of copper use—in design, installation, and innovation—on a particular building. Learn more about the project *here.*

Above: Cunningham | Quill Architects
Most visitors to Dumbarton Oaks come to admire the art in gallery vitrines or the ornate furnishings lining the halls of the historic mansion, and likely spare little thought for what’s beneath their shoes as they pass through Mildred and Robert Woods Bliss’s former home. Yet the original flooring of the Main House is a historic artifact in itself, and one that Dumbarton Oaks’ facilities team is working to preserve and protect.

The team is currently in the midst of a multiphase project to refinish the floors of the Main House, including several museum galleries, the Founders’ Room, and the Oval Salon. Director of Facilities Alan Dirican says that the process, which involves a light sanding to remove an old coat of finish and then the application and overnight drying of the new coat, takes two days for each room.

The refinishing project, which is taking place in a space that functions as a museum, historic home, and workplace, involves a variety of logistical challenges. The facilities team worked with museum staff to develop the best protection possible for the building itself and the objects within it.

Preserving these floors is particularly important because of the type of wood used in the mansion. According to Archivist and House Collection Manager James Carder, the floors, installed in 1922 and 1923, are acacia koa, a tree native to Hawaii and also known as “Hawaiian mahogany” for its distinctive sheen and rich red or golden-brown color. Prized today for furniture and decoration, the wood was used by early Hawaiians to craft dugout canoes and surfboards. However, after nearly a century since the original installation of the floors, native stands of koa have suffered extensively
from land clearing, poor cutting practices, and destruction by animals and insects. Increasingly rare, koa today is one of the most expensive types of wood in the world. Indeed, according to Carder, even the Blisses used it only in limited quantities. “The floor boards are what is called ‘engineered,’” he explains. “They have a quarter-inch of koa laminated to another wood.” The floors in the historic mansion would be very costly to replace today, making their preservation critically important.

Read more about the preservation process [here](#).

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**From the Garden Blog**

Now on View

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