**CURIOSITIES: Branching Out**

**What it will be**, nobody exactly knows: neither the 50 volunteers who will have happily trudged for hours through muddy woodlands north of Boston to gather tractor-trailer loads of saplings—linden, beech, Norwegian maple, depending on what the thaw has yielded—nor the artist himself, Patrick Dougherty. Only during the three weeks spent laying out those saplings, planting some, and then bending, twisting, and weaving them all together do the final, fantastical forms emerge. Dougherty, who hails from North Carolina and earned degrees in English and hospital administration before pursuing art, has erected more than 250 such sapling-based structures across the country and around the world during the last three decades. Judging from these, what ends up on the lawn of the colonial-era Crowninshield-Bentley House in Salem, Massachusetts, on May 23, might feature turrets or Russian onion domes, or look like a condensed Moroccan palace. It could resemble a softer, sway-backed version of Stonehenge, a clump of medieval thatched huts, or skinny teepees pushed askew by the wind. Dougherty’s constructions tend to have doors and windows, but they are not homes. “Seussical” is too whimsical a description; the dreamscapes are more suited to a van Gogh landscape, or even *The Scream*. What might add another twist in Salem is whether, and how, Dougherty juxtaposes his installation with the symmetrical, squared-off Georgian-style home and its formal front entrance. Built by fish merchant and sea captain John Crowninshield in 1727, the house is a historic site now owned by the Peabody Essex Museum, which commissioned Dougherty’s work. Whatever the resulting forms, they are expected to stay up for two years—unless nature reclaims them first.

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Clockwise from above: *Sortie de Cave* (Free At Last) 2008, in Chateaubourg, France; *Summer Palace* 2009, in Philadelphia; Patrick Dougherty

1945. The firm would soon grow to take on many more who trained at Harvard, where Gropius and his Bauhaus colleague Marcel Breuer were influential forces for years. Many of these designers, Doran says, were drawn by Lexington’s proximity to Cambridge and the availability of inexpensive, open land.

The two original neighborhoods were quickly followed by others. Middle Ridge (1953) was developed by another Gropius student, Carl Koch ’34, M.Arch. ’37, who also designed the 1950s homes in the Conantum community, in Concord. (Thousands of his Techbuilt homes, assembled from prefabricated elements, also appeared across the country.) Peacock Farm (1953), Rumfield Road/Shaker Glen (1959-60), and Upper Turning Mill (1962-65) were based on designs by MIT-trained architects Walter Pierce and Danforth Compton.

Other custom-built modern homes and civic-minded enclaves still exist in Greater Boston—such as Kendall Common in Weston, Snake Hill in Belmont, and Brown’s Wood in Lincoln—and are dotted throughout New England. Their initial popularity coincided with the arrival of European designers and intellectuals who fled World War II, a nascent American push to modernism, and the postwar “building boom and optimism about design and technology’s roles in progress,” says Peter McMahon, founding director of the Cape Cod Modern House Trust, which has restored and now manages three homes in Wellfleet (www.ccmht.org).

As those houses have aged, he adds—with many already demolished and others under threat—local historical societies, preservation groups, and museums are increasingly apt to add modernism’s artifacts to their repertoires. Historic New England, for example, has long owned and managed the Gropius House in Lincoln, Massachusetts, where Friends of Modern Architecture/Lincoln helps preserve and promote the eclectic array of modern homes in town. On October 9, the Concord Museum mounts its own *Middlesex County Modernism* show (www.concordmuseum.org).

Of this surge in activity and interest, McMahon also notes, “Post-modernist structures have aged very badly, and nowadays architecture is just very chaotic.