

Nathaniel Saltonstall (April 24, 1903 - November 13, 1968) was an architect and arts patron. He was a prominent Boston architect and first cousin of Sen. Leverett Saltonstall. A co-partner in the firm of Saltonstall & Morton, he had a wide span of interests in art and architecture, ranging from designing motels to advising Mrs. John F. Kennedy on White House paintings. Nathaniel Saltonstall designed the interior of the Napoleon Club (Napoleon's). Saltonstall also designed a number of architecturally significant houses on Cape Cod.

After attending Milton Academy and the Santa Barbara (Calif.) School, he graduated from Harvard College in 1928 and from the Mass. Institute of Technology School of Architecture in 1931. At Harvard, he was a member of the Spee Club and received a bachelor's degree in 1928, the same year that Walter Gropius toured the United States. The Harvard Society for Contemporary Art (HSCA) was founded in Cambridge the following year" ... for the purpose of holding displays of contemporary painting, sculpture, and decorative art that are frankly debatable, and would otherwise be difficult for people of greater Boston to see" (Harvard Crimson 1931). It was the first organization in the United States to display changing exhibits of recent art and held the first Bauhaus art exhibit in the country in 1930, before the landmark show at New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and MIT in 1931. Saltonstall witnessed both watershed exhibits, acquiring his master's degree in architecture from MIT in 1931. He served as the membership secretary for MoMA the following year.

Saltonstall worked for the firm of Little and Russell while completing his graduate education at MIT. He was an associate partner in Putnam & Cox & Saltonstall from 1931 to 1939, and a partner from 1939 to 1942. During his tenure there, Saltonstall met his future professional partner Oliver Perry Morton, and experimented with Modernism in the design of his own house at 70 Main Street, Medfield, Massachusetts.

In 1945, Saltonstall established the firm of Saltonstall & Morton with Oliver Perry Morton (died 1964). Oliver Morton's son, Peter Morton joined the firm as a partner briefly from 1953 to 1957, after working with Eero Saarinen and Associates (1949-1953). He subsequently gained employment with Marcel Breuer and Associates in New York (1957-1959) before establishing himself as a managing designer at TAC from 1959 until his retirement in 1985. Peter Morton's presence at the firm and personal relationship with its founders likely strengthened their affiliations with preeminent Modern architects Eero Saarinen and Marcel Breuer.

Saltonstall & Morton designed the Mayo Hill Colony Club in Wellfleet (1948-1949), an artists' retreat cooperative in a wooded setting that encompassed a cluster of modernist cottages and a communal gallery. Saltonstall served as president of The Mayo Hill Colony, Inc. beginning in 1949. Saltonstall designed the cluster of cottages

known as The Colony in 1949, which he operated as a retreat for artists, collectors, and patrons. The Colony and the Saltonstall-designed Wellfleet Art Gallery built on Route 6 around 1952, became an integral part of Wellfleet's art and social scene. Although Saltonstall conceived of and developed The Colony, he designed its 13 buildings in collaboration with his employees and other artists. The gallery building, near the street side of the complex features a raised relief wall by Xavier Gonzalez and the remainder of the complex incorporates landscape designs by Stanley Underhill and furnishings by Charles and Ray Eames and Hans Knoll.

Saltonstall acquired land in Wellfleet and construction began in 1948. The club first opened in 1949. The builder was Edward T. Whiting, and the landscape architect was Stanley Underhill. The first building constructed was the Gallery, located on Chequessett Neck Road. Cottages 1 - 6 were constructed next, along the western ridge of the property. Cottages 8, 9 and 10 were built later on the eastern hill and were designed 2 feet larger than the original 6 cottages. The Casserole Kitchen was constructed in 1950 to prepare casserole dishes, salads, and basic groceries for guests. Cottage 6 served as Saltonstall's summer residence during much of his ownership of the club. Saltonstall maintained ownership of the club until 1963, when it was sold to its current owner.

