

## Gropius House

## A Brief Landscape History

Walter Gropius believed that the relationship of a house to its landscape was of paramount importance, and he designed the grounds of the home he built for his family in 1938 as carefully as the structure itself. He sited the house on a grassy plinth defined by existing stone walls. A “civilized area” around the house included a lawn extending roughly twenty feet around the house and a perennial garden that continued the thrust of the south-facing porch. Beyond the well-tended ring around the house, the apple orchard and swamp were left to grow naturally. By mowing the orchard two or three times during the growing season and keeping the ever-encroaching woodland under control, Gropius maintained sweeping views to the east, south, and west and preserved the feeling that the house stood high on a hill. (Some of the views the Gropiuses enjoyed in their lifetimes have been lost as trees on surrounding properties gained in height over the years.)

In the fall of 1937, before the house design was even completed, Gropius moved mature trees from nearby woods and planted them around the site. Digging of the foundation for the basement began in April of 1938. The earliest surviving photographs of the construction site show the frame of the house with mature, wrapped, and wired trees already in place.

For their new trees, the Gropiuses selected Scotch pine, white pine, elm, oak, and American beech. Vines such as bittersweet, trumpet vine, and Concord grape were planted to link the house with the landscape. Wooden trellises reaching from the east and west sides of the house and covered with pink roses offered protection from the road. The Gropiuses’ goal was to create a New England landscape, complete with mature trees, rambling stone walls, and “rescued” boulders used as focal points for gardens.



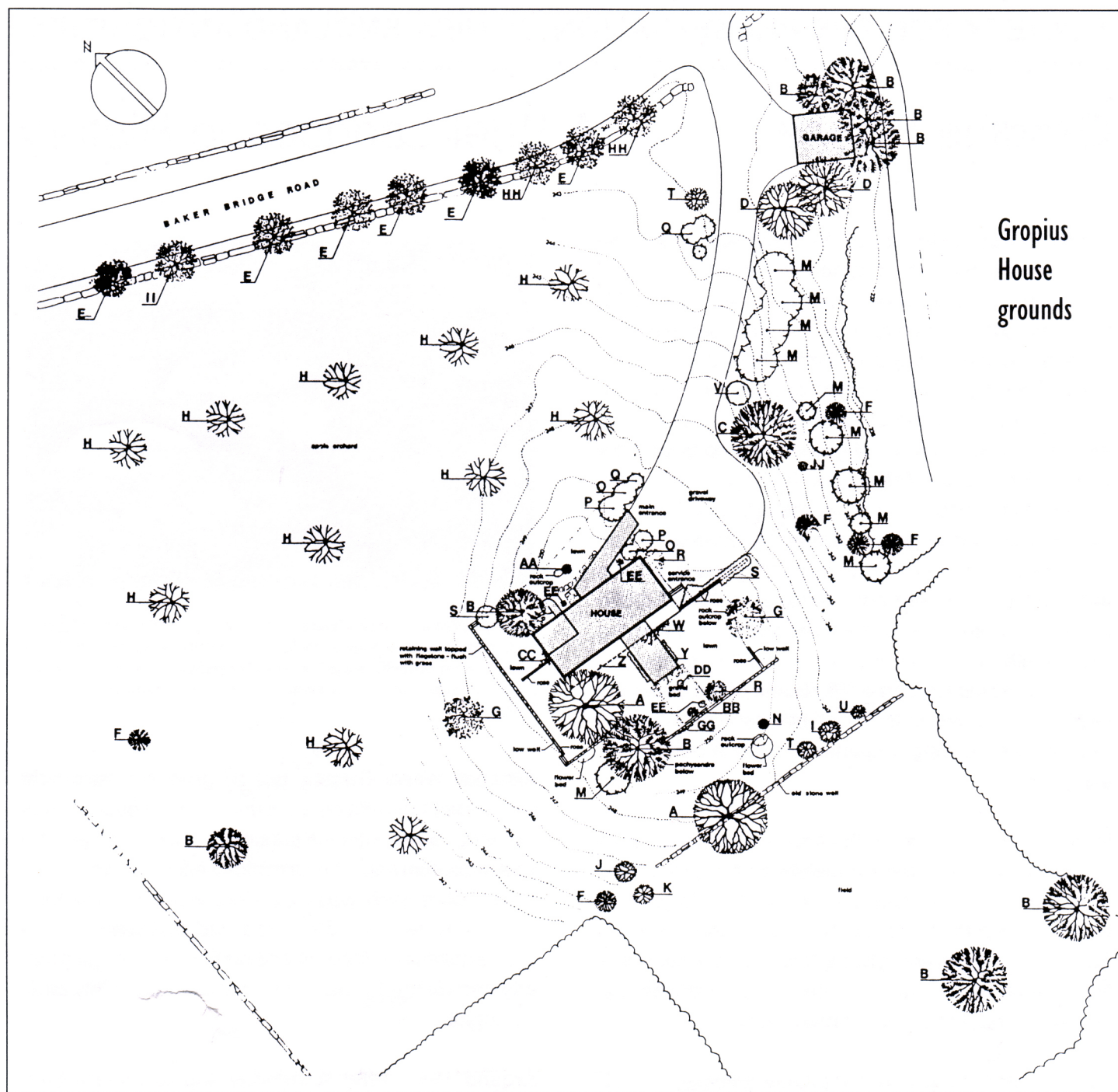
Ise and Walter Gropius seated on the wall dividing the formal yard from the meadow, c. 1945. Photographer unknown. Bush-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Gift of Ati Gropius Johansen; photo credit: Katya Kallsen; © President and Fellows of Harvard College.

