

A Brief History of Architectural Follies



FLORENCE GRISWOLD MUSEUM
OLD LYME, CT

*A PRE-VISIT LEARNING TOOL FOR
FOLLY WOODS: AWESOME WEE FAERIE
ARCHITECTURE ALONG THE ARTISTS' TRAIL*

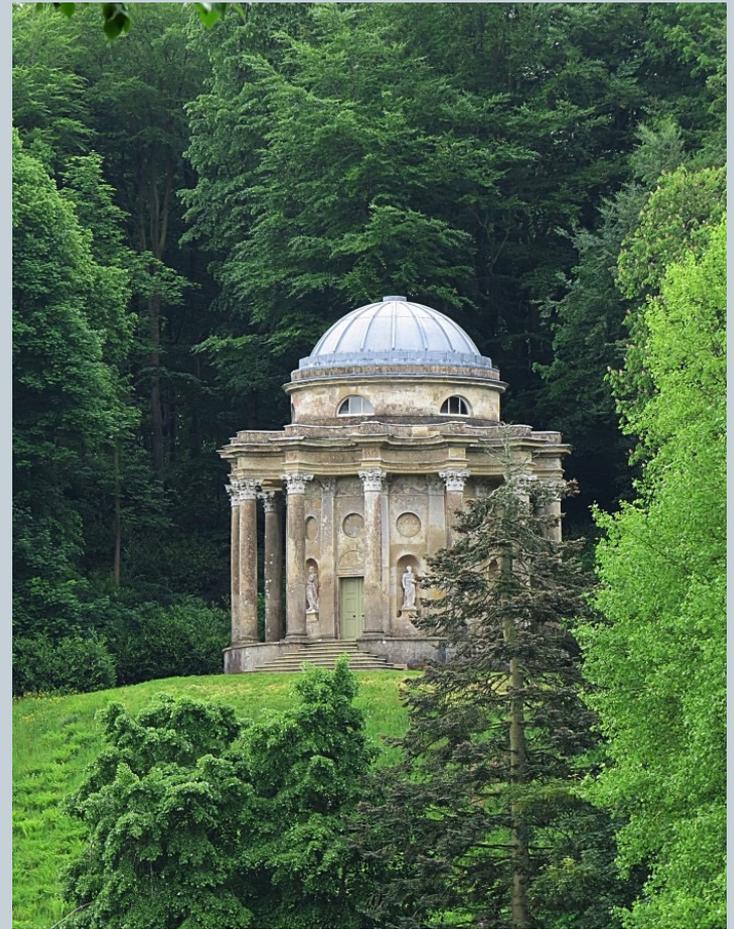
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What Are Architectural Follies?



Follies are garden buildings and structures designed to enhance and enliven the surrounding landscape.

- Aesthetic beauty is their main function (and generally only function)
- Provide a whimsical flair!
- Also known as EYECATCHERS
 - ✦ *creating visual interest, giving the eye a place to rest and the imagination to run wild*



Temple of Apollo, Stourhead Gardens, Warminster, UK. By Henry Flitcroft, 1765

Architectural Follies



As structures designed purely for decorative beauty, not necessarily for a functional purpose, “follies” received their name from this association to silliness and impracticality.

“Folly” - English term for foolishness, or lack of good sense

“Folie” – French term for madness, extravagance, or **delight** and **favorite abode** – emphasis on aesthetic beauty, a quality that is pleasing to the eye

History



Freston Tower, Suffolk, England.
Constructed c. 1578 (the oldest folly!)

*The first follies date back to
before 1600*

Follies rose to highest popularity in the 1700s and 1800s. They were prominent features of French and English landscape design for parks, gardens, and estates.

- Primarily made of stone, wood, or brick
- Often took the shape of soaring towers

Through the Years...



Follies fell periodically in and out of popularity through the centuries. Known for their variety, no architectural style or scale was off-limits, and included appearances of:

- Classical Greek and Roman temples
- Gothic towers
- Egyptian pyramids
- Chinese pagodas
- Rustic cottages
- And many more!



The Chinese House,
Buckingham,
UK.
Constructed
1738.

*Follies often held symbolic importance, demonstrating not only the landowner's wealth but also a certain **ideal** or **virtue**: classical dignity, grand worldliness, appreciation for rural simplicity, etc.*

Examples



Temple to Philosophy, Oise, France. 1765-1776.
Left purposefully unfinished to symbolize an endless quest for knowledge.



The Casino at Marino, Dublin, Ireland. 1775.
Inspired by Italian Classical architecture.

Examples



Sway Tower, or Peterson's Folly, Hampshire, England. 1885. *The world's tallest non-reinforced concrete structure.*

