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AD100 Peter Pennoyer Architects and Reed Hilderbrand Craft an Art-Filled Oasis

When a prominent art collector set out to transform 140 acres of Ohio countryside into a private home and sculpture park, he turned to Peter Pennoyer Architects and Reed Hilderbrand

By Sam Cochran
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Among approximately 35 sculptures on the grounds are *Psyche*, 2015, by Saint Clair Cemin, displayed in a custom pavilion realized with Peter Pennoyer Architects, and a 2018 site-specific installation by Richard Serra (far right).

Charlotte Abrahams, “Faye Toogood: a new collection from the designer who upends expectations and rewrites the rules,” *The Design Edit*, August 24, 2020.

It's a sunny summer afternoon in Ohio, and our host, a house-proud art collector, has taken to the fields. Across a meadow he goes, guiding me and his architect, Peter Pennoyer, single file into the forest and along a sharp ravine. The songs of bobolinks and the rush of the river break our silence as we continue down the narrow path, which remains uncannily level—a constant elevation of 950 feet. That, as artist Andy Goldsworthy discovered upon studying the site, is the only topographical line to cross the full length of the 140-acre property. “This is the most intimate way to experience the land,” the homeowner says of Goldsworthy’s installation, which follows the existing terrain. “Everything is changing around you but you.”

Today this meticulously mapped footway is one of some 35 outdoor works (including pieces by Richard Serra, Ai Weiwei, Ursula von Rydingsvard, and Anish Kapoor) that dot the private sculpture park—an extraordinary and ever-evolving domain that has made him the envy of museums and the white whale of art dealers the world over. At the property’s heart sits a creative triumph of a different order: a 16,000-square-foot house designed by Peter Pennoyer Architects in the spirit of Czech Cubism. “Walking the land, that was our start,” recalls Pennoyer, noting the structure’s high perch, at turns visible and hidden along the approach, with sweeping views of the meadows and woods. From the beginning, the client’s ambitions were clear: a traditional structure with stucco massing, crisp geometry, and neat symmetry, all at an intimate scale for his family. “Every room had to count,” the homeowner explains. “No gift-wrapping room. No dog-grooming room. We wanted it to be warm and welcoming—I walk around in flip-flops and sweatpants.”



In the oak-paneled library, the ceiling and mantelpiece riff on Czech Cubist forms while mechanized Studio Drift Shylights flutter overhead; portrait and equestrian painting by Michaël Borremans, grandfather clock by Maarten Baas, and console table by Ingrid Donat.

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His initial design references zeroed in on historic English Arts and Crafts houses. But a visit to Prague introduced him to Czech Cubism, the city's obscure, short-lived (1911–1914) spin on the avant-garde movement, which yielded chiseled, seemingly charged buildings, paintings, and objects. Never mind that plans for his home were already complete. He immediately called for more height, more angles, more oomph. “That was my ‘more cowbell’ moment,” jokes the client, referring to the iconic Saturday Night Live sketch. Back at the drawing board, Pennoyer and his team ramped it up.

“It was like learning a new language,” notes the architect, who worked closely with his firm’s design director, Gregory Gilmartin, to distill the movement into a language of facets and triangles. Like an iceberg, crystalline forms now emerge from the house’s limestone-trimmed stucco façades, beyond which arches, vaults, ironwork, moldings, and mantelpieces echo that vocabulary. “There is a lot of energy that comes from angles, but those forces equalize,” reflects Pennoyer, noting that the motifs feel carved, as if from a block of stone, rather than applied. “The whole project has a consistent calmness.”



The House's symmetrical rear façade reveals its Cubist influences through angular stucco volumes and a faceted limestone grotto.

In their brief heyday, Czech Cubists failed to produce a fully conceived interior. So client and architect felt free to play, creating bespoke rooms that pivot between periods and personalities. Covered in an exuberant mosaic, the entry takes inspiration from Hildreth Meière's lobby for One Wall Street. The zellige-tiled sunporch, meanwhile, is where, as the homeowner puts it, "Wiener Werkstätte meets the Casbah." And the study features an immersive commission by Ingrid Donat that spans wall panels, shelving, and a chandelier. "He encouraged us to dream," Pennoyer says of the homeowner. As the client puts it, "You gotta drink the tequila."

The house now serves as a magnificent showcase for an important collection of design, from the Arts and Crafts era through today. "Ruhlmann and Coard coexist with Hoffmann, Peche, Ponti, and Printz, just as they did in the Paris salons of 1925," notes Stephen Harrison, curator of decorative art and design at the Cleveland Museum of Art, an institution near to the homeowner's heart. "The works in his collection have leaped from the pages of journals, escaped from the museums where they usually reside, and have come alive with purpose."



Gothic-inflected arches draw the eye along the house's main axis; Pendant light by [Woka](#).

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Glass artist Thaddeus Wolfe created a one-of-a-kind pendant for the gallery;
framed sketches by Josef Engelhart.

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Compression, 2017, by Roxy Paine.

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They are joined by an equally impressive trove of contemporary art, which is both sprinkled throughout the home and displayed in a basement gallery. Hirst, Yuskavage, Borremans, Bove, Dumas—the gang’s all here. “He has built a collection that is driven not only by his passion and his eye but by his relationships with artists,” explains Harrison’s colleague Emily Liebert, curator of contemporary art. “When he supports an artist, he places his full trust in their vision.” Cases in point: Goldsworthy, who has completed six installations on the grounds; and Serra, who, after surveying the acreage, installed five monumental steel plates (each one 96,000 pounds) along five ridge points carved by receding glaciers. Says the homeowner, “I offered zero input.”

The property’s spiritual foundation remains the terrain, which he first explored 17 years ago while living next door. “He saw this project as much as an effort of conservation as the building of a home,” notes landscape architect Gary Hilderbrand, who began masterminding the grounds before any conversations about the house had started. After assessing the wildlife and vegetation, his studio, Reed Hilderbrand, set about protecting the diverse topography, fortifying the ravine, nurturing the forest understory, and adding rows of apple trees to honor the orchards that once thrived on the property. The firm would eventually anchor the house with formal gardens of clipped European hornbeam, as well as a potager fit for a feast. Most significant, they restored the 70 acres of meadows that had been overtaken by multiflora rose, threatening those vocal bobolinks, or, as Emily Dickinson called them, “the rowdy of the meadow.”

The land, since christened Rowdy Meadow, now provides varied opportunities for presenting art, allowing viewers to come across works slowly or else be totally surprised. Ironically, the most obvious place for sculpture is the one spot it will never be installed. Anything at the center of the meadow would create a roost for raptors, who would feed off bobolinks nesting in the tall grasses. But those birds are themselves performance art. As the homeowner says, quoting Dickinson again, “Some keep the sabbath going to church. I keep it staying at home, with a bobolink for a chorister, and an orchard for a dome.”

Religion comes in all forms.