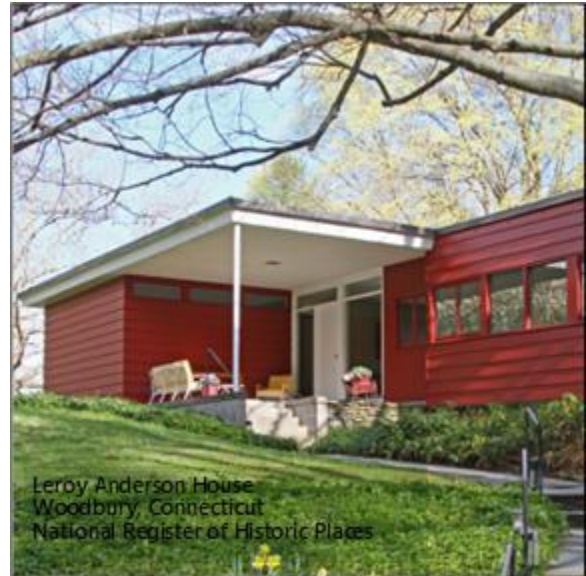


A Mid Century Modern Composer's Home in Woodbury, Connecticut

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Leroy Anderson House, Woodbury, Litchfield County, Connecticut

The Leroy Anderson House, built for the American composer Leroy Anderson and his family in 1953-54, is a historic house museum set on 13.2 acres of land on the south side of Grassy Hill Road in Woodbury, Connecticut. ¹

Anderson commissioned Waterbury architect Joseph Stein to design the Mid-century modern house, where Anderson lived from October, 1953, until his death from lung cancer on May 18, 1975. ²

Built by the McGinn Company of Naugatuck, the two-story home, with its native stone walls and floors, expansive living room windows, and wide footprint, stands apart from the perennially popular Cape Cod and Colonial Revival style homes of Woodbury. At the same time it blends with the tree-covered landscape it overlooks. It was named to the National Register of Historic Places on December 31, 2012 and since 2014 is owned by the Leroy Anderson Foundation. ³

Design



Modernist architect Joseph Stein (1916-1977) earned his B.A. in Architecture from Dartmouth College, was elected to *Phi Beta Kappa*, and received a Master of Architecture degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Design in 1941. Walter Gropius was Chair of Architecture from 1938 to 1952 and, along with Marcel Breuer, had introduced the Bauhaus philosophy of clean lines, simple, unadorned shapes, primary colors, and the rational use of modern

materials such as glass, concrete, and steel to American architecture. Stein was one of Gropius's first students at Harvard and was also influenced by Marcel Breuer. Other architects who studied under Gropius and Breuer at the time included Philip Johnson, Edward Larrabee Barnes, Eliot Noyes, and John M. Johansen. All of these architects designed buildings in Connecticut.^{4, 5}

Stein believed the space people occupied affected the quality of their lives, and he was committed to work on affordable housing, libraries, and schools. The Leroy Anderson house is the earliest example of Stein's residential house designs and represents the migration of modernist ideas from the university to the American mainstream. In addition to residences, Stein designed the Beth El Synagogue in Waterbury; the Alumni Building at the University of Connecticut, Storrs; Waterbury's Bureau of Water; the Gilmartin and Regan elementary schools in Waterbury, and the Mattatuck Animal Hospital. Stein received an Award of Merit for Public Library Design in 1964 for the design of the Silas Bronson Library in 1964. He also designed the Waterbury Courthouse, which was built from 1972 to 1974.^{3, 4, 5}

History

Composer's Home, 1953 - 1975

Anderson and his wife, Eleanor, spent the summer of 1946 in Woodbury in a cottage on Painter Hill Road that was owned by Eleanor's mother and two unmarried sisters. The quiet of Woodbury appealed to them, and the Andersons settled in Woodbury permanently in 1949 at Eleanor Anderson's mother's home on Painter Hill Road. Thanks to Anderson's success as a composer, he and his wife were able to build a house in Woodbury. They chose Waterbury architect Joseph Stein based on a recommendation Leroy received from a fellow passenger on the train between New Haven and New York City.

Stein was thoroughly influenced by his professors at Harvard – Marcel Breuer (1902-1981) and Walter Gropius (1883-1969). Gropius had developed his design philosophy from his years of leading the Bauhaus School in Germany (1919-1928). At Harvard he adapted his philosophy to the context of America. Gropius and Breuer took inspiration from the New England landscape. As a result, Stein's modern house for the Andersons incorporated traditional New England architectural elements, including clapboard siding painted barn red and native stone in the chimney. The linear outline and ribbon windows are typical of early modernist residential architecture. A large copper beech tree and a distinctive entrance canopy softens the presentation of the house.

Stein designed a house for the Andersons which is responsive to its site and fits the landscape. Connecting the house to nature, making the outdoors part of the indoor living experience, was important to Stein. Borrowing from a Marcel Breuer design signature, Stein supported the roof over the front entrance with a single steel column. The similarly designed roof over a long, flagstone patio adjacent to the dining room makes an elegant indoor-outdoor transition.

The floor plan creates a well-defined sense of daytime living spaces and bedroom retreats. The slate floors in the foyer and the combined living and dining room provide textural depth and character to the interiors.

The Andersons moved into their 3,000-square-foot new home in late October, 1953. They collected pieces by the Danish modern designers Hans Wegner, Arne Jacobsen and Jens Risom. The furniture and decorative objects from Denmark and Sweden justify describing the interior of the house as Scandinavian modern. The Andersons also commissioned a sculpture from William Talbot and a painting from Russell Benjamin Huff, both modern

abstract artists. Gropius and Breuer, who at the Bauhaus headed the department which taught furniture design, believed that sculpture, painting and furniture are essential elements in the linking, structuring and designing of spatial relationships.

