

Architectural Traditions in the Hudson River Valley



Montgomery Place, courtesy of Historic Hudson Valley

The Hudson River Valley is known not only for its natural beauty but its architectural heritage. It was here that architects developed early residential styles, created mountain resorts, and designed spectacular riverside estates. America's first travel guides touted these architectural wonders 150 years ago. The invitation still holds: Visit the farmhouses of Dutch and French Huguenot settlers; tour the mansions and grounds along the river; and marvel at the creations of some of the country's greatest 19th-century architects.

Dutch, Huguenot Influences

The houses built by Dutch colonists during the 17th and early 18th centuries are the only examples of Dutch architecture in North America. Farmhouses, such as Pieter Bronck's brick residence (1663) in Coxsackie, feature distinctive pitched roofs with gable ends, prominent roof beams, and open fireplaces.

After the English took charge of the colony in 1664, Dutch building traditions continued and can still be seen at the Madam Brett Homestead (1709) in Beacon and the Luykas Van Alen House (1737) in Kinderhook.

The French Huguenots who emigrated to the banks of the Wallkill Creek and founded the settlement of New Paltz built stone houses that combined Northern European and medieval building traditions with those of their Dutch



Madam Brett Homestead, Beacon
Steve Turner, courtesy Charles Davey LLC



Bevier-Elting House, Huguenot Street, New Paltz

neighbors. Huguenot Street, arguably the oldest street in America with its original houses, includes three with portions that date back to the 1690s: the Bevier-Elting, Jean Hasbrouck, and Abraham Hasbrouck houses. The buildings are of local stone, with steeply pitched shingled roofs and Dutch jambless fireplaces.

Today, the legacy of the Dutch colonial vernacular is kept alive in more contemporary historic buildings, many of which were influenced by Franklin Roosevelt.

In the 1930s, FDR was involved in the design of six regional post offices, three schools, his own presidential library, and Top Cottage, his retreat at Hyde Park. By promoting native fieldstone construction and using historical models for new designs, FDR helped to preserve an important architectural tradition in the Hudson River Valley.

Origins of the Great Estates

As second- and third-generation colonists became more prosperous, many early landholdings expanded. Frederick Philipse I, a Dutch carpenter who emigrated in the 1650s, successfully acquired a large amount of land and two mill sites, the Lower Mills in Yonkers and the Upper Mills on the Pocantico River in the village of Sleepy Hollow. The core of Philipse Manor dates back to the 1680s, but its transformation into a country estate began under Frederick Philipse III, who remodeled it into a Georgian-style mansion in the 1750s.

Farther up the river, Robert Livingston acquired a royal patent for a vast tract of land in Columbia County, and one of his sons built a Georgian-style country house he named Clermont.



Philipse Manor Hall, Yonkers
Steve Turner, AerPhoto, courtesy Charles Davey design LLC

Clermont established a new standard for the country house and the prominence of the Livingston family. Federal-era mansions, such as Ten Broeck Mansion (1798) in Albany, Boscobel (1804-07) in Cold Spring, and Locust Lawn (1814) in New Paltz, demonstrated the increasing wealth of the Hudson River Valley.



Clermont, Germantown

After the Revolutionary War, Americans celebrated their independence through a new style of architecture that attempted to shed the colonial trappings of the past, but they still clung to the neoclassicism inherited from England. Several important houses were destroyed during the war and rebuilt in the Federal style. In its elegant post-war reincarnation,



Boscobel, Cold Spring



James Vanderpoel House, Kinderhook



Lyndhurst, Tarrytown
Steve Turner, courtesy Charles Davey LLC



Dutch Reformed Church, Newburgh
Tom Daley



Lindenwald, Kinderhook

Residential Architecture: the Cottage and the Villa

During the first half of the 19th century, American architects experimented with a variety of styles, and it was during this period of eclecticism that the valley's most whimsical and exuberant houses were created. Sunnyside, a "cottage" in Tarrytown designed by writer Washington Irving in the 1830s, evokes this romantic spirit with its fanciful combination of Dutch, Scottish, and Spanish architecture.

Foremost among professional architects was Alexander Jackson Davis, a young New Yorker who was a partner in the country's first architectural firm, Town and Davis. By the 1830s, Davis had completed the Custom House in New York City and the Greek Revival Dutch Reformed Church in Newburgh. He also received a commission for a Hudson River estate, the Knoll in Tarrytown.



