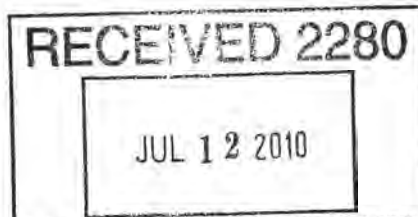


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

567



# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Mills, Willis N. House II  
other names/site number n/a

### 2. Location

street & number 1380 Ponus Ridge Road  not for publication  
city or town New Canaan  vicinity  
state Connecticut code CT county Fairfield code 001 zip code 06840

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,  
I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national  statewide  local

[Signature] SHPO 7-8-10  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
CCT / SHPO  
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting official Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register  determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register  removed from the National Register
- other (explain:)

[Signature] 9/16/10  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
 (Check as many boxes as apply.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

**Category of Property**  
 (Check only one box.)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
 (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	1	buildings
0	0	district
0	0	site
0	1	structure
0	1	object
1	3	<b>Total</b>

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
 (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

Mid-Twentieth Century Modern Residences in  
 Connecticut, 1930 – 1979

**Number of contributing resources previously  
 listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC – single dwelling  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC – single dwelling  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: CONCRETE  
 walls: STONE;  
 WOOD – Weatherboard  
 roof: OTHER – Built-up Tar-and-Gravel  
 other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

#### **Summary Paragraph**

The Mills House II, designed by architect Willis N. Mills of Sherwood, Mills & Smith for himself in 1956, is a local expression of a clean-lined, Bauhaus-reflective Modern style house in the Modernist enclave of New Canaan, Connecticut. The hillside house consists of a two-story, attenuated, rectangular wood-frame box projected and cantilevered dramatically off a natural rock ledge. Terraces and decks connect to carefully designed outdoor living areas at multiple levels. The exterior of the house is punctuated by expansive glazing and is clad in natural brown toned vertical wood siding with white trim and foundation. One end wall of the house and the garage are gray fieldstone. The colors both harmonize and contrast with the dark gray and green tones of outcroppings, retaining walls, dense natural tree cover, and garden plantings. The property sits on Ponus Ridge in the northwest corner of New Canaan. The closest Modern houses nearby are the Day House (1965), and a group clustered at the north end of Chichester Road: Smallen House (1957), System House (1961), Tatum House (1962) and Parsons House (1964). Philip Johnson's Glass House (1949; NHL) and Hodgson House (1951; NR listed) are located less than 1 mile to the south on Ponus Hill Road. The Mill House II property encompasses an immediate garden setting, an unaltered natural woodland landscape, and one non-contributing garage, erected circa 2000. A pool and adjacent pergola, installed in the late 1970s are also located on the property and contribute to its historic significance.

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### **Narrative Description**

#### **Setting**

The Mills House II is set back about 200 feet from Ponus Ridge Road at the southeast corner of a two-acre lot that slopes steeply to the west and south. The flat, gravel parking area edged with granite Belgian blocks is level with the second floor of the house and accessed directly off the street. A linear and elevated natural ledge outcropping and a woodland setting with trees, moss, shrubs, and groundcover plantings along the road creates a visual and sound barrier, providing privacy and a sense of seclusion. The house is oriented with the long elevations facing east and west, with the main entrance on the east side. It is built with the north end anchored into the rugged south-facing rock cliff that drops about 45 feet in elevation from the driveway and entrance level to the bottom of the slope. Extensive fieldstone retaining walls help maintain the stability of the slope below the house and other locations on the property. The placement and orientation of the house takes full advantage of views south, east, and west through tall trees to a creek valley below. A few scattered houses have been built nearby since the Mills II House was constructed, but their distance and intervening trees maintain a natural setting. Terraces and balconies with associated garden plantings on the east, south, and west sides of the house allow outside enjoyment of the natural landscape and vistas.

Paths and stairs of bluestone and fieldstone direct circulation through the natural landscape around the house. From the driveway, a long straight bluestone walkway angles southwest along the east side of the house toward the front entrance and becomes a narrow wood balcony that enters the front door at the upper living level. At the north end of the balcony railing, bluestone steps descend steeply alongside the rock face to an open terrace along the east side of the lower level of the house. Fieldstone retaining walls with bluestone caps are constructed against the rock face. The terrace is a cantilevered concrete structure shaded by the high tree canopy and the entrance balcony. Robust wood planting boxes on metal posts define the east and south edges of the terrace, and an undulating bed with garden plantings runs along the northern side adjacent to the stairs. The original concrete pavers were replaced with bluestone circa 2000. A second straight run of metal pipe and wood tread, open riser and stringer stairs connects the east side of the main terrace to a smaller terrace below. Vertical rods connected to the stair supports and the underside of the terrace form a railing on the west side of the otherwise open stairway. The lower terrace area is covered in loose gravel fronted by a low retaining wall and is protected by the overhangs of the main terrace and the projecting south end of the house. Outdoor living on the west side of the house is accommodated on an angled sun deck attached to the west side of the house at the upper level and a smaller deck below. At the parking area, a narrow bluestone path between the garage and the north end of the

house connects with stone steps to an open wood pergola and a small pool surrounded by granite pavers perched on the ledge above and northwest of the house.

