

# The best house museums in the U.S., mapped

 [curbed.com/maps/glass-house-museum-historic-preservation-fallingwater](https://www.curbed.com/maps/glass-house-museum-historic-preservation-fallingwater)

6/26/2017

## From Gilded Age mansions to daring Modernist experiments, these are residential masterpieces that resonate

by [Patrick Sisson](#) Jun 26, 2017, 2:38pm EDT

---

Visitors to Frank Lloyd Wright's architectural masterpiece Fallingwater, the summer home commissioned by Pittsburgh department store owner Edgar Kaufmann in 1938, tour the home on in May 1999.

*AP Photo/Gene J. Puskar*

At Curbed, we're obsessed with superlative homes and groundbreaking domestic design, architecture that not only features exceptional living spaces but in some cases, looks to define new ways of living. There's no shortage of noteworthy homes across the country, spanning different styles, regions, and eras. But for our nationwide map of exceptional home museums—listed from west to east, without any thought of rank—we looked with a wider lens and created a list of landmarks, all open to the public, that have made a significant impact.

Our criteria balances architectural importance, aesthetic beauty and cultural relevance, looking to create a mix of old a new across the country. As always, if we missed something, please let us know in the comments.

*Update: A previous version of this map included LA's Sheats-Goldstein House, designed by John Lautner. While this house is indeed [one of our favorite residential marvels](#) in the United States, it is not presently open to the public for tours.*

### 1 Hearst Castle

The inspiration for Xanadu in Orson Welles's classic film Citizen Kane, William Randolph Hearst's castle in San Simeon was built on family land where he would take camping trips as a child. Architect Julia Morgan designed the ranch and hilltop estate based on the newspaper tycoon's eclectic tastes, including Spanish themes. "La Cuesta Encantada" ("The Enchanted Hill") became a sprawling enterprise, complete with the nation's largest private zoo, a movie theater, the Neptune Pool (which contained the façade of a Roman temple Hearst imported from Europe) and a private power plant. A perfectionist, Hearst often ordered different sections to be redesigned and rebuilt; Morgan started pitching ideas in 1915, but the project still was incomplete by the time Hearst died in 1951.

---

Hearst Castle

*Creative Commons Image by Bri*

750 Hearst Castle Rd  
San Simeon, CA 93452

- [Visit website](#)
- [Directions](#)

### 2 Eames House

Anybody convinced that modern design means cold edges and a stark palette need only peek inside the exuberant home Ray and Charles Eames designed for themselves in 1949. Commissioned as part of *Art & Architecture* magazine's Case Study program and placed amid a eucalyptus grove in the Pacific Palisades, the prefab exterior, a Mondrian-like assembly of off-the-shelf parts—colorful panels, glass, and steel—conceals a playful and living room. The inspiring, oft-photographed space, an artful array of toys, tchotchkes, and furniture reassembled piece-by-piece as part of the epic “California Design” exhibit, embodies the couple’s imaginative and all-encompassing design philosophy.

---

Eames House  
*Carol Highsmith/Library of Congress*

203 Chautauqua Blvd  
Pacific Palisades, CA 90272

- [Visit website](#)
- [Directions](#)

### 3 Schindler House

A radical departure from architectural convention at the time it was built in 1922, R.M. Schindler’s experiment in shared space, separated by sliding glass panels, came from an unlikely inspiration: a vacation village at Yosemite National Park. The layout of those shared campsites gave Schindler the idea of creating a live-work space appropriate for two families, a pair of L-shaped apartments with two studios and a utility room apiece. While it may not look it from the road, the home’s then-unique blurring of interior and exterior created a precedent. Also known as the Schindler Chace House, since his friend Clyde Chace and his wife were the first family to share the home with Schindler (Richard Neutra was next), this unique building was a early Modernist classic, and is now the headquarters for the MAK Center for Art & Architecture.

