



An exotic mansion that was the home of artist Frederic Edwin Church, is framed by trees on the Olana property in Greenport, NY. — AP photos

Artists' homes tell the story of the Hudson River School



The Hudson River can be seen beyond the treetops surrounding Olana, the home of artist Frederic Edwin Church.



A visitor to Olana, the home of Hudson River School artist Frederic Edwin Church, relaxes on a bench looking out onto a field on the property of the artist's estate, in Greenport, NY.

On either side of the Hudson River, two artists' homes tell the story of that famous genre of American landscape painting known as the Hudson River School. In the village of Catskill, New York, you can visit the house where Thomas Cole, considered the founder of the Hudson River School, lived until his death in 1848. Across the river in Greenport sits Olana, a 250-acre landscape with an elaborate 1870s mansion designed by Cole's star student, Frederic Edwin Church.

Autumn is the perfect season to visit the sites, and the 2-mile Rip Van Winkle Bridge connects Catskill with the small city of Hudson, located 5 miles from Olana, making it easy to see both in one day. You can even walk across if you're trying to up your step

count. Just remember that tours sell out, so book ahead, and note that the Cole house closes for the season on Oct 30.

Thomas Cole national historic site

It's hard to imagine today, but in the early 19th century, "the concept of being an American was not very well-defined," says Elizabeth Jacks, director of the Thomas Cole site. Cole, along with other artists and writers, helped define America's cultural identity "with a new style of art that celebrated the beauty all around us as something that was a unique American treasure."

Cole captured the Hudson River and Catskill Mountains on canvas "in a way that called upon people to appreciate it, care for it

and preserve it," Jacks said. That philosophy contrasted with the conventional sensibilities of his era, which saw the wilderness as something to be "developed and exploited." Cole burst onto the art scene in 1825, when three of his works were shown in New York and he was "hailed as a genius. It was an overnight success story."

Cole moved into the house in 1836. The Federal-style yellow brick house, built in 1815, offers a lovely view of the Catskills from a columned porch.

A copy of a painting Cole did of the view is displayed on the porch, lined up with the scene it depicts. The comparison shows that the landscape is virtually unchanged in nearly two centuries. Inside the home, you'll find

artifacts like Cole's guitar along with exhibitions of contemporary art.

Olana state historic site

Cole's paintings depicted the natural world as grand and majestic, and that influenced an entire generation of 19th-century artists. One of those students was Church. "Cole introduced Church to the hill where Church would later build his home, Olana, so the two are very intertwined," Jacks said. Church and the second generation of Hudson River painters romanticized their landscapes even more than their elders, filling their canvases with light and drama. The Church site, Olana, is also quite dramatic, very different from Cole's spare and simple house.