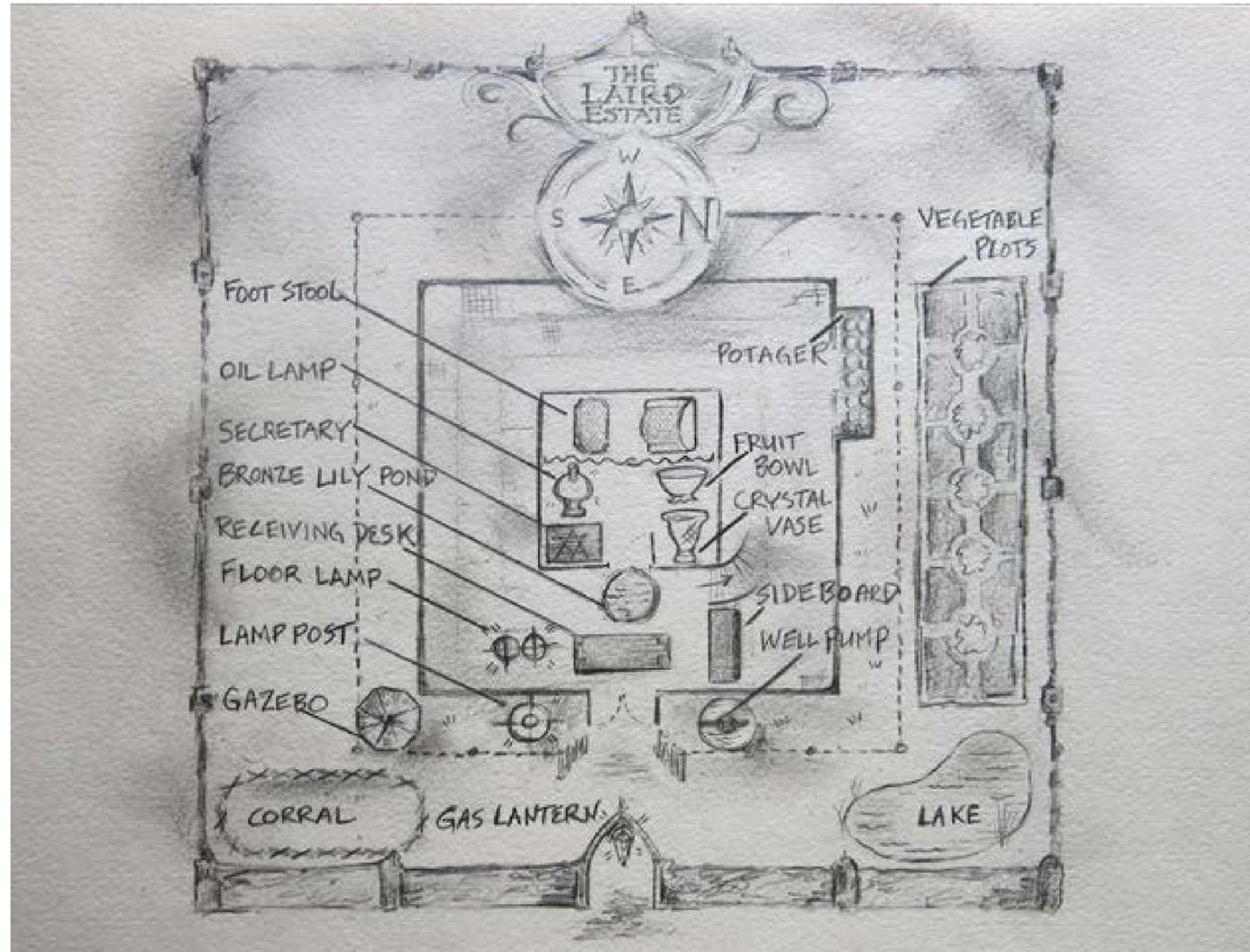


# SCAVENGER HUNT

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE MDM LAIRD ESTATE  
FROM THE OUTSIDE INWARD



Where are each of these found in The Laird Estate?