---

Schindler House

835 N Kings Rd  
West Hollywood, CA 90069

- [Visit website](#)
- [Directions](#)

### 4 Hollyhock House

[Finally restored](#) to its true ‘20s glamour, Frank Lloyd Wright’s most stunning work in California was based in part around oil heiress Aline Barnsdall’s favorite flower, found sprouting in the central courtyard and etched into the home, via abstract motifs the appear throughout. In many ways, this Mayan revival home, an elaborate stucco residence perched on a 36-acre hilltop site, planted the seed of California Modernism, according to curator Jeffrey Herr. Filled with Japanese influences and Wright-designed furniture, the centerpiece is the elaborate fireplace, which some believe is an abstract representation of Barnsdall as an Indian Princess.

---

Hollyhock House  
*Elizabeth Daniels*

4800 Hollywood Blvd  
Los Angeles, CA 90027

- [Visit website](#)
- [Directions](#)

## 5 The Gamble House

A lot of weighty associations are attached to this airy Pasadena home and its gabled roofs: it's the finest surviving example of architectural duo [Greene and Greene's work](#), an exemplary California bungalow, and a high point of the Arts and Crafts movement. But its romantic silhouettes, Japanese influences, and exemplary woodwork also point to an early example of Southern California cool, a thoroughly modern attempt to create a building wedded to the climate (note the numerous sleeping porches). Commissioned by David Gamble, an heir to the Procter & Gamble fortune, and designed in 1908, the summer home has become one of L.A.'s most-loved residences.

---

The Gamble House  
*Creative Commons image by ehpien*

4 Westmoreland Pl  
Pasadena, CA 91103

- [Visit website](#)
- [Directions](#)

## 6 Taliesin West

Originally designed and built in 1937 as a reflection of the desert landscape (petroglyphs discovered onsite formed a basis for a motif found throughout), Frank Lloyd Wright's winter camp for the Taliesin Fellowship offers a striking model of his philosophy, and functions as the home of the foundation that protects his legacy. This was a workshop for Wright, both a center for instruction and a constantly evolving creation (after returning each summer, he would quickly circle the site, hammer in hand). At the very beginning stages of a large-scale restoration effort, this is one of the 10 Wright projects nominated for UNESCO World Heritage recognition, along with the original Taliesin in Spring Green, Wisconsin.

---

Taliesin West  
*Images by Andrew Pielage via Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation*

12621 N Frank Lloyd Wright Blvd  
Scottsdale, AZ 85259

- [Visit website](#)
- [Directions](#)

## 7 Judd Foundation

The Judd Foundation spaces in Marfa, Texas, may appear more museum than home, especially considering the numerous studios and architecture offices spread among the sprawling town centered on a former Army base turned art mecca (don't forget the famous middle-of-nowhere Prada store courtesy Ballroom Marfa). But the private residence of Donald Judd, set inside La Mansana de Chinati, or The Block, a former Quartermaster Corps office turned city block-sized development, is an adobe walled-home complete with a garden and Judd-designed furniture. Set within the larger complex, which provides unheard-of space to artists, the home suggests not merely a sense of freedom and Southwestern flourishes. Taken as part of a larger vision, Judd's home and studios represents a different model of art, creative practice, and large-scale installations.

---

The Art Studio, Marfa, TX Image © Judd Foundation Licensed by VAGA  
*The Art Studio, Marfa, TX. Image © Judd Foundation. Licensed by VAGA*

104 Highland St  
Marfa, TX 79843

- [Visit website](#)
- [Directions](#)

## 8 Whitney Plantation

While there certainly are grander, more opulent plantation homes across the South, it's hard to imagine one that offers both architectural history and a true reckoning of what these buildings represented to those who toiled in the nearby fields. The centerpiece of the first museum in the United States dedicated to telling the story of slavery, the architecturally significant grand French Creole mansion on the grounds, seems meant to be glimpsed at from inside the recreated slave jail. The home sits amid a collection of slave cabins, artwork, and a granite memorial etched with the names of 107,000 slaves who were forcibly brought to the state before 1820. Since re-opening in 2014, this plantation has stood apart from other such buildings on River Road.