Although Walter Gropius gained great pleasure from the gardens and fields surrounding the house, it was Ise Gropius who was the principal landscaper. Her goal was maximum impact with minimal effort, yet she spent many hours each week planting, weeding, and trimming. Mrs. Gropius also filled and maintained more than a dozen bird feeders and bird houses on the property and claimed to have known more than ninety birds personally.

Around 1957, after a summer trip to Japan, Mrs. Gropius redesigned the perennial bed beyond the screened porch in imitation of a Japanese garden. She replaced the bulbs and flowering perennials with widely spaced azaleas, candytuft, and cotoneaster, covering the soil with a layer of gray gravel. In the center of the wooden framework at the end of the bed she planted a red-leaf Japanese maple.







**Plant List** (Botanical name, followed by common name)

A	Quercus borealis, Red oak	M	Juniperus chinensis 'Pfitzeriana,' Pfitzer juniper	Z	Celastrus scandens, Bittersweet
B	Pinus strobus, White pine	N	Juniperus excelsa, Greek juniper	AA	Yucca filamentosa
C	Pinus nigra, Austrian pine	O	Pieris japonica, Japanese Andromeda	BB	Acer palmatum 'Atropurpureum,' Bloodleaf
D	Tsuga canadensis, Canadian hemlock	P	Taxus cuspidata, Japanese yew		Japanese maple
E	Acer saccharum, Sugar maple	Q	Kalmia latifolia, Mountain laurel	CC	Vitis spp., Concord grape
F	Juniperus Virginiana, Red cedar	R	Cotinus coggygria, Smoke bush	DD	Kurume azalea
G	Cedrus Atlantica, Blue cedar	S	Euonymus europaea, Spindle tree	EE	Cotoneaster divaricata, Spreading cotoneaster
H	Malus pumila, Apple tree	V	Rosa Hougonsis, Father Hugo's rose	FF	Iberis amara, Candytuft
I	Cornus kousa, Japanese dogwood	W	Campsis radicans, Trumpet vine	GG	Rosa Spp., Rose
J	Cornus florida 'Rubra,' Pink-flowering dogwood	X	Rhus typhina, Staghorn sumac	HH	Acer pseudoplatanus, Sycamore maple
K	Cornus florida, Flowering dogwood	Y	Euonymus fortunei 'Vegetus,' Bigleaf	II	Acer rubrum, Red maple
L	Juniperus chinensis 'Hetzii,' Hatzi Juniper		wintercreeper	JJ	Chionanthus Virginicus, White fringe tree