*Record the page numbers on which you find mention  
or description of each item.*

CORRAL \_\_\_\_\_

GAZEBO \_\_\_\_\_

RECEIVING DESK \_\_\_\_\_

SECRETARY \_\_\_\_\_

LAKE \_\_\_\_\_

WELL PUMP \_\_\_\_\_

BRONZE LILY POND OR BASIN \_\_\_\_\_

CRYSTAL VASE \_\_\_\_\_

VEGETABLE PLOTS \_\_\_\_\_

KITCHEN POTAGER GARDEN \_\_\_\_\_

TEA TRAY ON SIDEBOARD \_\_\_\_\_

FRUIT BOWL \_\_\_\_\_

GAS LANTERN \_\_\_\_\_

LAMP POST \_\_\_\_\_

FLOOR LAMP \_\_\_\_\_

OIL LAMP \_\_\_\_\_

FOOTSTOOL \_\_\_\_\_

# SCAVENGER HUNT | ANSWERS

THE LAIRD ESTATE: BETTER ONE DAY HEREIN  
THAN A THOUSAND ELSEWHERE.

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“What’s with the *feng shui* of the fences?” Sybil asks . . . “I mean, there seems to be some flow of life force in the layout of the fields, as though the fences form a rune or a symbol.”

Paige tips her head to one side . . . “Yes, the fences,” she says. Libby, too, looks down and out again upon the symmetry of the landscaping as Paige explains. “The outer dry-stone hedge, you can see, is punctuated by a dozen rock pillars and still in decent repair. It encompasses a forty-nine-acre tract. It’s only four feet in height, but the century-old wall was meant more as demarcation than protection. It was never intended to keep anyone out but rather to differentiate MDM’s wider agricultural holdings and pasturelands beyond from the homestead within.

“Then notice how, at the center of this walled-in parcel of land, the smaller, domestic yard is enclosed by a right-angle ribbon of picket fence equidistant on all sides to the mansion, which in turn is positioned at the center.”

Yes, Libby can see it. She follows the square-within-square layout as Paige traces the path she and Sybil had taken this morning.

“Look at how straight the road is out there”—Paige points beyond the property line—“where you turned off the highway onto Salem Drive and passed beneath the fieldstone arch hung with its nineteenth-century *gas lantern*, still manually lit when the museum is open.”

The words of welcome inscribed into that arch had struck Libby at the time. *Laird Estate: Better one day herein than a thousand elsewhere*. It smacked of ownership pride . . .