---

Whitney Plantation  
*Creative Commons Image by Corey Balazowich*

5099 LA-18  
Edgard, LA 70049

- [Visit website](#)
- [Directions](#)

## 9 Farnsworth House

"The essentials for living are floor and roof. Everything else is proportion and nature." Modernist figurehead [Ludwig Mies van der Rohe](#) certainly focus on the essentials with this raised, glass-encased weekend retreat for Chicago Doctor Edith Farnsworth. Finished in 1951 despite a falling out with the client, this monument to minimalism would become a huge influence, both to other architects (Philip Johnson saw early sketches of the project before designing the Glass House) and Mies himself (the beginnings of Crown Hall can be found here). Set upon steel columns meant to lift the home above regular floodwaters—which have occasionally risen above the floor—the home appears to hover above the site. The extreme openness that comes with being surrounded by glass walls is modulated by the private nature of the site and surrounding woods, giving the seemingly exposed structure a sense of sanctuary and serenity.

---

Farnsworth House

*Creative Commons Image by jalbertgagnier*

14520 River Rd  
Plano, IL 60545

- [Visit website](#)
- [Directions](#)

## 10 John J. Glessner House

Sullivan, van der Rohe, Wright: All iconic designers who made Chicago an international center for architecture, and all admirers of this historic landmark in the city's elite Prairie Avenue District. Architect Henry Hobson Richardson's most notable creation and final work, a severe looking, castle-like structure finished in 1887, conceals a revolutionary layout. Recognizing that construction advances meant thinner, stronger walls and a new relationship between form and function, Richardson pushed exterior walls to the edge of the property and planted a vast private courtyard in the center of the lot, allowing for a private, light-filled urban residence. The home became a prototype of urban design, signifying a decidedly modern shift in building layouts, and conceals a magnificently appointed interior

---

*William Zbaren*

1800 S Prairie Ave  
Chicago, IL 60616

- [Visit website](#)
- [Directions](#)

## 11 Miller House

The work of many of the leading lights of Modernism come together at this glass-walled Midwestern home: architect Eero Saarinen, interior designer Alexander Gerard, landscape architect Dan Kiley, and owner, industrialist and philanthropist J. Irwin Miller, whose vision turned Columbus, Indiana, into an architectural "Athens of the Prairie." The streamlined exterior and 10-acre lawn, featuring two rows of honey locust tree, just hints at the colorful, open interior, accents with Gerard's playful patterns and an iconic sunken [conversation pit](#).

---

Miller House

*Balthazar Korab/Library of Congress*

506 5th St  
Columbus, IN 47201

- [Visit website](#)
- [Directions](#)

## 12 Alden Dow House

A scion of the Dow Chemical Company founder, Alden Dow made a name for himself with beautiful, naturalistic

architecture, designing with the motto “gardens never end and buildings never begin” in mind. His own home, studio and garden, built in the hometown of his father’s firm during the ‘30s, lives on as perhaps his finest work, a fusion of Wright-inspired Prairie principles (Dow spent a year at Taliesin) and his own material and geometric experimentation. Viewed from across the pond—which wraps around his artfully sunken conference room—the home’s slanted green copper roof and white “Unit Block” walls, formed from residue from the Dow Chemical plant, offers a sweeping example of organic design.

---

Alden B. Dow House

*Creative Commons Image by Bryan Robb*

315 Post St  
Midland, MI 48640

- [Visit website](#)
- [Directions](#)

### 13 Saarinen House

Eliel Saarinen’s greatest creation may have been the freewheeling curriculum at the [Cranbrook Academy of Fine Arts](#) in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, which gave a generation of designers such as the Eames, Florence Knoll, and his own son Eero the freedom to explore and experiment. But the storybook campus he designed is certainly a close second. In the midst of 225 acres of land bordering the River Rouge and Kingswood Lake, he created a series of residences and educational facilities, including the home on Academy Lane he shared with his wife Loja and Eero. As befitting Saarinen’s belief in a total work of art, the home, a blend of Art Deco and Arts and Crafts styles, features Eliel’s furniture, Loja’s textiles, and early furniture designed by their son. The dining room, a layered series of circles, squares, and octagons accented with traditional wall hangings, exudes hidden details (the rug’s octagonal pattern recalled snow drifts on the similarly shaped tiles outside). This level of precision earned Saarinen’s entire campus plan exceptional praise at the time as an “educational and cultural center of unusual beauty.”

