



## ISAAC BELL HOUSE

Isaac Bell House is one of the best surviving examples of shingle-style architecture in the country. Its architects and designers drew from a mix of international and American influences to create a unique Gilded Age style. Considered very modern in its time, Isaac Bell House still fascinates anyone who appreciates creative architecture.

## OWNERSHIP AND ARCHITECTURE

Isaac Bell House was designed by the firm of McKim, Mead and White in 1883 for Isaac Bell, a wealthy cotton broker and investor. After passing through a succession of owners, the house was purchased by the Preservation Society in 1994 and is today designated a National Historic Landmark.

Although not as large or ostentatious as many of the other 19th century mansions in Newport, this house is among the most significant, and stands as an architectural landmark. It is widely considered to be a masterpiece of Shingle Style architecture, and it was one of the early examples of this style, which would become popular in the late 19th century, particularly in New England coastal resort communities like Newport. It was also one of the first commissions of McKim, Mead & White, which would go on to become one of the nation's leading architectural firms of its era.

Unlike most of the other architectural movements in 19th century America, the Shingle style was not an imitation of earlier European designs. Instead, it was a distinctly American style, and typically blended elements of colonial architecture while also using traditional building materials, such as the ubiquitous cedar shingles. Like the contemporaneous Queen Anne style, Shingle style homes tended to have complex, asymmetrical designs, often with turrets and large porches. However, Shingle style deliberately avoided the excessive ornamentation of Queen Anne architecture, and instead featured exteriors that were almost completely covered in shingles. As a result, these homes tended to blend in with their surroundings, instead of other types of houses that were specifically designed to stand out.

Isaac Bell House is a fully realized experiment that visually represents the search for an American style of architecture. It is left sparsely furnished, as the Preservation Society acquired it, to emphasize the uniqueness of its interior designs.