The designs were inspired by the Bauhaus designs from Europe - using new manufactured materials to make inexpensive yet elegant designs. The use of this material on the exterior was unique, according to Oliver Morton's son, Peter W. Morton. Peter W. Morton did some of the site plans and drawings for the Colony while he was an architecture student at Yale and shortly after he left in 1949. They also designed approximately 40 residences in the Truro and Wellfleet area. Saltonstall and the Mortons were linked to several of the best-known modern architects of the time, such as Eero Saarinen, Marcel Breuer, Olaf Hammerstrong and Walter Gropius. Saltonstall was the first of the group to work in Wellfleet, and likely introduced many of the others to the community. Marcel Breuer designed a residence near the Colony, and Peter Morton designed three homes behind the Colony. Eero Saarinen built a home in the eastern part of town, likely drawn to Wellfleet because of his connection with Peter Morton, who worked with Saarinen Architects for 4 years.

Other commissions included houses at 6, 10, and 16 Millbrook Road, Medfield (ca. 1941); the Solaray House, a prototype solar house at 86 Woodland Street, (South Natick (1946); exterior alterations to Locke-Ober Restaurant, Boston (1956); interior work at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (1958); the first Institute of Contemporary Art, 1175 Soldiers Field Road, Boston (1959-1960). Saltonstall was a founder of Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art, established in 1936 and known until 1948, when he began serving as a trustee, as the Institute of Modern Art.

Saltonstall was a member of Mrs. John F. Kennedy's Committee for the Permanent White House Collection for American Historical Art, vice president of the Skowhegan (Maine) School of Painting and Sculpture, served on the advisory council of the Friends of Art at Colby College, a member of the Art Collection Committee at M.I.T., and of the Visiting Committee at Wheaton College.

Saltonstall's other memberships included the Boston Society of Architects, Massachusetts State Assn. of Architects, National Council of the Architectural Registration Board, and the Harvard Club of Boston. Saltonstall acted as a trustee of The Boston Museum of Fine Arts and established the Nathaniel Saltonstall Arts Fund in 1959 to support cultural institutions through sales of art in his private collection.

The Kuhn House, 420 Griffin Island Road, Wellfleet, is a Bauhaus-inspired, Modern style vacation residence designed by Nathaniel Saltonstall in 1960 for Samuel and Minette Kuhn of New York City. The house is located within the boundaries of the Cape Cod National Seashore. It is expressed as a low, flat-roofed rectangular form defined by square recesses, projections, and interior spaces that are proportionately manipulated within a strict orthogonal grid. The exterior has a solid, grounded appearance achieved through the structure's placement close to grade on a concrete block foundation and the use of dark-colored, diagonally laid pine sheathing boards. The interior incorporates high-quality regional materials and elements of passive solar design. The property encompasses a Saltonstall-designed garage built concurrently with the house, which contributes to its historic and architectural significance. Samuel and Minette Kuhn stayed at architect Nathaniel Saltonstall's Mayo Hill Colony Club (The Colony) located on Chequesett Neck Road near the site of a late-nineteenth-century resort, in the 1950s around the time they decided to build their own vacation home nearby. Local builder Edward Whiting erected the house to Saltonstall's specifications in 1960 for use by the Kuhns during their retirement. Minette Kuhn and Nathaniel Saltonstall shared a passion for contemporary art, which may have enticed the Kuhns to use his architectural design services.

Saltonstall and Morton are recognized for their design of the Christian Herter Center art museum in Boston (1960), which served as a model for the design of the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. Among the firm's Massachusetts works are the Veterans Housing Development (Boston, 1948), St. Andrews Episcopal Church (Wellesley, 1949), Yankee Traveler Inn (Plymouth, 1950), and the Horizons motel (Truro, 1953).

Saltonstall's distinct characteristics are identifiable in The Colony and two other extant residences he designed on the Outer Cape; the Comfort House (1951), and the Yeston-Nossiter House (1959). Both houses are located on Griffin Island approximately one-half mile south of the Kuhn property and slightly more than one mile northwest of The Colony. A third residence located in Wellfleet, the Stuart

Harrod House, was destroyed by a fire. Each of the houses exhibit Saltonstall's low cubist forms, but The Colony buildings exaggerate the effect through the use of planar vertical walls that intersect with the horizontal overhanging roofs and full height glazing that fills the surface of each rectangular face. The Comfort house reiterates Saltonstall's affinity for passive solar design through expansive, southeast-facing glazed walls divided by prominent muntin grids; screened-in porches; and open-air walkways sheltered by brise soleil screens. Saltonstall's lifelong passion for modern art especially influenced the design of the Yeston-Nossiter house, in which he arranged geometric building sections with various height changes, setbacks, and glazed or open spaces. The interior doorways, wall cutouts, and fireplace are created from rectangular openings of varying sizes and orientations that present the space as a highly sculptural volume. The setting of the house features a concrete block retaining wall painted to resemble the De Stijl artwork of Piet Mondrian.