## Exterior

Willis Mills designed the house as a minimalist, rectangular volume in a 98 foot by 26 foot footprint that emphasizes horizontality and efficiency, creating a counterpoint to the verticality of the natural site. The concept is rooted in an underlying symmetry, with the north half of house balanced on the upper cliff and the south half extending downward to three levels. Flanking concrete and fieldstone wing walls at the midpoint anchor the building into the natural terrain. Mills created a dynamic quality in the static box through the placement of voids in the singular solid geometric form and with the angled entrance balcony (east) and sun deck (west). These features start at the mid point of the long elevations, taper toward the south, and cut at right angles abruptly into the main mass.

The steel and wood-frame structure is clad in vertically laid, natural red cedar tongue and groove board siding and has a flat built up, tar and gravel roof. A small chimney projects above the roof plane at the south end. The doors, window trim, and foundation are painted a contrasting pristine white. The windows vary in size from the full height glazing at the south end that marks the two-story living room to smaller windows along the more private areas of the house that are a combination of original wood sash, and steel and aluminum fixed, casement, and sliding sash. The immense south facing floor to ceiling window is an original feature with triple hung wood sash. The upper level fixed windows in the living room are original, while the lower level sliders have been replaced to match the original configuration. Two small plastic skylights on the roof light selected interior spaces.

The upper level of the east elevation is a primarily blank stone wall at the north end, where it is flanked by an entrance walkway. A few small rectangular windows are set high on the wall at this location. South of the main entrance, the elevation opens abruptly into a dramatic two-story void with full-height glazing on both levels that reflects the surrounding landscape and allows sun and shadows into the interior. The main entrance walk balcony slices the void horizontally and the railing cuts perpendicularly through the glass wall, continuing inside the house and blurring the distinction between indoors and outdoors. The front door itself is a flush door painted white. Simple dark sheet metal down lights at the cornice line illuminate the walk and entrance.

The west elevation, on the private side of the house opens to the landscape views with double sliding doors accessing a bluestone walk at grade along the north half, and a sundeck starting at the mid-point and extending into the south half. The sundeck is supported on two parallel concrete block walls set perpendicular to the foundation and shades a smaller deck at basement level below. The decks have slatted wood floors and slender, metal pipe railings that are painted white. A ribbon strip of horizontal slider windows lights the upper level, and a two-story, four-pane window near the south end articulates the double height living room and opens onto the sun deck.

The narrow south end wall of the house cantilevers off the basement, jutting off the hillside into the landscape. It is treated as a massive enclosed end that wraps each corner and is punctuated by a full height window at the west side of the south elevation. The north wall of the house, originally a two-car garage opening, was enclosed circa 2000 with a random laid fieldstone wall that matches the adjacent contemporary garage constructed in the driveway to the northwest. The wall contains three horizontal windows set high and extends as a privacy wing wall toward the entrance walkway to the east and a short distance to the west.

A cast concrete and concrete block foundation, painted white where it is visible under the southern portion of the house differentiates the manmade structure from the native rock formations. The north half of the building rests on a slab and the south half on a full, exposed basement with one window in the south elevation.

## Interior

Willis Mills' minimalist Modern aesthetic continues on the interior of the house, enclosing 4,368 square feet of living space. The plan organizes shared living areas at the center and south, and the private section to the north, with the arrangement of spaces stepping downward from north to south. Occupying approximately two-thirds of the footprint, the

upper level opens to the two-story living room at the southern end. The lower and basement levels are restricted to the south half of the footprint. Modifications to the original plan made during the 1970s and circa 2000 focused on conversion of the original garage to a master bedroom and bath on the upper level and incorporation of a former bedroom into the kitchen layout on the lower level.

The light and airy entrance lobby on the upper level overlooks the two-story living room to the south and directs circulation to various parts of the house. It accesses the top of descending stairs and a study, both opposite the entrance to the west. The study has a built-in walnut cabinet and sliding rice paper screen overlooking the staircase. Floating walnut bookshelves on the north wall may be original. The wood staircase descends to the west between a walnut paneled wall and a plastered wall with a simple wood handrail to the lower level and lands in front of the full height window in the west elevation. To the north of the entrance lobby a long narrow hall runs the length of the east side of the house and was extended slightly in the renovations. It is lined with original built-in cabinets, painted white, with flush door hardware and lit by three horizontal windows above. Two original bedrooms and the new master bedroom (formerly garage), open off the hall toward the west. During the ca. 2000 renovations, one original bathroom off the southern bedroom was retained, the original middle bathroom was reworked, and the master bath at the north end was created. The southern bedroom retains its original built-in closet with flush hardware.

