Strategies for Saving National Treasures
Pond Farm, founded in Guerneville, California, in the 1930s by Gordon and Jane Herr, was originally conceived as an artist colony with a faculty composed primarily of artisans forced to flee Nazi Europe. Envisioned by Gordon Herr as a “sustainable sanctuary for artists away from a world gone amuck,” Pond Farm evolved into the Pond Farm Pottery school of ceramic arts under the leadership of Marguerite Wildenhain, an internationally renowned female pioneer in ceramics and ceramics education and a central figure in the studio pottery movement and the emergence of ceramics as an important art form.

Wildenhain, an early Bauhaus graduate and Germany’s first female “Master Potter,” was forced to leave her teaching post because of her Jewish ancestry when the National Socialists came to power in 1933. After initially immigrating to the Netherlands, she was forced to once more flee the Nazis in 1940, eventually making her way to Pond Farm in 1942. The site—including a 19th-century livestock barn converted into a ceramics studio and showroom, Marguerite’s modest home, a guest cottage, and cultivated landscape—served for half a century as an important gathering place for artists, students and visionaries to explore art-making, design and critical theory about education and the environment.

Owned by the California State Department of Parks and Recreation since 1964 and part of the Austin Creek State Recreation Area, the Pond Farm site has been closed to the public and minimally maintained in a state of “arrested decay” since Marguerite’s death in 1985. In 2012 the National Trust named Pond Farm a National Treasure and joined forces with the Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods, the California State Parks Foundation, and the California Department of Parks and Recreation to transform Pond Farm into a preserved, well-maintained and engaging...
Located in Sonoma County, California, Pond Farm was the home and studio of Marguerite Wildenhain, an internationally renowned female pioneer in ceramics and ceramics education. Pictured here is the barn that she used as her pottery studio.

historic site with strong community support and a sustainable management plan.

While Pond Farm is situated in a state park and its legacy is steeped in its unique Northern California setting, its significance extends well beyond its local associations. The Pond Farm Pottery Historic District was recently listed in the National Register for its national significance in the areas of art, education, and social history. Pond Farm holds a compelling place in the history of art and arts education, women’s history, Jewish history, and sustainable living, and above all it embodies a universal story of triumph in the face of adversity.

In addition to seeking capital investments in site stabilization, the partners are exploring the creation of a small-scale artist residency program along with other arts programming that will engage the public and share the story of Pond Farm.

It is in this context that the Alliance of Artists Communities—an international association of artist residency centers—was recently asked by the National Trust to explore how the arts and artist residency programs can offer a path forward in re-envisioning historic sites.

WHAT ARE ARTIST RESIDENCIES?
Over a century ago, the first artist colonies in the United States were created as places where artists gathered to devote them-
selves wholly to their art, typically seeking seclusion, a bucolic natural landscape, and the fellowship of like-minded individuals.

Today there are more than 1,500 artist residency centers around the globe, defined as places that provide dedicated time and space to artists of any discipline for the development of new creative work. While artist residency centers take many shapes, they are all guided by the conviction that supporting individuals in the creation of new work and the exploration of new ideas is essential to human progress.

Beyond sharing this core value, there are countless residency models. There are programs for one or two artists at a time or 50 creative fellows; programs that focus on a single discipline or bring together visual artists, writers, composers, choreographers, filmmakers, scholars and others; environments designed around solitude and those fostering collaboration and exchange. There are residencies in urban warehouses, in rustic castles, in old army barracks; on crowded urban streets and palm-tree studded beaches; in vacant storefronts, modern factories, and ancient monasteries. Some provide state-of-the-art facilities while others are Spartan—a bed, a chair, a room of one’s own. There are residencies that keep the public at arm’s length and those that welcome the community into the creative process. Some give artists the opportunity for a brief period of intense work for a week or two; others offer them months or years to invest in creative development. More artist residency programs are being created every year.

**HOW DO ARTIST RESIDENCIES OPERATE?**

There is no one-size-fits-all organizational model for artist residencies. While traditional artist colonies have functioned as stand-alone operations primarily for the purpose of providing residencies, more and more residency programs are integrated within other institutions—cultural centers, museums, universities, parks, research centers, commercial industries, and even hotels. Such a variety of models offers artists a diverse set of opportunities for working and engaging with a new community, and allows institutions to develop programming that is appropriate to their location, scale, approach and values.
The growing shift from stand-alone artist residency centers to those operating within a broader organizational context is, in part, a reflection of current financial realities. Residencies are generally defined by a focus on creative development not tied to specific outcomes. As such, there are few earned revenue sources for artist residencies, and programs that are not buffered by the support of a larger institution have long struggled financially. The tangible products of a residency—the films and paintings, plays and dances, books and music, and other things that may be programmed and monetized—often emerge months or years later, while many results are never tangible at all.