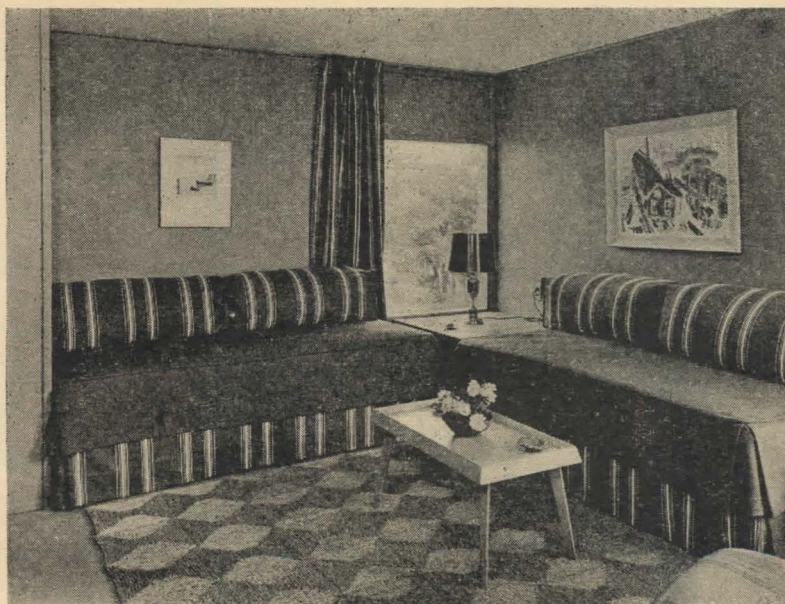
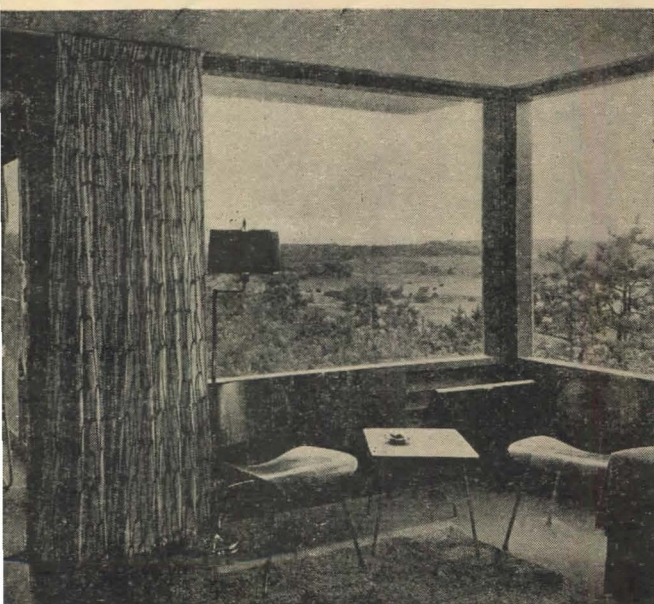
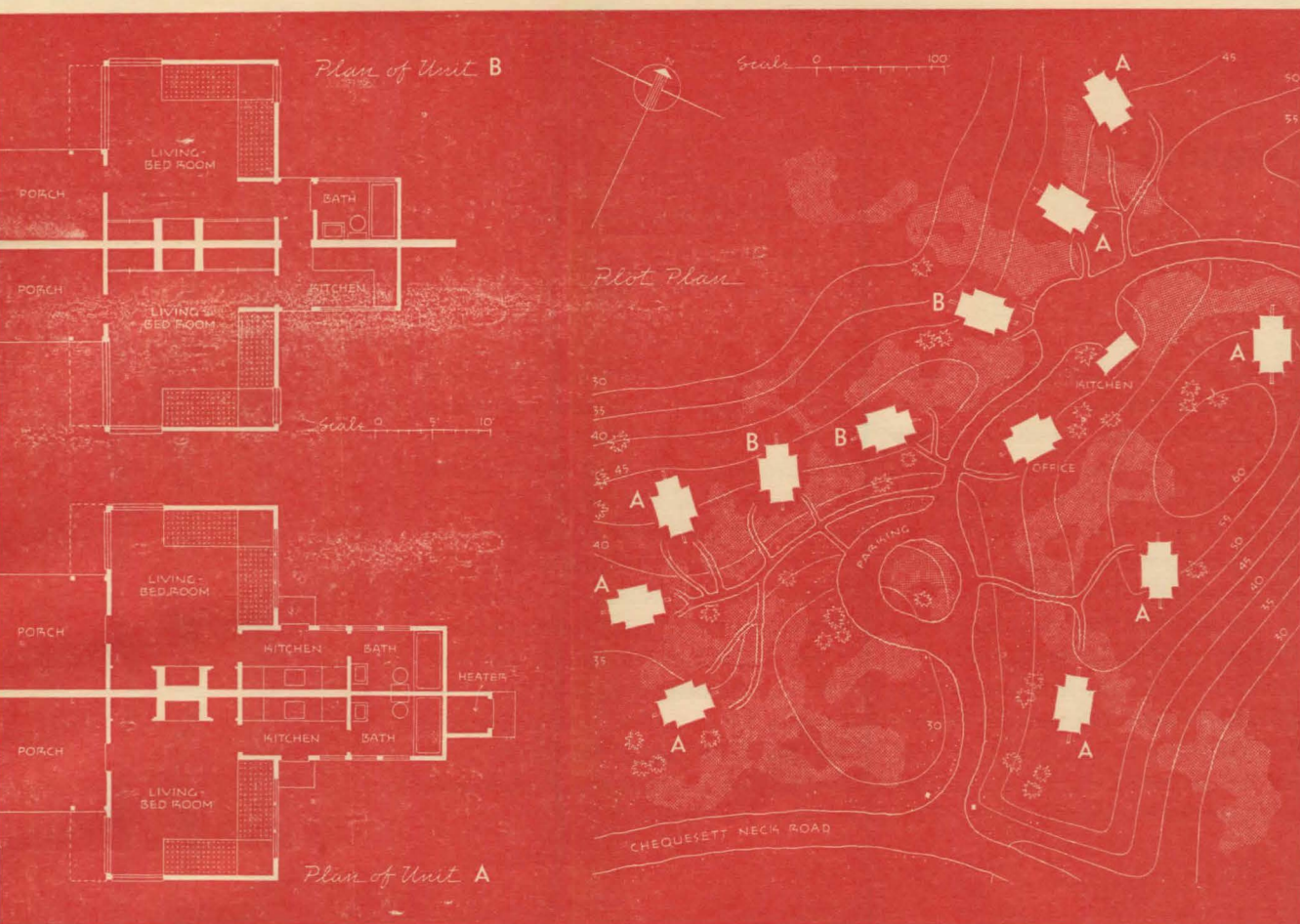