The lower level plan is configured around a stair, utility, and bathroom core, with a flow of spaces on the south, east and north and an open passageway on the west. The living room, which occupies the southern end of the house, retains its original soaring double-height ceiling and windows on the east, south, and west providing views into the tree canopy and meadow below. The sliding glass doors in the east wall lead to the outdoor terrace framed by high natural ledge beyond. The north wall against the stairs is full height with a crisp rectangular fireplace opening at the east end, underlaid with a projecting dark slate hearth that runs the length of the wall toward the west. Historic photographs show that the room originally contained floating bookshelves on the south wall, similar to that in the study, and a hanging light fixture composed of five separate globes in the southeast corner of the room. To the east of the fireplace wall, the living room space flows into the dining room through a wide, full height opening under the entrance hall and wood clad balcony railing that runs above from outdoors, through the exterior glass wall to the southeast corner of the central core. The kitchen at the north end of the lower level was originally on the east side and accessed off the dining room with a bedroom to the west. The demising wall has been removed to create a space across the width of the house and the kitchen remodeled using natural wood and dark slate materials compatible with the historic materials of the house.

Wall and ceiling finishes throughout the house are white painted plaster, with wall tiles in bathrooms. Originally, the owner architect's wife selected warm colors to blend with the natural landscape and a light cerulean blue color for the living room, study, and entrance hall continuous ceilings. The upper level retains hardwood floors, and but the lower level floors were replaced with white marble in the living room and dining room and dark slate in the passages and kitchen in the circa 2000 renovations.

The basement under the south section of the house is reached by a stair in the central core and has plain finishes. An unfinished crawl space is located north of the kitchen area.

### **Alterations**

The Mills House II was renovated circa 2000 in an effort to repair and update the house. These alterations included the installation of new floor materials on the lower level and terrace, and the remodeling of the kitchen with wood and slate finishes. The attached garage at the north end of the house was previously converted into living space during the 1970s (Kristal 2005:154). The current garage, pool and adjacent pergola were added to the property between the 1970 and about 2000.

## **Outbuildings**

### ***Garage, non-contributing (ca. 2000)***

A two car-garage, facing east, built into the slope at the rear was erected about 1990 when the original two-car garage at the north end of the house was converted to living space. The garage is clad in random gray and brown fieldstone under a low pitch shed roof clad in tar and gravel. The rear wall is gray stucco and has two small openings with metal grilles. The east front has a slight parapet with a bluestone cap that extends as a short wing wall on the south. The garage opening roll up doors and a pass door on the south elevation are constructed of horizontal wood tongue and groove stained a dark color.

### ***Pool, contributing (Late 1970s)***

A rectangular, in-ground pool installed during the late 1970s is located northwest of the house and behind (west of) the garage. A raised hot tub and patio comprised of granite pavers flanks the north side of the pool. The pool was installed during the period of significance of the property and is associated with its residential use.

### ***Pergola, non-contributing (Late 1970s)***

An open wood pergola constructed during the late 1970s faces the pool and is located on the opposite side of the flanking patio. The roof is an open trellis constructed of wood planks and supported by four-inch by four-inch wood posts. The plank floor deck is raised approximately six inches off the ground and has a curved front. The pergola was installed during the period of significance of the property and is associated with its residential use.

## **Integrity**

The Mills House II retains its remarkable steep, rocky and wooded setting and views of the remote natural landscape. The complicated system of retaining walls and outdoor living areas designed to allow construction on this challenging site and optimize enjoyment of its natural features are intact. Architect Willis Mills' geometric box volume of wood and glass and adjoining outdoor living components incorporating indigenous rock, intended for himself and his family, is a personal local expression of a mid-twentieth-century Modern residence. The property's execution by local builders Borglum and Meek remains evident through details of construction and finishes.

The house experienced a period of diminished appreciation, deterioration, and some alterations that were reversed in a thoughtful renovation project undertaken circa 2000. Despite certain changes made at that time, including new floor materials on the lower level and terrace, and kitchen renovations, the overall design of the building is clearly present. Appropriation of a garage or carport for living space was a fairly common practice in Modern houses and the modest plan changes are in keeping with original design intent. Certain deteriorated elements that could not be repaired such as the decks were replaced with similar materials to match the original design. Mills' massing, dramatic positioning, subtractive voids, and interior program are intact, as are the majority of the original materials.

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL HISTORY

ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance**

1956-1979

**Significant Dates**

1956: House constructed

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Mills, Willis N.

of Sherwood, Mills & Smith

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

**Period of Significance (justification)**

The period of significance for the Mills House II begins in 1956 when the house was completed and extends to 1979, the end of the mid-twentieth-century Modern architectural period as defined in the Mid-Twentieth-Century Modern Residences in Connecticut Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF).

**Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)**

The end date of the period of significance meets Criteria Consideration G as part of the exceptional significance of the development of Mid-Twentieth Century Modern style residential architecture in Connecticut as discussed in the MPDF.

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

The Willis N. Mills House II is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C at the state level for its associations with the progressive architectural social milieu and the development of Modern style architecture during the mid-twentieth century. The building possesses significance under Criterion A in the category of Social History for its association with the established cluster of Modern style architects who were living, networking, and realizing their experimental designs in New Canaan. Under Criterion C, the building possesses significance in the area of Architecture as a local expression of a mid-twentieth-century Modern style residence designed by architect Willis N. Mills of the Stamford, Connecticut firm, Sherwood Mills & Smith, as his family residence. The house is the second of two residences Mills' created for himself in New Canaan, and the last of five houses in town designed by the firm in New Canaan. The Mills House II meets the requirements for listing under property type Number F.1 Box, as defined in the Mid-Twentieth-Century Modern Residences in Connecticut Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF), and contributes to the Modern Architecture Movement in the United States, 1920–1979 and Mid-Twentieth-Century Modern Residential Architecture in Connecticut, 1930–1979 historical context themes described in the MPDF.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance.)

**Areas of Significance: Criterion A**

**Social History**

The growth of the progressive architectural culture in New Canaan in Fairfield County and surrounding Yale University in New Haven County, with close connections to New York City, during the mid-twentieth century provided substantial opportunities for emerging and established designers to develop their own expressions of the Modern style. Regional and local architect Willis Nathaniel Mills (1907–1995) resided in New Canaan from 1938 until his retirement in 1970. He lived in two houses he designed for himself, Mills House I (1939) and Mills House II (1956). Mills had joined the New Canaan community and designed his first house in town before World War II, and was well ensconced when the influential “Harvard Five” group of architects (Marcel Breuer, Landis Gores, John Johansen, Philip Johnson, and Eliot Noyes) established themselves in town after the war.

Mills was born in Menominee, Michigan and graduated from the Kent School in Kent, Connecticut in 1925. He received a bachelor's degree in architecture from the University of Pennsylvania in 1929 and immediately began working as a draftsman and project manager for the New York architecture firm of Shreve, Lamb, & Harmon (Bowker 1956). While in this position Mills may have worked on any of the firm's large New York projects including their signature commission, the Empire State Building completed in 1931. Mills attended Columbia University from 1933–1934, possibly to train in a specific area as he did not receive a degree. He returned to Shreve, Lamb, & Harmon for two years from 1935–1936 before opening his own firm, aided by an early commission for the Edward Pickard House in Kent, Connecticut completed in 1936.

From 1937 to 1941 Mills had his own firm in New York, although he was employed as a project manager for New York architect William Lescaze in 1938. During this period he settled in New Canaan and designed his first house for himself, Mills House I, in 1939. The partnership of Howe & Lescaze had designed the Philadelphia Saving Fund Society building, the first International Style high-rise building in the United States in 1929–1932 and Sun Terrace, the first International Style country house in New Hartford, Connecticut in 1932 (both NR listed). Lescaze formed an independent firm in 1935. Mills may have been involved in the design process or project management of the Professor F. S. Dunn House and Cottage in Woodbridge, Connecticut which was in design and construction from 1936 to 1939.

Mills career was interrupted by World War II, and after serving in the Marine Corps Reserve from 1942 to 1946, he formed a partnership with Thorne Sherwood (1910–1994) and Lester W. Smith (1909–1993) in 1946. All three architects had received a traditional Beaux-Arts education in the 1930s. Smith completed an undergraduate degree in architecture and a master of fine arts from Princeton University in 1933. Sherwood attended Williams College and received his



architecture degree from Columbia University in 1936. According to a 1957 article in *Progressive Architecture*, the decision to establish the Sherwood, Mills & Smith office in Stamford, a residential-industrial city a 50-minute train ride north of New York City, allowed them to lead pleasanter lives, connect with the community, and build a region-wide diversified practice. Unlike most of the Modern architects with studios in the area, Sherwood, Mills & Smith had a staff of over 50 that included interior and furniture designers. They were responsible for many large commercial and institutional buildings in the region, including the South School in New Canaan (1950), the Mutual Insurance Company of Hartford (1959), and St. Mark's Episcopal Church in New Canaan (1962).

Post-war American domestic culture developed out of an unprecedented emphasis on family life, individuality, and the ideal that the average citizens, especially returning veterans, each could strive for their own private utopia in the form of an affordable single-family suburban house with a comfortable amount of interior and exterior space for enjoyment (Wright 1989:253). This renewed interest in an enhanced quality of life, paired with the development of innovative new construction materials and mechanized conveniences, revolutionized preferences for residential design and provided opportunities for emerging Modern style architects to introduce strikingly new concepts that would be assimilated into popular culture in the following decades (Mock 1945:12–21).