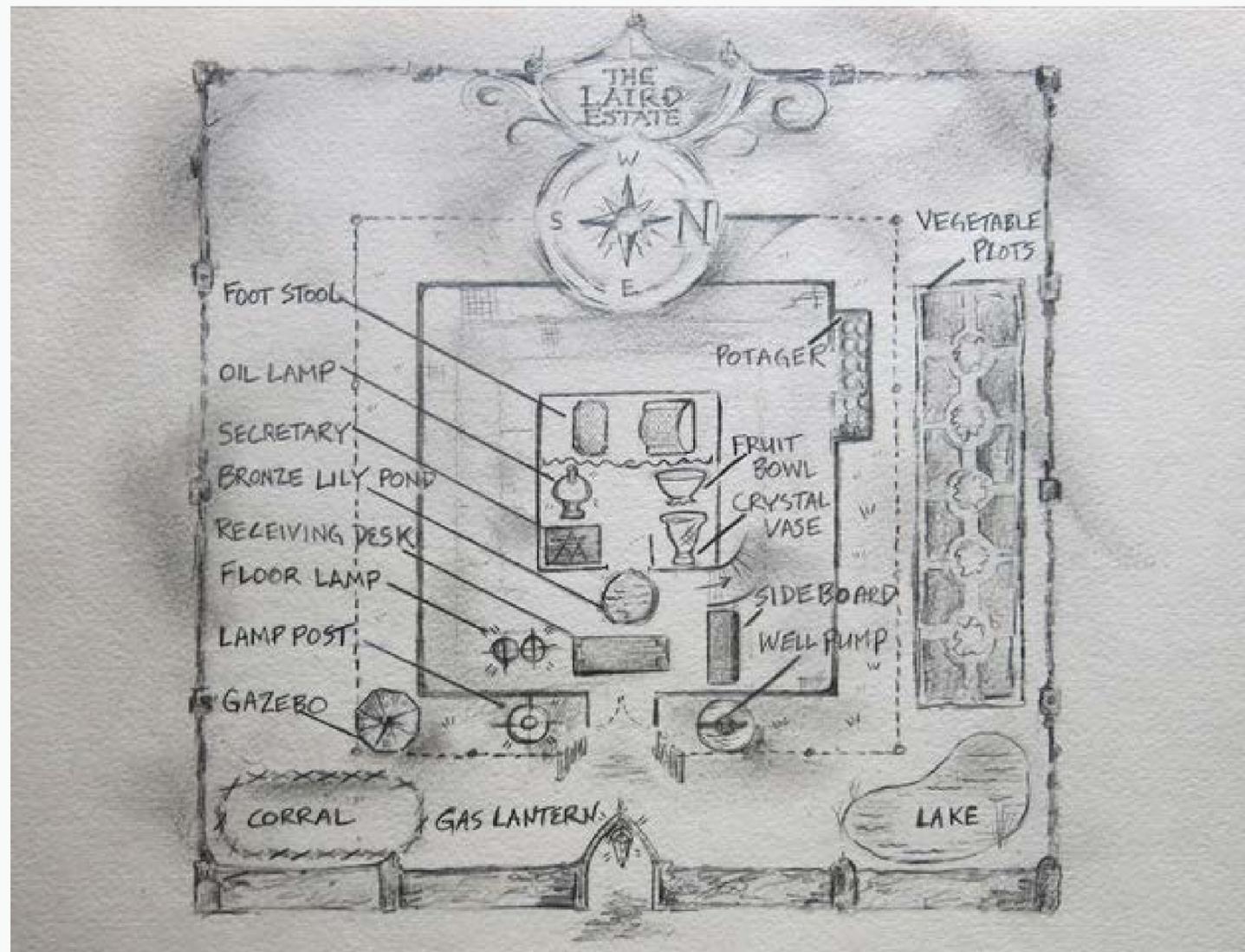
“As you approached the museum,” Paige goes on, “you drove within sight of the livestock *corral* and the small *lake* and the *vegetable plots* inside the stone fence . . . Then, passing into the inner court of the yard through the gate—you can see the pattern easily from this height—we walked by the remains of a *reception gazebo*, a hand-pumped *water well*, the iron *lamppost*, and the kitchen garden [*potager*] attached to the north side of the house. It’s as though MDM’s personal landscaping mimics the larger farm layout.”

Libby strains to decipher the correlation between elements of the outer periphery and the domestic yard—the corral to the gazebo, the lake to the well.

“Salem Drive is the sole entrance to the museum grounds, and the road lines up with the pedestrian walk leading through the rusty yard gate into the inner courtyard, taking the visitor from the outside world to the front door of the mansion in deliberate, orderly design.”

It appears to be a code of some sort.

“Look for this pattern of enclosure, which is repeated again as a motif in the floor plan of the mansion.” Paige clatters free a brass key from the ring in her apron pocket and fits it into the lock of the paint-flaked door beneath the eaves of the rooftop terrace. “Now, please follow me into the house itself. Watch your step over the raised sill.”



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“Wow, what’s with all the activity?” Jamie asked. They stood at the head of the path that ran from the gate straight through the mansion’s front door, which was wide open to the sunshine this afternoon. “Looks like a celebration.”

“The first day in May is earmarked by the KPS for spring cleaning.”