Here, Anderson composed and played music, and his children grew up, attending Woodbury's public schools. To insure the quiet necessary to write his music scores, Anderson had his work room sound-proofed with fully insulated interior walls. Stein had two doors installed – one opened in, and one opened out to the corridor.

During his years at Grassy Hill, Anderson wrote many of the compositions for which he is best known today: *Serenata*, *Belle of the Ball*, *Bugler's Holiday*, *The Typewriter* and *Forgotten Dreams*. This period saw the rise in the international popularity of *Sleigh Ride*, a composition he began in Woodbury in the summer of 1946 during a heat wave.

While Anderson was composing in the peace and quiet his home in Woodbury offered, he also made time to form the Southwood Quartet. Anderson played cello, Dr. Joe James of Woodbury, and George Weigl of Southbury played violin, and Irma Holst, also of Southbury, played viola. Together, these musicians played chamber music by Beethoven, Mozart, Schumann, and Handel every Friday evening for 10 years.^{3, 5, 6, 7}

1975 - 2014

Eleanor Anderson (1918-2014) established the Leroy Anderson Foundation in 2010 to further her late husband's memory, to own and maintain the Leroy Anderson House as a historic house museum, and to welcome the public for guided tours, concerts and other educational programs. Through her efforts, PBS created a biographical documentary with Peter Rosen; Burgess Speed authored a bio-bibliography of the composer, and an official website about Anderson's life and work was launched.

As an example of a mid-20th century modernist home and the place where an American composer lived and wrote much of his music that is part of the standard repertoire for orchestra and band throughout the world, the Leroy Anderson House was named to the National Register of Historic Places by the National Park Service in Washington, DC, on December 31, 2012.^{3, 8}

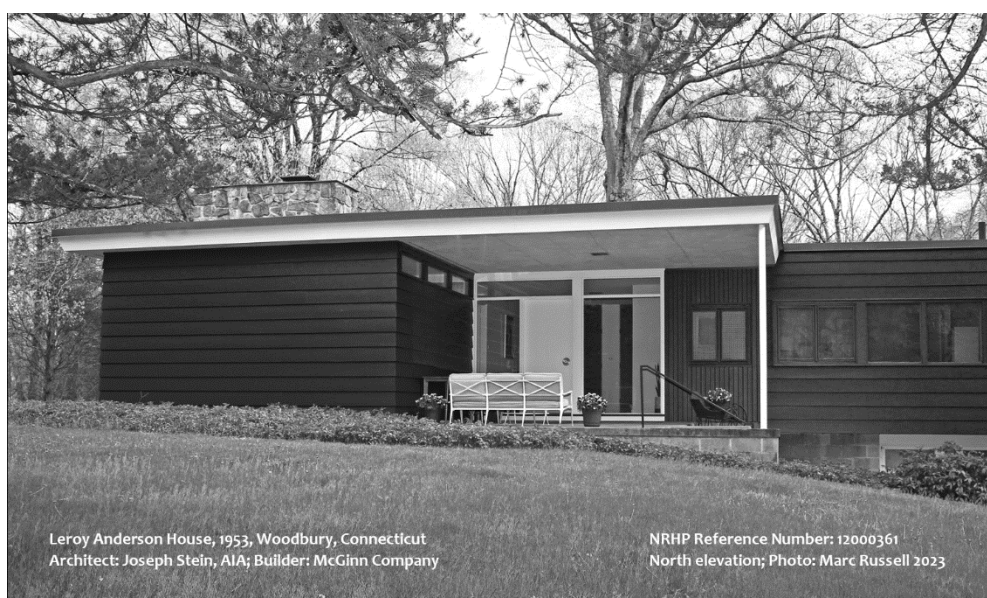
Following the death of Eleanor Anderson in 2014, the house and surrounding land was conveyed to the Leroy Anderson Foundation. The Town of Woodbury designated the Leroy Anderson House a historic house museum on March 27, 2018.

In addition to being one of a small number of composers' homes open to the public in the United States, it is also one of a few mid-century modern homes open to the public in New England.^{9,10} The Leroy Anderson House remains fresh, original and engaging, just like the composer's music.

Historic House Museum 2018 - Present

Visitors to the Leroy Anderson House can see original artwork and furnishings along with Anderson's Steinway grand piano near the floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the terrace. From the windows, they can see a modern sculpture by Connecticut kinetic artist William H.M. Talbot. They will also see Anderson's workroom and library along with his first composing desk that he built himself. On view are a formal portrait by Isabel Wadsworth commissioned by Eleanor Anderson, and Russell Benjamin Huff's painting inspired by *The Firebird* of Igor Stravinsky which was commissioned by Leroy Anderson in 1960. Today, the house includes an exhibit dedicated to the musical legacy of Leroy Anderson in a first-floor room that was once the Anderson children's playroom. The house is open for visits and guided tours on many weekends by appointment.

The Leroy Anderson Foundation has since 2018 hosted concerts outdoors on the lawn from May through late September and lectures and concerts indoors from October through April. Numerous area non-profit groups have also held meetings at the house by invitation from the foundation.⁵



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Categories

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2. National Register of Historic Places in Litchfield County, Connecticut
3. Houses completed in 1953
4. Houses in Litchfield County, Connecticut
5. Woodbury, Connecticut