---

Saarinen House

39221 Woodward Ave  
Bloomfield Hills, MI 48304

- [Visit website](#)
- [Directions](#)

### 14 Ringling Mansion (Ca’ d’Zan)

Built during the height of the ‘20s boom, this Venetian-style home in Sarasota was the Ringling family’s tribute to Venice (the name itself means “House of John”). Circus owner John Ringling and his wife Mable commissioned this stunning waterfront home, based in part on Doge’s Palace and other locations they had discovered during extensive overseas travel, for \$1.6 million, covering it in terra cotta and roof tiles imported from Spain. While the lavish and colorful 36,000-square-foot home was a haunt for celebrities—a crystal chandelier from the original Waldorf-Astoria hangs inside—it fell into disrepair, at one point standing in for Miss Havisham’s home in a remake of *Great Expectations*. It’s since been reopened to the public after a \$15 million renovation project.

---

Ringling Mansion

*Creative Commons Image by Roger W*

5401 Bay Shore Rd  
Sarasota, FL 34243

- [Visit website](#)
- [Directions](#)

## 15 Biltmore Estate

At the largest private residence ever built in the United States, superlatives abound. George Washington Vanderbilt II spared no expense at his 125,000-acre estate in Asheville, North Carolina, which features the work of celebrated architect Richard Morris Hunt and landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted. Said to be modeled after three historic French chateaus in the Loire Valley, the sprawling estate may appear to be modeled after all of them, since the combined living space inside the numerous buildings totals 178,926 square feet (roughly four acres). To construct the home, a project which lasted from 1889 to 1896, a brick kiln and woodworking factory were built on site. The four-story home, divided into two wings, offers commanding views of the Blue Ridge Mountains as well as a vast collection of incredible statues, artwork and architectural eye candy, including a 70,000-gallon indoor pool, bowling alley, winter garden, 1,700-pound chandelier and a magnificent limestone staircase. Designated a national historic landmark in 1964, it's currently a major tourist attraction and draws nearly a million visitors annually.

---

Biltmore Estate

*Creative Commons Image by Jennifer Boyer*

1 Lodge St  
Asheville, NC 28803

- [Visit website](#)
- [Directions](#)

## 16 Vizcaya

Placed amid 180 acres of mangrove swamp and tropical forest, the "Hearst Castle of the East" is noteworthy for adapting Mediterranean and European architectural styles to the balmy Florida coast (the name references a northern Spanish province). French and Italian styles are reflected in the garden and façade, designed by Colombian Diego Suarez and F. Burrall Hoffman, respectively. Owner James Deering, who derived his fortune from being an executive at the family business, Deering McCormick-International Harvester, even created his own crest of sorts for the estate, a caravel, a type of Spanish ship. The home reportedly cost \$26 million to build in 1916 and employed 1,000 workers.

---

Vizcaya

3251 S Miami Ave  
Miami, FL 33129

- [Visit website](#)
- [Directions](#)

## 17 Fallingwater

As Donald Hoffman notes in his book about this iconic home's history, numerous streams run down the Appalachians throughout Western Pennsylvania, but Bear Run, the one ingeniously channeled through Frank Lloyd Wright's magnificent Fallingwater, probably has the real claim to fame. The waterway's steep drop on an elevated piece of woodland property owned by Edgar and Liliame Kaufmann, forms the dramatic nexus of Wright's most famous example of organic architecture, a home of interlocking, cantilevered concrete terraces designed in 1935 and arranged so that a waterfall runs through it. This might be the most famous home on the list, but despite all the accolades, photos, and features, there's still something remarkable about hearing rushing water in the middle of a living room.