vacation motel

location	Wellfleet, Massachusetts
architects	Saltonstall & Morton
landscape architect	Stanley Underhill
builder	Edward T. Whiting

More than a motel and not quite an inn, this group is made up of a series of cottages, each with two housekeeping apartments; or, in the case of Type B, a unit that may be used to accommodate a family of four. Each unit has a living-bedroom, kitchen, bath, and porch. A separate unit houses a casserole kitchen where prepared casserole dishes, salads, and basic groceries are available. The group is not for the use of the passing motorist. Rather, the units are rented on a vacation basis, for a week or more. Extraordinary attractions include maid and porter service, firewood with fires laid each morning, and a first snack in the refrigerator on the tenants' arrival.

A program requirement was that the houses be spaced sufficiently to provide complete privacy. Fixed glazing and ventilation were selected, to minimize the need to check on the houses during weather or when tenants are away. A concrete-block wall divides each house into two apartments, physically and acoustically, and exterior extensions of these keep the porches private, as well. The houses are of frame, with waterproofing board on the exterior and insulating board as interior surface. They have gas refrigerators, stoves, and heaters. Prefabricated heat-distribution cores are part of the fireplace construction to increase heating efficiency.



At the typical corner window (above, left) drop panels below the glazing introduce ventilation via screened louvers. In one corner of a living-bedroom in a Type B house (above, right), the panel occurs above the window. Outside colors echo the surrounding countryside—sage green, dusty gray, beach plum; inside, each apartment has its own color scheme—and original watercolors and drawings.

Photos: Bishop & Scott