The yard buzzed with activity: gardeners digging in flowerbeds, a handyman patching siding shingles, and hands wiping the upstairs windows from the inside. Paige and Jamie passed by the footings for the gazebo, which had fallen into significant disrepair when it no longer served as the receiving lobby for MDM’s purchases. The **gazebo** was a freestanding atrium that had acted almost as an altar for the offering of skins and pelts brought for trade by trappers—by Blackfeet and Ojibwa, Métis and Cree, Arikara, Hidatsa, and Mandan. A few steps on, Paige let her fingers slide over the cool brass handle on the **well pump** that still provided water to the pool at its base, once used as an outdoor washing station for bloodied hands or muddied feet. On a stepladder, a girl polished winter off the globes of the **lamppost**, perpetually lit during tourist season. The herb garden at the side of the house had been tilled and seeded.

“Okay,” Jamie said, “I know on the fall tour you mentioned a pattern being repeated over and over on the property. But I didn’t quite get it.”

That wasn’t surprising. Paige’s research depended on MDM’s highly developed symbolism. She wasn’t sure she could swear to its validity herself.

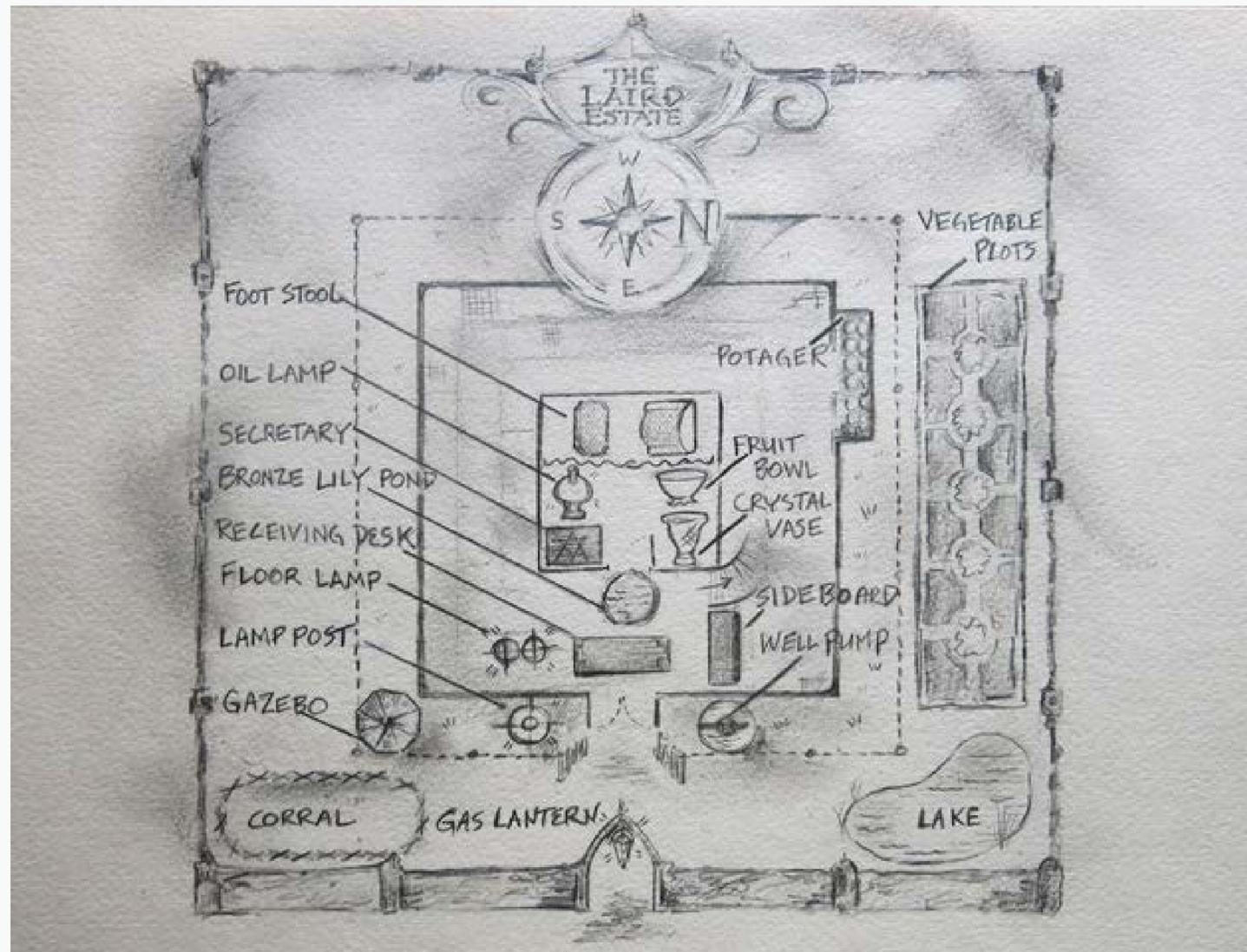
“Think from the outside inward,” she began. “We have MDM’s wider grazing lands, within which the stone fence encloses the homestead, within which another square delineates the yard’s picket fence, within which the square of the mansion sits. MDM’s orderly layout of the inner yard’s gazebo, well, kitchen garden, and lampstand reproduced the elements of the outer ring of his larger estate.”