Mid-twentieth-century residences in New Canaan designed by Sherwood, Mills & Smith, likely with Willis Mills as lead architect, are the Rantoul House (1947–1948), Durisol/Risom House (1949), James and Barbara Mills House (1950), and Knoll House (1954, demolished). In nearby towns the firm later completed the Taylor House in Greenwich (ca. 1968), the Mills House in Wilton (ca. 1973), and the Steinmetz House in Wilton (ca. 1973). Sherwood, Mills & Smith also worked on a “Development House” for General Electric built in Dobbs Ferry, New York, in 1954.

Mills served as an architectural design critic at Columbia University and on the Advisory Council at Princeton University. He was active in the Architectural League of New York and the Association of Stamford Architects, and served on the housing authority in New Canaan (Bowker 1962).

### **Area of Significance: Criterion C**

#### **Architecture**

Willis Mills purchased land in remote northwest New Canaan and built his second personal house in town in 1956. The evolution of the emphatically Modern design of the Mills House II can be traced in Mills's portfolio of local residential projects back to the late 1930s. In 1936 Mills had completed the Pickard House in Kent, Connecticut. The house was completed four years after Howe & Lescaze's Sun Terrace, the first International Style country house in New Hartford, Connecticut in 1932. The Pickard House's transitional design incorporates a few contemporary features, such as a second floor cut-out porch centered in the facade and interior redwood sheathing, combined with conventional Colonial Revival style details. The house was included in the November 1936 issue of *The Architectural Forum*.

Two years later, in 1938 Mills purchased land in New Canaan and designed the Mills House I, completed in 1939, as his first house for himself and his wife Esther Mills. The Mills House I, designed with the freedom of having himself as the client, is a more consistent and coherent contemporary statement. While still fairly traditional in plan and massing this house leans toward the International style in the use of horizontal exterior sheathing, glass block, steel casement windows, brise-soleil, and a corner cut-out porch. Mills's wife Esther Mills noted that it caused a stir in the town, and a 1944 article in the journal *Pencil Points* remarked that the house was one of an expanding group of New England houses “that are both congenial with the region and suited to the tastes of twentieth-century livers.”

At the time Willis Mills designed his second house in New Canaan in 1956, approximately 36 Modern houses had been built in town and eight houses were completed during that year, including John Black Lee's Lee House 2, Roy Binckley's Hurlburt House, Frank Lloyd Wright's Tirranna/Rayward House and Philip Johnson's Boissanas House. The structural innovations incorporated into Modern houses and modernist architects' interest in siting resulted in the construction of these houses on challenging properties that were traditionally considered unbuildable. The Mills House II was erected on a steeply sloped rocky site and was included in New Canaan's fifth Modern House Tour in 1957. Upon completion, it was featured in national publications including the *Architectural Record Houses of 1957*, *Progressive Architecture* in

March 1957, and *House & Garden's Book of Building* of 1958–1959. Mills's design is similar to the pure rectangular boxlike form that emerged from the design philosophies of the Bauhaus School in Germany in the 1930s. He would have been aware of the progressive houses recently completed in New Canaan by Marcel Breuer, Eliot Noyes, Landis Gores, Philip Johnson, John Johansen, and other Modern architects.

The restrained design of the Mills House II references the cantilevered rectangular form of the Marcel Breuer House II completed nine years earlier and uses the drama of the plunging slope to accentuate a sense of cantilever. Mills used an angled entrance balcony (east) and sun deck (west), and terraces to open up the house on the private sides away from and below the entrance. The house celebrates widely used simple and inexpensive materials of the Modern aesthetic, including white concrete block, natural red cedar, and expansive aluminum windows. It features an unusual baffle detail enclosed in the eaves designed by Mills to work with ceiling insulation and a white roof surface to maintain cool temperatures at the ceiling level.

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**Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)**

**Ownership History**

Willis Mills retired in 1970 and moved to Chatham, Massachusetts with his wife, Esther. It is likely he sold the house on Ponus Ridge Road at that time. The house passed through several owners in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, before being purchased by Craig Bassam and Christopher Scott Fellows in 1998. Bassam and Fellows undertook a careful rehabilitation of the building that included upgrading the kitchen and bathrooms and modest changes to the interior and exterior garden setting. James Seuss acquired the property in 2007 and continues to maintain it under Willis Mills House LLC.

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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Town of New Canaan

2010 Assessor's Records. On file, Town Hall, New Canaan, CT.

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): \_\_\_\_\_

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### 10. Geographical Data

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**Acreage of Property** 2.0  
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>18</u> Zone	<u>0622980</u> Easting	<u>4557141</u> Northing	3	<u>                    </u> Zone	<u>                    </u> Easting	<u>                    </u> Northing
2	<u>                    </u> Zone	<u>                    </u> Easting	<u>                    </u> Northing	4	<u>                    </u> Zone	<u>                    </u> Easting	<u>                    </u> Northing

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The property boundaries encompass the legally recorded lines of Block 24, Lot 29, shown on Map 27, containing 2.0 acres.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries include the house and full extent of the associated landscape features that contribute to the setting and appearance of the property.