---

### Fallingwater Lead

1491 Mill Run Rd  
Mill Run, PA 15464

- [Visit website](#)
- [Directions](#)

## 18 Darwin D. Martin House

Sibling rivalry may have played a small part in the decision of Buffalo businessman Darwin D. Martin, who worked for the Larkin Soap Company, to hire Frank Lloyd Wright to create his home, a Prairie-style icon that would be among the architect's best works. After his brother, William, had Wright design him a home in Oak Park, Darwin brought Wright out to western New York and commissioned a [complex of buildings](#), including the lengthy, open-plan main residence, one of the largest of its type ever built (Martin supposedly granted Wright an unlimited budget). Currently undergoing the finishing touches of a huge renovation, the main house and adjacent buildings feature a wealth of Wright-designed art glass, which casts jewel-like tones across this residential masterpiece.

---

### *Darwin-Martin House*

125 Jewett Pkwy  
Buffalo, NY 14214

- [Visit website](#)
- [Directions](#)

## 19 Monticello

No disrespect to the White House, but Thomas Jefferson's "Little Mountain" offers a pinnacle of presidential architecture. The Piedmont villa, designed with Palladian principles in mind, was the statesman's own creation, a fusion of classical elements, European style, and his own design solutions that served as the centerpiece of his large plantation. A restless thinker, Jefferson constantly tinkered with and redesigned his final home, adding personal touches such as an octagonal dome and vast library.

---

### Monticello

931 Thomas Jefferson Pkwy  
Charlottesville, VA 22902

- [Visit website](#)
- [Directions](#)

## 20 Mount Vernon

While it was actually named after an English military figure, Vice Admiral Edward Vernon, this eccentric example of period architecture is quintessentially American. Located less than 15 miles from the nation's capital on a stretch of Fairfax County near the Potomac River, the plantation home of George Washington is a symbol of the gentleman planter, founding father, and slave owner, as well as his own lifelong interest in architecture. Washington oversaw numerous renovations of his home throughout his life—his idea for a two-story piazza was widely copied—and the resulting historic attraction is a grab bag of Palladian, Classical, and Colonial influences.

---

*Creative Commons Image by Christopher Bowns*

3200 Mount Vernon Memorial Hwy  
Mt Vernon, VA 22121

- [Visit website](#)
- [Directions](#)

## 21 Winterthur

While it was funded by the fortunes of a chemical company, Winterthur stands as a paean to handcrafts and horticulture. Originally a modest 12-room Greek revival manor in the Brandywine Valley, Winterthur became the homestead of the Du Pont family, expanded over the decades as the family's business and fortunes multiplied. Its most notable resident and renovator was Henry Francis du Pont, who took responsibility for the estate in 1914 and transformed it into a sprawling, 175-room center for his passions: art, agriculture, and American furniture and decorative arts. He collected so much, in fact, that he eventually turned Winterthur into a museum that opened to the public in 1951.

---

Winterthur  
*Wikimedia Commons*

5105 Kennett Pike  
Wilmington, DE 19807

- [Visit website](#)
- [Directions](#)

## 22 Manitoga

Midcentury designer [Russel Wright](#), best known for his American Modern line of ceramic dinnerware and influential *Guide to Easier Living* book, carved this mountain sanctuary and home studio from an old granite quarry. Set above

a pond and nicknamed Dragon Rock, the home shows Wright, a former set designer, expertly staging a meeting of man and nature, with a low-slung, Japanese-inspired exterior blending into the granite cliffs and surrounding woodlands. Inside, Wright's mastery of materials is on full display, with sliding doors made of pressed ferns and butterflies and a ceiling embedded with pine needles. It's no surprise this was the first home featured in *Life* magazine upon its completion in 1961.

