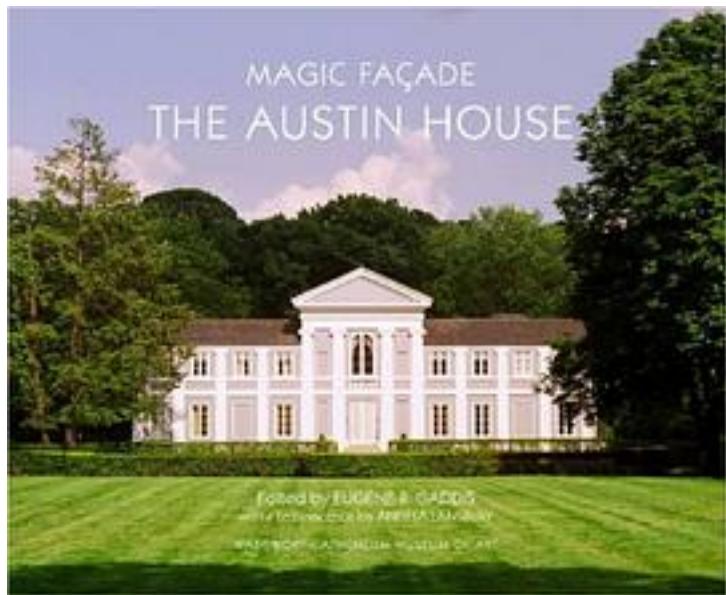


# Magic Facade



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In 1930 twenty-nine-year-old Chick Austin and his wife, Helen Goodwin built a house on one of the grandest streets in Hartford. It was a pastiche inspired by a sixteenth-century Palladian villa they had seen near Venice on their honeymoon, but instead of brick and stucco, the house was constructed with painted pine boards. Behind its 86-foot-long facade, it was a mere 18 feet deep, leading Austin's neighbors, who lived in respectable neo-colonial or Tudor-revival houses, to dub it "the pasteboard palace." The house became the stage set for Chick Austin's life, a gathering place for leading figures in the international art world who came to experience the artistic tidal wave that Chick Austin set in motion as the transformative director of Hartford's Wadsworth Atheneum from 1927 to 1944. Austin emerged as a pioneer in both the rediscovery of the baroque and the introduction of modernism to the United States, presented the first comprehensive American exhibitions of Italian baroque

painting and surrealism as well as the works of Picasso, and produced a series of groundbreaking performances at the museum, including the premiere of the now legendary opera by Gertrude Stein and Virgil Thomson, *Four Saints in Three Acts*, and the first public performances by Balanchine's original company, which evolved into the New York City Ballet. Austin--himself a painter, an actor, a designer of sets and costumes, a superb cook, and an expert stage magician--shone as an impresario of the arts or, in the words of composer Virgil Thomson, "a whole cultural movement in one man." The book includes more than 100 illustrations, including historic photographs, works of art from the Atheneum's collection, Austin family archival material, and recent images of the house and its interiors by noted photographer Geoffrey Gross. It features a reminiscence of Chick Austin by his friend Angela Lansbury and an essay by Eugene R. Gaddis, the William G. DeLana Archivist and Curator of the Austin House, whose biography of Austin, *Magician of the Modern*, was published in 2000. Gaddis tells the story of the Austin House, its creator and his family, with commentary by Chick Austin's son, architect David Austin. Richard Guy Wilson, the Commonwealth Professor and chair of the Department of Architectural History at the University of Virginia, provides an essay setting the Austin House in the context of early-20th-century American domestic architecture in both its "antic" and serious modes. Krystyn Hastings-Silver, the Austin House Restoration Project Director, describes the philosophy, the meticulous detective work, and the techniques required to recreate the magic of this National Historic Landmark and rekindle the spirit of Chick Austin.

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