

142 PARK ROAD

Handing Robert and Marguerite Antell a stem of Queen Anne's Lace, and holding one himself, and having the three flowers touch, architect James Johnson said, "There is your house." This was the genesis of what became popularly known as the "Mushroom House," located at 142 Park Road in Perinton.

Marguerite Antell's great-great grandparents, James and Lucretia Packard Hannan, had farmed in the area of Routes 250 and 31, one of Perinton's original hamlets, in the early 1800's. The Antells lived in the 100-year-old family farmhouse on the site until 1969 when they sold the property to Wegman's and purchased a 1.2 acre lot on Park Road at the edge of Powder Mill Park. When architect Jim Johnson asked the Antells to describe what they wanted in a house, they responded by saying that they wanted their house to "require growing...to 'catch up' with its design and concept...to give us an exciting adventure in living..." The house should "belong to its site and ...have a natural, honest feeling," and should be "built of permanent natural materials." Some of the adjectives they used to describe their vision were "free, organic, fun, growing, informal, open, and comfortable." Johnson's unique and contemporary "pod" design would give the owners what they wanted: a sense of belonging to their spectacular surroundings and a place that was perfect for their family and their many friends.

Four 80-ton pods and one balcony, resting on variable-length concrete and steel stems that rise from the ravine, comprise the house. Builders Peter Strong and William Ashton made molds in the ground, on the site, which they used to form the stems and the pods. The stems vary in height from 14 to 20 feet, taper from 5 feet at ground level to 3 feet at the top, and are designed to support a pod 34 feet in diameter. Getting the pods to the top of the stems was a major concern. After several failed attempts, the decision was made to construct the pods in two parts, a bottom and a top. The pod bases were formed in 30 foot "pie pan" molds of concrete and polyurethane. Lifted into place, they were reinforced with concrete and steel rods, and a rim of the same materials was added for stability. Steel and concrete floors connected the segments. The tops were molded over a hill of sand, reinforced and insulated, and successfully moved into place.

Inside each pod, the center "stem" spreads a tracery like the underside of a stem of Queen Anne's Lace across the ceilings. The windows are large, giving the owners the sense of being in a tree house or a birdhouse. The floors are covered with 9,000 earth tone ceramic tiles hand-made and fired by Mrs. Antell, an accomplished ceramist. The original interior surfaces were stucco designed to match the color of the sand on the site. The rooms are defined not by walls, but by use, and one flows into the other. Two pods serve as sleeping areas, the center pod houses the kitchen and sitting room, and the fourth the living-dining areas and fireplace. The fifth pod is a deck. The Antells furnished the house with a mixture of contemporary and antique items, and recall that living in the house was a spiritual experience. "Each season is unique. The birds are at eye level. Every nuance of nature is deeply experienced."



The house was and continues to be a curiosity. From time to time, the Antells had unannounced visitors. A couple was noticed setting up a tripod outside the bathroom window early one morning, and an architecture student, camera in hand, arrived one Sunday afternoon. Many simply assumed that the house was part of the park. The nickname “Mushroom House” was possibly given by a younger visitor, probably one of the many children who came with their class to tour the house. Apparently, no one called it the “Queen Anne’s Lace” house.

The Antells sold the house in 1996, and the new owners did extensive redecoration, lightening up the interior with paint and new wood trim. The house returned to the Antell family in 1999 when it was purchased by Steven and Christine Whitman. Steven is the son of Marguerite Antell’s cousin, and remembers both watching his aunt make some of the tiles that are in the house and also spending Christmas there. To quote the Antells, “It’s perfect because they always came to our house for Christmas and now we go to their house for Christmas – same house!!” The Whitmans are delighted to have the house back in the family, and they plan to do some restoration of the house, including reintroducing some of the original artwork and furniture. They also have plans to restore the landscaping.

Although not an historic house in the time sense, the “Mushroom House” is historic in its design. In 1974, Paul Malo included it in his Landmarks of Rochester and Monroe County as a distinctive modern building, “one that will be admired in the future as a fitting contribution to 20th century architecture’s place in the history of building.” It is the only contemporary house listed in the book. Completed in 1970, the house was designated as a Perinton landmark in May 1989.