

Hudson River Heritage (HRH) is a nonprofit membership organization committed to preserving the unique character of the Mid-Hudson Valley's historic architecture, rural landscapes and scenic views through education, advocacy and community involvement. HRH is the federally designated steward of the Hudson River National Historic Landmark District, a 32-square-mile area stretching from Germantown, in Columbia County to Hyde Park, in Dutchess County.

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## HUDSON RIVER HERITAGE COUNTRY SEATS TOUR 2012 20TH-CENTURY COUNTRY SEATS

The architectural design of country homes evolved substantially during the course of the 20th century, reflecting changes both in taste and society, and our tour this year will highlight many of those changes.

At the beginning of the century, grand country houses were still being constructed much as they had been in the post-Civil War, late 19th century. Large tracts of land, some farmed, some simply maintained as meadows and woods, typically surrounded such houses. Mansakenning is one of these, built in 1903 for Eugene Tillotson Lynch, a Livingston and Suckley descendant. Designed in the then-popular Classical Revival style, the house originally had wraparound porches, evidence of which can still be seen in the stonework of the façade.

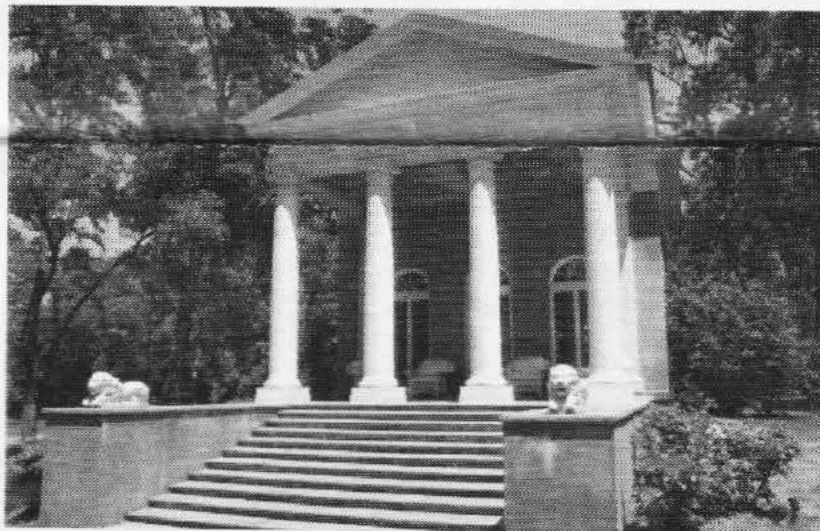
After World War I, the Great Depression, and especially World War II, everything changed. Revisions to the tax codes made owning and maintaining such large homes and estates much less feasible. Staff to care for large homes was unavailable. So estates began to be subdivided and sold off.

A perfect example of a mid-century country house, after the Depression but just prior to the Second World War, Orlot, built in 1940, illustrates the developing trends. A simplified approach to traditional architecture, with more than a nod to modernism coming from Europe and Chicago, the house manages to be gracious and expansive without ostentation, and is designed so the owners can live in it with or without staff.

Fast forward to the 1960s. The economy was growing, and tastes were changing. A new owner of a classic country house on the Hudson, Chiddingstone, wisely decided to construct a separate party pavilion rather than add on awkwardly to a house that did not lend itself to expansion. When he went to prison for a bribery-and-kickback conviction, what was left was a classic contemporary-style house from that period, on a scale larger than most, but with a clearly recognizable form. Out with the old, in with the new. Soaring ceilings and walls of glass open the house to the landscape in a way that older houses could not.

Another house of the 1960s draws from the classic modern style, with its characteristic flat roof and efficient open-plan interior. This house embodies the changes that contemporary architects sought to bring to residential design. The flat roofs are an easy tip-off, but so are the alternating expanses of wall (with vertical siding) and

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EDGEWATER GUEST HOUSE, BARRYTOWN



MANSAKENNING, RHINEBECK



HALF MOON, RHINECLIFF



ORLOT, RHINEBECK



FALLEN PINES  
FARM, MILAN





HARTSHORN RESIDENCE, RHINEBECK

1825, while appearing to be a contemporaneous outbuilding, and this it does very well.

In the same year we have a very different, idiosyncratic house designed by its owners, with the help of their architect son, incorporating another American architectural strain—this one of innovation and experimentation. Eschewing a particular architectural style, the house nonetheless has a recognizable style of its



WEINTRAUB RESIDENCE, RHINEBECK

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glass. An arbor leads from the parking area to the front entrance. Inside, the simplicity of the plan belies the careful thought that went into creating it.

