



Brazilian designer Hugo França's stackable timber Rings appear to slither against a stone wall at the Noyes House, where American artist Alma Allen's pleated bronze *Not Yet Titled* sculpture takes center stage in the courtyard. Photo: Michael Biondo

Behind the Design

Eliot Noyes's Iconic New Canaan House Has Been Transformed by 34 Artists and Designers

The Harvard Five architect's midcentury home is opening to the public for the first time with a unique showcase

By Alia Akkam

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New Canaan, Connecticut, is a bastion of midcentury modernist architecture, and although the most famous example is arguably Philip Johnson's Glass House, it was architect Eliot Noyes who planted the seeds of a flourishing, and at times controversial, design movement in this idyllic patch of New England. Before his fellow Harvard Five architects landed in New Canaan, Noyes, who at various points headed MoMA's industrial design department and worked on projects for IBM and Mobil, settled there in the 1940s. An exhibition opening today, "At the Noyes House: Blum & Poe, Mendes Wood DM, and Object & Thing," offers the public, for the first time ever, a chance to visit the Noyes family home, where its sunny rooms have been bolstered by the contemporary works of 34 international artists and designers.

When New Canaan resident Abby Bangser, the founder and creative director of [Object & Thing](#), realized that she would have to pull the plug on the second edition of her Brooklyn-based art and design fair because of the pandemic, she began pondering alternative creative possibilities. "In the digital space there were certainly great

examples of new thinking and collaboration,” Bangser tells AD PRO, “but there is something so special about the physical experience of art.” She asked herself: Could there be a way to safely do it?



The pine coffee table and pine-board deck chairs by New York’s Green River Project LLC are in organic dialogue with one of Japanese ceramist Kazunori Hamana’s imposing vessels, which nod to the *tsubo*, a prehistoric clay jar used to store food.
Photo: Michael Biondo

After a few informal conversations with friends and family, Bangser turned her attention to the nearby Noyes House, which in 2019 ensured the protection of its design heritage by signing a preservation easement with the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation. “The house has always been a place for art and design, but not in a precious way,” Bangser explains, noting how the Noyes family was friends with artists like [Alexander Calder](#), who created his large-scale stabile sculpture *Black Beast II*—now part of MoMA’s collection—for the Noyes House’s courtyard. Noyes was also pals with Charles and Ray Eames, and an Eames plywood plinth sculpture once adorned the fireplace. Works by Isamu Noguchi and Pablo Picasso were also casually integrated into the home over the years, revealing Noyes’s philosophy that art should be embraced in everyday life.

Propelled by that spirit, Bangser, in collaboration with Object & Thing artistic director Rafael de Cárdenas, New York gallery Blum & Poe, and the São Paulo-based gallery Mendes Wood DM, set about filling the residence with more than 80 pieces of art, mingling them with original furnishings to establish a thoughtful juxtaposition between past and present. Noyes’s son Frederick, also an architect, helpfully weighed in during the design process.



One of British designer Faye Toogood's woven tapestries, *Maquette 061/Clay Seat Tapestry*, presides over the dining area, where her rubber-coated black *Moon Vase/Rubber*, a play on traditional Korean ceramic moon jars, also appears on the dining table. It's in good company beside Italian designer Gaetano Pesce's *Drip Vase* and New Mexican ceramist Johnny Ortiz's elaborate wild clay works. Brazilian designer Hugo França's *Guava V Stool* strengthens the connection to the outdoors. Photo: Michael Biondo

When deciding which pieces to feature, the team considered the history of the house so that the new layers would be particularly meaningful. For example, Bangser turned to [Aaron Aujla](#) and Ben Bloomstein, founders of New York workshop Green River Project LLC, for an alfresco coffee table and chairs to replace the simple slatted pieces that originally adorned the courtyard.

“We’re releasing a new collection of furniture in October, which is inspired by artists and architects in upstate New York, Connecticut, and Massachusetts, and this outdoor suite is part of that collection,” says Aujla. “We had been thinking about Eliot Noyes and his work when we were designing it.”