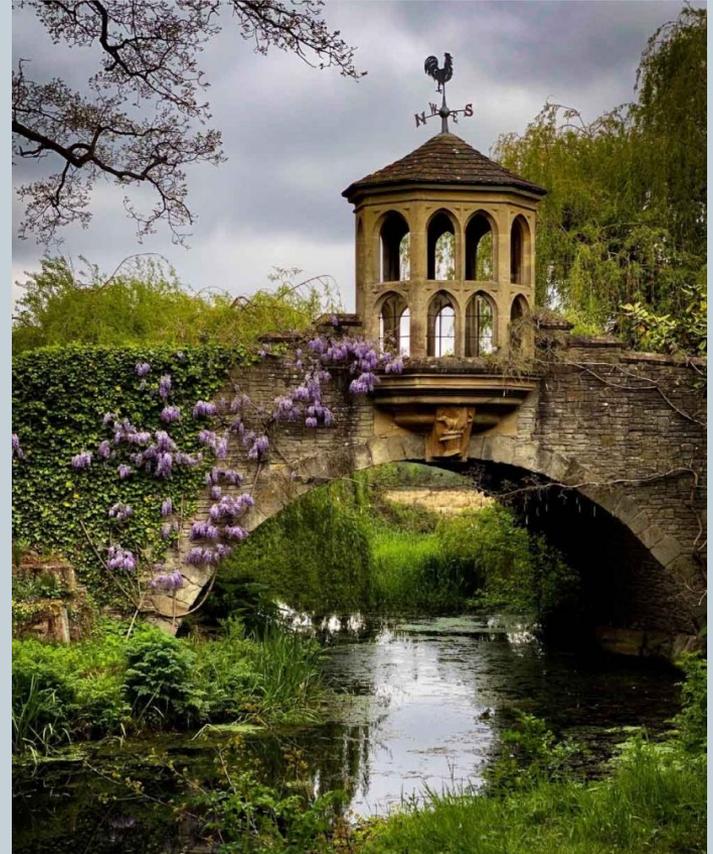


The Ruined Abbey, Painshill Park, Surrey, England. 1772. *On an estate that is full of follies, this is a screen wall designed to look like a historic Gothic abbey.*

Examples



Paon et Pagadon, Bois de Boulogne, Paris, France. *Inspired by East Asian architecture, this lovely green pagoda resides in Paris' largest public park.*

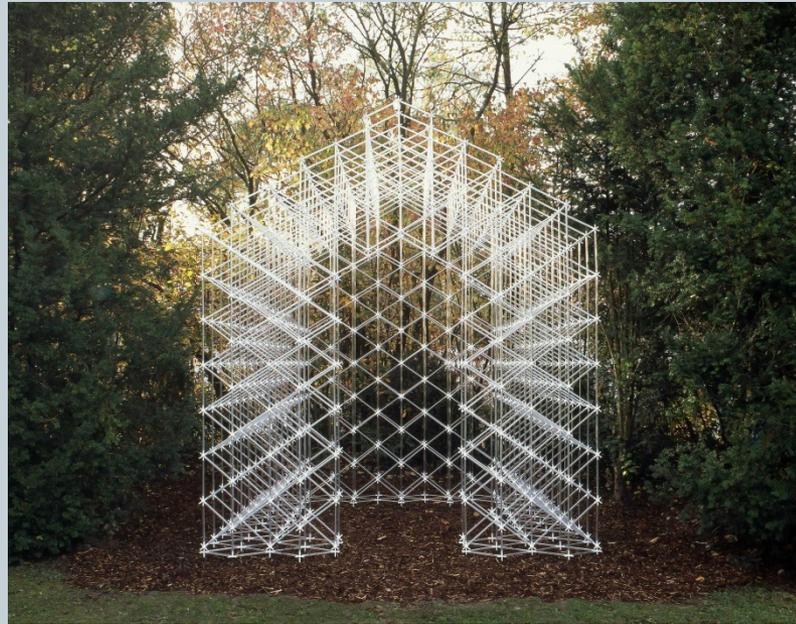


Bridge Folly, Dunsborough Park, Ripley, England. 1939. *This folly crowns a bridge of this estate's Water Garden.*

Follies Today



- As follies become more contemporary, their appearances push the boundaries of architectural genres



Garden Folly, Kawahara Krause Architects, Germany. 2017.

Rain Amplifier Folly, Matthijs la Roi Architects, Belgium. 2020.



- Examples in everyday life include gazebos, garden pavilions, and sculptural structures

Fun Facts on Follies



- During the Great Famine of 1845, the Irish government commissioned the construction of follies to provide employment and economic relief
 - One folly includes a road etched between two seemingly random points, in the middle of nowhere
- Many folly designers loved the idea of ancient ruins, so they would construct “sham ruins” – fake cottages, temples, or abbeys that, despite being brand new, appeared to be falling into disarray
- Some designers chose to model their follies off of fanciful structures that sprung from the imaginations of landscape painters, such as Claude Lorrain and Hubert Robert
- A great deal of follies are not completely without function: some originally served as hunting towers and lookout posts. Today, the beauty of follies are utilized as tourist destinations, wedding venues, and even filming locations
 - Scenes from *Pride and Prejudice* (2005) were filmed at Stourhead Gardens’ Temple of Apollo!



The Dunmore Pineapple,
Dunmore, Scotland.
Late 1700s.

Follies at Florence Griswold



In each of these examples, follies represent an appreciation for beauty, architectural daring, and a playful sense of humor.

Though most are now relics of gardens past, follies embrace our desire for interesting destinations, visual splendor, and whimsical imagination.

As the perfect “favorite abode” for a wee fairy, be sure to visit Florence Griswold’s FOLLYWOODS!

Further Information



- Architectural Digest – <https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/caleb-anderson-royal-oak-architectural-follies>
- Veranda Magazine’s article on folly history - <https://www.veranda.com/outdoor-garden/a32128726/garden-folly-history/>
- Twisted Sifter’s article on follies - <https://twistedgifter.com/2012/10/follies-extravagant-buildings-that-serve-no-purpose/>
- Painshill Park (Surrey, England) Website - <https://www.painshill.co.uk/>
- The Folly Fellowship, a UK group that protects and preserves follies – <http://follies.org.uk/>
- Follies Pinterest Board - <https://www.pinterest.com/nancyjlawrence/architectural-follies/>