Partly because of its limited design vocabulary, along with its self-conscious rejection of many traditional elements, modern architecture as a residential style never appealed to the general house building public as much as it did to architects. So while this remains an evolving style still in use today, interest in more traditional revival styles has never abated. One of the architectural profession's own reactions to Modern was Post-Modern, where some traditional forms were consciously evoked or incorporated into design in the 1980s and 1990s. We can see this at work in the interesting composition at Fallen Pines Farm in Milan. Constructed around the core of camp cabins from the 1940s, the house has grown with its owners' family. Multiple levels and outbuildings have created a compound that is site-specific, carefully structured, but informal in its demeanor, in part because of the traditional elements and references.

More literal by far is the perfect classical composition that is the Guest House at Edgewater. Built in 1997, the exterior could have been lifted from a century or two ago. The interior cleverly incorporates modern conveniences such as a kitchenette and a bathroom flanking the corridor to the main space, along with some concealed closets and semiconcealed beds. Obviously the intent was to defer to the main house, Edgewater, of

own, as any student of Buckminster Fuller, Bruce Goff, or Bart Prince will know. Simply constructed within and around the shell of a Quonset Hut-type structure, the house showcases the art of craft, and the craft of art in its numerous details.

The most recent country seat on our tour, built at the close of the 20th century, is one that wraps an exterior full of traditional cues around a thoroughly modern plan. The board and batten siding, copper roofs, turrets, and balconies recall both Gothic Revival and French Country antecedents, while the large expanses of glass and the siting of the house on a bluff south of Rhinecliff takes full advantage of spectacular views of the Hudson and the Catskills. ■



THE PAVILION AT CHIDDINGSTONE, GERMANTOWN

See back of newsletter for Country Seats Tour order form.

## EVOLUTION OF PRESERVATION WAS TOPIC FOR THIRD-ANNUAL FORUM

The third in our series of annual forums exploring topics related to historic preservation, this year's program was held on Saturday, April 28th, in the excellent conference facilities at the Henry A. Wallace Center, part of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Museum in Hyde Park, New York. The day-long forum

brought together knowledgeable speakers from across the broad spectrum of preservation, with a focus on the evolution of our understanding of and approach to preservation over the course of the last century. The forum speakers explored the results and implications of this change, and discussed what challenges and opportunities lie ahead.



THE WALLACE CENTER IN HYDE PARK

Hudson River Heritage President Warren Smith welcomed the thirty attendees, followed by HRH founder Wint Aldrich, who offered his own perspective on the significance and relevance of the forum's topic to the field of historic preservation.

Helene Gillette-Woodard of the Williamstown Art Conservation Center led off with a fascinating presentation on the conservation and restoration of decorative objects. Her images of objects ranging from textiles to sculpture, porcelain to plastics included X-rays, fiber analysis, before-and-after photos, and the whole contemporary spectrum of tools used in restoration. Connie Frisbee Houde of the New York State Museum talked about her own varied experience in the field of preservation and conservation, focusing on her ongoing work with Cherry Hill, the Philip Van Rensselaer Mansion in Albany,

where the house and all its contents required an initial inventory and subsequently a triage approach to preservation. Connie's talk was followed by Gwen Spicer, who heads a textile conservation studio in Albany. Gwen discussed the challenges unique to cleaning and preserving fragile, historic fabrics, illustrated by several case studies.

After a bountiful catered lunch, with some time to enjoy the surrounding gardens or pop into the FDR Museum (which granted free admission with the day's program), the afternoon sessions resumed with a talk by Neil Larson, who heads a consulting firm in Woodstock, New York. He made the point that buildings extend beyond their walls to the surrounding context, which must be considered in any approach to whether, where, and how to preserve a structure. The final speaker, Ned Kaufman, who heads a New York City-based consulting firm, gave an even broader "macro" view, discussing the challenges of preservation in dealing with large projects in historic districts or national parks. These included one of the communities on Fire Island, New York, assaulted by overdevelopment and beach erosion; the venerable Springfield Armory in Massachusetts, which is suffering from insensitivity, neglect, and a lack of municipal will (and funds); and the historic village of Woodstock, Vermont, which is lucky enough to have a community benefactor to help preserve surrounding open space for continued use as agricultural land.

All the forum participants agreed that the speakers and their subjects had made it an informative, worthwhile, and enjoyable day. ■



SPEAKER GWEN SPICER