



Lauren Bacall and Edward Albee during Scenery Greenery 1984 cocktail party benefit for the Montauk Village Association.

Since its founding in 1967, The Edward F. Albee Foundation has stood as proof that if you build it, they will come—even in Montauk.
by HAVEN HATHAWAY

Built for Art

A chance recommendation from a college barista set Jakob Holder on a path that would eventually lead to Montauk. After being urged—almost demanded—to read *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, Holder won a playwriting award in Alaska, caught the attention of Edward Albee at a theater conference and accepted a job as his assistant in New York. That position, begun in 2001, eventually evolved into running the day-to-day operations and later the executive direction of The Edward F. Albee Foundation, a hub for supporting writers and preserving Albee's legacy in Montauk.

"At some point, the ownership of the position becomes almost inextricably linked with your own personality. You don't just do the job of being the head of The Edward F. Albee Foundation—it becomes part of your entire being," says Holder. "I felt that there was a force field around Edward. And it either widened or narrowed, depending on the context of the person. But what never wavered was the obvious integrity he carried—not only in relation to the arts as something to experience as an observer, but also as something to participate in as a creator."

The Edward F. Albee Foundation, is much like its founder—shrouded in its own quiet barrier of creativity. For nearly 60 years, it has maintained the William Flanagan Memorial Creative Persons Center, better known as The Barn, in Montauk. The Barn provides writers and visual artists from all walks of life with uninterrupted time and space to work. Although it is not open to the public, it serves as a stabilizing presence for the local community.

As Holder recalls, "When you go into The Barn, you are walking into an approximation of that man's head," reflecting Albee's personality in its furniture, artwork and the very feel of the place. At the time, Montauk was a humble, working-class fishing village, and The Barn began as a former horse stable with a history as a community dance hall and roller-skating rink. Albee did just enough work to make it habitable, but left it largely raw.

"The entire point of being out there is to be left alone," Holder says. Over the years, the Foundation has systematized the residency program while staying true to Albee's sensibilities:

Artists and writers are chosen by other artists and writers, ensuring the space remains a haven for dedication rather than careerism.

Today, The Barn hosts more than 40 creative fellows each year, doubling the capacity it had in Albee's lifetime, but the spirit remains the same. As Holder puts it, "We give the resources. We don't get in the way whatsoever."

Since Albee's passing in 2016, The Barn has undergone thoughtful renovations, making the space even more equipped to support a creative's life. "The No. 1 thing I hear from people is a simple line: 'I got more work done this month than I have at any other point in my career,'" says Holder, who credits much of The Barn's enduring quality to local expertise.

"We have such real care from our partners— landscaper David Rivkind, painter John Pomianowski, property manager Brian King— old-school Montauk people who labor over the details. It's really important to choose locals who deeply understand what needs to be done," he says. "We have a foundation at The Barn that we think is going to last another 100 years because

of the people who worked on it. When our fellows come out, they can't believe the month they've been given."

The Barn has been sustained by the people who live and work alongside it. Rex Lau, the longtime facilities manager, volunteered from 1980 until 2015 and has been a vital link between the Foundation and Montauk. Equally central was his late wife, Diane Mayo, a beloved sculptor and teacher whose passing in 2021 was deeply felt across the community.

What sets The Barn apart isn't luxury or convenience, but its insistence on simplicity and on purpose. As Holder puts it, "No one has ever complained that this place would have been great if only there were a thermos of soup put outside their door. We've always wanted to offer people freedom from every pressure except the positive, internal kind." The artists who come to Montauk aren't chasing brass rings or market trends—they're here because they're compelled to create. "We're not there to launch anybody," Holder adds. "We're there to gather people and say: Focus only on the doing." albeefoundation.org

The Barn's south entrance in Montauk, designed by TenBerke.

