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Introduction

Peter McMahon
Founding Director,
Cape Cod Modern House Trust

The Cape Cod Modern House Trust (CCMHT) was founded in 2007 to collect, archive, and share documentation of the Outer Cape's important modern architecture, restore a group of endangered experimental houses owned by the National Park Service (NPS), and to relaunch them as platforms for new creative work.

The three derelict modern houses we have leased and restored now host our artist/scholar residencies, which seek to re-populate these dynamic structures with creative people, whose work relates to nature, the history of modernism, and the creative community that thrived here in the mid-20th century. Since its inception our project has been a close collaboration with the NPS and specifically the Cape Cod National Seashore, which acts as the steward of the

houses, and their pristine natural environs.

In the past CCMHT has hosted designers, artists, composers, filmmakers, and writers. For this residency, curators Dylan Gauthier and Kendra Sullivan selected artists whose work overlapped in some way with the scientific research undertaken by NPS staff as well as by a wide range of visiting field scientists working within the Park's boundaries.

Wellfleet's modern houses served as laboratories, for their original inhabitants who sought empirical data to inform new approaches to visual art, curation, and the design of furniture, housing and urban spaces. Of particular interest is the informal think tank that was centered at the pond-side retreat of architect and academic Serge Chermayeff. By the mid 1940s, Chermayeff and his friends Bernard Rudofsky and György Kepes (along with their families, friends and students) were spending summers in Wellfleet — growing their beards, talking, arguing, and sitting by bonfires on the beach, and gathering research to support their own counter-cultural strain of modernism.

Chermayeff painstakingly diagramed possible relationships between housing and its urban context in hopes of providing users with the amenities of modern living while protecting them from the noise and disruption of thoughtless development. These proposals culminated in his seminal book *Community and Privacy*.

Living nearby in a cabin with no indoor plumbing, architect and writer Bernard Rudofsky took an ethnographic deep dive into pre-industrial cultures

(especially Japan's) to rediscover and reclaim more human-friendly ways to eat, dress, build, and live. These inquiries resulted in a series of critical shows at the Museum of Modern Art and a series of pivotal books including *Architecture without Architects*, which championed ingenious and environmentally responsive, vernacular building traditions from around the world.

Artist and photographic pioneer György Kepes, who lived and worked nearby in a house designed by his life-long friend Marcel Breuer, founded the groundbreaking Center for Advanced Visual Studies at MIT with a mission of bridging the boundaries between art, science and design.

Today, the CCMHT is delighted to welcome a new generation of creators to become inspired by these house/laboratories, ensconced, as they are, in the landscapes that inspired their design.

— Wellfleet, May 2018





Resident artists are given a tour of the NPS archives accompanied by curator Bill Burke.