Jamie nodded. “I remember that part. The yard light represents the **gas lantern** hanging on the entry gate, I think you said. The well stands for Beulah **Lake**, where my friends and I always swim. But . . .” Jamie stopped, her forehead wrinkling.

Paige picked up the narrative. “The **potager** beside the kitchen door imitates the large **vegetable plots** set between the yard fence and the stone hedge’s northern edge. Both the **gazebo** here and the **corrals** out there had to do with animals.”

Of course, Paige had read all of this herself for her graduate studies, antecedent researchers having already made the link between inner yard and outer homestead. One expert even developed the idea that the primary source of the imitation was the natural world of native grassland irrigated by the Red River, overrun by wild prairie animals, and illumined by the sun, moon, and stars—flora, water, fauna, and light represented three times over.

However, in one eureka moment Paige had singlehandedly discovered the next level of repetition—the design of the house itself. This was the genius kernel of her thesis, but she’d stumbled on it out of pure luck so she almost hesitated to take credit. When examining an aerial photograph dated 1927 of MDM’s estate, she’d inadvertently placed alongside it a sketch of the house’s floor plan. That’s when she first observed the enclosing schemata within the house itself—the outer walls of the home forming a perimeter of hallways and salons, a secondary ring within that incorporating the high-ceilinged foyer and staircase, and MDM’s most private room, the den, at the hub. The replication of pattern corroborated for her the purposeful planning of the house blueprint by MDM.



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The front door of the Laird Mansion, facing east, opened inward onto the foyer or great hall, at the left edge of which a smaller replica of the outside **lamp** stood sentinel. The walnut **reception desk** beside this indoor lamp, as Paige explained to Jamie, once welcomed trappers and hunters in a continuation of the business begun in the **gazebo** outside. It still held receipt books for traded goods showing payment by MDM to signatories with names such as Abooksigun—meaning “wildcat,” Paige told Jamie—or Hokoma meaning “guide,” or a simple X in the case of illiteracy. Beyond the floor lamp and desk, a free-standing **bronze basin** reminiscent of the outside **pond** was empty but would soon be filled with floating water lilies, which Jamie seemed to remember from last fall. Against the right wall, a **side-board** held a silver tray and pot, where scones and tea had once waited to refresh—just as the **outer gardens** and fields provided nourishment.

Jamie’s eyes glittered. “How cool. Did you really tell us all this last year?”

“Probably not in such detail.” Every month Paige’s own understanding had gained clarity, and the whole system of analogy was too complicated to explicate to large groups. Right now Jamie’s time had almost run out, too. Her first shift started in a few minutes, so Paige summarized.