Artists-in-residence may be asked to teach a workshop or offer classes for which the host organization can charge tuition, but the nature of a residency requires time spent creating and exploring free from other expectations, and this often limits participation in fee-based programs of a sufficient scale to subsidize the costs of the residency itself. But while there are few earned revenue sources associated with these residency programs, many have developed a strong network of contributors supporting their work, and indeed the grantmaking community is increasingly interested in artist residencies. Such funders recognize how artist residency programs benefit society by engaging the public in an artist’s creative process, offering a new vantage point from which to see a place or an idea, and celebrating art-making at its source.

**HOW ARE ARTIST RESIDENCIES EVOLVING?**

If the early artist colonies often had a monastic quality, many of today’s communities can be thought of as research-and-development labs for the arts. It’s easy to think of artist residencies as places of escape, but artist residencies are as much about advancing as retreating, about what artists are being drawn to even more than what they are drawn away from.

Pond Farm was the site of Pond Farm Workshops, an artists colony conceived during World War II by a San Francisco couple who wanted to create a sanctuary for European artists. The ongoing funding crisis for California State Parks poses a direct threat to Pond Farm’s survival.

The ongoing funding crisis for California State Parks poses a direct threat to Pond Farm’s survival.
While the basic notion of providing artists with time and space in an environment designed to encourage creative work has remained constant, three particular trends are shaping the field of artist residencies significantly today.

First, artist residencies are increasingly involved in the intersections of art, science and the environment. Not only are artists more engaged in such work on their own, but they are also seeking opportunities to explore ecological concerns and develop work in collaboration with scientists, environmentalists, resource managers and others that addresses some of the most challenging issues of our time. Residency programs that have a strong commitment to ecology and place can offer a rare opportunity for cross-sector exchange in an intimate setting where individuals are closely connected to a site.

Second, more artist residencies are responding to the interests of artists whose work is tied to engaging the public. While traditional residency programs have focused on supporting the work of solitary studio-based artists, more artists today are involved in community-based art-making or expanding the way they develop and share their creative practice with the public. This offers residency programs unique opportunities to not just share an artist’s finished work with the public but also to illuminate that work to others and draw the public into the creative process.

Lastly, artist residencies are increasingly interested in the relevance of place. Wake to the sound of coyotes in the Santa Cruz Mountains at Djerassi Resident Artists Program; read the names of Thornton Wilder, Aaron Copland and Alice Walker on the walls of The MacDowell Colony; get lost along the boardwalks connecting Atlantic Center for the Arts’ studios in the old Florida forest; take on some of today’s most critical urban challenges at McColl Center for Art + Innovation in the heart of Charlotte, North Carolina; board the Arctic Circle’s research ship for three weeks of collaboration and exploration between artists and scientists near the North Pole; or step into the majestic studio of Daniel Chester French in the New England countryside and you can’t help but be shaped by place.
Aaron Copland's home in Cortlandt Manor, New York, where the composer lived and worked for the last 30 years of his life, is maintained as a historic site as well as an artist residency center. The National Historic Landmark was designated an Official Project of Save America's Treasures, and the home and studio include many of Copland’s books, furnishings, and memorabilia. Volunteer gardeners maintain the grounds, removing invasive species and planting native ones that are in harmony with the property, and maintaining some of Copland's favorite plants as an ongoing homage to the composer.

Intended as a living tribute and active workplace, Copland House is operated in a way that is designed to be an extension of the composer's values rather than a shrine to the artist himself. The residency program hosts one emerging or mid-career composer at a time to live and work at Copland House for three to eight weeks, and residents may offer intimate presentations exploring the creative process.

When composers are not in residence, Copland House occasionally hosts small concerts, open houses or other gatherings in keeping with the intimate nature of the site, and welcomes school and community groups for tours and educational programs. Off site, Copland House also provides educational programs in regional schools, produces a music performance series through a nearby partner venue, and promotes the work of its composers-in-residence and other American composers across the United States through concerts, broadcasts, and recordings by its resident Music from Copland House ensemble. By focusing on Aaron Copland’s legacy of generosity and advocacy for new generations of composers, Copland House has developed a vision that both embraces the history of a person and a place and also contributes to contemporary culture.
ARTIST RESIDENCIES AND HISTORIC SITES: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Along with interacting with and drawing insights from physical environments, artists-in-residence may also be affected by the history and context of the site and the surrounding community. While many residency centers continue to provide critical support for creative work that could essentially be done anywhere, other residency programs are increasingly exploring how to cultivate a stronger connection between the artists they host and the site itself.

For example, at the Anchorage Museum, in collaboration with the Institute of the North and the Rasmuson Foundation, the museum’s artist-in-residence program provides resources to support artists’ in-depth research and encourage the creation of new work that responds to complex issues of the Polar North. By hosting artists who are interested in exploring a particular place, making use of the site’s unique resources, and engaging in the local community, the Anchorage Museum not only offers renewing perspectives on the critical issues of Alaska but also expands the awareness of artists who then return to their own communities with a deeper understanding of a place and a desire to share that understanding with others.