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### 11. Form Prepared By

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name/title Virginia H. Adams/Sr. Architectural Historian and Jenny Fields Scofield, AICP/Architectural Historian  
organization PAL, Inc. date May 2010  
street & number 210 Lonsdale Avenue telephone 401.728.8780  
city or town Pawtucket state RI zip code 02860  
e-mail vadams@palinc.com; jscofield@palinc.com

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### Additional Documentation

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.  
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

**Photographs:**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

**Name of Property:** Mills House II  
**City or Vicinity:** New Canaan  
**County:** Fairfield **State:** Connecticut  
**Photographer:** Jenny Fields Scofield, PAL, Pawtucket, RI  
**Date Photographed:** February 2, 2010

**Description of Photograph(s) and number:**

- 1 of 6. View of east elevation and terrace looking southwest.
- 2 of 6. View of west and south elevations looking northeast.
- 3 of 6. View of north and west elevations looking southeast.
- 4 of 6. View of east and north elevations garage looking southwest.
- 5 of 6. View from entrance hall looking southeast.
- 6 of 6. View of study looking south.

**Property Owner:**

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Willis Mills House LLC  
street & number 1380 Ponus Ridge telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town New Canaan state CT zip code 06840

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

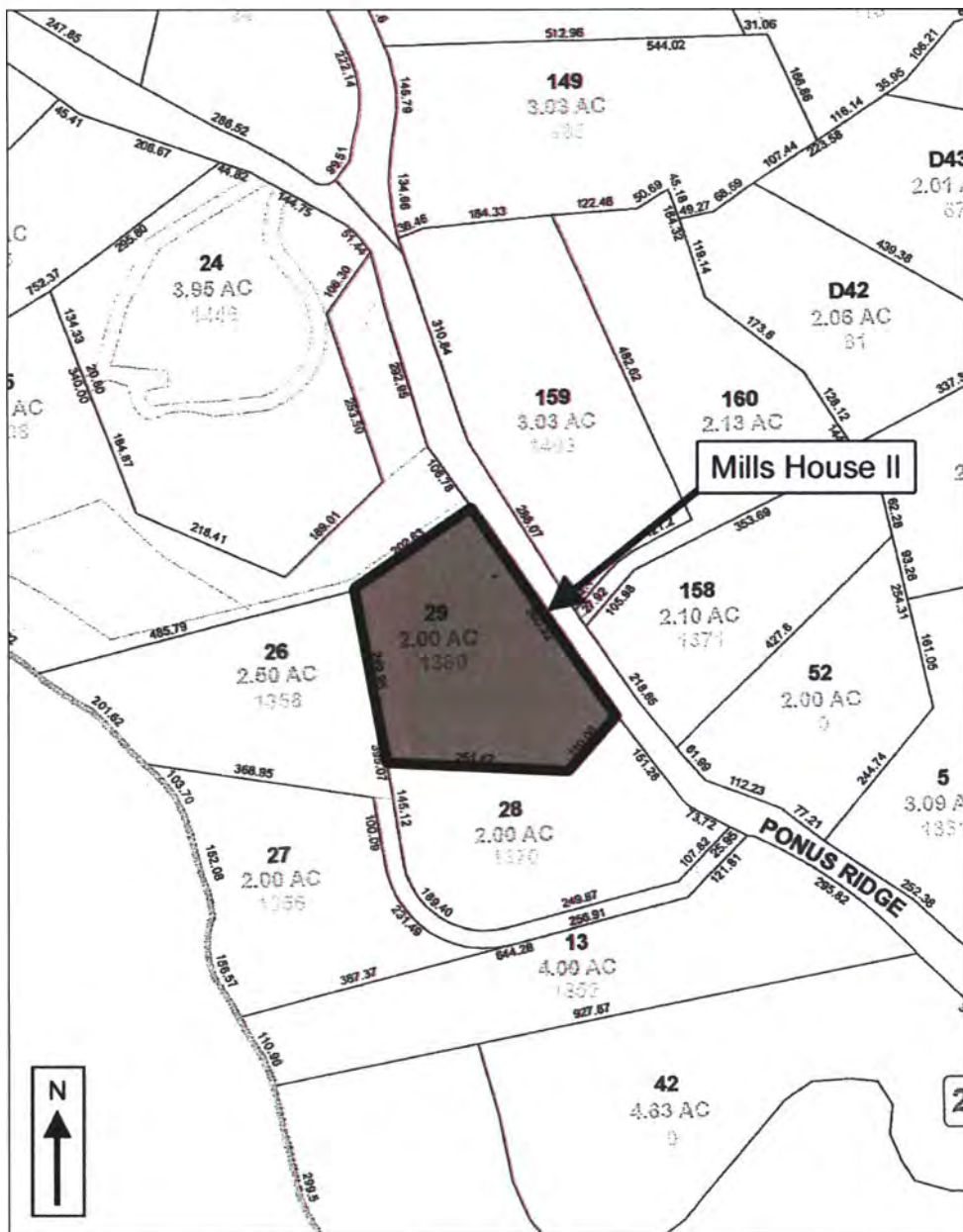
National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Mills, Willis N. House II

Fairfield County, Connecticut

Mid-Twentieth Century Modern Residences in  
Connecticut, 1930 – 1979

Town of New Canaan Assessor's Map Number 27.



