

For generations, the spectacular landscapes along the Hudson River have attracted people to build homes there. Often, the handiwork of one generation has enhanced the landscape, making the river even more attractive for future generations.

From the beginning of European settlement, home builders believed that the architecture of Europe could blend in harmony with American landscapes. Beginning with the Dutch patroons and the British manorial landlords, homes along the Hudson reflected visions of the European past. Many of the earliest mansions incorporated materials imported from Europe as well as European designs.

In the 19th century, the Romantic artistic movement gave new meaning to the Hudson River landscape. The Romantics idealized the art and architecture of the Middle Ages as well as nature itself. Romanticism appealed to people who hoped to escape from increasingly industrialized, crowded and polluted cities and find peace and beauty in the dramatic grandeur of nature.

As a writer, Washington Irving strongly influenced American Romanticism with tales of 17th century New York like "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." As a home owner, he influenced the Romantic movement in architecture with Sunnyside, the 18th century Tarrytown farmhouse Irving refurbished with Dutch design elements and Gothic details inspired by medieval Europe. While Irving's stories inspired people to settle in the Hudson Valley, Sunnyside inspired many of the homes they would build.

19th century home builders were also influenced by the ideas of Andrew Jackson Downing, a Newburgh native who became one of the nation's leading experts on architecture and horticulture. Downing popularized the idea that architecture and landscaping should join to make each house a harmonious whole that blended into its natural setting.

The Hudson River School of artists in the mid-19th century illustrated the Romantic vision of the landscape. Their imposing nature paintings inspired more people to settle along the river. One of the most successful Hudson River artists, **Frederic Church**, built his own home, Olana, near the river. Olana was an artistic statement in its own right, boldly displaying Persian and Middle Eastern influences while somehow fitting into its New York surroundings.

In time, more wealthy families made statements of their own by building mansions along the Hudson. Joining the traditional landowners, and sometimes replacing them, were newly-rich industrialists, railroad magnates and financiers. They sought to emulate the lifestyles of patroons and gentleman farmers. Railroads made it easier for them to live in the country and commute to the cities, turning the Hudson Highlands near West Point into a "Millionaire's Row."

Imposing homes like Ogden Mills's Staatsburgh, J. P. Morgan's Cragston, Frederick W. Vanderbilt's mansion at Hyde Park and John D. Rockefeller's Kykuit evoked the European and American past in Neo-Classical and Colonial Revival style. Combining carefully landscaped surroundings with impressive views of the river, these wealthiest New Yorkers impressed guests with rich furnishings while indulging in reveries of bygone rural life. Many millionaires maintained working farms on their property, while their children played in wide-open rustic surroundings that inspired some to become preservationists and environmentalists as adults.

People who had grown up in the beautifully maintained countryside

feared the encroachment of skyscrapers, highways and billboards. Many became convinced that everyone, not just the privileged, should be able to escape from the cities and enjoy the scenic wonders of the Highlands or the Valley. Some of them no longer had use for their parents' mansions, or could no longer afford to maintain them, but didn't want the great houses to vanish or fall into disrepair.

The 20th century became an age of historic preservation along the Hudson. Wealthy families began to donate their homes to the state or federal government for use as historic parks, allowing people to roam the rooms and halls once reserved for the wealthy. Others donated their homes to the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt grew up in Hyde Park as a neighbor of the Vanderbilts. As President in the 1930s, he received the Vanderbilt mansion as a gift to the nation to become a national historic site. In time,

FDR's home, Springwood, became a historic site as did Val-Kill, Eleanor Roosevelt's private cottage. The Rockefeller family also became preservationists. John D. Rockefeller Jr. purchased Sunnyside, Washington Irving's old home, as the centerpiece of his Sleepy Hollow Restorations project. His dedication to maintaining the state's architectural heritage continues today in the Historic Hudson Valley organization, while his own home, Kykuit, became a historic park after the death of Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller. Frederic Church's Olana has also been preserved with its furnishings intact as a living museum and a popular site for special community events.

The Hudson River landscape is a truly historical landscape. It has evolved in a way that blends history and nature into a harmonious whole that continues to impress and inspire new generations of New Yorkers.

Image: Photo of Kykuit in Spring courtesy of the Historic Hudson Valley.



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The Gilded Age

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Newspaper Tie-ins to Today:

After looking through several editions of the newspaper (in-print or online) for names of well known people - politicians, business people, athletes, entertainers and others, who, among these, does or might like to live along the banks of the Hudson River? Why do you think that? What type of home do you think they'd have?

Take a tour of one of the historic homes mentioned in this feature, either in-person or virtually via the Internet. After reading one or two travel stories in the paper, write a brief article about the home you visited. Be sure to include details including the best way to get there, fees if any and other places of interest nearby.

For more information on the Hudson-Fulton-Champlain Quadricentennial go to www.exploreny400.com.