Indeed, as more residency programs are being embedded within broader operational contexts, it is particularly important that we consider how to continue supporting artists in open-ended creative inquiry while also serving an institution’s public mission and engaging in important social themes. Historic properties come with a range of challenges—most significantly, covering the expense of upkeep of the property itself while assuring that its historic integrity is maintained and that historic regulations are adhered to. In addition, determining how best to honor people, places and histories is almost always subjective, and those most closely tied to a site frequently bring competing visions for the future.

The residency field offers a variety of models for preserving the legacy of historically significant people and places. There are dozens of examples of bringing new life to the stories and properties of prominent artists through artist-in-residence programs—including artist Mary Hambidge’s Hambidge Center for Creative
Arts & Sciences (Rabun Gap, Georgia); monumental sculptor Daniel Chester French’s home, studio and gardens at Chesterwood (Stockbridge, Massachusetts) that are being reimagined as an artist residency and art education center; the arts-and-crafts architect Howard Van Doren Shaw’s family home-turned-residency at Ragdale (Lake Forest, Illinois); Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site (Cornish, New Hampshire) that preserves the home, garden and studio of the sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens and invites sculptors-in-residence to create and demonstrate work to the public; and the newly launched Rauschenberg Residency (Captiva, Florida) in the former home and studio of artist Robert Rauschenberg.

In each case, a balance has been sought between faithfully preserving the history of a person and place and allowing the site to evolve through new uses and interpretations.

Artists can play a strong role in weaving together the history of a place with new perspectives and contemporary relevance. At Governor’s Island, for example, the residency program of the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council (LMCC) hosts artists in visual arts studios, performing arts rehearsal spaces, and a multidisciplinary exhibition space, to develop new work and engage visitors at the historic site. The artists’ work is frequently influenced by the history of the site, the stunning parkland, the water views, and the military architecture, and LMCC’s programming has brought expanding audiences to Governor’s Island to experience the site in new ways through the vision of artists.

At Treasure Hill Artist Village in Taiwan, an artist residency program is playing an even more active role in preserving a site. Originally an illegal settlement of military veterans of the Chinese
Civil War in the 1940s and threatened with demolition for decades, Treasure Hill has been called “the attic of Taipei carrying the memories, stories and traditions of the past generations.” Today Treasure Hill is the first neighborhood to be officially designated a historic community of Taipei and, with just 22 of the original families remaining in the settlement, Treasure Hill is working to sustain itself at the intersections of history, ecology and creativity. Bringing artists to live and work in Treasure Hill has been an essential part of this preservation and sustainability strategy, drawing visitors to the district to learn about the important history of the site, welcoming the public into previously unseen spaces that reflect a significant chapter in Taipei’s history, and engaging the community in dialogue about how we honor the past and create a meaningful future in the midst of vanishing histories and environmental fragility.

ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE AT STATE AND NATIONAL PARKS
Like many of these examples, Pond Farm is more than a historic site—it is also a public site, owned by the State of California and tied to the vision and values of the state parks. While juggling myriad priorities presents some challenges, artist residency programs operating within state and national parks also have extraordinary opportunities, as few private artist residencies have access to the environmental resources and expertise, existing educational programs, and diverse audiences that the parks do. By engaging the public in history, nature, community, and creativity, Pond Farm can offer new ways for the state park to fulfill its mission of providing for the inspiration and education of park visitors and protecting a critical natural and cultural resource.

Indeed, more than 50 national parks host artists-in-residence to offer opportunities for creative inspiration and provide the public with new approaches to site interpretation. From the Grand
Canyon, to Denali National Park in the remote Alaskan wilderness, to Ellis Island, artists are invited to live and work at the parks and share their vision of the site with the public. State and national park artists-in-residence play a critical role in supporting the interpretive mission of the parks by offering fresh ways of seeing and being inspired by the setting. For some artists there is an obvious connection between the site and their work, with the landscape making its way onto a canvas, or the sights and sounds of nature woven into a poem, or the ecological issues inherent to the site directly addressed through site-specific projects. But for many artists, a residency in a park manifests itself in more nuanced ways that may incorporate the natural world, the history of a place, the visitors and staff, and the American legacy of public spaces. Engaging with a park’s artist-in-residence who has been offered time to absorb the surroundings and explore new ideas can turn an otherwise passive visit into a moment of insight that alters the way we, the public, experience a place.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR POND FARM**

While there is no single, easy way to transform a historic site into a vibrant, sustainable resource, the arts offer opportunities to preserve Pond Farm’s original intended use as a place for artists to live and work, build public support for the legacy and history of Pond Farm, and engage new audiences with the contemporary relevance of the site. Pond Farm—as a place, a history, and a crucible of ideas—is widely significant and compelling, and the arts offer a path forward for Pond Farm’s future use and as a model for struggling historic sites across the country. Pond Farm was never intended as a shrine, but rather a vibrant home to ideas, curiosity and creative process. Bringing artists to engage with the site again can ensure the vision and the story of Pond Farm are not lost, provide rich interactions with park visitors and the broader community, and foster renewed support for this important national treasure. FJ

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