

A modern homage  
to the farm in  
Saratoga Springs'  
greenbelt.

# The COOP CONTEMPORARY

WRITTEN BY MEGIN POTTER | PHOTOS PROVIDED

Conspicuous because of its clean, contemporary coolness, this 2021 structure stands on the foundation of a chicken coop originally built in 1893.

Located on the fringe of the city's greenbelt, 499 Union Avenue challenges the traditional notion that country = historic farmhouses at a spot blending the borders between the urban and the rural.

Here, the widened road shoulders and sidewalks have made the area more walkable. Homeowners Ardie Russell and her husband, Dan, enjoy taking an early morning stroll to Stewart's Shops for a coffee in the morning or to dinner at the 550 Waterfront in the evenings. For Ardie, an avid nature lover, hiker, and rower, the convenience of having the state boat launch less than a mile away is nearly unmatched.

## THE CALL OF THE WILD

Characterized by open green spaces and additional pedestrian access, this area, designated for low-density development, is teeming with the sounds of nature.

"It's at the apex of Saratoga's air quality," said Ardie. Situated between Saratoga Lake and Lake Lonely, crosswinds coming off the water create a pleasant breeze that seems to be constantly blowing through the .86-acre plot.

With the wind come the waterfowl, and the distinctive calls of an amazing number of eagles and blue herons, she added.



saratogaTODAYnewspaper.com



## ART FOR ALL

Appreciating art and the environment is an impulse that Ardie has never abandoned. She is a Wheaton College graduate with a dual degree in American Studies (with a concentration in American Pop Art) and Environmental Policy. The disciplines have woven themselves into Ardie's life throughout her 30-year career in art direction, marketing, and communications.

Built as a celebration of passion, beauty, and light, **The Coop Contemporary** is at home in a region that has embraced the arts since Ardie first moved here in 1994, she said. In the last decade, she has witnessed a surge here of art-related activities.

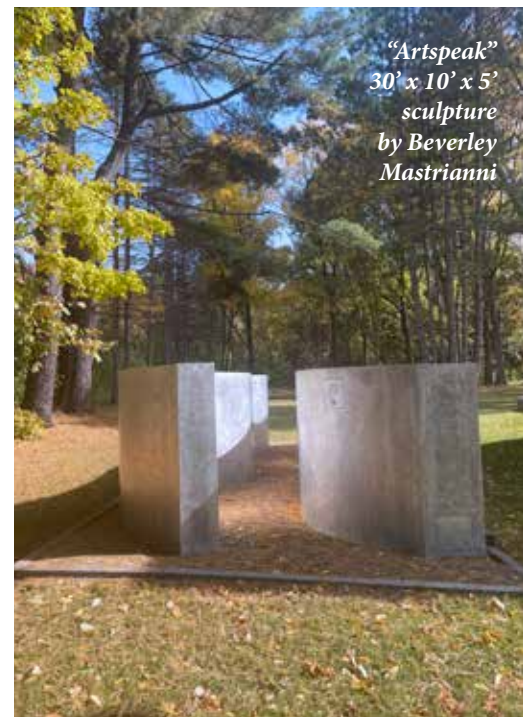
"The city has branded beyond the springs and the horses to include the arts, which has worked to everyone's benefit and increased the quality of life for all."

**CONTINUING THAT  
'CITY IN THE COUNTRY' FEEL**

With the knowledge she accumulated as an art curator and exhibition designer, Ardie created distinctive environments for organizations including American Farmland Trust, Land Trust Alliance, The Nature Conservancy, and Saratoga Race Course. This house however, is her first foray into envisioning a full living space.

Existing almost entirely on the original home's footprint, the 1,200 sq. ft., 1 bed, 2 bath home has a natural pine wood exterior made from vertically hanging boards. Its floor-to-ceiling windows and open loft space allow light to flood into the bright rooms - minimal by design.

"We spent years wanting to simplify. There are very few surfaces to collect clutter here and that is very much intentional, so all the attention is on the art."



"Artspeak"  
30' x 10' x 5'  
sculpture  
by Beverley  
Mastrianni



**WHERE ART SPEAKS FOR ITSELF**

The gallery-like space, with its white walls and grey concrete floors, creates a pure atmosphere free of distractions. This level of discipline directs the viewers to the interesting textures, sheens, and transcendent modern art on display.

Although she appreciates the work of the Hudson River School artists and other environmental movements, for Ardie, contemporary artists resonate most. An abstract landscape reflects the time it was created in, she said.

"The mind can interpret it any number of ways and you're not cornered into one way of thinking. It's a more expansive experience."

In the bedroom, a soothing, serene, garden-like scene sets the mood, while the kitchen springs to life with David Gordon's *Poppy Series*. The art of Betsy Krebs, Joanne Murphy, and Pat McEvoy also grace the interior spaces, while outside, Beverley Mastrianni's substantial 30' x 10' x 5' "Artspeak" sculpture tells the story of the genre out loud. Originally created for the engaging Tang Teaching Museum's *SOS - Scenes of Sound* exhibit, the voice of artist Jackie Pardon plays through four motion-activated speakers, encouraging you to see the art, and the world, in a different way.

"For guests, it's an introduction to another aspect of our lives. I just love it," said Ardie. "Every time I drive up and see it, I feel so privileged."

**LIFE ON DISPLAY**

Built on a scale inspired by larger institutional spaces in California and Brooklyn, a stunning green wall of philodendrons bring life to the space. Maintaining its vibrancy is surprisingly simple - it only needs to be watered every six weeks and trimmed every three months.

The indoor temperature is regulated with a geothermal heat pump, and the finished concrete floors hold in the heat. In the future, the Russell's plan to convert a portion of their 60ft x 20ft garage into a Maker's Space Studio powered by solar energy.

Here, Dan plans to make more artisan hardwood and epoxy resin benches and charcuterie boards from the black walnut, cherry, and American hickory trees harvested onsite during renovation. It will also be a space where artists can create, collaborate, share ideas, resources, tools, and materials. *Find them at [www.thecoopcontemporary.com](http://www.thecoopcontemporary.com)*

...More Photos on [SimplySaratoga.com](http://SimplySaratoga.com)!

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