



Plans to save Marcel Breuer’s summer home, historic contents, and final resting place from likely demolition. Significant 4.2 acre site in Wellfleet MA, surrounded by National Park Lands and abuts the headwaters of the Herring River

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Over 75 years ago, the iconic Bauhaus architect, Marcel Breuer, designed and built a summer home for himself and his family. The house and its original contents have remained in the Breuer family since then. The nonprofit organization Cape Cod Modern House Trust (CCMHT), is now under contract to buy the house from Marcel Breuer’s son, Tomas, in spring 2024.

CCMHT has a little under one year to raise the funds to save this cultural gem by acquiring the property and restoring the home, preserving Breuer’s original design, and relaunching it as a locus for study, creativity, and public access. Donations are needed to help raise at least \$1.4 million of the \$2 million purchase price, and CCMHT will seek a mortgage to fund the remaining purchase price.

Since 2016, the Outer Cape has been losing on average one important modern house per year. If the Breuer house goes on the open market, a new owner could tear down the house after a 12-month Historic Demolition Delay and build 3,600sf of new construction without need of a variance, which would also significantly disturb the ecosystem.

“The Breuer house is not only an important piece of architecture, it was also a meeting place for many of the great designers and artists of the era including the Saarinen family, Florence Knoll, Alexander Calder, Walter Gropius and many others. We have a chance to save it from ruin and to make it a busy nexus of learning and creativity again.”

Peter McMahon, Founding Director, Cape Cod Modern House Trust

Altering or demolishing this house would mean the loss of an irreplaceable piece of the Outer Cape’s heritage as well as a critical link in the history of the Bauhaus diaspora. In a painful precedent, Breuer’s Geller House on Long Island was demolished in 2022 so the neighbors could build a tennis court. Wellfleet residents have shown their support for saving these local cultural treasures by voting on three occasions to spend CPA (Community Preservation Act funds) on the restoration of CCMHT’s previous projects.

Who was Marcel Breuer?

Breuer was one of the 20th-century's most important designers, and his house is considered the most significant of the Cape's many modernist buildings. He was a visionary who left an indelible mark on the architecture and design world.

At age 18 Breuer left Hungary to enter the Bauhaus (in Weimar, Germany) as its youngest student, and later became the most famous graduate of the revolutionary design school. By age 25 he was the Master of the furniture workshop, gaining international acclaim for his pioneering use of bent tubular steel for lightweight, elegant, and affordable furniture. His Cesca chair (#B33) is one of the world's most reproduced chair designs. After practicing in Europe he partnered with Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius in London, and then at Harvard University where Breuer became the indispensable mentor to the great generation of American modern architects including IM Pei, Eliot Noyes, Paul Rudolph, Phillip Johnson, and many others.

"We have lost many significant Modern homes due to increasing land values and lack of stewardship including Breuer's Geller house on Long Island in 2022. There is so much to be studied and learned from these modest places and our cultural legacy cannot be replaced. Everyone who cares about the legacy of the 20th century should support this effort to save Breuer's own house and his final resting place. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to protect such an important home and make it open to the public." **Liz Waytkus**, Executive Director, Docomomo US

The House and its Contents

Over the years Breuer restlessly used the house as a laboratory for new ideas. The walls were painted and re-painted in different colors to achieve various effects. In 1961 he added a large studio for art making, music and gatherings, and in 1968 added a small apartment with a darkroom and separate entrance for his son, Tomas.

The acquisition would include the contents of the house: Breuer's irreplaceable art collection, and furniture, including examples of Breuer's iconic manufactured furniture, as well as one-of-a-kind tables, couches, and hand woven wool rugs made specifically for the house. There are over 200 books on art and design, many inscribed to Breuer by the authors. The art collection includes works by Alexander Calder, Bauhaus alumni Paul Klee, Josef Albers, and Herbert Bayer, and bronze sculptures by Costantino Nivola. Next to the driveway, in the shadow of a Pine tree, is a stone slab made by sculptor Masayuki Nagare, which Breuer brought back from a visit to Japan. Under the stone lay the ashes of Marcel and his wife Connie Breuer, Connie's sister, and her husband. Taken together the house and contents are a cultural treasure of international importance.

In addition, the house contents include hundreds of rolls of film taken by Tomas Breuer, an accomplished photographer who chronicled Breuer family and friends, and the house's evolution over decades, an invaluable asset for the restoration process as well as significant in its own right.

"The Breuer Cottage in Wellfleet is a rare architectural treasure. Its signature floating screen porch and combination of American vernacular wood construction with Bauhaus geometry and spareness represent a fast disappearing moment in architectural history in this country. Its value is enhanced by the astonishing fact that it has not been altered

over time, thus laying out for students, scholars, architects, and all those interested in our architectural history, an authentic example of a very specific era in New England and American life.” **Brenda Danilowitz**, Chief curator at the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation

Programming

Once restored the Breuer House will allow CCMHT to expand the range of its programming. The three separate apartments will be an ideal home for an annual, semester-long fellowship which will allow three student/scholars to get hands-on experience in the preservation of modern buildings, restoration and conservation of the natural environment, and the archiving of primary source materials.

About Cape Cod Modern House Trust

The Cape Cod Modern House Trust (CCMHT) was founded to collect, archive, and share documentation of the Outer Cape’s exceptional modern architecture, restore a group of important, endangered modern houses, and relaunch those houses as platforms for new creative work.

A grassroots effort to save Cape Cod's modernist houses led to the incorporation of the Cape Cod Modern House Trust in 2007. CCMHT is the only nonprofit organization devoted to saving and preserving historically-significant modern houses on the outer Cape. They aim to ensure that the rich legacy is safeguarded and accessible.

This project would represent CCMHT’s first acquisition. Currently, they lease the other four properties from the Cape Cod National Seashore (National Parks Service)

“The unprecedented opportunity to acquire Marcel Breuer's Wellfleet house will allow the CCMHT to expand our scholarship, preservation, and education programming while helping train the next generation of preservationists. We are also thrilled to preserve the land abutting the headwaters of the Herring River, another major restoration project.”

Jenny Monick, Board President, Cape Cod Modern House Trust

For more details about this project please see <https://ccmht.org/breuerhouseproject>

For more information about Cape Cod Modernism please see the book *Cape Cod Modern* by Peter McMahon with Christine Cipriani, (2014, Metropolis Books) winner of the Historic New England Book Prize, 2015.

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