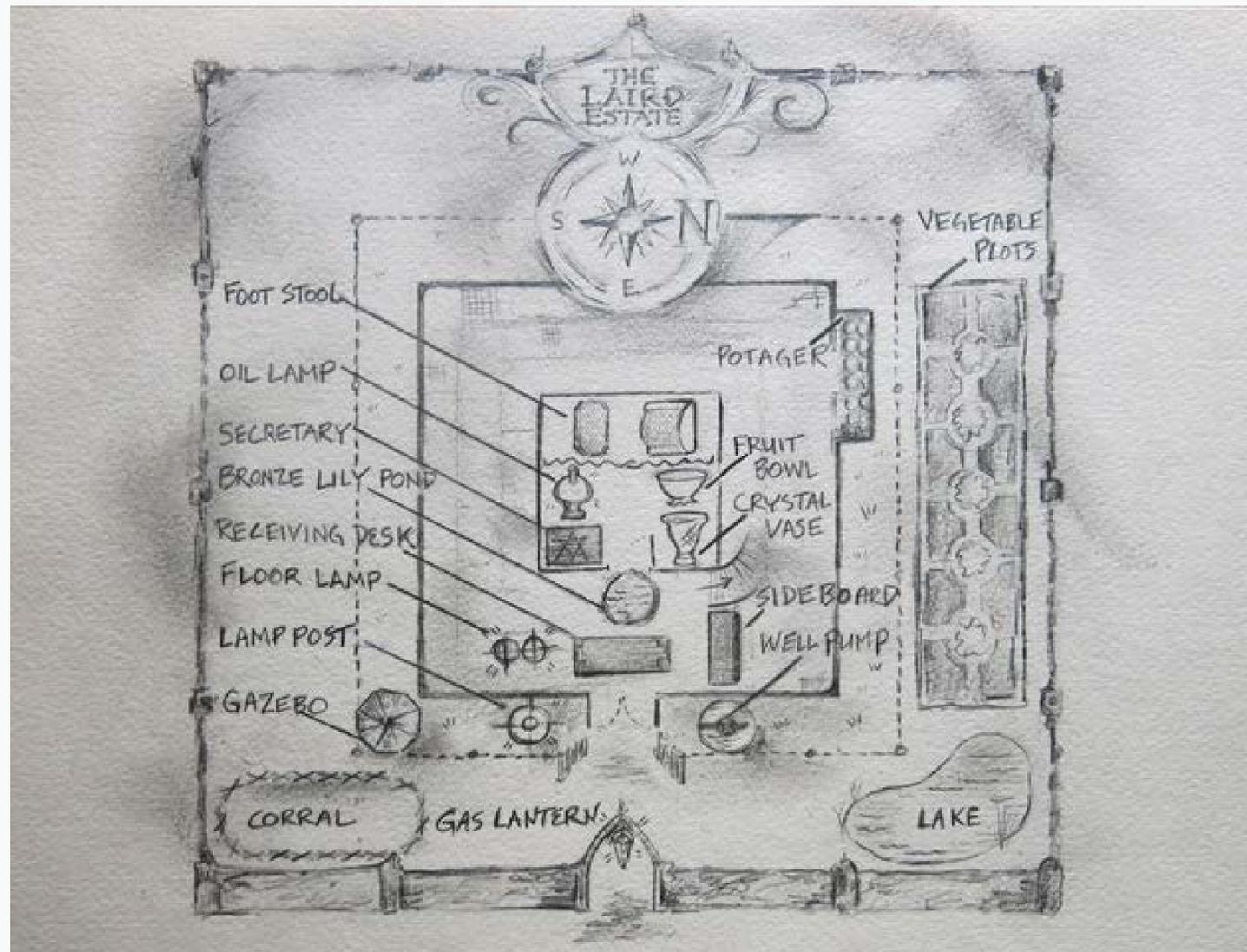
With their backs to the eastern door, Paige pointed out how the south and north wings opened out on either side, connected through the western corridor—with music parlor, library, dining room, pantry, and kitchen arranged in a semi-circle. The room flow led back to the great hall, and to the den, of course, the innermost chamber, the core of the house.