Elsewhere in the house is Green River Project LLC’s *Airline Pendant*, repurposed from old airplane parts, and a vessel crafted with limestone sourced from Bloomstein’s Egremont, Massachusetts, property, which also marks the duo’s first time working with stone.



Engulfing the master bedroom's stone wall is *Wade in the water II* by Brazilian artist Antonio Obá. A reference to the early 20th-century spiritual of the same name, today it is also an ode to George Floyd, depicting the courage of moving through fierce, rippling waves. Japanese-American artist Megumi Arai's *Large Bedspread*, a collage-style quilt evoking the Japanese craft of *boro* textiles, is also striking. These works are rounded out by an Alma Allen sculpture near the foot of the bed and a vase by Connecticut ceramist Frances Palmer on one nightstand, with Pesce's *Tube Vase* on another. Photo: Michael Biondo

In the courtyard, Calder's monumental piece has made way for American artist Alma Allen's eight-foot-tall pleated bronze sculpture, just as the spot where a Calder mobile once hung indoors is now home to a biomorphic stitched-fabric sculpture by Brazilian artist Sonia Gomes.

Ceramist Frances Palmer, who lives not far away in Weston, had the chance to visit the Noyes House several years ago and was thrilled when she discovered that her new wood-fired vessels would fit right in at the abode. "I make all my glazes with ashes from burnt wood on my property. When you put the pot in the kiln, the ash from the burning wood settles on the pot and creates new glaze," she says of her process. Every week Palmer will come to the Noyes House armed with fresh flowers such as "bright and exuberant dahlia and zinnia" from her own garden so that the installation looks especially vibrant.

Wandering around the house reveals numerous surprises, like a cheerful vintage giraffe sculpture originating from a carousel that illuminates Noyes's quirky side to curating. "There's a new energy in the house," as Bangser points out, but it's also "an antique treasure hunt."

The show runs through November 28, and interested parties can schedule private appointments for up to 10 people via blumandpoe.com, mendeswooddm.com, or object-thing.com.



Los Angeles artist Mark Grotjahn expands his *Capri* series with this painting, rife with scraped-out areas of thick paint, prominently placed above the fireplace. It's complemented by *Large Red Pebble Vase*, one of Pesce's poured resin pieces, and on the coffee table, American potter Jim McDowell's *Madison Washington* (2017) face jug and *AMAXA* (2013), a ceramic sculpture by American artist Lynda Benglis. Photo: Michael Biondo



Spanish designer Pablo Limón fashioned this futuristic polychromatic chair, *Silver Nitrates-Prototype #3*, out of hard foam planar constructions in collaboration with Barcelona's Ds Paint & Modeling workshop. On the desk, Japanese artist Miho Dohi's small-scale *buttai 46* sculpture and a trifecta of wood-fired vases by Frances Palmer brighten the study area, as do the two paintings from Brazilian artist Lucas Arruda's *Deserto-Modelo* series that grace the stone wall. Photo: Michael Biondo



Allen's sculpture demarcates a cozy art-filled seating area featuring Green River Project LLC's *Airline Pendant* and Pesce's *Table Top Vase* and *Drip Vase*. On view are four drawings by Japanese artist Yoshitomo Nara—*She Says "I'm Alone," angry face, in the water, a knock down drag out fight*—and *Entre Nuvens*, a mountain landscape painting by Brazilian artist Patricia Leite. Photo: Michael Biondo



A close-up of Kazunori Hamana's work in the courtyard. The smaller piece, made in collaboration with Yukiko Kuroda, highlights Kuroda's contemporary approach to *kintsugi*, the Japanese art of mending damaged pottery with lacquer and polishing powder. Photo: Michael Biondo



This green aluminum chain curtain by Brazil-based Spanish artist Daniel Steegmann Mangrané serves as an artful threshold between architecture and landscape. Photo: Michael Biondo



A group of Frances Palmer vases dresses the table of another seating nook, which pairs a duo of vintage fabric-covered Patél chairs by Mexican architect and designer Daniel Valero/Mestiz with Japanese artist Tomoo Gokita's multihued moody painting, *Looking for a Lover*. Photo: Michael Biondo