(Assessor's Map source: New Canaan Tax Assessor 2009).

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

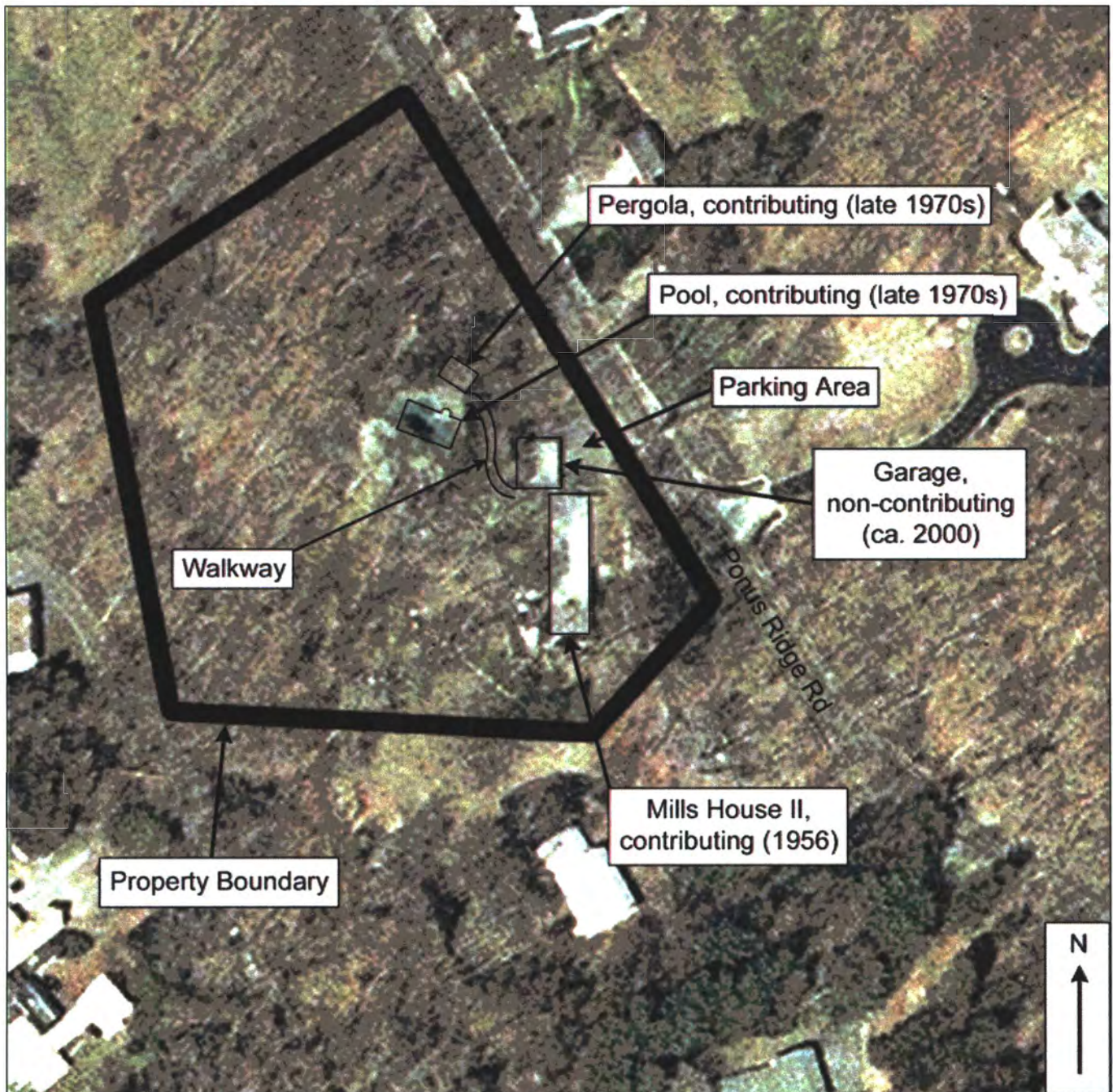
National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Mills, Willis N. House II

Fairfield County, Connecticut

Mid-Twentieth Century Modern Residences in  
Connecticut, 1930 – 1979

Site Plan of the Mills House II Property



(Base map source: [www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com). Accessed March 2010).

