

THE DECORATIVE ARTS TRUST

For Immediate Release:

HISTORIC ANNAPOLIS AWARDED 2026 PRIZE FOR EXCELLENCE AND INNOVATION

Media, PA – The Decorative Arts Trust is excited to announce that **Historic Annapolis** is the recipient of the 2026 Prize for Excellence and Innovation.

The restoration of the **James Brice House in Annapolis, MD**, undertaken by Historic Annapolis (HA) in partnership with the State of Maryland, represents one of the most significant preservation projects underway in the United States. Constructed in 1767–74 and designated a National Historic Landmark, the Brice House is an extraordinary example of 18th-century architecture and craftsmanship. It is also a rare documentary record of the labor, materials, and domestic systems that shaped life in colonial Maryland. HA has approached the building as both a work of art and a historical archive, guided by the principle that every space, finish, fragment, and ghost serves as a record of all those connected to the house.

Since launching a full-scale, museum-grade restoration in 2016, HA has established a process that will serve as a model for future preservation projects. The interdisciplinary team's work has revealed rare textured plaster surfaces, fragile distemper coatings, and 18th-century woodgraining through meticulous removal and stabilization techniques. Decorative plaster ornaments concealed beneath many layers of paint have been recovered, and damaged masonry has been repaired using historically compatible materials.

The team includes architectural historians, preservation architects, conservators, engineers, and master tradespeople whose expertise has advanced conservation science and traditional craftsmanship alike. Key members of the restoration effort include **Willie Graham**, Colonial Williamsburg's former curator of architecture; preservation architect **Bill Neudorfer**; **Michael Day**, HA's Executive Vice President; and **Tyler Tate**, President of Lewis Contractors. Additional expertise in historic preservation and conservation is provided by renowned specialists such as **Marcia Miller**, Maryland Historical Trust's former Chief of the Office of Research, Survey, and Registration; conservator **Christopher Mills**; paint analyst **Dr. Susan Buck**; materials scientist **Dr. Kirsten Travers Moffitt**; master mason **Ray Cannetti**; and Colonial Williamsburg's Vice President of Operations, **Matt Webster**.

The next phase of work includes one of the most technically demanding components of the entire restoration: comprehensive architectural hardware conservation and reproduction. Prize funding will support several critical elements of these efforts, including the conservation and stabilization of surviving hardware; evidence-based reproduction of missing locks, hinges, bolts, and weights; and the fabrication of historically accurate fireplace cranes.

This work is critical to understanding the building's surviving hardware, ranging from blind-set mortised dovetail hinges and hand-built mortise locks to drop handles and rare cast-iron butt hinges. This effort will preserve an extraordinarily valuable record of 18th-century fabrication, consumption, and household organization. Each hinge, lock, and brass fitting will be studied and conserved as primary sources of the building's design, craftsmanship, and domestic hierarchy.

Visit decorativeartstrust.org/prize to learn more about the Prize for Excellence and Innovation.

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James Brice House, c. 1774, National Historic Landmark in Annapolis, MD. Photo by Jeff Voigt Photography.



Matt Webster, Vice President of Operations at Colonial Williamsburg, conducts comparative research for the Brice House project on the locks and fittings at the nearby Ridout House, c. 1765. Photo by Willie Graham.



Decorative lock fitting in situ on decorative bowfat (or built-in cabinet) in the dining room of the Brice House. Brass. Photo by Willie Graham.