---

Manitoga

584 NY-9D  
Garrison, NY 10524

- [Visit website](#)
- [Directions](#)

## 23 Lyndhurst

A towering stone castle built along the Hudson River, this limestone manse and country house once owned by robber baron Jay Gould exudes a romantic character, owing in part to its asymmetrical design and steep, Medieval roof, ornamented with rows of crenellations and turrets. Originally designed by Alexander Jackson Davis in 1838, the home was expanded over the decades, eventually given a striking garden with rolling hills and a steel-framed conservatory. Filled with English accents and Tiffany windows, it's one of the finest examples of Gothic Revival in the country.

---

Lyndhurst.

*Flickr/Creative Commons by Mel Peffs*

635 S Broadway  
Tarrytown, NY 10591

- [Visit website](#)
- [Directions](#)

## 24 Glass House

"I have very expensive wallpaper," quipped [Philip Johnson](#), the creator of this deceptively simple, 56-foot-long glass enclosure in Connecticut that has become shorthand for contemporary architecture. In many ways an apex of the modern architectural thought that came before it, from German Glass House pavilions and modernist theory to Mies van der Rohe's planar layout for the Farnsworth House, Johnson's relatively simple dwelling, finished in 1949, created a revelation over its promotion of concepts we take for granted today, such as glass curtain walls and open plan living. The recently refurbished [sculpture gallery](#), one of many additional buildings on site, is another great draw.

---

Glass House

*Creative Commons/Thomas Nemeskeri*

199 Elm St  
New Canaan, CT 06840

- [Visit website](#)
- [Directions](#)

## 25 Oheka Castle

Considered an exemplar of Gilded Age excess—on pristine grounds designed by the Olmstead Brothers, owner Otto Kahn would hold annual Easter Egg hunts featuring gold eggs concealing thousand-dollar bills—this is a truly Gatsbyesque manse on Long Island’s Gold Coast, situated on the highest point overlooking Cold Spring Harbor. Kahn, a wealthy financier, commissioned the duo of Delano and Aldrich to build this steel-and-concrete estate after his previous home was ruined in a fire. They responded with a 137-room paean to European architecture, a summer home that would have cost roughly \$110 million in today’s money. Falling into disrepair after Kahn’s death, Oheka has cycled through a number of owners and failed renovations, and now operates as an historic hotel.

---

Oheka Castle

*Image via Wikimedia Commons*

135 W Gate Dr  
Huntington, NY 11743

- [Visit website](#)
- [Directions](#)

## 26 Gropius House

Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius put his principles to practice when designing this home for his family in 1938, after he was offered a teaching post at Harvard. The German architect simply considered it his take on regional design, complete with a brick and clapboard facade. But, of course, one of the first International Style homes in the United States was far from what you’d expect from a standard New England neighbor (one of whom referred to the influential design as a “chicken coop”). The home’s stark, white exterior and unique material composition, including glass block and chrome banisters, offered a radical blend of the old and new, turning a post and beam frame home into a modernist statement. Designed in concert with Marcel Breuer, it is, according to Gropius student I. M. Pei, his teacher’s “definitive statement of domestic architecture.” Now a National Landmark, the home contains one of the largest collection of Bauhaus furniture outside of Europe.

---

Gropius House

*Library of Congress*

68 Baker Bridge Rd  
Lincoln, MA 01773

- [Visit website](#)
- [Directions](#)

## 27 The Breakers

It’s revealing that when Cornelius Vanderbilt II set out to build a summer cottage in Rhode Island in 1885, he ended up commissioning a 70-room Italian Renaissance-style palazzo that stands as one of the grandest in a string of

extravagant Newport Estates. The Vanderbilt summer home, designed by [Richard Morris Hunt](#), stands as an exemplary Beaux Arts creation, featuring imported marble (including a blue marble fireplace), rare wood and a massive central hall. Hunt used the Renaissance palaces of Genoa as his model for the mansion, which contains a series of open-air terraces looking out at the ocean.

---

The Breakers

*Creative Commons image by Heather and Matt*

44 Ochre Point Ave  
Newport, RI 02840

- [Visit website](#)
- [Directions](#)

© 2017 [Vox Media, Inc.](#) All rights reserved.