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Mills, Willis N, House

MULTIPLE NAME: Mid-Twentieth-Century Modern Residences in Connecticut 1930-1979, MPS

STATE & COUNTY: CONNECTICUT, Fairfield

DATE RECEIVED: 7/12/10      DATE OF PENDING LIST: 8/18/10  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 9/02/10      DATE OF 45TH DAY: 8/26/10  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 10000567

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: Y  
OTHER: Y PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: Y SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: Y NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

   ACCEPT       RETURN       REJECT                         DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

*See attached sheet.*

RECOM./CRITERIA

REVIEWER *[Signature]*      DISCIPLINE *Historia*  
TELEPHONE *202.351.2278*      DATE *August 25, 2010*

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: RESUBMISSION

PROPERTY NAME: Mills, Willis N, House

MULTIPLE NAME: Mid-Twentieth-Century Modern Residences in Connecticut 1930-1979, MPS

STATE & COUNTY: CONNECTICUT, Fairfield

DATE RECEIVED: 9/14/10  
DATE OF 16TH DAY:  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

DATE OF PENDING LIST:  
DATE OF 45TH DAY: 10/29/10

REFERENCE NUMBER: 10000567

DETAILED EVALUATION:

ACCEPT     RETURN     REJECT    \_\_\_\_\_ DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

~~See SLR~~

RECOM./CRITERIA

REVIEWER

*[Signature]*

DISCIPLINE

*Historia*

TELEPHONE

DATE

*9/16/10*

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N







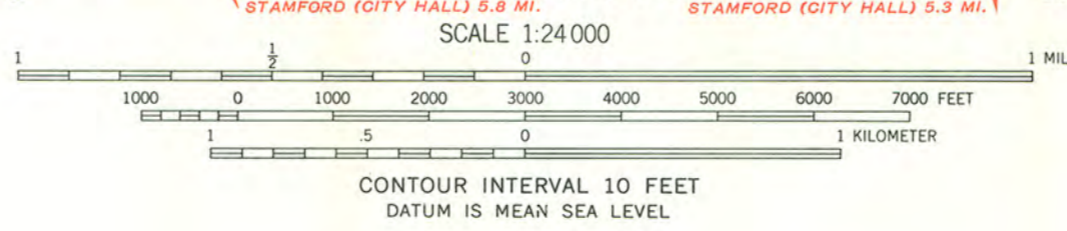
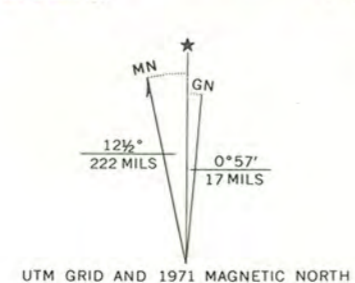








Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS, USC&GS, USCE, and Connecticut Geodetic Survey  
Topography from aerial photographs by photogrammetric methods  
Aerial photographs taken 1949. Field check 1951. Revised 1960  
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum  
10,000-foot grids based on New York coordinate system, east zone  
and Connecticut coordinate system  
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,  
zone 18, shown in blue  
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where  
generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked  
Revisions shown in purple compiled in cooperation with  
Connecticut Highway Department from aerial photographs  
taken 1971. This information not field checked



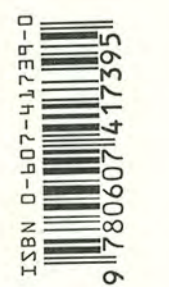
ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Heavy-duty	Light-duty
Medium-duty	Unimproved dirt

State Route  
Interstate Route

POUND RIDGE, N. Y.—CONN.  
N4107.5—W7330/7.5  
1960  
PHOTOREVISED 1971  
AMS 6266 II NE—SERIES V821

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, WASHINGTON, D. C. 20242  
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST







Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism



Arts  
Tourism  
Film  
History

MEMORANDUM

One Constitution Plaza  
Second Floor  
Hartford, Connecticut  
06103

860.256.2800  
860.256.2811 (f)

**TO:** Roger Reed  
National Register of Historic Places

**FROM:** Stacey Vairo, National Register Coordinator

**DATE:** July 9, 2010

**SUBJECT:** Mid-Twentieth Century Modern Residences in CT, 1930-1979

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The following materials are submitted for nomination of the **Mills, Willis N. House, New Canaan, Fairfield County, CT** to the National Register of Historic Places:

- National Register of Historic Places nomination form
- Multiple Property Nomination form
- Photographs
- Original USGS maps
- Sketch map(s)/figure(s)/exhibit(s)
- Pieces of correspondence
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**COMMENTS:**

- Please review
- This property has been certified under 36 CFR 67
- The enclosed owner objections do \_\_\_\_\_ do not \_\_\_\_\_ constitute a majority of property owners.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism

### Film Division

One Constitution Plaza  
Second Floor  
Hartford, Connecticut  
06103

860.256.2800  
860.256.2811 (f)

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