Knoll, Tarrytown

Together, Davis and Downing were responsible for developing the two key building types that would define the nation's residential architecture: the cottage and the villa. The bracketed style was an answer to the quest for a native architectural style, particularly because it could be adapted to a range of incomes.

In 1837 Davis introduced this new, romantic style in his landmark book, *Rural Residences*, which included the Blithewood gatehouse, the first published example of a board-and-batten cottage in America. Over the next 15 years, Davis' picturesque ideals were interpreted for the public in Downing's widely distributed books, *Cottage Residences* and *The Architecture of Country Houses*. When Davis remodeled Montgomery Place, the Federal-style estate in Annandale-on-Hudson, Downing served as an adviser on the gardens and grounds.

The Knoll was considered the first picturesque villa in America, and in the 1860s it became the heart of Lyndhurst, a much larger, more spectacular residence.

It was through the commission for the Blithewood estate in Annandale-on-Hudson that Davis met landscape architect Andrew Jackson Downing.



Sunnyside, Tarrytown

As tastes changed during the 1840s, accomplished architects like Davis and Richard Upjohn were called upon to remodel outdated federal-style houses into more fashionable Italianate or Tuscan villas. Davis worked with Samuel F. B. Morse to create Locust Grove in Poughkeepsie, while Upjohn remodeled Lindenwald, a 36-room mansion in Kinderhook commissioned by President Martin Van Buren.

Carpenter Gothic: an American Church Style

By mid-century, the romantic ideals of Downing and Davis were common knowledge, and the board-and-batten church had become the natural style for Gothic revival church architecture in America. The light and vertical wooden buildings stood in sharp contrast to the heavy stone Gothic structures of England.

The architect Richard Upjohn earned a reputation as the most talented designer of board-and-batten churches. Upjohn was so busy by the 1850s that he published *Upjohn's Rural Architecture*, which included "do-it-yourself" church plans. A typical example of his work, St. Luke's Chapel (1857) in Clermont, displays the bell cote and intricate woodwork characteristic of this style, an important contribution to the history of American architecture.



St. Luke's Chapel, Clermont
Tom Daley



Main Building, Vassar College
Tom Daley



State Capitol, Albany



Wilderstein, Rhinebeck



Vanderbilt Mansion, Hyde Park
Richard Cheek



Kykuit, Sleepy Hollow

A Tradition of Rural Leisure

The 1870s were an exciting time in the valley. The renowned New York architect Richard Morris Hunt designed the Stick Style Howland Library in Beacon, and his equally famous colleague, Henry Hobson Richardson, was working with a group of other designers on the New York State Capitol. A fire at the Albany City Hall nearby resulted in a new architectural commission, and Richardson created another impressive civic building. At Poughkeepsie James Renwick, Jr., designed the mansard-roofed main building for Matthew Vassar's new college for women.

As urban centers were growing, the Hudson River Valley remained an important resort destination, and, beginning in the 1870s, visitors could stay at the expansive Mohonk Mountain House in the Shawangunk Mountains.

At the same time, Frederick Clarke Withers began creating the monumental Hudson River State Hospital in Poughkeepsie, the country's first use of the High Victorian Gothic style for an institutional design. Calvert Vaux, Andrew Jackson Downing's successor, and Frederick Law Olmsted designed the innovative hospital grounds.

During the second half of the 19th century, some of the country's greatest architects brought new residential styles to the valley and renovated the old-fashioned estates of their predecessors. Vaux updated the landscape plan for Wilderstein, the Queen Anne estate in Rhinebeck, and worked with Frederic E. Church on his elaborate Persian-style residence, Olana, in Hudson.



Trailside Museum, Bear Mountain State Park

The next generation of prominent Hudson River families called on the New York architectural firm McKim, Mead and White to remodel their estates—Vanderbilt in Hyde Park and Mills in Staatsburg—into more fashionable countryseats.

Two early 20th-century sites represent the extent to which the Hudson River Valley continued to attract some of the country's greatest estates and to foster the tradition of rural leisure. Kykuit, the Rockefeller estate, boasts stunning

gardens and impressive collections of art and sculpture. And in 1917, a little known architect named Herbert Maier designed the first rustic trailside museum at Bear Mountain State Park. The museum became a prototype for rustic buildings throughout the national parks.

Olana, Hudson