“The orderliness of it can’t have been a fluke,” Paige said, more to herself than to Jamie as she considered the multiple tiers of her proposed typology. Straight ahead from the entrance, a wide oak staircase, its surfaces rubbed with seven coats of hot beeswax to a lasting luster, rose from the floor of the great hall towards the ceiling two stories above. The lounge chairs and billiards table of the upper hall were visible from here, but bedrooms clustered around the balcony behind the second-floor wall. Paige didn’t lead Jamie onto the carpeted steps but let her go on down the hallway to the back porch, converted into the museum gift shop, to begin her shift.

When she had gone, Paige made a beeline on the main floor past the grand staircase towards the den, almost hidden behind the staircase like a secret.

At the center of the floor plan, and the final room on the tour towards which Paige now hurried, the den proved once again her conceptualized schemata of correlation. As usual, she couldn’t wait to see it. The outer part of MDM’s personal office incorporated a cherry-wood **secretary** inset with a Star of David design, a porcelain **washbasin** with **pitcher**, a kerosene **lamp**, and a fruit **bowl**. One more furnishing in the den clinched beyond all doubt her argument about MDM’s architectural reproduction in the square-within-square structure—den within house, house within yard, yard within forty-nine-acre farmstead, walled farmstead within the greater estate. The treasure lay at the heart of the mansion, concealed in the den for shock value behind a heavy linen curtain acting as a room divider. That apex of the tour waited now for Paige’s attention.

She grasped the brass doorknob of the den, a wild sort of joy rising in her at the anticipation of flinging it open.



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As she speaks, Paige caresses the cool lacquered surface of the antique Chinese piece in the den's vestibule. "This cherry-wood **secretary**—look at the lovely Star of David inset—is where MDM answered his personal mail and kept his stack of Legal Tender Notes at the ready to make payment for delivery of furs and hides . . . I believe this desk is meant to represent the larger, walnut **desk** in the great hall, which corresponds to the receiving **gazebo** outside in the yard, where MDM traded in wild animal skins. That, in turn, references the **corral** within the stone-fenced periphery, and perhaps his livestock grazing in the pastures beyond. Do you see what I mean?"

The facial expressions of most of the guests suggest to Paige that she should give up on postulating about her scholarly breakthrough. After all, even for her the concepts had been difficult initially, and her academic advisors tried to dissuade her when she pitched her theory as a thesis project to them.

But then Libby speaks up again, her strange eyes shining. "I think I get it. The outside **lake** and the yard's **well** are copied again in the foyer's lily **pond** and here in the **vase**?" She nods towards the wild pink blossoms spilling over the squat crystal vase on the pedestal.

"Yes, that's it." Paige has finally found someone in the public who gets her theory . . . "This fruit bowl is a mini version of—"

"The **tea tray**," one girl bursts out, entering into the spirit of the riddle, "and the **gardens**."

Goosebumps dance over Paige's arms and she pushes her explanation further. "We walked clockwise through the attic around the elevator shaft and storage space; then we moved down to the second story to trace a similar path around the rooms bordering the upper great hall. And now we've made it around the first-floor rooms to the final stop, other than the gift shop, before our tour is over. You won't want to rush through this room. Good things come in small packages. This den is the physical center of the entire house . . . In a sense, the mansion pivots around this hub of the den, like the house is the hub of the yard, and the yard is the hub of the farmstead, and the farmstead is the hub of the greater universe. Each step has taken us farther down and closer in, drawing us towards the center of the structure."

And right on cue, Libby, eyes narrowed at Paige and dandling that ring at the end of her necklace, demands in her resonant voice, "So, what is at the center of the center?"

Paige has been waiting for this, of course. It's usually a child who asks. She pauses to heighten suspense before answering. "Why, the hidden treasure, of course . . ."

She's watching the odd expression on Libby's face.

That woman must know about the **footstool**.

